



University of  
South Australia



NCSEHE  
National Centre for Student  
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University



# Investigating transitions to university from regional South Australian high schools

Sharron King, Cathy Stone, Chris Ronan

2022

Make tomorrow better.

[ncsehe.edu.au](http://ncsehe.edu.au)

# Investigating transitions to university from regional South Australian high schools

2022

Sharron King, University of South Australia

Cathy Stone, The University of Newcastle & NCSEHE, Curtin University

Chris Ronan, Country Universities Centre

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

Tel: +61 8 9266 1573

Email: [ncsehe@curtin.edu.au](mailto:ncsehe@curtin.edu.au)

[www.ncsehe.edu.au](http://www.ncsehe.edu.au)

Building 602: 146 (Technology Park)

Curtin University

Kent St, Bentley WA 6102

GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845

## DISCLAIMER

Information in this publication is correct at the time of release but may be subject to change. This material does not purport to constitute legal or professional advice.

Curtin accepts no responsibility for and makes no representations, whether express or implied, as to the accuracy or reliability in any respect of any material in this publication. Except to the extent mandated otherwise by legislation, Curtin University does not accept responsibility for the consequences of any reliance which may be placed on this material by any person. Curtin will not be liable to you or to any other person for any loss or damage (including direct, consequential or economic loss or damage) however caused and whether by negligence or otherwise which may result directly or indirectly from the use of this publication.

This research was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. The findings, recommendations and guidelines in this report do not represent the views of the Australian Government.

## COPYRIGHT

© Curtin University 2022

Except as permitted by the Copyright Act 1968, and unless otherwise stated, this material may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted without the permission of the copyright owner. All enquiries must be directed to Curtin University.

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) at Curtin University for funding the broader research project from which this report was produced. In particular, we would like to thank the reviewers and Professor John Phillimore and Professor Sarah O'Shea for their input and advice. We would also like to thank Myfanwy Tilley for her invaluable contribution as the research assistant on this project.

We would also like to acknowledge the expert assistance of Monica Davis, CEO of Country Universities Centre for creating the maps from ABS data that are included within this report.

Finally, we would like to thank and express our appreciation to the high school students and school educators for providing their views and opinions on the issue of regional students' transition to university.

# Table of contents

Executive summary.....	1
Section one: The research questions.....	6
Research Question .....	6
Subsidiary Questions .....	6
Definition of terms .....	7
Section two: The SA higher education context .....	9
Impact of SA geography on university participation .....	9
University presence and locations in SA.....	11
How this compares with NSW .....	12
Regional University Centres .....	13
Summary .....	14
Section three: Literature review .....	15
Under-representation of regional and remote students in higher education .....	15
Regional students are less likely to complete secondary schooling.....	16
Regional student transitions.....	16
Regional students have lower university completion rates, but better employment outcomes amongst those who do complete .....	16
Impacts and influences on regional students' post-school aspirations and decisions.....	17
1. Proximity of a university to their community .....	17
2. Deciding whether to leave or stay.....	17
3. Cost.....	18
4. 'Don't know' factor and the Gap Year.....	19
5. Access to adequate career advice and information about university .....	19
6. Student Aspirations .....	20
7. Family and community aspirations & influences .....	20
Section four: Method.....	22
Survey: Current Year 11 and Year 12 Students.....	22
Focus groups and interviews with students and staff .....	23
1. Focus Groups with Students .....	23
2. Interviews with teachers, career advisers and senior staff .....	23
Section five: The schools and their students .....	25
About the schools and their localities.....	25

About the students .....	25
Other demographic characteristics.....	26
Students' engagement with school and their studies .....	26
Section six: Findings from the study .....	29
1. The impact of proximity to a local campus .....	29
2. Impact of cost/financial issues .....	31
Students' knowledge about financial support options .....	32
Students' understanding of the costs of tertiary study.....	34
Sources of information on the financial costs of going to university .....	36
3. Deciding whether to leave or stay .....	36
4. 'Don't know' factor and the Gap Year. ....	38
5. Access to adequate career advice and information about university.....	41
The Impact of university outreach visits to schools.....	41
Career Advice .....	44
6. Student Aspirations.....	46
7. Family and Community Aspirations and Influences .....	47
8. The Impact of parents' level of education on students' post-school choices .....	51
Section seven: Summary of key findings .....	53
Section eight: Recommendations.....	56
Recommendations for universities.....	56
Recommendations for schools and governments .....	56
Recommendations for further research.....	57
The gendering of university aspirations in regional communities.....	57
Interstate differences in HE opportunities and barriers, including infrastructure .....	57
The impact of small regional university campuses on student aspirations .....	57
The impact of Regional University Centres on widening participation.....	58
Mismatch between student aspirations and teacher perceptions.....	58
Employment rates for regional graduates.....	58
References .....	59
Appendix 1: Year 11/12 Student Survey.....	64

## List of tables

Table 1. Distance from each school to Adelaide, nearest campus & RUC; & ASGS classification .....	25
Table 2. Students by gender .....	26
Table 3. Students' year of study .....	26
Table 4. Other demographic characteristics .....	26
Table 5. Approximately how many hours a week do you spend on the following? .....	27
Table 6. How much do you know about the following ways of funding your university education? .....	32
Table 7. How much have you learned from each of the following sources about the types of financial assistance available for university (e.g. scholarships, grants, subsidies, loans)? .....	36
Table 8. Select the box which most accurately represents your level of agreement with the statements below? .....	48
Table 9. How much impact do the following people have on your decision about what you want to do after high school? .....	49

## List of figures

Figure 1. ASGS 2016 Remoteness areas for Australia.....	7
Figure 2. Bachelor's Degree Attainment (15 Years plus) – SA - 2016 ABS Census Data .....	10
Figure 3. Bachelor's Degree Attainment (15 Years plus) – Coastal SA - 2016 ABS Census Data .....	11
Figure 4. Bachelor's Degree Attainment (15 Years plus) and location of university campuses – NSW - 2016 ABS Census Data .....	12
Figure 5. Bachelor's Degree Attainment (15 Years plus) – metro Adelaide - 2016 ABS Census Data .....	13
Figure 6. About how often do you do any of the following? .....	27
Figure 7. If going to university is in your future plans, where are you most interested in attending? .....	30
Figure 8. NSW and SA Comparison of HECS-HELP and Youth Allowance Knowledge .....	33
Figure 9. If you were to go to university how much do you think it would cost each year (think about books, accommodation, living expenses and transport)? .....	35
Figure 10. What do you think you are most likely to do immediately after finishing school? .....	39

Figure 11. How much impact do university open days have on your decisions about what you want to do after school? .....	43
Figure 12. How much impact do careers advisors have on your decisions about what you want to do after school? .....	45
Figure: 13. How far do you expect to go with your education? .....	46
Figure 14. Comparison of NSW and SA Student Responses to “How far do you think your parents/guardian expect you to go with your education?” .....	48
Figure 15. Which of the statements below best describes your mother’s and father’s education? .....	51

## Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CBD	Central Business District
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
DET	Department of Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HECS-HELP	Higher Education Contribution Scheme – Higher Education Loan Program
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
NSW	New South Wales
PLP	Personal Learning Plan
RUC	Regional University Centre
SA	South Australia
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TAFE	Tertiary and Further Education
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality Standards of Australia

# Executive summary

This research sought to identify why high-achieving students (i.e., those in years 11 and 12 in an ATAR<sup>1</sup> stream) from regional South Australia (SA) are transitioning from school to university at lower rates than students in metropolitan areas. Additionally, the project aimed to build an interstate comparison between previous NCSEHE research conducted in NSW on the same issue (Quin, Stone, & Trinidad, 2017).

Compared with students at metropolitan high schools, students at regional and remote high schools are less likely to complete high school, less likely to apply to university, less likely to accept a university offer and, for those who do take up a university offer, they are twice as likely to defer it and less likely to complete their degree (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019, p. 14). Additionally, regional students from high socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds are more likely than those from low SES backgrounds to take up their deferred university positions the following year (Polesel, 2009).

Both the NSW study and other research into the participation and achievement of regional students have revealed a number of barriers impacting the post-school choices and decisions of regional students, including those on an ATAR pathway who are academically capable of achieving a place at university. These can be summarised as:

- Geographical distance to a university.
- Difficulties involved in the prospect of leaving home, family and community.
- Family and community expectations and norms to stay and work locally.
- The significant costs of attending university, particularly when living-away-from-home.
- Difficulty making decisions about career plans, pathways and courses<sup>2</sup>, frequently leading to a postponement of this decision by taking a 'gap year'.
- Insufficient accurate and timely information and advice about careers, courses, pathways; also about what university is like, how much it will cost and what financial assistance is available.
- Lack of role models of people who have been to university, amongst family, friends and community.

This research set out to explore if these and other factors may be impacting on the decisions of SA regional high school students to attend university.

The main research question for this study was:

*Why are significant numbers of high-achieving school students in identified areas of regional SA choosing not to transition to university directly from school?*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 that indicates a student's position relative to all the students in their age group. Universities use the ATAR to help them select students for their courses and admission to most tertiary courses is based on a student's ATAR plus any applicable adjustments (University Admissions Centre, 2021). To be eligible for an ATAR, high school students must choose certain courses in Years 11 and 12, in which case they are considered to be on an ATAR stream or pathway.

<sup>2</sup> Course is the term used in this report to denote a full course of study – e.g. a university degree.

### **Subsidiary questions were as follows:**

- What do academically capable SA regional students see as the major barriers preventing them from going to university?
- What impact does student housing and accommodation arrangements have on regional SA student transitions?
- What are the major influences on a student's decision to transition or otherwise to university?
- What other post-school options are being chosen by regional SA students with ATARs above 60?
- What impact does online learning and regional information technology infrastructure have on regional student transitions?
- How does the unique geography of SA impact the transition of regional students to university?

### **Method**

These questions were explored through surveys and focus group discussions with Year 11 and 12 students, along with staff interviews with teachers, principals, career advisors and other school educators. In total 14 schools in regional SA participated in the survey. Of these, eight schools participated in focus groups and nine schools participated in school educator interviews. A total of 198 students participated in the survey while 124 students participated in focus group discussions, and interviews were held with 23 school educators.

### **Key Findings**

The findings from this research show both similarities to and differences from the findings of the NSW study, as well as supporting many of the findings from other research into factors impacting regional school transitions to higher education (HE).

Similar to the NSW findings:

- Cost and finances played a significant role for the majority of students in decisions about whether to go to university, with particular concerns about relocation and accommodation/living costs.
- There was a lack of knowledge about financial support options such as scholarships and government benefits, amongst both students and school educators.
- These regional students were concerned about leaving their local area, their family, friends and local employment, in order to attend university. Concerns ranged from loneliness, to expense, to fears about living in college or where else they may live, to finding their way around – hence, deciding whether to leave or stay was a complex and difficult decision.
- The popularity of taking a gap year was similarly high, with many students undecided not only about whether to go to university but also what course or type of future career they wanted.
- Access to adequate career advice and information was lacking; both in terms of what was available at their school, as well as in terms of the type of advice and information from the universities themselves.
- The regional students in an ATAR stream largely had aspirations towards university.
- Parental aspirations were also high, with the majority of students reporting that their parents were supportive of their aspirations.

However, unlike the NSW study:

- There was a widely-held perception amongst both students and school educators that 'local' is not as good as 'city' when it comes to the quality of the university experience and ultimate qualification. However, this difference is also consistent with the difference in the types of campuses available in SA versus NSW, as outlined in Section Two.
- University outreach visits were not seen as helpful by either students or school educators, with both groups regarding them largely as marketing exercises for the universities rather than of practical help to students.
- Visits to cities and university campuses were arranged by many of the schools, with both students and staff finding these much more helpful.
- Boys appeared to be under more pressure than girls to 'stay local', through undertaking a trade, finding local employment, or working on a family farm, rather than go to university; additionally, the lack of course/subject availability at local campuses was perceived as an obstacle to pursuing a course of study locally, particularly for boys.
- Fewer than 10 per cent of fathers had been to university (compared with 25 per cent of mothers), which may impact on parents' university aspirations for boys, also on boys' aspirations for themselves.
- The greater geographical isolation of SA regional students results in fewer opportunities for transition to university for these students.

These findings also closely reflect and support the other recent research outlined in the literature review. Lack of access to a university in or near their home created significant challenges, financially, emotionally and psychologically, with boys appearing to be particularly under pressure. Cost was a determining factor, particularly for lower-income families, with a significant part of the cost of university related to moving away from home, housing and accommodation arrangements.

The importance of "quality career advice" (Austin et al., 2020, p. 34) is also evident in the findings, along with appropriate and targeted university outreach that includes school visits to cities and universities.

With online education delivery becoming much more prevalent, career advice also has a role to play in ensuring regional students have the information they need to help them consider this as an option, including knowing about the support and infrastructure available through a Regional University Centre (RUC)<sup>3</sup>.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations, based on the findings from this study, are offered for schools, universities and governments, along with recommendations for further research.

---

<sup>3</sup> Regional University Centres (RUC) are an emerging initiative across Australia that create more options for students to study in their hometown. These centres support students who are studying online or by distance and provide high-speed internet, computer facilities, study spaces, face-to-face academic support, and wellbeing support (Australian Government DESE, 2021).

## **Recommendations for universities**

We recommend that universities:

- Work with regional schools and their local communities, seeking the input of schools, students, parents and other community stakeholders such as local business and industry, to determine how university visits to schools can be improved and made more relevant to the needs of the local community, with the focus on understanding university in general, building aspirations and widening HE participation.
- Ensure that students, parents, and schools are proactively directed to accurate and easy-to-access information about costs, financial support, scholarships and other practicalities of going to university.
- Expand peer mentoring programs to encompass transition support for both prospective regional students as well as first year undergraduates.
- Seek to collaborate with schools, local communities and industries to develop innovative ways to increase the range and diversity of courses available to those living in regional areas.
- Work closely with Regional University Centres and regional campuses with a view to encouraging/supporting online university options for regional high school students with face-to-face support/contact/technology infrastructure provided through RUCs and local regional campuses.
- Work with schools, students and parents to develop a system by which contact can be maintained with students who have deferred a university place; thereby providing students with an avenue to continue to discuss/consider their university options whilst on their gap year.

## **Recommendations for schools and governments**

We recommend that:

- The federal government seeks to improve incentives for universities to collaborate with each other and the RUC network in order to provide greater diversity of course offerings for regional students to stay and study locally.
- Schools and government education departments ensure that school career advisors are sufficiently resourced and supported, through professional development and adequate time, to keep up to date with accurate career information and advice, relevant to the needs of their students and local community, including online options for students and how these can be supported.
- Governments, whether at state and/or federal level, adequately fund and support all regional schools to run school excursions to universities, which include gaining knowledge and experience of university campuses, finding out about both on- and off-campus accommodation, using public transport and talking with other students about what studying and working in the city is like.
- Government financial support for regional students be reviewed to ensure that university is affordable for all students, irrespective of family financial situations.
- The federal government considers differences between Australian States when deciding on HE investment, as each one has its own particular geographical and socio-economic challenges that impact upon HE attainment.

## **Recommendations for further research**

This report has identified several issues within the findings that would benefit from further research.

1. The gendering of university aspirations in regional communities.
2. Interstate differences in HE opportunities and barriers, including infrastructure.
3. The impact of small regional university campuses on student aspirations.
4. The impact of Regional University Centres on widening participation.
5. Mismatch between student aspirations and teacher perceptions.
6. Employment rates for regional graduates.

## Section One: The research questions

This research sought to identify why high-achieving students (i.e., those in years 11 and 12 in an ATAR<sup>4</sup> stream) from regional South Australia (SA) are transitioning from school to university at lower rates than students in metropolitan areas.

Additionally, the project aimed to build an interstate comparison between previous NCSEHE research conducted in NSW on the same issue (Quin, Stone, & Trinidad, 2017), to be referred to subsequently in this report as ‘the NSW study’. This comparative research explores if the factors identified in the NSW study transcend Australian state borders, in order to begin to develop a national response to the factors that are identified as inhibiting regional student transitions to higher education (HE). This project was somewhat complicated and delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic that reached Australia in early-2020, resulting in the temporary closure of schools and university campuses, and the rapid development of online subject material provided to high school students as an alternative to face-to-face classes. Although schools were not closed for long periods of time in SA, there was a policy on minimising visitors in schools, which impacted the ability of the research team to make site visits. It was therefore not possible to collect data for this project during 2020 as intended, so data collection was delayed until the first half of 2021, when SA schools were comfortable inviting external researchers into their school and when travel to regional communities become more practical.

### Research Question

Why are significant numbers of high-achieving school students in identified areas of regional SA choosing not to transition to university directly from school?

### Subsidiary Questions

- What do academically capable regional students see as the major barriers preventing them from going to university in SA?
- What impact does student housing and accommodation arrangements have on regional SA student transitions?
- What are the major influences on a students’ decision to transition or otherwise to university?
- What other post-school options are being chosen by regional SA students with ATARs above 60?
- What impact does online learning and regional information technology infrastructure have on regional student transitions?
- How does the unique geography of SA impact the transition of regional students to university?

---

<sup>4</sup> The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 that indicates a student’s position relative to all the students in their age group. Universities use the ATAR to help them select students for their courses and admission to most tertiary courses is based on a student’s ATAR plus any applicable adjustments (University Admissions Centre, 2021). To be eligible for an ATAR, high school students must choose certain courses in Years 11 and 12, in which case they are considered to be on an ATAR stream or pathway.

## Definition of terms

It is important to acknowledge that the terms regional, rural, and remote are often contested, used interchangeably, or homogenised across different research.

For example, Pollard's (2017) work on remote students makes a clear distinction when defining those communities. However, the Naphthine Review combined Regional, Rural and Remote into one category – 'RRR' – and often speaks of 'RRR' students as one equity group (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019).

A common way to geographically categorise communities is through the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), as used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ASGS has five classes of remoteness based on relative access to services, i.e., major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. These are illustrated in the map below.

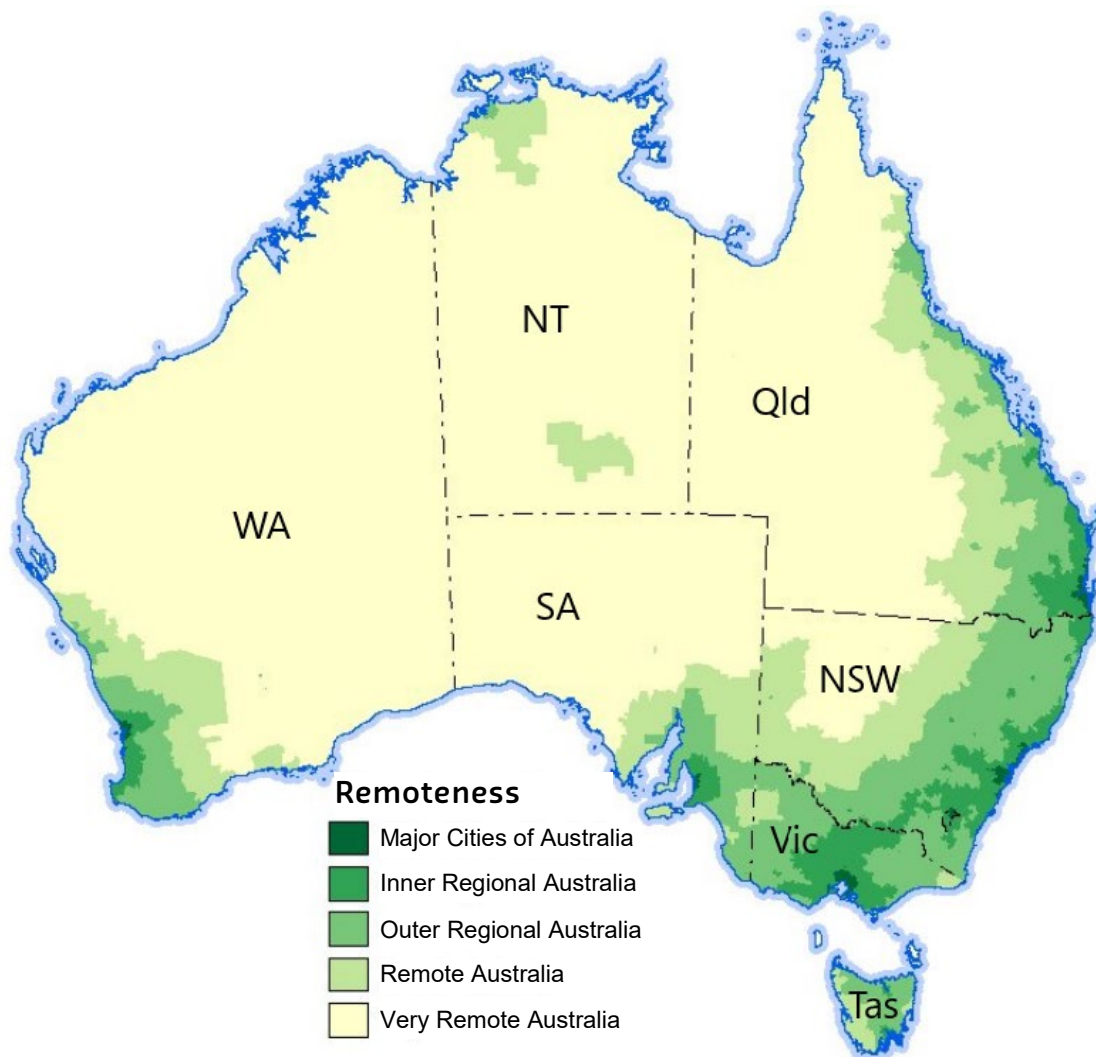


Figure 1. ASGS 2016 Remoteness areas for Australia

As can be seen from this map there is a significant difference in the distribution of outer regional to very remote areas between SA and NSW with SA having a greater proportion of its land mass designated as remote or very remote.

The classifications of inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote Australia are often used in education research. However, the Naphthine Review highlighted that the ASGS framework has not been specifically designed for use in relation to education and, as a result, there are limitations that make it difficult to use for tertiary education purposes (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Some research used within the literature review for this report does reference the ASGS framework; however, the research team decided that within this report, for simplicity, to use the term 'regional' when referring to all non-metropolitan areas of SA; that is, any place outside of Greater Adelaide. Also, for consistency with the Australian Government-designated equity classifications, the term 'regional and remote' is used in the Australia-wide context, for example when discussing Australian education and equity statistics more broadly.

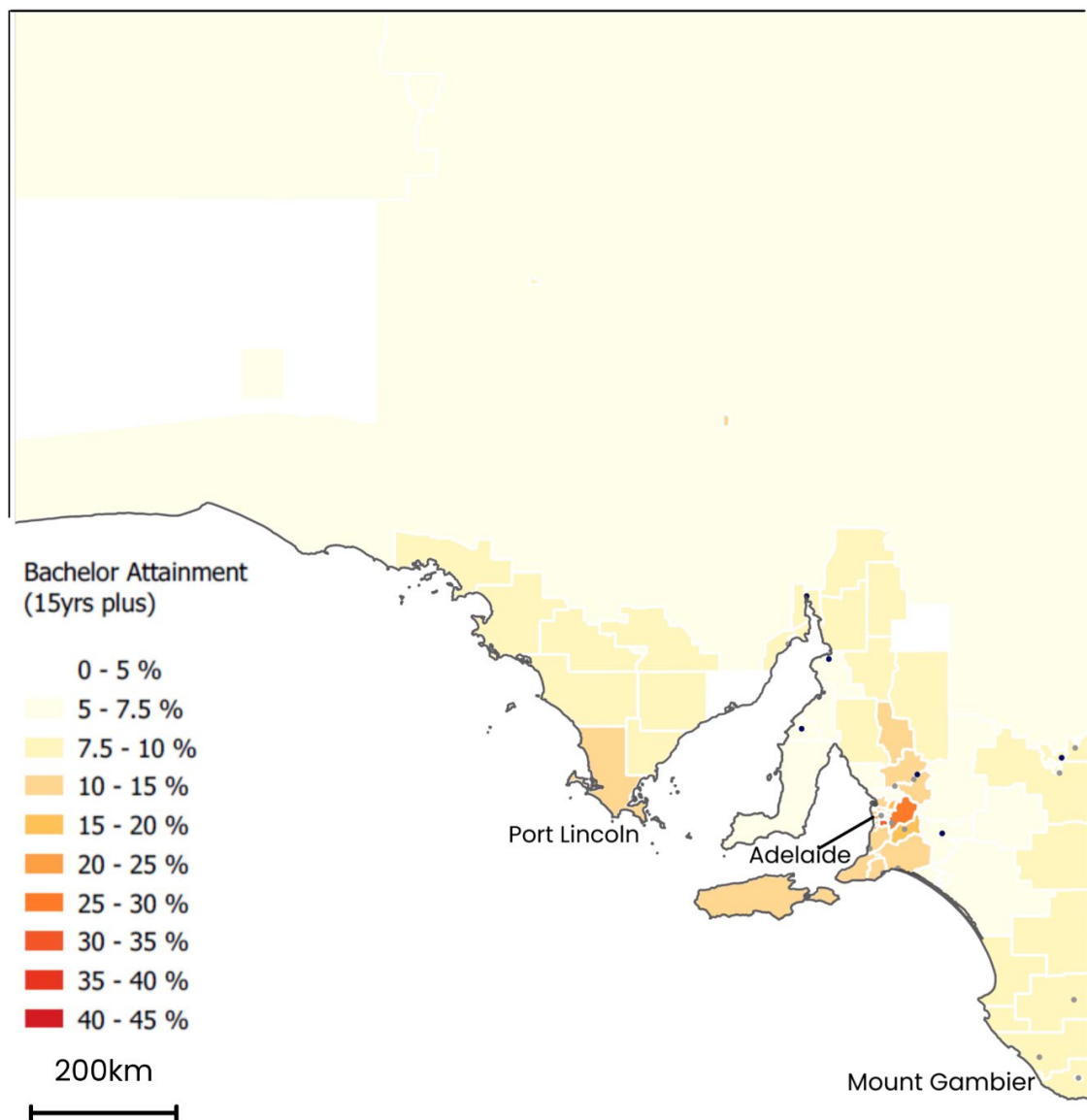
Every community has unique geography, cultural identity, and history – no categorisation can fully capture this complexity. Throughout this report, comparisons are made between NSW and SA geography and HE infrastructure. However, rather than making these comparisons based on geographical categories, each point of comparison is made within the local context of the two states and the experiences of the students who participated in the study. Further exploration of the geographical characteristics of the schools selected for this research can be found in Section Five.

## Section Two: The SA higher education context

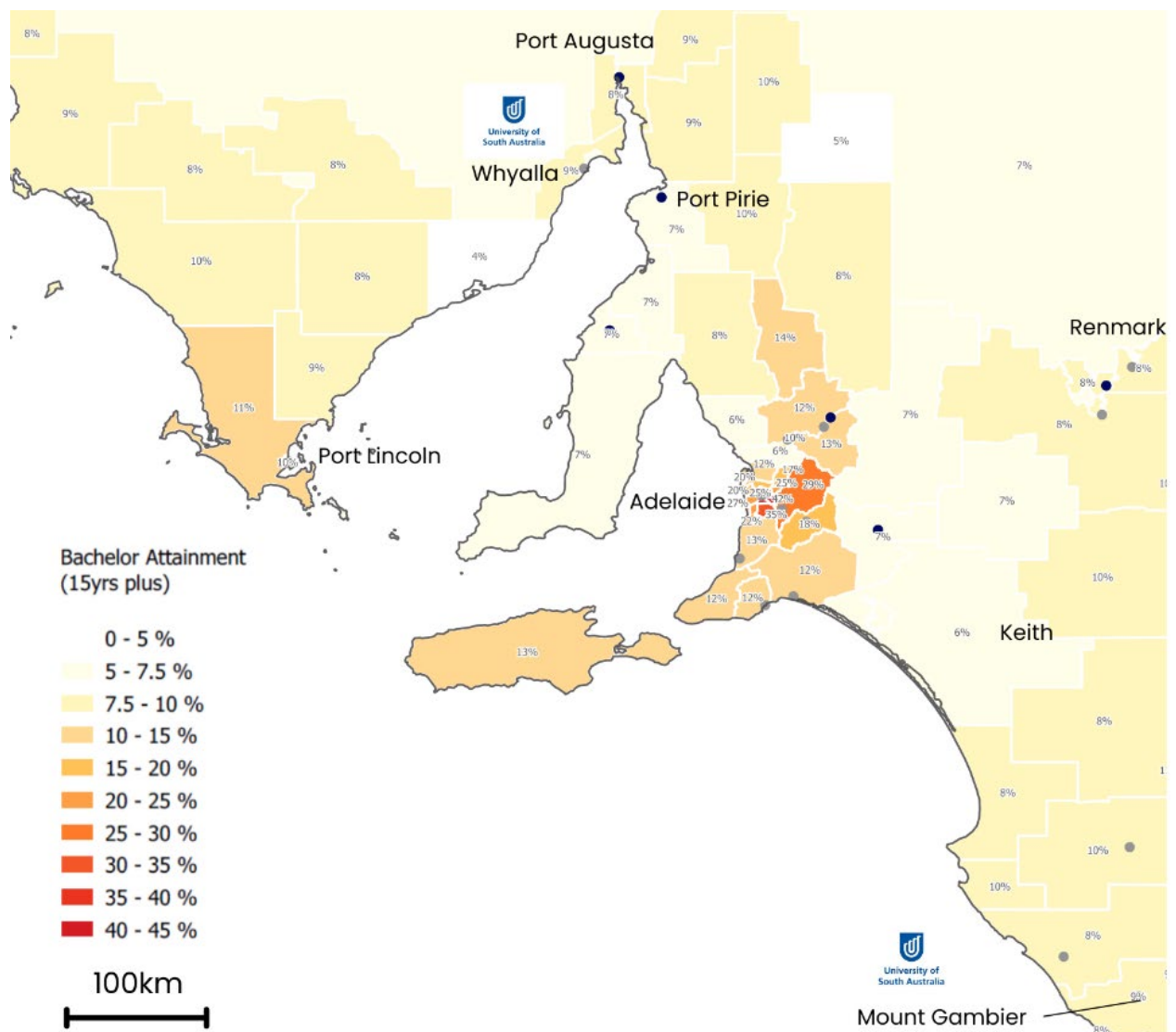
### Impact of SA geography on university participation

South Australia has a unique geography that impacts HE provision in the state. Seventy-seven percent of the SA population resides in Greater Adelaide, which is significantly more concentrated than metropolitan centres in other states (SA Government, 2021). For comparison, 64 per cent of the total NSW total population resides in Greater Sydney (NSW Government, 2021). The population concentration in Adelaide means that regional SA communities are small. The two largest communities outside of Adelaide are Mount Gambier and Whyalla, yet they only have 25,512 and 21,501 people in their respective populations (ABS, 2016). In addition to having smaller regional centres, there is also greater distance between towns when compared to the Eastern Australian states. These factors present significant challenges for universities to create viable access to HE in regional SA communities compared to other states.

Across Australia, people in regional, rural, or remote areas are less than half as likely to gain a bachelor's degree and above qualification by the time they are 35 years old, compared with those from metropolitan areas (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). In 2019, 39.7 per cent of people in metropolitan communities had obtained a bachelor's degree, while in Inner Regional, Outer Regional, and Remote communities, attainment was 20.5 per cent, 18.9 per cent, and 16.3 per cent respectively (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Regional SA has even lower bachelor's degree attainment rates than the national regional average. Figure 2 shows 2016 Census data for the highest level of educational attainment across regional SA.



**Figure 2. Bachelor's Degree Attainment (15 Years plus) – SA - 2016 ABS Census Data**



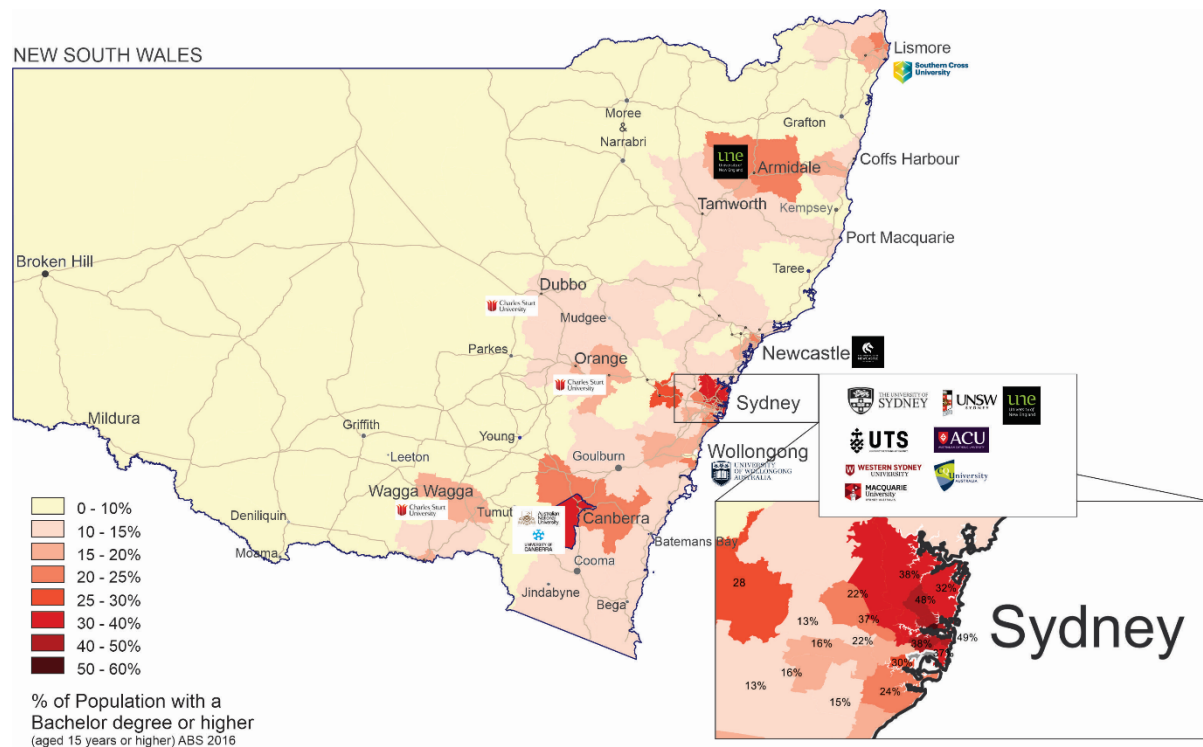
**Figure 3. Bachelor's Degree Attainment (15 Years plus) – Coastal SA - 2016 ABS Census Data**

SA has three main universities all based in metropolitan Adelaide. The only formal regional campuses are in the state's two largest regional centres of Mount Gambier and Whyalla. The Mount Gambier campus has been operating since 2005 and Whyalla has had a university campus for several decades. Both operate as satellite campuses of a metropolitan university and offer a limited selection of courses. They are also isolated, being 434km and 385km away from Adelaide respectively. Their presence does not appear to make a significant difference to the university participation rates in their communities, with bachelor's degree attainment rates being no higher here than in other areas of regional SA. In addition to these two regional campuses, all SA universities have some presence in regional SA; however, these are not full campuses that offer learning and teaching more broadly. Instead, they are specific medical training hubs, research centres, entrepreneurial innovation hubs or study centres.

## How this compares with NSW

Comparatively, NSW has multiple regionally headquartered universities located in larger regional centres. These universities offer a comprehensive selection of courses, some being directly targeted towards the communities in which they operate. This is a significant difference in HE access compared to SA.

Bachelor's degree attainment in NSW also has a different profile from SA, as shown in Figure 4.



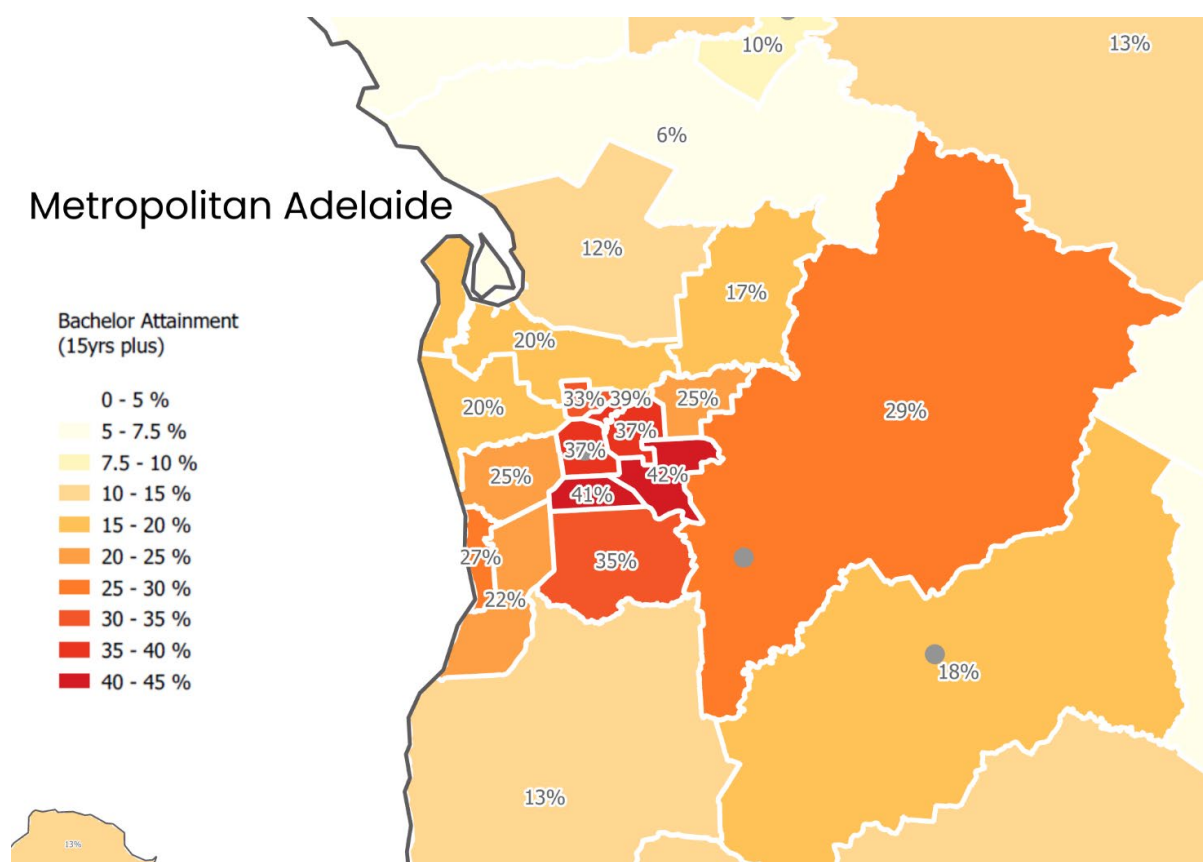
**Figure 4. Bachelor's Degree Attainment (15 Years plus) and Location of University Campuses – NSW - 2016 ABS Census Data**

Figure 4 also highlights where universities in NSW are located and the impact that proximity to these universities has on a community's bachelor's degree attainment rate. This impact can be seen to be significant in communities such as Wagga Wagga, Armidale and Lismore, all of which have a university centrally located within their communities. The higher population density across NSW compared with SA has meant that it has been more viable in NSW to establish regional universities and locate them centrally within large regional communities.

There is however similarity in the apparent impact of small satellite campuses on bachelor's degree attainment rates in NSW and SA. As mentioned previously, the two satellite campuses in SA of Mount Gambier and Whyalla appear to have little impact on boosting bachelor's degree attainment rates. Smaller satellite campuses of universities in NSW communities such as Bega, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, similarly have lower bachelor's degree attainment rates than NSW communities with a central university presence.

Given all of the above, it is unsurprising that bachelor's degree attainment rates in SA diminish rapidly outside the Adelaide metropolitan area. Figure 5 shows that the central

business district (CBD) of Adelaide has a bachelor's degree attainment rate of around 40 per cent, quickly dropping off outside Greater Adelaide. Comparatively, Figure 4 shows that Sydney maintains higher bachelor's degree attainment rates outside of the CBD and into the inner regional areas where large regional universities are located.



## Regional University Centres<sup>5</sup>

Another factor in the HE landscape of both SA and NSW, as well as other Australian states and territories, has been the introduction of the Regional University Centres (RUC) program, established by the Commonwealth Government in 2018. This RUC program supports the development of community-owned and operated university centres, with the aim of enabling students in regional Australia to access and complete HE without having to leave their community; there are currently six RUC sites operating in SA with more planned in the future (Australian Government DESE, 2021). These RUCs take different forms and have a range of relationships with universities. Some provide supported degrees, where they have partnered exclusively with a university to deliver a specific course locally. Others provide general academic, wellbeing and technology support to all students studying at any Australian

<sup>5</sup> Regional University Centres (RUC) are an emerging initiative across Australia that create more options for students to study in their hometown. These centres support students who are studying online or by distance and provide high-speed internet, computer facilities, study spaces, face-to-face academic support, and wellbeing support (Australian Government DESE, 2021).

university. Given the recent addition of the RUCs to the HE environment in SA, there is as yet little research on their impact on high school students transitioning to HE.

## Summary

The discussion of the SA higher education context within this section, particularly in comparison with that of NSW, highlights the unique challenges that SA faces in widening HE participation of regional students. The lower density of its population across its extensive regional areas has largely confined HE infrastructure to the city of Adelaide. The presence of small satellite campuses appears to be less successful in boosting bachelor's degree completion rates when compared to the presence of a university itself, with all of its associated degree offerings and infrastructure. Clearly there is a need for more creative HE solutions in a less populated state like SA, which may include government-funded programs such as the RUC as well as innovations by universities themselves to better cater for the education needs of SA regional communities. Specific recommendations for governments and universities are offered at the end of this report.

## Section Three: Literature review

The issue of access and participation of regional students in higher education has long been of concern to both the Commonwealth and State governments. Governments at both levels have funded research and initiatives aimed at increasing the HE participation of regional, rural, and remote students. The Australian Government conducted an independent comprehensive review into regional, rural and remote education, which highlighted the challenge for regional students transitioning to university (Halsey, 2018). This review has led to the establishment of a National Regional, Rural, and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy, the establishment of a Regional Education Commissioner and significant investment into the Regional University Centre program (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) has also funded Equity Fellowships explicitly to investigate issues impacting regional students.

At the same time there has been a strong government emphasis on the importance of strengthening career education for young people (Australian Government Department of Education, Skills & Employment [DESE]<sup>6</sup>, 2019; Shergold et al., 2020), so that they are in a better position to make informed choices about their post-school study options. The implications for regional students are highlighted by the Education Council's report *Looking to the Future* (Shergold et al., 2020, p. 69) which states that: "There is clearly great need to improve the availability and currency of career advice and information available to school students across the board and in regional schools in particular."

This section examines and discusses key research findings into the barriers standing in the way of regional and remote students' participation in HE participation; what is causing these barriers and how these may be reduced or mitigated.

### Under-representation of regional and remote students in higher education

Student equity data (Koshy, 2016) show that between 2008 and 2015, the number of regional and remote students participating in university increased by 33.1 per cent. However, this growth was slightly less than the growth in total domestic student enrolments over the same period (34.7%) and less than the growth in enrolments of other equity groups, including low socio-economic status (SES) students (50.4%), Indigenous students (72.1%) and students with a disability (88.6%).

Despite the absolute growth in regional and remote student numbers, the proportion of regional students that make up the total university undergraduate population has remained unchanged for over twenty years. In 1997, 19.2 per cent of undergraduate students at Australian universities were from regional areas (Poretti, 2019; Australian Government Department of Education and Training [DET], 2017). In 2014, this had marginally increased to 20.5 per cent and then declined to 19.6 per cent in 2019 (Koshy, 2020).

---

<sup>6</sup> Previously known as Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET)

## **Regional students are less likely to complete secondary schooling**

In metropolitan areas of Australia, 80.3 per cent of students complete Year 12 or equivalent by the age of 19. This rate falls to 63.9 per cent in inner regional areas and 40.3 per cent in very remote regions (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016). Regional and remote students also have lower achievement levels in Year 12 than their metropolitan counterparts and therefore lower rates of transition to university (Cardak et al., 2017). Children growing up in regional or remote areas with the same academic ability as their metropolitan peers continue to be much less likely to attend university (Productivity Commission, 2019).

## **Regional student transitions**

Compared with students at metropolitan high schools, students at regional and remote high schools are less likely to complete high school, less likely to apply to university, less likely to accept a university offer and, for those who do take up a university offer, they are twice as likely to defer it and less likely to complete their degree (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019, p. 14). Other evidence tells us that students from high SES backgrounds are more likely than those from low SES backgrounds to take up their deferred university positions the following year (Polesel, 2009). This has clear implications for students in regional areas, where incomes are lower overall than in metropolitan areas (ABS, 2016).

## **Regional students have lower university completion rates, but better employment outcomes amongst those who do complete**

The Final Report of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019, p. 14) shows that six years after commencing an undergraduate degree in 2012, fewer regional and remote students have completed, compared with metropolitan students (65.5% for metropolitan students, 61.4% for inner regional, 58.5% for outer regional, 48.7% for remote areas). Interestingly, those regional and remote students who did succeed in completing their undergraduate degree had better employment outcomes in 2018 (76.7% in full time employment) than their metropolitan counterparts (71.8%).

While further research is required to more fully understand why this is the case, perhaps the extra persistence required by regional students to complete high school, gain a university offer, accept it, commence and complete within six years, plays a role in their successfully securing employment post-graduation. Another factor to consider is that regional areas have been providing significantly more employment opportunities over the past five years in particular, with figures from the Regional Australia Institute (2021a) showing the job vacancy rate growing at around six percent between 2016-2019; “the fastest since the mining construction boom”. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has seen a further boost to regional employment opportunities, with regional SA experiencing a 107 per cent increase in job vacancies in the 12-month period of May 2020 to May 2021. With professional positions having the highest vacancy levels (Regional Australia Institute, 2021b), regional students who may be returning to their local communities’ post-graduation are therefore more likely to find employment than their metropolitan peers.

## Impacts and influences on regional students' post-school aspirations and decisions

The NSW study found that the major barriers for regional students transitioning to HE were cost, not knowing what to study and insecurity about leaving family and friends. The following section looks at these and other research findings about the various influences that impact the post-school choices and decisions of regional students, including those on an ATAR pathway who are academically capable of achieving a place at university.

### 1. Proximity of a university to their community

A lack of access to a university located in or near their home has been shown to be a major obstacle preventing regional students from attending university (Halsey 2018; James, 2001, 2002; Katersky Barnes et al., 2019; Polesel, 2009). Woodroffe et al. (2017, p. 160) talk about “factors of rurality” and how this “can impact on awareness of the possibility” of educational options, including higher education. In the previous section the challenges in providing a larger university presence in regional SA have been discussed. There have been recent attempts to increase HE access in small regional communities with the RUC program, which provides campus-like facilities, academic, and wellbeing support for students at any Australian university (Australian Government DESE, 2021). Recent research has shown that RUCs are playing a significant role in providing better access and support for students studying online in regional areas (Crawford, 2021). Since 2017, there has been a significant increase in the number of RUCs opening across Australia which are providing more opportunities for individuals to study in their local region. However, there has been no research as yet on the impact RUCs are having on school-leavers and if they would consider studying online with the support of an RUC as a genuine study option.

### 2. Deciding whether to leave or stay

Even if a regional campus is located nearby, young people in regional communities are often faced with the decision of whether to ‘stay’ or ‘leave’ their community (O’Shea et. al., 2019).

*Distance, coupled with poor public transport, have established an invisible wall, as the practicalities of getting out make it physically and emotionally hard. With such a pervasive sense of feeling stuck, it takes particular drive and courage for young people to go to a place like university (Gore, Fray, Patfield, & Harris, 2019, p. 59).*

The challenges of leaving home and community came across strongly in the NSW study, with just over 40 per cent of students ( $n=531$ ) indicating on the survey that they would be reluctant to leave their home, their family and friends. Comments in focus groups also indicated a level of anxiety about moving to a city, where there are so many unknowns and even catching public transport is an unfamiliar activity.

Other research highlights this as a very difficult decision for many regional students (see for example, Corbett (2008); Pollard, 2017). In stories of regional students gathered by O’Shea et al. (2019, p. 7) “the sense of ‘loss’ and ‘leaving’ featured strongly”, as students contemplated “losing connection to family and land as well as the anticipated loneliness” implicit in making a decision to leave. Fray et al.’s (2020, p. 65) scoping study of 65 articles examining HE aspirations of Australian regional/remote students, published between 1991 and 2016, found that 26 of the

articles “identified the emotional cost of relocating in order to access university education as a negative factor influencing student aspirations”. Gender appears to play a part in this as well, with research indicating that boys are less likely to move away, due to family and community expectations that they will stay and work in the local area (Fray et al., 2020), including an expectation in farming communities that sons will stay and take over the family farm (Gore et al., 2019). Overseas studies echo these findings, such as a recent Swedish study (Rosvall, 2020, p. 1027) which showed that boys were less likely than girls to leave their regional community to go to university due to “more [employment] opportunities for boys, and more visible examples of men as role models”, mainly in the areas of typically male-dominated trades and industries.

However, for young people considering university, success is often defined by leaving their regional community irrespective of whether there is a local university option (Ronan, 2020). Staying behind can be seen as a form of failure, as success is contingent upon leaving (O’Shea et al., 2019; Ronan, 2020; Stockdale, Theunissen, & Haartsen, 2018). Not all students want to attend their local university, with the NSW study finding that a number of students (and teachers) viewed their local university as not as ‘good’ as metropolitan universities and considered that employment outcomes post-graduation were greater in the city.

It remains to be seen if the introduction of an RUC into a local community impacts upon the post-secondary choices of regional students, perhaps resulting in more students choosing to study remotely/online with a university of their choice while being able to remain in their home community. Certainly, from early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the development and normalisation of online learning, challenging preconceived ideas about studying online (TEQSA, 2020). Despite the increased normalisation of online learning in universities, there is no research as yet on whether these developments have challenged the notion that success is defined by leaving rural communities in Australia or shaped the post-secondary choices of regional students. While too early to tell, the broader prevalence of online study as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, combined with local support from RUCs, may lead to a greater acceptance of online study as a legitimate and practical choice by regional students.

### **3. Cost**

The NSW study identified cost as the most significant barrier for regional students transitioning from NSW schools to university. For many regional students, going to university means relocating to a city or a large regional town with a university and meeting the associated costs of housing, food and transport on top of the cost of books and equipment and/or consumables necessary for successful course<sup>7</sup> completion. Cost emerges as a significant barrier in numerous other studies and reports on regional student HE participation, with recommendations for universities and governments to improve financial support for regional students (see, for example, Katersky Barnes et al., 2019; Fray et al., 2020; Kilpatrick et al., 2019).

The cost of living away from home varies by location and individual choices as to type and quality of accommodation but it is generally accepted to be over \$20,000 per year. For example, the Australian government requires that an international student has available to

---

<sup>7</sup> Course is the term used in this report to denote a full course of study – e.g. a university degree.

them a minimum of AUD \$21,041 for living costs for one year (Australian Government Study Australia, 2021). This figure is a reasonable guide as to the costs for a domestic student who must live away from home to attend university. For Australian students over the age of 18 who must live away from home to study, the full rate of Youth Allowance paid is \$512.50 per fortnight equating to \$13,325 per year (Australian Government Services Australia, 2021). This amount begins to taper when annual parental income exceeds \$55,626. There is a gap of \$7,716 between what is considered a minimum cost of living for an international student and the income support for students who must relocate to study. It is assumed that parents/guardians will contribute money, or the student would need to work at least eighteen hours per week to support themselves.

#### **4. 'Don't know' factor and the Gap Year**

The NSW study found that 43 per cent of students experienced 'not knowing what to do' as an obstacle to going to university immediately after school. This was the second-highest ranked obstacle (with cost being the first). Students who had a firm view of their career path, the courses they needed to take to pursue their goals and the financial means, were more likely to be planning to make the transition to university upon finishing school, than students who were undecided about their future or who needed/wanted to earn money directly after finishing school. The study found that 50 per cent of students were intending to take a gap year. Many of these students saw a gap year as a time to decide what they wanted to do, or, for those who intended to go to university, a chance to earn money and meet the criteria for Youth Allowance 'independent' status; however, most were uninformed about the details of how to do this, such as not knowing the qualifying period, the amount they needed to earn, or how to apply for payments.

The NSW study also surveyed a cohort of students who had graduated from school at the end of 2015 – about 20 months prior to the study being conducted. Of these school graduates, 51 per cent ( $n=37$ ) reported having taken a gap year after high school, with 89 per cent of them ( $n=33$ ) having gone on to university the following year. This finding contradicts NSW Department of Education internal data from previous cohorts of regional students which showed that five years after finishing school, only 5 to 6 per cent of students who had taken a gap year transitioned to university (Quin, Stone & Trinidad, 2017, p. 5). Clearly, more research is needed into the impact of a gap year on future entry to university.

As previously mentioned, regional students are more likely to take a gap year than metropolitan students (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Additionally, with students from low SES backgrounds being less likely to start university in the year following their gap year (Polesel, 2009), regional students are more likely to be disproportionately affected.

#### **5. Access to adequate career advice and information about university**

The various uncertainties that led to so many students in the NSW study deciding to take a gap year were indicative of the paucity of accurate information and advice that appeared to be available to these students. A lack of accurate and appropriate guidance for regional students in relation to post-school education and careers has been identified, with the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey, 2018, p. 29) recommending recognition for "the growing importance of career information". Other studies make similar recommendations; for example, Woodroffe et al. (2017, p. 160) report that,

within the regional school context, “rural youth are often not given the information and skills they need” to make informed decisions about future careers; while Kilpatrick et al. (2019, p. 561), in their evaluation of a university outreach program in regional schools, conclude that “facilitating access to information, physical, financial, academic and social resources [is] needed for successful participation” of regional students in higher education.

Looking more broadly at students from low SES backgrounds (who are overrepresented in regional schools), a major study of 6,492 students from Years 3 to 12 at 64 NSW public schools, both regional and metropolitan, talks of the need to provide “more detailed and meaningful information” and “tailored advice about what is needed for specific careers” as part of the “nurturing” required to encourage students from lower SES backgrounds to enter university (Gore et al., 2017, p.1398). Similarly, Austin et al. (2020, p. 34) in reference to their work in Australian career development, make the point that while “quality career advice... has the potential to lessen the gap in educational and employment outcomes of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds”, in many countries, including Australia, there are a number of identified problems with the career advice that is currently being offered in schools, “including resourcing; teacher qualifications, knowledge, and attitudes; equity; and regulation”.

## **6. Student Aspirations**

Earlier research found that non-metropolitan students were less likely to aspire to university study than metropolitan students (Alloway et al 2004; Khoo and Ainley, 2005; Kilpatrick and Abbott- Chapman, 2002). However, more recent research indicates that young people from low SES backgrounds, including those in regional and rural areas of Australia, aspire to attend university following high school at a comparable rate to high-SES metropolitan regions (Vernon, Watson & Taggart, 2018; Gore et al., 2019). Additionally, “female students in metropolitan, regional and remote locations appear to be more likely than males to aspire to university” while male students in regional areas are more likely to “prefer apprenticeships to formal education” (Fray et al., 2020, p. 70). More broadly, the career aspirations of Australian students are highly gendered (Gore et al., 2017).

Yet, without opportunities to support and nurture their aspirations, the transition to university is unlikely (O’Shea et. al., 2019). Students who discuss university more frequently with others, including parents, peers, and teachers, are more likely to expect to attend university post school (Vernon & Drane, 2021). Indeed, one recent large study into university access, participation and success, which surveyed 3,180 regional and remote students (Katersky Barnes et al., 2019) concludes that the key factors encouraging aspiration for university are: home and community factors; family, friends, teachers and other school staff; presence of a university campus locally; and school visits both to and from universities.

Clearly, focusing on whether regional students are aspirational or not, oversimplifies the complexity that students face in their post-secondary decision-making process (Ronan, 2020). Much research has highlighted that without concrete opportunities to support and develop their aspirations, students in regional areas are unable to internalise the goals of a university education (Vernon, Watson & Taggart, 2018).

## **7. Family and community aspirations & influences**

Educational and career aspirations for regional students can be shaped by the expectations of significant others, including parents, teachers and peers; also by other community influences such as socio-economic and local employment factors (Fray et

al., 2020; Harwood et al., 2017; Katersky Barnes et al., 2019; O'Shea et al., 2019; Vernon & Drane, 2021). While some research indicates that parents in regional/remote areas are less likely to expect their children to go to university (Koshy, Dockery & Seymour, 2017), other research indicates that parental aspirations are more closely aligned to socio-economic status than location (James et al., 2008; McLachlan, Gilfillan & Gordon, 2013).

We would argue that a more nuanced perspective is needed, given that regional/remote communities can differ greatly from one another, as can the parental aspirations within them (Gore et al., 2019). While we know that “parents living in regional and rural Australia... are less likely than their urban counterparts to have continued onto post-year 12 education” (Kilpatrick et al., 2020, p. 22), this does not necessarily mean that these parents do not have university aspirations for their children. Indeed, the NSW study found that both the regional students and their parents had high aspirations for their futures, with 77 per cent of the students intending to complete a university degree and 75 per cent believing their parents expected them to go to university. This indicated a close match between student and parent aspirations.

This finding is supported by a research study across 64 NSW schools with prospective first-in-family students (Patfield, Gore, & Weaver, 2021). These students aspired to go university upon leaving school and, even though neither parent was university-educated, a high level of parental encouragement for their university aspirations was reported; “students particularly spoke of their parents identifying the chance to build a different life as a direct result of going to university” (p. 603), “with university symbolising a level of income, security, and prestige that has not yet been achieved in the family” (p. 604).

However, while parental aspirations may be high, the capacity to actively encourage and support their child/ren on the path to university can be impeded by their lack of experience, and the “gap between parental aspirations and parental knowledge” (Kilpatrick et al., 2020, p. 33).

## Section Four: Method

The SA Department for Education initially identified 13 schools with which the research team could engage, with each of these schools appearing to have cohorts of students achieving an ATAR greater than 60, but with lower rates of transition to university than SA metropolitan schools. One additional school also participated in the research. See Table 1 in the following section of this report for the de-identified list of participating schools, with information on each school's ASGS remoteness category and the distance of each from Adelaide, from a local university campus and from a Regional University Centre where applicable. This project was cleared by the University of South Australia HREC, ethics clearance number #202791 and approved by the SA Department for Education.

Fourteen schools participated in the survey; this included the 13 initially identified by the SA Department for Education and one additional school that was added during the research project. Eight of these 14 schools also participated in focus groups. Section Four of this report further explores the geographical differences of the schools who participated in the study.

Given that one of the intentions of this research was to be able to compare findings with that of the NSW study, a similar methodological approach, research questions, data collection, and outcomes were selected. Therefore, the approach to the investigation has been similarly multi-faceted and used:

- Quantitative data on ATAR scores, offers, refusals and enrolments collected by the SA Department for Education to establish the existence, and extent of, the issue of academically capable regional students not transitioning to university.
- A literature review to explore the findings of current research in relation to why regional/remote students choose to enrol or not enrol at university.
- Surveys (anonymously completed) of current Year 11 and Year 12 students designed to explore the presence or otherwise of the barriers to university participation identified by both the NSW study and the literature review.
- Qualitative data collected in interviews with school staff and focus groups with Year 11 and 12 students, designed to test the importance and relative weights of the obstacles and barriers to university participation identified in the survey.

### Survey: Current Year 11 and Year 12 Students

A survey was distributed to each of the 14 participating schools, with 198 Year 11 and 12 students responding. A copy of the survey is attached at Appendix 1. The survey was designed to:

- collect demographic data [Questions 1-11]
- ascertain the student's level of engagement with school [Questions 12-15]
- establish the level of aspiration towards university of students and their parents [Questions 16-19]
- identify the factors influencing student decision-making about post-school destinations [Questions 20-21]
- determine the student's current intentions post-school [Question 22] and impact of cost on this intention [Question 23]

- ascertain level of awareness of Regional University Centres and how they can assist/support regional students [Questions 24-25]
- determine the level and sources of knowledge students have about university costs, including awareness of free enabling courses [Questions 26-29]
- discover whether and how often each student had travelled to Adelaide [Question 30].

The survey replicated to a large extent the survey used in the NSW study to ensure that the data gathered in SA schools was as comparable as possible to the NSW data, with some adaptations made for the SA context and the increased presence of Regional University Centres since the time of the NSW study.

## **Focus groups and interviews with students and staff**

This study also conducted focus group interviews with Year 11 and Year 12 students at eight of the 14 schools where the survey was distributed. Additionally, one-to-one or group interviews with staff were held at nine of the 14 schools.

### **1. Focus Groups with Students**

Focus group participants were drawn from the cohort of students who had completed the survey; each of the schools determined which students would participate in these groups. A total of 24 student focus groups were held – seven with Year 11 students, fourteen with Year 12 and three with a combination of both year 11 and 12 students. A total of 124 students participated in the focus groups, 84 girls and 40 boys.

The aim of the focus groups was to drill down into students' thinking about the possibilities of and obstacles to making the transition from school to university. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were recorded with the student participants. The researcher had a set of prompt questions but the conversations were allowed to go in the direction students took them. The prompt questions focused on:

- how students informed themselves about university courses and requirements
- their future aspirations
- their immediate intentions post Year 12
- those individuals the students perceived as having an influence on their decision
- the obstacles they perceived they might face in realising their aspirations
- their knowledge about financial support and pathways to assist students from regional schools to attend university.

Each focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes. The researchers took notes which were subsequently analysed to ascertain any dominant themes in the students' responses. The written notes from each focus group were analysed using NVivo 12 and coded to identify recurring themes and issues.

### **2. Interviews with teachers, career advisers and senior staff**

Interviews were conducted with Year 12 coordinators/year leaders, principals, deputy-principals, career advisors and Year 12 teachers – a total of 23 staff members. These staff members interviewed will be referred to collectively as 'school educators' throughout the remainder of this report. The aim of these interviews was to seek the views of staff regarding how and why their students were making decisions about university study. Notes from the interviews were coded and analysed in the same way as the student focus group notes.

To better understand the 'voices' of the participants, examples of verbatim remarks from both students and school educators are provided in the Findings section of this report.

# Section Five: The schools and their students

## About the schools and their localities

The 14 schools which participated in the study are from geographically diverse regions of SA. The de-identified list below outlines each school's ASGS remoteness category and the distances from Adelaide, the nearest university campus (metro or regional), and closest Regional University Centre.

**Table 1. Distance from each school to Adelaide, nearest campus & RUC; & ASGS classification**

School	Distance to Adelaide in km	Distance to nearest university campus (regional or metro) in km	Distance to nearest RUC in km	ASGS Classification
A	249	206	108	Outer Regional
B	182	182	164	Outer Regional
C	435	3	363	Inner Regional
D	294	156	221	Remote
E	382	52	310	Outer Regional
F	430	7	363	Inner Regional
G	271	183	199	Remote
H	651	267	342	Remote
I	532	148	224	Remote
J	387	5	76	Outer Regional
K	384	182	105	Outer Regional
L	55	55	42	Outer Regional
M	259	259	218	Outer Regional
N	537	337	260	Outer Regional

The size of the schools in the study also varied significantly. Some schools were in larger regional centres and had significant Year 11 and 12 cohorts. Others were 'Area Schools' which are schools that offer Reception<sup>8</sup> to Year 12 in small rural communities. The Year 11 and 12 cohort in some Area Schools that the research team visited consisted of fewer than 10 students.

Additional schools expressed interest in participating in the research and a desire for the research team to visit and facilitate focus groups within their school. However, Covid-19 generated significant challenges in achieving this. A reduction in regional flights plus other travel restrictions due to the pandemic limited the ability of the research team to engage with more schools. The research team aims to continue engaging with these schools to speak with their students and will use this additional data in any further publications beyond this report.

## About the students

A total of 198 students participated in the survey. As mentioned earlier, the 124 students who participated in the focus groups also completed the survey. Hence, responses to the

---

<sup>8</sup> In SA schools, Reception is the name used for the first year of school, prior to Year 1. Children commence school at 5 years of age in SA.

survey questions provide us with an understanding of the whole student cohort involved in this study. This section looks at the demographics of these students, as well as their level of engagement with school and their studies in general.

Tables 2 and 3 show the breakdown by gender and year of study.

**Table 2. Students by gender**

Males	68	34.3%
Females	127	64.1%
Non-Binary	2	1%
Not disclosed	1	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	198	

**Table 3. Students' year of study**

Year 11	72	36.4%
Year 12	126	63.6%
<b>Total</b>	198	

### Other demographic characteristics

All participating Year 11 and 12 students lived and studied in regional SA. Of the total cohort 4 per cent identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 3.5 per cent spoke a language other than English at home. Most of the students, 62 per cent, were living with both parents, 21 per cent with their mother, 3 per cent with their father, 2 per cent with a guardian and the remaining 12 per cent were living independently, with relatives or in other accommodation.

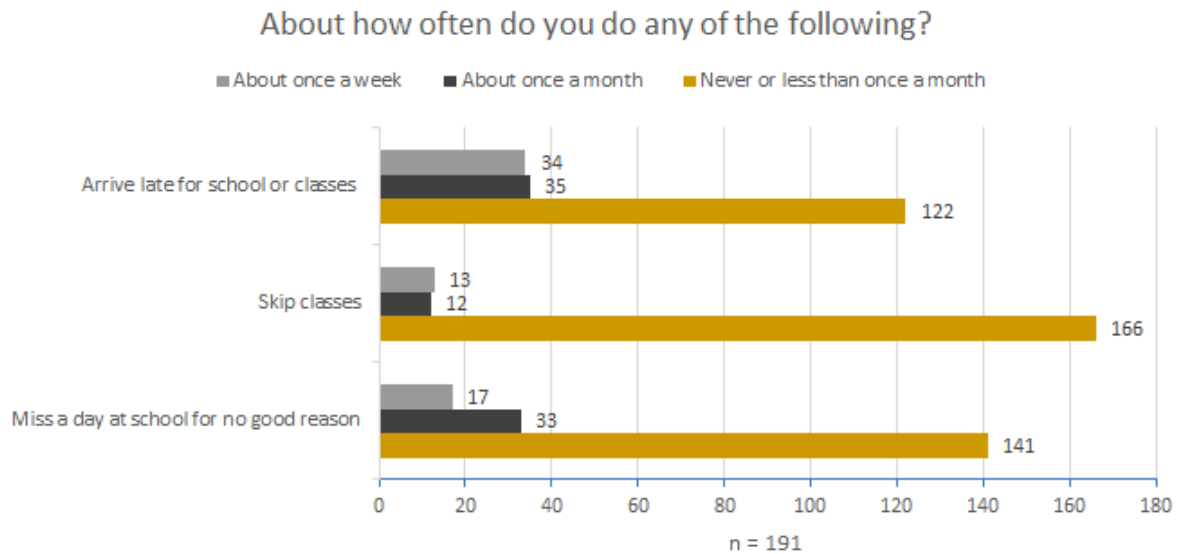
Amongst the 198 respondents, 29 per cent had a sibling or other family member either at university or who had completed a degree. This means that 71 per cent of the school student cohort in this study would be, if they chose to go to university, the first child in their immediate family to attend university. See Table 4 below

**Table 4. Other demographic characteristics**

<b>Student attributes:</b>	<b>% of sample</b>
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	4.0
Spoke languages other than English	3.5
Living with both parents	62.0
Living independently	12.0
Potentially first in family at university	71.0

### Students' engagement with school and their studies

Attendance and participation in school and school-based activities are predictors of academic success and therefore likelihood of receiving an offer of a place at university (Erebus, 2008). As a measure of their engagement with school and study, students were asked how often they missed school or arrived late for classes. Figure 6 highlights that most students did not arrive late for classes, skip classes or miss a day at school for no good reason regularly. This suggests that these students were generally motivated and engaged with their schooling.



**Figure 6. About how often do you do any of the following?**

As another measure of student engagement, the survey asked about the number of hours students devoted to study and school-based activities. See Table 5.

**Table 5. Approximately how many hours a week do you spend on the following?**

	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	More than 15	Responses
<b>Paid work.</b>						
Count	43	18	61	39	30	191
Row %	22.5%	9.4%	31.9%	20.4%	15.7%	
<b>Study outside school hours.</b>						
Count	16	109	50	13	3	191
Row %	8.4%	57.1%	26.2%	6.8%	1.6%	
<b>Participate in school sports/activities.</b>						
Count	110	66	12	1	2	191
Row %	57.6%	34.6%	6.3%	0.5%	1.0%	
<b>Participate in sports/activities outside of school (music lessons, club sports, dance classes etc.)</b>						
Count	79	77	26	3	6	191
Row %	41.4%	40.3%	13.6%	1.6%	3.1%	
<b>Do unpaid volunteer work</b>						
Count	162	25	4	0	0	191
Row %	84.8%	13.1%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	
<b>Care for siblings, parents, grandparents, children etc.</b>						
Count	93	68	23	2	5	191
Row %	48.7%	35.6%	12.0%	1.0%	2.6%	
<b>Totals</b>						
Total Responses						191

Considering that all respondents were in an ATAR stream, the percentage of students (65.5%) studying less than five hours a week outside of school hours seems high; however, this is the same percentage that was found in the NSW study. Like their NSW regional counterparts, these SA students were doing less than an hour a day of extra study. Only 8.4 per cent of the students surveyed said they were studying more than 10 hours per week outside of school time.

Perhaps the large number, 68 per cent, of students working in paid employment for more than six hours a week and almost 36 per cent working more than 10 hours a week is a reason for the low number of hours devoted to study. One variance between the NSW and SA students was that only 25 per cent of the NSW students were working more than 10 hours per week, compared with 36 per cent in this SA study. However, in both studies, the students were in paid work for a higher number of hours each week than they were studying, outside of school.

In summary, based on their school attendance patterns, the SA regional students who responded to the survey were similar to the NSW cohort, in that they were on an ATAR pathway, appeared to be generally engaged with school, with many working part- time in paid employment.

## Section Six: Findings from the study

Through surveys and interviews we sought to establish why fewer academically able regional SA students are transitioning to university than are metropolitan students, the barriers impeding SA regional students' engagement with higher education, and how significant are these barriers from the students' perspective.

This section outlines our key findings. We situate these findings within the context of the following list of barriers to higher education for regional students, gleaned from both the literature review and the findings of the NSW study.

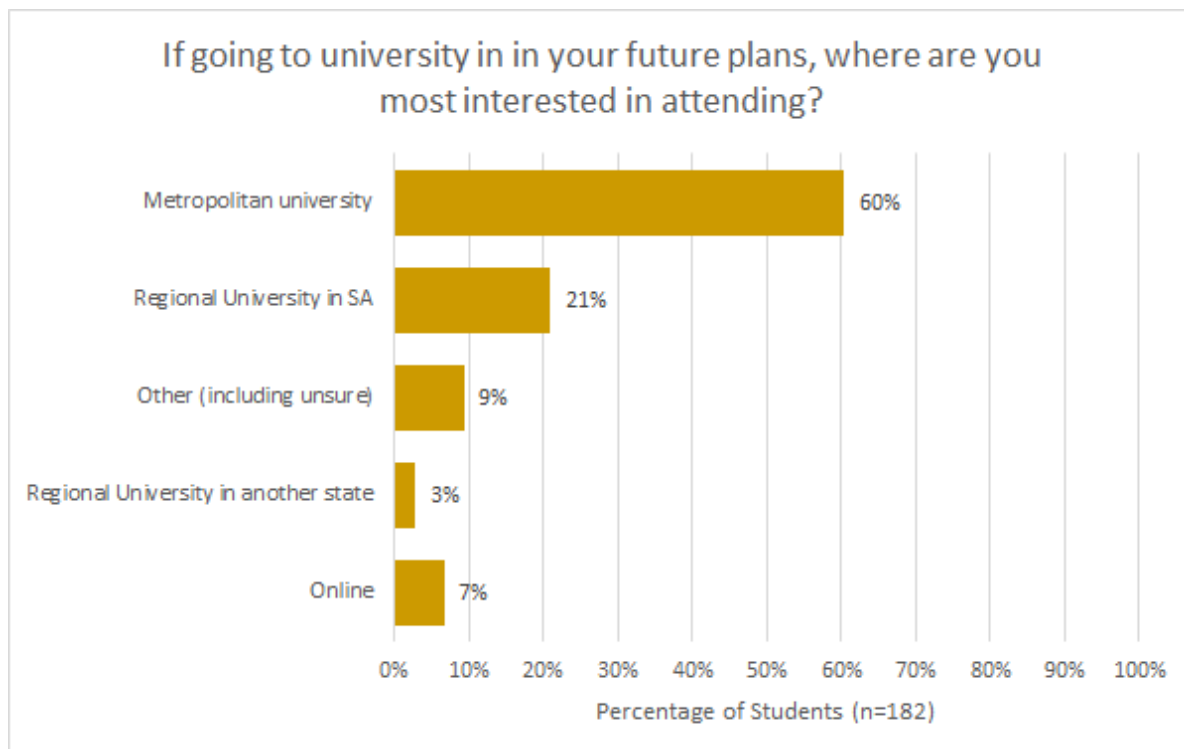
1. Proximity to a university or local campus.
2. Impact of cost/financial issues.
3. Deciding whether to leave or stay.
4. 'Don't know' factor and the Gap Year.
5. Access to adequate career advice and information about university.
6. Student aspirations.
7. Family and community aspirations and influences.
8. The Impact of parents' level of education on students' post-school destinations.

The findings from the analysis of the student survey responses, student focus group discussions and school educator interviews are now discussed, structured under each of the eight points from the list above.

### 1. The impact of proximity to a local campus

The survey of current students included a question on the location of their preferred future university option. Of the 198 participating students, 182 provided a response to this question. As can be seen from the responses in Figure 7, only 21 per cent of the respondents were interested in attending a regional campus in SA. With all the SA universities based in Adelaide and very few regional satellite campuses, it is not surprising that the majority indicated that they wanted to study at a metropolitan university (60%). In the NSW study, only 25 per cent of students wanted to study in a metropolitan university, reflecting the impact of the presence of large regionally based universities in NSW which offer a broad selection of courses, compared to the satellite campuses in regional SA. So, although significantly more SA students wanted to attend university in a metropolitan area than in the NSW study, this is likely to be explained by the lack of regionally based universities and the limited options available at the small regional campuses in SA, as previously outlined.

The NSW study also found that almost 20 per cent of students were unsure of where they wanted to study, while in SA this was 9 per cent, perhaps reflecting the wider choice of university in NSW compared with SA.



**Figure 7. If going to university is in your future plans, where are you most interested in attending?**

Discussions in focus groups with students indicated that, even where there was a regional campus located nearby, many did not want to go there. This was a prevalent view amongst students at five of the eight schools at which focus groups were held, across different locations. While their knowledge of university in general was fairly scant, nevertheless they regarded the local campus as being a second-best option, inferior to going to a university in a major city. Most believed that local campuses were of lower quality compared with metropolitan campuses; also that their options would be limited by going to a local campus due to a more limited choice of courses. While there was agreement that some students may decide to go to a local campus (where they had access to one) they indicated this would only happen “because it was there”, not because students really wanted to do one of the courses on offer. For example, in one focus group, a few of the students said they wanted to study Nursing in Adelaide, even though exactly the same Nursing course was offered locally. When asked why they would prefer to study in the city, rather than at the local campus, they said that there were more opportunities and they were more likely to have a successful career if they completed their degree at a metropolitan campus.

The school educators also tended to be more positive about going to a university in Adelaide than to the local campus within their geographic area. Some staff expressed the view that the local campus had a poor reputation, so they would not recommend students go there; also that the local campus limits the opportunities of students due to the restricted number of courses available. Some noted that boys were particularly limited by the lack of broader course availability, with local courses on offer being seen as more traditionally ‘female’, such as nursing and teaching. Such comments came from staff across three different schools, in different regional areas.

It is noteworthy that the large metropolitan universities in SA have regular outreach programs to the schools at which such negative attitudes towards regional campuses and study centres were expressed. Later in this report the impact of recruitment visits by

universities is discussed, with students generally having a high level of awareness of marketing approaches and being quite negative about universities coming to “talk about how great their uni is” (student focus group). Nevertheless, outreach visits from metropolitan universities may be having an influence on both student and staff perceptions of what constitutes a ‘good’ university.

As previously mentioned, these findings differ from those of the NSW study, in which studying locally was more positively regarded, with only a minority (which included some of the more academically successful students) believing that the local campus was not good enough. The majority were intending to go to a regional university if within a manageable travelling distance. It is worth noting that NSW regional universities tend to be very active in terms of outreach programs to schools within their regional area, promoting both the universities in general and any local campus in the vicinity, with one of many examples being the In2Uni program (University of Wollongong, 2021). However, the NSW study also found that amongst the students who only had access to a smaller satellite campus locally, their intentions to study locally were mainly influenced by whether it offered the course they wanted to do.

Other research indicates that the regional presence of a university and its active outreach programs contribute towards increasing university aspirations amongst regional/remote students (see for example, Kilpatrick et al., 2019; Fray et al., 2020). Further research needs to be conducted with schools and universities to explore what more can be done to encourage students in regional SA to consider local campuses as positive options. As found by Gore et al., (2019, p. 37) in their study of how post-school aspirations are formed, “the local university provides a critical space for newcomers to higher education”. The concerns expressed by students and staff about the financial and social implications of relocation would seem to indicate a need to encourage and support more local university study options for the many regional students who are indeed, along with their families, newcomers to higher education.

## 2. Impact of cost/financial issues

The discussions with students in the focus groups confirmed that cost was a significant barrier for many. As in the NSW study, the cost of attending university was raised by students in every focus group. Discussion focused on costs of relocation, rent, food, transport and loss of income for those locally employed or potentially employed upon leaving school. A common view was that, while parents might be able/willing to help to some extent, the costs would need to be borne largely by the students themselves.

*They’ve always said, if you’re going to do that you’ve got to make the money yourself. That’s just how I was brought up. I would just have to come up with the money myself, but I just don’t know how long it would take.*

For farming families, capacity to fund university depended on external and largely uncontrollable factors such as weather. In the words of one student, it “depends if there’s rain”. In another region, where fishing was a key industry, a view was expressed by students in one focus group that they could not justify going to university and not earning money for three years, when they could go work on a fishing boat and earn a salary straight away.

School educators also believed that the cost of going to university was a significant barrier for many of their students. Some felt that the cost of having to fund a child’s relocation to Adelaide, let alone the other costs of university study, would be out of the reach of most of

the families in their school community, especially if there were several children in the family. As a result, some educators were cautious about recommending university as a pathway, if they felt it was unattainable given the financial reality of family situations.

### Students' knowledge about financial support options

Students were unaware of the details of potential sources of financial support for university, as shown in Table 6, with 62 per cent knowing 'a little or nothing' about Youth Allowance<sup>9</sup> and 73 per cent knowing 'a little or nothing' about HECS-HELP<sup>10</sup>.

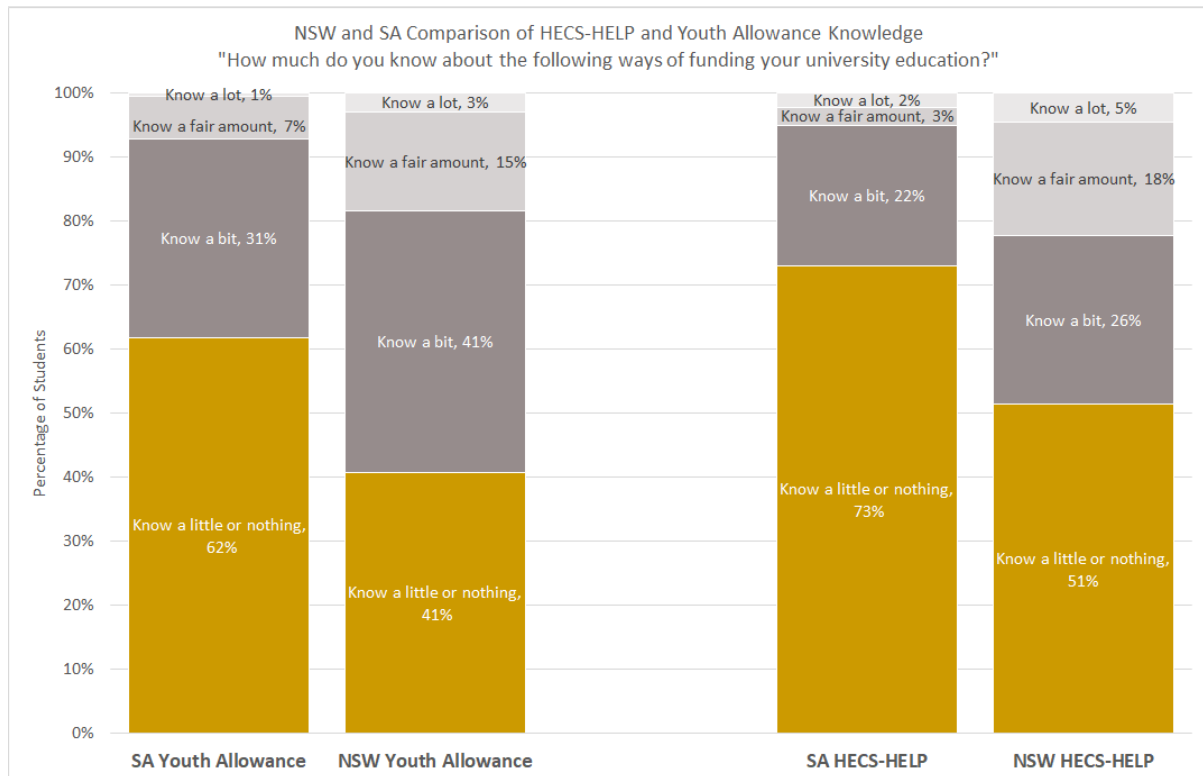
**Table 6. How much do you know about the following ways of funding your university education?**

	Know a little or nothing	Know a bit	Know a fair amount	Know a lot	Responses
Youth Allowance Count Row %	110 61.8%	55 30.9%	12 6.7%	1 0.6%	178
Austudy Count Row %	151 84.8%	24 13.5%	3 1.7%	0 0.0%	178
Abstudy Count Row %	154 86.5%	21 11.8%	3 1.7%	0 0.0%	178
Student start-up loan Count Row %	107 60.1%	64 36.0%	7 3.9%	0 0.0%	178
HECS-HELP Count Row %	130 73.0%	39 21.9%	5 2.8%	4 2.2%	178
Scholarships Count Row %	36 20.2%	97 54.5%	41 23.0%	4 2.2%	178
Totals Total Responses					178

SA students had significantly less knowledge of financial support options than students in the NSW Study. Figure 8 shows the difference between the knowledge of Youth Allowance and HECS-HELP between regional students in the two states. In the NSW study, 41 per cent knew little or nothing about Youth Allowance, while this figure increased to 62 per cent for this SA study. The variance in knowledge of HECS-HELP between these two studies was also significant, with 51 per cent of the NSW students knowing little or nothing the HECS-HELP, while for the SA students in this study it grew to a substantial proportion of 73 per cent.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government means-tested financial assistance for students – includes Abstudy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

<sup>10</sup> Australian Government system of income-contingent loans for higher education (Higher Education Contribution Scheme – Higher Education Loan Program)



**Figure 8. NSW and SA Comparison of HECS-HELP and Youth Allowance Knowledge**

The SA students' lack of knowledge of avenues of financial assistance was similarly evident in the focus groups. Most students knew very little about how the system of government support for students through Centrelink<sup>11</sup> worked, nor did they understand the income-contingent nature of HECS-HELP loans. While there was some limited understanding that they need not pay up-front for university courses but could defer the cost through the HECS-HELP scheme, there was very little clear understanding of what this actually was and how it works. For example, a number of students talked of wanting to be able to pay for their course and avoid a HECS-HELP debt, as their parents were warning them not to go into debt. It is indeed understandable that families with low and/or uncertain incomes would be averse to accruing debt, but without full and accurate information, they are not in a position to weigh up this risk against the income-contingent nature of the loan and the potential financial benefits of gaining a degree.

There was also a great deal of uncertainty about how much money they would need for living expenses in general, and what help and support is available, both through government benefits and directly from universities. Many were unaware of Youth Allowance or any other support through Centrelink and, while some had heard about scholarships, most had no idea how to apply for them. Scholarship application criteria and processes were not well understood, indicated by comments such as: "it can be a bit confusing with, like, what you have to do to obtain them and how to apply for them"; "you get told about them but not how to get them"; and "I know there are scholarships but I don't know who pays for them". Scholarships were generally considered to be only available for the top academic students - as expressed by one student, "getting money from the school for being smart, right?"

<sup>11</sup> Australian Government agency that administers welfare benefits and payments.

Knowledge of equity or rural scholarships was very limited, with many students having no knowledge that these existed, let alone how they might go about applying for them. In one focus group, students indicated they would feel guilty about applying for a scholarship, as they would be wasting the time of the people reading them because they weren't "good enough".

Frustration was expressed with the lack of information that they received from their schools, and from university visits, about these and other financial aspects.

*We don't get told anything but what is a scholarship, when do we apply, how do we apply, who do we talk to? How much does rent in Adelaide cost? It would be good if they told us that...*

As one student phrased it, "the financial thing is the main reason why a lot of people might not go to uni", yet this student also voiced that if she had more information about financial supports, "I would definitely start considering [going to university]". It was clear that the information provided was not easily understood by the students, some of whom felt overwhelmed by the way it was presented.

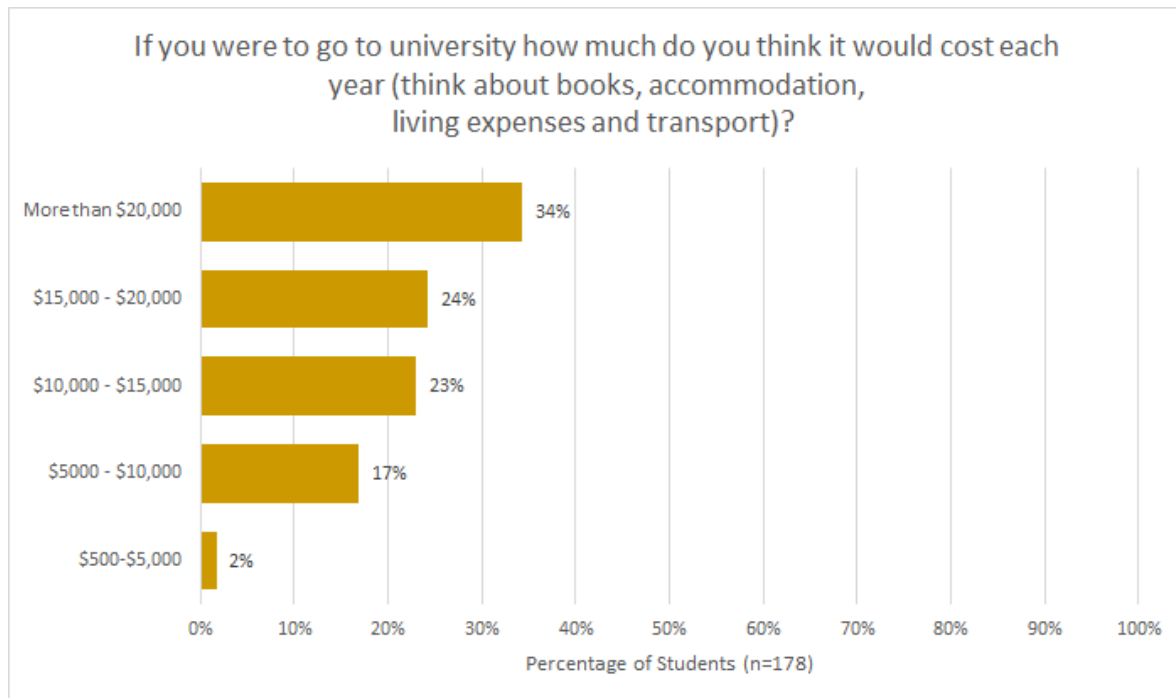
*A few unis do presentations at school, but they bring lots of books and make us look at them – it isn't helpful and they make going to uni sound easy, but we know it isn't.*

Unfortunately, a lack of knowledge and understanding of financial support available was not limited to the students but present amongst many of the school educators as well. They too would become frustrated by not being able to find out more about the financial support available. To quote one teacher, "Do we just google university grants and scholarships? Where do we find that? I am sick of looking". Many of the school educators had relatively little knowledge about scholarships, with once again a common misunderstanding being that they were only available for high-performing students. Most were only aware of the more prestigious scholarships based on academic merit.

An exception to this was at one school where there was a surprising amount of knowledge amongst both staff and students about scholarships in the local region. This was because of a local charity being particularly active in offering financial aid and scholarships for youth projects, which also extended to education, based on financial circumstances rather than grades. Both students and staff were aware of this assistance, which indicates perhaps the importance of devolving information and resources to local communities, and the greater effectiveness of local, community promotion.

### **Students' understanding of the costs of tertiary study**

The survey asked students to estimate the cost of a year at university (excluding the HECS debt). As Figure 9 shows, about one-third of the students thought more than \$20,000 per year is needed, while the majority estimated less than this.



**Figure 9. If you were to go to university how much do you think it would cost each year (think about books, accommodation, living expenses and transport)?**

Of course, the actual cost depends upon where the student chooses to attend university. If students attend university in their hometown or can commute to a university then they can remain living at home and the cost is lower. However, as previously discussed, the lack of regional study options in SA has meant that most students need to relocate to study at university.

Interestingly, students were extremely focused on Adelaide as being the only option for on-campus study, with only 8 per cent of students considering going to university interstate. This is surprising given that parts of the southeast of SA are closer to universities across the Victorian border, in Ballarat and Greater Melbourne, than Adelaide. The focus groups revealed that even students in communities near the Victorian border still looked to Adelaide as their desired option. Students felt that Adelaide was a cheaper city to live in, but more interestingly, they felt their identity was more South Australian than Victorian, and this influenced them to want to go to university in Adelaide.

Assuming the actual cost of attending university and relocating to do so is about \$21,000 per annum (not including HECS; and based on government information for international student needs per year) then around 34 per cent of the students had a fairly accurate idea of the living costs entailed in a year's study at university. However, despite this relative accuracy in the survey, discussion in the focus groups seemed to indicate that many students actually knew little detail of the potential costs of relocating and living away from home. Their estimates varied widely, with some being fairly close to the mark, while others considerably underestimated or overestimated. Suggestions across the focus groups regarding how much money they would need to support themselves at university for a year, varied from \$10,000 to \$45,000. What was clear though in all the focus groups was that students were wanting to know more about the specific expenses they would need to cover, and the cost of these in a city environment. There was a sense of frustration for many that this information was not

being given to them. In the words of one student, “I know I need to save money, but I don’t know how much or what I will have to pay for when I get to uni. Why can’t they tell us that?”.

In the interviews with school educators, a number also admitted not knowing themselves how much it would cost for a student to live and study in Adelaide, so felt very ill-equipped to offer advice on this.

### Sources of information on the financial costs of going to university

As can be seen in Table 7, the survey revealed that the two sources from which students had learned “a fair amount” or “a lot” were parents (39%) and teachers (26%). This varies from the NSW study which found that the greatest sources of information about the financial costs of going to university were “University websites” (39.58%) and “University staff school visits” (33.46%). SA students did recognise that these university sources were helpful, however they did so at almost half the rate of the NSW students (18%). “Other members of the family” (17%) and ‘Social Media’ (14%) also had an influence but the other options appear to have limited impact in disseminating information about financial support.

While the survey showed that many students could accurately predict the likely annual costs of relocation for the purposes of attending university, it also showed they have very little knowledge of the financial support options available. Given students report getting their information on financial assistance from teachers and parents but have low levels of awareness of Youth Allowance and HECS-HELP as discussed in the previous section, this may be another indication that parents and teachers do not have accurate or up-to-date information themselves.

**Table 7. How much have you learned from each of the following sources about the types of financial assistance available for university (e.g. scholarships, grants, subsidies, loans)?**

	Learned nothing or very little	Learned relatively little	Learned a bit	Learned a fair amount	Learned a lot
My parents	15%	21%	25%	30%	9%
Teachers	17%	22%	36%	21%	5%
University Websites	19%	23%	41%	17%	1%
University staff visiting my	28%	24%	29%	16%	2%
Other family members	21%	33%	30%	13%	4%
Social Media	28%	25%	33%	11%	3%
Friends	30%	29%	33%	7%	1%
SATAC websites	31%	29%	32%	6%	2%
Online news	37%	27%	30%	6%	1%
TV, Newspapers	46%	24%	22%	8%	1%

## 3. Deciding whether to leave or stay

As the literature review indicates, deciding whether to leave one’s local community in order to attend university can be a very difficult one to make. This section examines the complexity of this decision for these students, including the various influences at play that emerged from the survey responses and focus group discussions.

The focus group discussions showed great variation in students’ intentions and level of confidence about moving away to go to university. Across the different schools there were

students in focus groups who appeared both confident and certain about leaving to go to university in Adelaide, using words such as “Adelaide gives more opportunities for study, friendships and work”. Amongst these were some who actively wanted to leave their local communities, citing their local area as being “quiet”, “boring” or “a bit of a hole” where there is “not much to do”. Others, although equally confident and certain about going, indicated that they thought they would like to come back and work locally once they had their degree. Some were quite open about the fact that they would miss their families and friends, even though they still intended to leave. It appeared that for most of these students, there was also confidence that their parents would be financially supporting them whilst at university, and/or that they had relatives in Adelaide with whom they could live.

However, there were also students across the groups and schools for whom financial support was much less certain, which impacted significantly upon their post-school plans. For example, in one focus group, initially only one student (male) admitted to wanting to leave to attend agricultural college. For this he was laughed at by the others in the group, who talked of doing trades locally. Interestingly, as the discussion continued, it became clear that the other students would consider going to university if their families could and would support them financially to do so. These were students whose ATARs were estimated by their teachers to be 75-85. The combined factors of the expense involved in going away to university, and the community pressure to ‘stay local’, appeared to be significantly impacting upon the post-school choices and decisions of these academically capable students.

Not all who would have financial support to go to university were confident about moving away. For many, while they expressed high levels of confidence in their ability to meet the academic requirements of university study, their confidence in living in a city, and life outside the classroom in their local area, was low. While acknowledging university would be academically hard, they were more concerned with living away from home rather than the actual study, with some being quite fearful of city life. As one student expressed it, “I wouldn’t even know how to move to a city”. There was considerable concern expressed in some groups about the fear of being alone, feeling lonely, not having friends, and living in a residential college. For many, all their family and friends were in their local community, so it was a huge challenge to think of leaving, whereas those who had family or friends in Adelaide with whom they could initially live, felt more fortunate in this regard, as they would not be navigating the strangeness of university and living in the city all alone. However, despite their fears and anxieties, many felt that moving away for university was the only way to be successful in their desired fields, hence they were experiencing a strong conflict of emotions as they struggled to make a clear decision.

In some of the groups, the possibility was raised of staying in their communities and enrolling in university online, with a few students across different schools indicating that they have thought or were thinking of doing this. However, many more were adamant that they did not want to study online, and therefore were going to have to move away if they wanted to study at university. Their experiences of doing their school studies online during the period where schools were closed due to Covid-19 restrictions had only added to their dislike of this. For example, “I hate online learning, Covid learning was so bad – why would I do that after school?” For those who wanted to go to university, almost all were intent upon a traditional campus experience, even though they were aware of the emotional and financial challenges involved.

The survey findings in relation to online learning were particularly interesting. When students in the study were initially asked if they would consider studying online, only 6.6 per cent indicated they were considering it as an option. Further into the survey, students were also asked:

*Are you aware that there are now a number of Regional University Centres in South Australia where students doing online university courses can go to study, to meet other students, get help from tutors and access books and resources?*

Around 48 per cent of students indicated that they were not aware that these RUCs existed. Students were then asked:

*If there was a Regional University Centre located near where you live, would you be more likely to consider doing an online university course?*

Having been given this brief explanation of the purpose of RUCs in the previous question, 49 per cent indicated that they would be more likely to consider studying online with the support of an RUC. This is a significant change from the 6.6 per cent who were initially considering online study as an option. RUCs are a new concept and awareness of them in regional communities is low. However, the response of students in the survey should illuminate the potential that RUCs have on providing alternative options for regional students who do not wish to leave their community.

The interviews with staff revealed that school educators also think that students will be lonely if they move away to university; and that, generally speaking, students do not want to move away and leave their friendship groups. At the schools where the staff interviews took place, relatively few students do go on to university, so it is perhaps understandable that educators have formed this view. They also referred to the community pressure for students to stay and work locally, especially in the areas that have strong local industries, such as farming, fishing and vineyards. The financial reality for most families, of not being able to afford the expense of sending a child to Adelaide for university was also raised. For all these reasons, in most of the school educator interviews it did not appear to be the case that educators were particularly encouraging of students' aspirations of going to university, being more likely to encourage students to stay and look for employment opportunities, as well as perhaps further education and training where this was accessible, within their local communities.

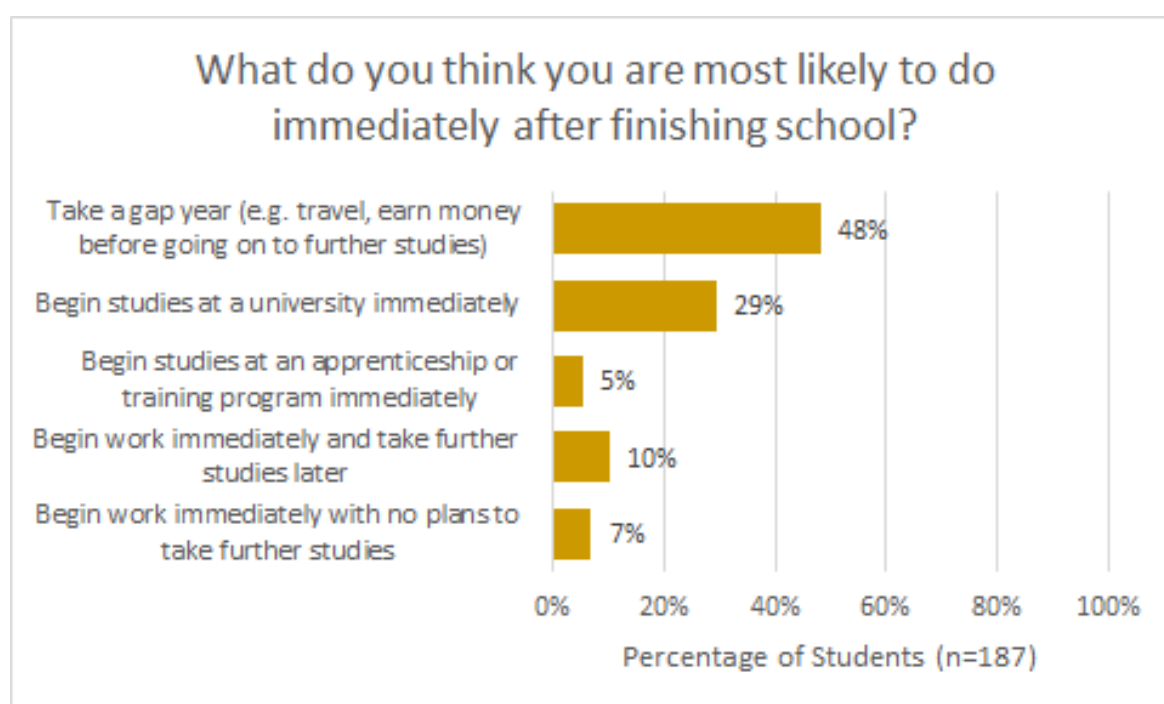
So there appeared to be a potent mix of factors operating within local communities that were impacting considerably on students' post-school options and choices regarding whether to stay or leave; these include family financial capacity, student confidence and certainty about university, presence of supportive family/friends in Adelaide, concerns regarding how and where to find accommodation, employment prospects locally, and community pressure and norms. It is clear that the decision whether to stay or leave is anything but simple for these regional high school students, with a range of complex practical and emotional factors at play. For many, it may be easier to simply postpone the decision by taking a 'gap year', which is discussed in more depth in the following section.

#### **4. 'Don't know' factor and the Gap Year.**

The dual concerns and pressures experienced by students about the cost of university, including relocating to the city, combined with the difficulties in deciding whether to leave

their local community or stay, appeared to be strong factors encouraging students to contemplate taking a 'gap year' before deciding whether or not to continue on to university. As was found in the NSW study, thoughts of taking a gap year featured prominently in student responses, both in the survey and the focus group discussions. It was also commonly mentioned in interviews with staff as being a frequent choice amongst students.

In the survey, current students were asked about their plans for the year immediately following graduation. As can be seen in Figure 10 nearly half the cohort of current students plan to take a gap year. While these students were participating in the study during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is unclear whether this had an impact on their post-school intentions; certainly, in the focus groups this was not mentioned as a reason for wanting to take a gap year. Also, the NSW study, held before pandemic times, found that almost 50 per cent of students were intending to take a gap year, so it seems likely that the pandemic had little, if any, impact on the SA students' intention to do so.



**Figure 10. What do you think you are most likely to do immediately after finishing school?**

Through the focus group discussions, several key reasons emerged for students' intending to defer a place at university and take a gap year. To summarise, they wanted to use this time to:

- decide what they really want to do – whether this is going away to university (and if so, which course to study), or staying locally, working and/or doing a training/trade course
- earn/save money/gain some financial independence
- have a break from school and study
- travel (if Covid allows).

For many, the idea of taking a gap year to more clearly identify what they want to do, was very appealing. They felt that it was very important to make the right decision about what course to study at university, as to get it wrong risked potential failure - "I don't necessarily

want to go straight into jumping into something and regret it and leave straightaway” - or additional expense through extra year/s of study, which may not be possible financially.

They also wanted to be sure that going to university was really what they wanted to do. Some talked of taking a TAFE<sup>12</sup> (Tertiary and Further Education) course during their gap year to see if this was what they would like to do instead. Most were planning to work for a year, to earn money and to see if they liked being employed full-time and/or if they found a job that they were happy with. Many just felt the need to “have a break”, some believing that this would refresh them to re-enter studies the following year.

Financial concerns were a major driver, wanting to save money for the transition to university, help their family with the financial burden, prepare for living away from home, learn to be more financially independent and be able to contribute towards personal expenses. Some students were vaguely aware that a year of earning money independently might help them to apply for government financial assistance for university, but were very unclear on the details, with the majority not being able to name Centrelink or Youth Allowance, nor was there any clear knowledge of how independent status, for the purposes of Centrelink, may be achieved or assessed.

While some students talked of travel during their gap year, they were also realistic that due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions this may not be possible; also that financially this could still be very difficult for them. There was some scathing talk of more financially privileged “Adelaide kids”, who could afford to go travelling on their gap year, in contrast to their own situations where the gap year is primarily a time to earn money.

*This one guy went to Bali three times in their gap year, while my sister worked on a vineyard. No-one here travels on their gap year; no-one goes to ‘find themselves’.*

There were mixed feelings in the groups about how taking a gap year may impact on their motivation to go to university the following year. Some expressed concerns – “If I have a gap year I might lose motivation” – indicating as well that, if they are working during their gap year, they may enjoy having an income too much to want to give it up. Others, however, expressed more certainty about staying motivated for university during a gap year. Some of these thought they would be very ready for university after a year of full-time work in their local area, that they would be refreshed after a break from study and keen to move on. Interestingly though, when discussion in some of the focus groups turned to ‘if money were no object’, more students indicated they would like to go straight to university rather than take a gap year and risk losing motivation.

Amongst the staff interviews, it was clear that for the most part, school educators like to encourage those students who achieve a place at university not to take a gap year, fearing they will indeed lose motivation and not take up this place a year later. They tended to believe that taking a gap year was “a trap”, effectively trapping young school leavers in their local communities. Some talked of a strong “gap year culture” in the local community, which they found hard to understand, as, in their experience, very few students who take a gap year end up going to university. Reference was made to the lack of confidence many young people feel about leaving their community, then using the decision to take a gap year to hide

---

<sup>12</sup> TAFE colleges are Colleges of Tertiary and Further Education, that offer primarily certificate and diploma level qualifications.

this lack of confidence, even amongst students whose families could afford to send them. In the words of one teacher:

*I always hear, 'gap year, gap year, gap year'; but this is the façade the kids hide behind to cover up their uncertainty in moving to university. They want to go, but they are scared.*

As discussed earlier in the literature review, it is unclear just what the impact of a gap year is on the transition of regional students to university in the following year. While the school educators we spoke with were convinced it is a deterrent to students' transition, this was anecdotal as the schools do not keep records on whether past students later take up a university place. Further research into this is undoubtedly needed. However, while it may be the case that a proportion of students who defer for a gap year do not later take up their place, we do not know how many of them would have actually taken up the place if they had not been able to defer. Similarly, we do not know how many have been more successful in their studies as a result of taking a gap year, giving them the opportunity to decide what they really want to do and to become a little more financially secure.

Whatever the case, it seems clear that, for many regional students, making the decision to leave family, friends, community and all that is familiar, immediately after school, is extremely difficult, and even more so when family finances are tight. From this perspective, the gap year seems to be an important option for students to have. Ideally this could be a time in which students are assisted to decide on careers and courses, maintain motivation and understand the processes for applying for financial support, through government, university and other community channels available.

Further findings on the need for students to receive more information and advice, about careers, future pathways, university options and all the associated processes, are discussed in the following section.

## **5. Access to adequate career advice and information about university**

### **The Impact of university outreach visits to schools**

Despite SA universities being based in metropolitan Adelaide, all universities are active in the regions with varying levels of engagement. Some offer early entry programs to regional students; some make student recruitment and information dissemination visits; some run outreach programs (including STEM programs<sup>13</sup>, entrepreneurial programs, student support, and university aspiration-raising programs); some assist regional students in getting to University Open Days; and some provide marketing visits to schools with materials about courses. Not all the efforts of universities are valued by schools and some schools felt they were being "inundated by the universities." Comparatively, in more isolated communities some schools found that all of the universities would visit their community in the same week and then not return for 12 months. This created a sentiment amongst school staff that the universities were 'ticking boxes' by visiting their school.

---

<sup>13</sup> Programs to specifically encourage and support students in taking science, technology, engineering and mathematics-based courses.

In the focus groups there were strong opinions expressed by students about the relative value of various university outreach activities. Overwhelmingly, across all groups at all schools, student comments about university visits to their schools were negative. Some had trouble remembering whether a university had even visited – “I think they have” – while others regarded the visits as marketing exercises for the universities, rather than intended to inform students about the specifics of university life. In the words of one Year 11 student:

*They come in and do a fun activity with us and then try to sell their uni, How stupid do they think we are? We know it is marketing. I already want to go to uni, I just want to know how.*

Another student from a different school echoed these sentiments in saying, “they just bring a PowerPoint and talk about how great their uni is”. As will be seen later, this was supported in the survey responses with 53 per cent of students stating that having university staff or students visit their school had little or no impact on their decision about what they would do after school.

Across all schools, the students stressed that they would prefer to be receiving information on application dates, how scholarships work, how to apply for them, what living in Adelaide is like, how much will it cost, how to find rental/college accommodation, and so on. Whereas instead, they hear that, “university is great, and you should all come - but they don’t get into the deep ins and outs of what that means – it isn’t very helpful”.

A high level of frustration across different focus groups at different schools was evident in statements such as:

*When unis come to the school they don’t talk about the daily life of students: how they live, eat, travel around the city. They are more focused on telling us to come to open days and how good the uni is.*

Students talked about being “forgotten” by the Adelaide universities, feeling that the universities are not interested in them, only interested in city students, as demonstrated by what they perceived as the universities’ lack of understanding of the realities of the students’ lives, for example, “sometimes they tell us about the open days, but we could never get there so why bother telling us?” They were also highly sceptical of the claims made by the different universities, believing that a more honest answer would come from family or friends who had experience of university. For example, “the unis give us the shiny picture, but I just talk to my brother or his friends to find out what going to uni is actually like”.

In summary, what came across strongly was that students wanted more information from universities on the specifics such as:

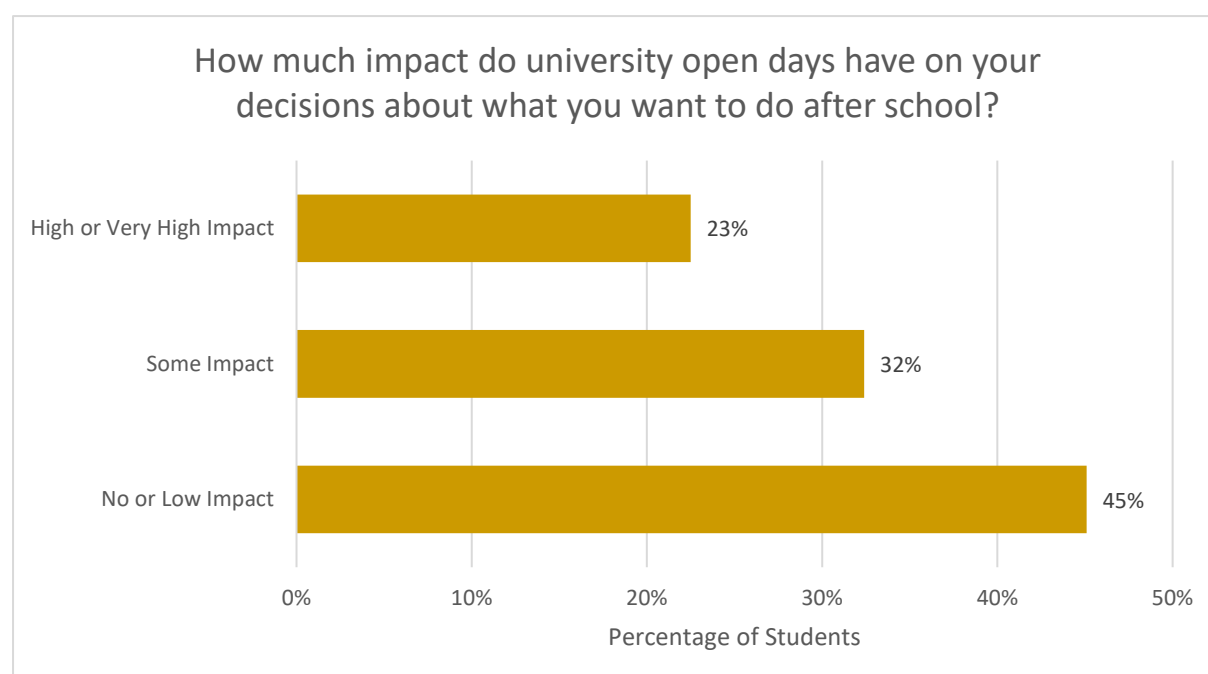
- Scholarships and grants: availability, how/when to apply, requirements.
- ATAR information.
- A ‘day in the life of a student’, resources, timelines, extensions, transferring courses, etc.
- Accommodation opportunities: types, locations, expenses, average living costs.
- Course information and outlines; including the opportunity to ‘sit in’ remotely on lectures.

This type of information was far more important to them than “the shiny picture”. In contrast, at five of the schools, students talked far more positively about visits to the city and university campuses that were organised through their schools, with two schools organising

this as an annual event during Year 11. Those students who were able to participate in these city visits spoke highly of the experience. They talked of having visited both university and TAFE campuses, learnt how to catch public transport and do other city activities, such as eating at restaurants – a novelty for students in towns where there were no restaurants as such. Some were also taken to a big sporting match, which was a highlight for those involved. Schools tended to try to organise this relatively inexpensively, encouraging students to stay with family or friends in Adelaide, where this was possible. Those students who spoke about these trips had clearly enjoyed them and learnt a lot more about university and city life.

Students at some of the other schools said that their school would notify them of university open days but does not take students there, leaving it up to individual students to follow up. As a result, students were less likely to attend.

Figure 11 shows the survey data presenting a mixed picture on the impact of open days on student decision making with 45 per cent of students indicating that they have no, or low, impact on their post-school choices.



**Figure 11. How much impact do university open days have on your decisions about what you want to do after school?**

The interviews with school educators revealed similar views to those of the students, both about the university visits to the school and about the school visits to the city, where these were offered. Comments about university visits included: visits were inconsistent; communication from the university to the school was poor; the visits are left too late – students have already “switched off” to the idea of university by the time of the visit; the students find the visits discouraging – just a one-off visit with an activity rather than useful information; and the visits are not giving students practical day-to-day information to build their confidence.

School educators also spoke of the “marketing” aspect of university visits, indicating that they too, along with parents, are tired of this emphasis. In the words of one teacher:

*Uni reps go on their sales rants, and the parents just switch off. Parents don't want to know uni-specific information, they want general information about the transition.*

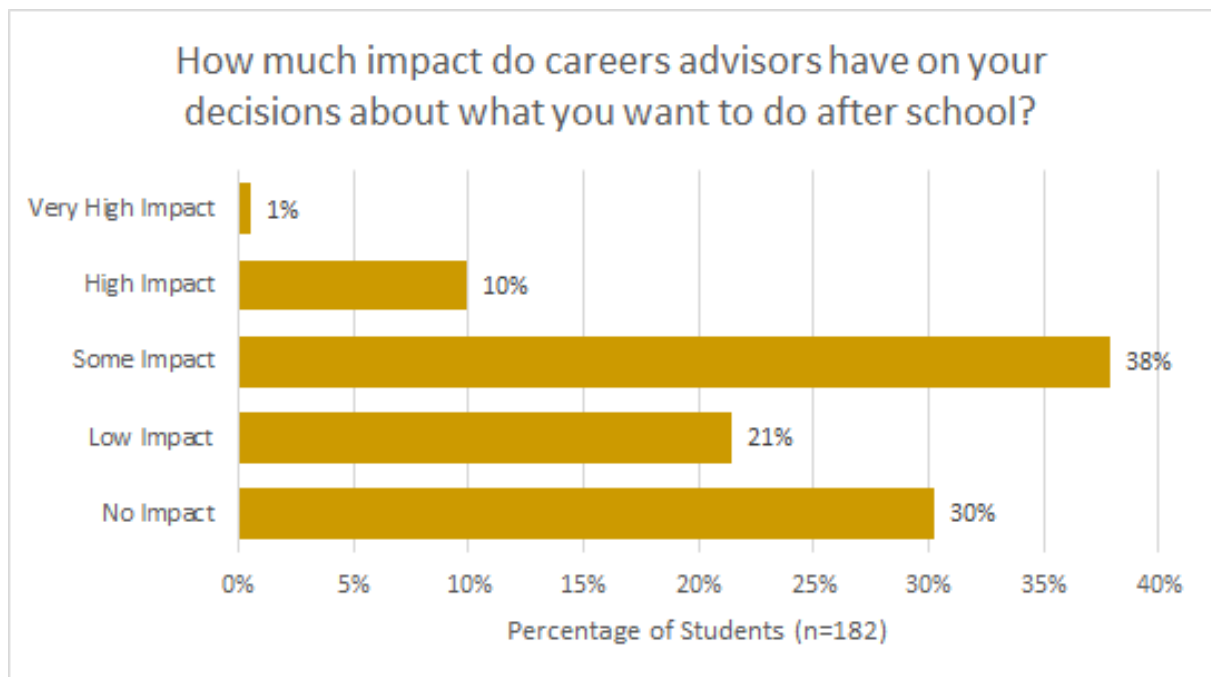
Another teacher indicated that the school is “sick of marketing people” from universities, finding it more effective to organise their own information program with ex-students and preferring to “leave the universities out of it”. Some positive suggestions about how the visits could be improved included having talks by student mentors, support services, and more detailed information about costs and living expenses. On the other hand, educators at schools that organised visits to the city, saw these as being far more useful and effective, boosting the confidence of students who were thinking of university. One felt it was “the best thing teachers could do” to encourage students’ university aspirations. Others highlighted the value of taking students to a university campus and having a multi-day experience in reducing students’ anxieties about moving away - “students are scared to navigate the city, they won’t admit it, but they are!”.

The NSW study found that, at several of the schools which wanted to take students on university visits, the expense involved was too great for most of the students to attend. While this was not raised in the SA focus groups and interviews specifically, the fact that not all schools arrange such visits perhaps means that finances are a barrier for some schools and some cohorts of students. This is worth considering and will be discussed further under Recommendations.

### **Career Advice**

From the focus group discussions, it appeared that the amount and quality of career advice and information that students received varied quite a bit across the different schools. Even within the same school, different focus groups expressed contrasting views of whether the career advice and resources were helpful, with some students saying they received good advice, and others saying the opposite. At one school, students spoke of a ‘careers immersion week’ in which they focused on specific information about a wide range of careers, while at another, students said they had received no career advice at all, with the careers counsellor being on leave all term. A minority of students felt they had a good understanding of universities and what courses they intended to do, having mainly done their own research online through university websites. However, even these highly motivated and resourceful students indicated that they would have liked more in-person advice to assist them.

The survey also indicated the variability of career advice, with the majority of students reporting that career advice had only some or low impact on their post-school decisions. See Figure 12.



**Figure 12. How much impact do careers advisors have on your decisions about what you want to do after school?**

Something that was frequently mentioned across different focus groups at the majority of schools, was their Personal Learning Plan (PLP). This is something that SA high school students are required to do as a compulsory subject, normally in Year 10. The aim of it is to help students choose their subjects for Years 11 and 12, and more generally to plan for their future, in terms of career and employment (SA Certificate of Education, 2021). While some students said they had not enjoyed this subject, most who mentioned it indicated that it had been influential in helping them decide what they wanted to do, or that it had inspired their interest in pursuing a particular subject or discipline area. This and work experience were described by a number of students as having focused their minds on what they might like as future careers.

An area in which information seemed to be particularly lacking was that of alternative pathways to university. All were aware of the ATAR as a pathway to university, but very few students were aware that this is not the only entry pathway. In the survey, 61 per cent of respondents were not aware of university enabling courses as an option for entry into university. The survey then explained what an enabling course was, and 88 per cent then responded that they were open to considering this as an entry pathway into university. There was some limited awareness of TAFE as a potential stepping-stone to university, but students had very little specific knowledge about this or other possible pathways.

Amongst the school educators, there was a view expressed by some that the career advice available to students was insufficient, as career advisors and teachers were not adequately resourced, in terms of time and up-to-date knowledge, to provide more comprehensive assistance. Career and subject counselling were described as occurring primarily through individual appointments with the career advisor, initiated by the student, rather than a broader outreach approach in which career information/advice is taken to students in either a one-to-one or classroom setting. For example, one career advisor reported that staff are not allocated sufficient time to have in-depth conversations with students about the benefits

of university, TAFE or other post-school options, nor to address student concerns and needs through a more comprehensive, whole of school approach.

So, a picture emerged from both students and staff of career information and advice within these regional schools as being patchy and piecemeal. While some schools were placing more emphasis on the importance of career counselling, this was by no means uniform across the sector, and all seemed to be under-resourced in this regard.

## 6. Student Aspirations

The majority of students who completed the survey indicated they had high aspirations for study at university. This was comparable to the NSW study as shown in Figure 13.

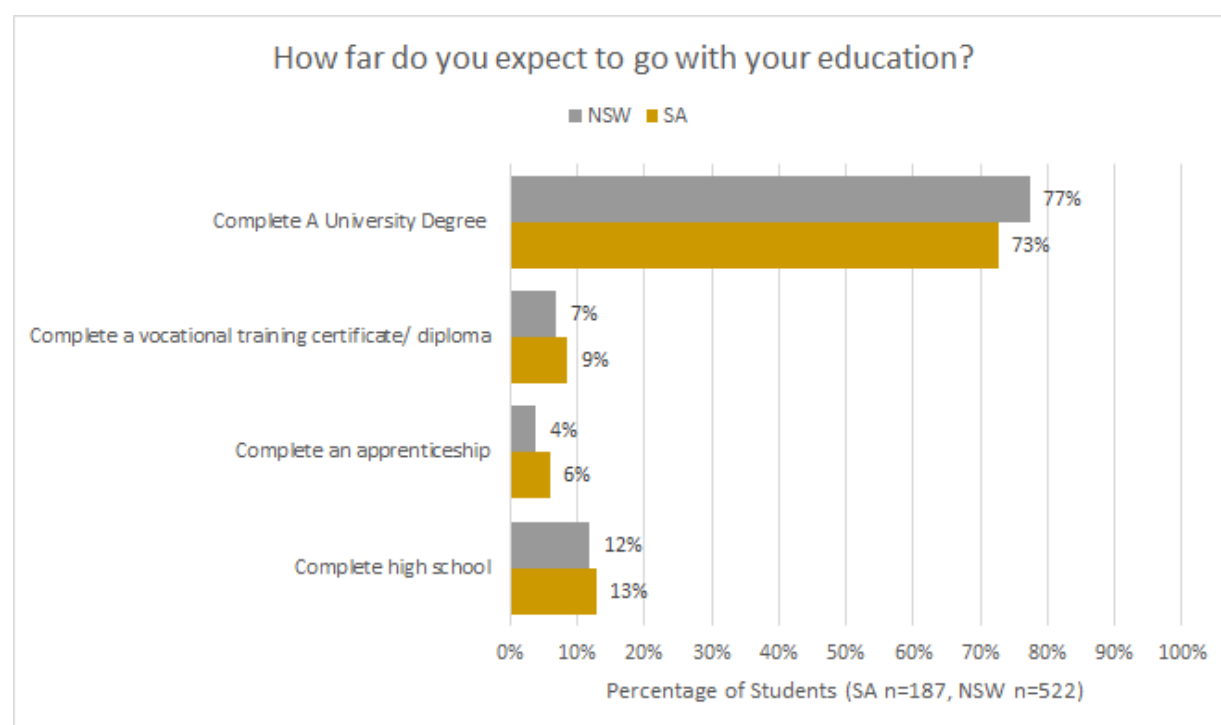


Figure: 13. How far do you expect to go with your education?

Since all the respondents were on an ATAR pathway in each school, that is, they had all chosen to study the subjects that would make them eligible for entry to university, the result (73% intending to complete a university degree) is to be expected.

Similarly, high aspirations to go to university were expressed in each focus group across all eight of the schools where focus groups were conducted. It was clear that the greater majority of students participating were considering university, even though some were uncertain about if and how it could be managed, and/or about what they would choose to study at university. There was a mix of students; who a) knew what they wanted to do at university and were able to clearly articulate this; b) wanted to go but were unsure what they would study, and/or; c) intended to go but were unsure whether they could either financially afford, or would feel ready, to go there straight after school.

Amongst those who knew what they wanted to do and could clearly articulate this, were some who were planning to go straight to university after leaving school, while others talked about taking a gap year, for all the types of reasons discussed earlier in this report.

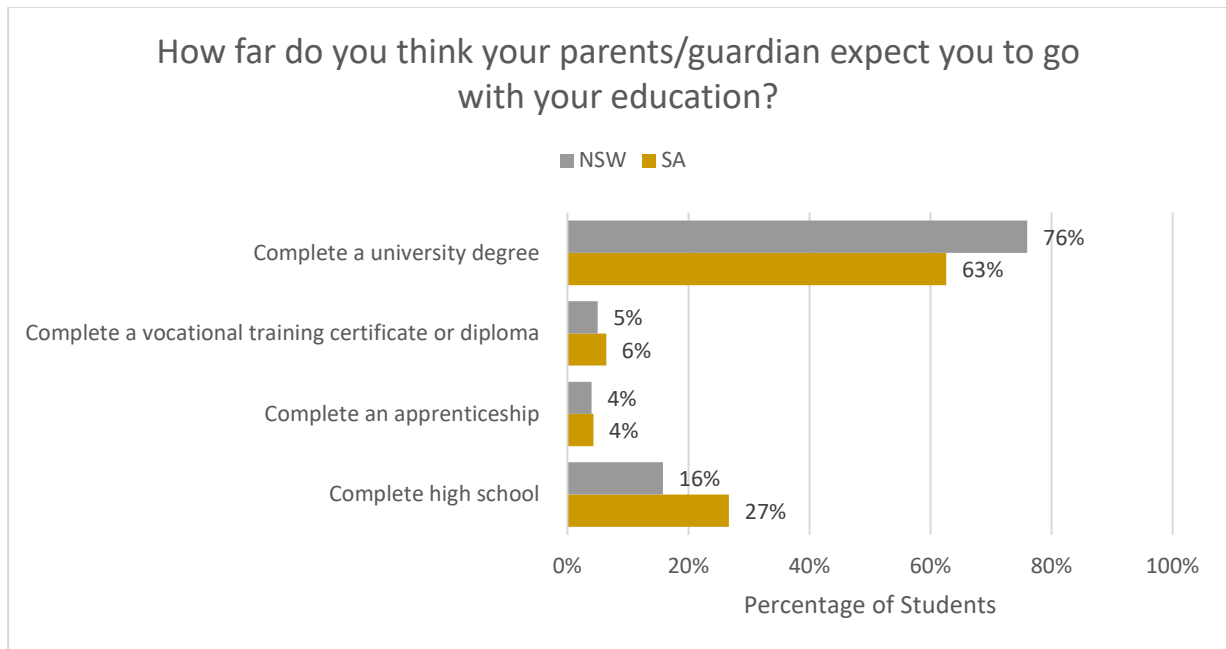
Relatively few students said they were not planning to go to university at all; these tended to be students at the more geographically isolated schools and were also more likely to be boys. As discussed previously, boys more often talked of pressure to stay and work locally, to find employment in local industries, to learn a trade and/or to work on family farms. However, they were not exclusively boys, with a few of the girls considering TAFE training rather than university, with two examples being hairdressing and midwifery certificate training. Again, as discussed before, whether university or TAFE was being considered, career choices tended to be highly gendered across the groups.

Amongst the school educators interviewed, there was also a mix of views about the extent to which students aspired to go to university, even amongst educators from the same school. For example, at one school, opinions varied from one teacher who saw the students at that school as being “resilient” and “determined to study at university, one way or another”, to another, whose view was that the students “don’t see the need” to go to university due to a lack of role models in the community, to yet another who reported that “in the six years I’ve been at this school, I have not taught a student who has gone on to university”.

Yet it was at this same school that a number of students in focus groups had expressed their certainty about going to university, clearly articulating their career goals and talking of plans to study courses such as law, agriculture, maths, allied health, teaching, visual arts and psychology. So, at times there appeared to be a mismatch between the aspirations expressed by the students in the focus groups and the views of the school educators about the students’ aspirations. While the reasons for this are unclear, it is concerning that some of the school educators seem unaware of these university aspirations, even if they are relatively uncommon within the school as a whole.

## **7. Family and Community Aspirations and Influences**

Students’ aspirations are also influenced by a range of factors such as family and socio-economic background and community environment. Current students were asked about their parents’ expectations of them regarding education. Within the survey, 63 per cent believed that their parents expected them to go to university. This is slightly lower than in the NSW study, as outlined in Figure 14 below.



**Figure 14. Comparison of NSW and SA Student Responses to “How far do you think your parents/guardian expect you to go with your education?”**

As seen in Table 8, the survey results indicate that students in the sample group felt well supported not only by their parents, but also by teachers and friends regarding their education intentions. Of the total number of respondents, 74.4 per cent indicated they felt supported by their teachers, 77 per cent felt supported by their friends and 85.4 per cent felt their parents supported their goals. Fewer than 4 per cent felt their parents did not support their goals. These findings on perceived levels of support were almost identical to the NSW study.

**Table 8. Select the box which most accurately represents your level of agreement with the statements below?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My parents or guardians support my goals	1%	2.1%	11.5%	46.1%	39.3%
I feel supported by my friends	2.1%	4.7%	16.2%	57.6%	19.4%
I feel supported by my teachers	1.6%	4.2%	19.9%	63.4%	11.1%
I enjoy school	2.6%	11%	28.3%	49.2%	8.9%

To see whether perceived support translated into impact on decision-making, in the survey students were asked about the impact of various people on their decisions about their post-school options. See Table 9.

**Table 9. How much impact do the following people have on your decision about what you want to do after high school?**

	No Impact	Low Impact	Some impact	High impact	Very strong impact
Parents/guardians	4%	10%	32%	40%	13%
Role model/other respected adult	10%	22%	40%	26%	3%
Teachers	14%	25%	37%	20%	3%
University open days	26%	19%	32%	20%	2%
Friends	19%	35%	30%	13%	3%
University students/staff visiting my school	28%	26%	31%	13%	2%
Sisters/brothers	35%	29%	24%	11%	1%
Careers adviser	30%	21%	38%	10%	1%

The results show that, as well as being supportive of their children, parents/guardians are having a “high or very strong” impact (53.3%) with a “role model/other adult” (28.5%) also having an influence on student decision-making.

Focus group discussions revealed similar views. Parents, immediate and extended family members emerged in these discussions as being the most influential people in students’ post-school decisions. Overwhelmingly, students talked about being confident of their parents’/family support for their choice of pathway post-school, including going to university. This was particularly the case for emotional/moral support, while for some, also financial support. Comments included: “They want what’s best for you and if, like, you’re capable of going to uni, then they’re like, ‘you go to uni’”; and, “support is definitely there”. Some spoke of being encouraged to choose what they want to do when they leave school, as long as they “work hard”.

This confidence in having their parents’ support was not confined to those whose parents or other family members had been to university, but also extended to those who would be the first in their family to go. Some students said they felt that their parents were even more supportive because they had not been to university themselves. For example, one student talked about it being an expectation in her family that she would go to university, even though no-one else had done so. “They just think that if you go to uni, you’re successful”. Two other students talked of their parents’ personal regrets at not having been to university themselves, and how they hoped for better opportunities for their children. While it is certainly positive that these students have such family support, some indicated that they felt under pressure to go to university, to be more successful than the previous generation. Also, despite this encouragement, many students expressed that their parents did not have the knowledge or information to help them understand what university was like; nor in many cases were they able to help them financially.

Some students had a sibling who was at, or had been to, university; others relied on the siblings of friends. “If I want honest advice about uni, I am going to go to my friend’s sister. She’ll tell me what I need to know”. Students also spoke of the influence of other extended family members on their decision to go to university, as well as on their course/career decisions. Two students spoke of their aunts who had been to university and had encouraged them to aspire to go; one spoke of the inspiration of her late grandmother, a nurse who had been very active and well known in the local community; while another spoke

of his grandfather, a medical practitioner, who had influenced him greatly. A number of other students spoke of family members whose own careers had inspired their interest in a particular career path for themselves. Many others, including those without family members as role models for a university pathway, said that their career/course choices were or would be based purely on personal interest.

A contrast emerged in some of the focus groups between those from wealthier families and those whose families were less financially secure. For example, in one focus group within a farming community, there were students whose parents were landowners and students whose parents were farm workers. Those with landowner parents were confident of both emotional/moral support and financial support, whereas those with farm worker parents were less certain about going to university, due to financial constraints and more mixed support for this aspiration within their families. However, even some with landowner parents reported that parents' financial support was conditional on what they chose to do; for example, one male student reported that he would be supported by his parents to study at either university or TAFE, as long as he didn't "waste money" and chose something relevant to managing the family property.

Interviews with school educators revealed that they believe "parental influence is key" in terms of influence on students' post-school choices. They saw this influence as being potentially both positive and negative. On the one hand, parents want their children to go to university, but as many cannot afford this, they are seen to be discouraging. Some teachers mentioned trying to "fill this gap" by providing more encouragement for university but were aware they do not have the same level of influence. It was mentioned that the idea of sending their child to a residential college was appealing to parents, but for most they are prohibitively expensive. One teacher talked about parents being "disengaged" from students and their futures, while another said that, without supportive parents, students "will not go to university". For students without university-educated parents, these school educators reported that it was a significant challenge to convince parents to support their children's university aspirations. Where no-one had been to university before, the school educators believed a low value was placed on education.

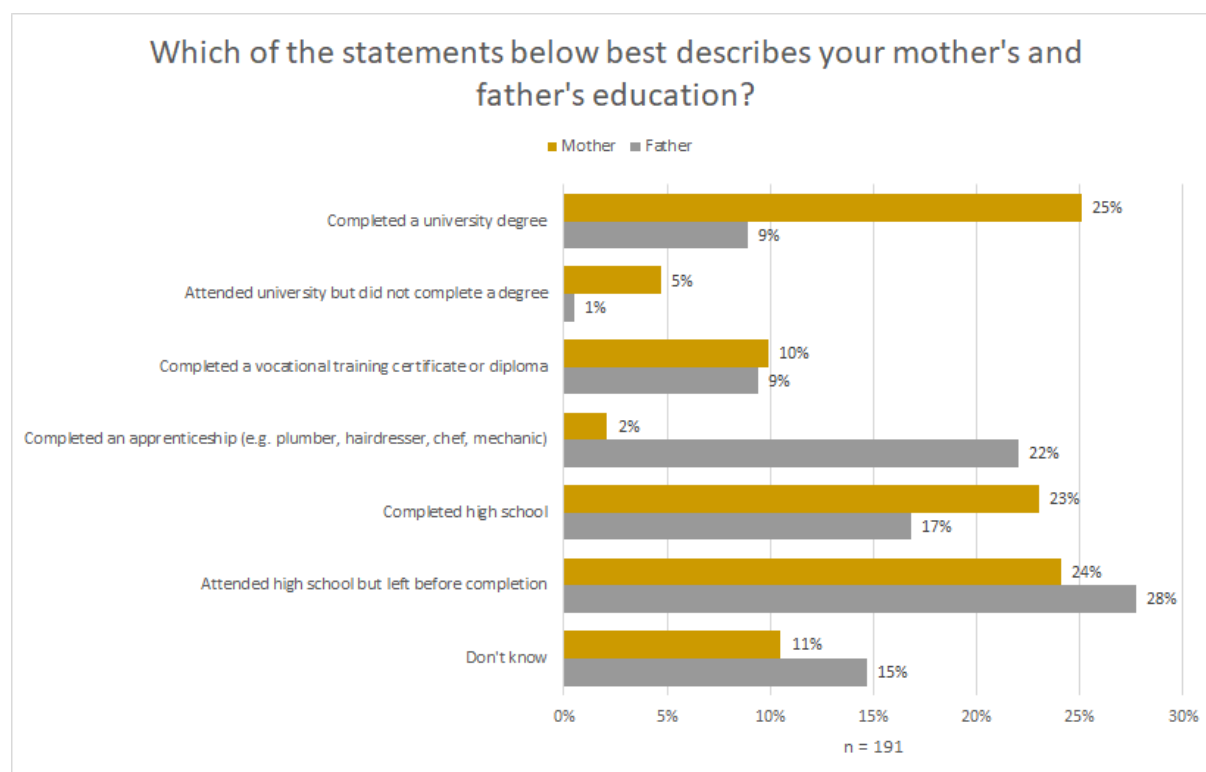
The educators' views seem to paint a bleaker picture regarding parental support for university than was indicated in the student focus groups. This may well be due to the fact that the school educators were taking a much broader view, across the whole school cohort, while the focus groups consisted of a narrower sub-section of students – those on an ATAR pathway. It could be argued that the fact they are on an ATAR pathway in the first place indicates a certain level of family support for the value of education; hence this sub-set of students is perhaps more likely to report having supportive parents than would the broader school population.

These findings about the significance of parental influence on students' decision-making are similar to those of the NSW study. It was also clear both in this study and the NSW one, that many of these regional parents, particularly those who have no experience of university themselves, are not in a position to fully inform their children about courses, costs, university requirements and student life. As has been discussed previously in this report, nor do students feel that they are receiving this information adequately from other sources. Recently there has been a focus in the research literature (Austin et al., 2020; Fischer, Katersky Barnes, & Kilpatrick, 2019; Kilpatrick et al., 2020); on ways that university outreach programs can focus more attention on parents, partnering with parents, schools and

communities, to ensure that high school students can be better informed about career opportunities, courses and pathways, and that parents are in a stronger position to guide and support student decision-making. More about this will be discussed in the Recommendations.

## 8. The Impact of parents' level of education on students' post-school choices

The regional students in this study were asked about their parents' level of education. Figure 15 shows a clear gender divide in the highest educational attainment of parents of students in this study with 25 per cent of mothers having obtained a university degree, compared with only 9 per cent of fathers. These rates were reversed for the completion of trade apprenticeships, with 22 per cent of fathers compared with 2 per cent of mothers. Mothers had significantly higher completion rates for both high school and university and this educational divide between genders increased as education progressed. For example, the divide was narrow between the percentages of mothers and fathers who attended high school but left before completion (24% and 28% respectively); however, this gap had grown significantly at the HE level.



**Figure 15. Which of the statements below best describes your mother's and father's education?**

In the NSW study about 50 per cent of surveyed students had at least one parent with a completed university degree. In SA, this number is halved to 25 per cent, which was driven by the low numbers of fathers who had a university degree.

It is interesting to note that, as mentioned earlier in this report, a gender difference became evident in some of the focus groups in terms of aspirations for university, with boys appearing to feel under pressure to stay local and find work, perhaps by undertaking a trade qualification and/or working in the local industry or the family farm. In a number of different focus groups, across different schools, there were reflections about boys being less likely to

go, or to want to go, to university. Reasons for this were explained in the following terms: families wanted boys to get trades where they live; only 'female' courses are on offer at local campuses; all their friends were leaving school and getting trades; most boys are out working already, making it hard to find the time and concentration for study; and to leave to go to university would make them an outsider within their family and community.

Some of the boys who reported feeling these types of pressures were still determined to go to university, as they talked about seeing the "long term benefits" of having a university education. In such cases, it appeared that family support was behind them. However, it was still difficult for them to stand up to peer expectations that they should leave and get a job.

This gender difference in aspirations was less apparent in the findings of the NSW study, where there was a higher rate of university-educated fathers (28%) compared with this SA study (9%). Further research on this would be needed; however, it is possible that the presence of fewer role models of fathers who have been to university, may be contributing to lower university aspirations amongst boys and peer pressure against university for boys, as expressed by the students in these focus groups.

## Section Seven: Summary of key findings

The findings from this research show both similarities to, and differences from, the findings of the NSW study, as well as supporting many of the findings from other research into factors impacting regional school transitions to higher education. Some important answers to the main research question of this study - *Why are significant numbers of high-achieving school students in identified areas of regional SA choosing not to transition to university directly from school?* – have emerged, along with some answers to the subsidiary questions. These findings provide us with insight into the perceptions of these SA students regarding the major barriers that stand in their way of going to university and the key influences on their decisions about post-school options.

The findings are presented below, firstly, by comparing and contrasting them with the NSW findings and secondly, through discussion of how they relate to other research findings and what ‘stands out’ as being particularly influential on these students’ transitions.

Similar to the NSW findings:

- Cost and finances played a significant role for the majority in decisions about whether to go to university, with particular concerns raised about relocation and accommodation/living costs.
- There was a lack of knowledge about financial support options such as scholarships and government benefits, amongst both students and school educators.
- These regional students were concerned about leaving their local area, their family, friends and local employment, in order to attend university. Concerns ranged from loneliness, to expense, to fears about living in college or where else they may live, to finding their way around – hence, deciding whether to leave or stay was a complex and difficult decision.
- The popularity of taking a gap year was similarly high, with many students undecided not only about whether to go to university but also what course or type of future career they wanted.
- Access to adequate career advice and information was lacking; both in terms of what was available at their school, as well as in terms of the type of advice and information available from the universities themselves.
- The regional students in an ATAR stream largely had aspirations towards university.
- Parental aspirations were also high, with the majority of students reporting that their parents were supportive of their aspirations.

However, unlike the NSW study:

- There was a widely-held perception amongst both students and school educators that ‘local’ is not as good as ‘city’ when it comes to the quality of the university experience and ultimate qualification. However, this difference is also consistent with the difference in the types of campuses available in SA versus NSW, as outlined in Section Two.
- University outreach visits were not seen as helpful by either students or school educators, with both groups regarding them largely as marketing exercises for the universities rather than of practical help to students.

- Visits to cities and university campuses were arranged by many of the schools, with both students and staff finding these much more helpful.
- Boys appeared to be under more pressure than girls to ‘stay local’, through undertaking a trade, finding local employment, or working on a family farm, rather than go to university; additionally, the lack of course/subject availability at local campuses was perceived as an obstacle to pursuing a course of study locally, particularly for boys.
- Fewer than 10 per cent of fathers had been to university (compared with 25 per cent of mothers), which may impact on parents’ university aspirations for boys, also on boys’ aspirations for themselves.
- The greater geographical isolation of SA regional students results in fewer opportunities for transition to university for these students.

These findings also closely reflect and support the other recent research outlined in the literature review. For example, in terms of the impact of proximity to university, the general absence of regional universities in SA, plus the limited course offerings at the few local campuses available, meant that most of these students perceived little choice but to leave their local area if they wished to go to university. This lack of access to a university in or near their home created significant challenges for these students and their families, financially, emotionally and psychologically. Such limited options meant that the majority were having to make the difficult decision of whether to leave or stay, with boys appearing to be specifically under pressure. Cost was clearly going to be a determining factor, particularly for lower-income families, even when university aspirations were generally high amongst these ATAR-stream students, along with most parents’ in-principle support.

A significant part of the cost of university related to moving away from home, with housing and accommodation arrangements needing to be considered. Concerns about relocation, where to live, how to find accommodation, the expense of residential college accommodation were all frequently mentioned in the focus groups.

The importance of “quality career advice” (Austin et al., 2020, p. 34) is also evident in the findings, along with appropriate and targeted university outreach that includes school visits to cities and universities. These are vitally needed to inform and educate students, families and schools about university pathways as well as the practical aspects of going to university, not only course options but also the ins and outs of scholarships and financial support, and the practicalities of city life. The provision of information such as this opens opportunities for more conversation about university, amongst students, parents and educators, which in turn has been shown to play a key role in nurturing university aspirations (Vernon & Drane, 2021).

With online education delivery becoming much more prevalent, career advice also has a role to play in ensuring regional students have the right information they need to help them consider this as an option, including knowing about the support and infrastructure available through a Regional University Centre. The findings show that our student participants were not well informed about online study possibilities, nor were their school educators, yet this could offer the possibility of university for the many students for whom moving away from home is difficult or impossible. It could also provide an alternative type of ‘gap year’ – beginning university while staying in their home and community and connecting with other students through an RUC, rather than moving away. The technology issues that are often encountered in regional areas, through slow or inadequate internet connections (Stone &

Davis, 2020), that may be exacerbated by a lack of access to modern hardware and software, particularly for low SES families, need not be a barrier to online study where there is an RUC or a regional campus nearby that can offer the technology infrastructure necessary for online study. In areas where neither such facility is available, students could be encouraged to use other community resources such as local libraries (Stone, 2013).

Based on these findings, a number of recommendations are offered in the section below.

## Section Eight: Recommendations

Recommendations, based on the findings from this study, are offered here for schools, universities and governments. Recommendations for further research are then discussed.

### Recommendations for universities

We recommend that universities:

- Work with regional schools and their local communities, seeking the input of schools, students, parents and other community stakeholders such as local business and industry, to determine how university visits to schools can be improved and made more relevant to the needs of the local community, with the focus on understanding university in general, building aspirations and widening HE participation.
- Ensure that students, parents, and schools are proactively directed to accurate and easy-to-access information about costs, financial support, scholarships and other practicalities of going to university.
- Expand peer mentoring programs to encompass transition support for both prospective regional students as well as first year undergraduates.
- Seek to collaborate with schools, local communities and industries to develop innovative ways to increase the range and diversity of courses available to those living in regional areas.
- Work closely with Regional University Centres and regional campuses with a view to encouraging/supporting online university options for regional high school students with face-to-face support/contact/technology infrastructure provided through RUCs and local regional campuses.
- Work with schools, students and parents to develop a system by which contact can be maintained with students who have deferred a university place; thereby providing students with an avenue to continue to discuss/consider their university options whilst on their gap year.

### Recommendations for schools and governments

We recommend that:

- The federal government seeks to improve incentives for universities to collaborate with each other and the RUC network in order to provide greater diversity of course offerings for regional students to stay and study locally.
- Schools and government education departments ensure that school career advisors are sufficiently resourced and supported, through professional development and adequate time, to keep up-to-date with accurate career information and advice, relevant to the needs of their students and local community, including online options for students and how these can be supported.
- Governments, whether at state and/or federal level, adequately fund and support all regional schools to run school excursions to universities, which include gaining knowledge and experience of university campuses, finding out about both on- and off-campus accommodation, using public transport and talking with other students about what studying and working in the city is like.

- Government financial support for regional students be reviewed to ensure that university is affordable for all students, irrespective of family financial situations.
- The federal government considers differences between Australian States when deciding on HE investment, as each one has its own particular geographical and socio-economic challenges that impact upon HE attainment.

## Recommendations for further research

This report has identified several issues within the findings that would benefit from further research.

### **The gendering of university aspirations in regional communities**

This study revealed the existence of a gendered view of university amongst some of the regional students, with many of the high school boys perceiving university as something for 'girls' to do. This appeared to be influenced at least in part by the limited course offerings in regional areas, such as nursing, teaching and social work, which were largely perceived as being 'female' professions. There also appeared to be more pressure on boys from family, friends and community to leave school and get a job, rather than finish Year 12 or go on to university, while at the same time very few fathers had been to university. As a result, some of the boys in this study talked of being deterred from or conflicted about considering university as a post-school pathway. This finding is worth exploring further. Is university considered more as a 'girls' post-school pathway in small regional communities? To what extent do low rates of university education amongst male role models and gendered views of career choices, combined with limited course offerings at regional campuses, shape the conceptualisation of university for regional boys? And to what extent do the expectations of parents, teachers and communities regarding post-school education, differ for boys and for girls?

### **Interstate differences in HE opportunities and barriers, including infrastructure**

The findings from this study, when compared with those from the NSW study, highlighted the geographic, cultural and infrastructure differences between SA and NSW in terms of HE opportunities and barriers faced by regional students. It seems likely that other Australian States and Territories would also have their own particular opportunities and barriers. A deeper understanding of these, across Australia, is needed to assist state and federal governments in developing targeted, state-focused approaches to widening regional HE access and participation, and ensuring availability of necessary infrastructure.

### **The impact of small regional university campuses on student aspirations**

A number of students in communities with small regional university campuses indicated that they would prefer to attend a metropolitan based university rather than study at a local campus. The limited course offerings available locally appeared to act as a deterrent for these students, diminishing their university aspirations. Further research would be valuable in exploring whether this occurs in other regions of Australia and, if so, why. Given that other research has found a positive impact on aspirations from proximity to a university campus, it would be important to determine what makes the difference – what does a regional university need to offer to enhance the aspirations of young people in regional communities? How does the presence of a regional university as opposed to a satellite campus of a metropolitan university influence HE aspirations? And what viable alternative models can be implemented to provide regional students with access to greater diversity in course offerings.

## **The impact of Regional University Centres on widening participation**

Regional University Centres were mentioned throughout this study. The students initially expressed the view that they did not want to study online, perceiving they would be doing this in isolation. However, almost half indicated they would consider studying online with the support of an RUC. These centres are new additions to the HE environment and further research is needed to explore the impact that they are having on widening participation amongst regional communities.

## **Mismatch between student aspirations and teacher perceptions**

Comments by teachers indicating that students' aspirations and capabilities for university were generally low, often appeared to be at odds with the high aspirations and confidence levels expressed by many of the students themselves. This needs further exploration, given that the numbers of teacher interviews in this study were not high. Students in ATAR streams tend to be a minority in regional schools and teachers are exposed daily to a much larger student cohort. Identifying and nurturing the university aspirations of a few may be very difficult alongside the pressure of teaching across a wide cohort of many who do not have such aspirations. Further exploration as to how these students may become more 'visible' within the school environment, how teachers can be better supported to recognise and encourage them and, in doing so, encourage others to aspire, would be very important indeed.

## **Employment rates for regional graduates**

Despite regional students having lower university access and completion rates than their metropolitan counterparts, they have higher employment rates upon graduation. Further research is needed to explore what factors influence this improved employment rate and how this information could be used to improve aspirations for university study in regional communities.

# References

- Alloway, N.; Gilbert, P.; Gilbert, R.; & Muspratt, S. (2004). *Factors impacting on student aspirations and expectations in regional Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A37399>
- Austin, K., O'Shea, S., Groves, O., & Lamanna, J. (2020). Partnerships and career development learning: Creating equitable shared futures. *ETH Learning and Teaching Journal*, (2)2, 43-38. Retrieved from <https://learningteaching.ethz.ch/index.php/lt-eth/article/view/99>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016). Census of Population and Housing. *Highest level of education*. Retrieved from [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA34590](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA34590)
- Australian Government Department of Education. (2017). 2017 Section 16- Equity Performance Data. Retrieved from <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/51496>
- Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2019). *Future Ready: A student focused National Career Education Strategy*. Retrieved from [https://schooltowork.dese.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/future\\_ready\\_a\\_student\\_focused\\_national\\_career\\_education\\_strategy.pdf](https://schooltowork.dese.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/future_ready_a_student_focused_national_career_education_strategy.pdf)
- Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2021). *Regional University Centres*. Retrieved from <https://www.dese.gov.au/regional-university-centres>
- Australian Government Services Australia. (2021). Youth Allowance. Retrieved from <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/youth-allowance>
- Australian Government Study Australia. (2021). *Education and living costs in Australia*. Retrieved from <https://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/english/live-in-australia/living-costs>
- Cardak, B., Brett, M., Bowden, M., Vecchi, J., Barry, P., Bahtsevanoglou, J., & McAllister, R. (2017). *Regional Student Participation and Migration: Analysis of factors influencing regional student participation and internal migration in Australian higher education*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Perth: Curtin University. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/regional-student-participation-and-migration-analysis-of-factors-influencing-regional-student-participation-and-internal-migration-in-australian-higher-education/>
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2019). *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy, Final Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.dese.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report>
- Corbett, M. (2008). *Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community*. Nova Scotia, Canada. Fernwood Publishing Co. Retrieved from <https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0055496>

- Crawford, N. (2021). On the radar: supporting the mental wellbeing of mature-aged students in regional and remote Australia. 2019/20 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship Final Report. NCSEHE, Curtin University, Perth. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/nicole-crawford-equity-fellowship-mental-wellbeing-mature-students-regional-remote-australia/>
- Erebus. (2008). *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing – Literature Review*. Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Retrieved from <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:29490/datastream/PDF/view>
- Fischer, S., Katersky Barnes, R., & Kilpatrick, S. (2019). Equipping parents to support their children's higher education aspirations: a design and evaluation tool. *Educational Review*, (71)2, 198-217. doi: 10.1080/00131911.2017.1379472
- Fray, L., Gore, J., Harris, J., & North, B. (2020). Key influences on aspirations for higher education of Australian school students in regional and remote locations: a scoping review of empirical research, 1991–2016. *The Australian Educational Researcher* 47, 61–93. doi: 10.1007/s13384-019-00332-4
- Halsey, J. (2018). *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra. Retrieved from: [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/03917\\_independent\\_review\\_accessible.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/03917_independent_review_accessible.pdf)
- Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Fray, L., McElduff, P., Weaver, N., & Wallington, C. (2017). Unpacking the career aspirations of Australian school students: towards an evidence base for university equity initiatives in schools. *Higher Education Research & Development*, (36)7, 1383-1400. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2017.1325847
- Gore, J., Fray, L., Patfield, S., & Harris, J. (2019). *Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village...?* Teachers & Teaching Research Centre, The University of Newcastle. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/community-influence-university-aspirations/>
- Harwood, V., Hickey-Moody, A., McMahon, S., & O'Shea, S. (2017). The politics of widening participation and University access for young people: Making educational futures. London and New York: Routledge.
- James, R. (2001). Participation Disadvantage in Australian Higher Education: An Analysis of Some Effects of Geographical Location and Socioeconomic Status. *Higher Education*, 42(4), 455–472.
- James, R. (2002). Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, Evaluations and Investigations Programme.
- James, R., Bexley, E., Anderson, A., Devlin, M., Garnett, R., Marginson, S., & Maxwell, L. (2008). Participation and Equity: A Review of the Participation in Higher Education of People from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds and Indigenous People. Centre for Studies in Higher Education. Melbourne: The University of Melbourne.

- Katersky Barnes, R., Kilpatrick, S., Woodroffe, J., Crawford, N., Emery, S., Burns, G., & Noble, M. (2019). *Regional communities' influences on equity participation in higher education*. Curtin University: National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education.
- Khoo, S.T., & Ainley, J. (2005). Attitudes, Intentions and Participation. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report Number 41. Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.
- Kilpatrick, S., & Abbott-Chapman, J. (2002). Rural young people's work/study priorities and aspirations: The influence of family social capital. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 43-67.
- Kilpatrick, S., Katersky Barnes, R., Heath, J., Lovat, A., Kong, W., Flittner, N., & Avitaia, S. (2019). Disruptions and bridges in rural Australia: higher education aspiration to expectation of participation, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(3), 550-564, doi: 10.1080/07294360.2018.1556619
- Kilpatrick, S., Burns, G., Katersky Barnes, R., Kerrison, M., & Fischer, S. (2020). Parents Matter: Empowering Parents to Inform Other Parents of Post-Year 10 Pathway Options in Disadvantaged Communities. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 30(3), 21-35.
- Koshy, P. (2016). *Student Equity Performance in Australian Higher Education: 2008 to 2015*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.
- Koshy, P., Dockery, A.M., & Seymour, R. (2017). Parental expectations for young people's participation in higher education in Australia. *Studies in Higher Education*. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2017.1363730
- McLachlan, R., Gilfillan, G., & Gordon, J. (2013). *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*. Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/deep-persistent-disadvantage>
- NSW Government. (2021). *Key Facts About NSW*. Retrieved from <https://www.nsw.gov.au/about-nsw/key-facts-about-nsw>
- O'Shea, S., Southgate, E., Jardine, A., & Delahunty, J. (2019). Learning to leave' or 'striving to stay: Considering the desires and decisions of rural young people in relation to post-schooling futures. *Emotion, space and society*, 32(2019) 100587. doi: 10.1016/j.emospa.2019.100587
- Patfield, S., Gore, J., & Weaver, N. (2021). On 'being first': the case for first-generation status in Australian higher education equity policy. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. doi: 10.1007/s13384-020-00428-2
- Polesel J. (2009). Deferring a university offer in rural Australia. *Australian Journal of Education*, 53(1).
- Pollard, L. (2017). Remote student university success: an analysis of policy and practice. *Equity Fellowship Final Report*. NCSEHE, Curtin University, Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/remote-student-university-success-analysis-policy-practice/>
- Productivity Commission. (2019). *The Demand Driven System, A Mixed Report Card*. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/university-report-card>

- Quin, R., Stone, C., & Trinidad, S. (2017). *Low Rates of Transition to University for High Achieving Students in Regional NSW. Report for NSW Department of Education*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education: Curtin University, Perth.
- Regional Australia Institute. (2021a). *Record Demand for Labour in Regional Areas*. Retrieved from <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/record-demand-for-labour-in-regional-areas>
- Regional Australia Institute. (2021b). *Regional Jobs Vacancy Map*. <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-jobs-vacancy-map/>
- Ronan, C. (2020). "Should I stay, or should I go?": The mobility paradigm in widening participation for regional, rural and remote students. *International Studies in Widening Participation*, 7(1), 34–47
- Rosvall, P. (2020). Counselling to stay or to leave? - Comparing career counselling of young people in rural and urban areas. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, (50)7, 1014-1032. doi: 10.1080/03057925.2020.1760788
- Shergold, P., Calma, T., Russo, S., Walton, P., Westacott, J., Zoellner, D., & O'Reilly, P. (2020). *Looking to the Future—Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*. Canberra, ACT: Education Council.
- SA Certificate of Education. (2021). SACE. <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/>
- SA Government. (2021). *Living in South Australia*. [https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/about-sa/living-in-sa?SQ\\_VARIATION\\_24942=0](https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/about-sa/living-in-sa?SQ_VARIATION_24942=0)
- Stockdale, A., Theunissen, N., & Haartsen, T. (2018). Staying in a state of flux: a life course perspective on the diverse staying processes of rural young adults. *Population, space and place*, 24, 1–10.
- Stone, C. (2013). Connecting online students with local libraries. *Incite*. 34(11/12), 8-9.
- Stone, C., & Davis, M. (2020). *Stark inequity of online access for rural & remote students*. EduResearch Matters, Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE). Retrieved from <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=5524>
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. (2020). Foundations for good practice: The student experience of online learning in Australian higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. November 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/latest-news/publications/foundations-good-practice-student-experience-online-learning-australian>
- University Admission Centre. (2021). *Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank*. <https://www.uac.edu.au/future-applicants/atar>
- University of Wollongong. (2021). In2Uni schools & partners. <https://www.uow.edu.au/engage/outreach-pathways/in2uni/partners/>
- Vernon, L., & Drane, C.F. (2021). Influencers: the importance of discussions with parents, teachers and friends to support vocational and university pathways. *International Journal of Training Research*, 18(2) pp. 1-19.
- Vernon, L., Watson, S., & Taggart, A. (2018). University aspirational pathways for metropolitan and regional students: Implications for supporting school-university outreach partnerships. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 27(1), 87-103.

Woodroffe, J., Kilpatrick, S., Williams, B., & Jago, M. (2017). Preparing rural and regional students for the future world of work: Developing authentic career focussed curriculum through a collaborative partnership model. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 27(3), 158–173.

# Appendix 1: Year 11/12 Student Survey

## Investigating Transitions to University from Regional South Australian High Schools

1) By completing and submitting this questionnaire/survey, you are indicating that you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and give your consent to be involved in the research.\*

☐ Yes, I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and give consent to be involved in the research

☐ No, I do not want to participate in this research

2) What year of schooling are you in now? \*

☐ Year 11

☐ Year 12

3) Gender: How do you identify?\*

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Non-Binary

☐ Prefer not to disclose

4) With whom do you live most (or all) of the time? \*

☐ Both Mother and Father

☐ I spend around half my time with each parent

☐ Mother only or Mother and Step-parent

☐ Father only or Father and Step-parent

☐ Guardians

☐ Other (e.g. relatives, group home, living alone)

5) Do you identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person?\*

☐ Yes

☐ No

6) What language(s) do you speak at home most of the time?\*

☐ English

☐ Other - Write In: \_\_\_\_\_

7) Which of the statements below best describes your mother's education?\*

☐ Attended high school but left before completion

☐ Completed high school

☐ Completed an apprenticeship (e.g. plumber, hairdresser, chef, mechanic)

☐ Attended TAFE or vocational college but did not complete

☐ Completed a vocational training certificate or diploma

☐ Attended university but did not complete a degree

☐ Completed a university degree

☐ Don't know

8) Which of the statements below best describes your father's education? \*

☐ Attended high school but left before completion

☐ Completed high school

☐ Completed an apprenticeship (e.g. plumber, hairdresser, chef, mechanic)

☐ Attended TAFE or vocational college but did not complete

☐ Completed a vocational training certificate or diploma

☐ Attended university but did not complete a degree

☐ Completed a university degree

☐ Don't know

9) Do you have a brother/sister currently at university or who have completed a university degree?\*

☐ Yes

☐ No

10) Are there any other members of your immediate family (e.g. step-parent, guardian, another family member who you live with) who is currently at university or who has completed a university degree? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

11) Please name the relationship to you of this person

---

12) Based on your current academic performance, what ATAR rank do you expect?\*

☐ Less than 50

☐ 50-59

☐ 60-69

☐ 70-79

☐ 80-89

☐ 90-99

13) Select the box which most accurately reflects your level of agreement with the statements below:\*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoy school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel supported by my teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel supported by my friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents or guardians support my goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14) Approximately how many hours a week do you spend on the following?\*

	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	More than 15
Paid work.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Study outside school hours.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Participate in school sports/activities.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Participate in sports/activities outside of school (music lessons, club sports, dance classes etc.)	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Do unpaid volunteer work	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Care for siblings, parents, grandparents, children etc.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

15) About how often do you do any of the following? \*

	Never or less than once a month	About once a month	About once a week
Miss a day at school for no good reason.	( )	( )	( )
Skip classes.	( )	( )	( )
Arrive late for school or classes.	( )	( )	( )

16) How far do you expect to go with your education?\*

- ( ) Complete high school
- ( ) Complete an apprenticeship
- ( ) Complete a vocational training certificate or diploma
- ( ) Complete a university degree

17) How far do you think your parents/guardian expect you to go with your education?\*

- ☐ Complete high school
- ☐ Complete an apprenticeship
- ☐ Complete a vocational training certificate or diploma
- ☐ Complete a university degree

18) What do you think you are most likely to do immediately after finishing school?\*

- ☐ Begin work immediately with no plans to take further studies
- ☐ Begin work immediately and take further studies later
- ☐ Begin studies at an apprenticeship or training program immediately
- ☐ Begin studies at a university immediately
- ☐ Take a gap year (e.g. travel, earn money before going on to further studies)

19) How do you feel about each of the following statements about your life?\*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
If I work hard I will get the ATAR score I need to pursue my goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will be financially successful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will have a career that I enjoy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20) How much impact do the following people/events have on your decisions about what you want to do after school?\*

	No impact	Low impact	Some impact	High impact	Very strong impact
Friends	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Careers adviser	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Teachers	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Parents/guardians	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Sisters/brothers	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
University students/staff visiting my school	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
University open days	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Role model/other respected adult	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

21) How much have you learned from each of the following sources about the types of financial assistance available to pursue further education after high school (e.g. scholarships, grants, subsidies, loans)?

	Learned nothing or very little	Learned relatively little	Learned a bit	Learned a fair amount	Learned a lot
My parent(s)/guardian(s)	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Other members of my family	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Friends	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Teachers	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
University websites	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
SATAC websites	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Online news and advertising	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
University students/staff visiting my school	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Television, newspapers, magazines	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Government publications	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Social media	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

22) If going to university is in your future plans, where are you most interested in attending?\*

( ) Regional university campus in South Australia

( ) One of the larger university campuses in Adelaide

( ) A university in another state capital city

( ) A university in an a regional area of another state

( ) Doing an online university course (enrolling as a distance student)

( ) Other - Write In (Required): \_\_\_\_\_ \*

23) If money were no object, would you change your preference of where you would like to study? Please comment:

---

---

---

---

24) Are you aware that there are now a number of Regional University Centres in South Australia where students doing online university courses can go to study, to meet other students, get help from tutors and access books and resources? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

25) If there was a Regional University Centre located near where you live, would you be more likely to consider doing an online university course?\*

☐ Yes

☐ No

26) If you were to go to university, how much do you think it would cost each year (think about books, accommodation, living expenses, transport)?\*

☐ \$500 - \$5,000

☐ \$5,000 - \$10,000

☐ \$10,000 - \$15,000

☐ \$15,000 - \$20,000

☐ More than \$20,000

27) Are you aware that most SA universities offer free courses that help you get into university that do not require an ATAR? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

28) Are these free courses a pathway you might consider in the future? \*

☐ Yes

☐ Maybe

☐ No

29) How much do you know about the following ways of funding your university education?\*

	Know a little or nothing	Know a bit	Know a fair amount	Know a lot
Youth Allowance	( )	( )	( )	( )
Austudy	( )	( )	( )	( )
Abstudy	( )	( )	( )	( )
Student start-up loan	( )	( )	( )	( )
HECS-HELP	( )	( )	( )	( )
Scholarships	( )	( )	( )	( )

30) Outside of school excursions, how many times a year (on average) have you travelled to Adelaide in the past 5 years?\*

- ( ) Never
- ( ) 1-4 time(s) per year
- ( ) 5-10 times per year
- ( ) More than 10 times per year