

Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council

Geraldton regional visit, July 2024



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The Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the many traditional lands and language groups of Western Australia.

RREAC respectfully acknowledges the Yamatji Nation Peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Council conducted its business, and pays respect to Elders past and present.

Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council

Geraldton regional visit July 2024

Local context

Within the Midwest region there are various localised Aboriginal language groups which are collectively known as Yamatji. This includes the Amangu people, Naaguja people, Wadjarri people, Nanda people, Badimia people and additionally the region includes the Western Desert people known as the Martu people.

Located 419 kilometres north of Perth, Greater Geraldton is a thriving city with a population of over 41,000 people. The city and the Midwest are recognised as having the most diversified economy in the state through industries including mining, fishing, aquaculture, agriculture, manufacturing, construction, retail and tourism. Greater Geraldton also incorporates the towns of Mullewa, Walkaway and Greenough settlement.

Within Geraldton and surrounding communities, education is provided at the following public schools:

Allendale Primary School	Beachlands Primary School
Bluff Point Primary School	Chapman Valley Primary School
Geraldton Primary School	Mingenew Primary School
Rangeway Primary School	Walkaway Primary School
Yuna Primary School	Mount Tarcoola Primary School
Waggrakine Primary School	Wandina Primary School
Geraldton Senior High School	Champion Bay Senior High School

There are also 3 district high schools in the wider Geraldton area, these are Dongara District High School, Northampton District High School, and Mullewa District High School. In addition, Holland Street School services students with disability and complex needs in Geraldton while Geraldton Residential College and Meekatharra School of the Air operate in the locality of Geraldton.

The following non-government schools operate within the Geraldton area:

Nagle Catholic College (Years 7 – 12)	Our Lady of Mount Carmel School (K – 6)
St Mary's School Northampton (K – 6)	St John's School (K – 6)
Geraldton Christian College (K – 12)	Geraldton Grammar School (K – 12)
St Lawrence's Primary School (Pre-K – 6)	St Francis Xavier Primary School (PP – 6)
Leaning Tree Steiner School (K – Year 9)	Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre (Years 7 – 12)

Background

Established in early 1997, the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) provides the Minister responsible for the education portfolio with evidence-based and solutions-focused strategic advice on education and training issues and developments in rural and remote areas of Western Australia.

From 23 to 24 July 2024, 8 of 18 RREAC members undertook a regional visit to Geraldton. The list of attending Council members and apologies is in Appendix A.

RREAC's focus area for 2024 has been 'access to post-secondary training and higher education for regional and remote students, that provide pathways to emerging careers, jobs, and industries'. The RREAC regional visit to Geraldton was designed to provide the Council with a snapshot of the current setting for students transitioning into post-secondary education. The Council toured a select set of facilities and met with educators from Geraldton and the surrounding areas to gain an understanding of the opportunities and challenges that impact on students.

To provide the Council with local context, site visits were undertaken at the following locations:

- Geraldton Universities Centre
- Champion Bay Senior High School
- Geraldton Grammar School
- Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre
- Central Regional TAFE, Geraldton
- Meekatharra School of the Air

In addition to the site visits, the Council facilitated a community forum for organisations representing education, industry, training, and support services in the Geraldton region. The Council itinerary for the regional visit is included in Appendix B.

The Midwest Education Region serves a total of 12,199 students of whom 7,681 students attend public schools, accounting for 2.4% of all public-school students across the State.

- Attendance is a challenge for public schools across the region with 40.2% of students attending school regularly.
- 18% of students are at severe attendance risk (attending less than 60% of the time).
- The number of students with disability is higher than the level seen across Western Australia. In 2023 in the Midwest, 5.9% public school students were eligible for Individual Disability Allocation compared to a rate of 4.5% across the State.
- The rate of students across the region who are eligible for educational adjustment funding was 31.2% (2,344 students), this is a far higher rate than the State average of 15% (46,336 students).

The Council were exposed to a range of views and experiences across the 2 day visit. The Council noted that despite the challenges faced by educators across the region, there were many successes. The education community seemed to be underpinned by strong partnerships that were in place across schools, local industry, and higher education. The Council acknowledge the great commitment and work being undertaken by school staff, families, and communities in supporting the education of students in the wider Geraldton area.

There were 4 key themes that emerged during the visit to Geraldton, these were:

- Aspiration and opportunities
- Financial challenges
- Curriculum and course offerings
- Partnerships.

Themes and Observations

Aspiration and opportunities

During the regional visit, it was evident that all schools and supporting agencies were keen to elevate their students' aspirations, encouraging them not only to complete their education but also to envision ambitious futures. Schools, in collaboration with families, are responsible for enhancing students' understanding and awareness of the various pathways and opportunities that are available to them.

Schools frequently reported to the Council that career conversations need to commence earlier. These discussions can broaden students' aspirations beyond their immediate experiences, which are often limited to family businesses or industries within their family network.

As part of the State government's 2021 election commitments, \$63.7 million was allocated to fund 5 initiatives aimed at improving career learning and vocational education and training (VET) for secondary students:

- **Specialised Career Practitioners:** Trial placement of qualified VET career practitioners in 70 public schools to lead career development and connect schools with industry. This includes resources and training to foster a robust career development culture.
- **Professional Learning for VET Teachers in Schools:** Funding for teacher relief costs to enable VET teachers to undertake industry-relevant professional learning.
- **Career Learning Toolkit for Year 8 and 9 Students:** An innovative toolkit providing career learning experiences.
- **Support Scheme for School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships:** A support scheme for vulnerable students at risk of not completing their training, funding items such as personal protective equipment, travel, and mentoring.
- **Career Resources to Support Parents:** Expansion of career information events and resources targeted at parents to boost their engagement and confidence.

Schools reported numerous career development opportunities and events that are currently in place across the region, including the Year 9 Career Taster program, Minister's Innovation Challenge, Clontarf career day, activities at the Geraldton Universities Centre, and visits to universities and TAFE facilities. Geraldton Grammar School also offers international trips that aim to encourage and inspire students to explore options beyond their immediate environment. The Career Taster program has been well received by schools, students, and families and is highly regarded in the region.

The Council noted that Career Practitioners are employed at both Champion Bay Senior High School and Geraldton Senior High School and are highly valued. However, it was referenced that staff shortages sometimes require these practitioners to teach on occasion, potentially detracting from their primary roles.

Staff at smaller district high schools highlighted the lack of exposure to senior secondary role models as an issue in raising aspirations within their cohort. Secondary-trained teachers at these schools often teach up to Year 10 and may lack experience and knowledge of pathway options for senior secondary students.

Students who presented to the Council expressed the pressures of choosing pathways and committing to future courses and fields of study. Schools reported challenges in motivating their students to undertake more difficult courses, particularly ATAR courses. Alternative pathways to university, such as bridging courses, UniReady, and portfolio entry options, are promoted to provide various means of access to tertiary study. Students reported they often viewed these alternate pathways as a more achievable option for them to pursue.

Visibility and emerging local industries

Geraldton is experiencing growth in several emerging industries, driven by local initiatives and broader economic trends. These include:

- **Green hydrogen:** Geraldton is becoming a hub for green hydrogen production, with major projects planned by companies like BP, Fortescue Future Industries, and Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners.
- **Port maximisation:** The Geraldton Port Maximisation Project aims to upgrade port facilities to support emerging industries and increase trade capacity.
- **Innovation and digital economy:** Programs like X-TEND WA provide grants to support innovative businesses in Geraldton, fostering entrepreneurship and commercialisation.

Despite the success of programs like the Career Taster program and career expos, exposure to new careers and emerging industries remains a challenge. Schools may need a broader view of local industry developments, and better engagement with industry representatives could bridge gaps in this area.

First in Family

The concept of "first in family" was frequently referenced during the regional visit. These students, often the first in their family to attain a particular level of education, face unique challenges. They are more likely to be Indigenous and/or come from socio-economically disadvantaged or rural areas. Challenges they may encounter include financial strain, cultural and social adjustment, academic difficulties, balancing responsibilities, and mental health issues.

At Champion Bay Senior High School, the school is in its fourth year of offering Year 12 education following its expansion to cater for students from Years 7 to 12. The school provides counselling to first in family students and their families to support them in completing their WACE rather than leaving for employment. Staff at the Geraldton Universities Centre also referenced supports for first in family students, including mentoring and supports, and financial assistance including travel bursaries, and scholarships provided through the Hollamby Foundation.

Financial challenges

Financial challenges across various contexts were a common theme during the visit, particularly for students needing to relocate for further education and training opportunities in Perth. Students often juggle part-time jobs, impacting their study time and educational outcomes.

Establishing a second household

The need for families to establish a second household was highlighted as a significant issue. Students seeking specific further studies in courses not available locally need to relocate to Perth. The Council was advised that some families can purchase properties in Perth to provide accommodation for their children, but for many families this is not feasible. The rising housing market in Western Australia exacerbates this issue, potentially limiting the educational opportunities for students from less affluent backgrounds.

The regional vs metropolitan gap year

The concept of a gap year typically refers to students taking time away from their studies to rest and recuperate before resuming their education. However, for regional students, a gap year is often driven by financial and practical considerations.

Regional students frequently commence full-time employment upon completing secondary school to save the necessary funds for relocating to Perth and affording the time to study. They feel a responsibility to earn money to support their households before undertaking further education, highlighting the inequity between themselves and their metropolitan peers.

Students who subsequently relocate to Perth often encounter several challenges, including:

- Homesickness
- Cost of living pressures
- Lack of access to existing support networks
- Mental health challenges

While a gap year can provide varied and valuable experiences, anecdotally, many students do not return to their studies and are lost to the system. It is not unusual for students who do relocate to return to Geraldton, unable to complete their studies due to the factors listed above. And this has repercussions including negative word of mouth stories.

During the consultations, students expressed awareness of the challenges they would face upon relocating to Perth, with many stating they would prefer to remain in Geraldton. The pressure to save enough money before undertaking a university degree is often too challenging, leading many to opt for local TAFE pathways or local employment.

Students noted that if their gap year extends beyond a year, their ATAR score becomes irrelevant after the age of 20 when they can access mature age entry to university. Consequently, undertaking a non-ATAR pathway, earning money through employment straight from school, and possibly attending university as a mature-age student can be more feasible than going straight to university. The ATAR pathway is perceived as more onerous and mentally challenging, potentially deterring students from accessing university via this pathway.

Curriculum and course offerings

Access to curriculum and course offerings is a significant barrier for regional students. There is often inequity between metropolitan and regional students in accessing a breadth and depth of curriculum offerings. Secondary schools with smaller cohorts struggle to provide a full suite of curriculum offerings, particularly in ATAR course offerings. Joint school offerings have been implemented where student numbers are insufficient, but maintaining these arrangements is challenging due to competing priorities and timetabling.

Teacher shortages can impact schools' ability to offer a broader curriculum and the available teachers may lack the required specialist skillsets. TAFE settings also face difficulties in obtaining the necessary staff, where it was claimed many lecturers were leaving for higher-paid jobs in industries such as mining. In school settings, limited registration teachers are sought to fill gaps, but this does not always provide the best career start for trainee teachers for multiple reasons.

Limited registration allows employers to hire suitably qualified individuals who are not registered teachers to fill specific teaching roles. Eligible nominees must have an offer of a teaching position, the required skills, expertise, and qualifications, English language proficiency, and be fit and proper persons to be registered. However, issues such as trainee teachers deferring their studies to work full-time and pressure from schools to prioritise work over their studies were reported.

Curtin's Uniready and other university enabling courses are highly regarded and beneficial for regional students. These courses support students who opt not to undertake a traditional ATAR pathway and provide opportunities for those in schools that have limited ATAR course offerings. In Geraldton, Curtin's Uniready is delivered to 2 secondary schools by the Geraldton Universities Centre.

The opportunities available for training at TAFE was consistently highlighted as a strength in the region. TAFE offers a wide range of courses and possesses well-resourced, top-class facilities, attracting students and contributing to the local workforce. School students undertaking a VET in Schools (VETis) pathway attend TAFE 2 days a week, benefiting from regionally specific courses and career pathways of which the Batavia Coast Maritime Institute and Fitzgerald Street campus were shining examples.

School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE)

As previously mentioned, in secondary schools with smaller student cohorts where course options are limited, students may need to study online to access their preferred units. While face-to-face education remains the preferred method of delivery, the significance of having access to online learning cannot be underestimated.

The School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) is the Department of Education's primary provider of distance and online education for K-12 students. SIDE plays a crucial role in the Western Australian public education system by providing access to learning for students who cannot attend traditional mainstream schools, including those in regional and remote areas.

Senior high schools with Year 11 and 12 students who are enrolled in SIDE are required to pay for these courses. Adjustments to their one-line budget are made in Semester 2 following confirmation of enrolments in Semester 1. In 2024, this funding amounts to \$1,785.49 per course accessed.

The Council has been informed of equity issues regarding access to SIDE, including financial barriers and unresolved timetabling conflicts. Consultations with schools and students frequently highlighted timetabling as a barrier to accessing SIDE courses. Some schools have attempted to address this by partnering with nearby schools to increase the number of students accessing a particular SIDE course. However, aligning timetables across partnering schools has often been challenging.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some access to SIDE courses may be limited to students possibly due to the financial costs borne by the school to be involved. Whilst some schools may struggle to provide adequate supervision for students accessing SIDE the funding of SIDE Coordinators was seen to be of great support for students undertaking SIDE courses.

Geraldton Universities Centre

A key issue that was explored during the visit was the need to develop more university courses that were fully accessible for regional students. Currently, students who undertake online courses with the centre's partner universities can access courses such as Nursing, Psychology, Education, Social Work, and Accounting and Business. These are delivered through face-to-face support through the university centre and through residential visits to campuses, generally in Queensland.

This travel can be prohibitive for students due to several factors. Not only is this an expensive exercise, but students being required to travel as part of their studies is not sustainable in students managing both their work and/or family lives.

University courses that could assist in addressing regional workforce needs in Western Australia include engineering, secondary teaching (STEM), and allied health are available in regional universities, particularly in Queensland and are fully accessible to regional students regardless of where they reside. They offer online theory content with intensive residential schools for practical components offered on campus. Regional students travel once per semester to their closest campus for the residential school but complete other course components where they live.

The Council were informed that Western Australian universities offer online options for Bachelor courses including Commerce, Primary and Early Childhood Teaching and Psychology however they do not offer anything science related like those areas of workforce need identified above. University courses delivered by Western Australian universities, particularly in areas of workforce need, could be redesigned so they are fully accessible for regional students to complete their qualification in Western Australia's regions with practical residential components of the course undertaken locally and in Perth.

It was acknowledged that there is no funding in place for this to occur. It was stated that university study hubs in Queensland and New South Wales attract significant funding from their respective State Governments. State Government assistance through funding incentives to Western Australian universities may encourage them to create academic content that could be delivered

locally in partnership with Western Australian university hubs, where enrolments will be relatively very small.

Partnerships

During the regional visit, the Council observed that numerous successful initiatives in the region were underpinned by robust partnerships.

Strong partnerships between schools, TAFE, universities, support services, and local industries support students and maximize their learning opportunities. In an educational context, partnerships can include but are not limited to:

- School to school partnerships
- Family partnerships
- Community and industry partnerships
- Higher education partnerships
- Multi-agency partnerships

It was particularly evident that secondary schools in the Geraldton region have established strong collaborations with TAFE. Regular TAFE access on Thursdays and Fridays for students participating in the VET in Schools (VETis) program was frequently highlighted during consultations as a notable strength in the region. Additionally, TAFE extended outreach services in partnership with various schools, not limited to secondary schools.

Furthermore, schools have formed alliances with the Geraldton Universities Centre, enabling Year 12 students to undertake the Curtin Uniready program, which they attend one day a week. This initiative includes students from both Champion Bay Senior High School and Geraldton Senior High School. It was noted that students attending the Geraldton Universities Centre were exposed to the rigors of university-level study and a more independent learning environment.

Schools also reported exploring joint offerings to increase the number of students enrolled in courses, thereby enhancing the viability of these programs. Inter-school collaborations were mentioned, including joint teaching agreements and cross-sectoral arrangements. Staff at Geraldton Grammar School noted previous partnerships with public schools for sharing teachers and classroom spaces, although these partnerships have ceased since the expansion of the 2 public schools to include Years 7 to 12. The logistical challenges and sustainability issues of these arrangements were frequently cited.

Similarly, the Geraldton Universities Centre has partnerships with Curtin University and 2 Queensland-based universities. These partnerships extend to local businesses and industries, with industry professionals providing tutoring services. Despite funding constraints requiring guest speakers to volunteer their time, the centre maintains strong links with local industry, facilitating teacher practicums and often receiving inquiries from businesses seeking to employ graduating students.

Workplace learning placements

During the regional visit, it was observed that work placements posed a significant challenge for both school and TAFE sectors. This difficulty stemmed from the large number of students competing for opportunities with industry partners capable of supporting placements.

The high demand for placements was noted to be problematic, as the limited availability of industry partner resources resulted in some students being unable to secure the placements they desired. Local businesses were also noted to be under considerable pressure due to the high demand across various sectors, with concerns raised this may erode willingness to participate in these arrangements in the future.

In smaller towns outside of Geraldton, establishing local industry connections proved particularly challenging. The absence of businesses in certain industries meant that students often had to seek placements further afield in Geraldton if it was feasible.

Summary and next steps

In recent years, RREAC has conducted 2 regional visits: one to Albany in 2023 and to Geraldton in 2024. These visits provided the Council with significant insights into the numerous achievements and successes of regional schools and students in these areas. There is much to celebrate, with strong partnerships evident across various organisations, including schools, higher education institutions, support service providers, and local industries. These partnerships collectively support students and maximise the learning opportunities available to them.

As larger regional centers, both Albany and Geraldton serve similar populations, with over 38,000 residents in Albany and over 41,000 residents in the City of Greater Geraldton. Both centres offer comparable schooling options, each having 2 public senior high schools with combined enrolments of approximately 1,600 students, in addition to several non-government school options. TAFE is present in both regions, and both also have access to university centers, namely the Geraldton Universities Centre and the Great Southern Universities Centre.

However, it is evident that regional students face several inequitable barriers as they navigate their educational journeys and transition from secondary school to post-school pathways.

These challenges, observed or referenced during both visits, include but are not limited to:

- Access to broader curriculum and course offerings
- Teacher and staff shortages
- Accommodation
- Transport
- Cost of living and other financial challenges
- Mental health and wellbeing

Students in both Albany and Geraldton were impacted by many, if not all, of these barriers. While some issues were observed or referenced more frequently, such as mental health challenges during the Albany visit in 2023, all the above issues seemed to be present to some degree in both regions.

RREAC considers that the work undertaken in the focus area of secondary school transitions is now complete. The Council will regroup in 2025 following the March election with Council members being confirmed by the Minister for Education. The Council will then determine a new focus area for its 2025 activities.

Day 1: Tuesday 23 July 2024

Geraldton Universities Centre

During 2000 the Geraldton University Access Group (GUAG) was formed and in June 2001 a delegation lobbied the Federal government for regional allocation of university places. The delegation was successful. The University of Western Australia, Curtin University of Technology and Edith Cowan University formed a consortium to bid for the Geraldton university places, with the University of Western Australia taking the role of Administering University. In November 2001, the Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) was established.

The GUC is a not-for-profit, incorporated body, supporting university courses on behalf of partner universities including CQUniversity, the University of Southern Queensland and Curtin University. These courses are offered and conferred by its university partners.

Around 300 students a year are supported at the GUC in mixed mode courses with more than 100 other students accessing GUC as their exam centre. Support from the Commonwealth Government saw GUC further expand facilities in 2020, with a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week study centre opening at the campus.

The Council and Lara Dalton MLA toured the GUC facilities with Director Natalie Nelmes. The Student Services Officer and Education Coordinator joined the tour. The pathways and course options for students were shared with the Council as well as some of the barriers faced by students and the Centre itself.

The GUC provides an option for students who are reluctant to relocate to Perth for their studies or who are financially unable to do so. This also assists to create the local workforce by keeping students in the regions and upskilling them. Students can be enrolled at any university and in any course and are registered as distance learners with their university.

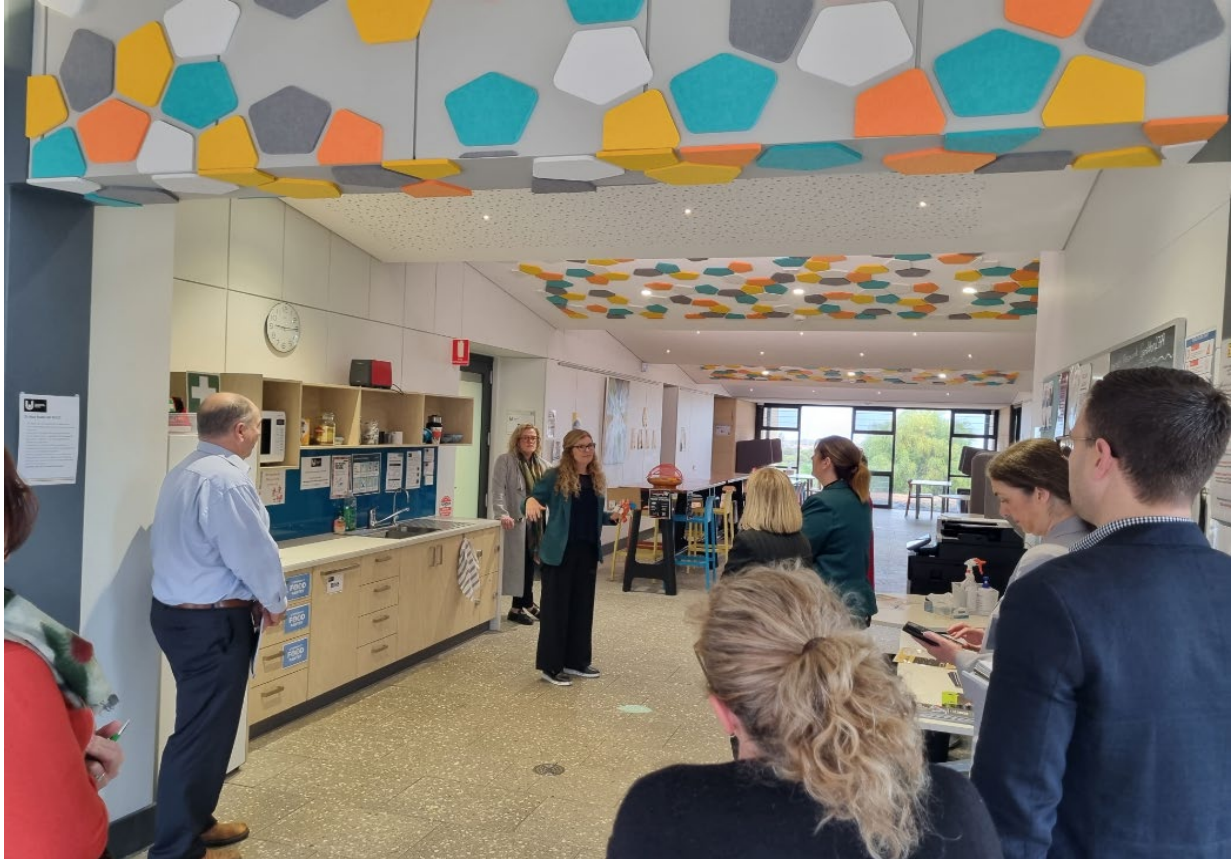
The GUC draws teaching, nursing, and social work students from Geraldton and beyond. Year 12 students access the GUC to complete the Curtin Uni-ready program with 15 students currently undertaking this field of study. The GUC staff reported having strong partnerships with local schools.

GUC staff reported that it is not attractive to students to enrol in courses that require travel to the Eastern States to attend partner universities to complete practical components of their course. Should Western Australian universities be encouraged to provide a greater range of fully accessible courses, this would allow regional students to undertake their study closer to where they live and could assist in addressing regional workforce shortages and provide more local content to course offerings.

Site observations

- Approximately 10% of students who attend the GUC, and 6% of all graduates are Aboriginal.
- Approximately half of all students utilising the GUC are over 24 years old and 20-25% of all students have previously enrolled in online learning or at universities in Perth.
- Anecdotally, teaching students who attend the GUC are in high demand. The Limited Authority to Teach has resulted in some students leaving their studies prior to completion to enter the workforce early.
- GUC staff report that they are fielding queries from all local schools seeking teacher trainees prior to completion of their studies, it was reported that this is a similar trend for nursing, social work and psychology students.
- The Hollamby Foundation has raised over \$800,000 since its inception in 2010 which has resulted in benefits to students via a range of scholarships and travel bursaries for travel to Queensland. Over \$100,000 has been raised and provided to students in 2024 alone.

- Staff reported the need for Western Australian university courses to be redesigned so that they are fully accessible for regional students.
- Funding is an issue and the GUC staff reported that university centres in the Eastern States attract significant State and Federal Government funding. With even a small amount of additional State funding, the centre could provide outreach and raise student aspirations.



Champion Bay Senior High School

Champion Bay Senior High School is an Independent Public School that caters for students in Years 7-12. Champion Bay Senior High School provides a comprehensive curriculum, including:

- an approved Specialist STEM program that is open to applicants across the region.
- the Indonesian program that offers with the opportunity to progress into an ATAR pathway.
- extra-curricular activities in Music, Visual Arts and Dance.

In addition to a selection of ATAR and General courses, the school offers Vocational Education and Training pathways for students in Years 11 and 12. The school values its partnerships with local businesses and industry, Geraldton Universities Centre, and the major educational institutions including the University of Western Australia, Edith Cowan, Curtin and Murdoch Universities.

In recent years, the school has undergone a \$20 million extensive building and major refurbishment program, providing students with new state-of-the-art facilities.



The Council visited Champion Bay Senior High School on 23 July. Upon arrival, Council members were treated to a welcome morning tea with senior secondary students making coffee for the group while other students conversed with the Council members regarding their chosen pathways and goals for the future.

Senior secondary students spoke with the Council members in a student forum format with senior school staff. The students discussed their career pathways, course selections, and the challenges they and their siblings had experienced studying in a regional area along with their plans for further study or employment. A combined vocational and general is pathway the most common pathway of the current cohort.

A common trend of losing ATAR students as they transitioned from Year 11 to 12 was reported. The school offers the Curtin Uni-ready program and reported an increasing number of ATAR courses that had to be offered via SIDE rather than face to face learning. Students reported that if

a chosen ATAR pathway was too challenging, there was always the fallback option of enrolling in the Curtin Uni-ready program rather than maintaining a full ATAR course load. School staff reported challenges in encouraging students to aspire to, and maintain, participation in the more challenging courses.

An issue that was raised by students was the notion of cost-of-living pressures and the need for many families to set up a second household to fund their children's education. Many reported that they planned to take a gap year through necessity to save up enough funds to relocate to Perth to attend University. Students reported the frustration of needing to take a gap year that often resulted in students either not returning to training or needing to extend the gap in their education beyond just one year. Students reported that in some cases they were aware of from older siblings or friends, it could often be numerous years before they would return to higher education which meant their ATAR was no longer relevant and they could access university via a mature age pathway.

Students reported that if they were unsure as to what pathway to follow, they would opt for a general pathway to provide a solid base with a view to obtaining a job upon leaving school. Some students reported that the option of undertaking a general pathway, obtaining a job and making money, and then going to university as a mature age student (mid-20s) is more attractive than going straight to university and struggling both financially and academically if they were not ready for such a change.

Site observations

- 2024 is only the fourth year that Champion Bay Senior High School has had students transitioning into Year 12 following the expansion to cater for Years 7 to 12.
- SIDE deliver some courses, with positive feedback from students. This style of learning works well for those who like independent learning however some students prefer a face-to-face classroom environment.
- The declining number of students seeking an ATAR pathway has resulted in a reduced number of ATAR courses being offered via face-to-face learning.
- The potential to offer a greater suite of ATAR courses in partnership with Geraldton Senior High School was raised. Timetabling issues were a barrier to this occurring.
- Despite course counselling being available, students reported feeling pressure in choosing pathways.
- The school hosts Clontarf, Shine, and Follow the Dream programs.

Enrolments

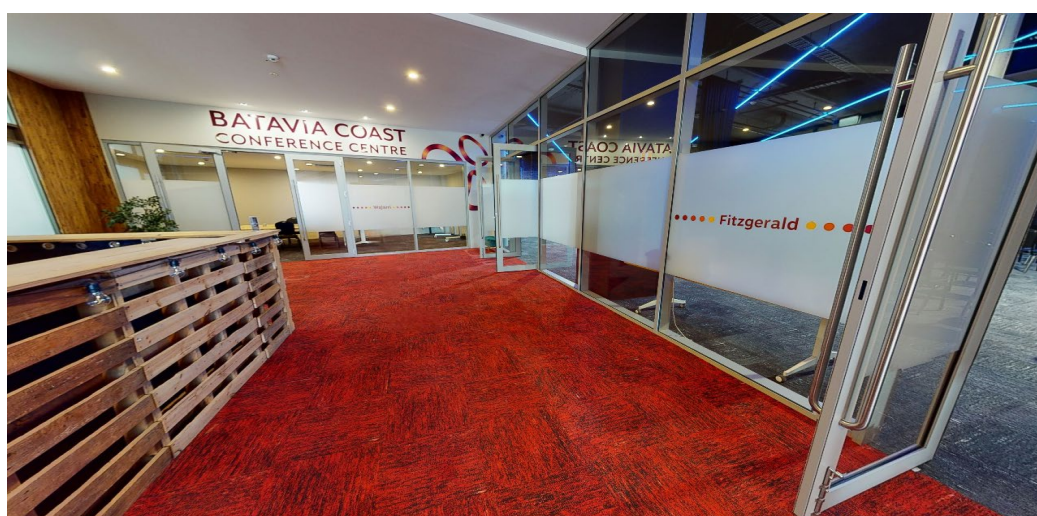
Semester 1	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Total
2024	157	162	145	144	110	78	796
2023	159	155	149	133	100	124	820
2022	148	153	134	104	167	82	788
2021	131	135	109	206	104	81	766

Community forum

Twenty-four organisations representing education, industry, training, and support services were invited to attend the community forum. Fifteen organisations were represented by 17 people including Ms Lara Dalton MLA, Member for Geraldton, and Ms Lisa Rodgers PSM, Director General, Department of Education.

Each representative was provided up to 5 minutes to address the following areas of inquiry which were provided in advance:

- What role do you and/or your organisation play in providing pathways for students to access post-secondary education?
- What currently works well?
- What challenges do you encounter and are there additional supports that would help overcome these?
- What challenges do you think that regional students face when seeking pathways to emerging careers and industries?



Forum observations

- Pathway planning is in place and the Year 9 career taster events are popular across the region.
- More information is needed earlier regarding career planning and pathway opportunities.
- Capacity for regional employers to provide work placements in some industries is limited.
- Financial pressures continue to impact across many areas:
 - regional vs metropolitan gap year – regional students need to save to study whereas their metropolitan counterparts can travel and enjoy their gap year.
 - the need for regional families to set up a second household for children to relocate to Perth for study.
 - affordable housing issues for students as well as difficulties for staff seeking housing.
- Attraction and retention of teachers continues to be an issue. There are reports that limited registration teachers in the second and even first year studying, are teaching.
- Universities need to provide a greater range of fully accessible course offerings in regional centres which could help address regional workforce needs.
- SIDE: Limited course offerings and issues with access.
- Visibility of future education and training opportunities – students cannot aspire to careers and industries that they do not know exist.
- There is a higher rate of individual disability allocation across the Midwest region.
- The range of available face to face tertiary courses is limited.
- Student behaviour and attendance is an issue across the region, student mental health and wellbeing remains a challenge.

The list of attendees and apologies to the forum is in Appendix D.

Day 2: Wednesday 24 July 2024

Geraldton Grammar School

Geraldton Grammar School is a co-educational Kindergarten to Year 12 school that has a proud history of providing outstanding academic and pastoral care to its students. From humble beginnings in 1996, the school has grown from 50 students and has developed into a renowned K-12 campus of nearly 700 students. Over the years it has added to its infrastructure, allowing more opportunities (curricular and co-curricular) for students. The school built a state-of-the-art gymnasium which opened at the end of 2022.

At the commencement of RREACs visit to Geraldton Grammar School on 23 July, the Council was provided an overview of the schools' background, context, and the available career pathways for students from Principal, Ms Neesha Flint and Deputy Principal, Mr Derek Lange.

The school has a total enrolment of 686 students and around 7% of students are Aboriginal and 22% of students are from a non-English speaking background. The school does not offer a boarding option for students, however, approximately 25 students reside at the Geraldton Residential College.

The school reported declining numbers of students who are seeking an ATAR pathway with approximately 65% of current senior secondary students on an ATAR pathway. The school no longer offers a university enabling program. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students were often not sufficiently equipped with the skills they required upon completing the program. Historically, around 75% of students undertook an ATAR pathway. SIDE courses are offered for learning areas that are cost prohibitive, or if a senior student enrolls at the school after the commencement of the school year needs to complete a subject that the new school does not offer.

There has been an increase in students seeking vocational pathways as there is a shift in community perception of the school from it being more than just the main 'academic school' in Geraldton. Year 11 students who are on a general pathway also undertake a certificate course at TAFE and students who attend TAFE 2 days a week, receive a 30% reduction in their school fees. The school is not big enough to become an RTO, and while there are no formal industry links, students often source work placements through links to family business. It was noted there are many agricultural and fishing industry links to local family and community businesses.

The school provides a range of pathway planning events which include parent information evenings, TAFE presentations and Year 10 career camps held in Perth where students visit institutions including universities and Fremantle TAFE. A skills forum is held every 2 years where students receive information and advice from local industry and employers. The school is trying to increase student exposure to what is available regarding new careers and industries but stated it was often hard to get students to dream beyond the family business, in particular those students who already had a reluctance to leave the Geraldton area. The school is organising more international and Perth visits to expose students to what is outside of Geraldton and will include visits to universities and TAFE sites.

School staff also noted barriers that are faced by the school and its student community. The school noted various issues regarding staffing. Most teachers at the school grew up in the region and know the local context, and while despite a relatively stable staff profile, housing was often a barrier to attracting new staff. The school reported that it found Mathematics and English teacher positions typically hard to fill. The school has recently been unable to fill a school psychologist position and noted that when attempting to fill positions, they are competing with other regional centres that are closer to Perth for example Bunbury and Busselton. The school has only had to appoint one limited authority to teach teacher (Mandarin) due to difficulties obtaining a local specialist language teacher.

The school noted that while the GUC provides a valuable service to the region, students were limited to nursing or teaching and were often forced to leave Geraldton to undertake differing fields of study. Staff reported that many students who leave to attend Perth based universities often return due to homesickness or cost of living pressures.

It was anecdotally reported that some families were buying rental properties in Perth to enable their children to relocate for work or study, however this was challenging for those families that could not afford to do so. The need for students to take a gap year to save for their post-secondary

education was also noted despite the higher socio-economic status afforded to its school community. The school reported that cost of living pressures has not had any impact on enrolments at the school nor have recent fee increases.

Staff emphasised that students should not always be so future focused and should enjoy their secondary school experience. The increased number of alternative pathway options including bridging courses and portfolio entrance options mean students have plenty future options should they leave school without a clearly defined pathway.

The tour took in various facilities across the 17 hectare site and concluded with a visit to the recently completed gymnasium. The building was completed in 2022 at a cost of approximately \$8million with around \$2 million in funding raised through the school community.



Site observations

- A range of training and pathways are available to students.
- Despite the higher socio-economic status of the school community, it was still reported that students often required a gap year to save for post school education or training.
- Mental health and student wellbeing was identified as a key issue and the school has appointed a student wellbeing officer who is in place 4 days a week. Building resilience is a key focus.
- Lack of available housing can make staffing difficult, however staff turnover is minimal with 40% of staff having been at the school more than 10 years.

Enrolments

Semester 1 enrolments	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Primary	241	253	259	253	304
Lower secondary	170	207	213	235	270
Upper secondary	99	85	70	81	100
Total	510	545	542	569	674

Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre

As a Curriculum and Re-Engagement (CARE) school, Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre (GFLC) provides an alternative option for young people who have been disengaged from mainstream education to re-engage with education in a specialised and supportive learning environment.

The GFLC has been operating since 2010 and offers an important option available in regional Western Australia for young people who have been disengaged from mainstream education.

The GFLC works closely with many government and non-government agencies which have an interest in supporting positive outcomes for youth. GFLC endeavours to meet the needs of its cohort while adhering to the requirements set by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) and Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA). Curriculum is delivered with the guidance of negotiated Individual Education Plans (IEPs). These plans are developed by the teacher and youth worker, in consultation with the young person and their families.

Immersion (Years 7 and 8) - flexible, negotiated learning that aims to balance academic work with adventure-based learning. Subjects and activities include English, Mathematics, Health & Physical Education, Art and adventure-based activities such as bike riding, bush walking and snorkelling.

Project (Years 9 and 10) - negotiated projects that are interest based and cover key aspects of the Western Australian Curriculum, including English, Mathematics, Health & Physical Education, Art, and offsite adventure-based activities.

Senior Transition (Years 11 and 12) - working towards the achievement of the Western Australian Certificate of Education, young people develop functional literacy and numeracy skills, practical work-related competencies, and build personal and core employability skills for life and work.

Specialist Programs

- Mayu Wanggajimanha: meaning “kids talking together” provides young people with the opportunity to work with staff from the local Irra Wangga language centre to learn the Wajarri language whilst also being introduced to local history of Indigenous language, place and people.
- Wellbeing program: a suite of psycho-educational programs that are delivered by youth work staff and aim to address identified needs within the school group community.
- Outreach support: a youth worker has been employed to work with young people at their point of need usually in homes or in the community. It is designed for those severely disengaged or socially anxious who have been identified as requiring one-to-one support through the enrolment process. The staff member works closely with families and young people to commence transition into the school setting.

The Council visited the GFLC having only relocated to the new facilities just 3 weeks prior. Prior to that, the GFLC was in the adjacent building that was previously part of the former St Patrick's College. On arrival, the Council noted 6 buses which the Centre uses for transporting students to and from the Centre. The bus run is also utilised for pastoral care services and daily outreach services which fosters relationships with both students and their families and is a key focus of the centre.

The Council was provided a comprehensive tour of the facilities and met briefly with some of the students who were soon being transported out for various activities. It was made clear to the Council that this is not a mainstream school setting. Around 10% of students are referred from other schools and non-school services. Each classroom consists of a teacher and a youth worker across 4 classrooms catering for mixed year levels which operate on smaller class sizes. 87% of students at the Centre are Aboriginal. All students are on an IEPs.

Staff care and support was a key issue as it was never known how students would present each day. Staff regularly meet in small groups and have 2 whole staff meetings each week as well as a debrief on Fridays. The Head of Campus acknowledged that the GFLC needs to continue

developing supports for staff and would benefit from an employee assistance program that is not directly linked to the school.

Site observations

- The GFLC commenced the 2024 year with 65 students and an attendance rate of 55%. This has increased and it currently caters for 98 students with an attendance rate of over 60%.
- The state-of-the-art commercial kitchen is planned to be utilised as a training resource for students.
- It was reported by staff that it is often the primary to secondary transition that triggers disengagement and the need for the flexible learning centre service.
- The GFLC has a first nations room, designed and maintained by indigenous students, however all students are welcome.
- The GFLC also has a transition space that provides students a space for tasks such as applying for their driver's licence and resume writing.

Enrolments

Semester 1	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Total
2024	3	13	16	10	12	11	64
2023	6	9	16	25	22	7	85
2022	0	10	29	24	19	16	98
2021	2	13	23	23	17	20	98

Central Regional TAFE

Central Regional TAFE operates across 3 campuses in Geraldton.

Fitzgerald Street Campus: offers training in industry simulated learning environments in the areas of health, education, community services, construction, building, rural industries, mining, metals, art, automotive, hospitality, business, management, information technology and more.

Batavia Coast Maritime Institute (BCMI): is an award-winning state of the art training, research and development facility. BCMI has positioned itself as a world-class centre of excellence, specialising in the areas of aquaculture, marine and environmental science research and training.

The wide range of partnerships and collaborations with industry allows the integration of industry, research and education throughout a broad range of fields, attracting students both locally and internationally. Students at BCMI have the unique advantage of learning and developing skills within a commercially operational environment, providing them with a realistic and hands-on training experience.

Technology Park Campus: is in the industrial area of Geraldton. The complex delivers training and qualifications for trainees, apprentices, post trade, technicians and plant operators in occupations relating to the construction, operation and maintenance of resource sector facilities, plant and equipment.

The Council was provided a tour of both the BCMI and the Fitzgerald Street Campus. The Council's tour of the BCMI was facilitated by Juan Gutierrez Serrano, Portfolio Manager – Marine, Environment and Technology. Council members had the opportunity to view the state-of-the-art hatchery where over 150,000 marine ornamental fish are produced every year. The facility is the largest supplier of clown fish in Australia, generating \$250,000-\$350,000 in fish sales annually.

The BCMI works in close partnership with local schools with students undertaking Vocational Education and Training in schools (VETis) at the centre on Thursdays. Students are drawn from areas beyond Geraldton. The centre also provides social outreach services and Kindergarten to Year 12 services for school students.

Following the tour of the BCMI, the Council moved to the nearby Fitzgerald Street Campus. The site has several wards for nursing programs and the facilities at the site appeared well maintained and well resourced. Staff noted that the large range of course offerings at the TAFE assists to keep young people in the region. Council members were able to view the training nursing wards and hairdressing facilities and noted how comprehensive these facilities were. The Council also noted a creche that was available for training purposes but was also available for real use one day a week for gold coin donation.



Staff noted that that work placements are a barrier facing TAFE. Local industries experience competing schools, university and TAFE in seeking work placements which puts strain on local employers. Student travel was also mentioned as a common barrier with students need to obtain their drivers licence prior to being able to travel to TAFE and/or work placements in the region. The Regional Youth Driver Education Program (RYDE) which provides young people the opportunity to complete their 50 hours of supervised driving experience with a volunteer mentor was mentioned as a solution to this issue. This program is currently not available in the Geraldton region.

Site observations

- Comprehensive training facilities are available for students across each campus.
- The BCMI offers a range of course opportunities ranging from Certificate through to Diploma level courses in Aquaculture, Laboratory Science, Conservation and Land Management, Marine and Environmental Science and Maritime qualifications.
- The institute manages a fleet of vessels including a 20 metre commercial training vessel (The Master Class) and numerous smaller boats used for fishing, maritime and aquaculture training. The Master Class is used for TAFE coordinated scuba diving courses, local charters and for travel to the Abrolhos Islands.
- Nursing wards at the Fitzgerald Street Campus offer industry level facilities.
- It was reported that many students will undertake certificate level courses, work for a period, before returning to later complete Diploma level courses.



Meekatharra School of the Air (SOTA)

In 1959 Meekatharra School of the Air was established with one teacher, who was Teacher in Charge, but under the direct control of The WA Correspondence School in Perth. In 1979, 20 years after its inception and 20 years after it was first suggested at a Parents and Citizens meeting, Meekatharra School of the Air became an autonomous school with its own principal.

The original school site was on the grounds of The Royal Flying Doctor Service where it remained until 1975 when it moved to a site adjacent to Meekatharra District High School. In 1995 the existing school building was enlarged and upgraded. After a fire destroyed the building in 2007, the school was relocated to 3 demountable buildings on the Beachlands Primary School site and in 2011, staff moved into a brand new, purpose-built building in Kempton Street in Bluff Point.

The school caters for students in Kindergarten to Year 6, with most of the students enrolled living on stations and travelling. The boundaries of its 540,000 square kilometres stretch from Wiluna to the Northern Territory border, to Newman, Mullewa and to Wubin. Since 2004 the school has delivered lessons via a state-of-the-art ICT Satellite based system known as SatWeb.

Full-time teachers conduct daily WebEx lessons and mark the students' written work. These lessons are still referred to as 'Air lessons' for sentimental reasons. An air lesson may vary in length from 30 minutes (4 year olds) to one hour. Families have the option of air lessons or non-air lessons. If they choose the non-air lesson option, they do all the same written work, do not have daily contact with the school. The written program the teachers provide are the foundation of the students' education. The materials are organised by the school into sets and are sent out to the children on a 3 to 4 week rotation. The children return a completed 'set' or unit of work every 3 weeks.

Teachers visit the students at home to work with them in both academic and non-academic areas at various times throughout the year. The teacher also assists the Home Tutor through home visits, phone calls and emails.

Face to face contact is made at various times throughout the year:

- Camps, Combined Home Visits and/or In School Activity Days are held at least once per term.
- An annual Learning Seminar is held for all Home Tutors and students in Term 1. This provides the opportunity for Home Tutors to further develop their teaching knowledge and skills.
- A camp for School of the Air students in Years 4 - 6 (including those students from Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland, Carnarvon, and Derby) is held annually in Perth.
- Students and families are always welcome to visit the school.

On 24 July, the Council were provided a tour of the SOTA facilities by Teacher Kathy Mannion in the absence of the principal who was away with students on camp. SOTA operates across 3 classes, a Kindergarten-Pre-primary-Year 1, a Years 2 to 3, and a Years 4 to 6. The range of levels within a single class was highlighted as a particular challenge with the Year 4-6 class consisting of students ranging from a Pre-primary to Year 10 academic level within the age-based cohort.

Preparation and planning at SOTA was reported as extremely intensive with school staff writing their own differentiated resources and lessons needing to be planned a month in advance with paper copies sent to students. Students in Kindergarten to Year 3 are provided paper resources and Years 4 to 6 students use OneNote. Families are sent laptops and iPads to participate in coursework at the commencement of the school year.

The SOTA experience is as much about training up and counselling a parent, mainly the mums, to be home tutor as much as it was educating the students. An athletics and dance package are offered as part of the curriculum offering and students study LOTE and Science via SIDE, while a specialist art and music teacher is available on Friday sessions. Staff spend a lot of time working

on speech as many students are only ever exposed to hearing their own family members converse.

Site observations

- Enrolments typically double by the end of Term 1, often due to families preparing to travel over winter. The school currently enrolls approximately 60 students.
- Quality of internet access can be a barrier to learning in some circumstances.
- Behaviour management can be challenging in the context of the online learning environment.
- Transition to high school was a key issue and students are prepared prior to their transition with various content that includes dealing with bullying, how to read timetables.



Enrolments

Semester 1	K	PP	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2024	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	2	35
2023	4	4	5	7	3	4	2	5	34
2022	2	13	7	8	5	8	5	4	52
2021	5	4	9	4	5	5	4	6	42

Appendices

Appendix A - Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council

Attendance

Name	Representing	Membership type
Jodie Hanns MLA	Government	Chair
Julie Brooks	Western Australian Council of State School Organisations	Community/Consumer
Pania Turner	Western Australian Council of State School Organisations	Community/Consumer
Linda Adnyana	Western Australian universities	Funder/Provider
Paul Bridge	Department of Education	Funder/Provider
Tony Curry	Catholic Education Western Australia	Funder/Provider
Natalie Blewitt	State School Teachers' Union of WA	Community/Consumer
Simone de Been	Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry WA	Community/Consumer

Apologies

Name	Representing	Membership type
Divina D'Anna	Government	Deputy Chair
Katherine Loader	Western Australian Council of State School Organisations	Community/Consumer
Darshi Ganeson-Oats	Regional education and training interests	Community/Consumer
Shanine Ryan	Aboriginal education and training interests	Community/Consumer
Paula Steenson	Western Australian Council of State School Organisations	Community/Consumer
Naomi Obst	Isolated Children's Parents' Association WA	Community/Consumer
Lorraine Hammond	Community/Consumer representative	Community/Consumer
Andrea Gaynor	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia – parent representative	Community/Consumer
Alan Buckley	Catholic Schools Parents WA	Community/Consumer
Chris Massey	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia	Funder/Provider

Appendix B – Itinerary

Date - Tuesday 23 July
8:45am Depart accommodation
9:00am Arrive Geraldton Universities Centre
10:15am Depart Geraldton Universities Centre
10:30am Arrive Champion Bay Senior High School
11:45am Depart Champion Bay Senior High School
1:00pm – 3:00pm Community Forum
3:30pm RREAC meeting
4:30pm End of day
Date - Wednesday 24 July
8:45am Depart accommodation
9:00am Arrive Geraldton Grammar School
10:30am Depart Geraldton Grammar School
10:45am Arrive Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre
12:15pm Depart Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre
1:45pm Arrive Central Regional TAFE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:45pm - 2:25pm Batavia Coast Maritime Institute • 2:30pm - 3:15pm Fitzgerald Street Campus
3:15pm Depart Central Regional TAFE
3:30pm Arrive Meekatharra School of the Air
4:00pm Depart Meekatharra School of the Air
End of day

Appendix C – Consultation list

Name	Position	Organisation
Lara Dalton MLA	Member for Geraldton	Government
Lisa Rodgers	Director General	Department of Education
Lisa Criddle	Director of Education	Midwest Education Regional Office
Julie Campbell	Assistant Director of Education	Midwest Education Regional Office
Natalie Nelmes	Director	Geraldton Universities Centre
Renae Olsen	Academic Coordinator-Education	Geraldton Universities Centre
Tiambra Calvin	Student support	Geraldton Universities Centre
Neesha Flint	Principal	Geraldton Grammar School
Derek Lange	Deputy Principal	Geraldton Grammar School
Lynnette English	Head of Campus	Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre
Mike Panter	Associate Head of Campus	Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre
Katie Dawson	Leader of wellbeing and child safeguarding	Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre
Juan Gutierrez Serrano	Portfolio Manager-Marine, Environment and Technology	Central Regional TAFE
Michele Edwards	Portfolio Manager-Health Education and the Community	Central Regional TAFE
Peter Jarzabek	College Manager	Geraldton Residential College
Karena Shearing	Principal	Geraldton Senior High School
Dan Van Vastenhoven	Program Coordinator	Geraldton Senior High School
Lauren Norris	Manager	Geraldton Jobs and Skills Centre
Steve Meeny	Career Development Officer	Joblink
Mike Friday	Education Manager	Leaning Tree Steiner School
Joanne Fabling	CEO	Midwest Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Nicki Patterson	Principal	Mullewa District High School
Cameron Todd	Principal	Northampton District High School
Janine Calver	Principal	Dongara District High School
Kathryn Mannion	Teacher	Meekatharra SOTA
Helen Lydon	Principal	Champion Bay Senior High School
Riley Crowe	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Caitlyn Hornby	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Clover Keatley	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Izzy Mitchel	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Brody Short	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Zara Warburton	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Mark Antonio	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Raymon Bonney	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Robert Bonney	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Mia Brearley	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Shakaia Cocker	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Blazemer Fabello	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School

Name	Position	Organisation
Matera Hornby	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Toby Jensen	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Jayden O'Malley	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Avril O'Brien	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Jackson Taylor	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School
Riley Crowe	Student	Champion Bay Senior High School

Appendix D - Community forum attendees

Name	Position/Organisation
Lara Dalton MLA	Member for Geraldton
Lisa Rodgers	Director General Department of Education
Lisa Criddle	Director of Education Midwest Education Regional Office
Julie Campbell	Assistant Director of Education Midwest Education Regional Office
Natalie Nelmes	Director Geraldton Universities Centre
Peter Jarzabek	College Manager Geraldton Residential College
Helen Lydon	Principal Champion Bay Senior High School
Karena Shearing	Principal Geraldton Senior High School
Dan Van Vastenhoven	Program Coordinator Geraldton Senior High School
Lauren Norris	Manager Geraldton Jobs and Skills Centre
Lynette English	Head of campus Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre
Steve Meeny	Career Development officer Joblink
Mike Friday	Education Manager Leaning Tree Steiner School
Joanne Fabling	CEO Midwest Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Nicki Patterson	Principal Mullewa District High School
Cameron Todd	Principal Northampton District High School
Janine Calver	Principal Dongara District High School

Apologies

Organisation	Organisation type
Geraldton Christian College	Education
City of Geraldton	Support Services
MEEDAC	Support services/industry
Geraldton Grammar School	Education
Nagle Catholic College	Education
Central Regional TAFE, Geraldton	Industry/training
Holland Street School	Education
CEWA – Regional Officer	Education
Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation	Support services

Appendix E - regional visit costs

Item	Cost incl. GST (\$)
Member travel	\$4,376.36
Accommodation	\$4,726.29
Room hire	\$800
Charter vehicle	\$1,450
Food and beverage	\$1,660.26
Other	\$91.16
TOTAL	\$13,104.07