



## **Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC)**

### **Report: Enhancing student aspirations - non-ATAR pathways to further education**

21 December 2016

## 1. Introduction

Attaining the required ATAR<sup>1</sup> can ensure direct access to a chosen university course (direct pathway). However completion of a Certificate III or IV, Diploma or Advanced Diploma TAFE course can create a pathway into further education (which could include university education) (indirect pathway). *Both direct and indirect pathways can be aspirational.*

Completion of a Certificate III or IV can pathway into a Diploma or Advanced Diploma TAFE course. In the university context, for example, depending on the course and the tertiary institution -

- Completion of a Certificate IV, may meet entry requirements for an undergraduate course.
- Completion of a Diploma or an Advanced Diploma, may meet entry requirements for an undergraduate course with what might be called advanced standing.
- Completion of a Certificate III, may mean that a student is eligible for university preparation courses.

Pathway entries can be popular - the Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) explained to the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) that more than 30% of GUC students have come to GUC from TAFE to undertake tertiary study; for example, in August 2016 there were 26 students attending GUC to upskill their business study from a Certificate IV to a Bachelor degree.<sup>2</sup>

While consideration of indirect pathways may more often occur in the context of an ATAR result that falls below the minimum for tertiary course entry, there is an opportunity for these pathways to be better communicated to students as they are considering their WACE course.

## 2. The issues

During RREAC's regional discussions in the Mid West region<sup>3</sup> there were consistent views that the opportunity for a non-ATAR pathway to university study, or a pathway to a Diploma or Advanced Diploma TAFE course, was lacking or misunderstood -

- Views were expressed that there was little information about the possibility of vocational education and training pathways to further education for students considering their WACE.

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<sup>1</sup> The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is the primary criterion for entry into most undergraduate-entry university programs in Australia.

<sup>2</sup> Discussions between RREAC and GUC in August 2016 during RREAC's Mid West regional visit.

<sup>3</sup> Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council, *Regional Report: Meetings in the Mid West Region - 29-31 August 2016*, Report to the Minister for Education, (December 2016).

- Some participants spoke of an overly strong focus by schools on the attainment of an ATAR. As noted by one person with whom RREAC met *“There is a lot of pressure in Year 12 on ATAR. There are so many other pathways to be promoted.”*
- There was also a perception that schools might guide students to enrol in a Certificate II or III vocational education and training course to ensure completion and attainment of a WACE. It was noted that a Certificate III or IV might have been achievable and could have provided a future pathway option to further education.
- *“Teachers know it - but parents do not understand it - so at Careers Night parents think that ATAR is the only pathway to university.”*

RREAC recognises that the selection of a Certificate IV course (and some Certificate III courses) is also dependent on whether it is feasible for a Year 11 or 12 student to complete given the practical components required by the courses and a possible lack of opportunity for work placements, especially in rural or remote areas.

Differing views were expressed regarding where the responsibility lies with regard to communicating the direct and indirect pathways to further education. However TAFE, GUC and schools all acknowledged that the message is not being communicated clearly enough (if at all) to students and their families in order for the student to aspire to a pathway entry to university (or a Diploma or Advanced Diploma TAFE course) when they are choosing a VET course as part of their WACE.

### 3. Questions to be asked at the local level

Issues that arose during RREAC’s discussions included<sup>4</sup> -

- What career guidance and advice is given to students and their parents from their local TAFE, from universities and the government and non-government school sector?
- Is that information adequately and accurately communicated to students and their parents?
- Do schools need to increase awareness that when students are choosing VET as part of their WACE they can do more than a Certificate II or Certificate III, and by so doing, increase any current or future aspirations for further education?

These are all important questions to be asked by the sector players at the local level; the most detailed documentation and online resources is only of value if it is adequately and accurately communicated to the student and their parents, and staff, in context.

RREAC draws these matters to the attention of the Minister for Education.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

#### 4. Recommendations

1. That the Minister for Education note this report.
2. That the Minister for Education consider writing to the Department of Education, the Association of Independent Schools of WA and Catholic Education Western Australia regarding the opportunities for better communication to staff, and to students and their parents, of the non-ATAR pathways to further education (which could include university education), when students are considering their WACE course.