



***COUNTRY EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP***  
**RURAL LEARNING SUMMIT 2019**

**RURAL AND REMOTE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF  
EDUCATORS AND EDUCATION LEADERS**

***DISCUSSION REPORT***



***“A leading voice on rural education”***

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## From the Chair

*“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”*

This quote, by Helen Kellar – the American author, political activist, lecturer and the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree – so perfectly encapsulates the atmosphere at this year’s Country Education Partnership Rural Learning Summit.

Around 70 participants came together in September 2019 and did so much, generously contributing their experience and ideas in exploring the growing challenge of recruiting and retaining quality educators and education leaders in rural and remote communities.

This Summit – titled *“Rural and Remote Recruitment and Retention of Educators and Education Leaders”* - brought together a range of people from country communities, universities, local government, education sectors and state government, creating an energetic powerhouse of creative thinking, discussion, debate, collaboration and passion.

The Summit was a good opportunity to ensure the bush voice is heard loud and clear and evidenced their innovative and problem-solving abilities to the challenges they face.

While CEP welcomes the initial Victorian Governments announcement during 2019 of \$82 million to bridge the divide between metropolitan and country education, we want to ensure that these communities have a say in what that might look like and ensure the allocated, and any future, money is spent on initiatives and programs that work for these communities in a sustainable way.

The Rural Learning Summit provides a great platform in which the area of recruitment and retention can be explored within the initiatives announced by the Victorian Government.

At CEP we believe in the value of the “bush voice and experience”; the passion of bush communities; the power of locally determined, place-based partnerships to make things happen.

As I see it, this is a clear opportunity for rural and remote education communities to contribute to influence the discussions occurring as a result of this governments direct spotlight on rural and regional education reform in recent times.

Thank you to each of the 70 delegates who shared their ideas, experience and vision with us in strengthening education and opportunities for children and students living and learning in regional and rural Victoria and considering how we might ensure that they are provided with the quality educators they need and deserve.



**Helen Clarke**  
**Chair**  
**Country Education Partnership - CEP**

## Country Education Partnership

### Achieving change for rural and remote communities by working together

***“The Country Education Partnership’s aim is to enhance learning opportunities and improve education outcomes for children and young people within rural and remote communities.***

***This work is centred on the areas identified within the document developed by the Country Education Partnership in collaboration with rural and remote education communities recently (“A Case for Action”).***

The Country Education Partnership (CEP) has been working to build the quality of education in rural and remote communities across Australia for more than four decades.

CEP’s mission is to be a “leading voice on rural education” and believes the best results happen when education providers, organisations and communities work together as partners.

### Achieving change for rural and remote communities by listening

***“It is time to re-conceptualize what is possible and what is desired in rural and remote communities to address this core issue of recruitment and retention of quality staff and education leaders in those communities.”***

***“That is why we want to work in partnership with our rural education communities and key stakeholder groups – we want frank discussion so we can make sure the correct information is being fed back to the Government and the Education Sectors in generating real change and real results for country students.” - Helen Clarke***

CEP’s biennial Rural Learning Summit turbocharges the mission of bringing together the best minds and experience in designing creative and workable solutions in ensuring students in rural schools and early childhood settings have the same opportunities as their city counterparts.

And the 2019 Summit – with its theme “Rural and Remote Recruitment and Retention of Educators and Education Leaders” – was no different.

More than 70 participants from rural education communities, government and Catholic education sectors, key stakeholders and universities spent a day sharing their experiences and ideas – ideas that will help inform CEP’s contribution to the Victorian Government’s development of a Rural Strategic Plan for the next five years.

While CEP has welcomed the initial Victorian Government’s package announced in 2019 (which includes attracting teachers to hard-to-staff rural schools, greater accessibility to professional learning and assistance for students to better access curriculum support) it is only as good as its implementation.

And that is where our rural and remote communities need to speak up because they’re the ones on the ground doing the work and seeing the challenges firsthand.

CEP believes the majority of past and present efforts to address the recruitment and retention challenges in rural and remote regions across Victoria have generally been largely ad hoc. There have often been piecemeal attempts to improve aspects and elements but there have been very few concerted and overall strategic or policy-driven approaches.

CEP congratulates the State Government in the recent establishment of two Working Groups to oversee the development of a strategic plan for education in rural communities and regional communities.

CEP will ensure that the needs and interests of rural and remote education communities are front and centre as they participate in this process.

This creates an opportunity for rural principals, educators and communities to have their say on how best the government’s measures could serve their school communities, with CEP starting this conversation at the Rural Education Summit.

## Background

### **Rural and Remote Education**

There is absolutely no doubt that teacher recruitment and retention is an educational issue of great significance, and the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural and remote communities is an even bigger challenge today.

The issue of teacher recruitment and retention has sharpened over the past two decades, and Governments and education systems in Australia and overseas have increased their focus on research, programs and initiatives, policy and trials in a search for answers.

These issues have been highlighted and explored in extensive national and international research and reported in the media.

In 2017, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported “up to half of all Australian teachers are leaving the profession in the first five years”, and in a 2019 article ‘We’re in a bubble: Country kids left behind as education gap widens’, *The Age* reported a slump in VCE scores over the last decade in rural and regional schools and explored the reasons for the slump, one of which was the difficulty experienced by these schools in attracting and retaining teachers.

Dr Paul Weldon - former Senior Research Fellow in the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) Teaching and Learning research program - believes the key issue is that the evidence upon which the research and commentary is conducted, is based on limited and potentially flawed data.

He wrote: *“The main issue is that the attrition rate in Australia is, in fact, not well established. It is unknown.”* (Weldon.P 2016)

Victoria and Australia are not lonely in this space. Nationally the states all have similar issues, as does much of the rest of the world.

In particular the difficulties experienced in rural and remote settings in all states and all countries, is a specific issue, within this broader context.

### **The CEP - Partnering for Solutions**

The Country Education Partnership (CEP) has been a leader in devising solutions, piloting and trialing ideas in improving outcomes for rural and remote education for many years.

In 2007 it undertook an investigation of how a more collaborative approach could be developed to support rural communities in recruiting and retaining quality educators.

The outcome was the formation of the Rural Educators Network, which successfully piloted and operated across several rural cluster and university partnerships. The partnerships created opportunities for pre-service teachers to undertake extended and supported teacher experiences in rural schools.

The review of this initiative indicated a significant increase in the uptake of rural educator positions from pre-service teachers involved in the initiative. Approximately 150 preservice teachers were involved in the Rural Educators Network over two years, with 38% of those involved gaining employment within a rural education community after their involvement.

While much research, discussion, political pressure and local community effort has been continued, CEP believes the school-university partnership is still an effective initiative in encouraging preservice teachers to experience, and be attracted to, rural education communities.

The time is again right to open up this debate with rural communities, and re-conceptualise what is possible in rural communities to address the core issue of recruitment and retention of quality staff and education leaders in these communities.

## Behind Summit Doors

### Prior to the Rural Learning Summit

Before the 2019 Rural Learning Summit, delegates were provided with a Discussion Paper outlining the challenges of attracting and keeping teachers in rural and remote Victoria, as well as evidence and evaluation of the effectiveness of past strategies and programs.

A copy of the Discussion Paper is available on the CEP website.

Delegates were also provided national and international academic research on teacher recruitment, teacher recruitment information from examples such as the Western Australia Teacher Training Framework programs that have been trialed in Australia and overseas and delegates were invited to consider eleven key questions to facilitate discussion at the Rural Learning Summit prior to attending.

### The Summit:

As an introduction, participants heard presentations from a range of varied experiences to encourage people to have a greater understanding of the challenges and possibilities in relation to rural recruitment and retention, they included:

- **The North West Rise Network:**

Supporting educators who are spread far and wide across the North West of America and Alaska focusing on small rural and remote education communities. In summarizing the issues and possible solutions they concluded:

*“It’s extremely difficult to draw high quality teachers to geographically disconnected, rural communities - and when they do come, it’s hard to get them to stay. Second, it is a challenge to connect teachers across remote and rural communities so they can share instructional practices and professional development.*

*One way to address the challenges facing rural schools, while leveraging their inherent assets, is to establish professional networks of teacher leaders aimed at providing support that helps their colleagues to succeed and encourages them to stay.” (Parsley.D 2016)*

- **Rebecca McKenzie:**

A recent graduate, who outlined her early teaching experiences within a rural education setting identifying the importance of support, collaboration and trust, alongside the positive opportunities for early career growth and responsibility.

- **Sameerah Arif:**

The Future Workforce Project Officer from the Rural Workforce Agency Victoria, (RWAV) provided a rural health perspective to recruitment and retention, and outlined a range of initiatives the health has developed to support the recruitment and retention of medical and health workers in rural and remote communities.

- **Dr Philip Roberts:**

An Associate Professor from University of Canberra, a long time researcher into rural and remote educational issues, focused on the specific and different nature of “rurality”, and explored some of the key impacts on recruiting and retaining educators within rural and remote communities.

### Key Questions Considered by Summit Delegates

As an important element of the summit the eleven questions provided for the 70 delegates to consider prior to arriving at the Rural Learning Summit were used to guide discussions and consideration throughout the Summit.

The questions were:

- Do we need a Government initiated framework for rural and remote educator recruitment and retention? Why or Why not?
- What do you consider to be the key roles for Government and the Education sectors?
- Do you favor incentives and which ones do you think will work?
- Who should manage/control the incentives?
- What needs to change in the preparation of teachers from a rural and remote perspective?
- Is forming collaborative partnerships a key option for education settings (across sectors, and across early years and schools) to work together on recruitment and retention? If yes, how and what? If no, why?
- What are the barriers and opportunities in forming partnerships of education settings for recruitment and retention?
- Do you believe education organisations use induction effectively? Please give reasons.
- Do you believe education settings use mentoring and coaching effectively? Please give reasons.
- Would an “external facilitator”, or “broker” in this area, working with a partnership of rural education settings support the changes, and reduce the workload of rural settings? How?
- How important is recruiting and retaining quality leaders in rural and remote communities? What can you suggest to change or improve this?

### Setting the Scene - The Context for Change

The efforts to address the recruitment and retention dilemma in all jurisdictions have generally been assessed as ad hoc by numerous research papers over recent times.

There have been piecemeal attempts to improve aspects and elements of the issue but very few concerted and overall strategic or policy-driven approaches.

What has been exposed through this approach is the cost outcome that can be directly related to previous attempts in this crucial area. There are two major concerns that need to be clearly understood and used to drive improvement in this area. They are:

- The cost to government and education systems for limited preparation of educators and the failure to attract and retain quality teachers and leaders in rural communities
- The impact on student outcomes when teacher preparation, recruitment and retention are not an ongoing focus of government, the education system and organizations.

### What the Data Tells Us

Teacher retention data is contestable, but the estimates are scary enough to drive action. The following provide some idea of the challenge in Australia:

- Initial retention for Teacher Education Training courses is 65 per cent for primary and post primary 68 per cent in Australia
- For post graduates it rises to 85 per cent
- 20 per cent of graduates do not take up teaching positions
- Estimates of teachers giving up the profession in the first five years range from 30-50 per cent (Walker, 2016)
- The annual attrition rate for teachers in Australia is approximately 5.7 per cent (AITSL - 2015)
- The aging profile of teachers in Australia is compounding the attrition rate.

The cost and the impact of these attritions are significant and should be ringing a loud enough bell to signal some response.

There are many experiences, studies, commentaries, policies and practices that have been recorded or trialed to change and improve teacher recruitment and retention in rural settings.

### Considering the Research

To help drive discussion, delegates were provided with a brief review of what the research is telling us in the four key areas of:

- Developing a Comprehensive Recruitment and Retention Policy
- Educator Preparation
- Recruitment
- Retention

These areas were explored in further detail within the Discussion Paper that was circulated prior to The Summit. It cited the research and outlined the following key points to enable participants to discuss and present ideas in these key areas throughout The Summit.

In summary, the areas included:

- *Developing a Comprehensive Recruitment and Retention Policy*
  - No overarching policy exists for rural and remote preparation, recruitment and retention of educators
  - A policy is needed to provide a framework within which this work can be undertaken, and data gathered.
  - It would also clarify the responsibilities for each level of the sector in doing this work.
- *Educator Preparation*
  - There is a clear link between what happens in the preparation phases for teaching and retention.
  - Questions have consistently been raised about the quality and nature of teacher preparation, over time.
  - There is a need for specific elements of teacher preparation to include rural components.
  - This should include the opportunity to experience immersion and practicum programs in rural settings
  - That collaborative partnerships between universities and groups of rural schools is one method that has been trialed and succeeded.
- *Recruitment*
  - Research has been able to provide some key understandings of the factors at work in rural recruitment.
  - This highlights the need for schools to be aware of those factors and develop actions to meet identified needs of prospective recruits.
  - This will include the provision of quality induction, mentoring and coaching programs, the ongoing support structures and opportunities as well as targeted incentives.
  - The use of a selection process that sets clear expectations and exhibits high standards as well as providing the necessary support indicated.
  - It is clear that recruitment needs to be well organized, structured and evidence based in its processes.
  - All of the same elements applied to educator recruitment apply when schools are seeking leaders.

- *Retention*
  - Retention is a national and international issue, but it is particularly so in rural and remote settings.
  - The research identifies several drivers that are at work in the area of educator recruitment and specifically rural and remote recruitment.
  - It also identifies key factors that exist in retaining quality teachers. In particular it outlines the extrinsic and extrinsic factors and how they influence a teacher's actions in retention.
  - The retention issues and drivers are important for all educator positions, including leadership
  - Key actions by schools should be in the areas of mentoring, coaching, collegiate support, collaborative practices, professional growth, recognition and incentives.

## Key Take-outs from the Summit

### Analysis of the Responses

The discussions and responses recorded in the Summit indicate five key overall messages that can guide future action.

These overall messages included:

1. A Holistic Policy Approach

There is an understanding that the issues have been with us for some time. Actions at all levels have been taken but the problems remain much the same.

The Summit highlighted and reinforced the desire to have a holistic approach, with all sectors playing their part and trusting each other to achieve the outcomes we desire.

2. Partnerships

Maybe this is the lynch pin to success in this area. Working individually and continuing to do the same thing is the classic case of getting the same result. Many placed based, locally determined rural partnerships currently exist to service the needs of their local communities.

Using this as a key strategy for change and supporting it with resources could result in changes in action and outcomes in the area of recruitment and retention of rural educators.

3. Collaboration

As a partnership strategy has the potential to achieve more together than alone. Using it in the preparation, recruitment and retention of educators requires a changed mindset but if achieved it uses the inherent potential of many rural schools for the benefit of the many.

Just as importantly it uses the resources of the many effectively and efficiently, to achieve better student outcomes, by providing a stronger, more collegiate environment for rural educators, as well the ability to address the challenge of professional isolation that many rural and remote educators experience.

4. Empowerment

At all levels will begin a holistic attack on the issues outlined.

At a Government level they have actions they must take and some of these are to empower rural schools to have the resources to once again become the local solver of local problems. This support is aimed clearly at reinvigorating this sector.

Schools will work closely with Universities to improve and support the preparation of pre-service teachers. At the partnership level schools will collaboratively develop new programs and practices that empower and support new and existing staff to maintain or become the quality educators they want and need.

5. Support

Support at all levels is essential.

Governments and Education Sectors must be prepared to provide the resources necessary to encourage and re-invigorate the rural and remote education sector.

Schools need to be more clinical in how they provide support and target the use of incentives for their staff, at all levels of development and experience.

Schools must support each other and be prepared to share without reservation, if the goal is truly, better outcomes for all students.

Within these five key messages, delegates were asked to consider, and propose in ranked importance, possible key areas of action based on their discussions throughout the day, the presentations that were made on the day and their own experiences.

These proposed areas of action were developed across the three key stakeholders who play a key role in recruiting and retaining quality educators and education leaders to rural and remote communities.

The Rural Learning Summit highlighted the importance of these three key stakeholders to work collaboratively to explore and implement the areas of focus proposed.

The following provides a summary of those responses and ideas that gained support from at least 85 per cent of respondents.

<b>Government</b>	
Government, in partnership with rural education communities, develop a rural recruitment and retention policy	<b>90%</b>
Governments take a leadership role in the promotion of rural education as a positive career path for educators	<b>88%</b>
Government to promote a cross-sector approach to preparation, recruitment and retention of educator with rural communities	<b>85%</b>
<b>Education Sectors</b>	
Create incentives that operate on two levels: * Intrinsic incentives, such as, sabbaticals, professional development, coaching and mentoring * Extrinsic incentives, such as cash incentives, accommodation, rural scholarships	<b>100%</b>
Development of a cross-sector induction and mentoring framework that is rural friendly	<b>94%</b>
Establish specific rural education leadership programs based on a “pipeline” approach	<b>97%</b>
Establish a Rural Innovation Fund to support partnerships of schools in the development of recruitment and retention strategies, including localised incentives, support professional development	<b>88%</b>
Develop a formal agreement that encourages school partnerships and universities to work together focusing on pre-service teacher practicums in rural locations	<b>91%</b>
<b>Rural Schools</b>	
Rural schools to work together in locally determined place-based partnerships to facilitate the recruitment and retention of staff	<b>89%</b>
Rural school partnerships establish relationships with universities to provide immersion and practicum experiences for pre-service teachers	<b>100%</b>
Rural school partnerships facilitate and provide induction and mentoring programs within the state developed framework	<b>100%</b>
Establishment of a statewide “Rural Educators’ Agency to support school partnerships in preparation, recruitment and retention	<b>95%</b>

## CEP Advocacy and Action

As a result of the Rural Learning Summit, and the proposed actions from the Rural Learning Summit discussions, CEP will undertake a process of advocacy and action to support and guide change in the preparation, recruitment and retention of rural and remote educators.

It is CEPs belief that within this context, the key strategies in recruitment and retention can be more effective if they:

- Cultivate collaboration within and across rural and remote education settings
- Empower educators
- Provide them with support
- Create better working conditions.

Therefore, the advocacy and action will be based around the following specific ideas and initiatives:

### **Government and Education Sectors**

- Development of a government-initiated rural recruitment and retention policy and framework, which is co-designed with rural communities. This needs to address the differentiation in rural education, draw on research and provide a strong, be cross sectorial, and provide a consistent message about the positives of living and working in rural communities.
- The establishment of intrinsic incentives to graduates considering and accepting rural and remote positions, including incentives for accommodation, removal of stamp duty on housing, rural scholarships, supporting sabbaticals for continued service, and payment of HECS that are flexible to accommodate the varying dynamics of differing rural communities.
- The establishment of a “*Rural Innovation Fund*”, part of which contains a specific allocation of support for teacher recruitment and retention.

A locally determined, place-based partnership of schools would be able to apply for this funding support to develop specific programs and incentives to meet their local needs. This is based on a “*local solutions to local issues*” that has been a successful strategy in rural communities on many levels and a key strategy identified within the Expert Panel Report on Rural and Regional Education.

- The development of a specific mentoring and induction program tailored to rural and remote education settings. This could be resourced through partnerships and the “*Rural Innovation Fund*”.
- The development of an ongoing professional learning experience for rural and remote educators and education leaders in partnership with key professional development organizations, such as Bastow Leadership Institute.

Incentives and recognition for this would allow such concepts of sabbaticals and rural service recognition to occur.

- Establish a cross sectoral external state-wide facilitation role (“Rural Educators Agency”, learning from the experiences within the model in the Health Sector) to support rural recruitment and retention.

This role was seen as essential in building school-university partnerships and working in rural education partnerships in broader roles such as marketing and promotion, recruitment, working with philanthropic groups, CRT’s and capacity building.

### **Schools and Universities**

- Rural education partnerships between rural education settings and universities need to work more effectively with specific encouragement, and support from Government, to pursue this action as a key to addressing preparation and recruitment issues.
- Advocating to the Education Sectors and schools to work in partnership with universities to better prepare pre-service teachers for rural teaching environments, including promoting the benefits of living and teaching in rural Victoria, covering the differences between city and rural teaching skills and experiences and offering teaching practicums in rural schools.
- Universities offer ongoing support to early career teachers who have accepted a rural placement.  
The current induction programs were seen as variable.
- Working with Universities to explore how ongoing support to early career teachers who have accepted a rural placement can best occur.
- Encourage and support Universities and rural and remote schools to work together to develop practicums for Pre-Service Teachers, to immerse them in rural education communities as part of their training.

### **Regional and Rural Schools**

- Advocate for greater collaboration between rural and remote schools in attracting and retaining teachers to their local area, including shared engagement, and utilisation, of educators, pooling and sharing professional development across partnerships, partnership approaches to mentoring and coaching, supporting flexible approaches to staffing and marketing.