

EXPERT COMMENT
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REVIEW INTO REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION RELEASED

The educational needs in non-metropolitan areas have been explored in a recent report.

On Friday, the Federal Government released the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, commissioned in 2017 and led by Emeritus Professor John Halsey of Flinders University. Experts respond:

Rural, regional and remote communities have specific needs – Dr Philip Roberts

Dr Philip Roberts, an Associate Professor in rural education & curriculum inquiry at the University of Canberra, described the report as a “much needed focus on the educational challenges facing rural communities.”

Dr Roberts notes that “The tone of the report, with its focus on the specific needs of rural, regional and remote communities, highlights that the standardised, one-size fits all, approach that typifies the last two decades of educational reform does not achieve the desired outcomes for these communities.”

This, he suggests, is because most reforms are developed in a “metro-centric mindset that doesn’t understand the unique needs of rural, regional and remote communities.”

Dr Roberts was pleased that the report names a priority area with a focus on rural, regional and remote research. He notes, however, that the report’s “Distinct lack of reference to rural education scholarship, both from Australia and overseas, as a missed opportunity, given that many of the issues raised have been engaged with in this research field.” He said, “We have a strong research base from which to implement the recommended research program.”

It is he suggests: “Critical that researchers who take up the invitation presented by the review understand what it is to be rural and value these perspectives, knowledges and meanings. Too often well-intended folk inadvertently reinforce deficit viewpoints by inherently comparing rural, regional and remote communities to the metropolitan norm, rather than viewing them from the perspectives of rural, regional and remote communities.”

For more information or an interview, please contact Philip Roberts on 0409 227 298 or at Philip.Roberts@canberra.edu.au.

A chance to generate creative possibilities and significant change – Dr Susan Ledger

Dr Susan Ledger, Associate Dean at Murdoch University in the School of Education and Vice President of the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia is “pleased to see rural education in the public forum” and “hopes it results in action rather than more reports”.

“With Australia being one of the most urbanized countries in the world with 66% of people living in capital cities and over 80% of the population living within 50km of the coast, it is no wonder issues related to rural, regional and remote education are often ignored and not represented in policy decisions or future planning,” notes Dr Ledger.

“Although the issues are not new and innovative practices not unique RRR is finally being discussed seriously at a national level and hopefully may result in policy changes that benefit rather than hinder growth in RRR areas,” says Dr Ledger.

She commends the call for a rural commissioner and national RRR education, training and research centre to build on the quality research and programs currently being undertaken within Australia by great researchers, organisations and philanthropists.

“A spokesperson and centre that brings the collective energies of a range of passionate groups involved in RRR has the capacity to generate creative possibilities and significant change.”

RRR communities, culture and conditions were at times represented as dichotomies possibly detrimental to the discussion: ‘in and out’, ‘stay or leave’, ‘ATAR or Vet’, ‘Uni or Trade’, ‘locals and incomers’. Dr Ledger suggests we focus on the context and culture first whilst students/teachers/leaders are going ‘through’ the system. Strengthen and identify the brand of the town/region/school by involving ‘**whole of community**’ policy decisions. Pride, confidence and empowerment of locals in their community and school is important and may help attract and retain great leaders and teachers in RRR areas.

Dr Ledger has a diverse background involving lived experiences in rural and remote communities within Australia and overseas. Her research explores how international and remote schooling and fields of study complement and compete with each and the importance of global competencies within these contexts.

For more information or an interview, please contact Susan Ledger on 0408 080 051 or at s.ledger@murdoch.edu.au.

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