

## **REPORT ON THE RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL REGIONAL MEETING IN ALBANY**

### **Background**

The Chair, Deputy Chair and Councillors of RREAC affirmed that, as part of the Council's core business, the opportunity to experience first-hand education in a regional context is paramount. RREAC investigated a number of options for its 2013 regional meeting. Investigation confirmed that the Great Southern Region (centre Albany) offered opportunities in terms of regional development, education provided by a range of systems and sectors plus opportunity to experience in real time, education and training in the regional context.

As an innovation RREAC worked with the Aboriginal Education and Training Council (AETC) to co-host this regional meeting.

### **Program**

A comprehensive program was provided for the Council and meetings and visitations included a range of relevant stake holders involved in education and training including:

- Chief Executive Officer, Great Southern Regional Development Commission
- Regional Executive Director, Great Southern Education Region;
- North Albany Senior High School (Department of Education);
- Mount Barker Community College (Department of Education);
- CARE School – ALTA-1 (AISWA);
- St Joseph's College (Catholic Education Office);
- Parent and Community Engagement program;
- The University of WA (Albany Campus);
- Reconciliation WA;
- Great Southern Employment Development Committee In;
- Partnership Brokers – Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
- Statewide Issues in Early Childhood Aboriginal Education.

### **Purpose:**

- Verify the work RREAC completed on early childhood education and care, the delivery and access to higher education and the future uses of technology in the delivery of education;
- Ensure that council members were attuned to the many issues and challenges facing regional students, staff, families, communities, and the strategies employed to overcome disadvantage and maximise outcomes; and to
- Expose the council members first hand to the varied educational environment in the Albany region (early childhood; primary; secondary; tertiary; agricultural education; alternative education for disaffected youth) and enable them to receive reports directly from those engaged in the delivery of education on the many issues and challenges facing regional and remote students, staff, families, communities and the strategies employed to overcome disadvantage and maximise outcomes.
- Host the 2013 regional meeting in partnership with the Aboriginal Education and Training council in WA to share information between councils and to gain further insight into the issues, challenges and successes facing Aboriginal students, families and communities within the Great Southern Region.

## **Key issues as noted by RREAC**

1. Nature of Funding Projects
2. Regional Education Plans
3. Education for the disengaged
4. Community College Model
5. On-line learning

## **Nature of Funding Projects**

RREAC noted that, in many instances, projects were initially dependent on seed funding. As a result of the unpredictable nature of sustained funding it has proven difficult to gain long term commitment from project officer and personnel and to fully engage and build trust with key stakeholders. Due to the nature of projects most cannot deliver measureable key objects and outcomes within a twelve month period and the expectation is there that ongoing funding will be available.

In a regional context, rarely will such progress be financially sustainable beyond the “pilot”. Increasing demands on local groups means they must make hard decisions on what they can or cannot do.

RREAC recommends lengthening funding cycles (3-5 years) to enable effective relationships to be established, accountability strengthened through measureable key objectives and outcomes (quantitative and qualitative data collection), social impact assessment of how projects are performing, and an ongoing audit to be implemented to ensure sustainability.

Options may be explored such as:

- Fee for service model where people are contracted to deliver programs may be more feasible as measurements and targets are set in place. Contracts have the added advantage in that they help build the capacity of people.
- Strategic approach to investment through engaging private companies who can commit to long term investments and have the ability to attract other companies.

## **Regional Development Education Plans**

One of the key capacities in delivering economic growth for the regions is human capacity. Education obviously is a key underpinning to building this capacity. RREAC has over many years documented issues and strategies to address gaps in regional education. Specifically, recent RREAC reports on technology, early education, higher education and remote education have been forwarded to Commissions for consideration in their Blueprint development.

Once Blueprints have been completed by February 2014, cross regional education issues (early childhood to university) will be identified, and priority strategies co-ordinated by the Regional Development Council.

On an ongoing basis, Commissions keep a watching brief on a range of education issues, particularly providing feedback on education reforms. Recent issues include:

- Year 7 transition to high school;
- New funding models in public education

## **Education for the disengaged**

RREAC noted the importance of education for disengaged youth in the Albany region. The Auditor General Western Australia Report *'Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools'* highlighted attendance as a key factor resulting in disengaged youth. The report concluded that of the more than 177 000 students in Years 1 to 10 in WA's public schools in 2008, almost 49 000 (28 per cent) are at educational risk because they are not attending school regularly. Poor school attendance is a significant problem among Indigenous and non-Indigenous students:

- The greatest numbers of students at educational risk due to poor attendance are non-Indigenous children in metropolitan schools.
- A high proportion of Indigenous students have low levels of attendance, making them over twice as likely to be at educational risk. Achieving adequate levels of education is one of the key contributors to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.
- RREAC notes that the Minister for Education has expressed an intention to look at the area of disengaged youth and encourages the Minister to conduct a review.

Regular attendance at school is important for a student to learn. A child's academic achievement is at risk if they regularly miss more than half a day of school a week. Poor educational outcomes can affect student's work skills and their ability to participate in the workforce. It can also affect their level of participation in the community. (Report 9, August 2009).

In addressing the significant issue of non-attendance and disengaged youth ALTA-1 (CARE school managed by AISWA) engages passionate people who work in partnership with critical community groups to make a difference for the disengaged youth. Alta-1 provides an alternative education program for young people between the ages of 15 and 19 years. The program enables young people who are not suited to mainstream schooling to complete secondary education. The successful model at Alta-1 Albany provides a learning environment for students who have a chronic history of non-attendance and have struggled to fit anywhere else. Staff work hard at helping students build real and healthy relationships with their teachers, mentors and peers. Whilst they work hard to grow the academic skills within students, as much time as possible is also spent exploring the development of emotional and spiritual tools and skills.

RREAC encourages the Hon Peter Collier, Minister for Education, to further investigate and address the challenges of non-attendance and disengaged youth.

## **Community College Model**

RREAC members spent half a day with staff and students at Mount Barker Community College. The college is a Kindergarten to Year12 public school, situated 50km north of Albany. Students come from Mount Barker and the surrounding rural communities. Approximately 7% of students are indigenous and a similar number from Afghanistan.

RREAC endorses the community college model at Mount Barker and noted its success in engaging both students and the wider community. Similarly, Merredin College operates in a similar manner. Key factors leading to success include strong leadership, capacity building, inter agency networking – people working together (health and education), and partnerships.

RREAC acknowledges differences in communities but notes the success of the community college model in both the Wheatbelt and Great Southern Region and recommends information sharing between schools and communities where similar models are being established in the regions e.g. Carnarvon.

### **On-line learning**

The biggest impact over last number of years in the Great Southern Region has been video conferencing. North Albany Senior High School (NASHS) is the lead school with the Great Southern Cluster comprising 6 schools. 8 senior school courses are taught via video conferencing with positive face-to-face interaction taking place. A significant advantage is the interaction between schools and teacher involved e.g. professional development conducted from NASHS throughout the year. Revision seminars are also delivered to regional towns such as Katanning.

Video Conferencing - Professional Development for staff included topics such as Introduction of the Australian Curriculum and what it might mean for Year 7's coming into high school.

A significant challenge for the cluster is that video conferencing facilities and maintenance are managed by school with no financial support from the Department of Education. The financial burden on the school is significant and may impact on delivery in the future.

The issues highlighted in Albany correspond to those identified in the Kimberley Region in 2012. RREAC within its report on the *Future Uses of Technology in Rural and Remote Schools* noted that ICT is potentially a powerful tool for extending educational opportunities particularly for those students located in regional and remote areas. Improving the quality of education and training is a critical issue. ICT can enhance the quality of education in several ways: by increasing learner motivation and engagement by facilitating the acquisition of basic skills, and by enhancing teacher training. ICTs are also transformational tools which, when used appropriately, can promote the shift to a learner-centred environment.

As identified above a number of challenges face not only the education sector but the wider community as a whole. However, these challenges are not insurmountable – planning, policy development and a strategic co-ordinated approach is a way forward for regional communities. Key challenges include: enhancing access; raising quality; capacity building and fixed and recurrent costs.

Recommendation 3 within the report stated that *all education sectors in our regional and remote areas have the capacity to ensure that teachers and all school staff have the support and training to utilise technology effectively to maximise student outcomes and to foster professional growth.*

RREAC will continue to pursue the issue of good practice related to technology within the education sector to provide ongoing feedback to inform the Minister of emerging issues and developments.

### **Recommendation**

That the Minister notes this report on the issues noted during RREAC's regional meeting in the Great Southern Region (centres in Albany) in September 2013.