

'YOU GOING TO UNI?'

EXPLORING HOW PEOPLE FROM REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS NAVIGATE INTO AND THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

EQUITY FELLOWSHIP REPORT

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UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

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Exploring how people from regional, rural and remote areas navigate into and through higher education

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2020 Equity Fellowship Report

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I live and work on Yuin Country on the lands of the Wodi Wodi people,
and, especially in a year of pandemic,
I feel privileged to be in such a beautiful location. I'm grateful to the
Aboriginal custodians, knowledge holders and elders, past, present and
emerging, and for the knowledge embedded in Country.

Reflections on the COVID-19 disruption

Any project undertaken in 2020 cannot ignore the events of the year, and those immediately preceding.

2020 was 'unprecedented' in many respects, and a term so overused at the time of writing that I hesitate to use it. However, it has been exactly that. For some of the participants in this study (and the earlier 2018 NCSEHE [Shifts in Space and Self](#) project), an 'unprecedented' ten-year drought had a direct impact on them and their families' and communities' daily lives, health, well-being and livelihoods. Some were then affected by the 2019-2020 'unprecedented' bushfires - the worst bushfire season ever with 18.6 million hectares destroyed, an estimated 3 billion animals killed or displaced ([WWF](#)) as well as loss of habitat, buildings, homes and livelihoods. And most devastatingly, 34 people lost their lives. One Year 12 student gave some insight into the compounding stressors, at an already highly stressful time of life, brought about by:

the bush fires and my house burning down and the HSC being very difficult but not knowing what is going to happen

Following the bushfires, there was 'unprecedented' rainfall, of course welcome in many drought-ridden places, but which soon became floods devastating some regions. And then the world was 'hit' by the COVID-19 pandemic, another 'unprecedented' event where uncertainty, disruptions and moving goalposts became almost routine.

In light of all this, the disruption to my Fellowship hardly warrants mention. Only my plans were disrupted which simply required rearranging 'how to', 'when to' and 'where' in order to fit in with COVID-19-safe data collection and recruitment timings of universities whose students and staff were under incredible pressure, especially in the first half of 2020. While it has delayed completion of the fellowship outputs, these are in various stages of development and will be accomplished in the first half of 2021. It is because of this that I am even more grateful for the response I received from students and staff alike, in spite of such challenging circumstances, enabling the fellowship aims to be met and deliverables to be developed. I also acknowledge that other universities were keen to be involved, and that under a different set of circumstances, schools also, but these unprecedented times conspired against that. What I do hope though, is that the findings and recommendations will be useful to regional, rural and remote students, and the staff who support them, as well as people of all ages, regardless of location, who may be thinking about their future options, and the possibility of further education as one of those.

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
FIF	First in family student
HE	Higher education
SES	socioeconomic status
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
QLD	Queensland
RRR	Regional, rural and remote
SA	South Australia
TAS	Tasmania
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Executive Summary

The overarching objective of the Fellowship entitled *'You going to uni?: Exploring how regional, rural and remote people navigate into and through university'*, was to explore risks to university completion for those in regional, rural and remote locations of Australia. While the original proposal focused on regional students, the participation of some from remote regions broadened this focus. However, to also be inclusive of rural students, the acronym 'RRR' will be adopted throughout the report, as widely accepted when referring collectively to regional, rural and remote¹ (Roufeil and Battye, 2008). Where appropriate, however, distinctions will be made between these groupings. The problem motivating the Fellowship inquiry was the consistently low rates of university completion for RRR students over the past decade. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data (2021), the proportion of RRR people with a degree qualification remains half that of people in major cities. Thus, the aim of the fellowship was to understand what factors contribute to this persistent disparity, and by taking a strengths-based approach to also capture what enables students to persist.

Privileging the voices of people from RRR areas at university or in senior school years was a critical aspect of the design. The aim was to explore perspectives on their future goals and perceptions of barriers to completion, as well as the very personal repercussions of movement into and through university. Capturing these voices would help ensure the translation of the Fellowship outcomes were as authentic and meaningful as possible for the RRR population. To achieve the main objective of how people from RRR areas themselves perceived and experienced higher education, there were three key questions driving the study:

1. How is movement into and through university articulated by people who are from regional, rural and remote areas?
2. What goals and hoped-for futures are students moving towards?
3. What barriers and enablers to higher education participation are perceived and experienced?

To explore answers to these key questions, a qualitative approach was taken to collect rich data from participants through surveys and interviews. The main participant dataset came from university students from RRR areas enrolled across 21 Australian universities (regional and metropolitan) or regional campuses, complemented with data from staff in various roles from 12 institutions. A number of senior secondary school students who were enrolled in a university outreach program also participated, as well as a small number of school staff. The key findings align with the three questions outlined above.

Key finding 1: For people from RRR areas,

- a) Movement into and through university entails more than geographical (re)location alone.
- b) Movement into and through university reflects strong connections to communities and families. The range of emotion expressed points to the complex and demanding negotiations that RRR students are undergoing.

Key finding 2: RRR students articulated like-to-be or like-to-avoid futures variously through specific, general, broad or big-picture goals. Actions and behaviours indicate that students

¹ The terms "regional", "rural" and "remote" are differentiated by respectively decreasing populations and accessibility to services. Broadly speaking: "regional" refers to non-urban centres with a population over 25,000 and with relatively good access to services; "rural" refers to non-urban localities of under 25,000 with reduced accessibility; and "remote" communities are those of fewer than 5,000 people with very restricted accessibility. (Roufeil & Battye, 2008, p. 3)

are mobilising strategies to realise what they hope for and imagine for themselves in the future.

Key finding 3: Barriers to and enablers of completion for students from RRR communities:

- a) Barriers outside the control of students included financial barriers, institutional barriers around inflexible processes, practices and (lack of) university staff understandings of the realities for these students.
- b) Barriers outside the control of the student included the complexities arising from multiple equity factors, which were the realities for most of the participants.
- c) Enablers: Students' individual strengths and qualities were enablers to persistence and completion of university, as were strong networks of support from family, communities, belongingness and connectedness.

Project Outputs: The main project output is the **Regional² Student Futures** website www.regionalstudentfutures.org.au, developed from the participant data. The site houses a range of open source resources including an advice tool *Within a Cooee!* which is comprised entirely of advice from student and staff participants to other people from RRR communities. Other additions to the resources include an interactive self-reflective tool to explore aspects of future-focused thinking and goal-setting, and non-prescriptive guide(s) for support staff.

² Note that use of the general term 'Regional' was decided upon for brevity and searchability reasons but should be considered as inclusive of regional, rural and remote students

Recommendations

There are six recommendations:

- 1. PVC Students (or equivalent) / University recruitment / Student outreach/support services / regional campuses** should work together to:
 - Engage students from RRR areas directly in developing bespoke and practical ways in which sense of community can be embedded across all interactions/encounters with students, families/communities, from pre-recruitment and through (a non-linear) pathway to completion.
 - Engage RRR students in developing options which enhance flexibility in course delivery and placement.
 - Ensure socio-emotional support is embedded within all learning experiences and environments, online or on-campus (e.g. through opportunities for interaction, Q&A, authentic stories from RRR student perspectives, family/community).
 - Provide exemplars of practice, drawing on regional campus' understandings of how sense of community is enacted and fostered.
- 2. The Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE)** should continue their commitment to fund existing regional university centres, as well as expand to other regions. These centres have been shown to provide support which is essential and meaningful to RRR students.
- 3. Student Support Staff at universities and schools, such as careers advisors, counsellors, student advisers, should:**
 - Embed opportunities for students to articulate personally meaningful hopes and dreams for the future, during formal and informal encounters.
 - Allow students to identify what might 'get in the way' of realising their vision so that students have some agency in mobilising relevant strategies.
 - Normalise fluidity of future aspirations which may change - many students can and do make changes within and across courses and support staff should guide them through possible options.
- 4. Institutional Management and PVC Students (or equivalent)** must work together to continue to develop policies, processes and practices that address the diverse needs and circumstances of students from RRR areas which support them to completion. Institutions must take into account the (in)equitable amount of emotional work undertaken by these students as they negotiate complex lives together with academic study. RRR students should be meaningfully involved in this, to resist homogenous 'solutions'.
- 5. DVC(A)s (or equivalent)** must maintain a resolute stance of 'pedagogy before technology' as pressure is increasingly applied for the 'latest and greatest' in technologies at the expense of inclusive design. Teams which include Academic Developers, Learning / Educational or TEL Designers / IT experts and students from RRR areas should be engaged for their collective expertise and skills to ensure appropriate online pedagogies and technologies are at the fore of design decisions. This will help ensure that RRR students who enrol have an equitable and inclusive learning experience.
- 6. Student support services / student outreach (universities and schools)** should draw upon the qualities and skills that students from RRR areas possess through 'students as partners' approaches, engaging them in design or development of innovative and bespoke support, resources, events, etc. that may also be targeted towards family and others who provide significant support to students.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I've never seen any evidence of "how-to" working without talking about the things that get in the way (Brené Brown, 2010, p. 35).

The overarching aim of the Fellowship was to explore risks of attrition from university for regional, rural and remote students. Hence, identifying what gets in the way of successfully completing a university qualification is a necessary step before any 'solutions' can be offered.

The original fellowship proposal was focused on regional students to explore their perspectives of university, seeking how they conceived their futures beyond Higher Education and what they perceive as barriers to completion, with particular attention to the very personal repercussions of their movement into and through university. As the research progressed, the scope was expanded from a 'regional' category focus in response to the data being collected as students from remote and very remote areas participated. To also be inclusive of those from rural areas, the acronym 'RRR' will be adopted throughout the report when referring collectively to all students from these locations. RRR includes regional, rural and remote regions³ and its use is widely accepted (Roufeil and Battye, 2008). Where appropriate, however, distinctions will be made between these groupings.

A critical aspect of the design was to privilege the voices of people from RRR areas at university or in senior school years to explore their perspectives on future goals and perceptions of barriers to completion. Capturing these voices was crucial to ensure the translation of the Fellowship outcomes were as authentic and meaningful as possible for this population. The target participants were people from RRR areas at universities and senior high schools, and included both students and staff. Students at universities and senior high school students provided insights about their future goals and barriers to achieving what they hoped for. University staff (and to a lesser extent, secondary school staff) also provided their perspectives gained through their own experiences of supporting RRR students. The qualitative data gathered explored the complexities of 'being regional, rural or remote' and going to university. By drawing directly on the participant voice, the aim of the study was to explicitly avoid 'collective or mythic constructions' of what the higher education environment might be for RRR students (O'Shea, Jardine, Southgate, Smith & Delahunty, 2019, p. 31). This was crucial for informing the Fellowship outputs, in particular the resources for RRR students, which have been developed largely from participant quotes for authenticity as well as to ensure that diversity across RRR populations is reflected.

This Fellowship builds on a previous NCSEHE project '*Shifts in space and time: moving from community to university*' (O'Shea, Southgate, Jardine, Smith & Delahunty, 2019) which gathered perspectives on future movement into higher education from a number of Year 11 school and university students from rural and remote regions of New South Wales. This movement involved negotiating not only geographic shifts but changes to identity and relationships, which were powerfully visualised through digital storytelling methodology as a tool to document their own stories. The use of smartphone or tablet technologies gave students agency to creatively reflect on their future through curating a short video using a selection of image, music and audio to represent their unique perspectives.

Findings highlighted that moving away from community to attend university needs to be understood from lived experience in these environments, as is choosing to stay (O'Shea, Southgate, Jardine & Delahunty, 2019).

³ The terms "regional", "rural" and "remote" are differentiated by respectively decreasing populations and accessibility to services. Broadly speaking: "regional" refers to non-urban centres with a population over 25,000 and with relatively good access to services; "rural" refers to non-urban localities of under 25,000 with reduced accessibility; and "remote" communities are those of fewer than 5,000 people with very restricted accessibility. (Roufeil & Battye, 2008, p. 3)

Thus, posing the question, “*You going to uni?*” to a person from a regional, rural or remote location is asking them to consider something far more complex than can be answered by a simple yes/no response. In fact, considering university as a future option can be fraught, as reflected by the higher-than-average university attrition rates of student from RRR locations. Thus a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in higher education participation for those who come from RRR areas is a clear and urgent need.

The report is structured as five main chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction: Fellowship aims and outputs

Chapter 2: Background

Chapter 3: Research design and methods

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 5: Discussion and recommendations

Website and resources: Regional Student Futures

The main project output is a website: **Regional⁴ Student Futures** www.regionalstudentfutures.org.au. This website houses a range of open-source resources including an advice tool *Within a Cooeel* which is comprised entirely of advice from students and staff to other people from RRR areas. The intention is that these students’ lived experiences may help normalise what others may be going through and at the same time allow them to “piece together ... and apply the pieces where they fit” (Wilson, 2008, p. 27).



Within a Cooeel is designed as a series of conversation starters. It is intended to be useful for a diverse audience with advice from a range of perspectives, acknowledging that those from RRR communities are *not* all the same (for more details see Appendix 3).

This resource is targeted at people thinking about university (school leavers and older people alike) as well as students already at university. It may also be useful for: parents, family members, partners or friends of potential/current university students; school staff in support roles; and university staff in student support roles.

There are four main sections:

- ***Being regional, rural or remote*** (focusing on strengths and qualities)
- ***I'm thinking about uni, but I'm still not sure*** (things to consider for those who are in the process of deciding)
- ***I'm at uni: now keep going!*** (advice from others who are also in the midst of study)
- ***Like a rollercoaster!*** (emotional highs and lows and the uni experience)

⁴ Note that use of the general term 'Regional' was decided upon for brevity and searchability reasons but should be considered as inclusive of regional, rural and remote students

Chapter 2: Background

Higher than average numbers of university students from regional, rural and remote areas do not complete their degrees (DESE, 2017; Pollard, 2018). There is little doubt that lacking material and economic resources impedes full engagement in higher education. However initiatives such as the Australian Government's Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program (DESE, 2019) and additional support for students in specific equity groupings (e.g. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, low SES, with disability) helping to alleviate financial reasons for attrition (DESE, 2021b). However non-completion is more complex than simply lacking material resources - these young people are not without aspirations or goals, which indicates a need to better understand what they themselves see as obstacles to pursuing and reaching future goals.

This fellowship gathered the combined perspectives of RRR university students and staff in various roles (e.g. teaching, outreach, careers, management, director, coordinator, librarian/technician roles - hereafter 'staff') from institutions Australia-wide as well as senior high school students engaged in an outreach program (and a small number of school staff). This range of perspectives enabled a better understanding of how complex decisions for future goals were negotiated, particularly where students' relational connections to community are strong and reasons to feel hopeful about the future are strengthened when people in their networks of support say and do things which help build and nurture "aspirations and expectations" for the future (Halsey, 2018, p. 20).

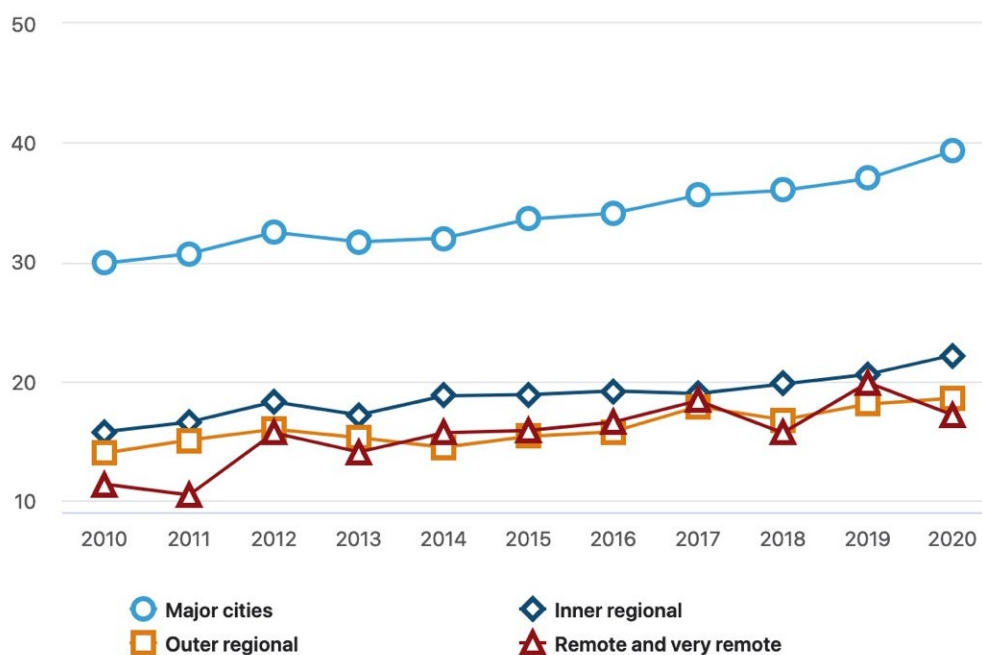
The next section provides some contextual information to briefly situate the project within the Australian context in terms of higher education and remoteness areas.

Disparity in the Australian higher education landscape

Despite steady growth in university participation in Australia over the past decade, a disproportionate number of students from regional, rural and remote areas do not complete their studies (DESE, 2017; Edwards & McMillan, 2015; Pollard, 2018). In 2008, the Bradley Review of Higher Education heralded widening participation education policies and initiatives, with the Federal Government setting a national target of 40% of 25-34-year olds having a degree qualification by 2020 (Bradley et al., 2008), since adjusted to 2025. In 2017, the national percentage was 39.4% (Taylor, 2019) which is seemingly within reach of the ambitious target. However, parity is far from being achieved when, in 2018, only 22.7% of people from RRR regions in this age group had obtained a degree (Davis & Taylor, 2019). This trend has not abated with the ABS Education and Work Survey (2021) stating that nationally 43.5% of Australians in the 25-34 year age group have a Bachelor's degree or higher. Those in regional, rural and remote areas (across the 15-74 year group) with a degree or higher continue to be underrepresented (at 17.5%) compared to those in metropolitan areas (35.8%). Variations across and between regional, rural and remote areas are also worthy of consideration to explore some of the underlying and persistent contributors to attrition that may be location-specific. For example, the proportion of degree qualifications varied significantly across remoteness categories⁵ (described next) with Inner Regional people representing 19.9% (down from 22.2% in 2020), and Outer Regional represented significantly lower at 16.0% (down from 18.6% in 2020) and likewise Remote/Very Remote representing 16.8% (down from 17.2 in 2020). Acknowledging the scale and complexity of multifaceted, additional barriers underlying unequal participation of RRR people in tertiary education, Naphthine and colleagues (2019) propose a set of recommendations and related actions aimed to halve this disparity by 2030. Naphthine et al. emphasised the need to have a co-ordinated approach, requiring "cultural and social shifts that cut across governments, communities and families" (2019, p. 6). The impact of these

⁵ Four of the five remoteness categories include: Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote

recommendations may be reflected in the 2020 Inner and Outer Regional data, but is yet to be evident in the Remote and Very Remote data as shown in Figure 2. (Note that the 2021 data cited above is likely to reflect the impact of COVID).



(a) All persons aged 20-64 years with a bachelor degree or above.
 Source: Education and Work, Australia, 2020, Table 26
 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Education and Work, Australia May 2020

Figure 2. Bachelor degree and above by remoteness categories (ABS, 2020)

Characteristics of remoteness areas

In terms of categorisation by remoteness, Australia is comprised predominantly of regional, and remote areas, although only just over a third, or 36%, of the population reside in these areas⁶ (ABS, 2020b). Regional and remoteness areas are highly diverse, with significant differences across areas, even when they are categorised by the same remoteness category. Australia is divided into five classes of remoteness “on the basis of a measure of relative access to services” (ABS, [Remoteness structure](#)). Remoteness areas are determined using a process that provides a consistent definition across Australia and over time. They are “derived by measuring the road distance from a point to the nearest Urban Centres and Localities in five separate population ranges” (ABS, 2016) giving an indication also of relative access to services such as education, hospitals etc. (For map showing remoteness areas, see Appendix 4).

To better understand these variations, some of the characteristics across states and territories are summarised for each of Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote. These categories provide an important backdrop to understanding some of the challenges that people from these areas may experience in relation to commencing and completing higher education study. For example, the post-COVID-19 push for more learning to be online should be considered in light of data such as from 2016 Census ([ABS QuickStats](#)). A comparison of household internet access across remoteness areas provides an interesting insight into the variations across states/territories, summarised in Table 1. It is

⁶ Australian population total in 2019 was 25,365,571. Regional/Remote population total was 7,045,198 (30.6%). Inner Regional 4,499,741; Outer Regional 2,054,693; Remote 290,431; Very Remote 200,333

interesting to note that 'internet connection to dwelling' could have been through a number of different ways and was defined as:

households that had at least one person access the internet from the dwelling. This could have been through a desktop/laptop computer, mobile or smart phone, tablet, music or video player, gaming console, smart TV or any other device.

Table 1. Internet connection to dwelling by state and remoteness

Remoteness Area	NSW	QLD	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	NT	Averages
Inner Reg'l	78.3%	79.7%	79.2%	80.3%	82.6%	79.5%		80%
Outer Reg'l	71.85	79.2%	73.6%	72.85	78.2%	74.9%	84.8%	76%
Remote	65.4%	79.2%	73.6%	72.8%	78.2%	71.4%	84.8%	75%
Very Remote	65.4%	68.6%		64.5%	69.5%	73.3%	54.6%	66%

From this table, it can be seen at a glance the obvious variations of internet access to households, ranging from as low as 54.6% in very remote Northern Territory to as high as 82.6% in inner regional parts of Western Australia. However, if these figures were able to be adjusted to include internet access using only those devices useful for university study, such as laptops, computers and perhaps tablets, these figures might be very different but perhaps be more reflective of the realities for people in RRR areas. (More summaries from 2016 Census data such as demographics, education, nature of work etc can be found in Appendix 5).

Australian higher education participation trends across equity groupings

Participation trends across equity groupings for the fellowship study, need to be considered within the broader context of Australian higher education. The data derived on commencing students by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2018) is summarised in Table 2.

Data is organised by location (under categories of metropolitan and regional/remote) and also by demographics, equity factors and other categories which provide an overall picture of the diversity within Australian higher education.

Table 2 shows that the characteristics of regional/remote commencing students vary in a number of ways when compared to metropolitan (metro) commencing students. For example, there is a larger proportion of mature-aged students, with 31% of regional/remote students aged 26 years and over, versus 22.2% of metro students. Other regional/remote characteristics include a larger proportion of first in family students (43.3% vs 35.7% metro), part time students (30.7% vs 24.7% metro) and those identifying as Indigenous (4% vs 1.3% metro). Twice as many regional/remote students are from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds (29.9% vs 14.8% metro), while significantly fewer are from a high SES backgrounds (9.9% vs 36.9% metro). For a full summary of DESE higher education participation statistics, see Appendix 6.

**Table 2. Higher Education participation, commencing students
by equity and other groupings**

		Total	Metro	Sum of Regional + Remote
Age	20 Years or under	47.2%	48.6%	42.0%
	21-25	29.5%	30.1%	27.0%
	26-30	8.4%	8.2%	9.1%
	31-40	8.6%	7.9%	11.6%
	41-50	4.3%	3.6%	6.8%
	51-60	1.5%	1.2%	2.6%
	61-70	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%
	71 years or over	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
First in Family*	No	45.9%	48.6%	36.4%
	Unknown	16.8%	15.7%	20.3%
	Yes	37.3%	35.7%	43.3%
Type of attendance	Full-time	74.0%	75.3%	69.3%
	Part-time	26.0%	24.7%	30.7%
Gender	Female	58.4%	56.8%	64.2%
	Male	41.6%	43.2%	35.8%
Indigenous	Not Indigenous	98.1%	98.7%	96.0%
	Identifies as Indigenous	1.9%	1.3%	4.0%
SES (first address)	High	31.3%	36.9%	9.9%
	Low	17.9%	14.8%	29.9%
	Medium	50.5%	48.2%	59.7%
	Unknown	0.3%	0.2%	0.5%
Disability	Without disability	92.7%	92.9%	92.0%
	With disability	7.3%	7.1%	8.0%
NESB	No NESB	96.8%	96.3%	98.6%
	NESB	3.2%	3.7%	1.4%

* Excluding 'Not Commencing' as the best available representation of commencing students

Regional, rural and remote students and aspirations for higher education

To better understand enablers and constraints that may contribute to the higher-than-average attrition rate of students from RRR areas (ABS, 2018), student aspirations and educational disparities are firstly considered, as these begin in schooling (Napthine et al., 2019) well before decisions to attend university are made.

There are many factors which may impact upon the educational access and performance of RRR Australians, who have lagged behind their urban counterparts in NAPLAN results and Year 12 completion (Halsey, 2018; Napthine et al., 2019). The achievement of a degree qualification or above for 25-34 year olds similarly follows a “decreasing trend with increasing remoteness” (Halsey, 2018, p. 10) for people from RRR areas. This trend was also noted by Cuervo, Barakat and Turnbull as a “general decline in the quality of education beyond the major metropolitan centres” or in more explicit terms, “the more ‘rural’ the location, the lower the educational achievement” (2015, p. 8). This trend begins in schooling, with disparity between metropolitan and regional/rural/remote schools confirmed by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA): students who “attend schools in very remote geolocation” have lower achievements than those attending in major cities, who achieve “at or above the national minimum” (ACARA, 2016, p. 64). Other aspects related to lower achievement but not necessarily to what a young person may aspire to can be influenced by teacher-student relationships. If these relationships are negative, emotional barriers for the student can result, and may lead to their disengagement in formal learning. Disengaged young people may have also experienced being told that they ‘weren’t smart enough’ or that they should ‘quit school’ (McMahon, Harwood & Hickey-Moody, 2016, p. 1111). Young people from RRR areas may also have traumatic experiences in transitioning from primary to secondary school, especially if this means “moving away from home within the context of educational institutions that often do not see themselves as part of a coherent youth system” (Buckskin, 2001 in Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015, p. 12). Each of these are factors which can affect positive imaginaries of post-school education.

However, lower achievement or disengagement at school does not necessarily equate to lower aspiration for higher education. Kenway and Hickey-Moody (2011) reject dichotomous and simplistic notions of aspiration, arguing that aspiration is far from straightforward, and is instead diverse, complex and “rooted in social, cultural and spatial inequalities” (p. 152). These authors challenge a normalisation of aspiration in policy discourses, which imply that aspiration is equally distributed as “a disposition, an attitude, a psychological and individual state” (Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011, p. 152). More recently, Gore, Fray, Patfield and Harris (2019) found that higher education aspirations for school students (Years 3 to 12) from many disadvantaged communities were “high”, a finding which challenged “the simplistic view that young people from equity target groups have ‘low’ aspirations for their futures” (p. ix). A challenge arises in considering the extent to which students have equitable access to the sociocultural experience and knowledge needed to pursue and achieve their educational and future goals. For those from RRR areas there are also challenges of remoteness, which in combination, influence their actual ‘capacity to aspire’.

Capacity to aspire

Capacity to aspire is a term used by Appadurai (2004) problematising aspiration and social and cultural positioning. Appadurai argues that a person’s capacity to aspire is affected by being in less powerful roles which diminishes the “ability to cultivate an explicit understanding of the links between specific wants or goals and more inclusive scenarios, context and norms” (2004, p. 83). Thus, by this logic, it is through what is *not* available to students who experience disadvantage (i.e. lack of resources, understanding, funding, information etc) that weakens their capacity to aspire (see Napthine et al., 2019), but Bok argues, not their *ability* to aspire (Bok, 2010).

Capacity to aspire to higher education then, is knowing how to 'play the game' (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013), which involves implicit understandings of 'rules' and 'expectations' of how to succeed at university. These implicit ways are not always known, visible or accessible to everyone who enters university (Bathmaker et al., 2013). In fact, the passing on of these knowledges from family or friends with first-hand experience of university, is simply not accessible to students from some equity backgrounds, such as those who are first in their family or their community to attend university. Thus, unequal distribution of implicit knowledges of itself creates many more hurdles for equity students than for their more advantaged peers, including socio-emotional challenges such as feeling like a 'fish out of water' or feeling stigmatised as a minority (Mallman & Lee, 2016). Similar perceptions of exclusion may also be exacerbated if students perceive that university is only for the 'smart' and rich, or that they have been accepted into university through luck, rather than being entitled to be there (Delahunty & O'Shea, 2020; O'Shea, May, Stone & Delahunty, 2017).

Similarly, Bok (2010) points out that capacity to aspire to one's future imaginaries often favours students from educationally advantaged backgrounds. When likened to mapping a journey into the future, those who have fluency in reading and following "their map of aspirations" are likely also to be more confident in exploring "unmapped possibilities". Bok argues that fluency enables the more advantaged to make "more powerful choices" or take risks to discover their futures (Bok, 2010, p. 164). When considering the capacity to aspire for equity students, being able to engage in activities valued by employers such as internships, extra-curricular activities, voluntary work or leadership roles, must be viewed together with the potential consequences of *not* engaging and the impact this may have on achieving future goals or competing in the postgraduate employment market (O'Shea, Groves & Delahunty, 2021). Some of the constraints which can reduce students' capacity to engage include the necessity of being in paid employment to survive, being in caring role(s), or having long commutes for study and/or work, highlighting an important point: "how students spend their non-study time may be of growing importance in determining future life-chances" (Bathmaker et al., 2013, p. 726). Non-study time can be consumed by commitments outside of study which are non-negotiable, with the extra engagement needed for these activities making it very difficult for those students who lack time, money and/or energy.

Unequal distribution of implicit knowledges and practices reveals a related issue around making informed decisions, which can impact on the capacity to aspire. Some people do not have access to all the information that is needed, thus inadequately-informed decisions may then lead to unequal access to educational opportunities. For example, young people or their families who do not have all the information needed to consider the possible educational options, may tend to rely on various pieces of second-hand, or 'grapevine' information (Ball & Vincent, 1998). By way of contrast, fully informed decision-making highlights a practice of cultivation which often occurs in more advantaged households or communities, which have the capacity and resources to provide children with the learnings and resources needed to succeed in life (Bathmaker et al., 2013). This is not an individual practice, but is shaped by the families and communities in which students live (Gore et al., 2019 p. 2). Thus when families and communities do not have access to certain knowledges and practices to pass on, then children and young people are also less aware of key knowledges of what contributes to enhanced chances of success in future social, economic positioning and employment, as well as how this can be achieved (Bathmaker et al., 2013).

Distance as a factor in inequitable participation and achievement

Issues of equitable participation and achievement in education for people from RRR areas can also be created by distance – both geographical and emotional/relational (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017; Davis, 1999). Distance has been shown to be a key mediating factor for young people from RRR areas contemplating their educational and vocational futures (Naphthine et al., 2019; O'Shea, Southgate, Jardine & Delahunty, 2019). In practical terms, challenges

presented by geographical distance include decisions to move away and the associated relocation expenses, or if staying, the need to drive long distances, bearing also the associated costs (monetary as well as time). Added to this is that many regional and remote areas lack convenient, reliable and/or affordable public transport (Nelson et al., 2017; O’Shea, Southgate, Jardine, Smith & Delahunty, 2019), which may be taken-for-granted in metropolitan areas. This may lead some students from RRR locations to opt for flexible or online options. Although studying online may mitigate some of the geographical challenges, this mode of study also experiences a higher rate of attrition than on campus, and can highlight other barriers such as difficulties accessing high speed internet or technologies, as well as a sense of isolation (Davis & Taylor, 2019). In terms of challenges presented by emotional/relational distance, decisions to leave one’s (often) close-knit community to attend university can be fraught. These factors alone call for much better understandings of how complex decisions for future goals are negotiated, and the influence of relational connections to family and community on RRR young people’s aspirations and goals for their future.

Equity groupings and regional students

In addition to educational inequities that exist in the schooling system, students from RRR areas often belong to multiple equity groups. As objective measurements equity groups are determined by DESE (2017) and applied to students i) from regional or remote locations, ii) who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, iii) with disability, iv) from low socioeconomic or v) from a non-English speaking background⁷. However, subjective equity factors are also important to consider in addition to the DESE groupings. The additional factors included students who are i) first in family at university, ii) mature-aged, iii) from working class background, iv) isolated area or v) refugee background. A dual measurement approach using objective and subjective measures was taken. As Rubin et al. (2014, p. 196) argue, social class and SES, for example, are often “conflated with one another” despite being distinguishable as separate constructs. To avoid overlooking diversity it was important therefore that participants were able to select from subjective and sociocultural factors, as these individually indicate additional challenges to educational equity. Subjective measures therefore are important for diverse populations to be able to “reflect on their own internalized standards, based on their individual, context-specific experiences and reference groups” (Rubin et al., 2014, p. 199). These factors provide intersectional aspects which do not require pre-established benchmarks (as for objective measures, such as income or postcode), but need to be considered alongside the formal equity groups. The following table outlines the subjective equity factors included and the rationale for their inclusion.

⁷ Five of the six DESE equity groups – not included was women in non-traditional areas. Higher Education Statistics <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2017-section-11-equity-groups>

Table 3. Subjective equity factors

	Equity factor and Definition (if provided to participants)	Rationale for inclusion
i)	<p>first in family</p> <p>Definition: first out of siblings, children, parents and partners to attend university (adjusted for school students: first in family ... to complete secondary school)</p>	<p>“First in Family can be conceptualised and addressed as a <i>supra category</i> of students that works across other equity driven categories of low SES, region, gender, disability, linguistic diversity and Indigeneity” (O’Shea et al., 2015, p. 35)</p>
ii)	<p>mature-aged</p> <p>Definition: over 21 years</p>	<p>The characteristic of ‘mature-age’, or delay in commencing tertiary study, is associated as risk to non-completion (Cherastidtham, Norton & Mackey, 2018, p. 9)</p> <p>However, in combination with other factors such as <i>mature-age, part-time and online</i> the risk to non-completion is even higher (Davis & Taylor, 2019)</p>
iii)	<p>from working class background</p> <p>Definition: Your parents/carers don’t earn a lot of money and perhaps are in jobs where they are only paid for the hours and days they work, perhaps physical kinds of work</p> <p>Definition (provided verbally to university participants during the interview if required)</p>	<p>Social grouping, subjective (Rubin et al., 2014)</p> <p>Social class refers to one’s ‘sociocultural background and is more stable, typically remaining static across generations [while] SES refers to one’s current social and economic situation and consequently, it is relatively mutable’ (Rubin et al., 2014, p. 196).</p>
iv)	<p>from isolated area</p>	<p>Isolated area is not necessarily not based on geographical ‘remoteness area’ but on perceptions of access, opportunities etc (this could be in terms of access to high speed internet, transport conveniences etc).</p> <p>For example 21 of the 36 participants who selected ‘Isolated’ were from Inner or Outer Regional areas. One participant from an Outer Regional area (defined by postcode) explained: <i>I live in a remote area and travel to university (100km each way) to attend 4 face to face tutorials per week.</i></p>
v)	<p>from refugee background</p>	<p>It was important capture any participants from a refugee background who, while they have a ‘status as a category of disadvantage’ according to national and multicultural initiatives, ‘remain hidden from the sectoral policy view’ (Molla, 2021)</p>

With diverse student populations, it is important to take a dual measurement approach using objective and subjective measures, as the following exchange during one of the interviews illustrates:

Interviewer: Are you from low socioeconomic circumstances?

Participant: *Do I answer that from my situation now or when I was growing up? There’s a reason I ask – because when I was 18 and leaving school, uni was not an option for me due to my family’s situation. We weren’t wealthy and my mum was a single mum and I needed to work so, although I was super-capable of uni at 18 or 19, I wanted a job to contribute and to be able to fund myself and my lifestyle. At 48, I’m not a low socioeconomic group at all; I would probably put us mid-range of being able to... there’s just my husband and I with no dependents and we both work full-time so we’re fairly financially stable. So there’s, yeah, two elements to that. If I was answering it as 18 year old, uni was not on the table for me ...*

Interviewer: *Would you say you were from working class background?*

Participant: Yes

Combinations of equity factors demonstrate that students from RRR areas are a highly diverse group (Davis & Taylor, 2019), which can have a compounding effect on educational outcomes and non-linear pathways to achievement. For example, these students may be of low socioeconomic status (SES), identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, be living with disability, and/or be from a language background other than English, as well as many combinations of these and other equity factors. They may be the first in their families to attend university, so they do not have access to a family biographical memory of university attendance that their second or third generation counterparts have, which is necessary for understanding the implicit culture, expectations and complexities of higher education (O'Shea, May, Stone & Delahunty, 2017).

Devlin and McKay (2019) outline many of the competing factors in low SES students' realities, which mirror that of other equity groups such as students from RRR areas. These realities include commitments to family, work and community; often students need to be in paid employment and are studying part-time. Kahu and Nelson (2018) also state that reasons for considering early departure from university for equity students are more likely to be "finance and family obligations" while for non-equity students these are "choice and lifestyle" (p. 60). Juggling multiple responsibilities can make prioritising study difficult, and studying can be guilt-laden, as some things have to be sacrificed. From this perspective, facilitating student success:

would entail students being empowered to develop university-specific sociocultural capabilities: including mastering the student role; feelings of belonging; and confidence to participate in the culture and discourses of higher education institutions (Devlin & McKay, 2019, p. 4).

At this point it is important to note that less-advantaged, or under-represented students are not lacking in aspiration (Bok, 2010; O'Shea, Southgate, Jardine & Delahunty, 2019). On the contrary they "do in fact aspire for HE [higher education]" (Hawkins, 2017, p. 40). Hawkins argues that this points to a need "to be mindful of the complexities surrounding low participation" (p. 40). As Gore et al. (2019) found with school students from diverse communities, these aspirations can begin as young as primary school, and one's socioeconomic and remoteness status has very little to do with high educational aspiration, even amongst disadvantaged communities.

Much of the research literature in this field challenges the simplistic view that those from equity groups have lower aspirations than more advantaged groups (Gore et al., 2019; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). The complexity of multiple equity factors also challenges a simplistic and homogenous positionality of students all being equal. Inequity in higher education creates and continues to foster an uneven playing field, reducing the capacity of equity students to aspire, regardless of their ability to aspire. Disparity exists because of the "socio-economic and cultural factors [that] enable some to more powerfully pursue their aspirations than others" (Bok, 2010, p.176).

Thus, 'the capacity to aspire' provides a lens to better understand aspirations of students who experience educational disadvantage (Bok, 2010), which includes those from RRR areas. In Bok's study, she also noted that the participants were "generally optimistic and hopeful" about their futures (p. 166). A way of understanding how and why students persist, despite challenges, may be seen in the actions they take whilst working towards achieving the kind of selves they would like-to-be or like-to-avoid in the future (Jones, Hordósy, Mittelmeier, Quyoum & McCaldin, 2021). The theory of possible selves will be described briefly.

Possible selves, imagined futures

The 'Possible Selves' model (Markus & Nurius, 1986) is a strengths-based approach to better understand how students coming from RRR areas articulate conceptions of imagined selves as they pursue and persist in higher education. Conceptions of like-to-be or like-to-avoid versions of self are not fantasy, rather they are enacted through actions taken to achieve particular future-states, or even when avoiding particular end-states (i.e. *me not working in woolies for the rest of my life*). In this model, there is a link between motivation and self-concept, and the meaning students give to their own idiosyncratic actions as they pursue these goals, or take steps to avoid others (Erikson, 2019, p. 28). Jones and colleagues (2021) describe this as a "bridge between the present and the future" (p. 3). In this study, the Possible Selves model enabled the student voice to emerge, giving insight and clarity around how students imagined their future, the end-states they were drawn to, and how they might be working towards those. A strengths-based approach enabled positive but realistic ways to understand the needs of students from RRR areas, and is important for designing support which focuses on opportunities to access higher education, rather than on barriers (Brown, Avitaia, Austin & Facchin, 2020).

However, barriers are a reality for those who experience educational disadvantage, including those from RRR areas. Students' individual circumstances may become potential barriers to completion. These may include disincentives such as compounding multiple equity factors, perceived level of risk involved in pursuing higher education, or prior negative experiences of education (Delahunty & O'Shea, 2020; McMahon, Harwood, & Hickey-Moody, 2016; Raciti, 2019). This can create complex negotiations for students to reach their educational goals and achieve hoped-for futures. Thus, the pathway through and beyond university is less likely to be linear when life is a complex balancing act of study and other responsibilities, which is the reality for many equity students (Delahunty & O'Shea, 2020; O'Shea, 2019; Stone & O'Shea, 2011). Thus, focus needs also to fall on what Burford and Mitchell (2019, p. 30) describe as the "complex and messy realities of diversity's enactment" in higher education". These will be explored through a qualitative research design, which presents "a window into the thinking of students as they negotiate complex educational choices" (Jones et al., 2021, p. 2).

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

This Fellowship adopted a qualitative approach to the research design to privilege the voices of people from RRR areas. There were two phases to the project to gather a range of perspectives: the first was university-focused and the second was senior secondary school-focused.

- 1) **Phase 1 University Students and Staff:** this focused on the transition of RRR students as they experienced the shift into and through the university environment.
- 2) **Phase 2 Senior Secondary School Students and Staff:** this focused on the perspectives of regional secondary school students as they anticipated their post-schooling futures, which may include contemplating the shift from their community into the university environment.

Impact of COVID-19

There is little doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was disruptive in many ways, including significant and rapid changes to education practices across the sector, and across the globe. The pandemic also meant that adjustments to the proposed research method and recruitment were necessary in response to the unprecedented situation, to align with government and institutional directives for social distancing and to ensure the safety of participants. These adjustments will be outlined further in the [Recruitment](#) section and further mention will be made of the COVID-19 situation as relevant. Without doubt these disruptions were also experienced variously by the participants; a summary of the impact on participants is provided in Appendix 14.

Research questions

To explore the broad research inquiry of how students from RRR areas navigate into and through higher education, there were three interrelated questions crucial to the generation of this knowledge:

1. How is movement into and through university articulated by people who are from regional, rural and remote areas?
2. What goals and hoped-for futures are students moving towards?
3. What barriers and enablers to higher education participation are perceived and experienced?

To answer the research questions the main survey and interview questions were informed by possible selves theory and designed to elicit detailed responses, including how university participation (or the anticipation of it) made participants feel. Examples of the kinds of questions for students (these varied slightly different between university and school participants) included:

- When you think about your life beyond (school/uni) what do you imagine doing in the near future?
- Thinking further into the future, what do you imagine doing with your life?
- What kinds of things do you not want to be doing?
- What kind of person do you want to be/not be?
- What would 'get in the way' of what you are aiming for or desire in life?

For university students, the questions also included reasons for deciding to go to university, considerations and decisions that had to be made, how they felt about their progress and the university experience, as well as the barriers and support experienced.

Recruitment

Recruitment was Australia-wide to gather a broad range of perspectives. Phase 1 recruitment was sought firstly through university networks such as the Regional Universities Network and Innovative Research Universities via the executive directors (EDs). The EDs forwarded on the information to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academics of universities in each of their networks, who then made contact with the researcher to express interest or seek further information. Recruitment was also sought via the Country Universities Centres located in New South Wales (NSW) regional areas (part of DESE [Regional University Centres](#) program). Finally, a 'snowball' recruitment strategy was also used to include those outside of these organisations. Totals of 150 students and 44 staff were recruited.

Phase 2 Recruitment of Year 12 students was via university outreach program coordinators, resulting in 30 student participants. Invitations to secondary public schools in NSW and South Australia (SA) resulted in the recruitment of three staff and nil students from public schools (see next section for further explanation).

Social media (Twitter) was also used to reach individual university and school staff, although it is likely that only a small number were recruited in this way, and this information was not requested.

Ethics applications and approvals

Prior to recruitment activities, ethics applications were submitted and approved via the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Wollongong (UOW; Approvals #HREC2019/486; #HREC2020/012; see Approvals: Appendix 7 and Appendix 8). For the school-focused research additional applications were made via state jurisdiction processes: SERAP #2020016 (NSW) and South Australia Education Research Unit #2020-0021 (see Approvals: Appendix 9 and Appendix 10).

Due to the long delays expected for state approvals as a result of the COVID-19 situation as previously mentioned, an amendment to #HREC2020/012 (UOW) was requested and approved on 5 May 2020. This amendment enabled recruitment of Year 12 students enrolled in university outreach programs.

SERAP (No. 2020016) approval was received on 9 June. Principals at eight outer regional NSW schools were contacted by email on 16 June and followed up on 19 August.

South Australia Education Research Unit Application (No. 2020-0021) approval was received on 4 August. Principals from twelve SA high schools were contacted by email on 6 August, but not followed up due to the timing being close to the end of Term 3, and at the height of Higher School Certificate exam preparation.

Adjustments to data collection were made from Friday 20 March 2020, on advice from NSW Health and UOW Research Ethics Committees. A directive from UOW required that, due to COVID-19 restrictions, "all data collection requiring face-to-face contact with human participants will be suspended from midnight on Friday 20 March 2020 until further notice". Thus in-person interviews and focus groups were replaced with telephone (phone) or videolink options (Zoom).

Data gathering and participants

Qualitative surveys and interviews (via phone/Zoom) were conducted with Australian university students, university staff and senior high school students. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with each participant provided with the option to member-check the transcripts, prior to analysis. A no-obligation invitation was extended to all participants to comment on the draft resources/recommendations, resulting in a total of 49 participants registering their interest (university students n33; university staff n16).

Surveys were online and anonymous for all participant groups and accessed via a hyperlink in the information form. Potential participants received the recruitment invitation according to the individual university’s normal communication practices, such as including the information form as an email attachment and/or providing the hyperlink to an online version of the information form. Completion of the survey for all participants was estimated at 10-20 minutes (actual average was 16 minutes) and interview 30-45 minutes (actual average was 40 minutes). Participants and modes of participation are summarised in the table below.

Table 4. Summary of participant data

Participant type	Surveys*	Interviews	Totals
University Students	124	26	150
University Staff	29	15	44
Year 12 students	28	2	30
School staff	3	-	3

*Empty surveys not included in the count.

Demographics and descriptive statistics

University students

The majority of university students who indicated gender (n130) were female (85%). In terms of age ranges, just over half were aged 18 to 25 (52%) with a breakdown of age ranges shown in Figure 3.

Age ranges n=127 (23 skipped)

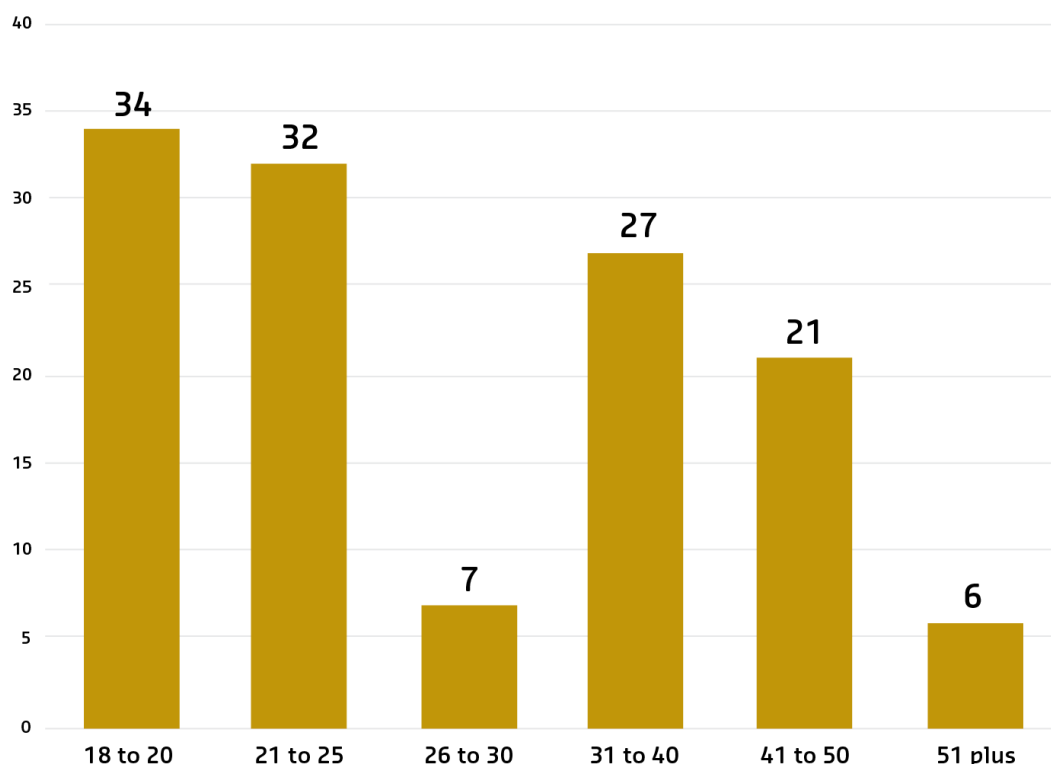


Figure 3. Age ranges (university students)

The majority of students were in their first or second year of study (37% and 26% respectively). Over two-thirds (69%) were studying full-time in a range of different modes. At the time the data was collected, the mode of study selected reflected the impact of COVID-19 as courses had pivoted to remote modes of delivery (shown in the Figure below

as “from xxx”). This shows that students were mainly learning fully online, blended or distance/block mode, shown in Figure 4 below.

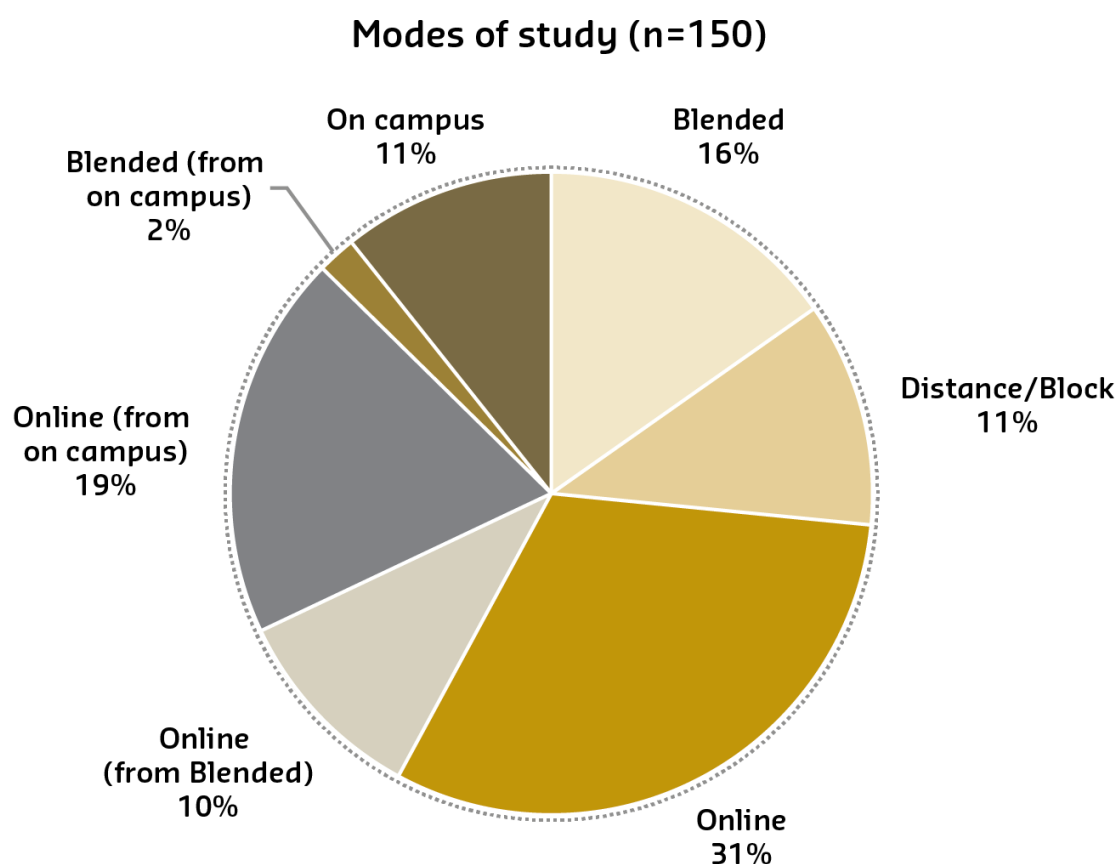


Figure 4. Modes of study (including shifts due to COVID-19)

Remoteness categories⁸

The locations in which students were living or in which they had been living immediately prior to attending university were spread across all States and Territories of Australia apart from Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Locational information (such as postcode or area/town name) from participants was categorised according to the remoteness areas of Inner Regional (IR), Outer Regional (OR), Remote (REM) or Very Remote (VREM), assisted by the ABS interactive regional and remoteness maps <https://itt.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?ABSMaps> (see also [Appendix 2: ABS Map of Remoteness Areas](#)). This data is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. University students by state and remoteness areas

State	Inner Regional	Outer Regional	Remote	Very Remote
New South Wales	31	8	3	
Northern Territory		9	3	1
Queensland	7	18	3	
South Australia	4	25	9	2
Victoria	1	8		
Western Australia	1	12		1
TOTALS (n146)	44	80	18	4
% of total (n146)	30%	55%	12%	3%

⁸ Note: there is some variation in numbers depending on response numbers. Generally ‘skipped’ responses will not be included (unless specified)

Equity factors

All of these students were in the formally recognised equity grouping of regional/remote. Participants were asked to select from a list of equity groupings (objective) and equity factors (subjective) all that were reflective of their circumstances. With the exception of 8 participants, all selected at least one additional equity grouping or factor to regional/remote (defined in [Equity groupings and regional students](#)), which included:

I am a student:

Equity Groups:

- from a regional/remote area
- who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- with disability
- from a low socioeconomic background
- from a non-English-speaking background

Equity Factors:

- who is first in my family to attend university (i.e first out of siblings, children, parents and partners)
- from a refugee background
- from a working class background
- from an isolated area
- mature-aged (over 21 years)
- none of these apply to me

The responses are summarised below in Table 6. Of significance is that 150 students made a total of 472 selections, indicating that having multiple equity factors was the 'norm' as well as showing a high level of diversity across these participants. Of significance is that close to half (either just above or below) were mature-age, from working class background and/or first in their family at university. There was also a significant proportion who were from low SES backgrounds and/or from an isolated location.

Table 6. Multiple equity factors

Equity factor	No. of selections	%
Regional/remote	150	
Working class background	76	51%
First-in-family	71	47%
Mature-age	78	52%
Low SES	32	21%
Isolated location	36	24%
Disability	20	13%
NESB	5	3%
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	4	3%
Total selections from n150 students	472	

As the above table indicates, diversity is a prominent characteristic of these RRR participants. To better understand similarities and variations of equity across locations, the data was re-organised according to remoteness areas. The table below provides a breakdown of the distribution of equity factors across each of the remoteness areas (Remote and Very Remote are combined). Percentages are based on the number of participants in each area, and significant variations **bolded**. Table 7 shows at a glance that the proportion

of students from working class backgrounds was similar for inner and outer regional and less so for remote, while there was a significantly larger proportion of first in family students from outer regional areas, and slightly more mature-age students from inner and outer regional. The proportion of those from low SES backgrounds was slightly more for outer and inner regional than for remote. Students with disability tended to be from inner regional areas. Students identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander all came from outer regional locations, and remote regions had a higher proportion of students living in isolated locations and from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Table 7. Equity factors distributed across remoteness area

Equity factor*	Inner Regional (n48)		Outer Regional (n80)		Remote/V Remote (n22)	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Working class background	24	50%	42	53%	10	45%
First in Family	17	35%	45	57%	9	41%
Mature-age	25	52%	40	51%	10	45%
Low SES	10	21%	18	23%	4	18%
Isolated location	6	13%	17	22%	13	59%
Disability	11	23%	8	10%	1	5%
NESB	0	0%	2	3%	3	14%
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	0	0%	4	5%	0	0%
Total no. of selections	93		176		50	

*As all were 'regional/remote' this equity category is not included in the table

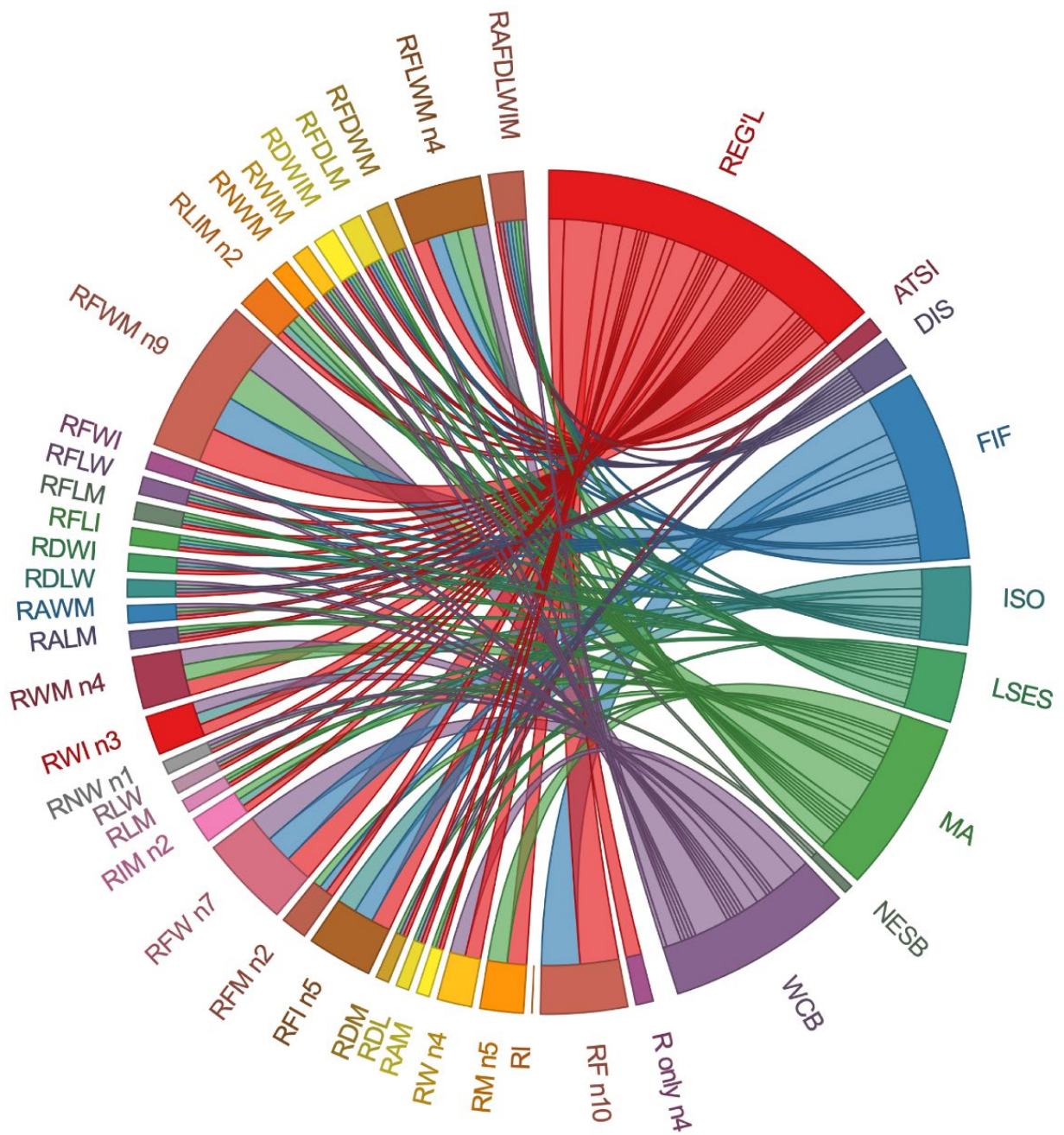
The table format does not however, provide a sense of the complexity of multiple equity factors. To better visualise this, a chord diagram was created, which provides a better representation of the combinations of equity factors, and hence the complexities. The outer regional data will be used to demonstrate these complexities and diversity.

The chord diagram in

Legend for equity factors:

- | | |
|---|--|
| R: Regional | I: Isolated, L: Low socioeconomic status |
| A: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander | M: Mature-age |
| D: Disability | N: non-English speaking background |
| F: First-in-family | W: Working class background |

Figure 5 shows the various combinations of equity factors (on the left-hand side) selected from the individual factors (on the right hand side). In total, there were 34 different equity combinations selected by 80 outer regional students. Where more than one person had the same combination this is indicated as 'nX'. For example, *RFW n4* means that there were four students who identified the combination of Regional, First-in-family and Working Class background; or *RFDWM* represents one student who identified an equity combination of Regional, First-in-family, with Disability, Working Class background and Mature-age. This is one way to present the complexity of diversity which is reflected through the intersection of the chords. As well as making the relationship between students and multiple equity factors more visible, it also provides a visual representation of the "complex and messy realities of diversity" that Burford and Mitchell talked about (2019, p. 30).



Legend for equity factors:

- | | |
|---|--|
| R: Regional | I: Isolated, L: Low socioeconomic status |
| A: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander | M: Mature-age |
| D: Disability | N: non-English speaking background |
| F: First-in-family | W: Working class background |

Figure 5. Visualisation of multiple equity factors (Outer Regional university students)

Other responsibilities

The university students also had many other responsibilities and commitments outside of study. As with selection of equity factors, students were able to indicate the other responsibilities they had which included:

- carer (of dependent children)
- family carer (of other family/community members)
- community commitments
- work – regular, part-time/casual
- work – irregular (casual)
- work – full time
- extra- or co-curricular activities
- none of these apply to me

Additional responsibilities were an important addition in gaining a clearer picture of the realities of life for many students from RRR communities and, similar to equity factors, students often chose more than one as reflective of their circumstances. This data is summarised in the following table, according to the three remoteness areas. The proportion of students who were carers (of children or other family or community members) was significantly higher in inner regional areas, as were community commitments. Outer regional areas had more students who were engaged in part-time work, while full time work was in similar proportions in outer regional and remote areas. There were significantly more students from remote areas who nominated involvement in extra-curricular activities. Other commitments (not included in the table) were voluntary work, sporting and farm commitments and medical appointments.

Table 8. Other Responsibilities distributed across remoteness areas (n127)

Responsibilities	Inner Regional (n42)		Outer Regional (n66)		Remote/ VRemote (n19)	
Carer (children)	15	36%	18	27%	5	26%
Carer (family/others)	9	21%	8	12%	0	0%
Community commit's	14	33%	20	30%	5	26%
(Reg) Part-time work	19	45%	36	55%	6	32%
(Irregular) Casual work	8	19%	16	24%	5	26%
Full time work	7	17%	17	26%	5	26%
Extra-curricular	7	17%	18	27%	8	42%
Total no. of selections	79		133		34	

University Staff

A total of 44 university staff participated (survey n29, interview n15). They came from 12 different universities and a number of different regional campuses (n9), as well as three different Regional/Country Universities Centres in three states. Their workplaces were located across Inner Regional areas (NSW, SA, TAS, VIC), Outer Regional (NSW, SA, VIC, WA), Very Remote (NT) and two Metropolitan (SA, WA).

Most of the staff participants indicated their gender as female (n39, 89%; male n5, 11%), and most were aged over 35. In terms of their roles many were in management or coordination roles, including that of Director (n19, 40%) and some were operating in two roles simultaneously. The remainder were in Student Outreach or Student Support roles (n12, 26%), Academic (n9, 19%), Librarian/Technician (n5, 4%) or Academics in Enabling Programs (n2, 4%), shown in Figure 6.

University staff roles (n=44)

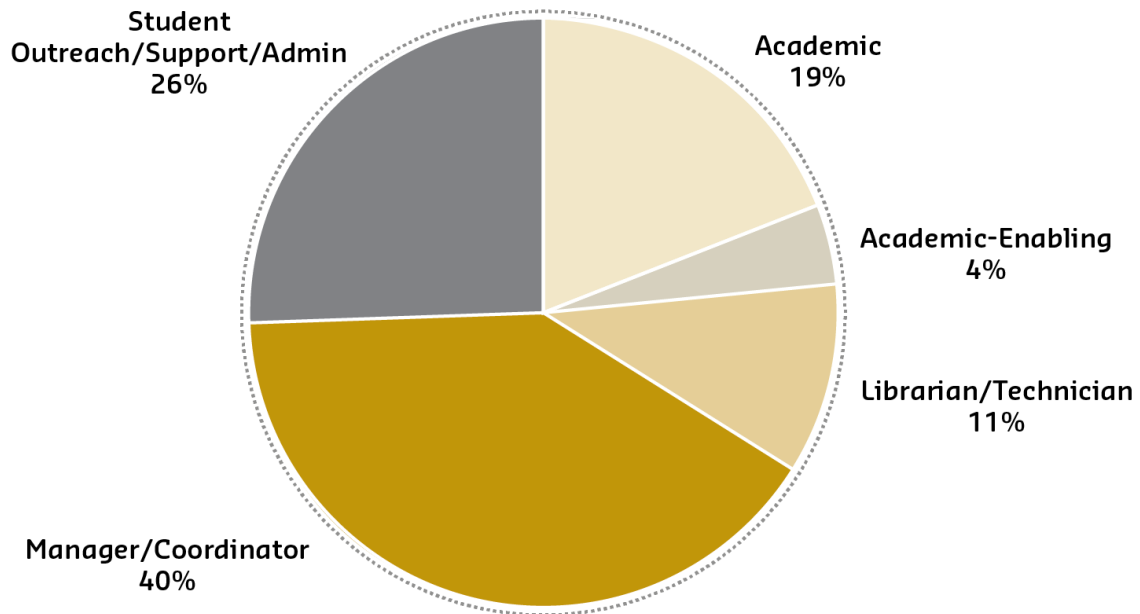


Figure 6. University Staff Roles

Staff were generally very experienced in supporting students in both their current and previous roles. A large percentage had been in their current role(s) for 5 years or more (n21, 45%). Thirty had previous experience in related roles and for the majority of participants, this experience extended to five years or more (n23, 80%), summarised in Table 9 below. Only six staff who were in their current role for less than four years had not worked in similar roles prior to this.

Table 9. Staff experience: number of years in current role(s)

Years in current role	No. of Staff
0 to 1 year	9
1 to 2 years	2
2 to 4 years	15
5 to 10 years	15
11 to 14 years	2
15 to 19 year	2
over 20 years	2
	47

*some work in more than one role concurrently (years may overlap but are included separately)

Senior School Students and Staff

Senior school students were drawn from one outreach program, in which 30 students participated (survey n28, interview n2). The gender mix was mostly female (n21, 72%; male n7, 24%; other n1, 3%). They were all in Year 12 (or the final year of secondary schooling) at various schools in the regional catchment areas of the outreach program. They were attending the outreach program at one of five campuses attached to the university: four campuses were Inner Regional and one was Outer Regional. In terms of multiple equity factors, all students except one were regional and 15 students indicated that no additional equity factors were reflective of their circumstances. Eight students selected one other category (i.e. Regional + 1) and four students selected two other categories (Regional +2). One student indicated she had caring responsibilities (summarised in Table 10).

Table 10. School Students Equity Factors summary

EQUITY FACTORS (n29)	
Regional	29
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	2
First-in-family (to reach Year 12)	6
With disability	3
Low socioeconomic	3
Non-English speaking background	2
Refugee	1
Working Class	1
Carer	1
	48

There was a small number of school staff who participated (n3). All were female and aged over 35 years. In terms of experience, they had been in their current roles from one year up to 5-10 years. Each had extensive experience in similar roles from 5-10 years to over 15 years. They were working in schools located in the Outer Regional areas of two states. Their roles included one executive, and two in student/youth support roles. The kinds of support they provided was wide-ranging, and included support for students as well as families, such as:

- Facilitating programs for preparing students for tertiary studies
- Well-being and engagement
- Career development
- In-class conversations, instigated by students
- Course and career counselling one-on-one with students and/or families
- Incidental conversations with students regarding career and university options.

The demographic data presented provides the context within which the qualitative data sits. The diversity of the university students, in particular, was presented in several ways, and the variations across remoteness areas highlighted. The experienced staff came from a range of institutions located across Australia. School students were from both inner and outer regional areas and in their final year of secondary school. In terms of equity factors, diversity was evident, with one student being a carer. The demographic factors presented in Chapter 3 provide the backdrop for the findings that follow, in answer to the key research questions.

Chapter 4: Findings

The data collected from the different participant groups represented an incredibly rich and highly diverse range of perspectives, which form the basis for the project website resources, and ongoing publications and presentations. The findings in this section will focus on the data which relates to the three research questions, and consequently, are skewed more towards the university student data. While the findings are presented in discrete themes and sub-themes, many are intertwined and overlaps will be inevitable.

In this section student participants will be identified by a pseudonym, and quotes will be followed by other details to assist in contextualising these within the findings, including remoteness category⁹ and age (actual or range), if these details were provided. As moving away from home was the exception, university student details will include 'moved' to indicate only those who relocated away from their region (indicated in the survey as "moved far away"). For ease of reading, student equity categories will not be included as the overwhelming majority of them self-identified with two or more equity categories, as well as other, often multiple, responsibilities, as detailed in Chapter 3. However, rather than overlooking these intersecting factors of equity and other responsibilities, the findings should be read as reflective of these complexities which are the realities for most of these RRR students. A detailed summary of demographics for each of the participant groups can be found in Appendix 11, Appendix 12, and Appendix 13 demographic summaries.

Research Question One: How is movement into and through university articulated by people who are from regional, rural and remote areas?

Movement into and through university was articulated in terms of actual geographical movement, but strongly linked to this were emotional and relational aspects that indicated strong ties to family and community. Thus, whether moving or staying, the decision-making for students from RRR areas was often driven by factors more complex than simply economic or instrumental goals. In this respect, Cook and Cuervo (2020) make the link between reflexivity and mobility, or the personal or professional growth that is experienced when weighing up options to stay, leave, or (eventually) to return. These authors provide a counter-argument, in regard to RRR young people, to the normative expectations that moving away denotes 'success', and staying denotes 'failure'. Rather, deliberate choices to stay or leave were often based upon painstaking considerations of alternative options as part of the decision-making process. This section will firstly explore actual geographical movement, which then leads into considering distance as a relational notion in which affective and relational aspects are embodied within the experience of geographical movement.

The two sections capturing different aspects of movement are: (1) Geographical movement: movers and stayers, and (2) Distance and movement as relational notions.

⁹ Remoteness categories are denoted as: IR=inner regional, OR=outer regional, REM/VREM= remote/very remote)

Geographical movement: Movers and stayers

Key finding 1a

Movement into and through university entails more than geographical (re)location alone. 'Movement into' is articulated as a complex process of decision-making and careful considerations, such as personal impacts as well as relational and emotional aspects of moving away (or not) from family, established social networks and familiarities of 'home'. Considerations were multiple and included whether to relocate (or not), to commute (or not), which mode of study options and/or course availability, and ease of access to a regional campus or regional university centre.

Overall, the majority of university students indicated that they stayed in their RRR home location, or did not move far away¹⁰ (77%, n115). However, as regional and remote areas in Australia have diverse characteristics and are distributed across a vast geographical landscape, a more nuanced way to view movement (that is, of relocating out of region to study i.e. 'move', or remaining in one's RRR location i.e. 'stay') was through 'remoteness categories' of Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote (see Chapter 3 for how these are defined). Mapping movement to remoteness categories, shows geographically-related variations which provide a backdrop for reasons given to move or stay. Using the distinctions provided by remoteness categories, the data shows that students in inner regional areas tended to stay (93%) and, to a lesser but still significant extent, so did those in outer regional areas (78%). By contrast, only 41% of students from remote/very remote areas stayed. (See Figure 7).

Geographical movement by remoteness categories

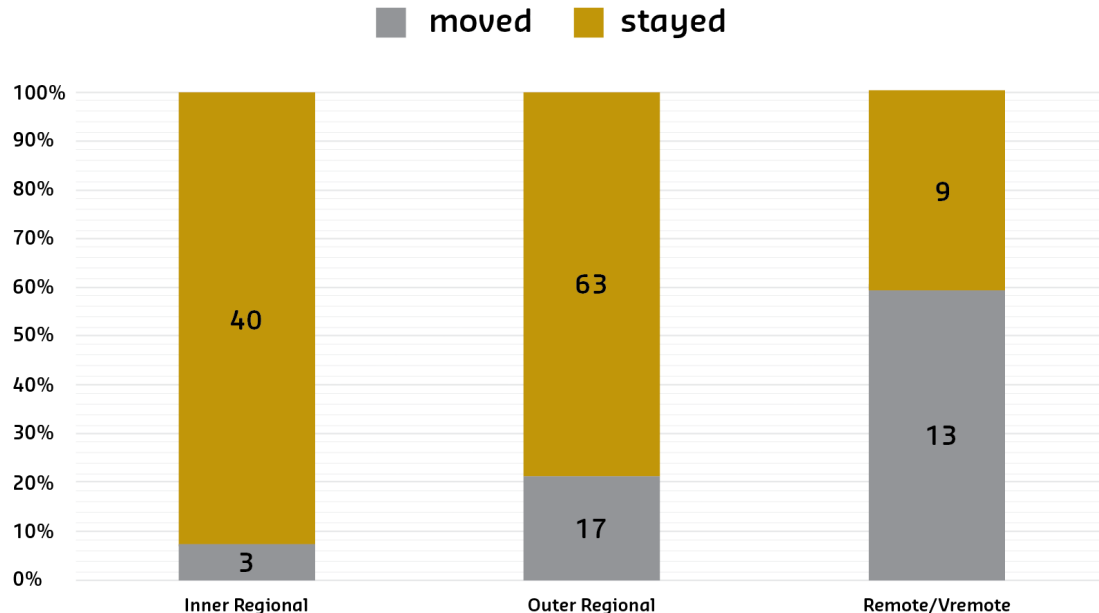


Figure 7. Geographical movement by remoteness categories

Movement may also be viewed through trends of internal migration. As elsewhere in the world, this peaks in Australia among young adults at around age 24 for females and 25 for

¹⁰ The data for those who stayed includes participants who indicated they did not move as well as a small number who indicated they had moved but were 'close by' (n13). These two groups were combined because even though participants may have moved (e.g. out of the family home) they considered the location as close enough to be able to regularly visit/return to their family/community.

males, and “reflect[s] the moves associated with the transition into adulthood” (ABS, 2018). When data for this study were examined for movement by age groupings, slightly more participants 25 years and under (n63) were stayers (n36, 53%) than movers (n27, 47%). However, when separated by remoteness categories, the proportion of movement away is much more prominent for those from remote or very remote regions, summarised in Figure 8. By drilling further into this data, the pattern looks quite different for the 26 years and over age group, although similarly the proportion of movers from remote/very remote is higher than for the other two regions (see Figure 9).

Geographical movement 25 years and under

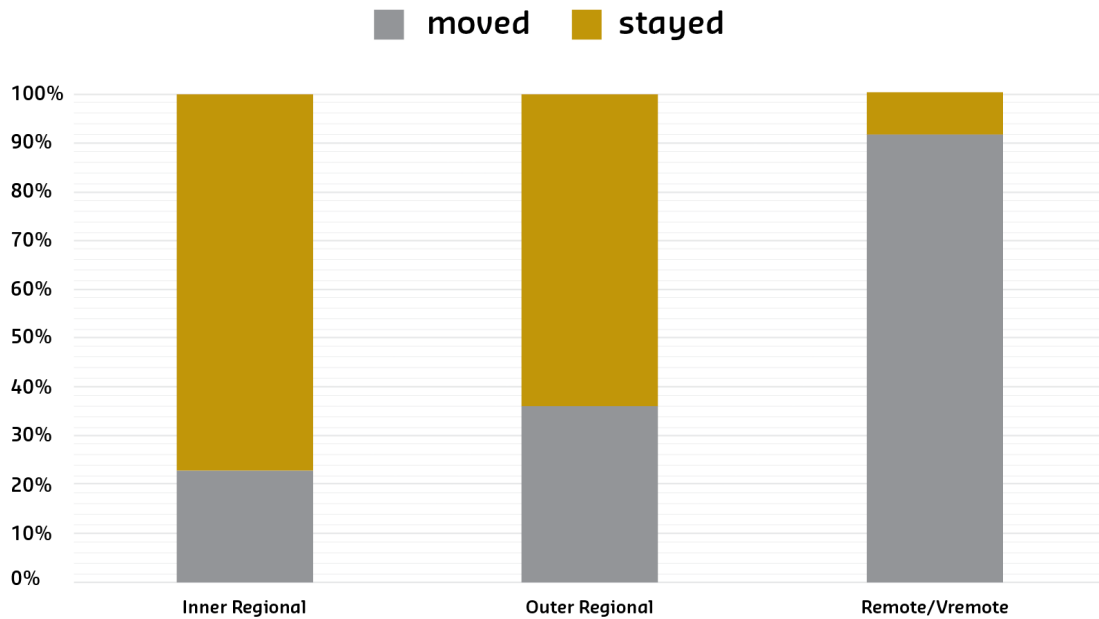


Figure 8. Geographical movement for the under 25 years age group

Geographical movement 26 years and over

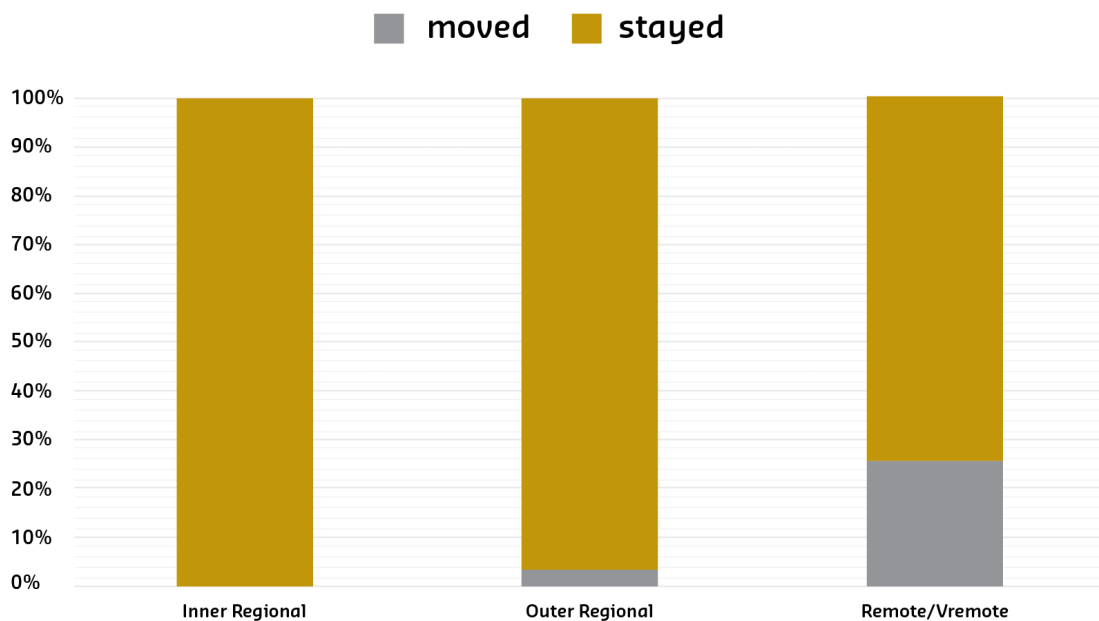


Figure 9. Geographical movement for the over 26 years age group

These patterns and variations suggest that movement for study reflects complexities which are broader than conventional notions of transitioning into adulthood. To expand on geographical movement, some of reasons given to move or stay will be presented next, from the perspectives held in the rich qualitative data.

Staying regional

Participants who stayed in their RRR location did so for a variety of reasons. The main ones included the mode of delivery which enabled them to stay: “I did not have to move thanks to online delivery of my course” (Jessica¹¹); being prepared to commute to the campus: “I didn’t move BUT that meant lots of traveling” (Freya, OR, 24); or choosing a course of study based on local campus offerings or access to a regional university centre: “I didn’t even consider degrees other than what was available at the local campus...because going to [the city] was not going to be an option” (Melinda, IR, 41). It is worth pointing out that these federally-funded regional university centres have dedicated study spaces, access to high speed internet and general academic support, among other things, and importantly, have been designed for regional people by regional people (see [DESE, 2021c](#); [CUC, 2021](#)).

As Freya mentioned above, staying also often meant commuting, sometimes long distances, which was frequently experienced as problematic, but something that often was accepted as ‘just the way it is’. Time spent travelling ranged from a few hours one-way but was sometimes as much as seven or eight hours. Carly talked about not “think[ing] twice about having to drive long distances” and conceded that “it sucks, but complaining is not going to change it” (Carly, OR, 31-40). Commuting was often connected with cost: financial cost (fuel, transport) and time cost (being away from family, support networks, study time). For example, Skye lived in a remote region and lamented the \$200 she had to outlay each week to commute, as well as being away from her family for “three days per week” (Skye, REM, 31-40). For others a ‘cost’ of attendance also entailed regular but temporary relocations:

Due to the remote location of my community, I am often required to temporarily live in town (100km from my family) during practicum/ professional placements and times of intensive face-to-face tutorials. (Linda, OR, 31-40)

Any sacrifice or inconvenience brought about by commuting may be exacerbated by a lack of (reliable) public transport especially in less populated areas, rendering this option as not viable. An example of the public transport system, described by Tina (OR, 41-50) as a “nightmare!”, was explained as ongoing issues of train cancellations and irregular timetabling for outer regional station stops. For Tina, the only option was a seven-hour drive to the city campus, a commitment she juggled with working fulltime, caring for school-aged children and being involved in various community commitments. Likewise, other participants mentioned having no other option but to drive, which forfeited opportunities to use the travel time to study enroute, do assignments or to catch up on recorded lectures, for example. It was quite common amongst participants who, by minimising the upheaval of relocating, found that geographical distance led to other issues related to travel and time that can have a cumulative impact on study, especially as the semester progressed. Not surprisingly, for some commuters, the unexpected opportunity to study from home brought about by campus closures in response to COVID-19 restrictions, enabled them to experience the flexibility afforded by the online mode and consequently, have the commute time returned to them.

While staying was the preferred option, it was sometimes the only option for students for whom moving away would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible. This difficulty was largely due to various personal or external factors, such as readiness, family, financial constraints or work commitments. Others were “drawn to the perceived stability and security of a familiar place” (Jones et al., 2021, p. 7). Some, like Carey, were not ready to move out:

¹¹ Note: some details such as region and/or age were not provided by the participant

“For me it wasn't a tough decision ... I just felt like I wasn't ready to leave home” (Carey, OR, 18-20). The many benefits of staying were cited, such as secure work as well as the importance of a support network. Ella explained her choice to stay: “I have my family's support, I have a job that's flexible, we've got all the resources that I need” (Ella, OR, 26-30), while for others, like Tori, moving away was not a choice due to affordability reasons, and online study was her “only option”:

I wasn't able to afford to move away for study. [Major city] is too expensive and I do not qualify for any assistance, though my parents cannot afford to support me. (Tori, OR, 18-20)

Having access to regional campuses or Regional University Centres was important in the decision-making to attend university, particularly for those who did not move. Many students encouraged other would-be students to ‘Go regional’ or ‘Stay regional’, expressing that having a regional campus “makes a huge difference” (Lisa, IR, 41-50) because “regional campuses are amazing” (Mikayla, IR, 18-20). Smaller class sizes often made the experience more personalised, as Tamsin reflects: “it's so much more intimate; you're getting all the depth, all the knowledge you need; you can ask questions whenever you want to” (Tamsin, OR, 21). Melinda, a busy mother who works part-time as well as being involved in the local community, would never have enrolled in a university degree if the regional campus did not exist. For this, she considered herself fortunate because she had become part of a “really supportive group”, support which also included social aspects:

like the campus manager baking cakes for morning tea ... I guess you don't get that in the big city campuses ... So that's a real perk ... of the small regional campus. (Melinda, IR, 41-50)

On the other hand, university management may deem face-to-face classes not viable if student numbers drop below certain levels. Moving to remote modes of learning made it difficult for some students to stay motivated, especially if face-to-face was the preferred way of learning, as it was for many participants. Mikayla, who is first in her family to attend university, found the experience of online seminars and lectures a challenge: “it's hard staying motivated”. As well she was not able to enjoy the experience of studying on campus with her classmates because a lot of regional students work, and so they don't tend to hang around, “they just go to uni and leave” (Mikayla, IR, 18-20).

Students who were able to access regional university centres (such as Country Universities Centres in NSW), without exception, had nothing but praise for the support and the facilities they had free access to. Caitlyn encouraged others to enrol if there is a centre nearby, emphasising that, “It is worth it...Honestly, I don't think I could have gotten this far without the Centre. Honestly” (Caitlyn, OR, 21-25). Wendy describes here her experience, which is also typical of the kinds of comments made:

The Country University Centre opened in [inner regional city] just as I was starting to do my degree so I've been very, very lucky to get a great deal of support from them ... they've been absolutely invaluable ... without the[m] ... I would have been lost. I won't say I would have probably thrown it in but I might have been tempted to have quit and just said, “No, it's too hard. I can't do this”. (Wendy, IR, 51+)

Moving away

Reasons for moving away (or considering to) included: a limited range of local course offerings, “I had to move...as the local university campus only covered a few courses I had no interest in” (Charley, OR, 18-20, moved); a lack of suitable future opportunities, “I like it here and don't want to leave but the job market is terrible” (Tyler, IR, 18-20); or simply wanting to gain broader experiences, “[I wanted to] get out of my town for a little while, push myself to achieve higher education” (Abbey, OR, 18-20, moved). For Bianca, the

opportunities in her remote home town were incongruent with her degree and career goals. As she identifies below, this was enough for her to decide not to return to live or to work:

I know a few things that I don't want to do – I don't want to come back to the small country town I grew up in. Even though I love it and I love coming back, like I'm back here now on the farm, but...with my degree and my experience and interest, there's nothing I can do back here. (Bianca, REM, 21, moved)

Findings from the school student data about movement into university was less about staying and more about moving away as a yet-to-be experience (school student quotes are indicated by 'SS'). Movement away was imagined with both anticipation and trepidation. For some there was an excitement, such as meeting new people, exploring new cultures and lifestyles, or simply "moving away from home, getting a part-time job" (Sienna, SS, IR, 16-18). Bella provides here a wonderful description of her anticipation sparked through imagining a future of independence:

I feel excited about moving out of home and moving to a different city. I am keen to start my own life and finally be really independent with my goals and the way I live my life. I feel once I am finished high school and moved out that I can really start making a roll with my life and really get it moving and start doing what I really want to do. (Bella, SS, IR, 16-18)

While Bella had already decided she would need to move away to the city as "the only way" to achieve her goals (of starting a successful business), for others, excitement was coupled with qualms. For Brad "moving away from family" was one concern as was "being able to support myself" (Brad, SS, IR, 16-18). Safia was worried about "travelling to possible universities" (Safia, SS, IR, 16-18) and Lexi spoke about the biggest challenge for her to date being "whether I want to move away from my family to pursue my dreams" (Lexi, SS, IR, 16-18). Strong ties to family and community that create a sense of belonging through the "everyday practices of working studying, caring, socializing and living in rural places" (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017, p. 220), are alluded to in Bonnie's comment:

I'm slightly concerned that I'm not actually ready to be independent and be away from what's been my home for all of my life. (Bonnie, SS, OR, 16-18)

There is little doubt that moving away can be stressful, especially if the transition did not entail a sense of feeling 'at home' or at ease in the new surroundings. Quality in relationships was also crucial and when lacking, this can impact on sense of belonging (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017). To illustrate, one participant, who relocated for study, talked about the combined effect of various stresses she faced:

While living there, anxiety, depression, stress, worry ... because living on campus was incredibly hard for me who had always lived on a farm. The 500+ rent a fortnight also put major strain on my family and put us all through an immense amount of stress. When living on campus you had to be a certain type of person otherwise you'd suffer immense bullying. I was a kid from a farm with a low-income family and the wealthier kids (which was almost everyone at college) didn't like that. (Holly, OR, 21-25, moved).

The next section builds on aspects of geographical movement and distance; by viewing these in terms of social and relational notions (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017; Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015) intangible affective aspects can be explored. This helps to build a more nuanced understanding of the RRR student experience.

Distance and movement as relational notions

Key finding 1b

Movement into and through university for regional, rural and remote students reflects strong connections to communities and families, which have played, and continue to play, an important role in students' social and emotional development. These connections and a sense of reciprocity, often 'secure' movement back to these places to 'give back', utilising newfound skills and knowledges gained during university study. To a lesser extent university can provide a means to forge a different life away from smaller locales, and this movement is perceived as opening up opportunities such as career and new social connections, that otherwise may not be available. The experience of university study is complex especially for those with families: this was articulated through negative impacts on family life and time. The higher education experience embodied a range of emotion, pointing to the complex and demanding negotiations that students from RRR areas are undergoing.

Considering distance and movement as relational notions, or the social and emotional connections to family and community (Cook & Cuervo, 2020), helps to reveal the intangible aspects of participants' reflections; in particular the important role that smaller communities and family have played and continue to play in students' decisions to move, stay, or indeed, to return.

Living in, or coming from, RRR areas, in which a sense of community was experienced both within and beyond the family, was a significant relational factor impacting students' articulation of their experience of moving into and through university. Examples of reciprocal acts of being known and knowing others, helping others and feeling cared for were strongly present in the data as participants talked about their communities. These were additional to other benefits such as solitude, family-friendly lifestyle, unhurried pace of life, access to open spaces, or opportunities for adventure, among others. However, some other realities of being in smaller communities were also mentioned, aside from challenges brought about through geographical distance.

Belongingness: community and family influences

'Belongingness', a state or feeling of belonging and acceptance, that accompanies being part of smaller communities (Wyn & Cuervo, 2017) was undoubtedly beneficial for many participants. While ties to smaller communities do not necessarily mean that RRR people do not leave these places, belongingness does appear to provide them with experience of a stable social network base, which they may return to, or alternatively, seek to replicate elsewhere. One participant reflected on smaller communities as having "so much love ... it's like one big family" (Cathy, OR, 26-30). For others, being part of a community meant that you "know almost everyone in your town" (Dana, OR, 18-20, moved), that relationships inevitably develop from "being involved in a tight-knit community" (Abbey, OR, 18-20, moved), and that other qualities are developed which helped foster positive relations. "Living in [my remote town] has definitely taught me about being generous. And friendliness! I've never met more friendly people" (Cassie, REM, 18-20, moved). Relational responsibility also extended to tending carefully to these relationships. Because of the heavier reliance on fewer people "you can't afford to burn bridges since there is less people around to build new relationships with" (Corey, OR, 21-25). Reciprocity is core to fostering a healthy community, as highlighted by Amanda's insights below:

I love the small town community. I think it is important that everyone takes part in improving their community, and each person has their own personal talents and goals they can bring to the table. Being off a farm, during butchering season, we have the neighbours and other farmers in our area help butcher, and for their

help they take some meat with them. I think it's important to contribute your skills where needed. (Amanda, OR, 18-20, moved)

Families and the relations between family members in particular played an important role in preparing young people for their future. Many participants were influenced by the work ethic that was instilled in them as part of growing up. Modelling a positive work ethic set students in good stead for later life, with examples such as Tina, who described her early years of going to work with her parents in the family milk bar, and seeing “everyone work”. She soon learnt that “if I didn’t work, I got my arse kicked” (Tina, OR, 41-50). Jules similarly reflected on her farming background of growing up “helping my parents work in paddocks”. She acknowledged that while difficult, it “taught me about hard work and respect for how lucky I am” (Jules, OR, 26-30). Parental influence also instilled values and benefits of a good work ethic that emphasised more than purely economic gains, with the added benefit of being transferrable to other areas of life:

We had such amazing opportunities because of the hard work my parents did and it's made me realise the value in hard work and that the only way you can do the things that we did when I was younger that I want to do when I'm older is to put in the hours into work, and to work hard. But it's not just work hard, and not to work for the money, but to work in an area that you enjoy. (Macey, VREM, 20, moved)

Indeed, coping mechanisms which came from living through times of extreme hardship, often experienced collectively, could be transferred to other situations in life, such as while studying at university. Some participants were directly affected by drought and recent bushfires. While traumatic, this was often when community spirit became most visible, when “everyone is willing to jump in and help each other no matter their own situation” (Monica, IR, 21-25). Bianca’s reflections below illustrate how she has been able to draw directly upon her own coping mechanisms borne from hardship; experiential learnings which she has been able to transfer to dealing with challenges at university:

My first 12 years of life was in drought ... so I've grown up being quite resilient, you know, things can be really bad but there's always a way to get out of it, there's always a positive side, so even when I was really struggling with especially the law, I knew that it wasn't going to be like that forever and that there's always got to be an alternative. (Bianca, REM, 21, moved)

Return to or escape from smaller communities

Movement into and through university was also described in terms of returning to communities on completion of their degree. One student explained that while people from RRR places might “crave new experiences”, that “ultimately many of us return to our home communities and find work if we can” (Kim, OR, 31-40). Some of the specific skills and knowledges that participants felt would benefit their communities often related to health care services gaps. For example, Ella who was in first year nursing, wanted to “work remotely ... in the communities that are lacking in medical resources”, specifically in oncology or palliative care. This desire can be linked to a relational focus that reflected the strength and quality of connectedness to community. In Ella’s words:

“they're sick obviously ... and you can be an impact on someone's life and for people that don't actually have family, you can be that person and you can actually build a relationship with that patient. (Ella, OR, 26-30)

To a lesser extent, university was a means to ‘escape’ and perceived as a way out of their RRR locales, seeking alternatives to life in smaller communities. Taking the step into university study was seen in terms of personal growth as well in terms of other opportunities that would be unlikely if not impossible if they stayed, such as secure work prospects or achieving ‘something significant’. This was exemplified in Alex’s comment, who perceived

the benefits of moving away as twofold: it “increased [my] chance of getting a good career” as well as “help[ed] me to get away from [my hometown]” (Alex, IR). While Gayle did not move away, she was realistic about life in smaller communities, which she conceded “can be a little bit tougher than in bigger towns because you can’t just quietly blend in” (Gayle, OR, 48). Chloe, below, expands upon this; she also did not move, but similarly acknowledges some of the less desirable realities:

Because everyone does know everyone, you don’t feel like you’d have that sense of anonymity where you can just sort of fade into the background and go, “I stuffed up there. No-one will know” but yeah, everybody does know ... because it is such a small community. (Chloe, OR, 41-50).

These honest perspectives from students who have lived in smaller communities confirm that these microcosms of society, while often valued, are not romanticised as “homogenous entities” (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017, p. 229), but are as diverse as those who inhabit them. The next section builds upon this through exploring some of the affective, or emotional, aspects that students experience as they move into and through university.

Affective aspects of movement

When distance is viewed as a relational notion, aspects of movement can be considered in affective or emotional terms. In terms of negative emotion, feeling ‘guilt-laden’ was expressed by some participants having to spread themselves across multiple responsibilities which encroached on the quantity and quality of time and attention they could give to their close relationships. This is unsurprising as almost half the participants were mature-aged (48% aged over 25) with responsibilities and commitments of family, paid or unpaid work, community or voluntary commitments and so on. Jessica, a student with disability and carer for her husband who has a terminal illness, gives a great deal of insight into feelings of guilt:

I feel some guilt about taking time out from my caring role in order to study. I also feel stressed sometimes trying to balance study and work and not spending enough time with my husband. Reducing my income in order to work part time so I could study also limited some choices. (Jessica, IR)

Cuervo and Wyn (2017) highlight how the routineness of relatively ordinary, everyday practices within families construct a sense of belonging. The decision to study often disrupted these routines and guilt can follow when comparing what they used to be able to do, especially in relation to shared family activities. Charlotte, who was in the second year of her degree, describes here feelings of guilt through the impact on family ‘routines’, exacerbated by withdrawal of support from her partner:

A fair amount of guilt, especially during holidays as uni holidays and school holidays do not align. Not being able to be part of family and school events. Feeling pressured from husband; initially he supported but not now. (Charlotte, OR, 41-50)

The quote below from Maureen, a staff participant, concurs with the experiences of Charlotte and Jessica, offering reflections from many years’ observations of and working with older students:

Many who work ... try to balance home time with study and family time. They are trying to improve their career to spend more time with their family, but in so doing miss out on so much due to studying. (Maureen, staff, Uni1, Academic Enabling Lecturer)

Exhaustion also contributed to emotional aspects of movement. When participants have little choice but to ‘fit’ university study in with other non-negotiable responsibilities, something often had to give; sustaining this over prolonged periods can undoubtedly become

exhausting. While Judy talked indomitably about “making it all work”, juggling multiple responsibilities did mean sacrificing her own social life, which she conceded “is fine” because “in 2026 I get my life back”. Another contributor to exhaustion was the cumulative effects of commuting long distances. Long travel times can manifest in physical and emotional fatigue, low energy levels and tiredness, which build as the semester progresses and assessments mount up.

Belinda, a staff participant reflects here on her observations of commuter students over her 25 years of experience, specifically that commuting “is where lack of equity begins”, as she explains:

When I teach in the room, I'm conscious that I might have in the room, a student whose commute to campus is a five-minute walk across campus and a student whose commute is two hours each way... I think we're not really attentive enough to that because we say that commuting is not our business, home is not our business. But actually this is where a lack of equity begins. And so, if I'm teaching someone who had to get up at 5:30 to be in the room, I'm already teaching someone who's exhausted and if that person's now got five hours of classes to justify getting up at 5:30, and will get home at 9:00, that person's going to be more and more exhausted through the day. (Belinda, staff, Uni2, Academic, Associate Dean)

However, while negative emotions were more prevalent in the data, there was also evidence that students experienced a full range of emotions in relation to movement into and through university. Words the students used to describe positive affective experiences included love, enjoy, passion, excitement, rewarding; or feeling proud, motivated, more confident, empowered. The following excerpt from Corey, who was in his fourth year of fulltime study, provides a fitting illustration of positive affect:

Challenging, enjoyable, eye-opening, empowering, interesting. The course content was challenging because of the technical mindset required. It was enjoyable because of the friends that I met and the community it gave me. It was eye opening because I never realised how many professional and personal opportunities would come my way. These opportunities, as well as the potential to make a difference ... made me feel empowered (Corey, OR, 21-25).

Affective meanings were sometimes emphasised and upscaled through the addition of ‘really’ or ‘absolutely’ or similar expressions, capitalisation or punctuation (e.g. really loved/enjoyed/disliked; absolutely LOVED/enjoyed/loathed, !!!) or infused in terms like ‘passion’, ‘over the moon’, etc.

Many students expressed both positive and negative emotion simultaneously. It was quite common for terms such as frustration / determination, excitement / anxiousness, stress / fun, challenging / rewarding, daunting / exciting, to be used together. This student summed up her experience as “Uplifting but draining! Never ending. Worth it” (Simone, IR, 41-50), and similarly Teri who was “excited and nervous ... nervous due to the fact nobody in my immediate family had gone to university before and excited because it's a new chapter of my life that I want to do well in” (Teri, OR, 18-20).

Research Question Two: What goals and hoped-for futures are students moving towards?

Key finding 2

Regional, rural and remote students articulated like-to-be or like-to-avoid futures variously through specific, general, broad or big-picture goals. Actions and behaviours indicate that students are mobilising strategies in 'everyday' ways (such as identifying what they desire, what they want to avoid being/becoming, setting goals, planning study, imagining their life and career post-university etc) to realise these hoped-for selves. Goals students were pursuing indicate a high level of altruism through desire to help others, to give back to communities and to make a difference, not only at a societal level but for their families, through the legacy of providing a better or more secure life than they had currently, or had experienced or observed in others previously. Personal goals often related to quality of life such as living a satisfying life, having the ability to choose a career or work trajectory, being engaged in meaningful work, being a 'decent' person, as well as having financial freedom.

Pursuing goals and having a sense of working towards what is hoped for in the future are important conceptions that indicate movement into and through university study, which is given meaning through goal-focused behaviours and actions, linking also to motivation (Erikson, 2019). This section focuses on how participants responded to conceptions of what they imagined 'being' or 'doing' in the future, and gives insight into motivations evident when working towards these particular goals. Some students had very clear and specific ideas and aims: "Get a job as a psychologist, get married, build a house, have a family, help people" (Dale, REM, 18-20), or "work as a social worker in community services, preferably an NGO" (Pauline, OR, 41-50); others were broader or more general: "I would like to take this accounting qualification and just put it to good use somewhere in the world" (Melinda, IR, 41-50). But overall most were working towards achieving goals for the future that were personally meaningful: "I've always loved learning. I also want my family to have a better future" (Holly, OR, 21-25, moved). Motivation can also be captured in efforts made to avoid particular future states, with such avoidance actions being equally influential in achieving hoped-for futures, for example: "I couldn't see myself just working on the farm the rest of my life" (Georgie, REM, 21-25).

This section responds to Research Question 2 through the perspectives of university students on hoped-for futures, organised into three themes, with Figure 10 showing the frequency of each theme across the dataset (detailed further in Appendix 15):

- Desire to make a difference
- Desire for satisfaction in life
- Selves to be avoided

This is followed by school students' perspectives under a fourth theme:

- Who do I want to become?

Future Selves: Main themes from university students (n120)

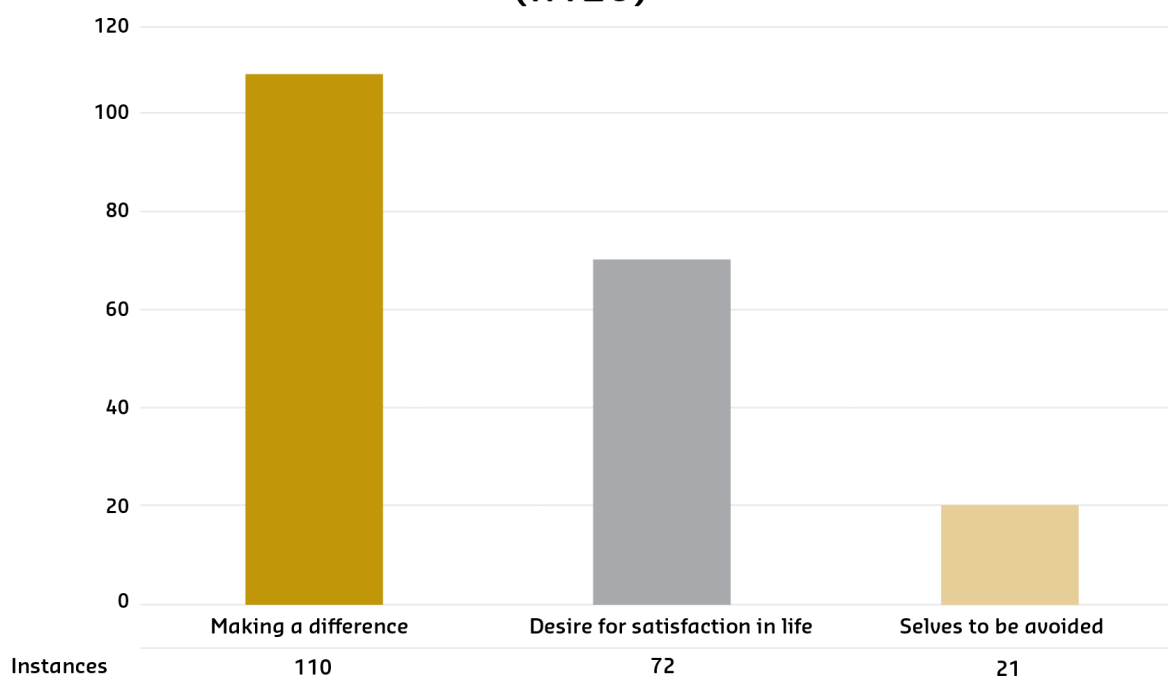


Figure 10. The future selves students were working towards (main themes)

Desire to make a difference

Desiring to make a difference through helping others was a dominant theme that emerged, reflected in 92 percent of student responses. Some of the specific futures students were working towards were to be health workers in areas such as nursing, psychology or aged care, to be social workers, teachers, or to use management or commerce qualifications for a variety of future options. Some made clear connections between the pursuit of a particular field of study and how they could use this to help others via their chosen field of study, such as Beth whose “personal interest is in forensic psychology, specifically PTSD¹²” (Beth, OR, 34), Jules who wants to “become a psychologist who works with children/teenagers” (Jules, OR, 26-30), or Alice who “know[s] I can be of best use helping others in our community” (Alice, IR, 41-50). More insight into some of what drives RRR students towards reaching their goals and the motivation that enables them to keep pursuing these desires, are expanded upon below by Beth and Jules:

I have a brother who's in the armed forces so I just see some of the effects of what they go through. A lot of his close friends that have died by suicide or those things ... it really hits home for me and I want to help him somehow. (Beth, OR, 34)

I went through dark times myself and I know how much my psychologist helped me ... I know the struggles of mental illness and I just want to be able to help them. They are the next generation, they are the future. (Jules, OR, 26-30)

Some students talked about big-picture future selves which were often influenced by altruistic values and clearly projected toward how these could add value to society. These values included desires to be influential in social change, policy decisions or in addressing particular societal issues. For example, Paula (IR, 31-40) who was studying criminology felt that becoming a researcher would help to “find ways to reduce recidivism and help offenders

¹² PTSD – acronym for post-traumatic stress disorder

reintegrate back into the community successfully, with a purpose for their life". Similarly, others understood that their university degree would enable them to contribute to decision making processes that would benefit others, such as Charlotte who "wanted to be part of the decision-making process within schools to help our students" (Charlotte, OR, 41-50), and Paige whose desire was to:

support people who cannot live their best lives. Social change ... Learning to cope with challenges, resilience and understanding how to support others. I feel excited to learn and know that I can make a difference. (Paige, OR, 41-50)

These altruistic values went hand-in-hand with a sense of personal gain that students envisaged in their future lives. This included striving to be engaged in meaningful work, having a good work/life balance and personal satisfaction. For Tina "being able to learn and grow as a person" was her primary goal (Tina, OR, 41-50), while Dane wanted "to do something meaningful, help others" as well as also wanting to "provide for family and leave them in a better position than I was" (Dane, REM). Some imagined their educational pathway would equip them to make a difference in the world as well as provide them with other opportunities or choices. For example, David's big picture goals to "increase public health outcomes in the region through my research" and "give something back" were expressed alongside personal aspirations of "widening my horizon ... and upskilling myself" and to "be a good dad for my two kids" (David, REM, 41-50, moved). Frankie also wanted to "make a difference - help people" but recognised that personal satisfaction was also an important value to pursue:

Work for an organisation that see me as a person not a number. Enjoy my work. Have a work life balance. Have the opportunity to work part time from home and part time at the office. (Frankie, IR, 21-25)

Desire for satisfaction in life

The desire for satisfaction in life was also a strongly represented theme (appearing across 60 percent of the responses), imagined variously, and not often solely with a career- or monetary-focus as the driving force. In fact, students talked about a range of important futures that they were aiming for and provided more nuanced glances into how they negotiated their movement through university: futures which were related to family or home life, chasing dreams, the ability to have some control over, or the capacity to choose, those things they desired in life. These ranged from the dream of eventually being an "AFL Talent Scout" (Adam, REM, 21-25, moved) to just doing university study "for myself" (Morgan, VREM, 18-20, moved). Family and relationships feature in how participants envisaged a satisfying life, such as for Kieran who "want[s] to have kids ... have a wife and be a successful family man" (OR, 18-20, moved), Similarly, Bianca wants a career that doesn't restrict "real life balance" and one that aligns with her family values, "I want to still be able to have a family because family's really important to me" (REM, 21, moved). Finally, Laura offers insight into a range of values that for her, were synonymous with creating a satisfying life:

[I] want to remain active part of my family, very important to me. Oh, and I want to own my own home, be financially stable (nil debts ever), and own chickens. I would like to be a good partner and active member of the communities that I live in over my lifetime. (Laura, OR, 26-30)

Working towards achieving a satisfying life was also connected to having the ability to choose work or career options. Financial security was an important aim for some participants such as Ben, who was in second year computing science. This degree fitted in well with where he was heading: "to improve career opportunities ... obtain stable employment for better financial security" (Ben, IR, 51+). While motivation towards achieving a high income was rarely mentioned, there were a few exceptions. One included Grace, who was in her

final year of education; her specific aim was to “get a high-income career” (Grace, OR, 21-25). She then qualified this as being more a desire for financial freedom: “just earn a good income that will allow me to start investing and not have to worry about money. And travel.” Similarly, Madeline wanted to earn enough to “live comfortably” but she also looked forward to “being absolutely able to earn a higher salary than my current job” if she finds work in her new field (Madeline, IR, 31-40). However, achieving these goals was not always an easy route, which had been Sean’s experience. Sean was the only person in his family to complete Year 12, and had been studying part-time for four years, with a graduation date of 2024. He moved a long way from home for on-campus study and is determined to finish. Realisation of his goals “to get out of the poverty ... just enjoy what I end up doing”, somewhat ironically could be thwarted by “money”, or more specifically, lack of it (Sean, OR, 21-25, moved).

In these varied pursuits towards a better future, gaining a university qualification was seen as a pathway which would generally open up more opportunities than these students currently had available to them, as Caitlyn and Frankie explain below:

I’m going to go on to uni so I can, at the very least, get written qualifications into the jobs that I’d like to pursue because what’s the point in getting stuck in a job that you’re not going to enjoy. (Caitlyn, OR, 21-25)

I want to earn better money than my parents who have struggled to find secure and well paid work for many years due to their lack of education, lack of opportunities in the local area and few employers in the area. (Frankie, IR, 21-25)

These quotes also indicate end-states that Caitlin and Frankie wanted to avoid, such as ‘getting stuck’ in unsatisfying work and struggling to find secure work. Selves to be avoided are equally important in understanding motivations and actions towards desired futures.

Like-to-avoid future selves

The kinds of selves one would like to avoid is the third main theme, reflected in 18 percent of the responses, which is significant as it was not a specific question posed to the university student participants (it was to the school student participants). People can be motivated by what kinds of futures or future selves they would like to avoid (Jones et al., 2021). Avoidance action taken usually emanates from the realms of experience or from observations (of self or others), and movement through university study may be viewed through motivation not-to-become someone or something. This may be in relation to work which is not perceived as satisfying, the threat of financial insecurity, or not having choices or opportunities in life and career trajectories. For example, Skye, a mother in her 30s, experienced working in hospitality and retail which she “cannot face going back to” because she felt it would “destroy me psychologically” (Skye, REM, 31-40). Being engaged in fulfilling work has become much more important to her and she had very definite ideas in regard to what she wants to avoid. She talks about her desired future in the quote below:

I knew that if I spent my whole life jumping between unfulfilling jobs I would be absolutely miserable. I know I am intelligent and hard working - I want to add value to the world ... I want a job that allows me to be outside, solve problems and pursue my own research. I want job options. (Skye, REM, 31-40)

Similarly, Billy expressed a desire to move away from labouring work which was not satisfying and did not form a part of his hopes for the future. In order to avoid this work and life becoming his future end-state he knew he needed to “upskill”:

I decided to go to university because I got tired of the job I was doing. I was loading boats and hooking up loads of wood to go onto the boat and that was

long hours and I decided that I didn't want to continue doing jobs like that. (Billy, OR, 20)

Observations of others can be a strong motivator for particular choices and actions to ensure a different outcome for oneself. Some participants observed negative aspects of others' lives which they then wanted to avoid, such as Bianca, who talked about the impact of long work hours on wellbeing and family life. Her words below indicate that she was cognisant that through identifying what she does not want (rather than what she desires), at this stage is having more influence on her behaviours and actions:

I don't want to be stuck at work 12 hours a day, 14 hours a day – I want to have an actual life ... you see all the worn-out people that spent too long at work and not enough time for themselves or with their family. That's not something I want. ... things that I don't¹³ want are probably guiding my mindset of what I do want. (Bianca, REM, 21, moved)

Likewise, aspects of Kelly's childhood experience coupled with observations of others which had negative impacts on her, became motivators for avoidance strategies, and important for understanding the realisation of taking a different trajectory: being and doing something different with her own life. She expressed a number of desires that are situated very much in her experience and background:

To better myself and my future family financially ... to be financially stable and be a positive influence on others because I longed for this as a child watching my family do the opposite. (Kelly, OR, 26-30)

School student perspectives: 'Who do I want to become?'

The school student participants who reflected on who they would like to become (n23), were perhaps at their most voluble when asked to describe their visions for the future, including who they would like to become and what sort of person they would want to avoid becoming. Such a private and complicated topic as how they envisioned their future lives and future selves naturally stimulated varied and idiosyncratic responses, however a clear emphasis was on the importance of finding a job they enjoyed with a stable income. This "dream job" (Safia, SS, IR, 16-18) varied widely and included such diverse positions as "Exercise Scientist for a football team", (Sabina, SS, IR, 16-18), "a career in Biomedical Sciences, something like Neuroscience" (Beau, SS, IR, 16-18) and the desire to "own a small hobby farm, live off the grid and teach Agriculture to students" (Bessie, SS, OR, 16-18).

Similar to the university participants, a key shared vision was a yearning to make a difference in the world or have a positive impact upon their communities. Over half of these students emphasised the importance of helping others and making "positive changes in society" (Bonnie, SS, OR, 16-18); other visions were more personal and included starting a family, travelling and making space for creative activities.

Although anxiety around financial security was a recurring theme, when considering their future selves, the quality of being wealthy was mentioned only once. Instead, students frequently cited personal achievement as an important factor: "I want to feel proud of myself and satisfied with the life I live" (Siena, SS, IR, 16-18). Other commonly identified qualities involved being happy, helping others and making a difference in society. Being "caring and compassionate" (Brad, SS, IR, 16-18) were popular personal attributes, as was being "a person who makes a difference in society" (Brody, SS, IR, 16-18). This clear tendency towards altruism was emphasised by the kind of selves they wanted to avoid becoming, with a surprisingly large number of respondents (87 percent) sharing a fear of becoming selfish,

¹³ *emphasis* by participant in interview audio-recording

arrogant or rude along with the more common fear of being unhappy: “I don't want to be selfish or heartless, I don't want to be money hungry” (Lexi, SS, IR, 16-18).

Perhaps more so than in the university participant data, school students expressed a clear and consistent anxiety around future employment, with a pronounced fear around working in a repetitive, meaningless job. A considerable number of participants had apparently entertained unsettling visions of being confined to a life devoid of passion or meaning, articulating fears such as “sitting in an office and not helping others and being proactive” (Lily, SS, IR, 16-18) or “stuck inside at a desk job” (Bessie, SS, OR, 16-18).

Research Question Three: What barriers and enablers to higher education participation are perceived and experienced?

A range of barriers or risks to completion emerged from the data, as well as enablers that helped students to keep persevering. This section will focus firstly on two kinds of barriers, financial and institutional, specifically the inflexibility of institutional processes and practices. It will then focus on the impact of the competing responsibilities in these students' lives and the impact of multiple equity factors.

This section will then build upon the previous discussion of motivation as an enabler to university attendance and completion with discussion of two further kinds of enablers; firstly, students' personal qualities and strengths and secondly, student support networks, which can be social, emotional and practical.

Key finding 3a

Barriers to completion outside the control of student in addition to financial barriers, included institutional barriers of inflexibility around processes, practices and lack of staff understandings of the realities for regional and remote students, and internet and technological issues that magnify inequitable access for students from RRR areas.

Financial barriers

A lack of access to adequate financial resources was by far the most commonly mentioned barrier to completing university by participants. Closely related to this is the fact that many needed to work to support themselves and their households, which can result also in time poverty. Molly, a staff participant working as a career consultant in student outreach over a number of years, noted that financial burden seems to be “one of the biggest” hurdles. In her many interactions with current and potential students, a recurring conversation, particularly with mature-age people, was “they would love to study, but they feel secure in their job at the moment”. Even though they may want something more, the risk of cutting down work hours to study is too great: “they risk losing their job, or losing their hours”, with potential flow-on effects to financial commitments, mortgages etc, because “something has to give”. Eleanor, a first in family student, also highlighted her financial situation as a “big barrier”. She explained how difficult it was, “coming from a low financial family” to then “put yourself into that situation of attending uni, just knowing you've got all that stuff to pay off” (Eleanor, OR, 18-20).

Others had to consider whether to take on the debt generated by their university attendance, especially if they were mature-aged with other large financial commitments. Melinda, in her 40s, said she deliberated for a “couple of years” about taking on an extra \$30,000 plus debt as she and her husband had “worked pretty hard to get where we currently were debt-wise”. While she was successful in obtaining a scholarship, a condition of that was that she study fulltime, which meant she is now “try[ing] to work a bit less ... but hopefully still be financially okay” (Melinda, IR, 41-50).

Apart from juggling family and work with other commitments, further difficulties included being able to afford the extra outlays, such as for books, “I am going to have to spend thousands on textbooks” (Tina, OR, 41-50); for travel, “travel costs alone exceeded \$10,000 last year” (Linda, OR, 31-40); or access to childcare which is difficult or non-existent in some areas. A multiplicity of considerations is summarised by Irene (OR, 31-40) who was first in family, from low SES and working class backgrounds. She was studying by block mode and was in her second year of part-time study:

Time commitment. Logistics of attending residential school - taking time off work, what to do with the kid, affording airfares, accommodation & food on top of ordinary bills. (Irene, OR, 31-40)

Finally, Colin a staff member, who identified as Aboriginal raised some of the issues he has witnessed which impact on the higher education experience of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students he has worked with, many who have relocated from interstate. In his roles as mentor and team member in an Aboriginal-led program with a focus on health issues in communities, wellbeing and traditional culture, he felt that a lot of the issues are interconnected with “loneliness, living away from home, or lack of money”. He described a situation of high attrition and asks “can’t we do it better?”:

We had 26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [students] last year – seven completed, the rest dropped out ... and why they dropped out ... was lack of family support because they’d come to [major city], away from their family, they have no money, accommodation was always an issue, and I guess in general, just poverty because they were isolated. Nineteen of them ended up going back to their country region and I sort of find that a bit of an insult but it’s just a lack of support. (Colin, staff, Uni4, Academic/Mentor).

Cuervo, Barakat and Turnbull (2015) highlight that for Indigenous students, and especially those from remote regions, there can be an interplay of many factors. Some of these were reflected in Colin’s insights which adds the dimension of cultural factors to the impact of material, financial, social and affective aspects. The response to drop out, arising from material from emotional factors in combination with other difficulties, as Colin described, can become insurmountable barriers to overcome.

Financial difficulties of placement

This section will focus on placements, which contribute to the completion requirements of certain degrees, and on particular financial aspects that have been problematic for some participants. Barrier 3 will consider other elements of placement as an institutional responsibility.

The reality of placement for students from RRR areas was that the likelihood of travelling long distances is “pretty high”. Often this meant not only travel costs but also accommodation costs. Even though students knew ‘what they signed up for’ and that securing placements close to home was not always possible, placement obligations were often difficult to negotiate. For one participant, Carly, placement was nine hours away: “so with everything that comes with that ... who will care for the kids because my husband works full-time ... and will I still be able to work my job full-time? My mental health was a big one” (Carly, OR, 31-40). She did not receive any financial assistance for the costs incurred: “No, nothing ... I have to pay for all travel, accommodation, everything ... out of pocket for the whole thing”. In addition, she needed to take leave from her job, and because she has 800 hours of placement her recreation leave will need to be saved and used solely for when she does placement; “that’s a lot of work days” (Carly, OR, 31-40).

Jenn, a staff participant working at a small outer regional campus, felt that there should be better accessibility to an alternative placement that “doesn’t require [a student] to move”. She knew of some students who coped with the cost of accommodation by “borrow[ing] a

caravan” which they “go and park for a week”. She acknowledged the financial stress of “having to leave their job for the duration”, as well as associated emotional stress of “leaving their families”. These challenges are perhaps more pronounced for the demographic she teaches, which is largely “women in caring roles” and she felt the impact of placement “on them is greater in those situations” (Jenn, staff, Uni2, Academic). Another staff participant, Maureen gave an example of placement that illustrates the “difficulties of learning outside a major city”. The student was a single mother of three children, living on a farm, with no babysitting support close by. She almost dropped out of an almost-completed unit of study when the placement allocated to her was three hours away and “she couldn’t afford to pay for three weeks of motels or child-minding” (Maureen, staff, Uni1, Academic Enabling Lecturer).

Institutional barriers: inequities made visible through practices, processes and assumptions

Institutional barriers are those which are directly related to inequities exacerbated through institutional practices, processes or assumptions, which will be explored through three key sub-themes. These are: inequities highlighted through staff attitudes/practices; institutional non-alignment to school holidays; institutional inflexibility; and internet and technological issues that magnify inequitable access to learning.

Practices of (in)equity amplified in experience of placement

Placement or professional experience has already been discussed in the previous section as challenging for many reasons, including finances, time, distance, family and paid work. Building on these significant challenges, this section now turns to inequities that are highlighted through staff attitudes and practices using examples from placement as well as other aspects of the student experience. Just over 40 percent of participants were enrolled in courses in which placement is an integral component such as education or health (e.g. nursing, psychology, physiotherapy, aged care, speech pathology etc). Increasingly, some kind of placement is a requirement across the broad fields of health and education courses, and as work-integrated learning is embedded into the curriculum across discipline areas, any processes and practices that disadvantage students from RRR areas will be highlighted. While the value of the experience of placement was not questioned by participants, difficulties were significant.

Difficulties around placement can be exacerbated when institutions reinforce inequity through applying the ‘same rules’ across the student body. To provide an example, one staff member, Sally, described following up a student who had dropped out of a unit because her circumstances made it impossible for her to attend placement. The student was a single mother with three small children and no babysitting options that she could rely on or afford. Placement was scheduled during school holidays, despite the student going through institutional processes to specify school holiday periods as unsuitable. Regardless, this timing was allocated by the university and non-negotiable. Sally’s inquiry to the centralised placement office on the student’s behalf was met with, “Oh well, she’s not special you know ... what about all the people that are first year uni students? They shouldn’t have to be away from their parents. I try to place them so that they can drive from home”. Sally contended that the student was “actually someone who does need some consideration”, and expressed surprise at the staff member’s attitude and (in)action of “just sort of getting the job done rather than doing the best for each student” (Sally, staff, Uni7, Student Outreach/Support).

Students’ descriptions of their experiences concurred with Sally’s description. When asked what could get in the way of achieving their goals, responses from working mothers included: “no flexibility of placements or personal considerations taken into account” (Janelle, OR, 31-40); concern that placements “are not always available in my area ... and who will care for the kids?” (Carly, OR, 31-40); or “there’s not many hospitals within two hours [of home]”; and, for the longer placements required in the latter years of study, “being

“away from the kids [would be] really hard” (Sophie, IR, 31-40). Janelle, a mother of two young children and working fulltime, who is now doing a fully online degree in Ageing, has tried twice to fulfil her “dream ... to complete the BA Nursing”. Both times she had to abandon them half-way through because “it’s impossible with the time and monetary commitment to placement / res¹⁴ school” (Janelle, OR, 31-40).

Some of the students with disability or special needs expressed concerns about inequitable treatment. Being geographically distanced from campus offices decreased the ability to speak to someone face-to-face, attend appointments in person or come in at short notice. Some felt being geographically distanced could jeopardise fair assessments of their needs, emanating from staff not knowing enough about them and their circumstances, or perhaps thinking this was not necessarily an institutional responsibility, as Freya shares:

I found, as a student with a mental health disability, that when I need stuff like extensions, it is very hard for me to get extensions even with living so far away because the topic co-ordinators generally fall back on the excuse of “It’s not fair on the other students”. (Freya, OR, 24)

Related to this is that institutional processes around special considerations can be confusing and complicated. Confusion can occur if steps or instructions are not clearly conveyed, such as when to apply for what, under which circumstances, which information will be needed and how to submit such data, or if terminology is not clearly defined:

What I’ve found quite difficult is reaching out to my head teacher, my tutors, my lecturers because I know they’re super-busy... and also I had to keep on telling my story to lots of different people about my circumstances and what’s going on, so to get on top of even reasonable adjustment for assessment and things like that, oh, my God, I was navigating this and how do I upload this to ask for an extension. I didn’t really know all the process of my reasonable adjustment ... so you go through it, you get this form but how it actually plays out in the classroom was really hard. (Lucy, IR, 49)

Indeed, there was consensus amongst students that there is an important place for flexibility in institutional processes which would reflect a better understanding of “the difficulty of being geographically removed from campuses”. This could include more flexibility or alternative options, for example, around scheduling exams to “better account for travel times from regional areas” (Rachel, OR, 31-40).

Non-alignment with school holidays

Non-alignment of the university timetable with school holidays needs to be considered as an institutional impact on students and their families, especially for those with school-aged children. While jurisdictions vary in the timing of school breaks, Chloe described the university semester continuing over school holiday breaks as her “biggest bug-bear”, that the timing is “terrible” and that it “interferes with family life a lot” (OR, 41-50). She felt that it could also be problematic when school holidays conflict with university assignments, as did Charlotte, who points out below that school holiday periods for many people living in RRR regions are when appointments or other events occur, because long distances make these difficult to be undertaken during school term:

A lot of people who live in regional areas travel during school holidays to family, doctors, specialists, shopping, children’s sporting events that are held or available outside of own regions. The time that this can be done is during school holidays. For example, this school holiday (barring COVID-19), I would have had

¹⁴ ‘Res school’ refers to residential school, which is when online or distance students come together on campus for a short period of time and attend lectures, tutorials, workshops to develop networks, knowledge and skills

two specialist appointments in [distant location], plus a major family event including Easter while I have two exams and one assessment due over this period. (Charlotte, OR, 41-50)

Learning online

Many participants were grateful to have access to their courses through online or blended modes of learning and were positive in their assessments of the experience. Significant factors for choosing to study online were that it enabled them to stay in their home location, provided flexibility around other commitments, including work and caring duties and they did not have to leave already established networks of support. However, poor access to reliable internet service undoubtedly becomes a hurdle when learning online. Inconsistent internet connection or low bandwidth speeds caused frustration for some participants, who were prevented by this from having an equitable experience. The advice of one student, who had twice commenced and withdrawn from an online course, was to make sure you had “reliable internet!!!” before committing to study (Janelle, OR, 31-40). However, in many areas of Australia this is not always possible (see Census Table 1). The following excerpt from an experienced mature-age student sums up her own situation and echoes similarities to that of others. Simone is in her fourth year of part-time study online, and juggles multiple other responsibilities (children and carer of other family members, community commitments, part-time work). She said that “everything takes longer” – the mail, receiving library resources or internet download speeds. She reminds us that:

There is no instantaneous in the country. Even the most simple thing like having the video on in an on-line meeting can make the difference between being able to attend or not due to internet speed ... Distance and technology are the restrictions to regional study. (Simone, OR, 41-50)

Staff also testified to some of the challenges that connection and technology can and do bring, for example, “I had a student telling me that they had to sit up on a hill near their house to get better internet so they could submit an assessment” (Vicki, staff, RUC4, Manager/Director /Coordinator). Another staff member, Suzanne noted that “there’s an expectation that everybody has ... reliable internet connection now ... but it isn’t always the case”. She described how the “double whammy of poor internet ... and an old machine to upload or download something they need” can add to the frustration students might feel in addition to preventing access to necessary course material (Suzanne, staff, Uni4, Student Outreach/Support).

The shift to online forced upon institutions during the COVID-19 outbreaks highlighted some other issues which had not been as visible under ‘normal’ circumstances, but which need to be considered as we gradually enter the post-COVID-19 era. While some participants were enjoying not having to commute, and expressed admiration for the efforts of staff, many more had less than positive experiences of the shift to online. Some students were critical of universities for the inadequate quality in the design of online exams or assessments. As high stakes activities, students highlighted the need for more knowledge and expertise in redesigning exams and assessments for online modes. One student, Carey said, “It has made exams difficult as no one knows how to put them online” (Carey, OR, 18-20), and another, Laura commented that this has had “HUGE impacts on education - exams all being conducted as online quizzes now” (Laura, OR, 26-30). One student who returned home during the lockdown described the experience of learning from the remote family farm as “a bit tricky”, because the “internet’s a bit flaky here”. She was managing her study through “a lot of personal hot-spotting to get through” (Bianca, REM, 21, moved). Belinda, a staff participant, noted that disadvantages to do with infrastructure mean that inclusive design becomes more critical, which was highlighted during COVID-19, when “video-rich resources” would not work well for a student with poor internet. She felt that “if we get better, more inclusive design for students at different locations, I think we can actually stay in this mode

for a long time and do better but we do more inclusive design” (Belinda, staff, Uni2, Academic, Associate Dean).

Multiple equity factors and competing responsibilities

Key finding 3b

Barriers to completion outside the control of the student included the complexities arising from multiple equity factors, that were the realities of most of the RRR participants. Matters of equity need to be the responsibility of all – from university management and policy makers to administrative staff. Regional, rural and remote students are likely to meet the criteria for more than one equity category and are likely to have other non-negotiable responsibilities in addition to study. A lack of consideration for the impact of these complexities, demonstrated through inflexibility in procedures, processes and practices, including staff attitudes towards issues/difficulties that students have little control over, can become institutional barriers to completion.

The university students in this study were managing very complex lives. As outlined in Chapter 3, the overwhelming majority of participants identified combinations of equity factors. While most students did not explicitly mention the impact of equity factors on their higher education experience, their lives and circumstances are embedded within these structural complexities. Adding to the complexities, almost all students were undertaking paid work in some capacity, with most in part-time or casual employment (72%). Almost a third had dependent children, a quarter cared for other family or community members, or had extra caring responsibilities, such as one mature-age student with disability, who is “also carer to children with disabilities” (Paula, IR, 31-40). The combined and cumulative effect of multiple equity factors and additional responsibilities can become barriers to a smooth-sailing experience at best, and to completion at worst.

Students who were parents, mothers in particular, spoke of the challenges of managing the demands of a household as well as having to work. Chloe talked about her biggest concern being “the pressure that I put on myself of whether I’m being a good mum and good wife” (Chloe, OR, 41-50). Another mother, studying part-time and online, talked about juggling these pressures with the busy-ness of school-aged children and full-time work. Coming from a working class background and as the first in her family to attend university, her main barriers were “time and money”. Here she offers a glimpse into a typical day: “if I work a 3:00 o’clock shift, I’ll get up in the morning and take the kids to school and then I’ll study all day until 2:00 o’clock, get ready for work, and go to work till 11:00 o’clock at night”. This meant that there was little time to devote to her own health and wellbeing and while she “would love to be able to do some exercise ... or something for myself” the demands of university study with deadlines made it too difficult (Carly, OR, 31-40). Judy told a similar story. Also in her second year of part-time study and working full-time, she gives a little insight into her experience of balancing her many responsibilities:

*to be honest, it has been a bit difficult juggling the life of being a mum, income earner for my family, my community work + running around after a teenager.
(Judy, IR, 41-50)*

Those who have to fit their study within school hours know only too well that the school days are short. Melinda, like many others finds herself “racing, racing to get stuff done while they’re at school ... I’m on a very tight schedule with everything” (Melinda, IR, 41-50). The disruption to routines was keenly felt by those participants with school-aged children during the COVID-19 lock-downs who found themselves not only having to home-school, but also having to put on hold some of their own study goals and routines: “My son was home-schooled which took more of a priority than my own education” (Sharon, OR, 31-40).

The decision to study was often a result of many and complex considerations, particularly for those who are older or who live in outer regional or remote areas. One participant from a remote area waited seven years because she “could not commit fully to university while my children were under school age”. At the time the demands on her were high - not only was she carer for her disabled mother-in-law but “we could not particularly afford for me not to work”. Some self-confidence factors surfaced in that she “was afraid of destroying my self-esteem if I tried to study and failed because of my other commitments” (Skye, REM, 31-40). Other participants expressed concerns about their own capabilities or readiness: “could I cope with the pressure?” (Rhonda, IR, 41-40), “was I capable of studying successfully?” (Pauline, OR, 41-50); or pressure to maintain the status quo within their lives and relationships: “How am I going to do it and how am I going to manage my time to still function and not get overwhelmed?” (Gayle, OR, 41-50).

Finally, Belinda (staff) believes that institutions need to consider the diversity that students bring with them. This includes not asking students to “leave most of their full self at the door”, or being interested only in the part of them that is acquiring education and not in the life context which is actually “the space within which this education sits”. To do this she argues that:

One of the first questions we should ask them is “Where do you work and how many hours do you work?” And we should not shame that; we should say, “How can we help you bring that in so that it’s really a useful thing for you to do?” We’re doing more on wellbeing than we used to which is good. I don’t think we’re really fully understanding where we are a contributor to poor wellbeing. (Belinda, staff, Uni2, Academic, Associate Dean)

Students’ qualities and strengths

The main enablers to completion of their higher education experience were students’ own qualities and strengths that set them in good stead for the rigours of university along with support gained through social networks of family, friends and communities. Additional factors contributing to a sense of wellbeing included animals, faith and various other activities. Students were asked to reflect on their own qualities and strengths while staff participants were asked for their perceptions of student qualities and strengths, drawing from their numerous and diverse encounters with students. Qualities and strengths named by students were consistent across both participant groups. Terms such as ‘resilience’, ‘determination’ and ‘persistence’ were most-mentioned, and skills included being resourceful, ability in problem-solving, collaboration and community mindedness, among others.

Resilience, determination and persistence

Students recognised in themselves qualities of resilience, determination and persistence, all of which are transferable to other life situations including university study. Being resilient in practice may look like an “ability to overcome obstacles” reported Zara (OR, 31-40), or could stem from “the need for a better life [which] usually overpowers anything (including harsh assessment marks) that negatively impacts university studies” added Gillian (OR, 21-25). Having resilience was considered by Evelyn as “great for coping with struggles and setbacks presented in uni and life” (OR, 21-25) showing an ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Staff also described student qualities in similar ways, for example “resilience, grit, determination, able to cope with things going wrong, setting goals for themselves, self belief” (Carol, staff, Uni12, Manager/Director/Coordinator). A compelling account is given below by a staff member who has many years’ experience with students in enabling programs prior to her current role. She believes students from RRR communities have “incredible determination and motivation and resilience”. She continues:

they often face the most incredible adversity, like serious adversity, not just a little minor hiccup here but major, major things that would normally spell the end

to most people I think. I mean I have people living in tents, I have people homeless, I have people escaping domestic violence, I have all sorts of people and they still get their assignments in. (Esther, staff, Uni5, Manager/Director/Coordinator)

Being determined and persistent is also closely linked to resilience. In practice these qualities may develop through self-discipline and motivation where there is an understanding of “delayed gratification as most things aren’t readily or easily obtained in regional/remote areas” (Rachel, OR, 31-40). Both determination and perseverance are essential because university study “is not easy, so it’s easy to give up” (Rhiannon, IR, 51+). Sometimes students felt a need to ‘prove’ to oneself or others that they are capable, such as Zara “to prove to myself that I can do this, even though people have told me that I can’t” (OR, 31-40), or Eleanor:

Just that willingness to succeed and show people that even though I do come from a different background to everyone else in Australia, that I can achieve what I want to achieve and if I put my mind to it, I can do it. (Eleanor, OR, 18-20)

Students often had a strong ‘internal drive’ to persist once they had begun something. One student, Beth, stated that “I like to finish things ... I’m quite headstrong and stubborn in that regard” (OR, 31-40) and similarly Louisa, “once I start something I need to finish it!” (OR, 21-25). Louisa was also motivated by “knowing how much enjoyment I get from working in allied health and helping people with quality of life”. A staff participant noted that being “a family person” returning to study may make them more determined “to do something for themselves” (Vicki, staff, RUC4, Manager/Director/Coordinator role). Another staff member felt that students from RRR areas are spurred on by their “hopes for the future” aided by the “strength and support from family” (Jane, staff RUC1, Student Outreach/Support). Wendy, after many years following her husband’s career and raising children, returned to study partly on her son’s urging her to “just enrol in something, mum!” Here she describes herself:

I think I am fairly determined and I am stubborn. Yeah, I’ll just do it ... once you kind of start something, you just have to do it no matter how hard it gets. I guess that’s what carries me through, and you know, knowing that there is a light at the end of the tunnel that at some stage, for me, when studying gets hard then I know that eventually I’m going to finish. (Wendy, IR, 51+)

Molly, a staff member at a small regional campus testified to the kind of perseverance that students have articulated. From her perspective students who have signed up to study have already passed through many barriers, so actually starting is “already a huge thing”. From her own discussions with colleagues and students:

it always come up that they have their own grit, they have their own determination to make it work and you know, we have really good academic results on regional campuses, and I think it’s because they know how to persist if something doesn’t work or if they get stuck on something, they know now to stick with it and if they don’t know, they’re happy to ask. (Molly, staff, Uni2, Student Outreach/Support)

Other strengths and skills

Other, but more obscure, personal strengths and skills were recognised as being developed through being part of smaller communities or living in harsher environments. The strengths and skills of RRR people included being resourceful, self-motivated, organised, with well-developed interpersonal skills, which auger well for group work or activities involving collaboration with others. It is important that students not underestimate the value of these strengths and skills and of their transferrability across different contexts, including that of successfully negotiating their way through university study. One student described those

from RRR or country areas as having “exceptional people skills [and are] known to be friendly natured. They are often strong and have likely experienced lows as a community” (Grace, OR, 21-25, moved). In terms of being resourceful and creative in problem-solving, according to one student, Billy, students who come from RRR areas tend to have hands-on skills out of necessity through having to do things for themselves when resources are not readily available. Billy provided an example, “if your car breaks down on the side of the road, you’re more likely to call a mate and fix the problem out there”. He believes that these skills transfer over in practical ways: “if you’re a student and not really on your budget, then you have got to figure out ways to improvise and adapt” (Billy, OR, 18-20). Similarly, having to do things in isolation gives these students an advantage when going to university, according to Kieran, because they know that if they want something, “the juice, the gas is going to have to come from them, they’re going to have to motivate themselves” (Keiran, OR, 21, moved). Another student believed that the experience of living in out-of-the-way locations could be beneficial when dealing with feelings of isolation and the stress that accompanies that as “these feelings can often come throughout the semester so this is a strong advantage” (Corey, OR, 21-25). Staff participants identified many of the same strengths as the students did, as well as other strengths, like tenacity, self-sufficiency, flexibility, strong sense of self, and ability to network, join in and seek out help.

Having well-developed interpersonal skills are advantageous at university as well as beyond. These are skills often gained through living in and negotiating the social nuances of smaller communities, which led to a sense of community-mindedness. From a staff perspective, being used to working with other people within their community and understanding what team work is “from an early age” added to a positive atmosphere:

that non-competitiveness and supporting each other in our classes is so obvious; it's just “Come on, we're all going to get through this. Let's get on” and that's really nice to watch. (Amy, staff, Uni2, Manager/Director/Coordinator)

Community-minded support can be developed through involvement in community activities and events. Tina, who described herself as “a massive volunteer” for the “footy club, the cricket club, the everything” gives some insight into this from her own life:

I think the fact that we are willing to help people, and considering what we've just been through here with the bushfires, people will just put their hands up. Yeah, so I think that's a huge quality ... For me, it's still that connection that we know people, we can reach out ... to ask for help. (Tina, OR, 41-50)

While engaged in such activities outside of university, the skills these activities help to develop can be beneficial within. Staff noted that students from RRR areas support one another and that smaller campuses offer the opportunities to do this. In this regard, Alison, who works at a remote university centre, praised students for their dedication and commitment to want to give back to their community. These qualities become visible through “a real commitment” to being a role model, with multiple benefits at the personal as well as the collective level:

a role model for their own kids and grandkids but also for the wider family and the wider community; a real pride and love of sharing their culture, a great sense of humour, and I think just a real hope – and that maybe sounds a bit strange but just in terms of real openness to connecting with good people, really loving and open, really thinking about the future and wanting to have a role in what that looks like for them. (Alison, staff, RUC1, Manager/Director/Coordinator)

Support networks and other strategies of support

Key finding 3c

Students' individual strengths and qualities were enablers to persistence and completion of university, as were strong networks of support from family, communities, belongingness or sense of connectedness to others, or place. Enablers that were intrinsic to the student were qualities of resilience, determination and perseverance, among other strengths and skills that are transferrable across life situations including university study. Students often accredited these strengths and qualities to having been developed and nurtured within their experiences of family and communities, often by example or through necessity, hardship or not having access to some material possessions. Families and other support networks also played important roles as enablers for students from RRR areas in persisting towards their hoped-for futures and completing their studies.

Student participants acknowledged the importance of belongingness within strong support networks which they drew upon for a variety of support that was emotional, social and practical. When asked who or what they turned to during tough times, students also named a number of other strategies that helped them maintain a level of balance, health and wellbeing.

Emotional and practical support came mainly from family, partners, friends and to a lesser extent peers or staff. Students' references to close familial and friendship ties were most noteworthy. Students talked about how feeling supported helped to spur them on, or keep them afloat as Mikayla reflects:

Having a loving family also that just make me smile and pick me up saying it's gonna be ok. (Mikayla, IR, 18-20)

Support can also come through a sense of pride shown by others and through firmly established networks. Being the first in the family to attend university can be a source of great pride for the family, like Eleanor's family who were "really supportive in me achieving what I need to achieve and what I need to do to get there" (Eleanor, OR, 18-20). Having a "super proud family" was what motivated and kept Tully going (Tully, OR, 18-20) and some like Ash felt very supported by their partner; Ash's wife supported him positively in his desire to "follow my dream" (Ash, 31-40). Archer said that during tough times she always had her family, but "especially my mum" who "always has the best advice and will always listen to me no matter how silly my problems may seem" (Archer, IR, 18-20). For Tamsin, her family is a huge enabler and during some kind of crisis in the previous semester, she felt that "the only reason I got those last assignments in and kept getting through it, was having my family" (Tamsin, OR, 21-25), while Paula was very specific about those who supported her, "My children, my husband, my 2 closest friends, my sister and my passion for what I do" (Paula, IR, 31-40).

Maintaining close relationships, whether this was at home or making new friends was key to student success. Tina talked about the "amazing network of friends and colleagues" that she had built up over ten years as one thing that kept her going, support which she described as "massive" and "huge" (Tina, OR, 41-50). The camaraderie and support from fellow students and the helpfulness and understanding of lecturers and tutors have helped students through rough patches. Grace's experience was that they "always find ways to help make sure I get through my studies when I need it" (Grace, OR, 25-25, moved). Also, smaller campuses which have the capacity to know everyone on a 'first-name basis' or the regional or country universities centres were also important in the networks of support that surrounded students from RRR areas. For those students who were parents, setting a good example for their children was another way that helped them. It is clear that gaining a university degree was

far from an individual endeavour as one staff member pointed out: it “takes a community for you to get your qualification!” (Carla, staff, Uni13, Librarian/Technician).

There were various other things which helped to keep students motivated, which included the company of pets, having a faith, taking breaks such as camping, physical activities, and simple things like chilling in the backyard, making phone calls to friends and family, having a routine which included scheduled “down time” or progressing “one goal at a time”. Also, escapism through books, games, movies, painting or television and streaming channels were found to be helpful. For Ella, her dogs “believe it or not” had supported her the most (Ella, OR, 26-30) as well as her partner and family. Expressing emotion like having a good cry also seemed to help, as did going or being home, which was “really therapeutic” for Morgan (VREM, 20, moved) and essential to wellbeing, further elaborated upon by Skye:

Living on country is essential to my wellbeing, and the times that I have lived in the city - though life was more convenient - there was always an emptiness to life. My children have space to understand themselves and their environment, I am certain it is the healthiest situation for my family. Country communities are tight, they provide a strong sense of identity and place for my family and result in a diverse range of people with often extremely contradictory values finding ways to connect and get along. Importantly, I am a saltwater woman and living on [...] Island is a beach lovers heaven, we have every single type of beach here and they're almost always deserted! (Skye, REM, 31-40).

Findings from the data have been presented in relation to the three key research questions, from which six key findings have emerged. The next section will discuss these key findings in relation to the literature, followed by the recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

From the findings there can be little doubt that distance is a point of convergence for almost every aspect of the university experience for students from RRR areas. Not only does geographical location create a stage for complex negotiations, but distance permeates these negotiations. From the evidence presented in the findings, distance, in fact, is where many inequities are made visible and earlier educational disadvantage may become more pronounced (Gale et al., 2010; Gore et al, 2019; Halsey, 2018; McMahon et al. 2016; Naphthine et al., 2019). Accompanying distance are equity factors, often in multiple combinations, which raises the question how these influence an individual's capacity to aspire. At the same time, pursuing like-to-be selves, or to a lesser extent like-to-avoid selves, provided a rich insight into the motivations and behaviours which drive towards a future-state as students work towards goals, drawing on their inner strengths and qualities as well as on the support found mainly in familial and social networks. Each of the key findings will be discussed in light of the literature, followed by recommendations.

Movement into and through university

The findings from this research show that movement is multifaceted, complex and fraught. While geographical movement was a significant consideration for students from RRR areas, the findings also draw into focus the relational aspects of movement in decisions around whether to stay or move, which can be swayed by social and emotional ties to family and community (Key Finding 1a). In a time of increasing mobility or potential for mobility, this project sought to understand the experience of students' movement into and through university and how these were influenced through strong connections to community and family (Key Finding 1b). There can be little doubt that the decisions made by participants to stay, move or return were both part of, but central to, many other options considered, such as family, financial or work considerations, mode of study, and preparedness for study, among others. Cook and Cuervo (2020) argue against choosing to stay as a deficit choice, providing a counter-argument in that choices result from a carefully considered decision-making process, as articulated by the students in this study. In light of this we may start to grasp the rationale behind why many participants decided to stay and perhaps 'put up with' some of the inconveniences of life in RRR areas such as impacts on family life, work, time etc. This was particularly so for those participants from inner and outer regional areas, many of whom decided to remain. In an increasingly mobile world Cuervo and Wyn (2017) explored how young people, "build meaning through their connections with people and places over time" (p. 220). The idea of building meaning through the social and relational notions of movement, such as belonging (Cuervo, Barakat, & Turnbull, 2015; Cuervo & Wyn, 2017) is considered next.

Belongingness

Belonging was a significant theme in the findings, and mentioned predominantly through repeated and unambiguous reference to sense of community. Students in this study valued the sense of community engendered through relationships within the smaller locales they came from or grew up in. Belongingness was likened to being one big family, where familiarity such as knowing everyone and being known was valued, as was reciprocity such as pitching in to help when the need arises with a general sense of feeling "at ease with oneself and one's environment" (Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015, p. 25). Relationships with family, friends and others in the community who mattered to students, featured prominently in their reflections of continual decision-making around their university participation and its implication on themselves and those around them. Relationships arguably have "the capacity to generate a bond and intimacy, and shape the decisions and choices [students] make" (Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015, p. 25).

Feeling this kind of acceptance can also extend to place, or the physical spaces where belongingness is embodied in ordinary everyday encounters (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017). These encounters occurred within the family, in the home or other shared activities; going to the supermarket and knowing people; walking down the street and greeting others; an atmosphere of friendliness; as well as significant environments such as being on the farm, in the fresh air, at the beach; to name a few, constitute belongingness. Similarly Jones and colleagues' (2021, p. 6) study of young people in the North of England found that "students felt empowered by their geographical familiarity and could avoid stepping into spaces that were culturally as well as spatially, alien". By extension, students in this study also valued the belongingness experienced at regional campuses and regional university centres in particular, and those interactions in which they were not made to 'feel like a number'. Fostering belongingness often materialised in small gestures, such as staff bringing cakes to share at morning tea time, staff being approachable and available to chat with, interactions with peers; in general, the sense that what matters to the student, also matters to another. Participants were very articulate about what made them feel connected and this "sense of rootedness" to place (Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015, p. 25) impacted greatly on their decisions to stay or leave.

On the other hand, feeling ill-at-ease or not completely comfortable with some aspects of place was also the experience of some, and may imply a sense of not-belonging. Some students in this study were not comfortable with 'small town' or narrow attitudes, such as attitudes towards diverse cultural or social groups, university study or the desire to venture outside the 'norms' or expectations in search of broader opportunities and experiences. For a few participants the opportunity provided by university study to move away was seized. In some ways this was seen as an opportunity for personal growth and realisation of future career goals. However, not-belonging is not always mutually exclusive to belonging, but each may exist simultaneously, as experienced by Chloe. While there were spatial aspects of the small community campus Chloe enjoyed such as the face-to-face experience, as she explained she "gets more out of it", she was not completely at ease with the 'knowing everyone' and 'being known by everyone' social-relational aspect. Although Chloe felt "that side of things is really good", this feeling was in tension with a simultaneous, incongruous feeling that she couldn't at first quite identify, describing it as, "a little bit – not claustrophobic - that's the wrong word". In elaborating, Chloe was able to identify that, for her, it was the sense of anonymity that had been lost, putting her less at ease in that space. Social tensions are undoubtedly present in smaller places, which also point to the diversities within and the complexities around both the reassuring and stifling aspects of belongingness in smaller places.

Concluding statement: Movement into and through university for people from RRR areas must be understood within the context of distance and (in)equity, as notions which are relational and inseparable from socio-emotional aspects, including belongingness to family, communities, and place. The notion of belonging proposed by Cuervo, Barakat and Turnbull (2015) is able to capture these relational and social processes as students move into and through their university experience. These processes are largely missing from conventional notions about 'pathways' 'trajectories' or 'routes', all of which which imply a starting point and an end point, such as school to work, or university to career (p. 24). In this vein relational and social processes radically shape the journey, and movement into and through university involves multiple points of social, relational processes which can be highly complex and non-linear.

For students coming from RRR areas there needs to be acknowledgement of the processes of decision-making that underly their participation. These processes include complex considerations around individual, family and community implications (material, financial, social and relational). Informed decisions require that all relevant information is available and accessible to those involved in the decision-making (e.g. around moving/staying), targeted at (potential) students, families and/or communities. For students from RRR areas to thrive at

university, there also needs to be acknowledgement that their experience of movement into and through university is not only about geographical distance, but also has social and relational implications. The high value these students placed on sense of community must be acknowledged and leveraged to ensure other students from RRR areas can experience belongingness in the various learning environments they are engaged in. University recruitment and student-focused units targeting students from RRR areas must consider the potential implications on student social and emotional wellbeing, regardless of whether students relocate far from home, or stay, by either commuting, studying online and/or accessing regional campuses or regional university centres. Bespoke ways to enhance belongingness from pre-recruitment through to completion should be drawn from the student voice, gathering a variety of student perspectives and ideas that reflect their particular contexts/environments and student diversity.

In consultation with a panel of experts in Equity in Higher Education, DESE has put in place an initiative to address some of the issues mentioned by the participants in this project. As part of a five-year strategy, a range of student perspectives will be sought, which will inform the 'Student Equity in Higher Education Roadmap'. The strategy aligns with "the reform agenda to drive and support wider aspiration, improved access, participation, retention, success, and completion and better transition to employment outcomes of students from under-represented groups nationally" (DESE, 2021a). In the meantime, to respond at a local institutional level,

It is recommended that:

- **PVC Students (or equivalent) / University recruitment / Student outreach/support services / regional campuses** should work together to engage RRR students directly in developing bespoke and practical ways in which sense of community or belongingness can be embedded into all interactions with students and their families/communities. These include interactions from pre-recruitment onwards, likely through a non-linear pathway to completion, with the aim of providing socio-emotional support through enhancing belongingness within the learning experience and environment (such as opportunities for interaction, Q&A, and authentic stories from RRR students and family/community). Engaging students in developing options which enhance flexibility in course delivery and placement is also an important aspect of this collaboration. Regional campuses often provide exemplars of practice in how to enhance sense of community.

Hoped-for futures, goals and motivation

Navigating into and through university 'successfully' in terms of participants' perceptions of and actions toward achieving their hoped-for states, was clearly articulated and defined through conceptions of these futures. These participants were not found wanting in motivation, driven in large part by altruistic aspirations that indicated strong connections to community (Fleming & Grace, 2017). Within the diversity across the responses, commonalities were evident. Envisioned futures were often community-minded, including making a positive impact on others and using their newly acquired expertise to contribute to their communities. This is reflected in the courses taken, with the most popular degrees being in the areas of Society and Culture, Health or Education. Personal goals were also diverse in the desire for a better or more secure future; they wished for 'a good life' (Bok, 2010), for personal satisfaction and pride in the kind of self they imagined becoming, such as being caring, compassionate and happy, while also articulating like-to-avoid selves, such as being selfish, arrogant or continuing with menial or unsatisfying work. Some wanted simply to be able to 'be myself' and the university experience and exposure to diverse perspectives and attitudes was an opportunity to discover and construct different identities.

Similar to other studies of underrepresented groups, notions of success and achievement were rarely focused solely on career or monetary gains as the drivers of their movement

(Jones et al., 2021) but weighted much more in favour of meaningful employment, a healthy work-life balance, pride and satisfaction in achievements, as well as having an increased capacity to choose how they live their lives in ways that are perhaps quite different to familial biographies (Delahunty & O'Shea, 2019; 2020; O'Shea & Delahunty, 2018). Quality, in terms of the university experience, was also valued, particularly in feeling connected, cared for and being known on a personal level. The motivation and persistence shown through the findings may also be understood through the notion of belonging (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017). Seeking belonging in the world may be through pursuing a desire and wanting to make a difference. This may be made visible through a desire to 'be myself' to wanting to be a psychologist/teacher/policy-maker, in outward-facing altruistic desires to make a difference in the world, or in wanting to be engaged in meaningful work, be financially stable or achieve personal satisfaction in their life or career choices. As participants shared their like-to-be selves there was a sense of being at ease with this journey, with some control over its direction, even if it became non-linear and difficult at times. However, the students in this study were not necessarily pursuing a particular course or pathway rigidly; their like-to-be futures did retain some fluidity. This was reflected in their advice to future RRR students which attempted to normalise fluidity, such as "try it and see if you like it and if you don't like it, then you know it's not for you" or "there's no harm in attempting something". Advice such as this, gives insight into how these participants had learnt to navigate the higher education terrain in order to reach whatever it was they were aiming for.

Concluding statement: There is clear evidence in the findings that these students were well able to articulate their like-to-be or like-to-avoid futures, as well as how they were mobilising "appropriate strategies for mobilising their vision" (Jones et al., 2021, p. 3). They possessed a high level of altruism, which reflected a sense of social responsibility as a citizen in the world, and in reciprocity to their communities. Like-to-be futures also included doing meaningful work, providing a legacy for their families such as being a role model, securing financial stability, or being in a better position to choose a healthy work/life balance. Working towards a goal of quality of life was no less important than imagining and fulfilling their futures than working towards particular careers; quality of life included living a life which was personally satisfying, having the ability to choose the direction a career or work might take, benefiting from financial freedom, as well as contributing to society in meaningful ways. However, underlying these narratives of imagined self were the complexities of moving through university as regional, rural or remote students and the constraints that posed a threat to their ambitions, such as other unavoidable commitments and less-than-ideal financial situations (Jones et al., 2021).

It is recommended that:

- **Student Support Staff (in universities and schools;** such as careers advisors, counsellors, student advisers etc.) provide opportunities for students to articulate their hopes and dreams for the future, that are meaningful to students and their values, acting as a bridge between the present and the future. These opportunities should also include students identifying what might 'get in the way' of realising their vision and give students some agency in mobilising relevant strategies to realise their vision. Staff have a role in normalising fluidity as not all students are convinced about the course of study they have chosen, especially if this does not align with like-to-be futures.

Barriers and enablers: getting to the heart of attrition

Having aspirations for the future is not solely the realm of the more advantaged; Bok argues that "aspirations are relatively evenly held" (2010, p. 164). However, realising aspirations is largely dependent upon knowing how to navigate information, an ability which is gained implicitly through social, cultural and economic experience; this is "*not* equally distributed" (Bok, 2010, p. 164, italics in original). For disadvantaged groups the capacity to aspire can

be impacted by not being able to access all the information needed to make fully informed decisions, which can also pose a risk to RRR students. In fact, the risk is not only in terms of attrition, it could actually prevent the commencement of higher education study in the first place (Bok, 2010). The impact of multiple equity factors together with various other responsibilities can increase the extent of stress experienced, which can weaken students' capacity to aspire, as distinct from their ability to aspire (see Chapter 2: Capacity to aspire). The emotionality of the experience for these RRR students, as revealed by the findings from this research, may be symptomatic of enablers or barriers, but importantly clearly shows the deeply embodied nature of participation. While much of the emotion described was highly positive, such as excitement, anticipation, fulfillment, pride and passion, this was juxtaposed with highly negative emotions associated with stress, dread, anxiety, being overwhelmed, feelings of guilt and exhaustion (see section *Affective aspects of movement*). However, when other challenges of disadvantage (as recognised by meeting the criteria for multiple equity groups) are added to the mix, along with inequities associated with distance, finances, time and competing priorities (paid employment/caring for others etc.), the 'conditions' for attrition are ripe: this is a different kind of emotional rollercoaster, where disparity abounds (Key Findings 3a, 3b).

In this vein, compulsory placements exacerbated the impact of financial barriers on RRR students. Placement can be complicated by a lack of local providers and if these placements are located hours from home, can preclude daily return trips. Participants who had completed placements spoke of the extra challenges associated with orchestrating childcare, household, farming, work arrangements, as well as financial outlays for travel costs and accommodation. Tellingly, the issues outlined - such as placement obligations leading to (un)reasonable travel distances and times, a lack of financial support and 'all students being equal' practices - reflect how the impact of inequities can be exacerbated through institutional processes, regardless of the student's desire to participate or how firmly envisioned their like-to-be futures are. Mismatches between student perspectives and the institution are not uncommon (for example Delahunty & O'Shea, 2020; Harrison & Waller, 2018; Jones et al., 2021). However the findings highlight that there needs to be greater efforts through institutional practices and processes to understand how to better support students with diverse needs and circumstances (Stone, Freeman, Dymont, Muir & Milthorpe, 2019). These efforts and subsequent changes must take into account all of the "complex additional strategising, logistically and financially" (Jones et al., 2021, p. 7) that RRR students have no option but to navigate. Often the onus to comply or change is directed towards the individual student, and less often towards the role and responsibility of institutions/organisations to resist and reject one-size-fits all approaches.

The COVID-19 situation also led to visible flaws in the hasty move online, creating uncertainties around progression, sometimes exacerbating isolation. Some students in this study felt that their situations were not empathetically considered by their institutions, adding more stress than was necessary. Bearing in mind also that many RRR participants enjoyed personal connections with others, there was a sense of loss experienced in the transition to online technologies and in the closure of facilities which removed impromptu opportunities for face-to-face interaction. Institutions must do better at the level of sound pedagogic online design to create learning environments where students are not excluded due to external issues of unreliable internet, low bandwidth or inadequate technology. Institutions need to resist putting the 'latest and greatest' technologies ahead of pedagogy, as this often assumes all students have similar access to services and/or devices. Institutions instead need to focus efforts on inclusive design and in creating sense of community in online environments (Stone, 2017; Delahunty, 2018; Thomas, Herbert & Teras, 2014).

The findings of this fellowship project are reflective of some of the most common reasons for seriously considering early departure nationally: health and stress, workload difficulties, study/life balance, financial difficulties and the need to be in paid employment. Edwards and McMillan (2015) stated that students who were non-metro, low-SES and Indigenous were

more likely to select all five reasons for considering early departure. This is echoed in the call from staff member, Colin, “can’t we do it better?” in regard to the insurmountable barriers faced by a cohort of Aboriginal students. The disconnection from support networks, practical issues of accommodation as well as financial difficulties imposed an accumulation of barriers upon these students. In complex situations like the one that Colin described, the argument of Cuervo and colleagues (2015) rings true: that there should be no place for ‘one size fits all’ approaches. They maintain that lack of success for some educationally disadvantaged groups can be attributed to the tendency to employ this approach as a solution “to an extraordinarily complex issue” (Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015, p. 14). Institutions need to actively resist one size fits all approaches, which can be problematic for students, such as RRR whose needs are perhaps “removed from the daily gaze of metropolitan authorities” (Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015, p. 11).

There can be no doubt that the RRR students in this study had diverse internal strengths and qualities and these, together with concrete notions of their future selves, potentially set them in good stead to persist and achieve their educational aims (Key Finding 3c). Apart from clearly articulated future selves or future states, which are indicators of motivation (Erikson, 2007), students described themselves as resilient, determined, tenacious and hard-working, as well as adaptable, friendly, community-minded and sociable. Problem-solving skills and creative ways of ‘making do’ and an ability to adapt to changing situations are but a few of the capabilities they identified. The qualities and skills that RRR students bring with them to the university experience are a rich, and possibly untapped, resource that could be beneficial to the broader student body especially in regard to persisting despite the odds. This was demonstrated in the clarity with which the students in this study articulated their perceptions, experiences and complex realities.

Being resilient was also a common characteristic. However, having to develop resilience as a result of structural inequities can challenge even the most determined and most focused of students. As Kahu and Nelson (2018, p. 60) argue, while compounding factors of inequity and multiple responsibilities may be “predictive factors”, these have no direct causal relationship with completion. Student characteristics such as “SES status, ethnicity or entry score [are] not the cause of their success or failure”. Attrition therefore becomes far less an individual issue and focus must be redirected to barriers external to the individual as governmental and institutional responsibilities.

Support from others was identified as another enabler (Key Finding 3c). Sense of community was reflected in the kinds of support that was valued, of being known, being cared for, feeling supported, feeling that ‘I’m actually a person not a number’. This creates a space in which people ‘don’t get forgotten’ and where they can flourish and ‘blossom’. Regional campuses and regional university centres provide a model of support which seems well aligned with students’ need for human care, which is arguably universal. However, there was a strong negative sentiment expressed in feeling overlooked by the parent campuses, for example in communications or information that was often more aligned to the majority, with little relevance to those at regional campuses. This contributed to feeling less valued by the parent institution, despite the crucial role regional campuses play in making higher education achievement more equitable and more possible.

Concluding statement: Matters of equity need to be the responsibility of all – from university management and policy makers to administrative staff. For RRR students, who are likely to meet the criteria for more than one equity category and likely to have other non-negotiable responsibilities in addition to study, it seems obvious that one size fits all approaches will not work. The lack of consideration for the impact of students’ life complexities on their university experience, including inflexibility in procedures, processes, practices and rigid attitudes towards how to respond to issues/difficulties that students have little control over (as exemplified in the findings about placements), can become institutional barriers to completion.

Enablers derived from within include the strength of character and future-focus already mentioned, but also the drive to achieve and succeed in the deeply nuanced ways that have personal meaning, rather than according to performance-based measures (Allen, 2020; Cunninghame & Pitman, 2020; O'Shea & Delahunty, 2018). Participants also were highly aware of the strengths and qualities they possessed which were potentially transferrable to their higher education experiences, such as resilience, determination, persistence, ability to be resourceful, self-sufficiency, organisational skills and ability to manage all the complex negotiations of their lives in order to pursue their educational, personal or altruistic goals. In addition to that they identified skills such as interpersonal or people skills, skills in problem-solving and teamwork which are all essential for university study. As RRR people do not tend to make plans in isolation (Fleming & Grace, 2017) the support from family, partners and friends was significant, although lecturers, tutors and social groups were also mentioned as contributors to support that students valued highly.

It is recommended that:

- **Institutional Management and PVC Students (or equivalent)** must work together to develop policies, processes and practices that address the diverse needs and circumstances of RRR students to support them to completion. Institutions must take into account the (in)equitable amount of emotional work undertaken by RRR students as they negotiate complex lives with academic study. RRR students should be meaningfully involved to resist homogenous 'solutions'.
- **DVC(A)s (or equivalent)** must maintain a 'pedagogy before technology' stance as pressure is increasingly applied for the 'latest and greatest' in technologies at the expense of inclusive design. Teams which include Academic Developers, Learning / Educational or TEL Designers / IT experts and RRR students should be engaged for their collective expertise and skills to ensure appropriate online pedagogies are at the fore of design decisions so that RRR students who enrol have an equitable and inclusive learning experience.
- **Student support services / student outreach (universities and schools)** should draw upon the qualities and skills that RRR students possess through students as partners approaches, engaging them in design or development of innovative and bespoke support, resources, events, etc that may also be targeted towards family and others who provide significant support to students.
- **The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and University Management/Executive** must continue to develop and refine existing policies and strategies, and through evidence-based research, identify and dismantle structural barriers to completion, which are outside the control of the individual student, but within the remit of policy and funding decision-makers. The perspectives of regional and remote students should be central to these negotiations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The following points provide a summary of how the discussion may be translated into a set of draft retention strategies for RRR students, which are directed towards decision-makers overseeing policy and implementing practices at institutional / governing body levels.

Draft retention strategies

- Embed human care in all processes (face to face and online; administrative and teaching/learning)
- Be proactive in creating sense of belonging/community and encourage building good networks
- Ensure that RRR students are given equitable opportunities and support to achieve their goals and aspirations
- Draw on RRR student expertise (e.g. students as partners approaches): ways to reach, support and enable RRR people to reach their goals and aspirations
- Recognise the impact of distance AND multiple equity factors on RRR students' capacity to aspire (i.e. unrelated to their desire to participate)
- Recognise the impact on participation of additional responsibilities and pressures outside university
- Recognise the costs to students: financial, social, time, emotional
- Ensure equitable practices across all dealings with RRR students so they are advantaged, and not further disadvantaged
- Identify (via the RRR student voice) where the university itself contributes to student poor wellbeing/risk to attrition and use these perspectives to implement change through policy/practices

Recommendations

Six recommendations emerged from the key findings, all are critical to supporting RRR students to thrive, not merely survive, at university. Each recommendation is targeted towards different decision-makers and stakeholders.

It is recommended that:

1. **PVC Students (or equivalent) / University recruitment / Student outreach/support services / regional campuses** should work together to:
 - Engage RRR students directly in developing bespoke and practical ways in which sense of community can be embedded across all interactions/encounters with students, families/communities, from pre-recruitment and through (a non-linear) pathway to completion
 - Engage RRR students in developing options which enhance flexibility in course delivery and placement
 - Ensure socio-emotional support is embedded within all learning experiences and environments, online or on-campus (e.g. through opportunities for interaction, Q&A, authentic stories from RRR students, family/community).
 - Provide exemplars of practice, drawing on regional campus' understandings of how sense of community is enacted and fostered.
2. **The Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE)** should continue their commitment to fund existing regional university centres, as well as expand to other regions. These centres have been shown to provide support which is essential and meaningful to RRR students.

3. **Student Support Staff (universities and schools)** (such as careers advisors, counsellors, student advisers) should:
 - Embed opportunities for students to articulate personally meaningful hopes and dreams for the future, during formal and informal encounters.
 - Allow students to identify what might 'get in the way' of realising their vision so that students have some agency in mobilising relevant strategies.
 - Normalise fluidity of future aspirations which may change - many students can and do make changes within and across courses and support staff should guide them through possible options.
4. **Institutional Management and PVC Students (or equivalent)** must work together to develop policies, processes and practices that address the diverse needs and circumstances of RRR students which support them to completion. Institutions must take into account the (in)equitable amount of emotional work undertaken by RRR students as they negotiate complex lives together with academic study. RRR students should be meaningfully involved in this, to resist homogenous 'solutions'.
5. **DVC(A)s (or equivalent)** must maintain a resolute stance of 'pedagogy before technology' as pressure is increasingly applied for the 'latest and greatest' in technologies at the expense of inclusive design. Teams which include Academic Developers, Learning / Educational or TEL Designers / IT experts and RRR students should be engaged for their collective expertise and skills to ensure appropriate online pedagogies and technologies are at the fore of design decisions. This will help ensure that RRR students who enrol have an equitable and inclusive learning experience.
6. **Student support services / student outreach (universities and schools)** should draw upon the qualities and skills that RRR students possess through 'students as partners' approaches, engaging them in design or development of innovative and bespoke support, resources, events, etc that may also be targeted towards family and others who provide significant support to students.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Key draft points for media release

Media Release

[date]

EMBARGOED UNTIL [time/date]

Insights from country students inform effective university supports

A universal understanding of the challenges faced by university students from regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas would inform equitable course delivery and support measures, major research has shown.

The Fellowship report by National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) Equity Fellow Dr Janine Delahunty recommends engaging and supporting students from RRR areas to identify their strengths and hopes for the future and communicate their challenges to improve educational outcomes.

Recent data ([ABS, 2021](#)) indicate the proportion of RRR people with a degree qualification remains half that of people from major cities. This Fellowship identified factors contributing to this disparity, and those which enabled students to succeed.

Dr Delahunty from the University of Wollongong surveyed and interviewed university students who were from regional, rural or remote backgrounds, across 21 Australian universities or regional campuses. Staff with significant professional expertise from 12 institutions also participated, drawing from their experiences supporting students from RRR backgrounds through various roles from director/coordinator/manager (e.g. regional campuses, university centres, programs) to student outreach and support. A group of secondary school students enrolled in a regional university outreach program also participated.

Student participants identified the importance of having a sense of community and belonging which helped to enhance their university experience. However it was not always 'guaranteed' to be part of the experience.

"RRR students should be engaged in developing bespoke and practical ways to embed a sense of community across all interactions throughout the student life cycle," Dr Delahunty said.

The study found that students were readily able to identify their own strengths and qualities often developed through the experience of living in smaller communities. They articulated with clarity, futures to which they would (or would not) aspire and were highly motivated towards completion of their university study.

"The personal qualities that RRR individuals commonly possess; for example, resilience, determination and resourcefulness, can be exemplified and built upon when they move into the role of a student in higher education," Dr Delahunty said.

"Students should also be prepared for potential barriers to realising their goals and counselled on the appropriate supports in place so they can mobilise relevant strategies and support."

The study found the main barriers to completion included financial constraints; inflexible course delivery and placements; and the combined impact of distance, additional equity factors, and competing responsibilities.

“The provision of scholarships and financial support by institutions alleviates disadvantage associated with expenses including travel, relocation and accommodation, and work placements,” Dr Delahunty said.

NCSEHE Director, Professor Sarah O’Shea said there were significant benefits in developing a clearer understanding of RRR students’ unique challenges and enabling factors.

“This research supports an institution-wide appreciation of the compounding disadvantage facing students from RRR areas, so measures can be taken to alleviate these pressures for a more equitable higher education experience,” Professor O’Shea said.

The final report, *‘You going to uni?’ Exploring how people from regional, rural and remote areas navigate into and through higher education*, will be accessible here on [date and hyperlink]

Ends/

Notes to Editor:

Based at Curtin University in Perth, the NCSEHE aims to inform public policy design and implementation and institutional practice to improve the higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people.

The Centre is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

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Appendix 2: Project Outputs to date

Date	Output type	Title	Details	Comments
Nov 2019	POSTER: International Conference	'You going to uni?': Imagining futures from the perspectives of regional students	ICED2020, Zurich June 16-18 (CANCELLED)	Proceedings publication
3 Feb 2020	Showcase	'You going to uni?': Regional students imagining their futures	HERDSA, Brisbane, June 30- July 3	Postponed to 2021/ Resubmitted abstract Nov 2020
4 Feb 2020	Emerging Initiative	'You going to uni?': Supporting regional students who start university, to stay	STARS, Brisbane, July 6- 8	Postponed to 2021
26/3/2020	Presentation	<i>You Going to Uni?</i> Project	ZOOM presentation to Regional University Centre Managers	
1/9/2020	Presentation	<i>Riding the rollercoaster of emotions: how regional students experience university</i>	ZOOM presentation Language & Linguistics Mini Conference UOW	
October 2020	Lightening Talks	<i>On footprints, the university experience and why we need to listen to regional students</i>	Webinar	
5 November	Workshop	<i>Text analysed two ways (Appraisal analysis of one interview)</i>	ZOOM. Hosted by UOW IDEAS research group, open invitation to international list	Presenters: Janine Delahunty and Anne Hellwig
28/29 November	Keynote	<i>Riding the rollercoaster of the 'new normal': moving beyond 2020 without collapsing</i>	International e- Conference on New Normal in Education 2020, University of Malay	Pre-recorded and live Q&A
31 January 2021	Publication – Campus Morning Mail	<i>Understanding attrition among regional and remote students</i>	Prof Sally Kift Contributing Editor series	
17 February 2021	Keynote Panel - UWS Learning and Teaching day	<i>Creating equitable learning environments, fostering community, and supporting students' mental wellbeing: Findings and strategies from NCSEHE research projects</i>	UWS Theme "The First Year Experience in The New Normal".	Presenters: Prof Sarah O'Shea, Dr Nicole Crawford, Dr Janine Delahunty by Zoom
19 April 2021	Invited talk	<i>On Footprints, the university experience and why we need to listen to RRR students</i>	CQU Student Retention Community of Practice	Virtual live session
24 May 2021	Presentation and Panel	<i>Regional students and hoped-for futures: motivation and external risks to achieving educational goals</i>	NCCRRE National Conference for regional rural and remote education	Virtual live panel presentation
8 July 2021 (rescheduled from 2020)	Presentation	<i>Supporting students from regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas to stay at university using a self- reflective tool</i>	STARS 2021 Virtual Conference	Pre-recorded presentation, live Q&A
8 July 2021 (rescheduled from 2020)	Presentation	<i>You going to uni?': Regional students imagining their futures</i>	HERDSA Conference, Brisbane [cancelled July 2021]	Presentation

Appendix 3: Regional Student Futures website – screenshots

REGIONAL STUDENT FUTURES

Home The Project Resources About Stories [Get Help](#)

Within a Cooee!

Advice Tool resource for regional people of all ages who are either thinking about university, or have already begun their university journey

Introduction

1. Being Regional

2. I'm thinking about uni, but I'm still not sure...

3. I'm at uni: now keep going!

4. Like a rollercoaster ride... is this normal?

I'm thinking about uni, but I'm still not sure...

I'm thinking about uni, but I'm still not sure, conversation starters directed towards regional people who are considering university as an option.

Go for it!

Carly is 32, from outer regional QLD, in second year Nursing, studying online and part-time. She has children, is working fulltime, is first-in-family, mature-age and is from a working class background.

Just to do it. Stop thinking about it and just do it. That's what I did. I acknowledge that there will be challenges and that there's challenges in life anyway and the time is going to pass anyway - just do something. If you're passionate about it, you'll get it done and at the end of it, you'll have a degree to be proud of. (Carly)

Cassie is 18-20, from remote NSW and is in first year of psychology, she moved 500kms from home to attend fulltime on campus. (until COVID) she also works a casual job, and is from working class background.

When it comes to university, absolutely go for it if you are in that position because you won't regret it at all. It's a great opportunity to be able to see what else is there outside of your town and really try and spread your wings. There's so many opportunities available at uni to meet new people and to try things that you may never have had the opportunity to before. Yeah, my advice would be to if you've got an idea or some kind of career path that you'd like to follow but you're not sure, absolutely go for it. (Cassie)

[Load More](#)

You can do it

"Don't be scared to study - do something that interests you" (#75 Brooke)

Grace is a 21-25 year old Education student from an outer regional area, and is first in her family to go to uni. She moved 400kms from her family and is now in her final year.

Don't be afraid to give it a go, at the end of the day it will have been a great experience to have taken part in and you will find yourself more capable than you realise. In Australia university is extremely accessible to a diverse range of students and situations and it can be possible. (Grace)

Ros is 28-30 from outer regional WA, and doing Social Work online, fulltime. She is mature age, from working class background and has children, carer for other family members, community commitments as well as working part-time.

You are more than capable and your life experiences living regionally are valuable in all fields to add unique perspectives (Ros)

[Load More](#)

Do it because you want to

Kim is 31-40 from outer regional QLD, in 2nd year Accounting fulltime, online. Kim is FIP and from working class background, and carer for family member(s)

Study something you think you will love and will be able to find a job you will enjoy doing at the end. Don't do what your mum (and sister/friend) whoever thinks you should do. Don't feel obligated and pressured to do something you don't really want to do, or it will seem like it takes forever and you will grow to resent it. Also, if you get there and feel like what you picked isn't what you expected talk to someone at the uni and switch if you need to. (Kim)

Teri is 18-20 from outer regional VIC, in first year Social Work online and fulltime. She is first in her family at uni and couldn't afford to move away to attend a campus

If it's something you want to achieve in your life, you should definitely go for it and find out ways that will allow you to pursue it, find out if help is available because you shouldn't limit yourself from happiness just because of living in a regional area (Teri)

[Load More](#)

etc...

Tailored resources for you

If you are having trouble finding resources that apply to you, use our resource finder tool.

[Find my resources](#)

REGIONAL STUDENT FUTURES

Resources
Resources for Students
Resources for Students

Contact
Regional Student Futures
122 Teet at Wollongong, 2500 NSW, Australia
(+61)24285 8585
Email us

Supported by
NCSSEH
Curtin University
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.
The views presented in this website do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Figure 11. Within a Cooee! resource

Excerpt from *Within a Cooe!* introduction:

This resource has been created from students' own experiences and learnings, to help create a sense that you are not alone, as well giving you a heads up on some things to expect. Making the decision to start university or to persevere until you complete your degree may be challenging, which is why it is good to hear from others who have already been there, and to spend time thinking about the hopes and desires you have for your future and what you can do to achieve them.

A number of other resources were developed and the website went live in September 2021. These include an interactive self-reflective tool, to be used as a support to explore aspects of future-focused thinking and goal-setting, however it may also be used informally by individuals. A non-prescriptive guide accompanies the tool with links to other resources and sites to enhance its relevance to a range of different situations and support roles (careers, counselling, youth support, older people ...). The tool is general in nature in that it does not assume that university is everyone's goal, and will have relevance for anyone contemplating future goals, whatever that entails (vocational, university, personal, altruistic, sporting, etc). For a list of project outputs to date see Appendix 2.

Evaluation was also a critical aspect of this development process with participants (n=3 students and n=5 staff) and critical friends (n=4) providing feedback to date on *Within a Cooe!* (see Appendix 14)

"My future self" Reflective tool

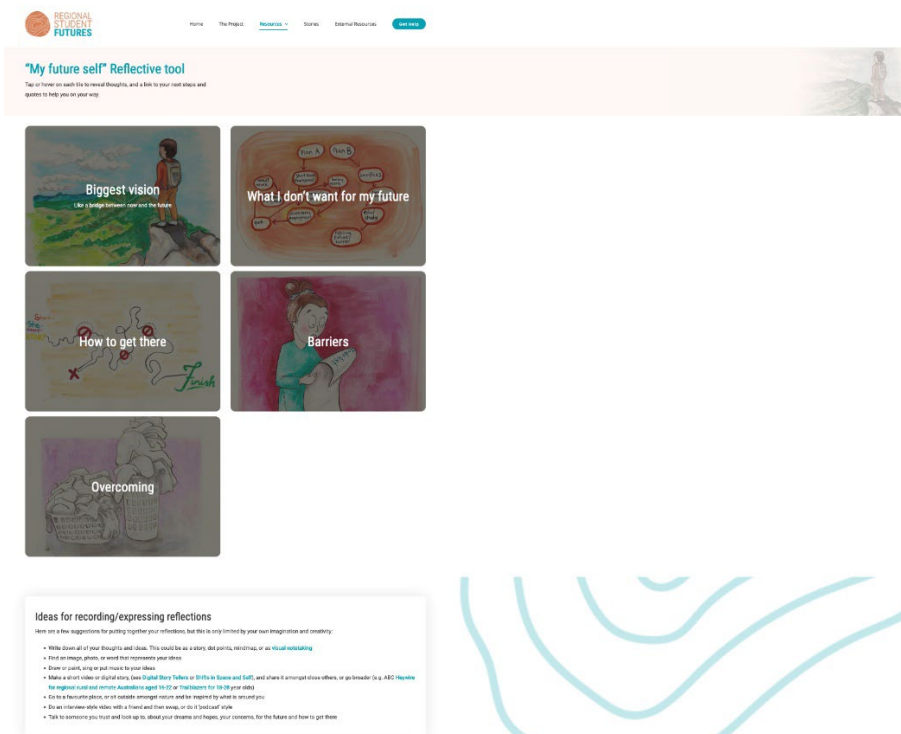


Figure 12. "My future self" Reflective tool

The My Future Self tool was designed to facilitate reflection, which can enhance self-awareness and has potential to change behaviour. When reflections have been articulated in some way, then conversations are likely to be more deliberate or meaningful in identifying the steps needed

to fulfil those goals. This is because others (e.g. family, friends and influential people) have a significant influence on what can be conceived as future possibilities.

There are five themes in the reflective tool, displayed as an illustrated card which flips when clicked. Each opens up to more nuanced prompts, followed by a selection of 'Here's what others have said' quotes to show the variation in responses from RRR participants, as well as give a sense of being part of a bigger and ongoing conversation.

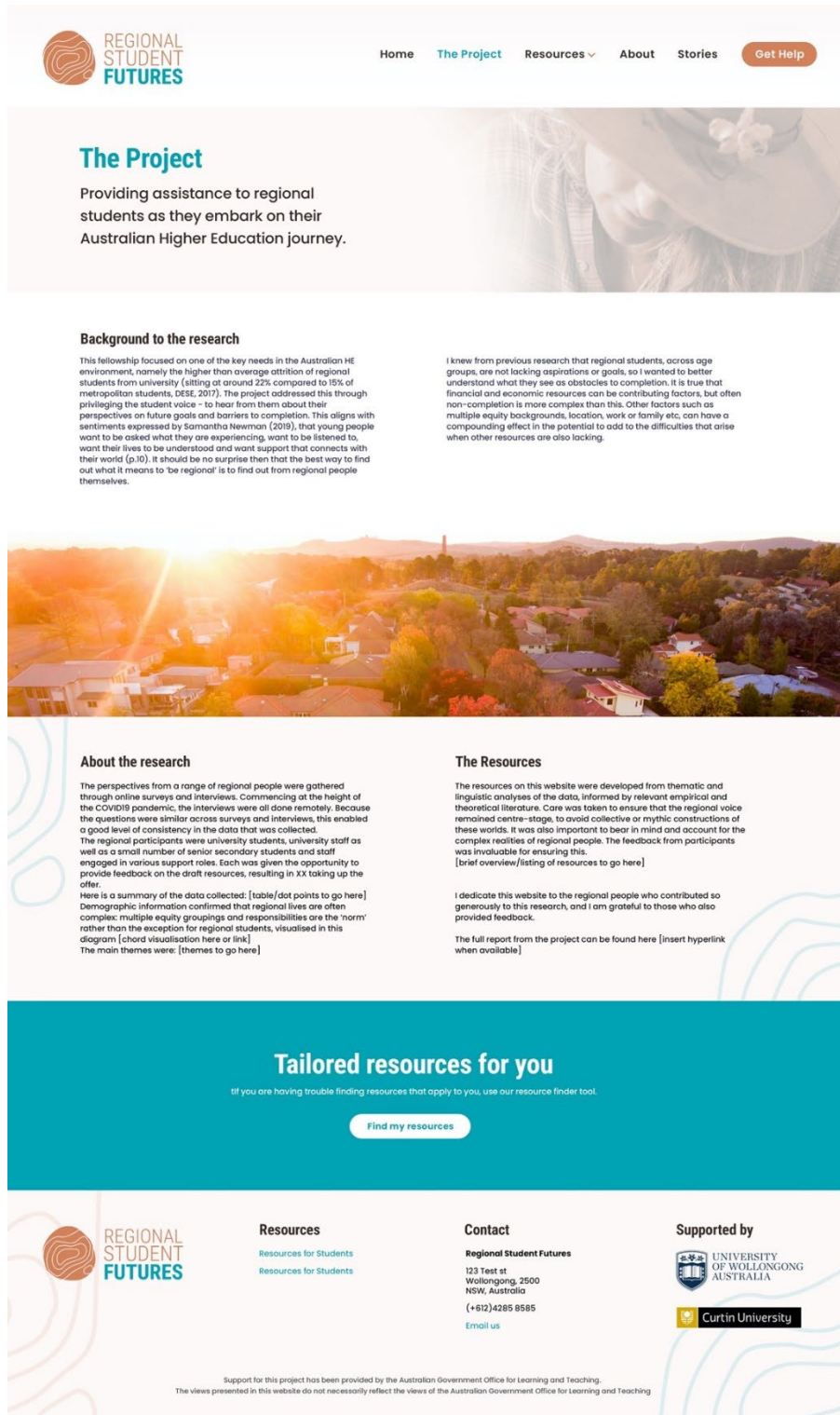
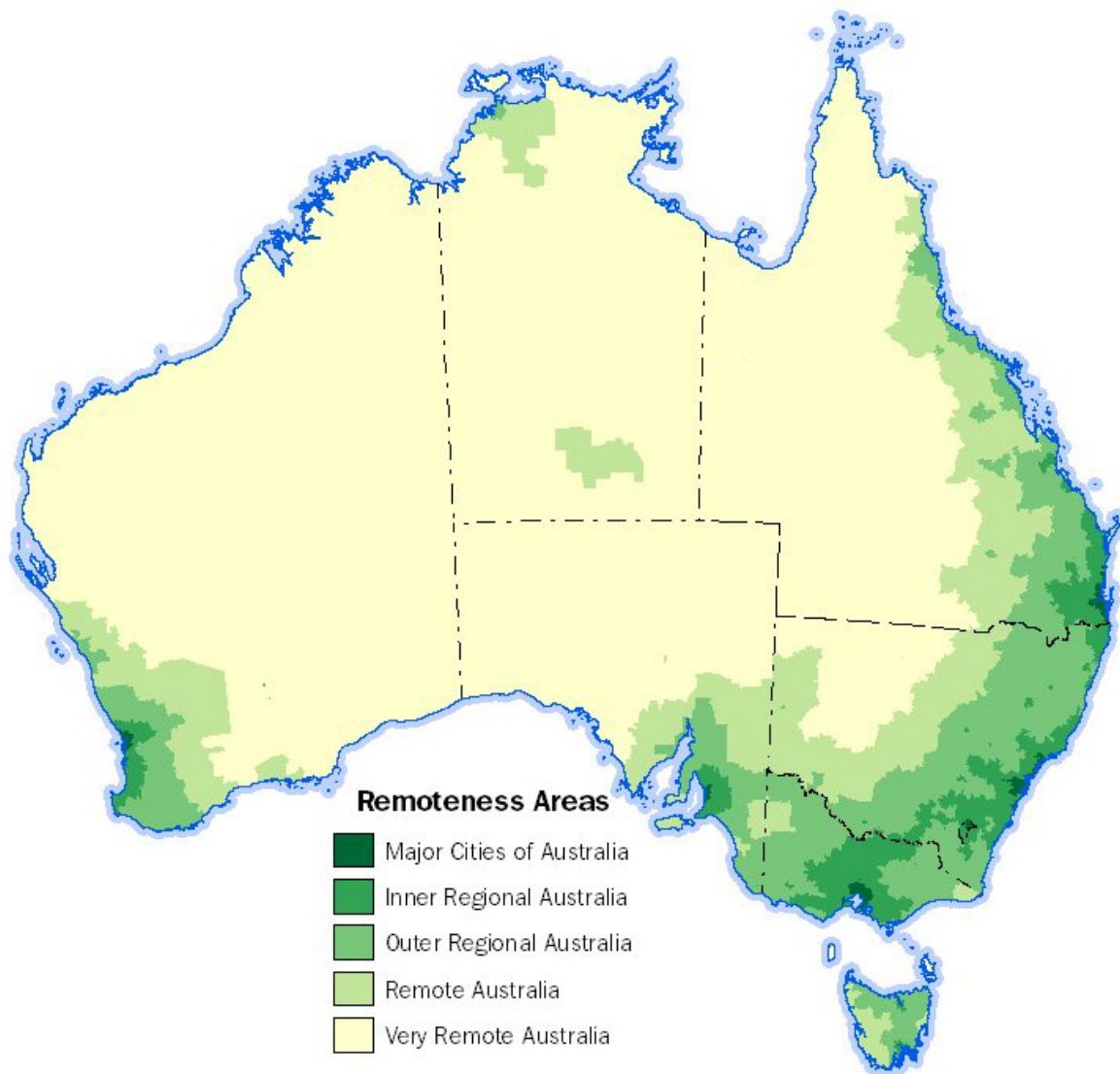


Figure 12. Screenshot of the Project page, <https://regionalstudentfutures.org.au/the-project/>

Appendix 4: ABS Map of Remoteness Areas

(accessed from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/remoteness+structure>)



Appendix 5: Census data summaries (various categories) by Remoteness and State

From Census QuickStats

(<https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/Home/2016%20search%20by%20geography>)

INNER REGIONAL	NSW	QLD	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	NT (n/a)
Median age	43	41	43	44	41	40	
Bachelor level	14.2%	12%	14.9%	12.2%	12%	18.8%	
Full-time work	54.8%	55.6%	53.9%	53.2%	53.7%	52.8%	
Part time work	33.4%	30.6%	34.2%	35.3%	32.8%	35.1%	
Unpaid work (domestic)	69.7%	69.9%	70%	73.6%	70%	70.9%	
Unpaid work (childcare)	26.8%	26.9%	28%	28.1%	28.4%	27.5%	
Unpaid work (disability care)	12.5%	12%	12.5%	12.5%	10.1%	11.7%	
Voluntary work	21.4%	20%	24%	26.95	22.1%	20.7%	
Internet connection to dwelling	78.3%	79.7%	79.2%	80.3%	82.6%	79.5%	
Main occupations	Professionals	Technicians and trades workers	Professionals	Professionals	Technicians and trades workers	Professionals	
Main industry	Hospitals (except psychiatric hospitals)	Hospitals (except psychiatric hospitals).	Hospitals (except psychiatric hospitals).	aged care residential services	Primary education	Hospitals (except Psychiatric Hospitals)	

OUTER REGIONAL	NSW	QLD	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	NT
Median age	46	38	46	45	41	46	33
Bachelor level	10.7%	12.7%	10.75	8.2%	11.1%	10.9%	20.4%
Full-time work	56%	58.4%	54.6%	54.1%	57.3%	51.2%	69.4%
Part time work	31.2%	28.85	33.3%	32.6%	29.9%	35%	19.85
Unpaid work (domestic)	66.6%	68.3%	67.2%	68.2%	68.7%	69.5%	65.45
Unpaid work (childcare)	24.5%	27.1%	24.3%	25.3%	26.5%	25%	26.7%
Unpaid work (disability care)	12.5%	10.4%	12.4%	12.2%	10.2%	12.1%	7.7%
Voluntary work	24.7%	20.2%	28%	27.6%	24.9%	22.3%	17.5%

OUTER REGIONAL	NSW	QLD	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	NT
Internet connection to dwelling	71.85	79.2%	73.6%	72.85	78.2%	74.9%	84.8%
Main occupations	Managers	Professionals	Managers	Managers	Technicians and trades workers	Labourers	Professionals
Main industry	Beef cattle farming (specialised).	Hospitals (except psychiatric hospitals).	Hospitals (except psychiatric hospitals).	Supermarket and grocery stores	supermarket and grocery stores	Supermarket and Grocery Stores	State government administration

REMOTE	NSW	QLD	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	NT
Median age	40	36	46	45	41	49	33
Bachelor level	9.2%	9.8%	10.7%	8.2%	11.1%	9%	20.4%
Full-time work	62.95	66.3%	54.6%	54.1%	57.3%	49.7%	69.4%
Part time work	24.2%	21.6%	33.3%	32.6%	29.9%	32.2%	19.8%
Unpaid work (domestic)	60.6%	64.7%	67.2%	68.2%	68.75	66%	65.4%
Unpaid work (childcare)	24.3%	26.75	24.3%	25.3%	26.5%	22.4%	26.7%
Unpaid work (disability care)	10.8%	8.9%	12.4%	12.2%	10.2%	10.3%	7.7%
Voluntary work	24.8%	22.9%	28%	27.6%	24.9%	22.1%	17.5%
Internet connection to dwelling	65.4%	79.2%	73.6%	72.8%	78.2%	71.4%	84.8%
Main occupations	Managers	Professionals	Managers	Managers	Technicians and trades workers	Labourers	Professionals
Main industry	Other grain growing	Hospitals (except psychiatric hospitals)	Hospitals (except psychiatric hospitals)	Supermarket and grocery stores	Supermarket and grocery stores	Accommodation	State government administration

VERY REMOTE	NSW	QLD	VIC (n/a)	SA	WA	TAS	NT
Median age	39	33		39	34	50	27
Bachelor level	9.2%	7.1%		10.3%	11.1%	13.1%	7%
Full-time work	64.4%	65.4%		71.3%	57.3%	56.9%	53%
Part time work	19.4%	20.3%		14.6%	29.9%	30.9%	18%
Unpaid work (domestic)	55.85	64.4%		62.7%	52.2%	70.4%	66.1%
Unpaid work (childcare)	20%	28.3%		26.6%	26.3%	22%	43.4%
Unpaid work (disability care)	9.5%	8.8%		9.9%	7.8%	10.1%	14%
Voluntary work	22.1%	24%		26%	17.5%	35.3%	14.65
Internet connection to dwelling	65.4%	68.6%		64.5%	69.5%	73.3%	54.6%
Main occupations	Managers	Managers		Managers	Technicians and trade workers	Managers	Professionals
Main industry	Other grain growing	Beef Cattle Farming (Specialised)		Combined primary and secondary Education	Iron ore mining	Beef Cattle Farming (Specialist)	Local government administration

Appendix 6: DESE (2018): Participation (commencing students, by first address)

		Total	Metro	Sum of Regional + Remote	Inner Regional	Outer Regional	Remote / Very Remote
Age	20 Years or under	47.2%	48.6%	42.0%	41.8%	42.9%	38.2%
	21-25	29.5%	30.1%	27.0%	27.8%	25.8%	22.6%
	26-30	8.4%	8.2%	9.1%	9.0%	9.2%	10.7%
	31-40	8.6%	7.9%	11.6%	11.3%	11.6%	15.9%
	41-50	4.3%	3.6%	6.8%	6.7%	7.0%	8.8%
	51-60	1.5%	1.2%	2.6%	2.5%	2.7%	3.1%
	61-70	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%
	71 years or over	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
First in Family*	No	45.9%	48.6%	36.4%	37.9%	33.6%	31.8%
	Unknown	16.8%	15.7%	20.3%	19.4%	22.2%	23.1%
	Yes	37.3%	35.7%	43.3%	42.8%	44.3%	45.1%
Type of attendance	Full-time	74.0%	75.3%	69.3%	69.8%	69.0%	61.6%
	Part-time	26.0%	24.7%	30.7%	30.2%	31.0%	38.4%
Gender	Female	58.4%	56.8%	64.2%	63.5%	65.3%	68.5%
	Male	41.6%	43.2%	35.8%	36.5%	34.7%	31.5%
Indigenous	Not Indigenous	98.1%	98.7%	96.0%	96.9%	94.7%	88.8%
	Associates as Indigenous	1.9%	1.3%	4.0%	3.1%	5.3%	11.2%
SES (first address)	High	31.3%	36.9%	9.9%	11.1%	7.5%	8.1%
	Low	17.9%	14.8%	29.9%	28.2%	33.7%	31.3%
	Medium	50.5%	48.2%	59.7%	60.3%	58.3%	59.0%
	Unknown	0.3%	0.2%	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	1.6%
Disability	Without disability	92.7%	92.9%	92.0%	91.5%	93.0%	94.3%
	With disability	7.3%	7.1%	8.0%	8.5%	7.0%	5.7%
NESB	No NESB	96.8%	96.3%	98.6%	98.8%	98.1%	98.0%
	NESB	3.2%	3.7%	1.4%	1.2%	1.9%	2.0%

* Excluding 'Not Commencing' as the best available representation of commencing students

Appendix 7: HREC Ethics HREC2019/486 Approval: University-focused stage

Wednesday, December 18, 2019 at 14:05:14 Australian Eastern Daylight Time

Subject: HREC Approval of Application 2019/486
Date: Tuesday, 17 December 2019 at 4:21:55 pm Australian Eastern Daylight Time
From: irma-support@uow.edu.au
To: Janine Delahunty
CC: Janine Delahunty, RSO Ethics

Dear Dr Delahunty,

I am pleased to advise that the application detailed below has been **approved**.

Ethics Number: 2019/486
 Approval Date: 17/12/2019
 Expiry Date: 16/12/2020
 Project Title: 'You going to uni?': Exploring how regional people navigate into and through higher education
 Researcher/s: Delahunty Janine
 Documents Approved:

- HREC Application V1 02122019
- Response to Review V1 10122019
- PIS Uni Students V2 10122019
- PIS Uni Staff V2 10122019
- Verbal Consent Uni Students V1 01122019
- Consent Uni Students V2 10122019
- Verbal Consent Uni Staff V1 01122019
- Consent Uni Staff V2 10122019
- Confidentiality Agreement V1 01122019
- Student Questions V1 01122019
- Staff Questions V1 01122019
- FAQs V1 01122019
- Generic Emails V1 01122019
- Recruitment Text V1 01122019
- Investigator Details - Janine Delahunty
- Ethics Training Certificate - Janine Delahunty

Sites:

Site	Principal Investigator for Site
University of Wollongong (Regional campuses and Wollongong/Innovation campuses)	Janine Delahunty
Regional Universities Network (RUN) (member universities)	Janine Delahunty
Innovative Research Universities (IRU) (member universities)	Janine Delahunty
Other universities who express interest in being involved (snowball sampling)	Janine Delahunty

The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document.

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Appendix 8: University of Wollongong HREC 2020/012 Ethics Approval: school-focused stage

Tuesday, March 17, 2020 at 16:45:43 Australian Eastern Daylight Time

Subject: HREC Approval of Application 2020/012
Date: Tuesday, 17 March 2020 at 4:43:55 pm Australian Eastern Daylight Time
From: irma-support@uow.edu.au
To: Janine Delahunty
CC: Janine Delahunty, RSO Ethics

Dear Dr Delahunty,

I am pleased to advise that the application detailed below has been **approved**.

Ethics Number: 2020/012

Approval Date: 17/03/2020

Project Expiry Date: 16/03/2021

Project Title: 'You going to uni?': Exploring how regional young people navigate into and through higher education (secondary school-focus stage)

Researcher/s: Delahunty Janine

Documents Approved:

- Ethics Application V1 20012020
- Resonse to Review V1 28022020
- Resonse to Review V2 10032020
- AppA Recruitment Wordings V2 28022020
- AppB PIS HS Students V3 10032020
- AppC PIS Parents V3 10032020
- AppD Consent HS Students V2 28022020
- AppE PIS Staff V3 10032020
- AppF Consent Staff V2 28022020
- AppG Verbal Consent Staff V1 20012020
- AppH Generic Communications V1 20012020
- AppI Student Questions V1 20012020
- AppJ Staff Questions V1 20012020
- AppK Confidentiality Agreement V1 21012020
- AppL FAQs V2 28022020
- Investigator Details - Janine Delahunty
- Ethics Training Certificate - Janine Delahunty

Sites:

Site	Principal Investigator for Site
Regional High Schools	Janine Delahunty

The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document. Compliance is monitored through progress reports; the HREC may also undertake physical monitoring of research.

Approval is granted for a twelve month period; extension of this approval will be considered on receipt of a progress report **prior to the expiry date**. Extension of approval requires:

Page 1 of 2

Appendix 9: NSW SERAP (No. 2020016) Ethics Approval (NSW)



Dr Janine Delahunty
39C.252G University of Wollongong
Northfields Avenue
WOLLONGONG NSW 2522

DOC20/535472
SERAP 2020016

Dear Dr Delahunty

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled *'You going to uni?': Exploring how regional young people navigate into higher education*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

You may contact principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to principals.

This approval will remain valid until 16 March 2021.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

Researcher name	WWCC	WWCC expires
Janine Delahunty	WWC1268901E	30-Aug-2023

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- The privacy of participants is to be protected as per the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.
- School principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the principal for the specific method of gathering information must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research approvals officer before publication proceeds.
- All conditions attached to the approval must be complied with.

When your study is completed please email your report to: serap@det.nsw.edu.au. You may also be asked to present on the findings of your research.

I wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Stevens'.

Dr Robert Stevens
Manager, Research
Strategic Analysis | CESE
9 June 2020

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS UNIT | CESE
NSW Department of Education
Level 9, 105 Phillip Street, Parramatta NSW 2150 | GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001
Telephone: 7814 2547 – Email: det.serap@det.nsw.edu.au



Appendix 10: SA Education Research Unit ethics (No. 2020-0021) approval



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

System Performance
31 Finders Street
Adelaide SA 5000
GPO Box 1152
Adelaide SA 5001
DX 541
Tel. +61 8 8226 1609
Education.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au
www.education.sa.gov.au

Reference No: 2020-0021

Dr Janine Delahunty
University of Wollongong
National Centre for Student Equity in HE (Curtain University)

Dear Dr Janine Delahunty

Your research project "*You going to uni?: Exploring how regional young people navigate into higher education*" has been reviewed by a senior officer within the Department.

I am pleased to advise you that your application has been approved, subject to the following conditions:

- That a copy of any final reports, presentations, manuscripts and developed resource materials accepted for publication be submitted to the Education.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au mailbox 30 days prior to their publication.
- That a copy of the final survey is to be forwarded to the DECD.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au inbox.

Please contact Georgia in the Data Reporting and Analytics directorate for any other matters you may wish to discuss regarding your application (Tel. (08) 8226 1609 or email: Education.ResearchUnit@sa.gov.au).

I wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Temperty'.

Ben Temperty
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

31 July 2020

Appendix 11: Demographic summary table - university students

SURVEY RESP# / INTERVIEW	PSEUDONYM (alphabetical)	STATE REGL CODE	COURSE	YEAR	MODE ¹⁵ (prior to COVID-19)	LOAD	EQUITY ¹⁶ FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITIES ¹⁷	MOVEMENT	GENDER	AGE RANGE
40	Aaron	NSW-IR	B.SOFTWARE ENGINEERING	2nd	OC	FT	RW	CA	STAYED	M	18 to 20
115	Abbey	SA-OR	B.NURSING	1st	OL	FT	RFW	NONE	FAR	F	18 to 20
112	Adam	NT-REM	B.EXERCISE SCIENCE	4th	OC	FT	RFIM	PT CA EX	FAR	M	21 to 25
42	Ainsley	NT-OR	B.EXERCISE & SPORTS SCIENCE	1st	BL	FT	RFW	PT	STAYED	F	18 to 20
128	Alan	SA-REM	B.SCIENCE (ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR)	5th+	BL	PT	RFM	CA	CLOSE	M	21 to 25
26	Alex	NSW-IR	B.CREATIVE ARTS/B.COMMERCE	1st	OC	FT	R	NONE	CLOSE	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
114	Ali	SA-OR	B.SCIENCE	5th+	OC	FT	RDWIM	PT	STAYED	Other	21 to 25
78	Alice	NSW-IR	B.ARTS	1st	OC	FT	RDLM	CH CO	STAYED	F	41 to 50
120	Amanda	SA-OR	B.SPEECH PATHOLOGY	1st	OL	FT	R	CC PT EX	FAR	F	18 to 20
63	Amelia	VIC-OR	B.NURSING	2nd	OL	FT	RF	PT	STAYED	F	21 to 25
27	Archer	NSW-IR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	2nd	OC	FT	RWI	PT	CLOSE	F	18 to 20
32	Ari	NSW-IR	B.SCIENCE (PSYCOLOGY)	1st	OC	FT	RF	CA	STAYED	F	18 to 20
39	Ash	SKIPPED	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	2nd	D/BM	PT	RFWM	CH FT	STAYED	PNS	31 to 40
105	Ash	SA-OR	B.EDUCATION/ARTS	3rd	BL	FT	R	PT	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
22	Avery	QLD-OR	B.PARAMEDICINE	1st	OC	FT	RFI	CO CA	CLOSE	F	18 to 20
41	Ben	NSW-IR	B.COMPUTER SCIENCE	2nd	BL	PT	RFWM	CA	STAYED	M	51 plus
Interview	Beth	QLD-OR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	1st	OL	PT	RFWM	FT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
Interview	Bianca	SA-REM	B.BUSINESS (ADV LEADERSHIP)	3rd	OC	FT	RW	PT	FAR	F	21 to 25
Billy	Billy	SA-OR	B.COMMERCE	1st	OC	FT	RF	CA	CLOSE	M	18 to 20
5	Blair	NSW-IR	B.POLITICS, PHIL & ECONOMICS	3rd	OC	FT	RLM	CA	CLOSE	F	18 to 20
3	Brady	NSW-OR	B.ARTS	1st	BL	FT	RDWI	PT	STAYED	F	18 to 20

¹⁵ Mode: BL=blended, OL=Online, OC=on campus, D/BM=distance/block mode

¹⁶ Equity Factors: R=Regional, F=First in Family, M=Mature-age, L=Low SES, A=Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander, D=Disability, W=Working Class, I=Isolated

¹⁷ Responsibilities: CH=carer children, CO=carer others, CC=community commitments, PT=part-time work, FT=fulltime work, CA=casual work, EX=extra curricular

SURVEY RESP# / INTERVIEW	PSEUDONYM (alphabetical)	STATE REGL CODE	COURSE	YEAR	MODE ¹⁵ (prior to COVID-19)	LOAD	EQUITY ¹⁶ FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITIES ¹⁷	MOVEMENT	GENDER	AGE RANGE
53	Brenda	QLD-IR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	3rd	D/BM	FT	RLM	CH PT EX	STAYED	F	31 to 40
Interview	Brianna	SA-OR	B.EDUCATION/B.ARTS	3rd	OC	FT	RFW	EX	FAR	F	21 to 25
74	Brooke	WA-OR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	3rd	OL	FT	RFDLM	CO PT	STAYED	PNS	SKIPPED
Interview	Caitlyn	NSW-OR	B.ARTS	3rd	OL	FT	RDLW	CC	STAYED	F	21 to 25
56	Carey	SKIPPED	B.MEDICAL LAB SCIENCE	2nd	OC	FT	RFW	CA	STAYED	F	18 to 20
Interview	Carly	QLD-OR	B.NURSING	2nd	OL	PT	RFWM	CH FT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
106	Carol	NT-OR	M.NURSE PRACTITIONER	1st	OL	PT	RNWM	CH CC FT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
91	Casey	SA-IR	B.NURSING	2nd	BL	FT	RW	CC PT	FAR	F	18 to 20
Interview	Cassie	NSW-REM	B.PSYCHOLOGY (H)	1st	OC	FT	RNWI	EX	FAR	F	18 to 20
122	Cathy	NSW-OR	B.HEALTHY AGEING	2nd	D/BM	FT	RFWM	FT EX	STAYED	F	26 to 30
103	Charley	SA-OR	B.SCIENCE/M.TEACHING	2nd	OC	FT	RF	PT	FAR	F	18 to 20
18	Charlotte	QLD-OR	B.TEACHING (PRIMARY)	2nd	OL	PT	RFM	CH CC PT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
Interview	Chloe	QLD-OR	B.EDUCATION (PRIMARY)	2nd	BL	PT	RFWM	CH PT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
28	Chris	NSW-IR	B.CREATIVE ARTS/B.ARTS	4th	OC	FT	RI	CO	CLOSE	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
45	Corey	NT-OR	B.ENGINEERING/M.ENGINEERING	4th	BL	FT	RWI	CC CA EX	STAYED	M	21 to 25
54	Dale	QLD-IR	B.NURSING	1st	BL	PT	RFDM	NONE	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
118	Dale	SA-REM	B.PSYCHOLOGY (H)	3rd	OL	FT	RFL	CC PT EX	FAR	F	18 to 20
108	Dallas	SA-OR	B.MEDICAL SCIENCE	1st	BL	FT	RFLI	CA EX	CLOSE	F	18 to 20
127	Dan	SA-REM	B.DISABILITY & DEVELOPMENT	2nd	OC	FT	RFI	PT	FAR	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
110	Dana	SA-OR	B.INT'L RELATIONS/POLITICAL SC	1st	BL	FT	RLW	PT	FAR	F	18 to 20
12	Dane	QLD-REM	B.OCC HEALTH & SAFETY	2nd	OL	PT	RFLW	CH CC CA	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
107	Danielle	SA-REM	B.BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE	1st	OL	FT	RI	PT	FAR	F	18 to 20
119	Darby	NSW-OR	B.INT'L RELATIONS/POLITICAL SC	1st	OC	FT	RFWI	CO CA	FAR	F	18 to 20
50	David	QLD-REM	B.SCIENCE (H)	1st	BL	PT	RFNM	CC FT	FAR	M	41 to 50
16	Drew	QLD-IR	B.NURSING	2nd	OL	PT	R	CH PT	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED

SURVEY RESP# / INTERVIEW	PSEUDONYM (alphabetical)	STATE REGL CODE	COURSE	YEAR	MODE ¹⁵ (prior to COVID-19)	LOAD	EQUITY ¹⁶ FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITIES ¹⁷	MOVEMENT	GENDER	AGE RANGE
4	Eden	NSW-IR	PG MEDICINE	2nd	OC	FT	RW	NONE	FAR	F	21 to 25
Interview	Eleanor	NT-OR	B.EXERCISE SCIENCE	1st	OC	FT	RFLW	PT	STAYED	F	18 to 20
Interview	Ella	WA-OR	B.NURSING	1st	BL	FT	RAWM	CC CA	STAYED	F	26 to 30
25	Ellis	NT-OR	B.NURSING	2nd	OL	FT	RFLNRI	CA	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
8	Emma	QLD-OR	B.MUSIC	3rd	D/BM	FT	R	PT	STAYED	F	18 to 20
68	Erin	WA-OR	B.EDUCATION	4th	BL	FT	RF	FT	STAYED	F	21 to 25
Interview	Eva	SA-IR	B.ACCOUNTING	1st	OL	FT	RW	CC PT	STAYED	F	18 to 20
73	Evelyn	WA-OR	B.SECONDARY EDUCATION	1st	BL	FT	R	FT EX	STAYED	F	21 to 25
14	Evie	QLD-OR	B.EDUCATION	5th+	OL	FT	RIM	CH CC PT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
62	Finn	VIC-OR	B.ARTS	3rd	OL	PT	RFLM	FT	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
79	Frankie	NSW-IR	B.COMMERCE	2nd	BL	FT	RFW	PT	CLOSE	F	21 to 25
Interview	Freya	SA-OR	B.SCIENCE	5th+	OC	FT	RDM	PT	STAYED	F	21 to 25
33	Gabby	NSW-IR	B.PARAMEDICINE	2nd	D/BM	PT	RFM	PT	STAYED	F	21 to 25
85	Gabrielle	NT-OR	B.BUSINESS/ARTS	3rd	OC	FT	RLM	PT	FAR	F	21 to 25
Interview	Gayle	SA-OR	B.BUSINESS	1st	OL	PT	RFLWM	FT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
90	Georgie	SA-REM	B.ARTS	4th	BL	FT	RLI	CC PT EX	FAR	F	21 to 25
59	Gillian	NSW-OR	B.ARTS	3rd	OL	FT	RDL	CC	STAYED	F	21 to 25
88	Grace	SA-OR	B.EDUCATION (PRIMARY)	3rd	OC	FT	RF	PT	FAR	F	21 to 25
75	Graeme	WA-OR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	3rd	BL	PT	RM	FT	STAYED	M	51 plus
72	Grey	WA-OR	B.DIGITAL MEDIA	1st	D/BM	SKIPPED	RIM	CO CC CA	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
Interview	Hannah	NSW-OR	B.NURSING	2nd	OC	FT	RFM	CO PT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
Interview	Hans	NSW-REM	B.SCIENCE (H)	4th	OL	PT	RFNWIM	FT	STAYED	M	41 to 50
98	Harlow	SA-OR	B.EDUCATION	2nd	BL	FT	RW	CA	FAR	F	21 to 25
101	Harper	skIPPED	B.NURSING	1st	OC	FT	RIM	CA	FAR	F	21 to 25
76	Helen	WA-VREM	B.BUSINESS	4th	D/BM	PT	RWIM	FT EX	STAYED	F	41 to 50

SURVEY RESP# / INTERVIEW	PSEUDONYM (alphabetical)	STATE REGL CODE	COURSE	YEAR	MODE ¹⁵ (prior to COVID-19)	LOAD	EQUITY ¹⁶ FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITIES ¹⁷	MOVEMENT	GENDER	AGE RANGE
60	Holly	NSW-OR	B.ARTS/BUSINESS	3rd	OL	FT	RAFDLWIM	CC PT EX	FAR	F	21 to 25
109	Indigo	SA-OR	B.BUSINESS (ADV LEADERSHIP)	4th	OC	FT	RWI	CC PT EX	FAR	F	21 to 25
51	Irene	QLD-OR	B.PARAMEDIC SCIENCE	2nd	D/BM	PT	RFLWM	CH CA FT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
111	Jackie	VIC-OR	B.BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE	3rd	OC	FT	RF	NONE	FAR	F	21 to 25
113	Jade	SA-OR	B.NURSING	3rd	BL	FT	RF	PT	CLOSE	F	21 to 25
129	Janelle	NSW-OR	B.HEALTHY AGEING	3rd	OL	PT	RFWM	CH CC FT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
117	Jared	SA-IR	B.COMMERCE	1st	OC	FT	RFLW	PT EX	FAR	M	18 to 20
104	Jed	SA-REM	B.IT SIM & SERIOUS GAMES	1st	BL	FT	RI	EX	FAR	M	18 to 20
13	Jennifer	QLD-OR	B.SOCIAL WORK (H)	3rd	OL	FT	RW	PT	STAYED	F	21 to 25
116	Jesse	SA-VREM	B.EDUCATION (PRIMARY)	2nd	OC	FT	RWI	NONE	FAR	F	21 to 25
19	Jessica	QLD-IR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	2nd	OL	PT	RD	CO PT	STAYED	F	SKIPPED
89	Jo	SA-OR	B.EXERCISE SCIENCE	5th+	OC	FT	RF	PT CA	FAR	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
124	Jono	NT-REM	M.EDUCATION	3rd	D/BM	PT	RFWM	FT EX	STAYED	M	31 to 40
15	Judy	QLD-IR	B.ACCOUNTING	2nd	OL	PT	RWM	CH CC FT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
20	Jules	WA-OR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	3rd	BL	FT	RFLWM	NONE	STAYED	F	26 to 30
23	Julianne	NT-OR	M.TEACHING	1st	OC	FT	RMx	CH	STAYED	F	26 to 30
65	Justine	QLD-IR	M.HEALTH SCIENCE	1st	OL	PT	RM	CC PT	STAYED	F	51 Plus
24	Kate	NT-OR	B.EXERCISE & SPORTS SCIENCE	1st	OL	FT	RFW	CC PT	STAYED	F	18 to 20
Interview	Keiran	NT-OR	B.CIVIL ENGINEERING	4th	OC	FT	RW	CA	FAR	M	18 to 20
70	Kelly	WA-OR	B.NURSING	1st	BL	FT	RAM	FT EX	STAYED	F	26 to 30
82	Kim	QLD-OR	B.BUSINESS/B.INFO TECH	2nd	OL	FT	RFWM	CO EX	STAYED	F	31 to 40
55	Laura	QLD-OR	B.NURSING	2nd	OL	FT	RWM	CC PT EX	STAYED	F	26 to 30
97	Lauren	SA-OR	B.NURSING	1st	OC	FT	RFWM	CH CA EX	STAYED	F	31 to 40
1	Leah	NSW-IR	B.NURSING	2nd	BL	FT	RFM	CO CC PT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
44	Leanne	QLD-OR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	5th+	OL	SKIPPED	RALM	CH	STAYED	F	SKIPPED

SURVEY RESP# / INTERVIEW	PSEUDONYM (alphabetical)	STATE REGL CODE	COURSE	YEAR	MODE ¹⁵ (prior to COVID-19)	LOAD	EQUITY ¹⁶ FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITIES ¹⁷	MOVEMENT	GENDER	AGE RANGE
30	Lee	NSW-IR	B.ARTS	1st	BL	FT	RW	PT	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
69	Linda	WA-OR	B.EDUCATION (PRIMARY)	3rd	BL	FT	RLIM	CH CC	STAYED	F	31 to 40
83	Lisa	NSW-IR	M.TEACHING	1st	OC	FT	RM	CH CC FT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
86	Lonnie	SA-OR	B.HUMAN NUTRITION	2nd	BL	PT	RWM	CH EX	STAYED	F	31 to 40
100	Louisa	SA-OR	B.DISABILITY & DEVELOPMENT	4th	OL	FT	RFI	PT EX	STAYED	F	21 to 25
Interview	Lucy	NSW-IR	B.ARTS (SOCIOLOGY)	1st	OC	FT	RDLWM	CH CO	STAYED	F	41 to 50
Interview	Macey	NT-VREM	B.NURSING	2nd	OC	FT	RFDWI	NONE	FAR	F	18 to 20
48	Madeline	VIC-IR	DIP.ICT	1st	OL	FT	RWM	PT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
37	Mairead	NSW-IR	B.SOCIAL SCIENCE (PSCHOLOGY)	3rd	D/BM	PT	RDM	CH	STAYED	F	31 to 40
49	Maureen	SKIPPED	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	1st	D/BM	PT	RWIM	FT EX	STAYED	F	31 to 40
Interview	Melinda	NSW-IR	B.COMMERCE (ACCOUNTING)	1st	BL	FT	RFWM	CH CC PT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
58	Michelle	NSW-REM	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	3rd	OL	FT	RFWIM	CH CC CA EX	STAYED	F	31 to 40
2	Mikayla	NSW-IR	B.COMMERCE	2nd	BL	FT	RF	CC PT CA	STAYED	F	18 to 20
46	Monica	QLD-IR	B.ACCIDENT FORENSICS	5th+	OL	PT	RDM	CC EX	STAYED	F	21 to 25
Interview	Morgan	SA-VREM	B.NURSING	2nd	OC	FT	RI	NONE	FAR	F	18 to 20
94	Nat	SA-OR	B.LAW & INTER'L RELATIONS	5th+	BL	FT	RFW	CA	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
Interview	Neil	NSW-IR	B.ARTS (HISTORY)	5th+	OC	PT	RFDLWM	NONE	STAYED	M	41 to 50
92	Nic	VIC-OR	B.EDUCATION (EARLY CHILDHOOD)	1st	BL	FT	RFI	PT	FAR	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
35	Nicole	NSW-IR	B.EDUCATION	3rd	OL	FT	RFWIM	CH CC FT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
66	Paige	VIC-OR	M.SOCIAL WORK	1st	BL	FT	RM	CC FT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
36	Pat	NSW-IR	B.SCIENCE	3rd	OC	FT	R	NONE	CLOSE	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
121	Paula	SA-IR	B.BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE (H)	4th	OC	PT	RDLM	CH	STAYED	F	31 to 40
71	Pauline	WA-OR	B.SOCIAL WORK (H)	3rd	BL	FT	RM	CH PT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
7	Rachel	QLD-OR	B.LAWS	2nd	OL	PT	RWM	CH	STAYED	F	31 to 40
6	Rae	NSW-IR	B.SOCIAL SCIENCE	2nd	OC	PT	RDM	CO	STAYED	F	51 plus

SURVEY RESP# / INTERVIEW	PSEUDONYM (alphabetical)	STATE REGL CODE	COURSE	YEAR	MODE ¹⁵ (prior to COVID-19)	LOAD	EQUITY ¹⁶ FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITIES ¹⁷	MOVEMENT	GENDER	AGE RANGE
81	Rebecca	QLD-OR	B.ALLIED HEALTH	1st	OL	PT	RFDWM	CH CC	FAR	F	31 to 40
87	Remy	SA-REM	B.NURSING	1st	OC	FT	RM	CH CA	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
31	Rhiannon	NSW-IR	B.SOCIAL SCIENCE (PSCHOLOGY)	2nd	D/BM	PT	RWM	NONE	STAYED	F	51 plus
43	Rhonda	NSW-IR	M.FORENSIC MENTAL HEALTH	1st	D/BM	PT	RFWM	CH FT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
80	Robert	NSW-IR	B.ARTS (HISTORY)	5th+	OC	PT	RFDLIM	CC EX	STAYED	M	41 to 50
38	Ronni	NSW-IR	B.BUSINESS (FINANCE)	1st	OL	PT	RFW	CO CC FT	STAYED	F	18 to 20
77	Ros	WA-OR	B.SOCIAL WORK	3rd	OL	FT	RWIM	CH CO CC PT	SKIPPED	F	26 to 30
29	Sam	NSW-IR	B.LAWS/B.ECONOMICS	5th+	OC	FT	RFW	CC PT	CLOSE	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
125	Sean	SA-OR	B.ENGINEERING	4th	OC	PT	RFI	CA FT	FAR	M	21 to 25
130	Serena	NT-REM	B.EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	4th	OL	PT	RW	FT	STAYED	F	21 to 25
84	Shane	SA-OR	B.DISABILITY & DEVELOPMENT	3rd	BL	FT	RFW	PT	CLOSE	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
93	Sharon	QLD-OR	M.EDUCATION	1st	OL	PT	RWM	CH CC PT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
34	Simone	NSW-IR	B.ACCOUNTING	4th	OL	PT	RM	CH CO CC PT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
123	Skye	SA-REM	B.SCIENCE (COASTS & OCEANS)	1st	OC	FT	RLIM	CH	STAYED	F	31 to 40
Interview	Sophie	NSW-IR	B.NURSING	1st	OC	FT	RM	CH PT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
Interview	Tamsin	WA-OR	B.EDUCATION (SEC)	1st	BL to OL	FT	RWI	PT	STAYED	F	21 to 25
126	Tanya	SA-OR	B.CREATIVE ARTS (VISUAL)	3rd	OC	PT	RFLWM	CO PT CA	STAYED	F	41 to 50
67	Teri	VIC-OR	B.VET/WILDLIFE SCIENCE	1st	OL	FT	RFI	NONE	STAYED	F	18 to 20
Interview	Therese	QLD-REM	PHD	1st	OL	SKIPPED	RM	CH	FAR	F	41 to 50
99	Tim	SA-OR	B.ENGINEERING	2nd	BL	FT	RW	NONE	FAR	M	18 to 20
Interview	Tina	VIC-OR	M.SOCIAL WORK	1st	BL	FT	RM	CH CC FT	STAYED	F	41 to 50
64	Tori	VIC-OR	B.BUSINESS (MANAGEMENT)	2nd	D/BM	FT	RF	PT	STAYED	F	18 to 20
52	Tully	QLD-OR	B.SECONDARY EDUCATION	1st	OL	FT	RFW	PT EX	STAYED	F	18 to 20
47	Tyler	WA-IR	B.PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE	1st	D/BM	FT	RDL	CA EX	STAYED	F	18 to 20
96	Val	NSW-IR	B.IT NETWORK & CYBER SEC.	1st	D/BM	FT	RWM	CH PT	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED

SURVEY RESP# / INTERVIEW	PSEUDONYM (alphabetical)	STATE REGL CODE	COURSE	YEAR	MODE ¹⁵ (prior to COVID-19)	LOAD	EQUITY ¹⁶ FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITIES ¹⁷	MOVEMENT	GENDER	AGE RANGE
102	Vic	SA-OR	B.SCIENCE (H)	1st	BL	FT	RF	PT	STAYED	SKIPPED	SKIPPED
Interview	Wendy	NSW-IR	B.SOCIAL SCIENCE	2nd	OL	PT	RLWM	CO	STAYED	F	51 plus
9	Zara	QLD-OR	B.NURSING	2nd	D/BM	PT	RFWM	CH FT	STAYED	F	31 to 40
21	Zoe	QLD-OR	B.PARAMEDIC SCIENCE	4th	OL	PT	RFWM	FT	STAYED	F	31 to 40

Appendix 12: Demographic summary: university staff

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Role Type	Uni / Reg'l Uni Centre Code	Yrs in current role	Yrs in related roles
Alison (staff)	F	37	Manager/Director/Coordinator	RUC1	Up to 1 year	5 to 10
Amy (staff)	F	45	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI2	5 to 10	20 years
Andrea (staff)	F	45-54	Librarian/Technician	UNI4	5 to 10	skipped
Annabel (staff)	F	35-44	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI2	2 to 4	skipped
Anne (staff)	F	45-54	Manager/Director/Coordinator	RUC2	11 to 14	Skipped
Asha (staff)	F	25-34	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI4	2 to 4	5 to 10
Belinda (staff)	F	skipped	Academic, Associate Dean	UNI2	25 years	not specified
Carla (staff)	F	45-54	Librarian/Technician	UNI13	2 to 4	5 to 10
Carol (staff)	F	45-54	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI12	5 to 10	15 years +
Christine (staff)	F	45-54	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	RUC2	2 to 4	2 to 4
Colin (staff)	M	skipped	Academic	UNI4	2 to 4	5 to 10
Esther (staff)	F	skipped	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI5	up to 1 year	11 to 14 years
Fiona (staff)	F	skipped	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI2	2 to 4	5 to 10
Fran (staff)	F	skipped	Academic	UNI6	28 years	not specified
Gayle (staff)	F	48	Manager/Director/Coordinator	RUC3	1 to 2	not specified
Geraldine (staff)	F	45-54	Librarian/Technician	UNI4	15+	skipped
Hulan (staff)	F	skipped	Academic	UNI2	2 to 4	not specified
Jade (staff)	F	25-34	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI2	up to 1 year	2 to 4
Jane (staff)	F	35-44	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	RUC1	up to 1 year	5 to 10
Jeff (staff)	M	35-44	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI4	up to 1 year	5 to 10
Jenn (staff)	F	45	Academic	UNI2	5 to 10	not specified
Jill (staff)	F	45-54	Librarian/Technician	UNI4	2 to 4	5 to 10
Josie (staff)	F	55+	Academic	UNI6	2 to 4	11 to 14 years
Kara (staff)	F	45-54	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI7	up to 1 year	30 years
Leigh (staff)	F	45-54	Academic	UNI2	5 to 10	11 to 14 years
Lorraine (staff)	F	skipped	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	RUC2	5 to 10	2 to 4


Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Role Type	Uni / Reg'l Uni Centre Code	Yrs in current role	Yrs in related roles
Louise (staff)	F	45-54	Librarian/Technician	UNI4	15+	skipped
Lynnette (staff)	F	35-44	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI11	5 to 10	2 to 4
Mary (staff)	F	55+	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI6	2 to 4	15 years +
Maureen (staff)	F	35-44	Academic	UNI1	5 to 10	5 to 10
Merrill (staff)	F	35-44	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI9	5 to 10	skipped
Michael (staff)	M	55+	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI8	2 to 4	15 years +
Michelle Staff	F	40	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI8	2 to 4	not specified
Molly (staff)	F	32	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI2	2 to 4	5 to 10
Murray (staff)	M	55+	Academic	UNI10	5 to 10	5 to 10
Narelle (staff)	F	55+	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI5	5 to 10	5 to 10
Pina (staff)	F	35-44	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI8	2 to 4	skipped
Pippa (staff)	F	25-34	Manager/Director/Coordinator	UNI2	2 to 4	5 to 10
Robyn (staff)	F	55+	Academic	UNI2	up to 1 year	11 to 14 years
Rosie (staff)	F	25-34	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI2	5 to 10	2 to 4
Sally (staff)	F	skipped	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI7	up to 1 year	not specified
Suzanne (staff)	F	42	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI4	5 to 10	20 years
Vanessa (staff)	F	43	Student Outreach/Support/Admin	UNI7	up to 1 year	not specified
Vicki (staff)	F	45-54	Manager/Director/Coordinator	RUC4	up to 1 year	2 to 4

Appendix 13: Demographic summary: school students (aged 16-18)

Pseudonym	Gender	YEAR	Campus code	Remoteness	Equity Factors	Importance of University
Amelia	F	12	Campus E	IR	RDW	Fairly important
Ava	F	12	Campus D	IR	R	skipped
Beau	M	12	Campus B	IR	R	Extremely important
Beck	F	12	Campus C	OR	RAF	Extremely important
Bella	F	12	Campus B	IR	R	Important but not essential
Bessie	F	12	Campus C	OR	R	Extremely important
Blake	M	12	Campus C	IR	R	Extremely important
Bonnie	F	12	Campus C	OR	R	Extremely important
Brad	M	12	Campus B	IR	R	Extremely important
Brody	M	12	Campus B	IR	R	Extremely important
Brooke	F	12	Campus B	IR	skipped	Extremely important
Lara	F	12	Campus E	OR	RN	Extremely important
Lena	F	12	Campus E	IR	RN	skipped
Lexi	F	12	Campus E	IR	RL	Extremely important
Libby	F	12	Campus E	IR	RDW	Extremely important
Lily	F	12	Campus E	IR	RF	Extremely important
Natasha	F	12	Campus D	IR	RFD	skipped
Noni	F	12	Campus A	IR	RL	skipped
Sabina	F	12	Campus D	IR	RF	Extremely important
Safia	F	12	Campus A	IR	R	Extremely important
Sam	M	12	Campus B	IR	R	Extremely important
Sammi	F	12	Campus A	IR	R	Extremely important
Sandy	F	12	Campus D	IR	RF	Extremely important
Sasha	F	12	Campus D	IR	RAF	skipped
Saul	M	12	Campus A	IR	R	Important but not essential
Sian	F	12	Campus A	IR	R	Extremely important
Sienna	F	12	Campus D	IR	R	Important but not essential
Steph	F	12	Campus D	IR	RL	Extremely important

Appendix 14: Within a Coeee! Summary of evaluations from participants and critical friends

Student/Staff	Section	Feedback
Staff	General	Small thing: the “coeee” really sets rural/regional in a particular frame. I’ve become conscious recently of a small but likely to grow minority of students from refugee backgrounds, including African backgrounds, who are coming to UOW and when I say “Oh where are you from?” they say “Dubbo.” Etc. Culturally they’re not the constituency you’re speaking to when you say coeee—the Hazari community in Young, for example. We will see more and more of these students in the life of this resource
Staff		I’d probably also separate out the “tips and tricks” advice at each stage from the overall story parts. Students share such great advice with each other. Get a good coffee machine!!
Staff		What an amazing resource this will be! Language perhaps could be 'softened' a little in places to be less 'researchy' e.g. themes and sub-themes, advice - is there a gentler way to engage students in these conversations? It does feel like there are a lot of quotes when presented in this Word document - what will draw students to specific ones? I think the contextual information about who the student is, is quite important. Further note on this below.
Staff		I LOVE the content. So many beautiful little snippets. This research is such a help to me as I'm thinking about how a similar resource for international students could work.
Student		There is good diversification with the mix of students and staff. I think the draft stays true to the goals and it feels genuine to read.
Anonymous		A great idea. Ensuring students access it at the time of need will be the challenge I imagine.
Student		The Advice Tool reads clearly so far, though it would be interesting to see how it will be displayed on the website as there is quite a bit of text.
Critical friend		Great job altogether Janine! You have created a really valuable resource. Let me know if I can help in any other ways.
Critical friend		I really love this – I think the quotes are great, not too many and yes they do have a logical flow in my view. I also like the title – not corny at all. Evocative! I can't see anything missing in particular, except for a couple of possible things where I have made comments and have added some other resources and suggestions for the section you particularly asked me to look at. It will be a fabulous resource – congratulations!
Staff		I have no issue or issue on the advice tool. I understand the 4 main sections. Regional people need to be heard.n
Staff		Congrats on pulling this all together, it is going to be a great resource! – I'll be sure to promote it once it's up and ready!
Critical Friend		Order of sub-themes in 1. and 2. – do these have a logical flow? Definitely. This is the decision-making process structured clearly.
Critical friend		I saw you had a dot in the space after 'strengths and qualities' in the Prelude, what do you think of including 'realities of regional life'? I don't think you should be too negative of course, but some of the limitations regarding long drives to pracs, difficulty with wifi etc may actually help some students feel better as they might feel less alone? Or you could put in quotes from the 'Possible Selves' section with a title like 'Imagining New Futures' or something, to encourage them to see the relevance of taking the leap.,
Critical friend		Also, it's a bit off the topic but isn't comment 4 (Brianna) in the 'What if I change my mind?' section contradictory? She says, "there's no harm in attempting... to see if they like university..." and then she says, "If you don't know what you want to do there's no point in going to university...". I got a bit confused here. Should I attempt a course to see if it's for me or should I save my money until I'm sure?
Critical Friend		I was wondering if you need something on managing parents and family (e.g. if they don't want you to go or if they don't know how to give support).
Critical Friend		Yes, there is a logical flow and I liked the topic areas you had.

Student/Staff	Section	Feedback
Critical Friend	Demographics	I just noticed that a lot of the quotes are from women – is it possible to integrate some quotes from men?
Staff		Are you going to use pictures or cartoons to go with each of the student identities? I think that would be very powerful. Imagining something like this (e.g. for Carly):  I'd like to read a quote, identify with that person, read more about them then read all the rest of their quotes – is that possible? Can you link by person as well as by topic?
Critical Friend		Will the actual online resource identify students by numbers? I felt that was a little off putting and needed names (pseudonyms). Are you using graphics when online?
(regional student and admin staff)		I think the demographics are helpful but bulky, could be shortened?
Staff		I love the demographic information and hope that can be provided for all the quotes, it gives context to the suggestion and could help students to relate in a more meaningful way. I am wondering if for the purpose of this tool being a resource for students that there needs to be the differentiation of survey vs interview contributors as either a pseudonym or #survey number - could they all be the same?
Staff	Quotes	But. I read it all and enjoyed it because I was asked to, and I'm not sure if my daughter (thinking of your target age) would have read it in the same way if she was help-seeking. Adding more clicks might not have made it more likely. If I think about resourcing at point of need, I'd probably try to have fewer, slightly longer and more differentiated quotes.
Staff		General: Nil. I loved reading the quotes. The demographic narrative is good but would suggest only giving minimal information.
Critical friend		Number of quotes: I think the quotes are well-chosen and I enjoyed reading them all. But am I right in thinking that the quotes are only accessible after you navigate to them? Because I know some people get intimidated by long pages of text, so a 'click to access' model would be perfect, I think it's called 'concertina' style? Where you have an image and a quote, and then you can click for more, but if you don't click for more the page remains relatively free of text. I think it's important to keep all these lovely quotes because I think there's a lot to be said for repetition as a tool of encouragement. But I also think it would be preferable if those who only want to 'dip their toe in' could also do just that.
Critical Friend		Number of quotes: I think there are enough but wondered about highlighting one in a narrative style then giving the further examples.
Staff	Links	Suggest linking to the First in Family site– my students find this a great resource, as well as the Student section of the Centrelink website https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/students-and-trainees . I'd also add Wellness services and Social clubs to the list I think a short explanation or example of what types of things the services do at the unis would be good - a lot of students I talk to don't equate the name of the service with what they want to talk about/need help with.
(from regional student and admin staff)		Conclusion

Student	Introduction	Concise, explains things nicely. Not much else to say on this part.
Anonymous		Take the inverted commas away from phrases like 'gathering', 'lessons', 'conversation starters', they're distracting. Otherwise is good.
Student		The introduction and explanation section might need to have its language simplified a little. For example, if someone is considering university study, are they going to be familiar with terms such as 'verbatim'?
Staff		I think the introduction is well explained and the purpose of the targeted audience.

Student/Staff	Section	Feedback
Critical Friend		Could this be used by teachers / other stakeholders?
Critical Friend		Should you address the diversity here as well – so be upfront that this is a diverse readership and not assuming all regional people are the 'same' but rather have included a diversity of perspectives in order to capture this diversity
(from regional student and admin staff)		I think the intro needs to give more explanation of each section and who they might be helpful for/how to use the tools. My first time reading I was pretty confused as not enough explanation.
Student		I think you could drop 'dogged' just determination is fine.
Critical friend		The right length, the right tone.
Critical Friend		I think long enough. I did wonder whether any of the resource was to help parents too and that could be raised in the intro.
Student	Prelude	This part feels like it characterises the people giving feedback. You can tell there is a lot of people from different backgrounds answering.
Anonymous		I'm not sure about starting with 'higher education is harder to physically access for regional communities'. Maybe start with a strength?
Student		There seems to be a mixture of responses between tertiary education being accessible and inaccessible for regional areas. Is this intentional? It may be worth including a few more quotes from both perspectives if that is the case.
Staff		The regional issues have been well covered, the rural and remote areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander areas are more complexed.
Staff		I am iffy about the word "prelude" – I'm not sure if you are planning to use the word prelude in the site but I asked my 12-year-old son if he knew what it meant and he said "nup". Coming from my rural background, prelude is a bit of a "posh" word, maybe "Uni & Being Regional" ???
Student		I fully appreciate that this resource is for regional students, however I grew up in a city, where I completed my first degree and then moved to regional Australia. Perhaps the resource is not targeted to me, and I appreciate that these are quotes - but it is mildly offensive to be called a spoon-fed city kid who does not know hard work and flips degrees on a whim. especially when the following advice states that it is fine to change courses if you don't like what you're studying.
Student	I'm thinking about uni	The main audience of this is section seems like people who haven't decided on even going to uni. And everyone who has done this interview appears to be involved with or obtaining a higher education so it could help someone make a decision by having additional insight. Although, I think reminding potential students to consider all options is important as the nature of the survey and this section itself has a natural bias and the decision to go to uni should be made with everything else considered.
Anonymous		Is there a way for students to see a hyperlinked 'contents' of the subthemes and click on the one/s they are most interested in? Otherwise, this section felt a bit never-ending. With 15 sub-themes, would be better with 3-5 quotes max in each one. Otherwise, consider whether this could be split in two - 'whether to go' and 'how to go'?
Student		There are quite a few subsections in this section. Would it be worth limiting the number of quotes for each section so that is it not too overwhelming?
Staff		As a uni employee and student I feel quite qualified, however as an Aboriginal person I am always having to prove myself to the wider community or as I call it unconscious bias
(from regional student and admin staff)		Too many quotes under "What about ATAR or gap year?" section
Student		The 'Just do it, and you can do it' section is nice
Staff		p.17 this quote does not seem to flow: Go for it. Regional campuses are amazing. There are a lot of less people, but that means you can access a whole lot of the services the main campus wouldn't offer.
Student	I'm in!	Very good information. A lot of people mention finances though. It seems to crossover with roller coaster a lot as well. If the opportunity is given, it might be cool and useful for a reader to see some actual amounts. Knowing ballpark of this from other regional students may give them an idea of what they could be in for. (As in, what are their biggest financial costs with moving and going to uni as a regional student etc.)

Student/Staff	Section	Feedback
Student		There is a little bit of difficulty with the flow in this section; some of the subsections have very short responses while others have longer responses and some are a mixture of the two. Would it be worth shortening a few of the quotes unless they are intended to highlight the subsection?
Staff		I always aim to do better and to be accepted. Uni does have supports that help
Staff		I'm not sure about the title of this theme. To me, "I'm in" means that I've made a decision to attend university but not necessarily attending yet.
Staff		p. 22 final quote (Macey) sp. had/hard
Anonymous		This section is a better length. I really liked the narrative demographic information - allows them to see that students are varied, and that there's sure to be someone at uni like them.
Student	Rollercoaster	I think it covers a lot. I also understand that students come from different backgrounds so their rollercoaster moments will all be different.
Anonymous		Just one 'rollercoaster' theme. Should this be a theme in 'I'm in'? Or could some of the quotes from other sections come here? (I was thinking that I'd seen some of the ideas from here in people's statements higher up). eg 'just do it - but' is acknowledging the rollercoaster aspect, though I can see that that's valuable where it is currently, and students might not get this far (especially if it were just a theme within the 'I'm in' section).
Staff		Everything is a rollercoaster and I am here for the journey and long haul
Staff		Help is just a Cooee away! p.26 This narrative in the first paragraph is a little wordy and repetitive
Critical friend		I felt that for the 'rollercoaster' section (and also in the Intro) that there should some reference to counselling/lifeline etc, (highlighted in yellow). You might also want to mention that the counselling service is free? I didn't know that until I'd graduated, I probably would have gone if I had known but I imagined it was too expensive.

Appendix 145: The impact of COVID-19

There is little doubt that the COVID-19 situation was disruptive in many ways; this disruption was also experienced variously by the participants. While most of the reactions were in relation to negative impacts, such as disturbances to study plans, placements and progress, reduced access to resources and support, the sudden pivot from on campus delivery, the uncertainties, and sense of loss (*"It has taken away the only face to face I have in my online course which has been very hard"* #63Amelia), there were a few positive reactions. Hannah (OR) who had preconceived ideas of studying online as "really isolated studying alone" found it "so interactive" that she's considering changing to online for her third year:

Because of the at-home learning ... I've been able to put large chunks of hours of time across three or four days without any interruptions into some of these assessments and getting really good marks for it as opposed to driving to [regional campus] three times a week and trying to fit in chunks there and there, you know, not having blocks of time. And it actually made me realise that this online learning is so different to what I imagined it would be. (Hannah, OR, F, 41, RFM, CO PT)

Other students who also no longer had to commute to attend on campus sessions, felt going online was a very positive consequence of COVID-19, exemplified by Freya (student) and Belinda (staff):

Because of COVID, this year has only had really one class which I do have to go in for. Normally I would have to be there Monday to Friday, going in for every single class. So, COVID has actually made things a lot easier on my end when it comes to studying the lectures online and doing classes online. (Freya, OR, F, 24, RDM, PT)

We're hearing that students felt very badly about this so I asked them and they said, "No, it's taking commuting away. I've got that time back. I'm going much more for my self-care. It's just much easier for me to lead a balanced life if I don't spend all my time on the train". (Belinda, staff, Uni2, Academic, Associate Dean)

Some students admired how the university and teaching staff faced the disruptions and felt that the "university has been fantastic and so supportive" (#76Helen, REM). Bianca also appreciated her tutors' support:

I made the decision for the duration of COVID lockdown to come home to my family farm. It was a bit tricky – internet's a bit flaky here so I was doing a lot of personal hot-spotting to get through university. It worked – all my tutors were pretty understanding of that. (Bianca, REM, F, 21, RW, PT, moved)

For Evelyn, below, the transition was seamless, which prevented it having "a drastic effect on my educational experience" (#73Evelyn):

I found the Zoom sessions almost the same as being in a classroom, except I got to wear my pyjamas. I realised the resilience faced by teachers during this time, and that only made me take my studies more seriously. (#73Evelyn, OR, F, 21-25, R, FT EX)

However, university staff were criticised for high stakes online exams and assessments, with objections aimed at the need for more knowledge, skills and understanding as to how to translate these effectively for online modes:

It has made exams difficult as no one knows how to put them online ... More information and in times of pandemic a better way forward, as no one knows how exams are meant to happen. (Carey, F, 18-20, RFW, CA)

University management was also criticised for a lack of understanding shown around "the impact that personal circumstances have on student's study outcomes. Specifically, the impact of home schooling" (#69Linda), and some of the choices made which one student, #101Harper,

felt had disadvantaged interstate regional students. The way the university dealt with the situation and the student herself resulted in Harper deciding “to change universities” due to the way she was treated. She describes how this felt for her:

Overwhelming, stressful, unpredictable, helplessness ... The university management made specific choices (surrounding COVID-19) that did not support their rural students who lived interstate and were unable to cross the border back to [city]. This caused significant anxiety and stress for me and I was initially met by faculty with contempt and a 'too bad' type of attitude. In the end they found ways to meet the needs of their rural students, but this was after weeks of back and forth emails and emotional torment. Subsequently I have decided to change universities due to the way I was treated. (#101Harper, F, 21-25, RIM, CA, moved)

Difficulties were also felt by students who had specifically chosen face-to-face study, who preferred in-person contact or whose courses were better learnt face-to-face. Significant readjustment was needed by these students when courses went online:

I miss campus – now it's online and it sucks ... I've found it quite difficult just because nursing is so hands-on and it's so much easier to talk about it face-to-face than through a computer screen. (Morgan, VREM, F, 20, RI, moved)

Being in-person on campus was fabulous and I miss it ... last semester, in that first few weeks, we had that personal connection with the people that were in the class and the tutor so I knew who they were and we had our Zoom meetings ... but this semester, it's a lot more challenging because I'm suddenly in groups of 25 black boxes on screens – most people don't turn on their video camera so you don't know who they are or what they look like, where they're from, which campus they're from and there's no chit-chat, there's no sense of community. (Melinda, IR, F, 41, RFWM, CH CC PT)

From a staff perspective the situation enabled them to show human care on the one hand, such as through an online “Compassion Corner” forum set up by this lecturer:

I just said, “You know that all of us are in this together; it's unprecedented times – I can't predict everything that you're going to go through but if there's anything that's not necessarily related to the content, put it down and then if anyone can help, we'll try and help each other”. That's when I discovered a lot of students didn't have a laptop”. (Hulan, staff, Uni2, Academic)

On the other hand, there was a sense of urgency, bordering on panic, with students inadvertently seeming like ‘guinea pigs’ in the sudden pivot to online. Here is an excerpt from Belinda (staff) who gives an honest account of her experience:

We'd just kind of dumped it online and then we've had to say, “No, this works really badly online” so we've had to back-track. Now I think we're asking hopefully at the highest level, “Can we just get more students in the classroom if we're not constrained by the number of chairs” and it's like “No, no, that's not good”. But we are zigzagging around, trying things, and that's put an enormous burden on them. I don't think they've experienced the new normal at all; I think they've experienced a sequence of madcap improvisations by us ... We haven't had enough time to test anything so everything has been tested live and I think they're tired of being experimented on ... I think they're finding it hard, actually, to even take us seriously. Several students have said to me that their motivation is really low, whereas it wasn't last semester, the adrenaline provided by a sense of emergency engaged them, but this semester not. So, it's a tough time for our students, it really is. It's a tough time for the students who are finishing, recognising, I think they have a grief that they're never going to be in a classroom again. (Belinda, staff, Uni2, Academic, Associate Dean)

The sense of loss also extended to students who were “very much used to remote learning”, as Molly explains:

Our students were very much used to having that ability to just drop into our office, I mean, like “Oh Molly, do you think you could have a look at this when you get a chance”, or “I forgot to let you know that this job came up and I’m going to apply” – just bumping into them in the kitchen – we’re missing out on all of that contact that just happened really naturally. (Molly, staff, Uni2, Student Outreach/Support)

It also needs to be remembered that certain regions in Australia, just prior to COVID-19, had experienced the devastation of a 10-year drought, followed by horrendous bushfires, then unprecedented flooding. Just as there was some semblance of normality returning, COVID-19 hit. Molly continues with insights into the cumulative effect:

Everyone down here is experiencing fatigue because we went through the bushfires over the summer and then we were kind of just getting to the point where the adrenalin was wearing down and we had, I think, three or four weeks of, I guess, nothing and then COVID picks up. The feedback that we’re getting through our staff and students is that they’re just feeling exhausted. There hasn’t really been a break and so I think it’s definitely changed in terms of engagement and harder to engage with them because they’re just, I think, trying to keep their head above water. (Molly, staff, Uni2, Student Outreach/Support)

Summary

The COVID-19 situation has been disruptive and a major adjustment for all, including students and teaching staff. While the situation did speed up some institutions’ investment in online learning, there is little doubt that the hurried nature is less than ideal for the future. Evaluations were mixed, with a few students enjoying the flexibility and time gained from not having to travel and expressing admiration for the efforts of staff and the quality of learning. However, many more were negative in their evaluations and the situation made some flaws more visible, such as preparedness for the sector to adapt to online learning, inadequate quality of pedagogic practices, and poor teaching and administrative processes. Some student also felt that their situations were not empathetically considered by their institutions, adding more stress than was necessary. Bearing in mind also that many RRR students enjoy the personal connection with others, there was a sense of loss experienced with the transition to online technologies and in the closure of facilities which removed impromptu opportunities for face-to-face interaction.

Appendix 15: The future selves students were working towards

Themes and sub-themes: Future Selves data (university students)

Total no. of students who responded to this question: 120

94 survey respondents, 26 interviewees.

Themes and subthemes	Selected examples to illustrate theme	No. of instances	Theme Total	%
Making a difference (through helping others)			110	92%
Helping others	<i>"I want to help people"</i> <i>"I wanted to have a job that I love, where I can help people in my home town"</i>	99		
Make a difference	<i>"I want to be successful, unique and to make a difference"</i> <i>"my education is going to allow me to make real differences"</i>	11		
Desire for satisfaction in life			72	60%
Aiming high	<i>"[it] always was an ambition of mine"</i>	13		
Meaningful future	<i>"my number one is to grow and learn as a person"</i>	14		
Personal satisfaction	<i>"I would like to be a good partner and active member of the communities"</i>	29		
Escape from/to the country		9		
Future prospects		7		
Selves to be avoided			21	18%
(Participants indicated explicitly what they would like to avoid doing or becoming in the future)	<i>"I don't want to get that job"</i> <i>"I don't want to do this [anymore]. I've got no interest whatsoever"</i> <i>"fear of working at Woolies my whole life"</i>			

(Note: data from many participants included more than one theme / sub-theme)