

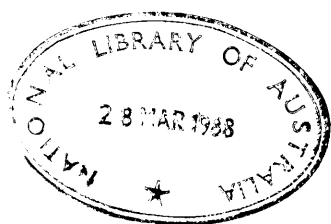
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SCHOOLING IN RURAL AUSTRALIA



Commonwealth Schools Commission

NOVEMBER 1987



SCHOOLING
IN
RURAL
AUSTRALIA



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COMMONWEALTH SCHOOLS COMMISSION

CHAIRMAN

PO Box 34, Woden
Australian Capital Territory 2606

19 November 1987

The Hon J S Dawkins, MP
Minister for Employment, Education
and Training
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Dawkins

We are pleased to submit to you our report on **Schooling in Rural Australia**. The report is the outcome of a detailed study by the Commission. It has paid particular attention to ways of increasing access to high quality schooling in rural areas.

In carrying out its study, the Commission has been concerned about the relatively low levels of senior secondary school completion in rural areas. The main themes running through this report, the topics it addresses and the recommendations it makes all concentrate on improving both the quantity and quality of the schooling undertaken by rural students.

This report contains information which will be of interest to many people involved with rural schooling. The report highlights challenges, as well as constructive approaches to meeting those challenges. It also identifies areas in which the Commonwealth might contribute to improving the schooling available to young people living in rural Australia.

Government and non-government education authorities, interest groups and many concerned persons have greatly assisted the Commission in its investigations and studies. It is hoped that this report justifies their interest and efforts.

In presenting the report we wish to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of Dr Bob Andrews, until recently a full-time Commissioner.

Yours sincerely

Garth Boomer (Chairman)
Joan Brown
Lyndsay Connors
Van Davy
Vin Faulkner
Maxwell Howell
Joe Lo Bianco
Patricia Mitchell
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Preface

Since its inception the Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC) has focused attention on issues related to the education of students in rural areas. In its **Report for the Triennium 1976-78** (1975), the Commission identified country students as an educationally disadvantaged group with special needs and funding requirements. In subsequent reports the Commission has continued to comment on the special educational needs of students living in rural areas. In 1977, on the advice of the Commission, the Government introduced the Disadvantaged Country Areas Program to help counteract some of the educational disadvantages caused to students by factors such as poverty, isolation and remoteness. This program evolved into the present Country Areas Program in 1982. The Country Areas Program continues to receive strong support from education authorities and school communities in rural areas.

In **Quality and Equality** (1985) the Commission stated its belief that there was an urgent need to address the broad issues in rural education at a local, State and national level. The report indicated that issues such as access to and the broadening of curriculum offerings require major attention and considerably increased resources. In line with comments made in **Quality and Equality**, the Commission recommended in its May 1986 report, **Commonwealth Programs and Policy Development for Schools**, that one of its major policy development projects to be undertaken in 1987 should focus on schooling in rural Australia. The Government accepted this recommendation, consistent with the concern about educational services in rural areas expressed in its April 1986 statement, **Economic and Rural Policy**.

Successive Commonwealth Governments have accepted that the needs of students living in rural Australia require Commonwealth action if the educational opportunities available to these students are to approximate, as much as possible, the opportunities available to students living in urban areas. Some examples of this action are subsidies to assist parents to purchase transceivers to enable their children to participate in school of the air programs (introduced in 1973), student assistance programs such as the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (introduced in 1973), the Loan Video Program (introduced in 1982) and the Country Areas Program referred to above.

The Commission believes that the involvement of the Commonwealth in supporting the provision of education in rural areas has been one of the major factors contributing to recent improvements in rural schooling. There is still, however, much to be done. The Commission believes that it is therefore essential that the Commonwealth continues to provide its support aimed specifically at improving educational outcomes for students living in rural areas.

In this report the Commission focuses on factors which it considers central to improving educational services in rural Australia. It presents a substantial amount of information on these factors, in order to help stimulate informed discussion and appropriate action directed at improving the educational opportunities available to rural school students. It points to successful initiatives in rural schooling and highlights directions which it considers should be taken to further improve schooling in rural areas. Finally, the Commission emphasises areas in which the Commonwealth might appropriately and beneficially provide further support for schooling in rural Australia.

Acknowledgments

In undertaking this study of rural schooling the Commission has been assisted by many government and local authorities, organisations, schools, interest groups and individuals. The Commission wishes to express its thanks to all of these organisations and individuals.

In particular, appreciation is expressed to the many people who gave of their time to discuss their views on rural schooling with the Commission during the visits made to rural communities as part of the study, or in the consultations undertaken with education authorities and State and national interest groups. Others expressed their views in written submissions to the Commission or in other forms of communication. Education authorities and organisations provided data and information on rural schooling. Particular appreciation is also expressed to the officers of education authorities and to the staff of education centres who helped to organise the visits and consultations undertaken during the study.

Special thanks are extended to the participants in the National Review Workshop, the members of the Advisory Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, the participants in the Working Group on Technology and the researchers who carried out the support studies on the rural economy, information technology and rural communities and their schools. Finally, appreciation is expressed to Ms Margaret Barbalet and Mr Don Squires who served as project consultants, and to those Commission officers who provided the support to enable the project to be completed.

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABSEC	Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AIC	Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme
BLIPS	Basic Learning in Primary Schools Program
CAE	College of Advanced Education
CAP	Country Areas Program
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
CDE	Commonwealth Department of Education
CDEET	Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training
CDEYA	Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs
CSC	Commonwealth Schools Commission
CTEC	Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DCAP	Disadvantaged Country Areas Program
DSP	Disadvantaged Schools Program
ELIC	Early Literacy Inservice Course
ESL	English as a Second Language
HSC	Higher School Certificate
ICPA	Isolated Children's Parents Association
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
NCIS	National Council of Independent Schools
PEP	Participation and Equity Program
SAS	Secondary Allowances Scheme
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEAS	Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme

Rural Australia and Schooling

Introduction

1.1 Rural Australia, as defined in this report, comprises over 95 per cent of the Australian continent. While much of Australia's population resides in major coastal cities, around four million people live in rural Australia. Of these, some one million are students attending school.

1.2 Rural Australia presents distinctive challenges for schooling which reflect rural circumstances associated with distance and isolation. Attitudes and traditions regarding education can be distinctive in rural areas because of the small size and close-knit nature of many rural communities, and can have a particularly strong influence on students and staff. Peer pressure, for example, can exert great influence on students in a small rural community. Many schools in rural areas are small in size and are faced with special challenges in seeking to provide the most coherent educational program possible for their students. The cost of providing these educational services can be high due to transportation and communication costs. In remote areas particularly, students can face difficulties regarding physical access to a school and may either have to study at home using distance education services, live away from home to attend school or travel extensively each day to get to school. Attracting staff and maintaining reasonable staffing continuity can be difficult in schools in remote areas. Staff in these schools can find that their preparation for teaching in remote schools and the extent of professional support available are insufficient.

1.3 Approaches to many of the educational challenges facing rural Australia need to take into account the circumstances of distance and isolation, as well as the specific characteristics of given schools or areas. School environments can be very different even for schools in the same district, with each school having its own strengths and weaknesses, and special challenges to confront. The rural population often differs in composition and nature from location to location. With different cultural settings, the learning environments and learning needs of students will differ. The objectives of schooling accepted by a community will also vary, as will community expectations of students and staff and the aspirations and expectations students hold for themselves. The support communities are able to provide for schooling varies. Some communities have a high level of poverty which severely limits the financial support they can provide and compounds the problems associated with isolation faced by community members. Given these many differences between schools and between communities, the approaches

adopted to improve rural schooling also need to differ to reflect local circumstances. In some cases, for example, new communication technologies may help greatly to improve educational offerings; in other cases different approaches will be required.

1.4 The Commission is strongly of the view that schooling should take account of, and build on, local circumstances and conditions. This view applies to all schooling, regardless of rural or metropolitan location. It does not mean, however, that the Commission considers that schooling in rural areas is, or should be, different in fundamental ways from schooling in metropolitan areas. The Commission has stated in its recent report **In the National Interest** (1987a, p. 32), that there are outcomes of schooling which all students should achieve. It does not advocate fundamentally different schooling for rural compared with metropolitan students. While in this present report, terms such as 'rural schools' and 'rural schooling' have been used, these terms are not meant to imply that schooling for rural students is a distinctive form of schooling. Nor are they meant to downplay the important contribution that boarding schools in metropolitan areas have made to the schooling of students from rural areas. Rather, these terms have been used simply for ease and variety of expression.

1.5 Rural Australia is characterised by considerable diversity among communities and regions, and yet rural communities share many common features. The varied circumstances in which rural children undertake their schooling, the diversities within rural Australia and the common features shared by many rural communities are all relevant to a thorough study of schooling in rural Australia. Economic factors are also relevant to such a study especially given the current state of the rural economy. It is within the broad context of schooling in rural Australia that this report therefore begins.

Understanding rural Australia

Diverse features

1.6 Rural Australia is characterised by considerable variation in climate, topography, industry and population. The diversity within rural Australia was emphasised by rural people in their discussions with the Commission on rural issues. Diversity is apparent to anyone travelling widely in Australia. Broad areas of the nation are very sparse in terms of both population and vegetation (eg. the north-western region of Western Australia). Some of these sparse areas are inland (eg. the central desert region); others are coastal (eg. the area around Ceduna, South Australia). Other rural areas of the continent are relatively densely populated and vegetated (eg. the south-west corner of Western Australia). Some areas experience extremely high temperatures for much of the year (eg. Julia Creek, Queensland); others experience quite low winter temperatures (eg. Cabramurra, New South Wales). Some areas, especially those which are inland, have low and irregular rainfall; others have considerable and regular rainfall or experience monsoonal conditions (eg. Weipa, Queensland). Regions may be mountainous, undulating, or vast plains. Some areas are extremely isolated from large centres of population, either by distance (eg. Tennant Creek, Northern Territory) or by the time required to travel over difficult terrain (eg. Queenstown, Tasmania) or to cross a significant stretch of ocean (eg. King Island). Many of these features have relevance for the lifestyle of local residents and the

opportunities available to them, as well as for schooling. Figures 1 and 2 show the major settlement and agricultural zones in Australia. The relevance of these features for schooling extends to the need for buildings adapted to climatic and other conditions, the need for students to have exposure to a different physical environment in order to make particular courses meaningful, and the need for expanded social contact for students studying in small schools in remote areas.

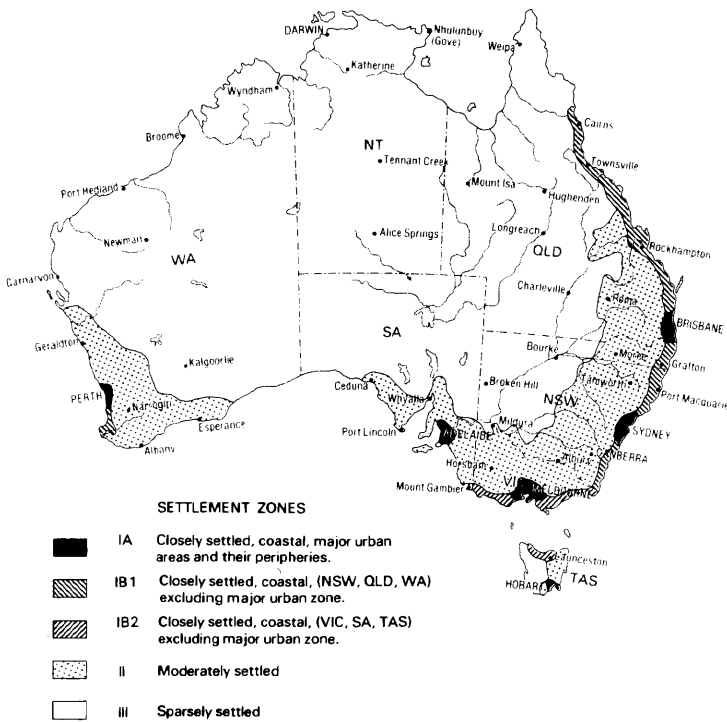
1.7 Associated with geographic differences are differences in land use and local industries. Industry differences have relevance for schooling as well as for other aspects of rural life. In some locations the industries are seasonal and provide irregular employment. As a result, the population may be transient (eg. in the case of fruit-picking and prawning). Many children of crayfishing families from the Abrolhas Islands off the coast of Western Australia study by correspondence lessons due to the seasonal nature of the crayfishing industry and the associated mobility of families. In mining areas (eg. Tom Price, Western Australia), the population is often made up largely of 'short stay' residents who moved to the area for employment, but who see their futures and those of their children being in larger centres of population. In contrast, more settled farming and pastoral areas are home for many long-established families who have resided in the area for generations.

1.8 The type of industry in rural towns is also relevant to the local economy. While 'rural crisis' and 'rural recession' are common terms, the recent rural economic downturn has affected different industries, and hence geographical areas, in different ways. An analysis of the effects of the rural recession is provided by Harrold and Powell (1987) in a report prepared for the Commission. The report indicates that areas producing cereal grains, sugar, horticultural products and rice have borne the brunt of the rural crisis, while pastoral areas have been less affected (see Figure 2). More will be said shortly about the rural economic situation.

1.9 The extent to which the economy within a rural area is dependent on one major industry, as opposed to being more broadly based, is also relevant. Single industry towns mainly offer school leavers employment opportunities linked to the one major industry. More broadly-based local economies which include a number of industries can offer a wider range of employment opportunities. Importantly, too, single industry rural economies are more vulnerable to downturns in international markets and to other factors (eg. crop failure, or an ore deposit being mined out) which may have serious consequences for the well-being of the local economy and hence for local employment prospects. More broadly-based local economies are less vulnerable, as they have some protection from downturns in any one industry.

1.10 There is also diversity within rural Australia in terms of the social composition of the population in particular areas. Some areas have a considerable proportion of self-employed farmers or graziers. Other areas have a heavy concentration of miners, or process workers, or workers in the tourist industry. There is also ethnic diversity within rural Australia. Some areas have a substantial Aboriginal population. Certain rural locations have attracted substantial numbers of people who migrated to Australia from the same country. The Barossa Valley area in South Australia, for example, is the home of a large number of people of German extraction. There is a substantial Italian community in Ingham, Queensland, while that town also has a sizeable population of people of Finnish background. Such differences in social composition have relevance for local schooling. Some areas, for example, require education provisions appropriate to Aboriginal students; others need to provide assistance for non-English speaking background students who have recently migrated to Australia.

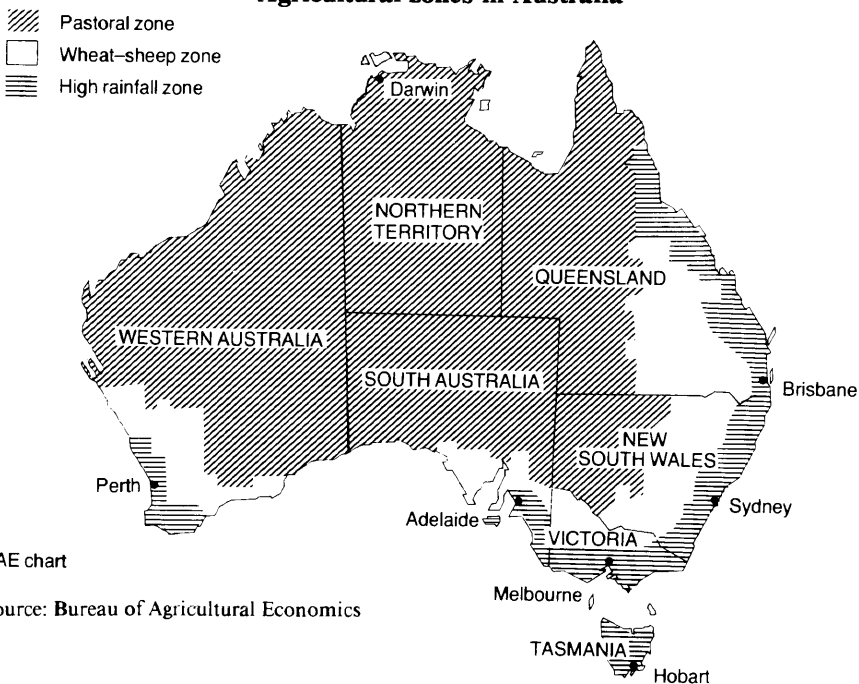
Figure 1
Settlement zones in Australia



Source: NATMAP [This map is Crown Copyright and has been reproduced by permission of the Manager, National Mapping, Department of Administrative Services, Canberra, Australia.]



Figure 2
Agricultural zones in Australia



Source: Bureau of Agricultural Economics

Common features

1.11 So far, the diversity within rural Australia has been emphasised. Features which are shared across rural Australia, however, must also be kept in mind in considering policies relating to schooling. These features include living at a distance from any major centre of population, dependence on agricultural or mining industries and a relative or absolute lack of community services.

1.12 A number of these common features are in the realm of attitudes and perceptions. Many rural people feel themselves to be 'away from the centre of things'. This feeling is not restricted to those who live a long distance from a capital city or large provincial centre. People who live a two-hour car drive away from a capital city may have this outlook. They feel distant from political power, involvement in decision-making, cultural activities, and specialist diagnostic and treatment services relating to medical, psychological, disability and learning problems.

1.13 Linked to the feeling of being away from the centre of things is a sense of 'being under threat': the threat being that, particularly in times of economic difficulty, local services will be curtailed. The general state of the Australian economy and the associated limitations on expenditure by governments has contributed to this sense of threat. Rural residents in areas which have been hard-hit by the downturn in the rural economy feel especially fearful that local services will be reduced. In some areas, for example, population shifts due to local economic circumstances or other factors have placed the local school at risk of closure, or have actually led to school closures.

1.14 Another common feature is a feeling of 'not being understood by city folk'. This includes the feeling that the contributions to the nation as a whole made by rural people and what they produce are not adequately appreciated. It also includes the feeling that neither the harsh realities nor the good things about rural life are understood or appreciated by people from the city. Rural people often feel that they are required to justify why they are living in rural Australia to city people who appear incredulous that anyone would voluntarily forego city life. The resultant outlook of rural people has consequences for how they view curriculum offerings available in local schools, as well as for their attitude towards teachers from metropolitan areas who take up rural teaching positions.

1.15 The sense of community is usually strong in rural areas, with a sense of community identity and of a mutual dependence of community members being evident. The local school and its staff are important elements of the community. School-community links are often strong and the school is usually a focal point for recreational and social activities.

1.16 It should be noted, however, that life in a rural town or remote community is life in a community in which every person is highly visible. This visibility sometimes proves overbearing to young people in their developing years. A teacher who has lived most of his or her life in large centres of population and who then takes up a rural teaching position can also find it oppressive.

1.17 A further common feature within rural Australia is the positive view that many rural residents have about rural living. While many rural people acknowledge that there are disadvantages to rural life, they are also very conscious of, and vocal about, its advantages. These advantages include aspects of the physical environment such as clean air, open space and closeness to nature, as well as aspects of rural community life, such as the interdependence of community members and the sense of 'belonging'.

Rural schooling

1.18 Daily access from their homes to a school appropriate to their year-level is available to the vast majority of school students in rural Australia. This is a significant accomplishment given the small population, but large size and distinctive geography of Australia. There are over 5000 schools in rural Australia. More than 4000 of these are operated by State education authorities, while more than 1000 are operated by non-government organisations (see Chapter 3).

1.19 Many schools in rural Australia have the same basic structure as metropolitan schools; that is, they operate as primary schools covering the usual primary year-levels for their State or Territory, or as secondary schools covering the usual secondary year-levels. Some rural schools, however, have a structure which differs from that of metropolitan schools in their State or Territory. These schools are often in areas which have a relatively small school population. For example, Mullewa District High School in Western Australia (described in Panel 1), offers primary schooling, as well as secondary schooling up to Year 10. 'Primary school with a secondary top' structures also exist in other States and the Northern Territory and are also termed 'area' or 'central' schools.

1.20 A feature of many rural schools is their small student enrolment and small teaching staff. This can place limitations on curriculum offerings, although these can be extended by using appropriate strategies. While small schools have some disadvantages for students and staff, they also have many advantages. Furthermore, the local school has great social and economic importance in rural communities. It is therefore of concern that population shifts resulting from the rural economic downturn, in conjunction with the general emphasis on expenditure restraint, could put some small schools at risk of being deemed educationally and/or economically non-viable and then closed down.

1.21 A number of small rural schools are using special teaching arrangements, involving communication technologies, to extend their curriculum offerings. The 'Mallee Cluster' of Ouyen High School and four other high schools in the north-west of Victoria (see Panel 1) illustrates one way to broaden curriculum offerings in small schools. There is a number of schools in which similar arrangements are now well established (eg. in Oatlands, Tasmania, and in some area schools in South Australia). In Western Australia 'mixed mode' teaching, involving supervision by a teacher of students taking correspondence school lessons while at school, operates in rural schools to provide study opportunities at the Year 11 and 12 levels.

1.22 While daily access from their homes to school is available to the majority of school students, for some students this is possible only as a result of extensive travel each day by school bus or other means. Others do not have daily access to school from their home, and for some of these students attendance at school is achieved through living away from home. Boarding schools are a well established means of providing for such students. Hostels and private accommodation are other means which make it possible for students to have daily access to school, albeit by living away from home.

1.23 Some students who do not have daily access to school from their home, study at home using distance education services (eg. correspondence school or school of the air). Many of these students live in very remote areas, particularly on cattle and sheep stations in northern, central and western Australia, and in western New South Wales. Correspondence schools have traditionally relied on the mailing of material between the school and the students. Schools of the air developed out of the experience of the Flying Doctor radio networks. They use

two-way radio to link teachers and students. Advances in communication technologies hold considerable hope for improving schooling for students studying by distance education means, especially through providing more reliable, faster and better quality communication between teacher and student.

1.24 Still other school-age young people in rural Australia have virtually no access to schooling. Many of these are Aboriginal children who live a considerable distance from a school and for whom living away from home to attend school or studying at home by distance education means are precluded by their use of an indigenous language, or by cultural or family circumstances. Other Aboriginal children in rural areas may live reasonably close to a school, but in a very real sense be isolated from it by cultural factors.

1.25 While the major constitutional responsibility for primary and secondary education lies with the States and the Northern Territory which provide the majority of funding for schools, substantial financial support for schools is provided by the Commonwealth. Commonwealth support is provided to metropolitan and rural schools through general recurrent grants, capital grants and Commonwealth specific purpose programs. Of special relevance to rural schools is the Country Areas Program (CAP) administered by the Commission. The CAP was established in 1982 to help alleviate the substantial and persistent educational disadvantage of many rural students. It replaced the Disadvantaged Country Areas Program which had operated since 1977 as a pilot program complementing the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

1.26 The Commonwealth also provides financial assistance to students and their families through education allowances. AUSTUDY, for example, provides income-tested financial assistance to young people aged 16 years and over to assist them to undertake schooling or tertiary study. Of particular relevance to rural students are the Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme (ABSEC) which provides financial assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to help them take advantage of secondary education opportunities, and the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) which mainly assists students who, because of geographic isolation, do not have reasonable daily access to an appropriate government school. The AIC provides financial assistance to help meet the boarding, second home or correspondence study costs associated with the schooling of geographically isolated students. A guide to Commonwealth programs and services in education and other areas which assist rural people is provided in **The Rural Book** (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987a).

Panel 1

Six Schools in Rural Australia

Edith Creek Primary School is located in rich farmland 16 km south of Smithton (population about 3400), Tasmania. The local economy is based on agriculture, with the major farming activities being dairying and beef cattle grazing, and the growing of peas, beans and potatoes for processing as cash crops. Edith Creek Primary School has a 1987 enrolment of some 110 students covering Years K-6, and a staff of six teachers. To attend a secondary school students will travel daily to Smithton. The school is closely linked to the community and its buildings are used by the community for social and recreational purposes. The school hall, for example, is regularly used for entertainment such as ballroom dancing and discotheque evenings.

(Source: Developed from the Smithton, Tasmania case study report (Tasmanian Department of Education, 1987))

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Murray Downs bush school is located 240 km by road from Tennant Creek (population about 3200), in the Northern Territory. Tennant Creek is remote from other centres, being 507 km from Alice Springs, 670 km from Katherine, 680 km from Mount Isa and 1000 km from Darwin. The Barkly Education Region, in which the Murray Downs bush school is located, covers an area which has beef cattle grazing and gold and copper mining as its main industries. The school consists mainly of a mobile classroom (about 15 metres long by four metres wide) and an attached covered verandah. It serves from 25-30 Aboriginal children and has a staff of one white teacher and one Aboriginal teaching assistant. Its facilities are used regularly for adult community activities. The school offers primary education. The nearest post-primary/secondary school is at Tennant Creek.

(Source: Developed from the Tennant Creek and Barkly Education Region case study report (Crowther, 1987))

...

St Columba's Primary School is a small Catholic school in Charters Towers (population about 7620), Queensland. Charters Towers was originally a major gold and mining centre and interest in its mining potential has recently been revived. The beef cattle industry is also very important in the region and tourism is a fast growing local industry. St Columba's Primary School has buildings which are in fair-to-poor condition. The grounds are limited in size and cannot support further building development. Office and storage space is very limited. The school has a 1987 enrolment of 140 students. Secondary education is available to the students in the town.

(Source: Developed from the Charters Towers case study report (Crowther and Travis, 1987))

...

Mullewa District High School is located in the central coast region of Western Australia. Mullewa (population about 1720), is some 485 km north of Perth and 96 km east of Geraldton. It is the centre of a farming community with wheat growing and sheep farming being the major local industries. The school offers Years K-10 for a 1987 enrolment of 128 students. About one in ten of the students travel to school by bus, the longest route being 54 km one way, taking 65 minutes. It is fairly commonplace for non-Aboriginal parents in the area to send their children to school in Geraldton or Perth. There is concern locally that this trend, together with the population decline in the area, will lead to the closure of the secondary component of the school.

(Source: Developed from the Mullewa case study report (Lake, Kerr and King, 1987))

...

Ouyen High School is located in the north-west of Victoria, 102 km south of Mildura. Ouyen (population about 1700), is an agricultural region which produces wheat, oats, barley, wool and fat lambs. Grapes and citrus fruits are also grown in the region. Ouyen High School offers secondary schooling covering Years 7-12. In 1987 it had an enrolment of 281 students and a teaching staff of 34. Over half of the students travel to school by bus, the longest route being 50 km one way, taking 60 minutes. Ouyen High School, and four other high schools in the region, have recently put forward the Mallee Cluster Proposal in response to changing education circumstances. Under that proposal, Ouyen High School would become a Secondary College with electronic communication links to the other four schools. Technical and technology-based subjects will be taught by computer and audio links, thereby overcoming previous difficulties in providing these subjects in each of the small secondary schools.

(Source: Developed from the Ouyen and environs case study report (Benalla Education Centre, 1987))

...

Alice Springs School of the Air was the first such school in Australia. It has a staff of 13 and an enrolment of some 140 students located over an area which stretches 800 km north of Alice Springs and 200 km and 350 km respectively into Western Australia and South Australia. Most of its students live on cattle stations in the Northern Territory. The school makes daily radio contact with its students who work on correspondence material delivered by mail. The school has two special mini-studios which teachers use to make video-recordings. Videotapes play an important part in the work of the school.

(Source: Developed from The Age, 10 March, 1987, p.24)

The rural economy

The rural economic downturn

1.27 Comment on the rural economy is appropriate here, to further set the context of this report and because rural economic conditions can have important implications for schooling. The Commonwealth Government's statement, **Economic and Rural Policy** (Commonwealth of Australia, 1986), provides useful background information on the rural economy. It states that:

The Australian rural economy is faced with serious problems — problems which rebound on the economy as a whole.

- The sector's real net income this financial year is expected to be down 21 per cent, to the second-lowest level since records began in 1950-51. It looks set to fall further in 1986-87.
- These developments come just three years after farm incomes fell to their lowest levels on record in 1982-83, as a result of drought.
- Many farmers have not had time to recover from the drought, and now face serious financial problems (1986, p.6).

It went on to note that:

The difficulties are unevenly spread, and are worst in the grain, sugar, dairy, sheepmeat and some horticultural industries. Returns are more satisfactory — though by no means buoyant — in the wool, beef, fishing and forestry industries. In much of Eastern Australia, however, farmers are again beginning to feel the adverse effects of dry conditions (1986, p.6).

1.28 The statement made it clear that the condition of the rural economy is a matter of importance to the nation as a whole. It pointed out that:

Despite the strong performance of the non-farm sector of the economy in recent years, the rural recession is a problem for all Australians. Notwithstanding the poor returns from world markets, rural products still represent 37 per cent of our export income. Improved export performance is needed to finance expanding imports, to help reduce our excessively large current account deficit, and to lift family living standards on a permanent and sustainable basis (1986, p.6).

The farm sector is directly responsible for 7 per cent of the nation's employment ... the proportion of total employment related to the activity in the rural sector is ... perhaps of the order of 20 per cent. The proportion of rural employment dependent on farming, forestry and fishing is much larger still (1986, p.6).

1.29 The 1980s agricultural crisis in Australia was examined by Harrold and Powell, who note that between 1980-81 and 1985-86 average farm income dropped an estimated 25 per cent in nominal terms and 48 per cent in real terms (1987, p.8). The effects of this agricultural crisis, as outlined by Harrold and Powell, include an increased level of farm debt, high debt servicing costs, a run-down of farm capital stock, the adoption of 'exploitative' farming systems which accentuate farm capital stock run-down and create problems such as soil erosion, falling land prices, a low level of confidence in the industry, and

uncertainty about operational aspects of farming due to the precarious financial situation in which farmers find themselves (see Harrold and Powell, 1987, pp. 12-13).

1.30 Harrold and Powell (1987, p.5) point out that the number of people in on-farm employment has decreased since the late 1950s, due to structural changes in the economy and increased integration between agriculture and other sectors of the economy, including the increased utilisation of 'purchased inputs' (eg. tractors) in farming. They suggest cautiously, however, that '...it would appear that there is no longer a decline in farm employment' (p.5). Of interest is the observation that there has been an increase in the use of part-time employees on farms. Harrold and Powell also note that farm operators and/or members of their households, often take part-time work off their farms (p.5). Findings from the 1985-86 Bureau of Agricultural Economics survey of farms in the broadacre, dairy and horticultural industries are relevant here. On the farms surveyed, 14 per cent of farm operators and 17 per cent of the spouses of operators worked off their farms, mainly in non-farm work (Males, Poulter and Murtough, 1987, p.5).

1.31 A decline in the number of farms and an increase in farm size are also noted by Harrold and Powell. They document a decline in the number of rural establishments from just over 200 000 in the 1950s to about 175 000 in the 1970s (1987, p.5), and an increase in average farm size from 2214 ha in 1955-56 to 3499 ha in 1977-78 (p.121).

1.32 In giving a prognosis for agricultural industries, Harrold and Powell suggest that while 'personal and communal trauma' induced by the state of the rural economy may still occur, there will be '... no substantive acceleration in the rate of structural change (e.g. farm size) or in employment levels' (p.13). They add, however, that employment could still diminish in wheat-sheep, sugar and horticultural areas and that there might be considerable variation in employment within particular zones.

1.33 Table 1 gives support to Harrold and Powell's prognosis, as it shows a growth of some 12 500 people employed in agriculture (including forestry and fishing) between 1980 and 1987. The table also shows, however, that as a proportion of all employment, employment in agriculture fell from 6.7 per cent to 6.1 per cent between 1980 and 1987.

Table 1
Employment in agriculture (including forestry and fishing)
and mining, 1966-1987^a

Sector	1966		1973		1980		1987	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Agriculture etc,	429.6	8.9	426.2	7.4	411.2	6.7	423.7	6.1
Mining	58.0	1.2	69.5	1.2	80.7	1.3	106.1	1.5
Whole economy	4823.9	100.0	5783.0	100.0	6174.1	100.0	6998.2	100.0

(a) Data from ABS, **The Labour Force**, February 1987; February 1980; 1977 (Cat.Nos. 6203.0, 6204.0)

Source: Blandy (1987, p.4)

1.34 Harrold and Powell point out that non-farm aspects also need to be considered in examining the rural economy. They note that there was a dramatic decrease in the purchase of farm machinery (eg. tractors and harvesters) during the 1980s and comment that employment related to the manufacture and distribution of farm machinery has declined (p.21). Such declines affect the economy in rural as well as urban areas. Harrold and Powell also discuss how the farm crisis can affect the non-farm sector by reducing farm income and hence expenditure. They note that with lowered consumption expenditure, local providers of goods and services (eg. car dealers and builders) will be adversely affected (p.23).

Rural population and rural migration

1.35 Of particular relevance for this report are Harrold and Powell's comments on population and migration. They point out that, compared with earlier rural recessions such as that of the 1960s, the current rural recession has seen less migration to the cities and more intra-regional migration (pp.xi, 29). They suggest that this is because, unlike the 1960s when the cities offered good employment prospects and were the main locations for tertiary education facilities, in the 1980s the metropolitan areas have levels of unemployment not much lower than the rural areas and educational opportunities in rural centres have increased (p.29).

1.36 The following assessment on this topic of rural population and migration is given:

... there is not likely to be any depopulation of rural economies on the scale that occurred in the 1960s. This would be in spite of a very severe rural crisis. The important factors that mitigate against a rapid population decline would appear to be a set of developments that give greater protection to household income, the improvement in rural economies in terms of the diversity of activity and services provided (especially tertiary education), the decline in the strength of the labour market, and a group of social and preference factors favouring a rural lifestyle (Harrold and Powell, 1987, p.29).

1.37 In terms of the provision of support services, a message can be drawn from this assessment. As rural people who have been affected adversely by the rural economic downturn are tending to stay in rural areas, the services aimed at helping them need to be located in rural areas. Community support services to families can make an important, even if indirect contribution, to the schooling of rural students.

A 'turnaround' for rural Australia?

1.38 The cautiously optimistic assessments of Harrold and Powell are generally consistent with recent writings by Hugo (1986, 1987), Blandy (1987) and Musgrave (1987), who refer to a 'turnaround' or 'deconcentration' tendency in Australia's urban-rural population distribution. These terms are used to refer to the fact that whereas up to 1976 Australia's population was becoming increasingly centralised in urban areas, from 1976 to 1981 this pattern changed (see Hugo, 1986, pp.110-111). As Hugo comments, 'In the 1976-81 inter-censal period... for the first time this century the proportion of the total population living in all non-metropolitan areas increased' (1986, p.111).

1.39 Table 2 suggests that this deconcentration tendency has continued into the period 1981-1986. The table shows that annual population growth rates between 1981 and 1986 were greater in non-metropolitan than metropolitan areas in four out of six of the Australian States. The exceptions are South Australia, in which metropolitan and non-metropolitan growth rates were equal, and Western Australia in which the metropolitan growth rate exceeded the non-metropolitan growth rate.

1.40 Hugo (1986, p.113), Blandy (1987) and Musgrave (1987), note the size of population centres which have experienced substantial population growth. Table 3 shows that between 1976 and 1981 centres with populations of 50 000-99 999 experienced most growth, but that considerable growth also occurred in areas of smaller population. In contrast, population growth in centres with populations of 100 000 or more was fairly slow between 1976 and 1981.

Table 2
Growth rates of metropolitan and non-metropolitan
populations, by State, 1981-1986^a

State	Annual population growth rates 1981-86	
	Metropolitan	Non-metropolitan
NSW	0.90	1.15
Vic	0.95	1.08
Qld	1.33	2.03
WA	2.15	1.90
SA	0.81	0.81
Tas	0.79	0.87

(a) Data from ABS 1981 Census and Resident Population Estimated by State
Offices of ABS

Source: Hugo (1987, p.6)

Table 3
Population change in settlements of various
sizes in Australia, 1976-1981^a

Type of settlement ^b	Population 1981	Percentage change 1976-1981
Rural	1 963 982	11.8*
Under 1000	447 319	13.4*
1000-2499	422 115	11.4*
2500-9999	1 003 425	11.5*
10 000-24 999	799 627	13.1*
25 000-49 999	505 761	12.0*
50 000-99 999	606 213	17.5*
100 000-249 999	681 804	5.7
250 000-499 999	258 956	3.0
500 000-999 999	2 634 191	6.2
1 000 000-2 999 999	5 452 942	4.0
Total	14 576 335	7.6

(a) Data from ABS (censuses of 1976 and 1981)

(b) Population size categories as at 1976

* Above national average rate of growth

Source: Adapted from Hugo (1986, p.113)

1.41 The data in Table 3 need, however, to be put in perspective. Musgrave (1987, p.9) notes that:

... a pronounced turnaround in population trends in more favoured regions, together with some increase in population in specific manufacturing and mining locations, has masked a general pattern of decline, stagnation or slow growth in a large number of traditional, small towns, particularly in the non-coastal hinterland. These developments are the consequence of a structural change which is promoting the growth of provincial centres at the expense of smaller towns.

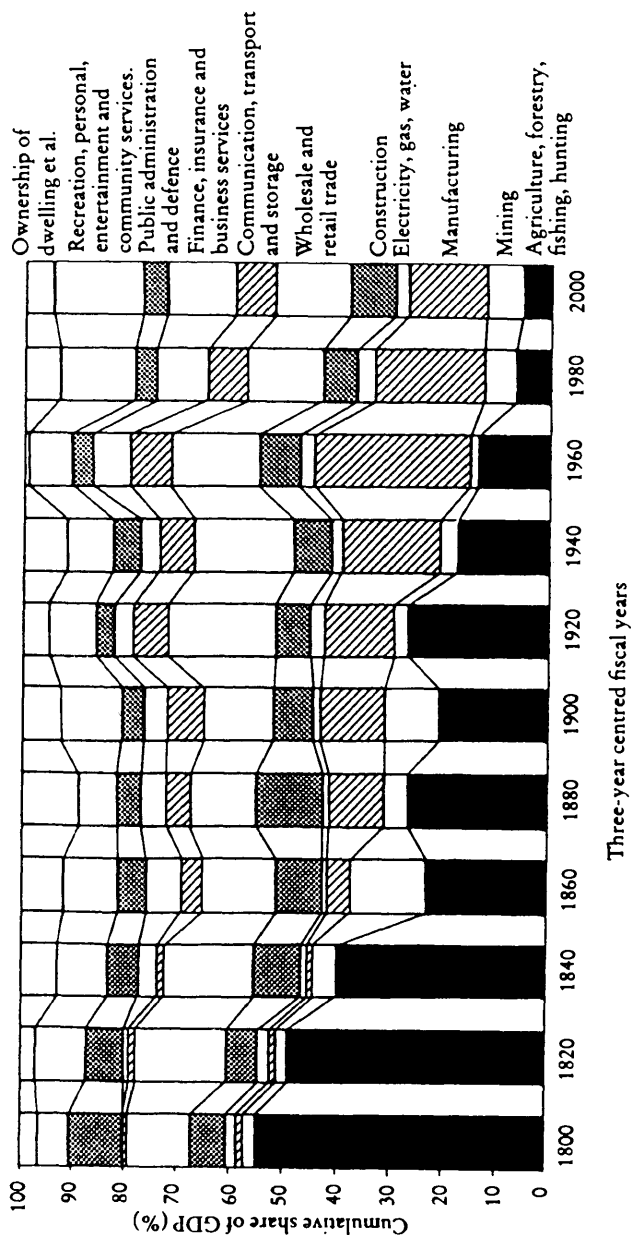
Similarly, Harrold and Powell, comparing the current rural recession with earlier recessions, point out that rural population shifts in the 1980s have led to '...some depopulation of small villages and expansion of regional centres' (1987, p.xi).

1.42 The broad trends in employment in rural Australia should also be mentioned here. Goddard's analysis of employment changes by settlement zone for 1976-1981 shows considerable growth between the 1976 census and the 1981 census in the number of people employed in settlement zone IB1 (see Figure 1, p.4), that is, the closely settled coastal areas (excluding the major urban areas) with amenable climates in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia (Goddard, 1983, pp.4, 4a, 14). The number of people employed in settlement zone IB1 increased by 21.1 per cent between 1976 and 1981, compared with increases of 8.2 per cent in zone IA, 8.6 per cent in zone IB2, 5.6 per cent in zone II and 12 per cent in zone III (Goddard, 1983, p.14). Hugo comments, however, that Goddard's analysis also shows that:

... in all zones there was a substantial decline in employment in agriculture and that the patterns of employment gain in the non-metropolitan zones heavily favour tertiary industry and tend to point towards a deconcentration of employment in Australia (Hugo, 1987, p.12).

1.43 Blandy (1987), in a recent paper titled 'Employment in Tomorrow's Rural Australia', painted a positive picture of a future Australian rural economy characterised by increased industrial diversity. Figure 3, which indicates for the period 1800-2000 the changing importance of various industries to Australia's economy, was presented and referred to in Blandy's paper. Of note in regard to the latter part of the period covered by Figure 3 are the decline in the importance of the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industry sector and the increases in the importance of the finance, insurance and business services industry sector and the recreation, personal, entertainment and community services industry sector.

Figure 3
Changes in the importance of industries within the
Australian economy, 1800-2000



Source: Hugo (1986, p.280), based on *The Australian*, 28 July, 1984, p.19)

1.44 Blandy writes positively of a 'rural Renaissance' which he considers is beginning in Australia. He states that 'Whatever the difficulties of the present, rural Australians can look forward to an exciting, diverse and rewarding employment future' (p.15). Blandy sees this renaissance as being aided by '... a refocusing of attention, and power for autonomous action - on the small group in society (including small communities and towns)' (p.12) and by advances in communication and transport. He sees tourism as an area of opportunity for growth in rural economies and sees the export of new products (eg. cut flowers, live crustaceans) as being made possible through developments in transportation (pp.13-14). He also considers that:

Appropriate reforms in trade liberalisation and the labour market will mean not only that employment in rural Australia will grow faster but that employment will continue to become more diverse industrially and occupationally. Rural employment will also demand increasingly skilled people in the future, whether as employees or in self-employment. Staple rural commodity production is likely to give way more and more to production of a more diverse range of differentiated products tailored to the needs of more clearly identified markets. The future farmer will be increasingly a businessman-scientist, using market research and bio-technology to achieve in farming what is achieved in well-directed manufacturing and service businesses - control of design and production to meet differentiated market requirements.

The growth of high value per kilo manufacturing in relatively small-scale establishments, the growth of decentralised 'information industry' jobs, and the growth of tourist-based employment will also demand the upgrading of technical and business skills. In addition, as rural populations increase in size and affluence, skilled persons in the service sectors will be demanded (medical, legal, business, technical, construction, maintenance and repair etc). The diversification of the rural job base and the increase in rural skill requirements will also offer greater employment opportunity for rural women and the children of rural families. More women will be employed 'off-farm', and more children will find careers in nearby locations. This will increase the attractiveness of rural family life and provide greater stability to rural family incomes (Blandy, 1987, pp.14-15).

1.45 While Blandy's rural renaissance may prove overly optimistic, his scenario, together with Goddard's analysis of employment changes and the trends depicted in Figure 3, suggest an increased importance for tertiary industry in the Australian rural economy of the future. Such an increase in importance would have implications for rural schooling, as tertiary industry will require well educated and skilled employers and employees. In many rural areas, however, primary industry is likely to remain the base for the local economy.

The rural economy and schooling

1.46 The rural economy and schooling are related in many ways. One way was indicated in paragraph 1.20 which referred to economic conditions putting some schools in danger of being deemed non-viable and closed. Difficult economic conditions can cause families with school-age children to leave an area, resulting in a reduced enrolment at the local school and possible eventual school closure. Even where the effect is not as stark as this, deterioration in the local

economy can affect rural communities in ways which have a substantial impact on schooling, including by influencing the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of students.

1.47 In its statement, **Economic and Rural Policy**, the Commonwealth Government pointed to another connection between the rural economy and schooling. It warned that declining family incomes in rural areas might detrimentally affect the capacity of parents to finance the education of their children, especially when that education necessitates that the children live away from home (Commonwealth of Australia, 1986, p.85). In this context the statement warned that the already low levels of senior secondary education participation in rural areas might deteriorate further.

1.48 The difficulties being experienced in the rural economy are an important backdrop to many of the issues discussed in this report. This does not mean, however, that those issues would cease to be important if a marked improvement in the rural economy occurred. On the contrary, many of the issues and concerns addressed in this report are longstanding ones which need to be confronted in order to ensure a more effective education for rural young people in the years ahead.

1.49 Furthermore, links between the rural economy and schooling need to be examined in a positive light. Negative links such as those mentioned in paragraphs 1.46 and 1.47 do not comprise the full picture. Schools contribute positively to local rural economies in many ways and the part schools can play in helping to revitalise the rural economy needs examination and recognition. As mentioned earlier, growth in tertiary industry in the rural economy will require well educated and skilled people. Likewise, the agricultural sector will increasingly need educated people who can apply their knowledge of new agricultural products and techniques, business practices and marketing to agricultural activities. The links between the rural economy and schooling are therefore addressed in this report.

Summary

1.50 The discussion in this chapter of the diversities and common features found in rural Australia, general schooling provisions in rural areas and the state of the rural economy, serves as a backdrop to issues addressed in subsequent chapters of this report. In addition, a number of the points or issues mentioned in this chapter are developed more fully in the chapters that follow.

About the Report

Introduction

2.1 Schooling provisions in rural Australia and the special educational circumstances of rural students have long been matters of interest and concern to the Commission. These matters have been addressed in successive Commission reports. The Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission (**Karmel Report**) **Schools in Australia**, published in 1973, drew attention to the low levels of education participation and achievement of 'country students' (Commonwealth of Australia, 1973, p.19). That report stated that high teacher turnover, difficulties associated with boarding and the added cost of tertiary education for many rural students were significant in the lower education retention of rural young people (1973, p.19). It also mentioned other suggested explanations for the lower educational attainment of country students, namely: attitudes to education; restricted cultural facilities in country communities; lack of employment opportunities for young people who complete their secondary education; and, the irrelevance of the curriculum to country students (1973, p.19). The report made special reference to Aborigines as '... one of the most educationally disadvantaged groups in Australia' (p.106) and to the '... educational problems of isolated children' (p.107).

2.2 Subsequent reports prepared by or for the Commission have addressed the special educational circumstances of rural children, for example the Commission's **Report for the Triennium 1976-1978** (1975a); Tomlinson and Tannock's **Review of the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme** (1981); and the Commission's **Study of Living Away from Home Facilities for Isolated Children** (Miland Report) published in 1982. Other Commission and Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) reports and projects have focused on matters related specifically to the education of Aboriginal children, especially those in remote areas. An example is the report **Funding Priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education** (CSC and NAEC, 1984).

2.3 In addition to drawing attention to the special educational needs and circumstances of rural children, the Commission has helped improve schooling provisions in rural areas through its involvement in Commonwealth specific purpose programs. This contribution is discussed in Chapter 3.

2.4 In its report, **Quality and Equality** (CSC, 1985a), which reviewed the Commonwealth's specific purpose programs for schools, the Commission noted the outcomes of a review of the Country Areas Program (CAP) (see Tomlinson, Bowman, Scott, Wasson and Weir, 1985), including the finding that the program was actively supporting a wide range of excellent projects in rural schools. The report noted, however, that there was significant evidence to indicate that children

in rural areas continue to be disadvantaged in their schooling. Furthermore, it noted that there was evidence of an increasing gap between rural communities and larger centres of population in terms of the educational, social and cultural opportunities they provide for young people (1985a, p.27).

2.5 The Commission also commented that:

Perhaps the most urgent challenge in this area is for education authorities squarely to address the need to provide full secondary education to students in rural and isolated areas. This would require not only a review of present practices but investigation in a co-operative way of the application of new technologies and new forms of residential provision to ensure that secondary education opportunities are significantly improved. The Commission proposes that the Commonwealth assist with such an investigation (1985a, p.28).

2.6 The concerns expressed by the Commission in **Quality and Equality** about schooling in rural areas, and the call in that report for further examination of matters related to rural schooling, provided an impetus for a study of rural schooling. The difficult circumstances being experienced in the rural economy and the Commonwealth Government's response to the rural economic situation were also motivating factors. In April 1986 the Government released its statement **Economic and Rural Policy**. While much of that statement concentrates on economic topics, it also contains a chapter on 'Rural and Provincial Affairs' which discusses amenities and services in rural areas, including those relating to education (see Commonwealth of Australia, 1986, pp.81-86).

2.7 The statement declared rural education to be an area seen by the Government as warranting further attention. It warned, as noted already in Chapter 1, that declining family incomes in rural areas might detrimentally affect the capacity of parents to finance the education of their children, especially when that education necessitates that a child live away from home. It also alluded to the possibility that the already low levels of senior secondary education participation by rural young people might be reduced even further as a result of the rural economic situation. Extended curriculum offerings and education services, and the provision of education and training for rural industries were mentioned in the statement as areas of need. The importance to rural industries of the understanding and application of advanced technology was noted, as was the importance to those industries of commercial management skills.

2.8 The statement noted that the Commonwealth Ministers for Education and for Primary Industry were to examine jointly the adequacy of rural education and training services. The statement also raised the matter of the availability and cost of educational services in rural areas, and reported the allocation of funds for 1986-87 to the Commonwealth Department of Education to publicise education services and support programs in rural areas.

2.9 The deteriorating rural economic situation and the Government's desire to respond to it, including through the improvement of rural schooling, have increased the timeliness of a study by the Commission of rural schooling. While, as noted in paragraph 2.5, the need to review aspects of rural schooling has been previously emphasised by the Commission, the state of the rural economy has intensified the need. The Commission's report **Commonwealth Programs and Policy Development for Schools: A Report**, published in May 1986, announced that a project on Schooling in Rural Australia was planned as part of the Commission's policy development activities for 1987.

Objectives and procedures

2.10 At the planning and preliminary stages of this study of rural schooling, the objectives set out by the Commission were very broad. As the study progressed, the objectives were refined to emphasise the following goals:

- the examination of the impact of economic and social circumstances in rural areas upon children's educational opportunities;
- the identification of issues and needs relating to the curriculum, school structures, staffing and other resources; and
- the examination of viable strategies to overcome difficulties arising from the circumstances or needs identified.

2.11 In addition to the above goals, two themes were identified to guide the study. These were:

- access to schooling; and
- the quality of teaching.

2.12 Preliminary planning for the study was undertaken in 1986. A Steering Committee was formed to guide the study and membership of that Committee is given on page iv of this report. The main procedural stages in the study can be summarised as follows:

- support studies were commissioned (see Appendix A for further details) namely:
 - background papers on the rural economy and its impact on the provision of education services, and on information technology and the provision of education services in rural areas; and
 - a case study of an isolated education region, and case studies of rural communities and their education provisions;
- projects focusing on rural education being undertaken by Education Centres were monitored (see Appendix A);
- a Discussion Document, which served as the basis for early discussions and consultations and which invited submissions to the Commission was distributed; some 50 submissions were received (a list of submissions is given in Appendix B);
- members of the Commission undertook visits to some 30-35 rural communities, involving meetings, discussions and school visits (see Appendix C for details);
- consultations were held with education authorities and interest groups (see Appendix D for listing);
- a two-day National Review Workshop was held to clarify issues and approaches. A paper on the intended approaches to the report served as a key document to focus discussion at the Workshop (see Appendix E for Workshop participants);
- matters related to Aboriginal students were considered by the Advisory Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education; and
- a Working Group on Technology was established to examine the use of communication technologies to improve rural schooling (see Appendix F).

Main issues and positions

2.13 The study attempted to identify and examine issues and concerns related to rural schooling, in order to propose directions for the future and ways in which the Commonwealth might contribute to needed improvements. It was not basically a study of the effectiveness of rural schools, nor of the ways in which government and non-government school systems manage and fund rural schools and educational programs for rural students. A review of the research and general literature on rural schooling led to the identification of a number of themes and issues of importance in the provision and delivery of rural schooling, and these were discussed in wide consultations. These issues included access to school; the need to acknowledge important differences between rural and urban schooling; the curriculum needs of rural students; student retention in school; the need for pre-service teacher education to include rural experience and teaching practice; staff training needs which are related to diversity among rural students; the recruitment, support and continuity of teachers in rural schools; technology as a resource in rural schooling; the relationship between school and community in rural areas; and the contribution of communities to schooling.

2.14 The main issues addressed in this report have been grouped under six major headings. These are:

- issues relating to physical access to a school (Chapter 4);
- issues relating to the curriculum in rural schools (Chapter 5);
- issues relating to meeting student needs, including the needs of special groups of students (Chapter 6);
- issues relating to teachers and rural schooling (Chapter 7);
- issues relating to the use of technology in rural schooling (Chapter 8); and
- issues relating to student retention at school (Chapter 9).

2.15 While the Commission's approach to these issues has taken into account the views and research evidence available to it, its approach has also been influenced by a number of positions or stances, of which the following are particularly important:

- that school-community links and interdependencies are of great importance;
- that ways of improving rural schooling are most effective when they take into account the circumstances and cultural characteristics of each rural community;
- that the quality of rural schooling is of great significance to rural communities, but is also a matter of national importance; and
- that increasing opportunities for rural students to complete a full secondary education, preferably in their own region, is an important policy objective.

2.16 School-community links are important, and improved links between schools and communities should be encouraged regardless of urban or rural location. In rural Australia, however, the links between school and community are particularly important and the interdependence of school and community is likely to be greater than in metropolitan areas. In provincial and, more especially, remote areas the school is often the focal point for community life, as well as being important to the local economy. Likewise, the community can, and often must, contribute greatly to the work of the local school in order to improve the quality of schooling it provides. Community support for the school and its staff are major factors influencing the quality of schooling. This position leads the Commission to

take the view that school systems should keep small rural schools open, whenever possible, and that they should maintain and where feasible even extend the network of schools throughout rural Australia. It also leads the Commission to look to further contributions schools can make to their communities and to how communities can assist more in improving the quality of rural schooling.

2.17 In Chapter 1 diversities within rural Australia were discussed, as were the common features shared by many rural communities. The Commission is strongly of the view that local circumstances and cultural characteristics are important in considering how to improve schooling in rural Australia. A recurring theme in discussions with rural people undertaken during the study has been the 'uniqueness' of communities and the need to adopt in each community approaches to improving schooling which suit particular community circumstances. This report provides examples of approaches which have been adopted successfully in particular communities. It encourages schools, communities and school systems to consider local needs and to seek out ways of using local resources to best advantage to improve the quality of schooling available.

2.18 Discussions during the study also made very apparent to the Commission the significance which rural people attach to the quality of schooling available in their area. In this report the Commission wishes to emphasise the significance of rural schooling to the residents of rural Australia. The Commission also, however, considers the quality of rural schooling to be a matter of national relevance. Inadequate schooling in rural areas is ultimately to the detriment of the nation as a whole. For this reason, as well as in the interests of greater equity in educational opportunities and outcomes, the improvement of rural schooling is a matter of national importance.

2.19 Special comment concerning issues related to school retention should be made here. In its recent report on secondary education and youth policy, **In the National Interest** (1987a), the Commission emphasised the importance to both individuals and the nation of increasing the proportion of young Australians who complete a full secondary education. The Commission called for a national effort to raise the Year 12 retention rate in Australia. In undertaking this present study of rural schooling, the Commission has been particularly mindful that school retention rates are generally lower in rural than in metropolitan areas. This report therefore contains a substantial chapter (Chapter 9), titled 'Raising School Retention Rates' which discusses the importance of staying on at school, factors influencing school retention/completion in rural Australia and approaches to increasing secondary school retention rates in rural areas.

Defining rural Australia

2.20 One of the early matters addressed in the study was how to define rural Australia. A definition was needed so that there could be a common understanding of how the term was being used in discussions and consultations, and in this report.

2.21 No attempt was made to produce a very technical definition of the type which would be more appropriate for a research study. Rather, a fairly straightforward descriptive statement of what was broadly meant by rural Australia was sought. Within that description, however, it was decided that a distinction needed to be made between remote areas and areas which are more closely settled. This distinction was considered important. While remote and

more closely settled areas share some common features of relevance to the study, especially in comparison with metropolitan regions, the needs and circumstances relating to schooling in remote areas and areas which are more closely settled often differ, as do appropriate policy approaches for these areas.

2.22 The process of defining rural Australia commenced with the identification of the geographic area deemed to be rural. Rural Australia was defined as being all of the nation excluding the following greater metropolitan regions and, generally, areas within 50 km of those regions (see Figure 4):

- Sydney-Newcastle-Wollongong-Shoalhaven;
- Melbourne-Geelong;
- Brisbane-Gold Coast-Sunshine Coast;
- Adelaide;
- Perth;
- Hobart; and
- Canberra-Queanbeyan.

2.23 This approach meant that some quite large centres (eg. Townsville, Ballarat and Darwin) were included in the area defined as comprising rural Australia. As such centres usually have a full range of schooling, cultural and other facilities, often including a higher education institution, they were generally considered to be outside the scope of this study. As a guide, centres with populations of approximately 50 000 or more have been treated in this way. A list of these centres is given in Appendix G. It should be noted, however, that these large centres often provide important educational services and support to the surrounding district. Their contribution to rural schooling must be acknowledged and will be mentioned, as appropriate, in this report.

2.24 Having defined rural Australia, the second step was to distinguish between the remote and more closely settled areas within rural Australia. For ease of discussion, the latter areas are referred to as provincial areas from here on in this report.

2.25 Figure 4 portrays these provincial areas, using demarcation lines drawn roughly parallel to the east coast of the continent and across the south-west corner. These lines were formed by connecting points 150km from relevant population centres of 10 000 or more people to provide a demarcation line between provincial and remote areas. Broadly, provincial areas are considered to be the areas to the coastal side of each of the demarcation lines on the map, excluding the metropolitan zones listed in paragraph 2.22. The provincial areas roughly correspond to the agrarian regions of Australia (the wheat-sheep and high rainfall zones in Figure 2 of Chapter 1).

2.26 The area inland of the demarcation lines on the map in Figure 4 is considered remote. The remote areas roughly correspond to the pastoral regions of Australia (see Figure 2 in Chapter 1). Certain areas of Tasmania, however, were also considered remote, not because of isolation due to distance, but because of isolation due to terrain and climatic conditions or off-shore location, as well as travelling time to more populated areas. The areas of Tasmania categorised as remote are:

- the Furneaux Islands;
- King Island; and
- the central West Coast area.

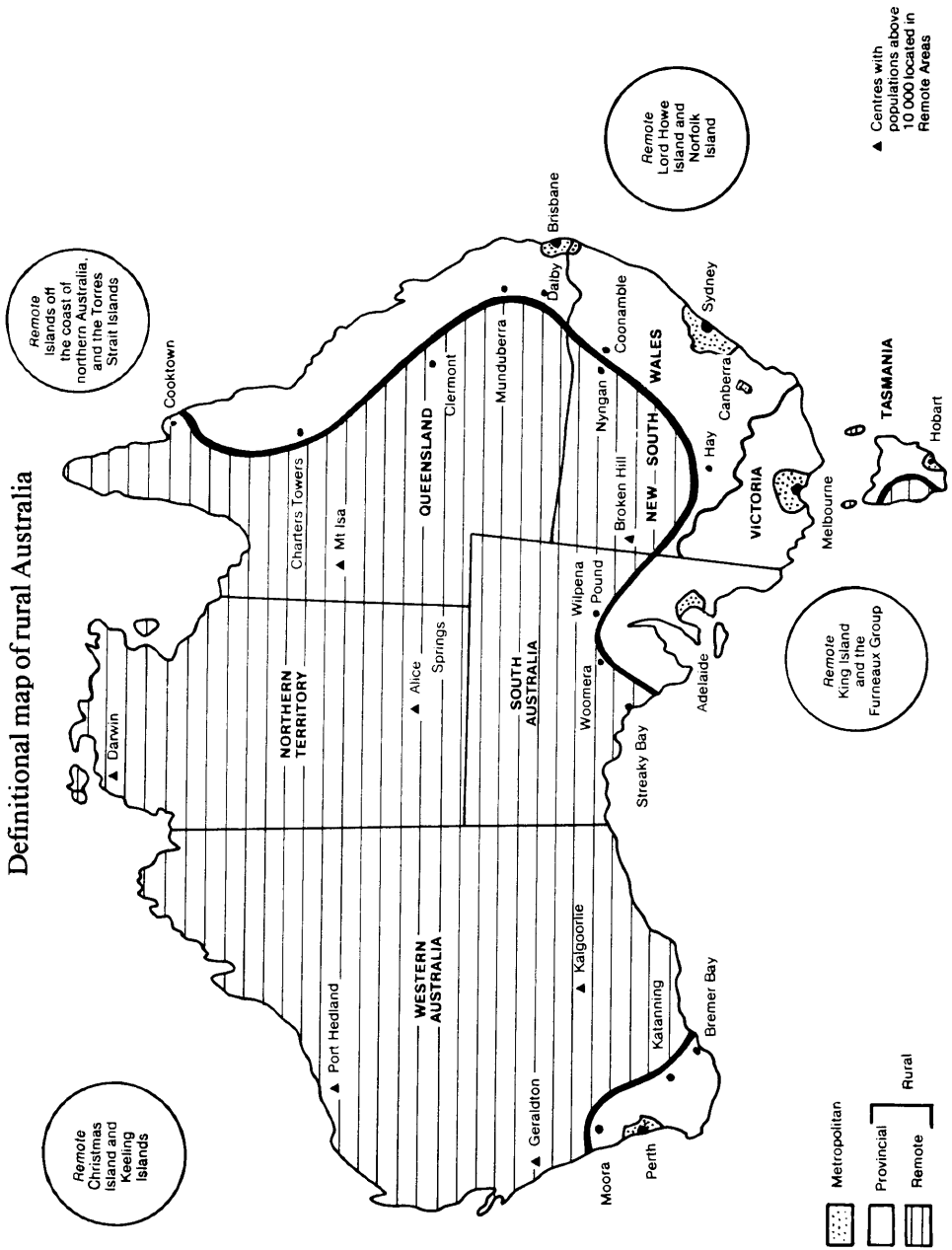
Likewise, areas elsewhere which were categorised as remote because of isolation due to off-shore location are:

- Lord Howe Island;
- the Commonwealth Territories of Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands; and
- the islands off the coast of northern Australia and in the Torres Strait.

2.27 In summary, rural Australia is defined as all of the nation excluding the greater metropolitan regions and, generally, areas within 50 km of those regions. Areas of rural Australia are categorised as provincial or remote. The provincial areas are those areas to the coastal side of the demarcation lines on the map in Figure 4, as well as most of Tasmania. The remote areas comprise the area to the inland of the demarcation lines, with the addition of the areas categorised as remote in paragraph 2.26.

2.28 It is appropriate to emphasise here that this definition of rural Australia and the distinction made between provincial and remote areas are for the purposes of this study of rural schooling and this report only. In implementing the initiatives and programs recommended in this report, attention would need to be given to developing appropriate administrative definitions.

Figure 4
Definitional map of rural Australia



Support for Rural Schooling

Introduction

3.1 The geography of Australia, its pattern of settlement and the traditional dependence Australia has had on its primary industries has meant that since the introduction of compulsory education, education authorities have had to pay particular attention to the provision of educational services in rural Australia. Australia has provided leadership in a number of areas in relation to primary and secondary education services for students who live away from major centres of population. Over the years the level of special provision has grown considerably, as has the innovativeness of students and parents in dealing with the educational difficulties created by living in rural, and more especially remote, areas of Australia.

3.2 This chapter outlines the special support which is currently provided for students studying in rural Australia. First, however, some demographic details of rural schooling are outlined.

Students and schools in rural Australia

3.3 As indicated earlier in this report, over one million students attend school in rural Australia. Table 4 gives an estimate of the number of students who attended school in rural Australia in 1986, by type of school and level of schooling. It indicates that in 1986 there were 1 177 000 students attending rural schools. This number comprises some 39 per cent of the 3 001 389 full-time school students in Australia in that year (ABS, 1987a, p.7). Table 4 also indicates that some 82 per cent of all students attending schools in rural Australia in 1986 attended government schools. In contrast, some 74 per cent of full-time school students in Australia as a whole in 1986 attended government schools (p.7). This comparison indicates the importance of government school provisions to the education of rural students.

3.4 Table 5 provides an estimate of the number of schools in rural Australia in 1986, by type and level. In 1986 there were an estimated 5394 schools in rural Australia, that number comprising some 53 per cent of the 10 085 schools in Australia as a whole (ABS, 1987a, p.7). Nearly 80 per cent of rural schools are government schools, whereas government schools make up only some 75 per cent of all schools in Australia. This comparison again indicates the importance of government school provisions to rural schooling. It is noteworthy that primary schools form a large proportion of rural schools.

Table 4

Estimated number of students attending school in rural Australia,
by type of school and level of schooling, 1986^{ab}

State/ Territory	Primary			Secondary			Total
	G	NG	All	G	NG	All	
	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000
NSW	183.0	45.9	228.9	136.9	29.9	166.8	395.7
Vic	139.1	27.0	166.1	78.3	25.9	104.2	270.3
Qld	165.8	27.8	193.6	76.2	21.3	97.5	291.1
WA	44.3	7.1	51.4	23.1	3.5	26.6	78.0
SA	31.5	5.6	37.1	20.5	1.8	22.3	59.4
Tas	24.2	5.1	29.3	18.7	3.5	22.2	51.5
NT	17.4	3.5	20.9	8.6	1.5	10.1	31.0
Total	605.3	122.0	727.3	362.3	87.4	449.7	1 177.0

G = Government; NG = Non-government

- (a) These figures were estimated from a number of sources by the Commission with the assistance of officers of State education departments. Local knowledge was at times used to determine what areas should be treated as rural. The definition of rural Australia given in Chapter 2 of this report was not strictly applied in developing this table
- (b) The table was compiled from preliminary enrolment figures. Figures exclude students enrolled in pre-primary, ungraded and special schools. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred

Table 5

Estimated number of schools in rural Australia, by type of
school and level of schooling, 1986^{a b}

State/ Territory	G	Primary		Secondary			Combined Pri/Sec			Total
		NG	All	G	NG	All	G	NG	All	
NSW	992	267	1259	171	61	232	61	34	95	1586
Vic	1032	128	1160	140	55	195	11	26	37	1392
Qld	813	211	1024	163	65	228	c	57	57 ^d	1309 ^d
WA	249	51	300	22	10	32	58	30	88	420
SA	206	37	243	29	3	32	42	5	47	322
Tas	115	29	144	26	2	28	25	11	36	208
NT	102	10	112	14	1	15	23	7	30	157
Total	3509	733	4242	565	197	762	220 ^d	170	390 ^d	5394 ^d

G = Government; NG = Non-government

- (a) These figures were estimated from a number of sources by the Commission with the assistance of officers of State education departments. Local knowledge was at times used to determine what areas should be treated as rural. The definition of rural Australia given in Chapter 2 of this report was not strictly applied in developing this table
- (b) Schools classified as 'other' in State publications have been excluded. The table was compiled from preliminary figures. Figures exclude pre-primary, ungraded and special schools
- (c) Not able to be extracted from data provided
- (d) Total excludes combined government primary/secondary schools in Queensland

Rural students studying at home using distance education services

3.5 Despite the large number of schools in rural Australia, some rural students are unable to attend school from home, due to geographic isolation or other factors. One option for these students is to study at home through correspondence schools, distance education centres or schools of the air. Other rural students who are in special circumstances (eg. those in highly transient families) also make use of these services.

3.6 Table 6 presents the number of rural students who were enrolled in a correspondence school or distance education centre in 1986, and who were not enrolled in a regular school, by State. As Table 6 indicates, some of the rural students studying at home through correspondence schools or distance education centres are at the primary school level, while a smaller number are at the secondary school level.

Table 6
Estimated number of rural students enrolled full-time in a
correspondence school or distance education centre/school
and not enrolled in a regular school, 1986

State/Territory	Primary			Secondary		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
NSW	249	289	538	88	105	193
Vic ^a	57	41	98	n.a.	n.a.	78
Qld	n.a.	n.a.	847 ^b	n.a.	n.a.	210 ^c
WA	60	65	125	252	297	549
SA	47	56	103	22	22	44
Tas	10	11	21	3	5	8
NT	—	—	—	32	39	71

- M = Male; F = Female; n.a. = not available
- (a) Refers to 'remote' school-age rural students
 - (b) Includes some students other than rural. In Queensland, students enrolled in schools of the air are also enrolled in correspondence school. These 'dual' enrolments are not included in this figure, but are included in Table 7
 - (c) Described as 'distance' students. This may include between 5 and 15 students attending a regular school

Source: Derived from information provided to the Commission by State and Territory education departments. The definition of rural Australia given in Chapter 2 of this report was not strictly applied in developing this table

3.7 Schools of the air, found in New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, are a unique and innovative way of providing educational services to students who, because of distance and isolation, would not normally have daily contact with a teacher. Without the school of the air many of these students would be dependent entirely on receiving school work by mail through a correspondence school. While schools of the air have been operating for some time in Australia, in the last 10 to 15 years improvements in technology have meant a far more sophisticated and effective delivery of school of the air education services. Table 7 provides information on the number of students enrolled in the various schools of the air throughout Australia in 1986. As Table 7 indicates, schools of the air offer schooling at the primary level only.

Table 7
Estimated number of rural students enrolled full-time in
a school of the air and not enrolled in a regular school, 1986

State/Territory	No. of primary students		Total
	M	F	
New South Wales			
Broken Hill School of the Air	77	87	164
Queensland			
Cairns School of the Air	132	141	273
Charleville School of the Air	166	189	355
Mt Isa School of the Air	106	89	195
South Australia			
South Australian School of the Air (Port Augusta)	18	21	39
Western Australia			
Carnarvon School of the Air	22	24	46
Kalgoorlie School of the Air	26	17	43
Kimberley School of the Air	28	18	46
Meekathara School of the Air	45	27	72
Port Hedland School of the Air	16	17	33
Northern Territory			
Alice Springs School of the Air	124	99	223
Katherine School of the Air	113	104	217
Total	873	833	1706

M = Male; F = Female

Source: Derived from information provided to the Commission by State and Territory education departments. The definition of rural Australia given in Chapter 2 of this report was not strictly applied in developing this table

3.8 It is of interest to note that in recent years, increasing use has been made of distance education services by rural secondary school students who are also enrolled at a regular school. According to information provided to the Commission by the Education Department of Western Australia, in 1984 there were 137 rural secondary school students enrolled in their Distance Education Centre who were also enrolled at a regular school. By 1986 this figure had increased to 293. Similarly, information provided by the Education Department of South Australia indicated that 291 rural secondary school students were enrolled in the South Australian Correspondence School in 1984 while also enrolled in a regular school, but that by 1986 this figure had increased to 515.

Rural school students who live away from home to attend school

3.9 Some rural school students who cannot attend school from home live away from home in order to have access to school. Many of these students attend boarding schools, while others live in hostels or board privately. Boarding schools have traditionally played an important part in giving such students access to school. Some boarding schools are located in rural areas (eg. Charters Towers, Queensland is a major centre for boarding schools), while others are in metropolitan areas. Some rural school students live away from home in order to attend school even though they have quite ready access from their home to a school offering study at the year-level they have reached. It should be noted that school students from rural areas attending metropolitan schools would not be included in Table 4; likewise, the metropolitan schools they attend would not be included in Table 5.

3.10 Options open to students from rural areas who live away from home to attend school are discussed in Chapter 4. That chapter also presents statistical information relating to living away from home to attend school.

State support for rural schooling

3.11 Set out in this section is a brief summary of the support provided by State and Territory governments and education departments to rural students, schools and parents. The summary has been derived from material provided to the Commission by State education departments and does not attempt to provide a detailed description of all the various services and assistance available.

New South Wales

3.12 The delivery of education to school-age children in rural areas of New South Wales is organised and maintained through a regional administrative structure that equates with the six geographical divisions of the State. Coastal rural communities are serviced by the North Coast, Hunter and South Coast Regions, while those situated west of the Dividing Range are serviced by the North West, Western and Riverina Regions. For administrative and developmental purposes, the Department of Education operates through a three-tiered structure involving the Head Office, the Regions and the schools. All schools are responsible to the Regional Director through the District Inspector of Schools. Policies for system-wide application are developed, coordinated and promulgated by the Head Office, whereas local policy issues and programs are developed and implemented through regional structures. Regional administrative networks ensure that the Department of Education is responsive to the needs of isolated schools and communities.

3.13 Support staff who operate within the regional structure include inspectors, consultants and counsellors, all of whom are involved in assisting rural schools and their communities. The planning and coordination of such services originate at the regional level for the development, monitoring and evaluation of programs concerned with school administration, curriculum, staff development and student welfare. Apart from local initiatives that emanate from a region, the Participation and Equity Program (PEP), the Country Areas Program (CAP) and the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) have each had a significant impact in meeting the specific needs of rural students, not the least being the encouragement of decision-making at the local level in the preparation and implementation of appropriate school-based programs.

3.14 The Department of Education has developed a network of decentralised correspondence centres at Cobar, Bourke, Walgett and the School of the Air at Broken Hill. While each centre operates independently of the Central Correspondence School in Sydney, they are dependent upon it for the planning and production of sequential primary course materials. Children who are isolated from a regular school are eligible to enrol as full-time students.

3.15 In the past three years there has been a noticeable increase in enrolments in the Broken Hill School of the Air, where the advantages of having regular two-way voice contact have been recognised by more families. There has also been a significant increase in the number of secondary part-time students enrolled in correspondence courses who attend small geographically isolated secondary schools. The correspondence school provides assistance to these secondary schools and central schools in the form of tutoring in elective subjects. Other resources are available to individual schools where special circumstances arise. Mindful of the rapid developments in communication technologies the Department of Education has investigated and conducted a series of electronic mail trials involving individual students, isolated families and country schools. Together with the availability of a toll-free telephone service to the Correspondence School, Sydney, the School's technology unit has coordinated technological developments in the area of audio and video tape production with particular emphasis on the adaptation of teaching strategies for isolated children.

3.16 The Department of Education has supported initiatives that enable children in isolated circumstances to meet with their correspondence teachers. These include workshops, camps, home visits and mini-schools, the latter held either in remote areas or at the Correspondence School in Sydney. All students enrolled in correspondence courses are eligible for travel grants to attend mini-schools in Sydney. A means-tested State allowance is payable to secondary school-age students who live away from home. This allowance is issued in two parts during the calendar year and currently totals \$338 per annum.

Victoria

3.17 The delivery of educational services to school-age students in rural Victoria is through five country regions. In each region School Support Centres support and service the needs of schools in the local area. This includes the provision of support in curriculum, student services, consultancy and professional development.

3.18 Rural schools and communities receive significant support and assistance from the Victorian Country Education Project (VCEP) which is the Victorian component of the national CAP. Organisational and operational arrangements adopted by VCEP give rural people real opportunities for shared and equal involvement and participation in education decision-making. The

VCEP, through its Statewide and local networks, has a significant impact in the delivery of educational programs and services that meet the needs of rural schools and their communities.

3.19 The Correspondence School provides assistance to students who are unable to attend a local school or who do not have access to a teacher for a particular subject they wish to study. Visiting teachers provide additional support for full time school-age students.

3.20 Shared specialist teachers are provided to clusters of small rural primary schools in the areas of music, art/craft and physical education. Through this program a broader curriculum is made available to students in small primary schools. Support personnel for schools and clusters, in the form of teacher aides designated for curriculum support, is also provided by the Ministry of Education. These aides are linked with the VCEP as the project's targeting procedures are used as a guide. Significant support and assistance is provided to clusters of small rural post-primary schools through the use of technology aimed at increasing participation in Years 11 and 12. Various modes of delivery and uses of the technology are being implemented across rural Victoria.

3.21 Victoria is also supporting curriculum options for girls' projects in two country regions. Further to this, initiatives encouraging tertiary extension and access for rural students have been developed. The Ministry of Education also sponsors travel and accommodation costs for Diploma of Education and Bachelor of Education students undertaking their final teaching round in country post-primary schools. Housing for rural teachers is also provided by the government in numerous rural locations.

Queensland

3.22 The priority initiative of the Queensland Department of Education is to make major improvements to the delivery and organisation of distance education services. Initiatives will flow from a major review of distance education services in Queensland undertaken during 1986 and will follow the principles outlined in the Report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Distance Education (Queensland Department of Education, 1986). Those principles, when expressed in broad terms, are based on a belief that in providing equal educational opportunities for all students, special initiatives are needed for students unable to attend regular day schools or who do not have access to a full range of curriculum offerings.

3.23 The Queensland government provides support through the following means:

- remote area tuition allowances to assist parents whose eligible children incur tuition costs in a boarding school;
- remote area hostel allowances for eligible students who board at approved hostels in order to attend primary or secondary schools. They are paid directly to the hostel attended and are not designed to offset hostel fees;
- remote area travel allowances which apply to all eligible isolated students, with the amount varying according to the location of the home and the distance travelled to the boarding facility;
- a remote area allowance for eligible students who attend special schools. The allowance is also available for students who attend rural training schools in Years 11 and 12; and
- school transport for eligible day students living outside the defined radius

from the nearest government school and for eligible boarding students for weekend and vacation travel.

3.24 The following special support services are provided for students in schools in rural areas:

- itinerant teaching services funded by the State Department of Education and the Priority Country Areas Program (PCAP). These provide assistance to families with students studying by correspondence. Three contact teaching centres located in the north-west of the State also assist families whose children receive their education by correspondence; and
- projects funded jointly by the State Department of Education and PCAP including the instrumental music program, the mobile field study unit and the mobile classroom. Others include the Isolated Children's Special Education Unit (ICSEU) which provides individualised programs for students with special needs, and the Production Services Branch which provides video support programs for primary science and social study syllabi, as well as an inservice video program for isolated teachers.

3.25 Two further initiatives supportive of schools in rural areas are the Schools Electronic Mail Network (see paragraphs 8.14 to 8.16) and the Rural Secondary School Support Scheme (Panel 42). The first operates mainly in secondary schools to support the Practical Computer Methods subject and a trial Information Processing and Technology syllabus. The second initiative, the Rural Secondary School Support Scheme, provides an extended-campus mode of operation to the secondary correspondence school and regional support networks.

3.26 The Queensland Department of Education is also involved in two special initiatives. The first, the Mount Isa School of the Air Satellite Trial, commenced in January 1986. The major areas of development through the trial have been interactive audio/video computer communications and multi-media learning packages. The other initiative is the establishment of Centres of Distance Education at Longreach and Charters Towers. The Centres provide for the centralised coordination of education services to students from pre-school to Year 10, in a defined geographic area.

Western Australia

3.27 Western Australian departmental policies are designed to give rural students relevant educational experiences and the best education opportunities possible, within the constraints imposed by distance and limited resources. There are departmental policies and provisions for rural children requiring educational support, academic extension and guidance. In addition, the specific needs of Aboriginal students are addressed through the Western Australian Aboriginal Consultative Group and the School and Community Relationship Unit. Regional administration has recently been restructured into smaller district units which will be of benefit to rural students.

3.28 State allowances available to students in rural areas include:

- a boarding-away-from-home allowance which provides a maximum of \$250 to supplement assistance provided through the Commonwealth's Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC);
- a hostel subsidy which is paid directly to the hostel (average \$3 per student per week per term);
- a conveyance allowance paid to parents to reimburse costs of conveying students to school bus pick-up points;

- travel subsidies provided to assist students to participate in sporting events; and
- State-provided airfares for student travel to and from isolated areas.

3.29 Support services specifically provided for schools and students in rural areas include:

- itinerant teachers to visit isolated students;
- distance education centre (DEC) courses for secondary students in rural schools;
- camp schools;
- a DEC residential facility for intensive teaching in upper secondary programs;
- seminars and residential courses for isolated parents;
- the Chidley Education Centre which provides short-term residential educational support for rural and isolated primary students;
- central advisory staff to assist with special services;
- country-based guidance staff; and
- country resource centres which loan equipment and materials, including audio-visual materials.

3.30 Most special programs in Western Australia for rural students are funded through the Priority Country Areas Program (PCAP), but there are also systemic and other special programs designed for rural students. Of note here is the Academic Extension Program which has within it three components:

- special focus residential programs;
- an itinerant teacher service; and
- a secondary special placement program which offers country students residential hostel accommodation linked with a place in a government senior high school in Perth.

South Australia

3.31 In 1985 the Education Department of South Australia established the Distance Education Advisory Committee (DEAC) to provide advice and make recommendations to the Director-General regarding the provision of distance education in South Australia. Its terms of reference cover the following areas:

- curriculum development;
- teaching processes relating to the provision of distance education;
- overseas and interstate developments;
- demographic trends;
- inservice requirements;
- personnel requirements; and
- needs of special groups of students.

In addition, DEAC provides a forum for the discussion of issues relating to distance education, including consideration of priorities, management strategies and resource requirements. DEAC also assists with the coordination of distance education activities conducted by various education agencies in South Australia. A Western Area Distance Education Committee also operates under terms of reference similar to those of the DEAC.

3.32 A secondary student who is required to live away from home to undertake an approved course at an approved secondary school may be eligible for an allowance payable by the Education Department of South Australia. The allowance is intended to supplement the Boarding Allowance payable under the Commonwealth's AIC and assist geographically isolated parents with travel, board and other expenses associated with the education of their children. Only students whose parents are approved recipients of the AIC's Boarding Allowance qualify for the State allowance.

Tasmania

3.33 The policy of the Tasmanian Government is to provide the best possible educational service for all children, wherever they may live. Support for the education of pupils in country schools is provided as follows:

- district high schools offer a wide range of subject choices in Years 7-10, in addition to the regular K-6 primary program. A senior staff weighting (50% of the number of students when compared to a high school), enables provision of subject expertise to smaller student populations;
- the newly established School of Distance Education has consolidated service provisions for isolated students K-12. Funding has also been provided to enable contact with teachers and for excursions, camps and urban visits to be included in the educational program;
- small rural primary schools now benefit from a recent decision to make an additional 20 (full-time equivalent) teachers available for small rural schools. This provision of part-time specialist teachers is in addition to the staff allocation determined on an enrolment basis;
- establishment of annexes at five district high schools to assist with the extension of the education program to include HSC subjects;
- maintenance of a State-wide fleet of free school buses to government and non-government schools. Students attending primary and/or secondary schools in country areas are provided with free bus transport to the closest government school. For students who travel on a fare-paying service, all but \$5 of the approved fare is refunded;
- telephone subsidies to compensate for distance from population centres;
- an excursion allowance is available for all country schools in the form of free bus travel; and
- schools on the Bass Strait Islands also receive a subsidy to meet excursion costs for travel to the Tasmanian mainland.

3.34 Teachers in country areas receive allowances which compensate for costs associated with living in isolated areas. These are:

- subsidised accommodation in isolated areas;
- isolation allowances which are included in annual salaries; and
- reimbursement for transport of vehicles to the Bass Strait Islands and general transfer expenses upon an approved transfer.

3.35 A range of State funded allowances are available for students from isolated areas. These include:

- an accommodation allowance for tertiary students of up to \$1200 per annum paid to students whose normal address is further than 40 km from a tertiary institution. This is in addition to any Commonwealth assistance for this purpose;

- the senior secondary accommodation allowance of up to \$760 paid to students whose normal address is further than 40 km from a secondary college;
- the hostel boarding allowance of \$2.50 per boarding week paid to parents with children residing in departmental hostels and who qualify for assistance through the Commonwealth's AIC Boarding Allowance at a level in excess of the basic \$989 per annum;
- the King Island Bursary (\$100 per annum) which may be granted to a parent or guardian of a senior secondary student who formerly attended King Island District High School; and
- the Scottsdale Bursary (\$100 per annum) which may be granted to a parent or guardian of a senior secondary student who formerly attended Scottsdale High School.

Northern Territory

3.36 The Northern Territory government undertakes to provide educational services to all people in the Northern Territory, and in particular to ensure access to an educational program for all children. Vast distances, trying climatic conditions, a small but scattered population, and areas accessible only by air or sea at certain times of the year, contribute to a high per capita cost of providing educational services.

3.37 Isolation and the general inaccessibility of many areas create difficulties in providing staffing support for many educational programs. Teacher turnover is high in comparison with other States and special incentives are provided to increase teacher continuity. Despite these difficulties, the Northern Territory Department of Education aims to provide the same range and quality of primary and secondary courses as are available in other States.

3.38 The Northern Territory government provides a number of allowances which are available to students from or in rural areas. These include:

- the provision of accommodation at Yirrara and Kormilda residential colleges and the Katherine House Hostel. This accommodation is available for students from isolated areas in the Northern Territory where normal secondary schooling is not available. There is also a Northern Territory private boarding subsidy scheme for secondary students from isolated areas;
- travel assistance for isolated students through the Northern Territory Student Travel Scheme supplemented by the Northern Territory Mid-Term Student Travel Plan which aims at reuniting parents with students who board away from home. Another scheme relates to allowances payable to boarders who are ineligible for allowances through the Commonwealth's Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme (ABSEC);
- the Northern Territory supplements the assistance to students approved for the Correspondence Allowance under the Commonwealth's AIC, and also may assist with delivery costs for correspondence school materials; and
- in some rural areas bus services are provided at a heavily subsidised cost or at no cost to students.

3.39 Support services are provided to schools and students in rural areas and given both the demography and geography of the Northern Territory, several unique services have been developed. More than 70 per cent of schools and 25 per cent of students in the Northern Territory are located in remote areas. Many of the students are Aborigines from basically non-English speaking communities. This

has given rise to initiatives such as the homeland centre/outstation education service, bilingual education programs and the provision of additional support staff in regional areas. Increasingly, homeland centres are being serviced with educational services from rural, mostly Aboriginal, hub schools.

3.40 There are more than 20 major Aboriginal languages in the Northern Territory. For many students living in Aboriginal communities or homeland centres, English is their second language. This has led to the development of special curricula, including bilingual programs in traditionally-oriented communities. Study by correspondence or school of the air is often not a practicable proposition for traditionally-oriented Aboriginal students.

3.41 For rural students studying by correspondence or school of the air special support is available. Regular residential schools are organised to provide students with important educational and social experiences otherwise unavailable to them due to their isolation. Individual telephone and high-frequency (HF) radio tutorials, teleconferences, student visits to the school of the air, and teacher visits to students' homes are additional support activities provided.

3.42 The Northern Territory Department of Education considers many of its Aboriginal education initiatives to be special programs for rural students. These include homeland centre programs, post-primary classes, secondary education programs for students from Aboriginal communities attending high schools in town, special English as a second language classes, and programs for Aboriginal students in non-Aboriginal schools. The Northern Territory has also taken a leading role in developing Aboriginal teacher education, providing support for mainstream teachers who teach a high proportion of tribally-oriented students, and in the provision of Aboriginal teacher support staff.

Commonwealth support for rural schooling

3.43 The Commonwealth provides substantial support for rural schooling through a range of school-based programs, as well as through the provision of financial assistance to rural students and parents.

Commonwealth Programs for Schools

3.44 Rural schools (both government and non-government), their students and parents, receive financial assistance through a range of Commonwealth programs for schools (for details of these programs see **Commonwealth Programs for Schools: Administrative Guidelines for 1987**, CSC and CDE, 1987). These programs are:

- General Recurrent Grants Program;
- Capital Grants Program;
- Country Areas Program;
- Disadvantaged Schools Program;
- Special Education Program;
- English as a Second Language Program;
- Participation and Equity Program;
- Basic Learning in Primary Schools Program;
- Education Centres Program; and
- Projects of National Significance Program.

3.45 The two general resources programs (General Recurrent Grants Program and the Capital Grants Program) are the principal source of Commonwealth assistance to schools and communities for general purpose funding in the recurrent and capital areas. In the government sector, funds provided through these programs are expended on priorities established by the various State and Territory education authorities. This is also the case in relation to the majority of funds provided through the non-government element of the General Recurrent Grants Program. In relation to the General Recurrent Grants Program, the 'betterment' funds presently being provided are generally expended following negotiations on resource agreements between education authorities and the Commonwealth.

3.46 The Capital Grants Program supports government schools and non-government schools eligible for Commonwealth general recurrent funding. The program supplements State and non-government education authority funding for the maintenance, upgrading and expansion of school facilities. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander element of the program is of particular relevance to Aboriginal education in rural areas.

3.47 The Commonwealth's specific purpose programs support activities in priority education areas by:

- providing additional resources for schools to support the specific educational needs of particular groups of students;
- supporting strategies to enhance educational outcomes for students from disadvantaged schools and to meet the special learning needs of students with disabilities;
- supporting improvements in the quality of schooling and hence improvement in educational outcomes through changes in school organisation, curriculum content and processes, and teaching and learning strategies; and
- supporting collaborative efforts among school authorities to investigate significant educational issues, disseminate outcomes, and develop supportive school climates.

3.48 The Commonwealth specific purpose program which is targeted directly at schools in rural Australia is the Country Areas Program (CAP). This is a joint government/non-government program which is strongly supported by rural communities. Local, area and State-level committees make recommendations on priorities and the allocation of program funds within the States. In 1987 an amount of \$10.92m (at June 1987 price levels) was allocated for the program nationally. Areas included in the program are prescribed by the relevant State or Territory Minister for Education. The program has three main aims:

- to alleviate the substantial and persistent educational disadvantage of many country children and their families which stems from restricted access to social, cultural and educational activities and services;
- to develop better ways of delivering educational services to students in country schools; and
- to provide a framework within which school communities and country people can work cooperatively to improve educational opportunities for country children (CSC and CDE, 1987, p.45).

3.49 Initiatives under the CAP are generated at the local level. Projects funded are considered by the communities to be important to the provision of the basic educational needs of the children in the area. The Commission believes that the program has been highly successful and that it has provided funds to allow communities to work cooperatively to improve the delivery of educational services in prescribed rural areas.

3.50 Among the other specific purpose programs, the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) and the Participation and Equity Program (PEP) have provided additional special assistance in rural areas. Table 8 provides information on the number of rural schools targeted under the PEP and funding levels for 1987.

Table 8
Number of rural schools targeted under the PEP
and estimated outlays, by State and Territory, 1987

State/Territory	Targeted schools		Percentage rural %	Outlays for targeted rural schools \$
	Total schools	Rural schools		
Government				
NSW	179	103	58	1 844 000
Vic	183	42	23	682 830
Qld	75	60	80	1 187 900
WA	85	56	66	416 500
SA	64	34	53	249 000
Tas	27	23	85	283 500
NT	6	4	67	83 988
ACT	11	—	—	—
Total	630	322	51	4 747 718
Non-government				
NSW	48	11	23	105 000
Vic	45	19	42	111 874
Qld	24	20	83	148 000
WA	27	16	59	39 000
SA	11	2	18	23 617
Tas	7	5	71	33 000
NT	3	—	—	—
ACT	2	—	—	—
Total	167	73	44	460 491

Source: PEP statistics collection, CSC. The definition of rural Australia given in Chapter 2 of this report was not strictly applied in developing this table

Commonwealth financial assistance to students

3.51 The Commonwealth provides allowances to rural students and parents through a range of education allowance schemes. In the brief discussion which follows, emphasis is placed on Commonwealth allowances which assist school students and special attention is given to those schemes which are particularly relevant to rural students. Further details on Commonwealth allowances are presented in Appendix H.

3.52 AUSTUDY is the largest of the Commonwealth's education allowance schemes. It provides financial assistance on a non-competitive basis to secondary and tertiary students aged 16 years and over who are undertaking approved full-time study (CDE, 1987a, p.1). AUSTUDY commenced in 1987 but was preceded by the Secondary Allowances Scheme (SAS), the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme (TEAS) and the Adult Secondary Education Assistance Scheme (ASEAS) (CDE, 1987a, p.1). It is expected that in 1987 some 110 000 young people will be assisted through the general secondary component of AUSTUDY, at an outlay of some \$148m (figures provided by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (CDEET)). Both rural and urban secondary school students benefit from AUSTUDY, but no figures are available on the proportion of rural students among those assisted.

3.53 Two education allowance schemes of particular relevance to rural school students are the Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme (ABSEC) and the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC). The eligibility criteria for these Schemes are such that they are more likely to assist rural, rather than urban, young people.

3.54 The ABSEC is intended to help '... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students take full advantage of educational opportunities at secondary school' (CDE, 1987b, p.2). The Scheme provides financial assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are under 21 years of age at 1 January and in secondary school, or who are at least 14 years of age at 1 January and in primary school.

3.55 Through the ABSEC several allowances are paid, namely:

- a Living Allowance for students living at home or, in special circumstances, a Boarding Allowance for those approved to live away from home to go to school;
- a Personal Allowance;
- a Book and Clothing Allowance; and
- an Excursion Allowance.

Other forms of assistance are also available through the Scheme (eg. assistance with fees and fares) (see CDE, 1987b). In 1986 some 25 100 students were assisted through the ABSEC and the outlay on the Scheme was \$32.4m (figures provided by CDEET).

3.56 The AIC is '... designed to assist students who do not have reasonable daily access to an appropriate government school because they live in a geographically isolated area' (CDE, 1987c, p.1). In addition to assisting students who are geographically isolated, the Scheme provides assistance to students with disabilities who cannot attend school from home, as well as to other students in special circumstances (eg. those undertaking special courses or requiring special remedial tuition) (see CDE, 1987c).

3.57 The AIC offers three main forms of allowance to primary and secondary school students:

- a Boarding Allowance for students who live away from home in a boarding school, hostel or private board, in order to attend school;
- a Correspondence Allowance, for students studying at home by correspondence; and
- a Second Home Allowance, to help towards the cost of maintaining a second home which enables students to have daily access to school (see CDE, 1987c).

In 1986, 20 665 students were assisted through the AIC at an outlay of \$24.4m (figures provided by CDEET).

Loan Video Program

3.58 The Commonwealth has provided funds to support the Loan Video Program since 1982. The program was introduced initially as a three-year trial to provide television and education video materials for students in remote areas until such time as the domestic satellite became operational. Funds for the establishment of the program and for its day-to-day operation are paid to the State and Territory education departments. The program, which is due to cease at the end of 1987, has now operated for six years with a commitment of around \$1m per year on the part of the Commonwealth.

3.59 Loan Video Program funds are allocated on the basis of the number of students in each State enrolled in primary correspondence courses and supported through the AIC. Each State determines eligibility and priorities under the program within its boundaries. Generally speaking, the program operates within the primary correspondence school frameworks of each State.

Summary

3.60 This chapter has outlined some of the demographic aspects of the school population in rural Australia. It has also given a brief description of State-provided education services available to rural students based on information from the States. Financial assistance for rural schooling provided through Commonwealth general resources funding, specific purpose programs and education allowance schemes have also been described. Together with Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter can be seen as providing background to the discussion of issues in rural schooling presented in subsequent chapters.

Access to Schooling

Introduction

4.1 Most rural school students have ready daily access from their homes to a school appropriate to their year-level. Some rural students, however, have to travel extensively each day to attend school. Others live too far away from a school to make daily attendance from home possible. This chapter looks at matters related to physical access to schooling. It concentrates on physical access issues associated with geographic isolation. Other access issues, such as the access difficulties of students with disabilities and the cultural or language barriers to access experienced by students from certain cultural or social backgrounds (eg. Aboriginal students) are addressed elsewhere in this report.

4.2 Two main alternatives exist for rural students who do not have daily access to school from their homes due to geographic isolation. They can study at home, making use of distance education services (eg. correspondence school or school of the air) or they can live away from home in order to attend school. Financial assistance is available to geographically isolated students through various State, Territory and Commonwealth schemes, including the Commonwealth's Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC). (See Chapter 3 and Appendix H for details of financial assistance available to students).

Selected details of the AIC

4.3 Financial assistance to help meet the boarding, second home maintenance or correspondence study costs of geographically isolated students is available through the AIC. As extensive reference is made to the AIC in this chapter, selected details of the Scheme are presented here as background information. The details concerning current AIC provisions are drawn from the 1987 information booklet and application guide (CDE, 1987c). All statistics on AIC allowance recipients presented in this chapter are from the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training's (CDEET) AIC statistics collection.

4.4 In order to be eligible for the AIC allowance due to geographic isolation, a student's home must normally be at least 16 km from the nearest government school offering tuition at the appropriate year-level and be at least 4.5 km from the nearest transport service to that school. If a student's home is less than 4.5 km from a transport service to a government school offering tuition of an appropriate year-level (regardless of whether or not it is the nearest such school), support can still be received through the AIC if the student's home is at least 56 km from that school, or if travel to and from that school using the transport available would take

at least three hours a day. These specifications are stipulated under the AIC's 'isolation criteria'. Some students, however, are deemed to be geographically isolated for the purposes of the Scheme due to 'Special Circumstances Causing Isolation'. An example of a special circumstance given in the AIC application guide is that of impassable roads in bad weather which would cause the student to miss school often during the year if he or she lived at home.

4.5 Students can also become eligible for an AIC allowance by meeting criteria relating to 'Other Eligible Students' which are not based on geographic isolation. Under these criteria, special eligibility circumstances are specified for students who are disabled, taking special courses, needing specialised remedial tuition or special diagnostic testing or from itinerant families. While some 76 per cent of the 20 665 students who received AIC assistance in 1986 were eligible because they met the 'normal' geographic isolation stipulations, the remaining 24 per cent were eligible because of circumstances such as those mentioned in this and the previous paragraph.

4.6 The eligibility criteria for the AIC have been discussed here for two main reasons. First, they indicate that statistics on AIC allowance recipients do not refer only to geographically isolated students, or only to rural students. Some students eligible for an AIC allowance, especially those eligible under the 'Other Eligible Students' conditions, would be from metropolitan areas. Second, issues relating to AIC eligibility are raised in paragraphs 4.79 to 4.81 and this brief outline of eligibility criteria is necessary background to that discussion.

4.7 As statistics on 1986 AIC allowance recipients are used extensively in this chapter, one change to the Scheme introduced in 1987 should be noted (see Appendix H for other changes). In 1986 a non-income-tested Basic Boarding Allowance of \$989 per annum was payable for all eligible students who were boarding away from home, with an Additional Boarding Allowance being payable if the adjusted family income of the student's family was below a specified level and boarding costs were above a specified amount (CDE, 1986a). In 1987, the terminological distinction between Basic and Additional Boarding Allowances was dropped and the application guide now refers simply to a Boarding Allowance. A non-income-tested payment of \$989 per annum is made under that allowance, with any payment above that sum depending on adjusted family income and other factors.

4.8 It is noteworthy that of the 20 665 students assisted in 1986 through the AIC, 28 per cent were at the primary school level, while 43 per cent and 29 per cent respectively were at the junior secondary and senior secondary levels. (Note that pre-school recipients were not counted in making these calculations, which accounts for differences between these figures and those given in Table 9). In contrast, approximately 57 per cent of school children in Australia in 1986 were at the primary school level, while 33 per cent and 10 per cent respectively were at the junior secondary and senior secondary school levels (see ABS, 1987a, p.31). Primary school students are therefore 'under-represented' among AIC allowance recipients, while junior secondary and, more especially, senior secondary school students are 'over-represented'. The over-representation at the secondary school levels reflects the greater number of students who have difficulties relating to physical access to school at the junior secondary and particularly the senior secondary levels, compared with the smaller number with such difficulties at the primary school level. This in turn reflects the more limited coverage of rural Australia by schools offering study at the secondary level, especially at Years 11 and 12, compared with the more widespread network of schools offering primary level study in rural areas.

4.9 It should be noted that more boys than girls received AIC assistance in 1986, with boys making up 55 per cent of AIC allowance recipients. Boys outnumbered girls among Basic Boarding Allowance recipients (56% boys, 44% girls), and Short-Term Boarding Allowance recipients (69% boys, 31% girls, but only 729 students received this allowance in 1986). Girls outnumbered boys, however, among Second Home Allowance recipients (53% girls, 47% boys) and marginally among Correspondence Allowance recipients (51% girls, 49% boys) (figures provided by CDEET). The sex differential among Basic Boarding Allowance recipients is discussed further in paragraph 4.18.

Studying at home using distance education services

4.10 Statistics on students receiving the AIC Correspondence Allowance give an indication of the number of rural school students who study at home using distance education services. The Correspondence Allowance assisted 4283 (including 661 pre-school) students in 1986. Not all of these students, however, would necessarily have been geographically isolated rural students.

4.11 According to AIC statistics, students receiving the Correspondence Allowance tend to be in the primary years of schooling. As Table 9 shows, 82 per cent of Correspondence Allowance recipients in 1986 were studying at pre-school or primary school levels, with only 17 per cent being in the secondary school years. In contrast, 87 per cent of students who received the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance in 1986 were at the secondary school level. Secondary students also made up 58 per cent of students assisted through the AIC Second Home Allowance. These figures suggest that parents tend to choose differently between the two alternatives mentioned in paragraph 4.2 depending on the level of schooling their child has reached. Studying at home using distance education services is the preferred alternative for many parents when their child is at the primary school level. Once the secondary school level is reached, however, many parents opt to have their child live away from home to attend school. One submission to the Commission stated:

We say [that boarding at independent schools] is the only real alternative, as the other two choices [available], private board and Correspondence schooling, hold their own peculiar difficulties. Private board is very difficult to find and rarely is a completely stable environment for a student where they may have to change 'homes' frequently. Correspondence, particularly at secondary level, though potentially offering an excellent curriculum and of late enhanced with certain technological advances is finally dependent on the student's attitude and determination and the supervisor's ability to assist. Even if these factors are positive the child does not experience the social learning so necessary at this age. (Submission from ICPA, South Australia).

The report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Distance Education, Queensland, also indicated that parents see studying at home using distance education services as a more viable option at the primary than the secondary school level (Queensland Department of Education, 1986). Relevant points from that report are given in Panel 2.

Table 9

Number of students who received assistance through the AIC in 1986,
by level of schooling and type of allowance

Level of schooling	Type of Allowance									
	Basic Boarding		Second Home		Corres-pondence		Short-Term Boarding		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Pre-school	10	0	1	0	661	15	7	1	679	3
Primary	1 928	13	335	41	2 891	67	393	54	5 547	27
Junior secondary	7 421	50	281	34	642	15	325	45	8 669	42
Senior secondary	5 478	37	199	24	89	2	4	1	5 770	28
Total	14 837	100	816	99	4 283 ^a	99	729	101	20 665	100

(a) This total (excluding 661 pre-school enrolments) differs from the total calculated by combining figures in Tables 6 and 7. Reasons for the discrepancy may include differences in the time of year to which the data refer and some possible 'double-counting' between Tables 6 and 7.

Source: AIC statistics collection, CDEET

4.12 The reluctance of parents to have their children study at home at the secondary school level stems from a number of concerns. These may include parental concern about their capacity or ability to provide adequate supervision at the secondary school level, concern that at that level students need more direct and specialist teaching in order to master complex subject matter and concern that children who study at home miss out on the educational and social benefits which can be gained from direct interaction with classmates in a regular school class.

4.13 A comparison of the number of Correspondence Allowance recipients in 1980 and 1986 is worth attention here, especially as the recent decline in farm incomes (see paragraph 1.29) and any resulting reduction in the capacity of families to pay the costs associated with having their child live away from home to attend school could have had the effect of increasing the number of students studying at home using distance education services (see Panel 3). Table 10 presents statistics for AIC allowance recipients in 1980, along the same lines as those presented for 1986 in Table 9. A comparison of the two tables shows that the number of Correspondence Allowance recipients increased from 3933 to 4283 between 1980 and 1986, an increase of some nine per cent. This increase, however, matches the increase of some nine per cent in the total number of AIC allowance recipients. There was also a similar increase (some 7%) in the number of Basic Boarding Allowance recipients, which does not support the notion that parents are opting to have their children study at home instead of boarding, due to financial or other reasons. It is noteworthy, though, that the number of Second Home Allowance recipients declined by some 23 per cent; financial factors may have contributed to this decline. It is also noteworthy that the number of Correspondence Allowance recipients at the junior secondary level increased by

36 per cent, which suggests that a swing towards studying at home has occurred at that level of schooling. Information provided to the Commission on the number of rural school students in 1984 and 1986 who were enrolled in correspondence schools, distance education centres or schools of the air, and who were not attending a regular school is also relevant here. Trends in these enrolments differ by State and Territory and may have been influenced by a variety of factors. Trends of interest are the recent increases in secondary school level enrolments in Western Australia (from 381 in 1984 to 549 in 1986) and primary school level enrolments in the Northern Territory (from 297 in 1984 to 440 in 1986).

Panel 2

Distance Education at the Secondary Level

The Committee noted that children enrolled in distance education services, of the home-based and small-school types, typically do not seek to pursue studies beyond Year 10 level using a distance education mode. Moreover, it was observed that some parents appeared to see the re-enrolment of children for Secondary Correspondence at Year 8 level as a psychological barrier. Even home tutors who had coped well to Year 7 level had fears about the secondary transition which appeared to be fuelled by widely held beliefs concerning the difficulty of Secondary Correspondence programs and the inadequacy of secondary support services.

This attitude was viewed by the Committee as a major concern, because secondary boarding school is clearly not an economically viable option for many families and is seen as contribution [sic] to an undersirable breakdown of the family unit by certain others. The Committee gained the impression that some families faced with Secondary Correspondence lessons as the only viable or acceptable option simply 'go through the motions' of satisfying course requirements until school leaving age is reached.

While many favourable comments were made about existing distance education services and about the dedication of present staff, concerns tended to focus on the lack of co-ordination between the various levels and types of services and the effects this has on continuity of programs.

Within this context, the broad organisational structures supported by the Committee are premised on a firm commitment towards continuity in children's learning experience during the pre and compulsory years of schooling, that is, from preschool to Year 10.

(Source: Queensland Department of Education, **Report to the Honourable L W Powell, MLA, Minister for Education, 1986**, pp.50-51.)

Table 10

Number of students who received assistance through the AIC in 1980,
by level of schooling and type of allowance

Level of schooling	Type of Allowance									
	Basic Boarding		Second Home		Corres-pondence		Short-Term Boarding		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Pre-school	0	0	0	0	847	22	0	0	847	4
Primary	2 662	19	542	51	2 516	64	254	94	5 974	31
Junior secondary	6 637	48	341	32	472	12	17	6	7 467	39
Senior secondary	4 472	32	173	16	98	2	0	0	4 743	25
Total	13 771	99	1 056	99	3 933	100	271	100	19 031	99

Source: AIC statistics collection, CDEET

4.14 Despite the misgivings of parents and the undeniable difficulties associated with studying at home by distance education means, completion of a full secondary education through distance education study undertaken at home is one option available to geographically isolated students. Support services for these students and for their families have been increased in recent years (see paragraph 8.4 in Chapter 8). Furthermore, advances in communication technologies are already improving distance education services and are likely to improve them even more in the near future (see Chapter 8). In the Commission's view, technological advances are seen as being likely to ease, sometimes quite substantially, the difficulties associated with studying at home in a remote area. Difficulties associated with such study will, however, still exist for students and for their parents. The students will still be working at home, rather than in a class with other students being taught directly by a teacher. Furthermore, they will still be living in a remote area with the experiential restrictions this imposes. The ICPA Federal Council commented to the Commission:

Technology can be an extremely valuable educational tool, but it cannot replace the human element, especially in the education of school age children.

Technologies should be used to enhance, not to replace the personal contact between teachers and children in an educational setting. Technology cannot replace the social interaction between a child and his/her peers.

(Submission from ICPA Federal Council).

Panel 3

Distance Education and the Rural Economic Downturn

The economic downturn means fewer job opportunities in rural Australia and therefore a greater need for a broader education.

In this area the difference between 'rural' and 'remote' is particularly glaring.

The government provides a rural secondary student with a school and a school bus service to reach that school. If a family financial disaster occurs, that child can still attend school.

A remote secondary student is accommodated in a boarding facility away from home in order to reach a school. If a family financial disaster occurs the child must be removed from the boarding facility and therefore the school. The only recourse is Distance Education.

For most families living in an isolated situation this is not a satisfactory substitute at secondary level for the social, sporting and cultural activities available at a conventional school. Add to this the difficulties for a mother trying to supervise secondary mathematics or science, in a family situation under stress due to financial problems, and the prospects for the student's success are bleak.

(Source: Submission from ICPA Federal Council)

4.15 Parents of students studying at home using distance education services have special needs, particularly parents who act as 'home tutors'. These parents may often feel unable to provide adequate supervision for their child, due to lack of knowledge of subject matter or to lack of awareness of teaching methods or strategies. They may also feel that the home tutor role and the parent role are to some extent in conflict, especially in the small social world of a remote property. Home tutoring may also conflict with other responsibilities of the parent, such as assisting with necessary management and other tasks on a family farm. Conflicting responsibilities, as well as feelings of inadequacy in the home tutor role, can be especially stressful if the child studying at home has a disability or learning difficulty. Some of the problems of home tutors are illustrated in extracts from submissions made to the Commission presented in Panel 4.

4.16 The Commission considers it important that technological advances be exploited to improve the schooling available to remote area students studying at home, as well as to students who attend school in rural Australia. The Commission has therefore devoted a chapter of this report to matters relating to the use of technologies in rural schooling.

Living away from home to attend school

4.17 Rather than study at home using distance education services, many remote area students who do not have reasonable daily access from home to school live away from home in order to attend school. An indication of the number of these students is given by the number of students who received the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance in 1986. This allowance assisted 14 837 students in 1986. Not all of these students, however, would necessarily have been geographically isolated rural students. It is estimated that in 1986 some 10 500 rural students lived away from home to attend school because of geographic isolation.

4.18 Table 9 indicates that only 13 per cent of Basic Boarding Allowance recipients in 1986 were primary school students, whereas 50 per cent were at the junior secondary school level and 37 per cent were at the senior secondary school level. This contrasts with the pattern for Correspondence Allowance recipients studying at home, 82 per cent of whom were at the pre-school or primary school levels. The apparent preference of parents to have their children study at home using distance education services at the primary school level, but to send them away to school at the secondary school level, has been discussed already in this chapter. As noted in paragraph 4.9, more boys than girls received the Basic Boarding Allowance in 1986, with 56 per cent of recipients being boys (see Table 11). Whereas boys and girls were equally represented among senior secondary school level recipients, at the primary school level 60 per cent of the recipients were boys, while at the junior secondary school level boys made up 59 per cent of recipients. The ‘over-representation’ of boys among Basic Boarding Allowance recipients at the primary and junior secondary school levels suggests that at those levels parents are either more inclined to send sons than daughters away to school, or that more boarding places are available for boys than girls, or that both factors are operating. This may change to ‘equal representation’ of boys and girls among Basic Boarding Allowance recipients at the senior secondary school level, in part because retention rates into senior secondary school are higher for girls than for boys.

Table 11

Number of students who received the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance in 1986, by sex and level of schooling

Sex	Level of Schooling									
	Pre-school		Primary		Junior secondary		Senior secondary		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	5	50	1 166	60	4 338	59	2 751	50	8 310	56
Female	5	50	762	40	3 033	41	2 721	50	6 527	44
Total	10	100	1 928	100	7 421	100	5 478	100	14 837	100

Source: AIC statistics collection, CDEET

4.19 Rural young people who board away from home to attend school have three main options, namely to:

- attend a boarding school;
- live in a hostel near a school; or
- live in private board near a school.

Each of these options will be discussed in turn before broader issues relating to living away from home to attend school are outlined.

4.20 Of the 14 837 students who received assistance in 1986 through the Basic Boarding Allowance, 10 163 (68%) attended boarding schools, 2881 (19%) lived in hostels and 1793 (12%) were in private board. These figures reflect the important role that boarding schools play in the schooling of students from remote areas. Table 12 presents these figures and also presents information on the annual boarding costs of Basic Boarding Allowance recipients. It shows that boarding school fees tend to be higher than hostel fees, which in turn are higher than the cost of private board. Annual boarding costs exceeded \$3000 for 41 per cent of boarding school students; for hostel and private board students the respective proportions are 34 per cent and four per cent. In considering these fee differentials, the services and quality of care provided by the three types of accommodation facility should be kept in mind. Boarding schools, for example, typically provide a high level of supervision and pastoral care, as well as a wide range of extra-curricular activities. It should be noted that the figures in Table 12 are for boarding costs only and do not include tuition fees or other costs associated with living away from home to attend school. Further details on costs associated with living away from home are presented later in this chapter.

Panel 4

Problems of Home Tutors

Parents, particularly mothers, feel they can go just so far. They may have the knowledge to assist children on distance education programmes but towards the end of primary school there comes a conflict between parenting and teaching when they seek to enrol their children at boarding school.

(Source: Submission from Christian Brothers Agricultural School, Tardun, Western Australia)

...

It is our experience that the machinery for special education is well established in the states but in almost all cases it is not getting past the populated areas. Isolated parents do not realise that help is available and specialist teachers do not realise that a clientele exists in isolation, unattached to a 'normal' school. For the educational good of isolated children and the sanity of their supervisors, accessibility to specialist services has to be facilitated and publicized.

(Source: Submission from ICPA, South Australia)

Table 12

Number of students who received the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance in 1986, by type of residence and annual boarding costs

Annual boarding costs (\$)	Boarding school	Type of Residence Hostel	Private	Total
Nil or not stated	594	251	120	965
1 - 500	278	189	30	497
501 - 1000	125	112	107	344
1001 - 1200	13	22	106	141
1201 - 1400	86	65	172	323
1401 - 1600	103	40	187	330
1601 - 1800	235	79	266	580
1801 - 2000	140	229	175	544
2001 - 2200	283	154	245	682
2201 - 2400	983	189	74	1 246
2401 - 2600	731	121	128	980
2601 - 2800	698	183	49	930
2801 - 3000	1 684	264	56	2 004
Over 3000	4 210	983	78	5 271
Total students	10 163	2 881	1 793	14 837

Source: AIC statistics collection, CDEET

Boarding schools

4.21 Table 13 shows that of the 10 163 AIC Basic Boarding Allowance recipients attending boarding schools in 1986, the largest numbers were from families residing in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. Again it should be noted that not all of these allowance recipients would necessarily have been geographically isolated rural students. Nearly all of the boarding schools in Australia are operated by non-government organisations. Some of these schools are in rural areas of Australia; others are in metropolitan areas, but often accommodate students from rural locations. Table 14 gives the number of non-government boarding schools in Australia, by institutional affiliation, for 1984, 1985 and 1986. As that table shows, over the years 1984 to 1986 the number of non-government boarding schools in Australia remained fairly stable. In the period 1974 to 1984, however, the number of these schools declined quite substantially. In 1974 there were 262 non-government boarding schools in Australia (CSC, 1975b, p.48); by 1984 the number had declined to 201.

Table 13

Number of AIC Basic Boarding Allowance recipients attending boarding schools in 1986, by State and Territory

State/Territory ^a	Number of recipients	%
NSW	3 569	35
Vic	379	4
Qld	3 386	33
WA	2 176	21
SA	309	3
Tas	126	1
NT	212	2
ACT	6	0
Total	10 163	99

(a) Determined by location of family residence

Source: AIC statistics collection, CDEET

Table 14

Number of non-government boarding schools in Australia, by affiliation, selected years

Affiliation	1984	1985	1986
Anglican	51	52	52
Catholic	81	78	73
Lutheran	6	6	6
Presbyterian	8	8	8
Seventh Day Adventist	2	3	3
Uniting	25	25	25
Other	28	30	32
Total	201	202	199

Source: CDE (1985, 1986b, 1987d)

4.22 A decline in the total number of boarding students in non-government boarding schools has accompanied the reduction in the number of boarding schools. In 1974 there were 32 030 boarding students (2503 primary; 29 527 secondary) attending non-government boarding schools (CSC, 1975b). By 1984 the number had declined to 29 741 (1170 primary; 28 571 secondary), but this decline was followed by a slight increase to 29 762 (1110 primary, 28 652 secondary) in 1986 (CDE, 1985, 1987d).

4.23 The reasons behind the 1974 to 1984 decline in the number of boarding schools are probably many and it is hard to be definitive about the extent to which different factors were influential. A 1976 survey of non-government boarding schools asked schools which had stopped providing boarding facilities in 1974, 1975 or 1976 to give the reason for this discontinuation (NCIS, 1977, p.82). Lack of finance, lack of suitable staff and the decrease in enrolments were prominent among the reasons given (p.77). It is particularly hard to determine the extent to which boarding school closures have been due to reduced demand for places. Even if it could be established that demand for places has declined, it would be difficult to ascertain whether this was due to changed parental preferences regarding the education of their children or to more parents having difficulty in meeting boarding school costs. Parental difficulty in meeting the costs of boarding schooling may well have increased as a result of the recent rural economic downturn and declining farm incomes. Increases in boarding school operating costs may also have contributed to these difficulties.

4.24 Table 15 presents 1979 and 1986 tuition and boarding fees for upper secondary students at 12 non-government boarding schools. New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia were the States selected for representation in the table because they had the largest number of Basic Boarding Allowance recipients attending boarding schools in 1986. The 12 schools were selected to give a range of schools and fee levels. The combined fee (tuition plus boarding) increased in all of the schools between 1979 and 1986, with the increase being quite substantial in many cases.

4.25 Boarding schools often have difficulty attracting and holding appropriate staff. Submissions to the Commission referred to the need for training courses for staff. The Charters Towers case study (Crowther and Travis, 1987) found that boarding schools in Charters Towers experienced high staff turnover and difficulty in attracting suitable staff. The need for suitable staff was emphasised in a recent study of boarding schools, which quoted one principal as commenting that:

The people involved in a boarding-school need to be completely committed to the educational, pastoral and physical care role of every student. It's as simple as that and if they are not absolutely committed, forget about trying to run a boarding-school.
(McShane, 1983, p.95).

A submission to the Commission from the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland, discussed the staffing problem as follows:

Teachers find the double job of teaching by day and caring for boarders after school very demanding. Dedicated and caring staff are difficult to recruit. The decline in religious staff has accentuated this problem.

Boarding schools and hostels have special needs for trained staff.

4.26 Reference should be made here to indications of a shortage of boarding school places for girls. McShane (1983, p.47) reported that girls made up only 36.2 per cent of the students in Catholic boarding schools in Queensland in 1983. She also reported that 'In 1981, throughout Australia 943 boys and 1652 girls were refused places in non-government boarding schools' (p.47), which suggests that the demand for places exceeded supply to a greater extent for girls than for boys. **The Report to the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools from the Working Party on Boarding Schools** recommended that there should be an increase of approximately 40 boarding places in Adelaide for Catholic girls in Years 10 to 12 (South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools, 1987, p.29). Enrolment numbers for boarders in non-government boarding schools in Australia in 1986 indicate that there are fewer girl than boy boarders. Some 42 per cent of all boarders were girls; at the senior secondary level (Years 11 and 12), girls made up 45 per cent of boarders (figures provided by CDEET).

Hostels

4.27 Hostels provide an alternative to boarding schools for geographically isolated young people who live away from home to attend school. In 1986 there were 2881 students assisted through the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance living in hostels (see Table 12). Again it should be noted that not all of these students would necessarily have been geographically isolated rural students. Table 16 shows the number of hostels catering for school students in each State and Territory in 1986. As Table 16 indicates, there are no such hostels in Victoria, South Australia or the Australian Capital Territory. Hostels are often operated by church or community groups, but Queensland has 13 government-assisted hostels, Western Australia has 10 State-operated hostels managed by the Western Australia Country High Schools Hostels Authority and Tasmania has nine hostels operated by the Tasmanian Department of Education.

4.28 According to the Commission's report **Study of Living Away from Home Facilities for Isolated Children** (CSC, 1982, p.31) there were 87 hostels catering for school students in Australia in 1982. When compared with the total of 49 given in Table 16, this figure of 87 suggests that a considerable number of hostels have closed in recent years. Several factors have contributed to hostel closures. Submissions to the Commission indicate that among those factors are escalating costs and the associated difficulty families have in meeting hostel costs, the insecure financial base of many hostels, management problems and difficulties associated with providing adequate supervision and pastoral care for boarders. Comments on hostels extracted from the submissions are given in Panel 5. In 1986 the majority of hostels set fees for seven-days-a-week board in the range of \$53 to \$80 per week, which converts to school-year costs of \$2200 to \$3200 (figures based on information provided by the ICPA). In addition to hostel boarding costs, the families of students attending a non-government school from a hostel would incur the additional cost of school tuition fees.

Table 15

Annual boarding and tuition fees for upper secondary students
in 12 non-government boarding schools,
three States, 1979 and 1986

Location and type of school	1979			1986		
	Tuition \$	Board \$	Tuition plus board \$ (per annum)	Tuition \$	Board \$	Tuition plus board \$
New South Wales						
Metropolitan girls school (Catholic)	1 050	1 650	2 700	1 620	2 100	3 720
Metropolitan boys school (Anglican)	1 755	1 740	3 495	3 525	3 525	7 050
Rural girls school (Anglican)	1 500	2 070	3 570	3 435	4 185	7 620
Rural co-ed school (Uniting)	1 635	1 835	3 470	3 045	3 135	6 180
Queensland						
Metropolitan girls school (Anglican)	1 460	2 040	3 500	2 460	3 220	5 680
Metropolitan boys school (Catholic)	580	2 000	2 580	880	2 880	3 760
Rural co-ed school (Anglican)	1 196	1 768	2 964	1 900	2 564	4 464
Rural girls school (Catholic)	300	1 460	1 760	1 560	2 380	3 940
Western Australia						
Metropolitan boys school (Anglican)	1 695	1 635	3 330	3 320	3 700	7 020
Metropolitan girls school (Method- ist)	1 638	1 605	3 243	3 186	3 734	6 920
Rural co-ed school (Anglican)	1 815	1 545	3 360	3 240	3 560	6 800
Rural boys school (Catholic)	330	900	1 230	600	2 320	2 920

Source: NCIS (1979, 1986)

Table 16
Number of hostels catering for school students
by State and Territory, 1986

State/Territory	No. of hostels
NSW	8
Vic	0
Qld	13
WA	16
SA	0
Tas	8
NT	4
ACT	0
Total	49

Source: Based on information provided by the ICPA

Private board

4.29 A third alternative for students from geographically isolated areas who live away from home to attend school is board in a private home. In 1986 there were 1793 students assisted through the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance who were in private board (see Table 12). Again it should be noted that not all of these students would necessarily have been geographically isolated rural students.

4.30 While generally being less costly than boarding at a school or hostel (see Table 12), private board and associated expenses can still be a financial burden to families, even given the financial assistance provided through the AIC. There are also other difficulties associated with private board. The quality of care given to the student depends very much on the board provider and parents may be concerned about the degree of support being given to their child and the setting in which the child lives. The board provider might decide at any time not to continue to take in boarders, necessitating a sudden change of boarding arrangements for the student. Private board may also be hard to find, either because few people take in boarders, especially school students, or because of the lack of information and assistance available to help parents find suitable board for their children. The work of the South Australia Country/City Information Unit, an initiative of the Country Areas Program in that State, should be mentioned in this context. The unit helps rural families locate board and schooling in Adelaide and provides information about allowances, tertiary education and careers.

4.31 Community efforts being made at Cleve in South Australia should also be noted here as an example of how community commitment and involvement can help overcome difficulties rural families have in obtaining appropriate board for their children. The community at Cleve is actively involved in maintaining a boarding program for some 35 secondary school students, many of whom come from towns in the region to undertake a special agricultural course which has been developed at the Cleve Area School. A community committee assists in the organisation and management of the boarding program to ensure its effective operation.

The second home alternative

4.32 Before turning to a fuller discussion of issues associated with living away from home to attend school, brief mention should be made of families who opt to establish a second home near a school in order to enable their children to attend school. The AIC Second Home Allowance provides financial assistance to families who adopt this approach to gaining access to school. The Second Home Allowance assisted 816 students in 1986, some 58 per cent of whom were secondary school students. Again it should be noted that not all of these students would necessarily have been geographically isolated rural students.

4.33 The financial cost of setting up a second home may be burdensome for many families, despite the assistance available through the Second Home Allowance. As noted in paragraph 4.13, there was a 23 per cent decline in the number of Second Home Allowance recipients between 1980 and 1986. Financial factors, including those arising from declining farm incomes, may have contributed to this decline. Problems can also result from the lengthy family separations that a second home arrangement usually entails. In addition, the setting up of a second home can mean that the mother experiences conflict between the obligations associated with the two homes and finds herself neither able to assist very much on the family farm, nor able to engage in employment from the second home.

Issues associated with living away from home

4.34 There are many important issues associated with living away from home to attend school, some of which have been alluded to already in this chapter. One issue concerns the financial costs to the family of having a child live away from home. That this cost can be a burden, especially in times of rural economic downturn and declining farm incomes, was indicated in submissions made to the Commission (see Panel 6).

Financial costs to the family

4.35 Table 12 gave an indication of boarding costs associated with living in a boarding school, hostel or private board. As noted in paragraph 4.20, the proportion of 1986 AIC Basic Boarding Allowance recipients for whom annual boarding costs exceeded \$3000 was 41 per cent for those attending boarding schools, 34 per cent for those at hostels and 4 per cent for those in private board. Table 15 gave a fuller picture of the costs involved in attending boarding school, as it showed both boarding and tuition costs for upper secondary students. The combined boarding and tuition costs in 1986 for the 12 schools in Table 15 ranged from \$2920 per annum to \$7620 per annum and exceeded \$5500 per annum for seven of the 12 schools listed. As paragraph 4.28 noted, hostel fees in 1986 were generally in the range of \$2200 to \$3200 per annum, with tuition fees being an additional cost incurred by families if their child attends a non-government school from a hostel.

Panel 5

Problems Associated with Hostels

Hostels provide accommodation with access to government high schools. Australia-wide their success varies greatly.

In Tasmania and Western Australia the state governments provide hostels giving access to Senior High Schools. Because their funding base is secure the pastoral care they provide is good, so consequently they have a high occupancy rate. They are perceived by isolated parents as being suitable places to send their children. However, they do not supply enough places for all remote children, and the balance are catered for by the Independent Boarding Schools.

Many hostels in the other states have not been so successful, because of an insecure financial base, and the consequent poor facilities, management, and lack of supervision, together with poor liaison with the schools they serve, have led to their rejection by many parents. There are some very successful hostels, but there is always concern about the financial structure and long term viability. With more secure funding there is a place for many hostels attached to Senior High Schools providing a high educational standard.

(Source: Submission from ICPA Federal Council)

...

Admittedly the viability of hostels is a concern. The 'image' problem suffered by these institutions as well as the fluctuations in student enrolments and staff mobility create difficulties in preserving the continuity of their operation.

(Source: Submission from Queensland Department of Education)

...

Hostels are a vital option in the education of the isolated child. However there is the problem of double trauma associated with hostel living. Both parent and child have to adapt to two systems - hostel and school, where discipline and standards may be different, as compared with the total environment of a boarding school.

Boarding schools are often preferred by many isolated parents, who feel a need for their children to experience the benefits of attending a school in a large centre as this enables exposure to social and cultural education. These isolated children are often insular in their outlook, and need the wider exposure.

(Source: Submission from ICPA, Northern Territory)

4.36 When compared with the 1986 allowance levels payable under the AIC boarding allowances, the fees associated with attending a boarding school or living at a hostel provide a starting point for examining the likely financial cost which families themselves have to meet if they have a child living away from home to attend school. In 1986, the non-income-tested Basic Boarding Allowance was \$989 per annum, while the maximum amount payable through the Basic Boarding Allowance plus the income-tested and boarding-costs-related Additional Boarding Allowance was \$2851 per annum for a student in Years 11 or 12 (see CDE, 1986a).

4.37 To do a detailed accounting of the net financial cost to families (ie. total cost minus AIC and State government financial assistance) of having a child live away from home at a boarding school or hostel in order to attend school, non-boarding/non-tuition costs (eg. travel for parents, telephone expenses incurred in 'keeping in touch') would have to be added to boarding/tuition costs. The cost of items covered by board which the parents would have provided had the child been living at home (eg. food costs) would have to be deducted. Other adjustments would also have to be made. Without attempting such a detailed accounting, a comparison of the costs mentioned in paragraph 4.35 and the levels of assistance available through the AIC boarding allowances noted in paragraph 4.36 makes it apparent that in 1986 many geographically isolated families would have borne a considerable cost in having their child live away from home to attend school. The cost to be met by families would, however, have been even greater had financial assistance through the AIC not been available to them. The importance of the Scheme to many geographically isolated families is thus made apparent.

4.38 The discussion in paragraphs 4.35 to 4.37 used 1986 boarding and tuition fees and 1986 AIC allowance levels. Some changes were made to the AIC in 1987, including increases in allowance levels (see Appendix H). The maximum Boarding Allowance payable for 18-19 year-old secondary school students in 1987 is \$4171 per annum, while for 16-17 year-old secondary students it is \$3821 per annum, with the non-income-tested minimum rate remaining at \$989 per annum. These increases and other increases in education allowances which are to commence in 1988 (see Commonwealth of Australia, 1987b, 1987c), however, are unlikely to do much to change the basic situation for families described in paragraph 4.37, as fees have also been increasing.

Emotional costs to the family

4.39 The emotional costs to the family of having a child live away from home to attend school can also be considerable. These emotional costs include the distress parents may experience when separated from their child, parental concern about the child, distress on the part of the child at separation from his or her family, school and adjustment/transition difficulties which may be experienced by the child and distress experienced by other children in the family. Some of these emotional costs are illustrated in Panel 7.

4.40 The emotional costs to parents can be increased by concern about the quality of care their child receives while living away from home. Boarding schools seem to have an advantage over hostels in terms of easing parental concerns about the care given to children. According to submissions to the Commission, the quality of pastoral care able to be provided by hostels often determines their success or failure. Panel 8 presents relevant extracts from submissions.

Panel 6

**Financial Costs of having a Child Live Away
from Home to Attend School**

To send children to a boarding school, for most families, requires a great deal of commitment and results in economic hardship. If people want to live in the bush — and someone must — it is a burden to be borne. Children must not be disadvantaged.

(Source: Submission from ICPA, South Australia)

...

The majority of boarders are now post compulsory school students.

The significance of the last point lies not only in the dilemma of no educational option that confronts country parents, but also in the economic reality that parents cannot afford fees over 5 years of secondary schooling particularly where, as is the norm, there is more than one child involved.

(Source: Submission from South Australian Independent Schools Board Incorporated)

Need for local accommodation facilities

4.41 Financial and emotional costs associated with having a child live away from home point to the need for more localised accommodation facilities. These facilities would make it possible for a child to live away from home to attend school, but still live in or close to his or her own region and be able to return home regularly. Submissions to the Commission indicated a need for local hostels and suggested a relationship between the degree of success hostels enjoy and local control, small size and proximity to client families. Extracts from submissions which point to the need for localised accommodation facilities are presented in Panels 9 and 10.

4.42 Providing accommodation facilities closer to students' homes should reduce the financial and emotional costs to families associated with having a child live away from home to attend school. This in turn should make school completion a more attractive option and help raise secondary school retention rates in rural areas. Local accommodation also has other advantages: the availability of more localised accommodation facilities may help to overcome problems associated with an apparent undersupply of boarding school places for female students (see paragraph 4.26); young people using these accommodation facilities would add to the student numbers at the rural school they attend, thereby increasing its enrolment size, staffing and overall viability; and the facilities would contribute to the local economy, as money used to establish and maintain hostels or other forms of student accommodation in rural towns would have a multiplier effect on the local economy and local employment.

4.43 In order for more localised accommodation facilities to be made available, more 'small-scale' facilities will be needed. These may range from medium-sized hostels to small 'group home' or 'cottage home' facilities providing a family-like setting for young people living away from home. Such facilities can be widely located and can provide good supervision and pastoral care. They do not involve large capital costs or operating overheads. Furthermore, small accommodation facilities of this kind have the advantage of being more easily turned to other uses, or sold, or leased out, should demand for accommodation places wane. Care should, however, be taken that these accommodation facilities are established in towns which can offer a reasonable range of educational opportunities to students, especially at the middle and upper secondary school levels.

4.44 Group home facilities of this kind have been used in a number of social welfare areas with reasonable success. The Uniting Church has been using such facilities to provide accommodation for school students in locations such as Atherton, Queensland. The recent South Australian Education Department study **Boarding Options Working Party Report**, identified small group home accommodation facilities as having potential for improving provisions for students from isolated areas attending school in regional centres or metropolitan areas. That report recommended the establishment of a Country Education Support Unit. Functions of this Unit would include facilitating the development of group home-style accommodation and providing advice on boarding options. (See South Australian Education Department, 1987, pp. 17-18). The success of more localised and fairly small-scale accommodation facilities is likely to depend substantially on local community support and involvement. Communities may well need to assume considerable responsibility for establishing or administering such facilities. The benefits of local facilities to the families using them as well as to the broader community should, however, make the taking of such responsibility worthwhile.

Panel 7

**Emotional Costs of having a Child Live Away from
Home to Attend School**

My main concern is always the access our outback children have to education. In our case being one hundred and seventy kilometres from the nearest school, our only option is to do correspondence and school of the air. Sorry, we could break the family unit and start a second home or opt to send a six year old to a hostel or boarding school. But let me ask you, are they really options? Then why expect others to? I can see no point in having a family if a parent can't have that family with them in those formative years that are so important for the emotional and moral well being of the child.

(Source: Submission from Mrs M J O'Brien, a parent)

...

In a great many centres in Queensland, schooling is available to Year 10 only. To complete Years 11 and 12, correspondence or boarding away from home are the only alternatives.

The emotional and financial costs to students and their families is great. Government-run boarding schools or government hostels, with appropriate supervision and pastoral care arrangements, should be established with these schools to enable children to return home at the weekend.

(Source: Submission from Queensland Teachers Union)

...

We love the land, and both our children do too but if there were boarding facilities close to the nearest Area School we would have sent our children there and could at least see them every weekend. Instead they are someone else's responsibility most of the year. We miss out on special days, such as interviews and open days. Private board is stressful — often not long-term and as the parent, I and the family caring for my child have difficulties in coming to terms with expectations of family life etc.

(Source: Sullivan, 1987, quoting a parent)

Panel 8

**Pastoral Care for Students Living Away
from Home to Attend School**

The quality of boarding facilities is of paramount importance to parents as are the pastoral care and services which make the boarding facility a 'home away from home' for the students. Parents have a duty and right to bring up their children in a manner in which they believe, in conscience, to be best for them. This is an important consideration when the children are away from the family environment for 40 weeks of the year and is one reason why the majority of parents choose the caring environment of a boarding school.

(Source: Submission from ICPA, Queensland)

...

When parents come to choose the appropriate accommodation for their child who needs to board away from home, the most important consideration is the kind of care that child will receive - the 'pastoral care'. The second consideration is the educational standards of the schooling to which that accommodation gives him/her access.

(Source: Submission from ICPA Federal Council)

...

What the boarding schools provide is organised activities during out-of-school hours.

The hostels do not provide this, at least not to the same extent, and I believe this factor can be overlooked when comparing the cost effectiveness of hostels with boarding school.

Several of our families have expressed concern about this lack of supervision/organised activity in the hostels.

(Source: Submission from Christian Brothers Agricultural School, Tardun, Western Australia)

...

In support of the philosophical basis [of boarding schools] is usually a highly developed network of pastoral care. Boarding schools are generally ordered communities and the degree to which students learn self-discipline is an important aspect. Surveys of parents of boarding schools often place school discipline as an important aspect in their choice of boarding schools.

Because of their ability to bring students together, boarding schools are able to offer a broad curriculum. This provides students with appropriate paths along which they might develop their vocational and other interests for the future. These curriculum choices also enhance a student's opportunity to gain useful and fulfilling employment in later life.

The socialisation that occurs at a boarding school is very important for all students, particularly those from areas where social contact with their peers is less frequent. These social skills are of vital importance for everyone.

Boarding schools do provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Sporting programmes as well as non-sporting programmes give students a range of experiences which attempt to develop a well rounded person. Many skills learnt are the basis of leisure activities in the future.

(Source: Submission from Association of Independent Schools of Queensland)

Panel 9

The Need for Localised Accommodation Facilities

A recent survey of Catholic school parents in the Pilbara, indicated that many of them would prefer to send their secondary students to a local school (if a suitable one was available) rather than have them board in a distant town or city. There appears to be then, a need (despite fiscal restraints) for governments to seriously look at ways of providing capital funds for new secondary schools and boarding facilities in major rural towns. This action would assist Aboriginal as well as white students to attend schools within their own environment.

(Source: Submission from Catholic Education Office of Western Australia)

...

We believe there is a need for more State Boarding Schools or boarding facilities attached to existing high schools in larger centres. There is a need for consultation with parents in geographically isolated areas to determine future needs given realistic financial help for such families. The siting of new boarding schools should take into account access to TAFE facilities.

(Source: Submission from Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales)

...

We would support wholeheartedly the establishment of accommodation facilities to service State high schools in both the city and country areas though not only at the post-compulsory Years of 11 and 12; which tends to be the government's way of thinking at present. It must be remembered that there are areas that just do not have schools that go to Year 10 - boarding facilities have to start at Year 8.

Any type of boarding, regardless of allowances, is becoming less of an option due to the escalating costs of those facilities. However, where a boarding facility is offered, serving a State high school, the tuition cost is eliminated thereby making it a more viable alternative.

(Source: Submission from ICPA, South Australia)

...

My husband and I own a property 60 km from Julia Creek and apart from 5 km of dirt the road is all bitumen. We have two boys who are in Years 1 and 3. We decided somewhat hesitantly to send our children in to board at St Joseph's Convent when they started school. A decision we have never regretted.

It is a great pity that there are not more schools like St Joseph's throughout the country. Not only is it a 'stepping stone' for our children who will eventually have to go away to a city to board, but because it is run by the Sisters, I feel confident in the knowledge that my children are being well cared for.

(Source: Submission from Mrs Judy McCowan, President, St Joseph's Parents and Friends)

Panel 10

Lack of Student Accommodation Facilities in Tennant Creek

There are at present no boarding school or hostel facilities within the Barkly Education Region for school children. A small number of primary-age children (suggested to be about 12) whose parents live in Tennant Creek, attend boarding schools, usually in North Queensland (mainly Charters Towers) or in South Australia (Adelaide). Secondary school-age white children from pastoral properties, mining and other small townships in the Barkly Region mostly attend the boarding schools referred to above, though some attend boarding schools in New South Wales. A small number of white children of secondary school-age is known to be studying by correspondence though the number was suggested to be no more than eight. Because the only secondary school in the Barkly Education Region is situated at Tennant Creek, and because no boarding or hostel facilities are available, many parents consider they have no alternative but to send their children to boarding schools in other states. In Tennant Creek itself, many parents have chosen not to send their children to the local secondary school, though it has not been possible to measure the extent precisely. From discussions with individual business and professional persons in Tennant Creek, many prefer strongly to send their children away to boarding schools, 'to broaden the outlook and experiences by living in bigger cities'.

In discussion with both parents and educators about hostel facilities in the town, the focus was clearly on providing improved access to education and improved living conditions for Aboriginal children of the region, rather than white. The only choices which Aboriginal children currently have for secondary education, are among Elliot (with minimal secondary facilities), Tennant Creek, and Yirrara College (Alice Springs), the latter offering the only boarding facilities.

The matter of hostel facilities was described by one respondent in Tennant Creek as being a 'chicken and egg' argument. Thus at this stage, few Aboriginal children from remote communities, can come to Tennant Creek for their secondary education, because no residential facilities exist. So, until there are hostel facilities, there will be few students.

It was reported that advertisements had been placed in the local newspaper seeking boarding places in the homes of local white families for Aboriginal secondary school-age children, from the bush schools. The advertisements had not drawn any positive response from the community in the form of offers of places.

(Source: Crowther, 1987)

4.45 The development of these facilities could be initiated by communities, non-government organisations, or other relevant bodies. Links with the schools attended by the students accommodated at the facility should be encouraged, with these schools preferably being represented on an appropriate governing body. The student care programs offered should complement the programs provided at the schools. In addition, it is important that the governing bodies recognise the need for adequate student and staff accommodation to be provided, and for staff training to be arranged to help ensure that appropriate supervision and pastoral care is given to students.

4.46 Communities or organisations will need financial and other support to establish and operate local accommodation facilities. It is relevant to note here that the Commission's 1982 report **Study of Living Away from Home Facilities for Isolated Children**, recommended the establishment of a joint capital grants program, the 'Living Away from Home Facilities Program'

... to provide assistance for the upgrading of accommodation for isolated children who need to live away from home to attend government and non-government schools. The aim of the program should be to alleviate the major deficiencies, found during this study, in the provision of basic accommodation facilities for isolated children (CSC, 1982, p.48).

It also recommended that the program should have two elements, one for hostels and another for boarding schools (p.49). The report further suggested that governments should recognise the status of non-government hostels as educational institutions, making it possible for them to attract grants in a similar way to non-government schools (p.48).

4.47 In considering issues in the accommodation area, the position is taken here that encouragement should be given to accommodation facilities which:

- are as close to students' homes as possible;
- support rural schools;
- give students access to locally-relevant curriculum, especially in Years 11 and 12; and
- are likely to increase student retention into upper secondary school.

4.48 This report therefore proposes support for local student accommodation facilities in rural Australia. This support should take the form of Commonwealth financial assistance for eligible hostels, group homes and boarding schools, with the assistance to be paid to the accommodation facility, rather than the student or the student's family. It is proposed that the assistance to hostels, group homes and small boarding schools should be at a higher rate than that for large boarding schools. Small boarding schools in this context are those with 40 or fewer boarders; of the 195 non-government boarding schools operating in Australia in 1987, only 29 were in this size category. This proposal does not deny the important contribution of large boarding schools, including those located in metropolitan areas, to the provision of accommodation for students from remote areas. It does, however, move the emphasis towards more localised and adaptable accommodation which can be provided more readily through small-scale facilities. It also takes into account that boarding schools currently receive Commonwealth Government assistance (eg. through the Capital Grants Program).

4.49 Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the Commonwealth establish an Accommodation Support Scheme to provide annual per capita subsidies to hostels, group homes and boarding schools in rural areas, to support the provision of living away from home facilities for students who are geographically isolated from an appropriate government school. Under this scheme an annual per capita payment should be paid to approved accommodation facilities located in rural areas, for each student accommodated who meets the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme's (AIC) geographic isolation criterion. To encourage the development of small-scale, adaptable facilities, the payment for hostels, group homes and small boarding schools (ie. those boarding schools accommodating 40 or fewer boarders) should be set at a higher rate than that for large boarding schools (ie. those accommodating more than 40 boarders), with the initial levels of payment being \$500 per annum and \$200 per annum respectively.

4.50 Prior to the commencement of the Accommodation Support Scheme guidelines would need to be developed, including standards to be met in order for an accommodation facility to be approved for the purposes of the scheme. The Commission envisages that the scheme would be administered in conjunction with the AIC. The annual cost to the Commonwealth of the Accommodation Support Scheme is difficult to estimate, as it would depend not only on the number of students for whom support payment is made, but also the type of facility in which they are accommodated. The Commission estimates, however, that in its initial years, the scheme would cost the Commonwealth no more than \$2m per annum.

Staffing of accommodation facilities

4.51 More localised accommodation facilities will not provide the instant solution to all the difficulties and concerns associated with young people living away from home to attend school. As indicated earlier, the quality of staff is important to the success of boarding schools and hostels and this will also be the case for group homes. Ways of improving the quality of residential staff should be considered. Courses provided by rural-based TAFE colleges or CAEs and aimed at training and developing professionally the staff of residential facilities catering for school students would be one possible approach. There are examples of training courses for residential staff in other service areas which might beneficially be examined. Staff in remote areas could be given access to appropriate courses by means of distance education techniques (eg. correspondence work-books and video course material).

4.52 The recent efforts of the Queensland Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools, Queensland, should be noted here. These two bodies are collaborating on a project intended to improve the professional competence of staff working in non-government boarding schools in Queensland. One of the objectives of the project is the development, in collaboration with tertiary education institutions, of an Associate Diploma in Residential Schools Services. The availability of such a course may help meet some of the staffing needs currently experienced as well as those likely to arise from attempts to make available more localised accommodation facilities.

Information needs of parents

4.53 The needs of parents for information and practical assistance related to finding accommodation for their child is another issue worth attention. These needs were mentioned frequently by people in discussions held during this study of rural schooling. Needs in this area may well increase as smaller and more

localised accommodation facilities are developed. Initiatives relating to the provision of information and assistance regarding student accommodation have been noted in paragraphs 4.31 and 4.32. Sykes (1986), in her review of ABSEC, highlighted the information needs of Aboriginal families in relation to the ABSEC student accommodation. She wrote that:

Parents who are obliged to send their children to boarding schools ... are frequently unaware of the different types of boarding schools available or whether any particular school follows a particular educational ideology or philosophy. They are unaware of whether a school encourages sporting prowess or places special emphasis on musical or artistic ability. Too frequently the decision about placement of their child is therefore left to others. In this way, a musically talented child may find himself on a football team, his musical talent discouraged, because other Aboriginal children had been sent to that school previously (Sykes, 1986, p.7).

4.54 Sykes recommended the compilation of a resource book which would give information on boarding schools and colleges, including details on modes of operation, ideology and specialisation (1986, p.8). It should be noted that the NCIS produces a boarding school register which is now in its fourth edition and which presents considerable detail on the many boarding schools it describes (see NCIS, 1986). The register may not, however, be in a style or format appropriate to the needs and circumstances of Aboriginal families requiring information on boarding school options. A modified register, and the creation of appropriate information networks might help Aboriginal as well as other rural families who require information on boarding options. Descriptive registers of hostels and other types of student accommodation facilities could also be useful to many rural families.

Extensive daily travel to school

4.55 While some students in rural Australia do not have access to school from home, most rural students can attend school daily from home. For some, however, daily attendance is only made possible by undertaking a considerable journey to and from school by school bus, private car or other means. Distances in excess of 100 km each way are not unknown.

4.56 While distance travelled gives some indication of how the journey to and from school might affect the student and the student's family, other factors are also relevant. In some areas of Tasmania and Victoria, for example, heavily forested or mountainous terrain means that quite short journeys in terms of distance are quite long journeys in terms of time. Difficult terrain or inclement weather can add to the danger and discomfort associated with these journeys. A 30 minute stop-start school bus ride in an un-airconditioned bus along dusty roads in 40°C summer heat is likely to be more arduous than a 60 minute school bus ride on sealed roads in temperate weather. Some students have to travel to the school bus stop by private car or other means, or have to make connections between bus routes. Others have to fill in time between bus connections or between bus arrivals and departures and school starting and finishing times. These factors add to the time and the arduous nature of extensive daily travel to attend school. The age of the child undertaking the travel is also a relevant consideration. For young children in lower primary school, for example, lengthy bus journeys or waiting periods can be extremely tiring. Case studies undertaken for the Commission provide descriptive accounts of travel to school. Panel 11 presents selected descriptions from the case study reports.

4.57 Lack of access to a bus service can be a major difficulty for a family. Families living some distance from a school, but who are not on a school bus route, often have to provide transport. Providing this transport can involve considerable cost, time, inconvenience and effort. It can be particularly difficult if the family has only one car and there are competing transportation uses for the vehicle, including uses associated with maintaining the family's livelihood (see Panel 12).

4.58 Use of private transport to get children to school can be costly in financial terms, despite assistance provided through conveyance allowances. Several submissions to the Commission indicated that conveyance allowances provided by States are considered by many parents to be inadequate, given the considerable fuel, car maintenance and other costs often involved in transporting children to and from school over long distances and/or poor roads. The time involved and the interruption of other activities required when providing the transport can cause difficulties, especially when both parents work. The working day, for example, has to be interrupted to provide transport to and from school. Return journeys can be lengthy, time consuming and tiring, and sometimes made over bad roads and/or in inclement weather. Providing transport can also prove difficult when there are younger children in the family who do not yet attend school. These children either have to travel with a parent or be otherwise cared for. This aspect of providing private transport can cause parents to feel stress and guilt as they endeavour to provide for the needs of all of their children.

Panel 11

Some Examples of School Bus Journeys

Material from the case studies shows the length and duration of bus trips (one way) to school, which some students have to undertake five days a week in order to attend school. For example, for students at the Central State School, Charters Towers, the longest bus route is 82 km with the journey lasting approximately 75 minutes.

(Source: Crowther and Travis, 1987)

...

The Smithton case study described the following situation faced by some students in the Smithton area of Tasmania:

The longest journey for a high school student is 64 km or about 70 minutes each way. Students from primary schools travel up to 46 km or 55 minutes each way. At Forest Primary School, children have to wait 45 minutes after school for the high school bus, then wait for a different bus to take them on to Lileah. Some kindergarten children therefore leave home at 7.30 am and return at about 4.30 pm in the afternoon.

(Source: Tasmanian Department of Education, 1987)

Panel 12

Difficulties Associated with Lack of a School Bus Service

I am from Deddick and as we haven't a [bus] service, I transport my daughter to school along twisted mountainous roads - 2 hours daily over a distance of eighty kilometres daily. I'm completely snowed under as I've three young children — 6 months, 4 years and my eldest 5 years. We run a grazing property which takes all my husband's time — consequently every day I pack all the kids up to travel to Tubbut twice a day. I receive 25 cents a day conveyancing allowance - which has recently been reviewed by the Department and not altered.

A young family with three children who are trying to send their daughter to Tubbut from Bonang have been forced into a desperate situation. ... the eldest daughter commenced prep this year. Her father travels to Melbourne on a weekly basis for work. The family have one car, consequently, either ... [the eldest daughter] doesn't go to school or ... [her father] doesn't go to work.

(Source: Extracts from submission from the ICPA, Tubbut Branch, Victoria)

Panel 13

Ill-effects of Lengthy Travel to School

Travel is always a disincentive to study. Some students are required to spend large amounts of time travelling to and from school. It interferes with their effective study programmes. It also prevents them from effective participation in extra-curricular activities.

A tired student is disadvantaged.

(Source: Submission from Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia)

...

Parents and teachers do express considerable dissatisfaction with the safety, comfort and convenience of travelling arrangements. It is argued that the bus trip sometimes contributes to tiredness, irritability and to behaviour problems because of inadequate heating and ventilation, poor roads and sometimes overcrowding. Implicit in this argument is the possibility that those effects may be detrimental to motivation for school and homework and, ultimately, school performance.

(Source: Sinclair, 1984, p.8)

4.59 It must also be recognised that there may be ill-effects on students from extensive daily travel to school. Such travel creates fatigue which may impede learning. It reduces students' time at home, and limits time for family interaction, farm or household chores, homework or recreation. Participation in 'after hours' school activities, such as sport, is often restricted because of the need to travel home. Panel 13 outlines some of the ill-effects on students of lengthy travel to attend school.

4.60 This brief discussion of travelling to school indicates the range of difficulties which can be experienced by students and their families when the family home is some distance from a school. It thereby highlights the importance of schools being available as close to where students live as possible. This closeness minimises travel time and the ill-effects of travel. The extent of travel required by students should be given due consideration when decisions are being made about the establishment of a school, or the possible closure of an existing school. The closure of a small school can mean that the students who attended it will have to travel a considerable distance to the next school. In the case of the closure of small primary schools, this can mean that quite young children will have to spend long periods every school day on school buses or in cars in order to attend school.

4.61 Before leaving this topic, brief reference should be made to travel associated with living away from home during the week in order to attend school. 'Mid-week' boarding arrangements have advantages over seven-day-a-week boarding in that they are often less costly, keep the student reasonably close to home and allow the student to live at home on weekends. These arrangements, however, can involve students and families in considerable travel at the beginning and the end of each school week.

The rural school network

4.62 The discussion in this chapter to this point has concentrated on those rural school students who have difficulties regarding physical access to school. It should be stressed, however, that for most rural students access to school is not a problem. For them, getting to school is no more difficult and may even be easier than for their metropolitan peers. Most rural students have ready access to school from their home because of the network of over 5000 schools spread across rural Australia. Details of these schools have been outlined already in Chapter 3 and their curriculum offerings are discussed in Chapter 5.

The importance of the network

4.63 The maintenance, and where possible the extension, of this network of rural schools is important to ensure that as many rural students as possible have ready access to school, and that the difficulties experienced by rural students who continue to have less than ready access to school are minimised. In this chapter the Commission has urged the development of more localised accommodation facilities for rural students who have to live away from home to attend school, so that the associated difficulties often experienced by these students and their families can be reduced. Student accommodation facilities, however, can only be as 'local' as the nearest school offering an appropriate level of study. The extent to which accommodation facilities can be localised therefore depends upon the extent of the rural school network. Similarly, the more extensive that network, the shorter in distance and/or duration will be the journeys to and from school which a substantial number of rural students have to make daily. In an 'ideal world' every school student in rural Australia would have ready access from home to an

appropriate school. In the real world, however, because of Australia's size and population distribution, the cost of providing all the schools which would be needed to achieve this situation would be prohibitive.

Threats to the network

4.64 While a network of schools sufficiently extensive to give every rural school student ready access to school is not feasible, it is of great importance that the network of rural schools be as extensive as possible. This consideration needs to be kept very much in mind in present day Australian circumstances. The current concern of governments with restraining expenditure, coupled with difficult economic conditions and population shifts in parts of rural Australia, have put the future of some small rural schools in jeopardy. In other cases, factors such as the desire to rationalise educational services are threatening the future of small rural schools.

4.65 It is noteworthy that the number of small primary schools in Australia has declined in recent years. Table 17 presents for 1982 and 1986 the number of primary and secondary schools in various enrolment size categories. As Table 17 shows, the number of primary schools with enrolments of one to 20 declined by 105 between 1982 and 1986, with little countervailing growth in the next two size categories of 21-35 and 36-100.

Table 17

Number of primary and secondary schools by size of enrolment, Australia, 1982 and 1986 ^a				
Enrolments	Primary schools		Secondary schools	
	1982	1986	1982	1986
1 - 20	725	620	8	3
21 - 35	622	626	5	3
36 - 100	1 364	1 361	32	37
101 - 200	1 062	1 290	75	62
201 - 300	1 004	1 147	111	126
301 - 400	865	886	152	114
401 - 600	1 015	899	353	329
601 - 800	374	262	380	370
801 - 1000	109	43	266	328
1000+	35	5	171	247
Total	7 175	7 139	1 553	1 619

(a) Excluded are schools with combined primary and secondary enrolments and special schools. These schools numbered 798 in 1982 and 1327 in 1986

Source: ABS (1983a, p.4), ABS (1983b, p.5), ABS (1987a, p.9)

4.66 The Commission wishes to urge that, wherever feasible, existing small rural schools should be kept open. The Commission acknowledges, however, that maintaining a small school is not always feasible or even desirable, for educational or economic reasons or a combination of both. Decisions on when a school has become educationally and/or economically non-viable are mainly the responsibility of the education authority responsible for the school. In regard to economic viability, it is worth noting that rural school places are more expensive to maintain than metropolitan school places. Harrold and Powell (1987, p.38), for example, cite a finding by Birks (1981) which indicates that the cost of providing education in Western Australia is some one third higher in rural schools than in metropolitan schools. The Education Commission of New South Wales report, **Listening and Responding**, noted that:

... current staffing formulae favour schools with small enrolments. This, together with the costs of conveying children in isolated rural areas to school, can make provision for a rural student up to four times as expensive as for an urban student (1983, p.7).

Material forwarded to the Commission by the Tasmanian Department of Education cited the following examples of the higher costs of providing educational services in rural areas:

- services in district high schools (eg. Ouse District High School) in small rural centres can be 70-80 per cent more costly than services in the city;
- the cost per pupil at Riana Primary School (near Burnie) is about 40 per cent higher than the per pupil cost at a 'moderately advantaged' school in Hobart; and
- the per pupil cost at Murray High School (Queenstown) is about 30 per cent higher than at Taroona High School in the Hobart area.

Reasons for maintaining small schools wherever feasible

4.67 The Commission's view that small schools should be kept open wherever feasible results from its examination of the difficulties experienced by students and their families when physical access to school is not readily available. That examination underscores the important role an extensive network of rural schools can play in minimising the number of students with access difficulties and in reducing the degree of difficulty faced by those still without ready access to school. The Commission's view, however, also results from its belief that small rural schools:

- provide educational advantages to students;
- are of social and cultural importance to their communities; and
- are of economic importance to their communities.

Panel 14 presents extracts on the importance of small rural schools.

4.68 Ready access to a local school has educational advantages for students. It means that they do not have to experience the difficulties associated with studying at home using distance education services, living away from home to attend school or extensive daily travel to school, which might hinder their educational progress. Access to a local small school also has direct educational advantages. Some of these advantages were outlined by the Education Commission of New South Wales in its report **Listening and Responding** (1983) and are discussed in Chapter 5.

4.69 Small rural schools also make an important contribution to their communities in social and cultural terms. The school itself is frequently the symbol of being a community. Buildings and grounds provide a meeting place for social, cultural and sporting events. School facilities are used for community educational purposes. For example, small high schools are often the venue for TAFE courses. The presence of a school encourages debate and decision-making about important issues involving education. This involvement in local decision-making can focus community interest and develop community feeling. One of the important features of the Country Areas Program (CAP), for example, has been its emphasis on community involvement in decision-making about the use of program funds. In addition to these benefits, school staff and their families bring ideas and talents into the community and add to the richness of community life.

4.70 Rural schools are also important to the economy of their communities. School staff members spend money in the community and the school may also provide employment for local people. Harrold and Powell (1987) examined the flow-on effects of expenditure on education in rural New South Wales. They found that:

... in larger NSW country regions the flow-on effects of initial outlays on schools are such that the final effects on regional expenditures are about twice the amount of the initial spending while personal incomes increase by some 50% more than initial outlays, and for every additional staff appointed to a school, the additional expenditures generated raise regional employment by another 0.5 worker (Harrold and Powell, 1987, p.xii).

4.71 The rural school is also relevant to the economy of the local community in other ways. Its presence can help maintain community confidence in difficult economic times. In contrast, its closure can be seen as the symbolic end of the community and of its hopes for economic recovery. In difficult economic times, the closure of a school can mean the loss of much needed economic flow-on effects, loss of community confidence and loss of population as staff members leave the area and as some families with school-age children leave to live near a school. School staff bring professional skills into the community and introduce new ideas through their teaching role, as well as indirectly through their contact with community members. They influence not only the children they teach, but also the adults in the community. One example of the influence of the school involves the use of computers by local business people. Rural visits undertaken as part of this study of rural schooling provided anecdotal evidence that experience with computers provided to business people at local schools has resulted in computers being used in local businesses.

Teaching arrangements, technology and small school viability

4.72 Because of the educational, socio-cultural and economic importance of rural schools to their communities, their preservation, wherever feasible, is highly desirable. While small schools can sometimes cease to be educationally and/or economically viable, making closure seem appropriate, there are often ways in which small schools can be supported and kept open. These ways include improved cooperation between schools (eg. government school/non-government school), improved cooperation between sectors (eg. schools/TAFE), and increased and improved use of communication technologies.

4.73 Ways of increasing the viability of small rural schools will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 8. It is worth noting here, however, that distance education methods are being used in some rural schools to broaden subject offerings and to extend the year-levels of study provided. In some schools, for example, students are studying using correspondence lessons, with supervision being provided by a teacher at the school.

Panel 14

Importance of Small Schools

The unpredictability of a small school's remaining open is another problem of families in remote areas. In these cases, the emigration from the district of one family can mean the closure of a school. Children then have to enrol at a correspondence school for an unpredictable length of time. This situation is highly unsatisfactory. Small schools, once established, should stay open at all costs. They could be used as centres for mini-schools, if over a length of time, they become **permanently** unviable as one teacher schools.

(Source: Submission from Queensland Teachers Union)

...

In Victoria the small primary school is not only the cornerstone of access to rural education in isolated areas, it is often the focus of an entire community. Its closure can have severe economic and social consequences for child, adult and entire community learning.

(Source: Submission from the Victorian Country Education Project)

Maximising enrolments to make small schools more viable

4.74 Maximising the proportion of students from a district who attend local schools, and minimising the proportion who go away to school in distant provincial centres or capital cities, is another way of increasing the viability of small schools. Two groups of rural students are relevant to the discussion of this approach. The first group comprises those students who could attend school locally, but whose families prefer to send them away to school for various educational and social reasons, even though they are not eligible to receive assistance through the AIC. The second group comprises those students who live away from home to attend school because they do not have reasonable daily access to an appropriate government school from their home. Students in this group are generally eligible for AIC assistance.

4.75 Enrolments in rural schools and school viability could be increased if more of the students in one or both of these groups stayed within or closer to their home district to attend school. The impact could be greater than that resulting just from the numerical increase in enrolments which would occur. There is some evidence that the students who go away to school tend to be from higher socioeconomic status families (see McGaw, Warry, Varley and Alcorn, 1977, p.111). There is also some evidence of a 'brain drain' from rural schools (see Panels 15 to 18). The 'image' of local rural schools could be improved and the educational and social experiences they offer could be broadened if more students attended local schools rather than going elsewhere for their schooling.

4.76 The first group of students referred to in paragraph 4.75, those who elect to go away to school even though they have reasonable access to school and are not eligible to receive AIC assistance, is a group about which relatively little is known. This is largely because the students in it are not in receipt of an AIC allowance. This group is thought, nonetheless, to be quite large in size. Hence, if a substantial proportion of the students in it were to enrol instead in their local school, local enrolments would be increased considerably. It should be noted that while many of the parents of students in this first group may pay the full cost of having their child live away from home to attend school, in some cases a company operating locally may meet all or part of the cost involved. State or Territory allowances, such as the airfares provided by the Western Australian State Government for home/school travel by students from designated isolated areas (see Chapter 3, paragraph 3.28), may also reduce the cost to parents.

4.77 While the parents of students in this first group are exercising their right of choice regarding the education of their child, the outcomes are often claimed to be detrimental to those students who attend their local rural school. The detrimental effects on these students can result from the factors mentioned in paragraph 4.76 as well as from the perpetuation of a cycle of small enrolments — limited provisions — continued small enrolments — continued limited provisions; in other words the ‘circuitous’ problem described by Lake, Kerr and King (1987) in Panel 18. Appropriate efforts should therefore be made to reduce the size of this group of students. The attention of parents should be drawn to the advantages of rural schooling, as well as to the potential of innovative teaching arrangements and communication technologies to improve the quality of that schooling. The importance to the community of breaking the small enrolments-limited provisions cycle should also be emphasised to parents and other members of the community.

4.78 In regard to the second group of students referred to in paragraph 4.75, it could be argued that the approach of maximising the number of young people who attend school locally is irrelevant to this group because the students in it cannot attend an appropriate government school from their home. Two responses can be made to this argument. First, provision of more localised accommodation facilities, as urged in this report, would help make it possible for more of these students to go to school closer to home than they do at present. As the earlier discussion of local accommodation facilities indicates, many families would welcome being able to have their child in mid-week board reasonably close to home. Second, a more stringent approach to AIC eligibility could be considered, with due care being taken not to deprive genuinely geographically isolated families of the financial assistance the AIC provides and upon which many of these families greatly depend.

4.79 The AIC eligibility criteria were outlined in paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5. One aspect of the AIC which should be examined is the distances which are stipulated under the isolation criteria. Under the current guidelines it is possible for a student whose home is only 16 km from an appropriate government school and 4.5 km from school transport to be eligible for AIC assistance. While in some cases these distances might constitute genuine isolation, it is likely that in many cases they would not be a serious barrier to school access in modern day circumstances.

Table 18

Distance from a school of the homes of AIC allowance
recipients in 1986

Distance from home to a school (km)	No. of students	%
0.1 - 15.9	52	0
16.0 - 18.9	166	1
19.0 - 55.9	3 951	28
56.0 - 60.9	1 062	7
61.0 plus	8 991	63
Total	14 222	99

Note: Excluded are students who qualified for assistance because of special circumstances (5057 students) and students who received the Pre-School Correspondence Allowance (657 students) or the Short-Term Boarding Allowance (729 students).

Source: AIC statistics collection, CDEET.

4.80 It is of interest to examine the distance from school of the homes of students who received the AIC allowance in 1986. Table 18 provides relevant information for some two-thirds of 1986 AIC allowance recipients. (It excludes those qualifying for assistance by virtue of special circumstances, those receiving the Pre-school Correspondence Allowance and those in short-term board.) Over 4000 AIC allowance recipients lived within 56 km of a school, which suggests that a number of recipients may have had reasonable daily access to school from their home. Research undertaken by McGaw et al (1977, p.111) also raised the possibility that some students who received AIC assistance may actually have had fairly ready access to school.

4.81 Another aspect of the AIC which should be examined concerns 'Other Eligible Students', especially those undertaking special courses. Some families in receipt of AIC assistance through the special course provisions of the Scheme have a genuine case for getting such assistance, especially at the upper secondary school level. There are indications, however, that some families use these provisions to help them exercise what is essentially a preference for their child to go away for their secondary schooling. Furthermore, interpretations of the special courses provisions for the purpose of deciding eligibility for the AIC are likely to vary both within and between States.

4.82 The increases to enrolments in local rural schools which might result from a more stringent approach to AIC eligibility are likely to be small. The total number of AIC allowance recipients nationally in 1986 was 20 665, with only 14 837 of these students receiving the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance. The overall impact on the quality of rural schooling may, however, be considerable, for the reasons given in paragraph 4.76.

4.83 It is of interest to note in Table 19 that many AIC allowance recipients are the children of either wage and salary earners or self-employed primary producers. Compared with the Secondary Allowances Scheme (SAS) recipients, AIC allowance recipients are considerably less likely to have pensioner or unemployed parents. The tendency for recipients of AIC allowances to be from higher socio-economic status families points to the possibility that some isolated low income families may find that AIC assistance is insufficient to enable them to send their children away to school. These families may opt to have their children leave school as soon as they finish their compulsory schooling. Alternatively, they may send their children to school locally, even though that may entail extensive daily travel.

Panel 15

**Students who leave Tennant Creek
to Attend School Elsewhere**

The Year 12 students reported that there were 60 students in their Year 9 (1984) class, about 48 in their Year 10 (1985), about 20 in their Year 11 (1986) and 10 in their Year 12 (1987).

Their observations in relation to the apparent drop-out from Year 10 to Year 11 were that many students had left Tennant Creek to go to boarding schools in Queensland and South Australia, but that most had left school to work, some gaining apprenticeships locally.

...

The opinion of students was that this [brain drain to urban centres] inevitably had to occur because of the lack of facilities for education in the town, especially if tertiary education was aspired to.

Students felt that some of the students who had gone to boarding schools were taken out of Tennant Creek High School by their parents and this was really against the wishes of the students. The main reasons why students left were that parents were not confident of standards in the school, and that there was prestige associated with going away.

Students perceived the practice of many professional people in education, sending their own children away to boarding school as showing little confidence in the local school.

(Source: Crowther, 1987)

Panel 16

**Students who leave Nhulunbuy
to Attend School Elsewhere**

Estimates of the number of students who leave Nhulunbuy to go to schools in other centres (mainly in Queensland — Charters Towers, Cairns and Brisbane) range from 35 to 50. While most of these students attend boarding schools, some are known to stay with relations and attend State high schools.

...

Parents expressed the view strongly that the 'best' students were either re-located at crucial times in their education, with their families, in places where education was considered to be better; or sent to boarding schools because the opportunities during and after their secondary schools were seen to be improved greatly by doing this. Thus parents saw the town high school to experience a definite 'brain drain'.

(Source: Crowther and Kale, 1987)

Panel 17

Students who leave a Rural Community in the North-West of New South Wales to Attend School Elsewhere

It is estimated from various sources that about 15-20 per cent of students undertake their secondary education outside the shire. In a small number of cases, this involves weekly boarding and day student attendance at another government school. More usually, students go to boarding school. Wealthier families, and/or those following a family tradition, generally send children to GPS type schools in Sydney or Armidale. A cheaper and closer boarding option is provided through a Catholic school located in a country town some 400 km south of Maintown. Some idea of numbers attending this school can be gauged from the fact that two buses are required to transport shire children to this school.

...

A number of parents do not regard Maintown High School as a viable schooling option. As a mild over-generalisation, the strength of reasons for this view seem to correlate with relative lack of knowledge or experience of the high school. An experienced staff member claimed that many parents who send children away have a view of the high school 'based on mythology' while another teacher described the views of some parents as 'uninformed, out-dated or untrue'. One high school parent commented that 'those who are most critical have least to do with it'. Another parent suggested that some parents see it as 'beneath them' to send children to the local school and that this attitude is rationalised through inaccurate criticisms of the school, its programs, and its students (particularly Aboriginal students).

...

To some extent there is a self-fulfilling prophecy in another reason cited by some parents, namely that the high school is 'bottom heavy' in terms of ability. Data from primary schools suggest that a disproportionately large number of the most able Year 6 students leave the area for secondary schooling. For example, about seven or eight of the 'top' ten Maintown Primary School students in the past two years have gone away. This reinforces the 'validity' of the 'bottom heavy' argument.

(Source: Baker, 1987)

Panel 18

**Students who leave Tom Price
to Attend School Elsewhere**

Retention Rate: A major concern of the Principal and teachers at the High School is the low retention rate in Years 11 and 12. The issue is not that a significant number of students terminate their education at Year 10. Rather, it is that they continue their schooling either in Geraldton or more commonly, Perth. The explanation given by parents is that they want their children to experience life in Perth whilst continuing their education. Secondly, they state quite accurately that the range of courses open to their children in large city high schools is much broader.

This latter fact presents a dilemma for Tom Price High School. Given the current number of teachers and students at the school, the range of subjects, courses and options open to students in Years 11 and 12 is impressive. The range would be increased if students did not leave for Perth schools. Hence the dilemma. Students leave because of the constraints of the programme. The school, despite taking all possible initiatives, cannot offer a broader programme because of the lack of student numbers. The circuitous nature of this problem defies solution.

Ironically, Commonwealth Government funding through the Isolated Children's grant ... [and State-funded] free airfares ... ensures that completion of schooling in the metropolitan area is a viable option. Community support is a concomitant of the overall development of the High School. The professionalism of the Principal and staff, and the nature of the school programme have resulted in strong community support. However, the positive reputation of the school is neither sufficient to persuade extensive participation in initiatives to form a School Council nor is it sufficient to dissuade parents from sending their children to Perth for Years 11 and 12.

...

Concern was expressed [by teachers] at the continued 'syphoning off' of the more capable pupils to secondary schools in Perth. Parents are prepared to carry the financial burden in return for what is perceived to be an enhanced academic programme, rather than send their children to the local high school.

(Source: Lake et al, 1987)

...

[Note: 1987 is the first year in which the high school at Tom Price has provided for study at the Year 11 and 12 levels. The recency of this provision may help account for the trends noted by Lake et al, 1987]

Table 19
Occupational distributions for parents of AIC and SAS
allowance recipients in 1986

Parental occupation	AIC allowance recipients %	SAS allowance recipients %
Wage/Salary	30.8	36.2
Self employed		
• Primary producer	44.5	7.1
• Other	7.3	11.6
Pensioner	5.6	34.3
Unemployed	3.3	8.3
Other	1.6	2.4
Not applicable ^a	6.7	—
Not known	0.1	—
Total	99.9	99.9

(a) Occupation of parents is not sought on the application forms for Pre-school Correspondence or Short-Term Boarding Allowances and this accounts for the high number of AIC allowance recipients in the 'Not applicable' category

Source: AIC and SAS statistics collections, CDEET

4.84 It is also worth noting that whereas some 72 per cent of AIC allowance recipients in 1986 received the Basic Boarding Allowance and lived away from home, some 90 per cent of ABSEC allowance recipients in 1986 lived at home (see Tables H.4 and H.6 in Appendix H). The AIC can arguably be seen as supporting education outside the student's home region, whereas ABSEC can be seen as supporting education in the student's home region. In making this comparison, however, the different purposes and target groups for the two schemes should be kept in mind (see Appendix H for more information on the Schemes). Despite the fact that only a small proportion of ABSEC allowance recipients live away from home to attend school, Sykes (1986), in a recent evaluation of ABSEC, recommended that alternatives to boarding away from home should be explored. Sykes concluded that even the alternative of 'limited high schools' (p.31) should be investigated and discussed.

4.85 During visits to rural areas undertaken as part of the Commission's study of rural schooling, it became evident that many rural people are concerned about equity considerations associated with existing education allowances. Some families who were ineligible for the AIC and other schemes appeared to resent the assistance provided through the AIC to families they considered to be quite affluent. Some families considered that the AIC was 'subsidising' schools outside the region, to the detriment of local services.

4.86 A re-consideration of AIC provisions seems timely. This re-consideration should take due care to ensure that vital assistance under the Scheme is maintained, and should give attention to the issue of how to provide most assistance to those in most need. It should bear in mind the original rationale for the AIC and give attention to the Scheme's broad impact on rural schooling. The AIC was introduced in 1973 as a means of helping to provide greater equality of access to schools for students whose homes were too far away from a school for them to have reasonable daily access to school (Tomlinson and Tannock, 1981, pp.1, 9). It is relevant to note here that Tomlinson and Tannock point out that:

The intention was that financial assistance provided by the Commonwealth should not enable a student to by-pass a local government school offering an 'appropriate' program of education if, given the operation of transport services, it was reasonably accessible from his or her home (1981, p.5).

4.87 This re-consideration should also have regard to how families who receive AIC assistance view the Scheme. Many such families see the Scheme as compensating them for the lack of provision of a government service (ie. a school). They would argue strenuously, therefore, against AIC allowances being seen as 'welfare'. They would also argue that AIC allowances have been eroded in value due to inadequate increases to allowance levels, taxing of allowances, the removal of eligibility for the Family Allowance from families receiving AIC assistance and increases in boarding fees and related costs (see ICPA, 1987).

4.88 **Recommendation 2:** It is recommended that the Commonwealth examine the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) to determine ways of making the Scheme a more effective means of the Commonwealth providing support for the schooling of remote area children. This examination should consider the Scheme's eligibility criteria, especially the specifications concerning distance and students undertaking special courses, its allowance levels, and the contribution it makes to the education of rural students.

Summary

4.89 This chapter has examined matters relating to physical access to school. It has discussed the difficulties experienced by rural students and their families when ready access to school is not available. It has urged the provision of more localised accommodation facilities to help reduce these difficulties. It has emphasised that many rural students have ready access to school because of the network of schools throughout rural Australia. These schools are seen as important for educational reasons, but are also recognised as making a valuable economic and social/cultural contribution to rural communities. The Commission has therefore urged that the network of rural schools be maintained and, where possible, extended. It has urged that small rural schools be kept open wherever possible. One approach to making small rural schools more viable is to maximise the proportion of students from a rural district who attend local schools and minimise the proportion who go away to attend school. This chapter has discussed this approach, including in relation to the AIC and its current guidelines and impact. The report now turns to other approaches to making rural schools more viable and to improving the quality of rural schooling.

Rural Schools and the Curriculum

Introduction

5.1 The Commission considers that the curriculum is central to what children learn in school, to how motivated they are about learning and to how successful they are in their schooling. The curriculum is at the heart of each child's school experiences and plays a vital role in their personal and social development, as well as their preparation for employment, further study, and adult life. Many rural parents clearly share this view of the importance of the curriculum. Curriculum issues, especially those which concern access to an appropriate curriculum over the period of a full primary and secondary education, were prominent among issues rural parents raised with the Commission during this study of rural schooling.

5.2 The curriculum issues that have emerged in recent years in regard to schooling generally are issues in rural schools and among rural parents. The early and effective development of literacy and numeracy skills is seen to be crucial for students' future educational progress. The development of a sound knowledge base in social studies and the sciences is valued. Access to languages, music and art is considered important. With a growing acceptance of the need for students to stay at school longer, the nature of the secondary school curriculum and its relevance for all students is a major point of discussion in rural communities. The availability in local schools of increased opportunities for study at the senior secondary school level is also an issue being discussed in rural communities.

5.3 One of the key curriculum concerns of rural parents is whether their children receive a curriculum that is as well rounded as that provided to students in urban schools. This concern is about the scope of the curriculum provided by schools, whether the full range of subjects is available, and the adequacy of the teaching across curriculum areas in rural schools. For example, after the provision of basic or core subjects, curriculum areas sought include art, music and physical education in both primary and secondary schools. In addition, the different levels at which subjects are offered in the secondary school, or the different purposes subjects have for secondary students in regard to future employment or further education, can be an issue for many rural students and their parents. An important question is whether an appropriate level of teaching is available for students who decide to extend their general schooling before taking up employment in a local industry.

Curriculum for a general education

5.4 The Commission recently developed a position on the nature and importance of the curriculum in its report, **In the National Interest** (1987a). The Commission argued that schooling at all levels should be directed towards a sound general education. A general education was seen as particularly appropriate to today's circumstances in which the future of students is 'likely to be characterised by high rates of change in key dimensions of [their] lives' (p.94).

5.5 The Commission took the view that the curriculum of a general education must be broad. Its views on breadth follow from the idea that a general education is non-specialist and is concerned with those concepts and skills which are useful in a wide variety of areas. A general education was considered to draw its content from many areas of human achievement. These were studies from the humanities, including languages and literature; from science, mathematics and technologies; from cultural and aesthetic studies; and from organisational studies which include civics, government and participatory skills (p.95). Through such a curriculum students would be expected to develop a sound knowledge base and a sense of autonomy, social awareness and moral responsibility.

5.6 The Commission also discussed the question of curriculum relevance, emphasising that curriculum content should be pertinent to the students and to the wider society (p.101). The curriculum should have relevance to the futures of students, their social responsibilities, and to work opportunities likely to be available to them as adults.

5.7 Curriculum relevance is a contentious issue. Some take the view that there is a growing 'cult of relevance' which holds that it is appropriate to include in the curriculum only that subject matter and the contexts which students accept as unquestionably relevant. The Commission is of the view that while the often legitimate concerns of students about the relevance of aspects of their study program should be listened to and responded to, some understandings are worth having for their own sake, even if they are not recognised by students as likely to bear on their future lives.

5.8 A major challenge for schools is how to ensure that teaching programs are as inclusive as possible of the background experiences of all students, and that the principles and key understandings that are important in these programs are related by teachers to students' everyday lives and concerns. One way in which this can be achieved is through making the curriculum locally relevant; that is, ensuring that educational experiences bring students into close and regular contact with their own community and region so that they can understand, appreciate and evaluate their local environment and culture. It is for these reasons that the Commission urges continuing efforts to bring schools and their communities closer together, and to increase opportunities for parents and community members to become more equal participants in curriculum development and implementation (CSC, 1987a, p.104).

5.9 The ability of rural schools to implement the curriculum is based on many aspects of their organisation and resources. The adequacy and appropriateness of the staffing available is a primary consideration, but other factors such as school organisation, school ethos, agreement on shared goals and objectives, and the availability of appropriate support services also influence the effectiveness with which the curriculum is implemented. These issues are referred to elsewhere in this report, but it is important to recognise that they are curriculum issues in so far as they affect the translation of curriculum ideas or plans into actual learning experiences for students.

5.10 An important aspect of curriculum implementation is the provision of opportunities for all students to gain proficiency in the range of important learning processes which are part of a sound general education. These opportunities help students develop the ability to think things through, to think critically about their views and ideas, to work independently, to work with others in pursuit of joint goals and to share and communicate ideas. This position is based on the Commission's view that the outcomes of education ought to be assessed in terms of their usefulness in assisting students to understand practical situations and real issues; that is, they should promote students' personal competence and a sense of power over their lives and environments (CSC, 1987a, pp.95-96).

5.11 The views above are provided as background to the following discussion on curriculum in rural schools. The present study did not seek to rigorously evaluate curriculum offerings in schools. It sought instead to examine the provisions made, as well as to identify major issues, good practices and important directions for future action.

Curriculum in rural primary schools

5.12 While the major focus of this chapter will be on the secondary school curriculum, the importance of the curriculum at the primary school level is fully acknowledged. Primary education lays the groundwork for secondary school studies. The curriculum offered to primary school students will not only influence the skills-base they take with them into secondary school, but will also influence their attitudes and dispositions towards education.

5.13 The Commission found rural parents to be generally satisfied with primary school curriculum offerings. Rural primary schools have a broad general curriculum that introduces students to a range of educational experiences. The curriculum typically covers literacy and numeracy skills, studies in the social and physical sciences, and subjects concerned with personal development. The curriculum in primary schools is common to all students, and specialisation or choice is not considered necessary or desirable. The main concerns among parents tend to be whether teaching is provided in art, music and physical education.

5.14 A number of approaches employed in recent years has helped to provide curriculum breadth in rural primary schools. These include special program activities funded through the Commonwealth's Country Areas Program (CAP) (see Chapter 3 and Panel 19). The use of communication technologies to help meet curriculum needs in remote schools is another approach. An example from the case study of the Western Area Directorate in South Australia (Sullivan, 1987) illustrates this approach. In that Directorate, remote schools receive music education lessons, including the teaching of percussion, electronic keyboard, piano, violin, recorder, trumpet, flute, clarinet and french horn, by means of a telephone link providing two-way audio communication between schools, or DUCT (Diverse Use of Communications Technologies). A recent Queensland initiative assisted teachers to develop new approaches to teaching literacy. A satellite communication system (Q-NET) enabled teachers in a number of schools in the remote north of the State to undertake the Early Literacy Inservice Course (ELIC). ELIC has been supported nationally through the Commonwealth's Basic Learning in Primary Schools Program (BLIPS).

5.15 It should also be noted that some aspects of BLIPS are particularly directed towards rural schools that have significant numbers of Aboriginal students or students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Through support for the development of home/school relations and parent participation, including through the employment of Aboriginal or ethnic teaching aides, home/school

liaison officers or Aboriginal education workers, curriculum provision has been improved through making the curriculum more applicable to the students. School systems are making efforts to increase the numbers of teachers who are Aborigines or from ethnic backgrounds other than Anglo-Australian, to help provide a more culturally relevant curriculum experience for these students.

5.16 The primary school curriculum is also considered by most rural parents to be of general relevance to students. Wide-ranging contacts with the community are often a feature of student learning, and teaching content typically emphasises the community and the local environment. However, some parents have commented on their concern that, especially in remote areas, children should be given opportunities to experience as wide an environment as possible, and learn about or experience other social contexts and community characteristics that make up Australian society.

5.17 The particular school organisation and teaching practices adopted in rural primary schools to implement the curriculum were also considered during discussions for this study as generally being appropriate to the age and development of the students. Again, however, some legitimate concerns persist. Teaching in rural schools places great demands on teachers' knowledge, expertise and personal resources (see Chapter 7). In some regions, support is readily available for teachers having difficulty meeting the full range of curriculum demands placed on them. This support may be in the form of professional development activities, consultancy services provided by school systems, staff support networks, or local community agencies or expertise. Where support is not available, and where teachers lack confidence in a specific curriculum area, deficiencies in curriculum provisions may result. In some primary schools the provision of itinerant resource or support teachers to teach particular subjects is a useful mechanism whereby a form of specialisation can occur, with the support teachers taking responsibility for specific curriculum areas. Similar schemes may be developed in schools which are large enough to enable the skills of particular teachers to be shared across the school.

Panel 19

The Country Areas Program in Action

Educational disadvantages in country areas grow from community isolation, lack of resources, denial of access to special services, facilities, and essential skills. So it must follow that to remove that disadvantage schools must work on the total community, break down isolation and barriers to communication, identify the resources they do have and build on them, create new networks that ensure greater access and greater local control of essential delivery systems.

Participation of the whole community is essential in this process, but not only via elected committees and meetings. The key to the Priority Country Education Programme's success lies in encouraging people to think broadly and positively about resources and offering them a chance to both use those resources for the good of schools and to build on them where possible. Local people are asked what they can offer, how they would be prepared to help. Individual schools are encouraged to identify materials which may be lying unused in separate schools, but when pooled with other resources from another school become a viable resource.

Central too is the notion of sharing resources and funds across Catholic, State and independent school systems, across whole areas and large distances. The model is of 'co-operative competence'. The programme attempts to produce more competent, efficacious people through sharing and group action than through individualised efforts.

(Source: Sullivan, 1987)

5.18 Curriculum supports as set out in the previous paragraph are more difficult or sometimes impossible to provide in very small schools in remote areas. It is often the case in these schools that a significant proportion of teachers is relatively inexperienced, and have a limited knowledge of teaching in remote areas. These schools may also have fewer curriculum resources of the type available to teachers in larger schools. Harvey (1986) suggests, however, a number of structural factors assist curriculum implementation and teaching in small rural primary schools to the benefit of students. These include the closeness of the schools to their social and geographic environment, the generally open nature of relationships with communities, the higher levels of resource support available, and the high levels of information that parents, teachers and children have of each other because they live and work together in small communities.

Curriculum in rural secondary schools

5.19 In the following discussion of curriculum issues in rural secondary schools, emphasis is given to examples of practices identified during the course of the Commission's study of rural schooling. In particular, examples of good practice are highlighted and used to illustrate approaches which may improve rural schooling. The Commission considers that a wide range of innovative practice already exists. These practices, however, need to be more widely applied and, where necessary, adapted to assist schools to meet successfully the challenges they face.

Range of subjects available

5.20 The curriculum offerings in even the smallest of rural secondary schools, or secondary sections of rural primary schools, generally show considerable breadth. For example, studies of New South Wales central schools by Boylan and Meyenn (1986) and by Sinclair (forthcoming) found that a wide range of subjects were offered in rural secondary schools even when total enrolments were quite small. Portland Central School in the Western Region of New South Wales is reported to have presented eight candidates for the Higher School Certificate in 1986. The students were examined in a total of twelve subject areas. Subjects studied included the 'traditional' academic areas of English, mathematics, history, science and economics as well as art, music, industrial technology and home science. The small secondary department of the Julia Creek State School in north-west Queensland, which enrolled 27 students in Years 8 to 10 in 1987, is an example of the breadth of subjects available in a small secondary program attached to a remote primary school. At each year level, students undertake 10 subject units and at Years 9 and 10 have options within five of these units.

5.21 A recent study undertaken by Lee (1987) for the New South Wales Department of Education analysed the subjects available at junior and senior secondary levels in schools in that State, which included 374 high schools and 62 secondary departments of central schools. Secondary enrolments ranged from 9 to 1499 students. The number of subjects provided ranged from 9 to 24 in Years 7 to 10 and from 7 to 17 in Years 11 and 12. At the senior secondary level the number of subject courses or units available ranged from 10 to 40. As might be expected, smaller numbers of subjects tended to be offered in the small secondary departments of central schools, which are located in rural areas. The study found that enrolment size has some influence on curriculum breadth, mostly at the senior secondary level, but that often the curriculum range in smaller schools was found to be substantial. Matthews, Atkinson, Edmonds and King (1986) report that small rural high schools in Victoria provide a range of subjects in Years 7 to 10 as broad as larger schools, with the exception at times of music, languages and some technical or craft specialisations. Where curriculum limitations were identified in these areas, they were found to be related more to the general shortage of teachers in those fields than to the size or location of the school. The study did find that there was a more restricted range of subjects offered in Years 11 and 12 in rural schools. However, subjects offered at this level usually covered the widest range that available staff expertise would allow, and classes in some subjects were at times provided for small numbers of students, something that larger schools may not contemplate (see Panel 20).

5.22 The Tennant Creek and Barkly Education Region case study report (Crowther, 1987) indicates that the Tennant Creek High School, a small high school of some 230 pupils in the Northern Territory, provides a broad range of subjects at both the upper and lower secondary school, with optional studies increasing as students reach higher levels. Years 7 and 8 provide compulsory studies for all students in nine subject areas. In Years 9 and 10 seven compulsory subjects are provided as well as optional studies. In the senior secondary school years, 18 subjects are taught covering both publicly examined and school-assessed subjects, and allowing different levels of mathematics study.

5.23 Similar examples to the above could be given for small rural secondary schools in other States. It will be noted that the above examples largely concern the breadth of secondary school curriculum in rural schools. Little evidence is

available about the balance in subjects offered or studied by students across the humanities, sciences and cultural areas, or about the subjects offered and studied by students which reflect student backgrounds and circumstances, including gender. The Commission recognises that the breadth of studies illustrated in the above paragraphs does not always equal the range of subjects to be found in schools in large population centres. The most likely limitation for students in these rural schools is that subjects might not be offered at a level appropriate to their needs.

School and classroom organisation and breadth

5.24 Innovative approaches to school or curriculum organisation are particularly helpful in broadening curriculum offerings in small secondary schools. An example is the use of subject unitisation for this purpose. Saint Joseph's High School, a small Catholic secondary school in Broken Hill, recently completed a restructuring of the curriculum, which, with associated timetabling arrangements, allows students of different year-levels to undertake the same 'subjects'. Unitisation makes it easier for subjects or units other than 'core' subjects to be offered on a rotational basis. Students from different grade levels study a unit in the year or semester in which it is available, and are assigned work that is appropriate to their stage of schooling. Subject or unit sequences are used only where this is necessary, in order to achieve maximum benefits from the approach. The combining of students in classes in this way at St Joseph's High School has meant increases in the size of class groups. Units are offered at differing semester intervals depending on demand. This arrangement also provides wider curriculum choice and more flexible and appropriate course patterns for students, allows part-time students, including mature age students, to study at the school, and takes considerable pressure away from a small school staff which is committed to providing a comprehensive curriculum for the student body. Secondary schools in Western Australia are currently undertaking curriculum unitisation as a result of recent changes to secondary education policies in that State, and this development can be expected to provide benefits in curriculum breadth for students in rural schools.

Panel 20

**Findings from a Study of the
Curriculum in Small Rural Post Primary Schools**

- Most schools have instituted some measures which have as their major aim the provision of a more comprehensive curriculum.
- The range of studies available in Years 7-10 is as broad as in larger schools except, sometimes, for music, languages and technical subjects.
- Restriction of subjects available is more evident in Years 11 and 12.
- The range of courses especially at Years 11 and 12 can be augmented by using Correspondence School Courses.
- The most common teaching pattern is the single teacher-centred classroom organisation in which all students in the group study basically the same course at the same level of difficulty.
- The relatively small number of teachers tend to promote discussion between teachers of different subjects ... but may limit exchange of ideas by teachers within subjects.
- Smaller class sizes enable a relatively high level of individual student attention.
- Communities are generally satisfied with a conventional curriculum ... but will also support innovative developments seen to be in the best interests of students.
- Most schools have strong work experience programs and can develop programs which link closely to their communities.
- Schools involved in co-operative arrangements seem to be well satisfied with them.
- The many changes taking place in Victorian education contribute to an uncertain environment for staff, and make it difficult to advise parents and students.
- Major barriers to the provision of comprehensive curricula include the limited range of specialist expertise in a small staff often accompanied by limited specialist facilities.
- Consultancy services and professional development opportunities are limited.

(Source: Matthews et al, 1986)

5.25 Another set of approaches to providing improved curriculum breadth in rural schools has involved cooperative arrangements among schools, and between schools and other education institutions. Where schools are in close proximity it is quite easy for them to make arrangements to share resources, including teachers, texts, videos, equipment and rooms. Matthews et al (1986)

point out that such arrangements require cooperation in arranging school timetables and the allocation of teaching staff. However, they can assist the economical use of specialised staff and teaching facilities, increase class size where this supports productive teaching activities, and ensure that students, especially at the senior levels, have the opportunity to take subjects which would not otherwise be available to them (1986, p.23).

5.26 In South Australia there are examples of clusters of secondary schools in larger rural centres, such as Port Augusta, combining their Year 11 and Year 12 classes and their resources to broaden senior school curriculum opportunities. The cooperative arrangements referred to can also include TAFE colleges. For example, the TAFE college at Geraldton in Western Australia offers courses in seamanship which are taken by students in local secondary schools, and which provide a useful link with post-school opportunities (submission from Christian Brothers Agricultural School, Western Australia). Similar cooperative ventures operate in other States, supplementing the curriculum of rural schools, especially in the post-compulsory years.

5.27 Of interest, too, are organisational arrangements such as multi-campus and open campus schools, the establishment of mini-schools, and host schools which support a group of small schools in curriculum areas. Many of these arrangements can offer savings in administrative and other costs which may be put towards the provision of itinerant support teachers and distance education support. In some cases, a major advantage of these approaches is that the local school is kept open, and provides an adequate curriculum for students. Alternative grading or grouping procedures that combine students at different year levels can make more efficient use of staff and instruction time, and have particular advantages when used with a unit or modular curriculum design. While composite grades (or vertical groupings) are sometimes considered to be more demanding on teachers, they have the potential to achieve tangible benefits to classroom climate, teaching and learning processes and student self-concept.

5.28 The favourable classroom climate that may often exist in small rural schools lends itself to cooperative classroom learning. The use of cooperative forms of learning provides teachers with an opportunity to inject some of the essential flavour of rural relationships into the relationships within the classroom. The segregation of students into classes or groups based principally on age is sometimes claimed to be a convention that was developed to meet the needs of urban schools and which is not appropriate to most rural schools, and does not reflect the reality of relationships outside the school.

5.29 The Commission is of the view that the relative smallness of many rural secondary schools can have the effect of helping to increase student understanding of subject content through the use of a range of teaching and learning approaches. This is because smaller class sizes, and the opportunity for more personalised and supportive conditions of learning, can provide the conditions to meet more adequately the individual learning needs of students, and for individual students to have a greater impact on the direction and pace of their classroom work. For example, the use of 'continuous progress' curriculum in rural schools in place of the more traditional lock-step design, can allow students to proceed through their studies at their own pace, and ensure that on completion of each sector they have mastered the requisite learnings for subsequent stages (Matthews et al, 1986, p.14). This approach casts the teacher in a role which is largely one of diagnosing and monitoring student learning. Where classes are small, or where class members are working at different grade levels, the increased flexibility can be of direct benefit to students.

Community resources and breadth

5.30 Another way in which rural schools extend their curriculum breadth is through tapping community resources, facilities and expertise. A long-standing example of this is provided by work experience programs, which are generally well-regarded by students and parents and which take learning experiences beyond the walls of the school. Similar benefits flow from employment experience programs established by schools. For example, students from one Victorian rural high school conduct a small commercial printery business in their school. Several high schools in New South Wales operate commercially viable Angora goat studs. Employment experience programs such as these bring students into contact with business enterprises in their community.

5.31 Other schools have identified people with useful knowledge and skills within their community who are willing to share these with students on either an occasional or regular basis. One example is the addition of a tutor-based Year 11 program attached to the Oatlands District High School, Tasmania. Local residents qualified to teach wool science, art and other subjects were located and requested to teach courses at the school. Some subjects are also made available to students by means of teleconference and facsimile links with a regional community college which offers senior secondary studies. The significance of this and similar developments is that they not only link the curriculum to local resources and facilities, but they also add to the year-levels of schooling available locally to students, with the result that many students continue their schooling for longer periods than would otherwise have been the case.

Technology and breadth

5.32 The curriculum of schools can be extended to provide a broader curriculum and subject array by using communication technologies. 'Mixed-mode' learning, or face-to-face teaching combined with some distance education study, has improved curriculum access for many rural students. In Western Australia, for example, nine district high schools are providing mixed-mode instruction for senior secondary students in 1987 with support from that State's Distance Education Centre (Panel 21). Similar provision is made by other State education systems. In some cases where these arrangements are made, the distance education component of a student's program may comprise virtually all of the student's study program, with the school providing social, cultural and sporting activities. In other schools, the assistance may be restricted to a school being supplied with correspondence lessons to assist in the provision of a course outside the teachers' professional specialisation for one or two students. This approach to curriculum provision through distance education can include using technological links from a distance education centre, as is the case in 'mixed-mode' learning (Panel 21). In addition, communication technologies can allow students in isolated areas to network with other students undertaking similar studies in other schools, or to receive by electronic means lessons that are being given to a class group by a teacher in another school (Panel 22).

5.33 These and other such examples have led the Commission to the view that size of school is not the main determinant of a school's ability to provide satisfactory breadth in its curriculum. This breadth in the curriculum offerings of small and often isolated rural schools has resulted from their willingness to adapt to the demands of their situation and to develop creative and innovative approaches to meet those demands. It depends on the readiness of many teachers to extend their efforts over a range of teaching areas to help provide a secondary program which is as challenging and as useful as possible to the students. It also

signifies a strong level of support from school systems. To provide these programs, schools must be able to work innovatively within system administrative arrangements. At the same time, they need to be aware that breadth of curriculum at one stage of schooling should not be achieved at the expense of narrowness at another.

5.34 The above discussion emphasises positive ways of increasing breadth in rural school curricula. Breadth of curriculum is reduced, however, where access to cultural experiences and extra-curricular activities is limited. As has already been pointed out, this was an area of concern commonly expressed in submissions and during the program of visits for this project. For a number of obvious reasons it is difficult in many rural areas to arrange appropriate access for students to experiences in the visual, dramatic and expressive arts, and provide a sufficiently varied program of social and sporting contacts. A further difficulty identified is the provision of a sufficient range of botanical, geological and other environments for field studies in schools located in the remote areas of Australia.

5.35 The above difficulties are, of course, magnified in those schools where distance and isolation are particularly significant factors and, understandably, are of greater concern to teachers and parents associated with these schools. At times, the provision of extra-curricular activities such as health and fitness classes, gymnastics, or choral work is dependent on the provision of physical resources and equipment, or on local expertise. Examples of effective ways to overcome these problems tend to come from schools where there are community organisations providing cultural, arts or sporting activities. For schools which are not assisted by these outside agencies, there is a strong case for developing the school as a provider of cultural life for its students and the community. This approach has been a particular focus for the CAP, and activities undertaken within that program in recent years demonstrate the importance of increased breadth in these subject areas in the curriculum in remote schools, and the measures that have been possible through CAP to meet the need.

Panel 21

Mixed-mode Teaching in Western Australia

The Distance Education Centre (DEC) is gaining increasing enrolments at the lower and upper secondary levels as a consequence of economic and social circumstances. This increase is a consequence of:

- (i) reduced financial ability of parents to send their children away to boarding schools and hostels for their secondary education. This is particularly evident at the upper secondary level (i.e. Years 11 and 12) where the DEC 'mixed mode' (i.e. students do the bulk of their course through DEC with the school teaching one or two subjects) system is gaining in strength each year. In 1987 there are 9 district high schools in Western Australia on 'mixed mode' and there are a number of other schools applying for 1988.

(Source: Submission from Education Department of Western Australia, Distance Education Centre)

Panel 22

Meeting the Curriculum Needs of Secondary Students

In order to meet curriculum requirements and needs of secondary students at senior level, a cluster of schools in the Mallee District of Victoria is utilising telephone land lines to provide an expanded curriculum package.

A communications package is based on a MacIntosh Computer with a software program that provides an interactive two-way visual link between the five participating schools backed up by a voice link (DUCT) and document transfer facility (facsimile machine). A graphics tablet and scanner are also used for the transfer of written information. The Australian designed software/modem package allows the simultaneous transfer of voice and screen data between two or more remote computers and allows up to fifteen documents to be used during a lesson period with facilities for handwritten or typed adaptation. The facility to write notes or display prepared notes, solve problems on screen, draw simple diagrams and display maps or other prepared materials is of great assistance to the schools involved in the project.

The program has been introduced as a result of trials carried out during 1985 and 1986 and was in the process of being established at the time this report was published. No specific outcomes are available.

Anticipated outcomes are as follows:

1. Students will receive instruction from teachers other than those available at their location.
2. Subjects such as mathematics, languages other than English, geography, history, and graphics may all be taught using the equipment.
3. Retention rates in Years 11 and 12 should increase.
4. Individual schools will be strengthened by using the expertise of neighbouring schools.

(Source: From material provided by the Working Group on Technology)

A local perspective

5.36 A topic frequently discussed during the visits for this study was whether the curriculum offered in rural schools was the most appropriate for students. The discussions recognised a tension between views that the curriculum should meet the needs of those students going into local employment, and emphasise an appreciation for local cultures and the rural heritage, and views that the curriculum should meet the needs of students going on to tertiary study or employment training in urban centres. The relative emphasis suggested for each of these apparently opposing sets of needs generally depended on community expectations for the future of its young people, and the prospects they had of gaining employment and a satisfying adult life in the local area. For example, some Aboriginal communities feel strongly that schooling ought not to alienate their young people from their culture and lifestyle, but should purposefully prepare

them to make a contribution to community life. In some schools with large Aboriginal student populations, decisions have been taken to move from a strongly academic curriculum to an emphasis on subjects that better meets the needs of the student group, including health education, life-skills and pre-vocational studies (Lake et al, 1987) (see Panel 23). In other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities parents are anxious that their children's schooling provides the means for them to move from the local environment to an adult life within the wider Australian society, should they choose to do so as adults. Parents in rural service-oriented towns with largely transient populations generally tended to seek a curriculum with an emphasis on wider cultural understandings and on future employment options in larger population centres.

5.37 The Commission does not see these different curriculum objectives as being incompatible. Rather, a systematic incorporation of a local perspective into the curriculum of rural schools is considered to have the potential to meet the needs of all students, regardless of their future study or employment destinations, in addition to:

- allowing students to assess critically the local environment, noting its positive features and its limitations when compared with other environments;
- enabling students to understand the interdependence of people and the patterns of skills and competencies that go to make up a community, leading to a more realistic and less hierarchical conception of the different types of contributions that individuals make to community life;
- providing students with a working knowledge of different types of occupations;
- demonstrating to students that people and places in the community can be used as resources in their school program (in addition to being resources for their school and teachers); and
- ensuring that students as adults are not locked in to any one circumstance, but are able, should they choose, to pursue their goals for the future in other communities and in a range of employment areas.

5.38 It should be stressed that the Commission sees a curriculum built around this approach as appropriate for all students. It should not be seen as a course of study for an 'alternative stream' of students or for those students with a strong local orientation. The approach does not necessarily mean developing new courses. Its objectives can be achieved by considering the full range of subjects provided in schools and developing a program which uses the local environment as a resource base, a source of teaching examples, and for in-depth studies.

5.39 One feature of a curriculum that emphasises a local perspective and is oriented to students' future lives, is that it supports local and regional economies by preparing students for employment in local industries (see Panel 24). In Chapter 1, reference was made to the rural economy, and to current trends in tertiary industry development in rural areas, and the need for schools to provide a skilled population which is able to maximise the benefits of new industries and new employment prospects in rural areas (see paragraph 1.44). In addition, existing industries in rural areas have undergone considerable change in recent years, and students expecting their future employment to be in agriculture, for example, need a knowledge of new agricultural products, farming techniques, business practices and marketing. Some of the examples given in this chapter illustrate courses designed to provide students with knowledge and skills in these areas, and to equip them to contribute to local and regional economies.

5.40 The participation of parents and community members in the task of curriculum provision is a key factor if the objectives outlined in paragraph 5.37 are to be met. This can be achieved if school staff make deliberate efforts to include parents in school committees and decision-making bodies. Meaningful participation by community members leads to the community accepting responsibility for the education of its young people, and can contribute to community development by strengthening a community's sense of identity and worth. If students are also included in these processes, they will benefit in their personal development and show evidence of being independent, active learners whose self-concepts reflect successful participation in their learning programs.

5.41 The Commission believes that there are good arguments for supporting curriculum initiatives which exploit the background and circumstances of rural students, as well as the skills and resources available in local organisations and business enterprises to increase the links between schooling and everyday life. This is particularly true in the post-compulsory years of secondary school. The goals which have been set for the increased retention of students in rural school programs are more likely to be met if students can pursue courses which value explicitly their backgrounds, culture and rural heritage, and the lifestyles of the local community, and use these as reference points for studies which give them an understanding of unfamiliar environments and lifestyles.

Panel 24

Agricultural Studies at Cleve Area School

The Cleve Area School on the Ayre Peninsula of South Australia has recently established a successful agricultural course for senior secondary students. Of a population of 2000 in the area, 600 students attended the school in 1987; 34 were enrolled in Years 11 and 12 for the agricultural course. Many of these came to Cleve from other rural towns. The present course was developed partly as a result of the school gaining control of a local farming property previously held by another government department.

The agricultural course has six strands; agricultural humanities (including studies in English), agricultural commerce (including farm management), agricultural mechanics, agricultural practice, plant production, and a series of electives which include studies in animal husbandry.

The studies provided in agriculture are not just directed to local farming but are more widely included in the curriculum to promote an understanding of the place of agriculture and rural industry in Australian history and the contemporary life of the nation.

(Source: Information obtained during visits to rural communities)

Barriers to an effective curriculum

5.42 Previous discussion has lent support to a number of innovative approaches to providing a more suitable curriculum experience for secondary school students in rural schools. However, there are a number of barriers which can arise in seeking to implement these approaches. These can involve such matters as school staffing, school organisation, teacher preparation, and teacher turnover. In order to provide as broad a curriculum as possible, many small secondary schools rely on staff teaching curriculum units or subjects outside their main area of specialisation. Parents and students appreciate these efforts, but at the same time recognise this practice as a potential source of disadvantage when compared with larger or more favourably staffed schools. At times, duties are thrust upon teachers because a previous teacher who developed a course within his or her area of specialisation, was not replaced by a teacher able to teach the course. Some schools can utilise secondary correspondence course material to teach subjects which are not within the range of staff specialisation, and this arrangement has clear benefits for students. In rural schools, where there is a high staff turnover or where vacancies remain unfilled for long periods of time, lack of continuity in the curriculum can be off-set in this way, or through the increased use of communication technologies to provide subjects from other schools or a central curriculum source. However, ready solutions of this kind may not always be available.

5.43 Another barrier to achieving a fully effective curriculum, reported by Crowther and Kale (1987), is the repetition of curriculum material by successive teachers appointed to a rural school. This issue highlights the wisdom of arrangements whereby schools operate from a set of core teaching plans which ensure students receive a continuous study program in key subject areas regardless of staff change. These plans can be supplemented by studies that have content objectives which are within the expected stay of each teacher. A further barrier can occur in smaller schools where a secondary department is attached to what is essentially a primary school under the charge of a primary principal. In these schools there may be an insufficient number of experienced secondary teachers to provide the necessary leadership in secondary curriculum areas. In these circumstances, some school systems maintain a special position on the secondary staff for a curriculum leader to undertake the role of subject head and assist the principal with secondary curriculum matters, or appoint a regional or district curriculum adviser to assist small schools.

5.44 Teachers, parents and students have raised another barrier to an effective curriculum which involves curriculum support in rural schools. Well-organised school or community libraries, staffed by trained librarians, can help students in their studies. These facilities do not exist in most remote communities. This may be an area where the rational use of all community resources may be possible. Local government, social and cultural organisations, TAFE units, agricultural agencies and service organisations all have an interest in the provision of good library services and reference materials, and may be sources of support for a combined community library which is located in the local school. Further assistance is possible by the use of central information data banks accessible through the use of communication technologies. Panel 25 alludes to these issues by outlining some advantages and disadvantages of small schools for students and teachers.

Panel 25

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Small Schools for
Students and Teachers**

ADVANTAGES

- The family-like atmosphere provides security and confidence with considerable contact between different age groups of children.
- Student and teacher know each other well; teacher is aware of strengths and weaknesses of pupils and is more able to understand the family background of each student.
- The small school size enables high degree of organisational flexibility and small class size is related to improved academic progress.
- The greater potential for the curriculum to be made relevant to the environment and experience of students.
- In the small school, there is more parental community involvement, which is a major source of community cohesion and identity.

DISADVANTAGES

- There is a lack of peer stimulation due to the small numbers of students the same age and a lack of competition.
- A student may have to tolerate the same teacher (and vice versa) for a number of years.
- Rural secondary schools tend to have a restricted curriculum and are not able to offer the breadth and range of subject areas found in larger schools.
- Students from small rural primary schools and small rural central schools may have difficulty adjusting when they transfer to the larger secondary school.
- Teachers in small rural schools lack a range of professional contacts and support.
- Small schools generally have poorer facilities and resources than larger schools.

(Source: Education Commission of New South Wales, 1983, p.12)

5.45 A number of examples given in this chapter referred to innovative ways of providing Year 11 and 12 studies for students in small rural secondary schools. In Chapter 9 of this report attention is given to rural student retention into the upper secondary school. Low student retention rates are recognised as a serious challenge to rural schooling. While the Commission is aware of the minimum number of students generally required to enable Year 11 and 12 provisions to be made, and of the need for the economic and educational viability of secondary

provisions to be examined, it is impressed with the possibilities that exist in the innovative approaches that have been described. The Commission considers that further developments in this area are possible. These developments should recognise the employment prospects of rural students, the range of industries established in rural areas, and the need for students to contribute to the economy of their communities and their region as they are able to gain employment locally.

Curriculum developments

5.46 A number of practices aimed at reducing the impact of small school size or a remote location on the curriculum offerings in rural schools has been discussed so far in this chapter. These practices include:

- the use of community resources for curriculum support;
- provision of teaching in some curriculum areas from sources outside the school, such as by correspondence study, the utilisation of available telecommunications to provide study units from other schools, and subjects taught with community support;
- cooperative arrangements among schools (and colleges) combining students, staff and other resources to provide a broader and more appropriate curriculum for all students;
- innovative approaches to presenting the curriculum in schools which capitalise on the strengths of staff members, collaboration among staff, and classroom relationships; and
- school and community collaboration through special purpose programs, such as the CAP, which are designed to increase the level of local decision-making and action to solve perceived needs in rural schooling.

5.47 Difficulties in meeting the curriculum needs of students in rural schools have also been identified. In summary these include:

- curriculum limitations in schools resulting from staffing difficulties generally, and in a number of recognised subject areas specifically;
- a lack of curriculum continuity as a result of frequent staff changes and difficulty in arranging appropriate replacements;
- a lack of subject availability in curriculum areas such as music and languages;
- curriculum offerings in schools which do not meet the needs of all rural students, due to a lack of relevance to their backgrounds or future employment or study plans; and
- a lack of curriculum developments which are designed to respond to special circumstances, such as those which encourage the increased retention of secondary students and address the particular needs of girls in rural areas.

5.48 As indicated earlier in this chapter, new approaches have been developed which hold promise of addressing positively many of the curriculum matters raised. The curriculum needs of rural students can be met by actions which include encouraging local initiatives, differentiating the levels of teaching provided, developing locally relevant subjects and courses, and by alternative ways to teach in hard-to-staff subject areas. These approaches have the potential to improve rural schooling, especially at the secondary level. Curriculum provisions relating to Years 11 and 12 are especially urgent. The paragraphs which follow propose actions which the Commonwealth might take, and which will make a major contribution to addressing rural student needs.

Regional initiatives

5.49 Evidence obtained in this study has impressed the Commission with the benefits possible from regional initiatives in the areas of curriculum and teacher development. In the curriculum area, regional education authorities are well placed to encourage initiatives in rural schools, such as the development of more relevant studies for rural students and of innovative approaches to the provision and sharing of resources. Regional approaches to the curriculum difficulties set out in paragraph 5.47 can provide solutions which recognise local circumstances and utilize local resources, and involve a number of approaches to providing curriculum continuity in rural schools. Administrators in education regions in rural Australia have already begun to develop new approaches to these needs.

5.50 The Commission is proposing that the Commonwealth should provide funds to support regional initiatives aimed at increasing the retention of rural students in the senior secondary school. This recommendation will be developed in Chapter 9.

Development and dissemination of curriculum materials

5.51 Discussion in this chapter has not focused on curriculum content and centralised curriculum development, but on the range of innovative practices that are emerging in rural schools to provide increased curriculum access, breadth and relevance. The Commission considers that approaches such as those illustrated hold the key to improvements in curriculum provision in rural schools, and in the levels at which secondary programs in particular are available to rural, and especially remote, students.

5.52 Many of these approaches have been developed by schools, but also, to some extent, by school systems. A substantial contribution could, however, be made by the Commonwealth in curriculum areas which are important for rural schooling improvement. Special measures which are nationally relevant and applicable, and designed to avoid duplication in effort are:

- the provision of curriculum materials in subject areas such as languages, music and art, which are difficult to staff in rural locations, and seldom available in small rural schools;
- the provision of distance education materials for secondary students studying at home or in small rural schools; and
- the provision of appropriate curriculum materials for use by rural secondary schools to help them provide Year 11 and 12 studies for an increased number of students, including subjects which can be made available through the use of communication technologies.

5.53 It is envisaged that these curriculum projects will be coordinated by the Commonwealth with full participation by State and non-government systems. All materials would be designed to be shared across schools and systems. They will address the needs of secondary school students studying at home as well as students attending rural schools, especially remote secondary schools and secondary units. Attention will be given to recognising cultural and language differences which affect curriculum provisions. It should be noted that courses in areas such as languages and rural studies already exist in some States, and may be made available to students elsewhere.

5.54 Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the Commonwealth provide funding of \$0.6m per annum for three years to the Curriculum Development Centre, for the establishment of a priority area in Rural Schools Curriculum Development. Projects supported through the priority area should be directed at subject areas which are difficult to staff in rural locations, distance education materials for secondary students studying at home or in small rural schools by distance education means, and curriculum materials for senior secondary study.

5.55 The Curriculum Development Centre's (CDC) role in the Rural Schools Curriculum Development priority area would be largely one of coordinating and administering activities. Much of the developmental work would be undertaken through projects commissioned by the CDC to appropriate persons or organisations. The CDC would also assist in the dissemination of the curriculum materials and would encourage the sharing of materials already available.

Increased and improved use of technology

5.56 The discussion in this chapter has frequently referred to the role that communication technologies are playing in improving rural schooling. In the curriculum areas, technologies have provided an important impetus to efforts to broaden the curriculum. The provision of teacher inservice activities in rural areas using communication technologies has also been demonstrated. Chapter 8 takes up these matters in detail, and proposes a specific role for the Commonwealth.

Educational and social experiences of rural students

5.57 Emphasis has been given in this chapter to the importance of a locally relevant curriculum and of school-community cooperation in providing rich learning experiences for all students. Reference has also been made to the concern of many parents in remote areas that their children need access to broader educational and social experiences than those available in their local area. This concern is typically expressed by parents as a need to increase the opportunities students in remote areas have to experience and adjust to the social conditions of more populated areas. This need can be especially great in the case of remote area secondary school students who are studying at home using distance education services. It can also be great in areas where the population is relatively transient, and in which few students are subsequently likely to find long-term employment and live their adult lives (eg. in remote mining towns). Students from rural, and more especially, remote areas often have to go elsewhere if they want to undertake tertiary study or broaden their employment opportunities. Many parents and young people living in rural areas therefore see the broadening of students' educational and social experiences as being an important means of facilitating their future adjustment to the circumstances in which they may engage in tertiary study or employment. In turn, this adjustment is seen as necessary in order to have a successful adult life. This concern about broadening of students' educational and social experiences is well expressed in a submission to the Commission by the Catholic Education Office of Tasmania (Panel 26).

Assistance for a transition year

5.58 The Commission sees merit in financial assistance being provided by the Commonwealth to help students who have undertaken all of their secondary schooling in remote areas, and who have just completed Year 12, to undertake an additional year of secondary schooling in a city or large provincial centre. The

purpose of the assistance would be to help make it possible for these students to gain important educational and social experiences through studying in a larger centre. These experiences should be of value to those young people who subsequently return to live in a remote area, as well as to those who decide to stay in a city or large provincial centre. For many young people in the latter group, this further year of schooling will have the advantage of providing a valuable 'transition year' between secondary schooling in a remote community and tertiary study or employment in a larger centre of population.

5.59 Current AUSTUDY provisions provide a means by which some students in the circumstances described in the previous paragraph could qualify for Commonwealth assistance to undertake an additional year of secondary schooling in a larger centre (that assistance being subject to income testing). Secondary school students aged 16 to 18 could qualify for assistance under AUSTUDY during such schooling. Secondary school students aged 16-18 are not, however, eligible for AUSTUDY at the 'away-from-home' rate.* The maximum allowance such students can receive under AUSTUDY, if they are dependent students, is the maximum 'at-home' rate of \$40 per week for 16-17 year-olds, or \$45 per week for 18 year olds (to rise to \$50 and \$60 per week respectively in 1988) (see Appendix H; CDE, 1987a; and Commonwealth of Australia, 1987b, p.30, for AUSTUDY details). These levels of assistance are likely to be insufficient to make undertaking an additional year of schooling in a larger centre a viable option for remote area students from relatively low income families. This is especially so because undertaking schooling in a city or large provincial centre would usually involve boarding costs, as well as other costs associated with living away from home, being incurred.

* This is because special financial assistance for students who must live away from home to attend school is available through the Commonwealth's Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) and Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme (ABSEC). The AIC and the ABSEC provide means by which students otherwise eligible through these Schemes for a boarding allowance could qualify for assistance while undertaking an additional year of secondary schooling in a city or large provincial centre. These Schemes, it should be noted, allow the payment of benefits to students who are repeating a level of study. Students must normally be under 19 years of age at 1 January in order to receive AIC assistance, and must be under 21 years of age at 1 January in order to receive ABSEC assistance. Many remote area secondary school students, however, meet neither the AIC nor the ABSEC eligibility criteria. For example, non-Aboriginal secondary school students living in a remote town with government school facilities providing for schooling up to and including Year 12 would not generally be eligible for assistance through the AIC or the ABSEC.

Panel 26

Importance of Broadening Students' Experiences

There is a special need for students from isolated communities to be given exposure to, and stimulation of interest in, other people and places. Understanding the way of life of other people does not mean that they will necessarily undervalue their own, and it should help them to make a more balanced choice for their future.

(Source: Submission from ICPA Federal Council)

...

Projects which give country students access to city experiences and opportunities to stay in cities for a short period of intensive study are essential.

(Source: Submission from Catholic Education Commission of Victoria)

...

The value of such programs [city experience programs for rural students] is questionable unless the reverse process is happening to enable country children to feel justifiably proud of their backgrounds. A new kind of 'hidden curriculum' which devalues country life may well develop from this kind of activity.

(Source: Submission from Catholic Education Office of Tasmania)

5.60 Current AUSTUDY provisions classify secondary school students who are aged 19 or over at 1 January as adult secondary students. Adult secondary students can receive AUSTUDY at the away-from-home rate under certain circumstances. One specified circumstance is that the travel time (one way) by public transport between the parental home and the education institution attended by the student exceeds 90 minutes in Sydney and Melbourne and 60 minutes elsewhere (see CDE, 1987a, p.28). (Note that the CDEET advises that a uniform 90 minutes travel time will apply everywhere from 1988.) This circumstance would allow an otherwise eligible adult secondary student whose parents reside in a remote area to receive AUSTUDY at the away-from-home rate while attending secondary school in a distant city or large provincial centre. Adult secondary students, however, are not generally granted assistance under AUSTUDY if they are repeating a level of study (eg. Year 12) (pp.15-16). This means that a remote area student who has just completed Year 12 and who is 19 or over at 1 January of the following year would generally not be able to get assistance under AUSTUDY while undertaking an additional year of secondary schooling in a larger centre. It should be acknowledged, however, that relatively few remote area students aged 19 or over are likely to want to study at the secondary school level for another year after having completed Year 12.

5.61 **Recommendation 4:** It is recommended that two changes be made to AUSTUDY provisions as applied to students who have undertaken all of their secondary schooling in remote areas and who, having just completed Year 12, undertake an additional year of secondary schooling in a larger centre of population in order to facilitate their transition to employment or further study:

- (i) for students in this situation who are aged 16-18 in their additional year of schooling and who are otherwise eligible for AUSTUDY, the living allowance should be payable at the 'away-from-home' rate applicable to tertiary students of their age; and
- (ii) for students in this situation who are aged 19 or over at 1 January of their additional year of schooling, the prohibition against AUSTUDY assistance being paid to adult secondary students repeating a level of study should be waived.

5.62 Acceptance of this recommendation would mean that eligible 16-17 year old students could receive up to \$76 per week (at 1988 allowance levels) and eligible 18 year-old and over students up to \$91.20 per week (at 1988 allowance levels) (see Commonwealth of Australia, 1987b, p.30), while undertaking an additional year of secondary schooling in a city or large provincial centre. The additional cost involved for the Commonwealth would depend on the number of students receiving the assistance, the level of assistance received and whether or not the recipients would have received other Commonwealth assistance, possibly even through AUSTUDY, had they not opted to undertake an additional year of secondary schooling in a larger centre of population. At most, however, the additional cost would be unlikely to exceed \$2m per annum (at 1988 allowance levels).

Rural-urban student exchange

5.63 A further measure proposed to help meet the needs of students in rural areas for broadened educational and social experiences is a Rural-Urban Student Exchange Scheme. The scheme would help to provide students studying in remote areas or small provincial towns with an opportunity to broaden their experiences. While being of benefit to rural students, the exchange would also benefit urban students by giving them a better understanding of life in rural Australia and of the importance of rural Australia to the nation as a whole. The importance of broadening the experiences of rural students is indicated in Panels 26 and 27.

Panel 27

Our Smallest School tries the Big Smoke

The largest educational institution in Tasmania yesterday had a visit from the students of the State's smallest school. Eight students from the Cape Barren Island school dropped in on the University of Tasmania as part of their week-long trip to the 'big' cities of Tasmania. The children didn't seem to be too overawed by the enormity of the university, as compared with their one-room school, circa 1911, back home on the small island in Bass Strait off Tasmania's North-East.

Hobart and Launceston have not been their only experience of the big smoke though — last February, the whole school — 11 children — went to Melbourne.

The only teacher at the school, Ms Sandra Reid, has lived on the island for about 15 years. 'Trips like this one are also an important part of the curriculum,' she said.

Although 20th century life has well and truly reached Cape Barren Island, sights such as Wrest Point Casino, where they will lunch tomorrow, and the new Hobart Sheraton Hotel are definitely a change.

The children stay on the island for primary school only — for high school they have to board in Launceston. One benefit of the school, according to Ms Reid, was that individual attention could be given to the children.

The island had a shifting population, which sometimes meant that if two families moved out, nearly one-third of the school's population went too.

Next week the Cape Barren Island students will head north to Launceston, before going home to settle into the final term before summer.

(Source: **The Mercury**, 3 October 1987)

5.64 The proposed scheme would encourage the exchange, for periods of from one month to one school term, of students studying in remote areas or small provincial towns with students from large provincial centres or metropolitan areas. The benefits of the program will be maximised by building into it a 'sister school' or 'sister area' arrangement, whereby students from specified rural schools exchange with students from specified urban schools. The exchanges are envisaged as mainly taking place between students in their middle years of secondary schooling, with the focal year-level possibly varying by State to take account of different system conditions and requirements. Parents and students are less likely to be concerned about possible detrimental effects of the exchanges on academic achievement if the exchanges take place in the middle years, rather than in the senior years, of secondary schooling. Furthermore, if undertaken in the middle years, the exchange experience is likely to encourage rural students to complete a full secondary schooling.

5.65 It is proposed that the Commonwealth would contribute to such an exchange scheme by providing funds to help meet establishment and support costs. The advantages of the Rural-Urban Student Exchange Scheme would be that it:

- will benefit students studying in remote areas and small rural schools, by providing them with the opportunity to live for a short period in a larger centre of population, thereby broadening their educational and social experiences;
- will help increase rural upper secondary school retention rates by easing the transition to a larger school which many students from small rural towns must make if they are to stay on at school beyond Year 10, and by giving rural students a greater appreciation of the opportunities for education, training and employment which exist outside their region;
- will benefit urban students by giving them an opportunity for first-hand experience of rural living;
- is compatible with the current emphasis on students being made more knowledgeable about their own country, for example through Australian Studies courses; and
- is compatible with the current concern that urban-based Australians need to be better informed about life outside the major urban centres.

5.66 **Recommendation 5:** It is recommended that the Commonwealth establish a Rural-Urban Student Exchange Scheme to encourage exchanges between students in the middle years of secondary schooling in remote areas or small provincial towns and students at the same level of schooling in large provincial centres or metropolitan areas. The scheme should be trialled for a three-year period and should operate through 'sister school' or 'sister area' arrangements. The student exchanges should be for periods of from one month to one school term. Commonwealth funding of \$1m per annum should be provided to support the scheme during the trial period.

5.67 The Commission envisages that the Rural-Urban Student Exchange Scheme would be administered through a national element of the CAP. A grant would be made through the CAP to an appropriate body in each State to implement the scheme. Rural schools involved in the scheme would not, however, be restricted to secondary schools in designated CAP areas. It is envisaged that non-government as well as government schools would participate in the scheme. It is also envisaged that provision would be made for remote area students studying at home using distance education services to take part in exchanges arranged through the scheme. 'Contact schools' or 'home/school' arrangements, which link remote area students studying at home to their nearest school might prove useful in this regard, as well as providing other benefits to students.

Summary

5.68 The consideration of curriculum and rural schooling issues in this chapter has emphasised the general suitability of curriculum provisions in rural primary and secondary schools, including the breadth of curriculum available in rural secondary schools and secondary units attached to primary schools. Several important approaches that will improve provisions were emphasised. Curriculum developments for secondary courses in hard-to-staff subject areas and for the senior secondary school years are especially needed, supported by increased use of local community contributions to school programs and access to distance education materials.

5.69 Of particular urgency is the continued exploration of innovative ways to provide an effective curriculum for upper secondary school students in rural towns. The Commission has been impressed with developments which are occurring and considers that developments which provide new curriculum approaches to suit rural student needs, and use innovative delivery arrangements, such as tutor-based classes for small groups of students and mixed-mode and similar provisions utilising distance education materials under similar circumstances, will significantly change secondary schooling in small rural schools in the years ahead. They can also be expected to improve significantly retention levels in many rural communities.

5.70 These developments will be more successful if complemented by the comprehensive use of communication technologies to help resolve issues of curriculum breadth in key subject areas in rural schools and to provide improved distance education services at the secondary level for isolated students studying at home and in schools in remote areas, and generally to support education programs and teacher development in rural schools. The importance of widening the educational and social experiences of students in rural areas is also emphasised. Two proposals in this regard are put forward. They are support for a transition year of secondary schooling for students who have undertaken all of their secondary schooling in remote areas and a Rural-Urban Student Exchange Scheme for students in their middle years of secondary schooling.

Meeting Student Needs

Introduction

6.1 The last few decades have seen a greater appreciation of the diversity that exists within the student population in Australian schools. This has been brought about by a number of significant social and cultural changes in Australian society, resulting in a heightened awareness and understanding of some of the important differences in students' backgrounds and experiences that influence their schooling. These changes have included a marked increase in the number of students with cultural backgrounds other than the Anglo-Australian origins of most students, and the growing extent of poverty among Australian families. A greater understanding of the importance of culture in the school and community context within which students develop and learn, and of the 'sub-cultures' that students experience, has also emerged.

6.2 Cultural factors, however, are not the only influences that generate student needs, especially those of students in rural areas. Many other factors have already been referred to in this report. Rural student needs arise out of their experience of relative isolation, climatic conditions and economic circumstances, as well as out of travel requirements to attend a school and the educational offerings available to them in a particular school or at home. They arise from personal and social circumstances, physical and intellectual capacities, race and gender. 'Needs' in this sense are the circumstances of students that require some course of action. The teachers' task demands that teachers must have a clear understanding of these circumstances and the manner in which they may affect students' learning experiences.

6.3 The educational needs of some students in a school usually cannot be met by the services and resources available in that school. Additional support is needed to assist many (but not all) disabled students and students from non-English speaking backgrounds. These students require a higher level of specialist support wherever they attend school, and not just in a rural school. Yet, in rural areas their need for these services is frequently accentuated by isolation and the general lack, outside of the major provincial centres, of health and social welfare services and other forms of specialist assistance. Itinerant students, although not only found in rural areas, are an important group in many rural schools. There are different types of itinerancy and these are discussed briefly in this chapter. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, who constitute some two per cent of Australian school enrolments, and a higher proportion of enrolments in rural schools, are also discussed in this chapter. These students are

given particular emphasis because of the Commission's view that they constitute the most needy group of Australian students in the 1980s. The chapter then discusses the particular needs of girls in rural schools.

Special needs groups

6.4 Students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and students from itinerant families are considered in this section. In representations made to the Commission on this study of rural schooling these groups were frequently referred to and their special need for support emphasised.

Disabled Students

6.5 Students with disabilities and learning difficulties are to be found in most schools, including rural schools. The best estimates available indicate that approximately two per cent of students enrolled in regular schools will experience an identified disabling condition which will influence their school learning (Andrews, Elkins, Berry and Burge, 1979). These conditions include visual and hearing impairments and physical and intellectual disabilities. The Commission's **Report of the Working Party on Special Education on Commonwealth Policy and Directions in Special Education** (CSC, 1985b) proposed that a relatively small group of students with specific learning disabilities who are enrolled in regular schools need specialist support similar to that required by the disabled students just referred to. These students' disabilities are a result of neurological and other factors which severely impede their academic and social development. While many disabled students are enrolled in regular schools, larger population centres in rural Australia may also provide for them in special schools or units, as part of the range of provisions for disabled students made in a region.

6.6 Disabled students tend to be distributed among schools and classrooms in a predictable way. The prevalence of these students is similar in all localities, with a few exceptions such as Aboriginal students in remote communities where there is a high incidence of hearing and visual impairment. While in the past many rural students with significant disabilities were sent to metropolitan or provincial centres for schooling, or their families moved to those centres to ensure that a school program was available, in recent years most of these students live at home and attend local schools whenever possible. Disabled students generally require special support wherever they attend school, and this support needs often to extend to the students' families and teachers. This support is provided by a range of staff including counsellors, visiting teachers who specialise in teaching disabled students and therapists, depending on the circumstances and needs of each child.

6.7 Students with learning difficulties are also to be found in rural schools. Although the causes of their difficulties may differ from those of disabled children, most schools enrol children with learning difficulties. These students require less intensive support, but their teachers may need help and advice periodically from a teacher specialising in remedial teaching. Aboriginal and other non-English speaking background children with disabilities will also require special English as a second language (ESL) assistance. As a rule their need for this support will vary according to the extent of the difficulty they experience in learning English. It should be noted, however, that teachers who work with these students need the capacity to work in a school or classroom that has special cultural and language characteristics, as well as training to work with students who have learning problems.

6.8 The provision of support to these students is a major task in all rural areas of Australia. Support services are most highly developed in metropolitan areas, and similar levels of support can be found in larger rural centres. In provincial and remote areas with dispersed populations, however, provisions are less comprehensive and may not be available on a continuous basis. This is not always due to factors of distance and isolation; support services of this nature are hard to staff due to a shortage of qualified personnel. It is also generally agreed that fully satisfactory ways to meet the needs of these students in remote areas have yet to be found. The Commission proposes that this is an area for urgent inquiry. The principles and practices identified as the most appropriate in providing for the needs of disabled students in rural areas are also likely to apply to other special needs groups, and thus would have wide application.

Non-English speaking background students

6.9 Children of migrant families whose home language is not English have been attending rural schools in increasing numbers in recent years. While significant national groups have lived in rural areas for a number of decades, current migrant settlement policies have meant that non-English speaking background children can be found in a greater number of schools than previously. Many of these students take up residence with their families in rural areas on arrival in Australia, and have a very limited capacity to communicate in English. Their need to learn English for educational purposes and other reasons is great, and becomes a significant challenge to their schools.

6.10 A similar situation exists for another group of non-English speaking background students: Aboriginal children whose first language is an indigenous language. Many of these children live in central and northern Australia. They generally begin schooling without having learnt to speak the English language, even though their parents may speak English. Their instruction needs to be in their mother tongue. These students should be encouraged to use their own language throughout their schooling, in addition to having progressive English language instruction. A large proportion of the Aboriginal population in the communities of central and northern Australia is bilingual, and many speak a number of languages including English. Each generation of students must be assisted to maintain their indigenous language, while also developing fluency in English for educational, social and employment purposes. In the Northern Territory bilingual programs are provided in a number of schools and are being established in some schools in other States.

6.11 Adequate support services to these students are important for them to receive a quality education. In larger centres, an intensive language unit may be provided for students from non-English backgrounds or a visiting ESL teacher may provide assistance for students enrolled in regular classrooms. However, the lack of ESL support in rural schools, especially remote schools in central and northern Australia, is a concern in many locations. As for disabled students, access to specialist advice on educational progress and social adjustment, and counselling on personal or vocational matters for those students, is generally available in metropolitan schools. For rural students, however, these services may only be found in the larger provincial centres, yet many non-English background students may require this form of support.

Itinerant students

6.12 It is not always recognised that many Australian families frequently change their place of residence. The national average for families changing residence in the year ended June 1985 was 16.7 per cent, with the Northern Territory having the highest proportion of families who relocated (27.1%) (ABS, 1986a). The Northern Territory also has the highest percentage of itinerant children enrolled in its correspondence school and in the Katherine and Alice Springs schools of the air. Information from the 1986 ABS internal migration survey indicated that the number of people in Australia who changed their place of usual residence during the year ended 31 May 1986 was 2 438 900 (ABS, 1986a). Only ten per cent of these people moved interstate. Nine per cent moved to or from the metropolitan area of their State, and 32 per cent moved within the non-metropolitan area of the State in which they were living.

6.13 Families change their place of residence for a number of reasons. These include:

- employment in seasonal industries, such as fruit-picking;
- employment in transient jobs such as sheep-shearing and railway construction;
- employment in service industries such as banking, health and education;
- employment in the defence forces and the mining industry;
- movement by Aboriginal communities or families for cultural and other reasons; and
- other domestic or social circumstances such as family separation.

6.14 The children of itinerant families generally must move to a new school each time their family moves to a new location. While this will not disadvantage all students, the disruption can cause difficulties for many of them. While some families change their place of residence a number of times each year, others tend to reside in each location for from two to four years, including families employed in service industries. This is less likely to be true of families undertaking fruit-picking, grape-harvesting, or fishing, all of which are seasonal enterprises which depend on an itinerant workforce. Many families depend on this work, and return to the same areas for employment year after year. This employment supplements low annual incomes for many families, or gives a few months respite from unemployment.

6.15 In central and northern Australia, some Aboriginal communities have been moving back to a traditional way of life in homeland areas. Traditional life can include regularly relocating in an established pattern, according to seasonal hunting practices and annual ceremonies. Other semi-traditional Aboriginal people move among family groups in different settlements. Meeting the educational needs of children in these families is a particular challenge in the Northern Territory where Aboriginal students make up some 31 per cent of the government school population, and most are from families living on their traditional lands or in isolated settlements. While not all Aboriginal children are itinerant, in many communities the school children move as a group with their families, and their school program may need to move with them.

6.16 As a group, little is known about itinerant students, including their number, characteristics, and movements into, out of, or within rural areas. Itinerancy is not a distinctly rural issue, as there also is marked itinerancy in many inner suburbs of capital cities. There is, however, a significant number of itinerant students in rural areas. Recent research has highlighted the social problems of itinerant children as well as their educational problems. The findings from this research have emphasised the need to find ways to trace itinerant students effectively, and to ensure that educational data on them are available in their new schools, to assess the effects of curriculum changes associated with school change or itinerant students, and to identify appropriate school practices to alleviate the effects of change of school on these students (Panel 28).

6.17 Although curriculum differences between school systems are frequently highlighted as an educational issue, and the Commission accepts their importance, these differences are considered to be less of an issue than the year-level differences in enrolments that exist between States, and the possibility of adding a year to a child's total schooling when a family moves to a new school system. The effects of curricula differences between States on student progress need careful examination. It is also recognised that schools can have difficulty in coping with student itinerancy, especially those schools with high levels of student movement. This can be most difficult in small rural schools. Itinerancy can also have a complex effect on the staffing establishments of schools, and system policies need to be able to respond to the staffing pressures which can arise from unplanned and unpredicted changes in school enrolments as a result of student itinerancy.

Need for support services

6.18 Support services for all these special needs student groups, as well as services which support schools and teachers generally in provincial and remote areas, are an important provision in rural schooling. In all regions of rural Australia it can be expected that some support services will be available, but the services provided are generally intermittent or infrequent due to limited resources. Another difficulty in providing these services arises from the shortage of qualified staff to fill vacant positions; vacancies in areas such as student guidance, counselling or social welfare often go unfilled for long periods.

6.19 Regional support services are generally based on advisory teachers who are specialists in areas such as the teaching of disabled children, classroom management, subject specialisation and cultural enrichment activities. However, advisory services in these teaching areas, in ESL support for Aboriginal and migrant children, and in support for students with learning difficulties will not be available in most of the remote areas of Australia. In the current period of contracting education budgets, these services have actually declined in most regions. This aspect of rural schooling is a key area in which to seek improvements. It is important that school authorities place greater emphasis on meeting the needs outlined.

Panel 28

Meeting the Schooling Needs of Itinerant Students

Policy implications for education authorities and schools.

- allocate support teacher time to assist classroom teachers in 'screening' new enrolments
- identify children who are 'at risk' and place them appropriately in a class
- provide parents with an information folder when enrolling a child, informing them of matters associated with the functioning of the school
- develop a detailed school policy statement on transient children indicating the procedures to be undertaken in the school to lessen disruption to each child's program
- make greater use of existing support services
- request comprehensive background information from parents when enrolling a child, including family structure, medical and guidance reports, welfare contacts, and previous school attended.

(Source: Mills, 1986, p.17)

Aboriginal students

6.20 Aboriginal students* are an important student group in rural areas. Although they are only some two per cent of the school student population in Australia as a whole, in many rural towns and some States and the Northern Territory they make up a much higher proportion of enrolled school students. Table 20 sets out 1983 estimates of Aboriginal students in Australian schools and their distribution among the States.

6.21 The 1986 census data indicate that nationally the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population had reached almost 227 000. As Table 21 shows, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders live mainly in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Recent developments in Aboriginal education

6.22 As part of this study of rural schooling, consultations were held with a number of Aboriginal groups and parents. These included most State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. This section of the report has been developed as a result of these discussions. It seeks to set out recent developments and views on future directions for the schooling of rural Aboriginal young people (see also Panels 29 to 32). Recent developments at the

* The Commission acknowledges that there are two cultures indigenous to Australia — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. For convenience only, the use of the word Aboriginal in this report refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Commonwealth level intended to improve the educational opportunities of Aboriginal students have included establishing the Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme (ABSEC) (see Chapter 3, paragraphs 3.53 to 3.55) to assist greater numbers of Aboriginal students to complete a secondary education. The Commonwealth has also adopted a target of 1000 trained Aboriginal teachers in Australian schools by 1990, and has recently established a National Scheme for the Placement of Teachers in Aboriginal Schools to assist the appointment of appropriately qualified teachers to schools in Aboriginal communities. This Scheme also provides induction and inservice programs for these teachers which are designed to help improve the quality of education for Aboriginal students. Other Commonwealth initiatives include the Remote Area Program for Aborigines which encourages employment-related studies in schools, funding to provide increased numbers of Aboriginal teacher aides in schools, and assistance to Aboriginal students and Aboriginal education through a number of Commonwealth specific purpose programs.

6.23 There have also been important recent developments in the States. Aboriginal studies courses have been widely developed and are now being taught in many schools. In New South Wales, Aboriginal Studies is a subject within the Higher School Certificate (HSC) program. Aboriginal studies are also being introduced into some teacher education programs in tertiary institutions. Staffing arrangements which recognise the need to resource community schools above establishment levels have occurred, for example in Queensland. Both Commonwealth and State funding is providing for the appointment of Aboriginal staff to a range of school positions such as teacher aides, home/school liaison officers or community counsellors. Special training arrangements have been instituted in Queensland through the TAFE sector for Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines seeking a career in teaching.

Table 20

Estimated number of Aboriginal students in Australian schools, 1983

State/Territory	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
NSW	7 613	22.9	5 875	29.7	13 488	25.4
Vic	1 393	4.2	1 005	5.1	2 398	4.5
Qld	6 848	20.6	5 878	29.7	12 726	24.0
WA	7 389	22.2	3 150	15.9	10 539	19.9
SA	2 596	7.8	1 141	5.8	3 737	7.0
Tas	556	1.7	512	2.6	1 068	2.0
NT	6 696	20.1	2 144	10.8	8 840	16.7
ACT	160	0.5	74	0.4	234	0.5
Total	33 251	100.0	19 779	100.0	53 030	100.0

Source: CSC and NAEC, 1984, p.51

Table 21

Proportion of the Aboriginal
population of Australia living in each State, 1986

State/Territory	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
Percentage	26.0	5.5	27.0	16.6	6.2	3.0	15.2	0.5	100.0

Source: ABS, 1987b

6.24 Procedures for the appointment of teachers which ensure that appropriate staff are employed in schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments have been developed in some States. These include 'special fitness' appointments in New South Wales, special interview procedures involving Aboriginal educators in Western Australia and a general effort not to appoint newly graduated teachers to community schools in that State. It should also be noted that Aboriginal educators have been appointed to senior administrative positions in Western Australia and South Australia.

Some Issues in Aboriginal Education

Aboriginal Culture and the Curriculum

It has already been emphasised that Aboriginal culture is a critical component of relevant education for Aboriginal students. Such education not only embodies a growing understanding by them of the many elements of their culture, but also the development of their own personal identity as Aborigines, and their feelings of self-esteem and cultural awareness. In order to achieve satisfactory development in the latter, Aboriginal history and culture needs to be a recognised and valued part of the school curriculum. Until effective action on this is taken by schools and systems, Aboriginal students will continue to be unnecessarily disadvantaged. In addition, curricula for all students in Aboriginal schools should include specific Aboriginal studies elements, to increase cross-cultural understanding and in support of the development of a multicultural society.

Among the day-to-day strategies which are used in some schools to enhance the academic prospects of Aboriginal children is the employment of Aborigines as Aboriginal educators. The positive aspects of employing Aboriginal people in schools are manifold. The impact Aborigines have as role models for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is of crucial importance. While a commitment to increase the numbers of Aboriginal staff is generally sought, equally important is action to ensure that Aboriginal educators are employed in conditions which provided:

- permanency;
- appropriate status;
- appropriate salary levels;
- funds for travel as required by their appointments;
- time release for study and upgrading qualifications; and
- a clear definition of their role as educators involved in face-to-face teaching with student groups.

Bilingual Education

Bilingual teaching is especially valued when it extends throughout the school life of the children as a contribution to cultural maintenance, and is not phased-out when they have a level of English usage considered adequate for their progress in school. School approaches too frequently present a mono-cultural emphasis (the dominant culture) rather than assist the Aboriginal student to develop within his or her own culture, and to value at least equally Aboriginal culture. The availability of the linguists, teacher linguists, bilingual teachers, Aboriginal literacy workers and literature production workers necessary for effective bilingual education is a parallel issue that needs to be addressed.

Students in Traditionally-Oriented Communities

The factors which relate to the educational needs of these students include their geographical isolation; the threat of intrusion upon their life-style by developers and industry and persons administering government programs, influences from the wider Australian culture in some traditionally-oriented regions; the lack of educational opportunity for adults, the need to compete for educational services within general provisions for students; and the central place and value given to education by these communities. The teaching program elements perceived to be important for these students include:

- English as a second or foreign language, within a bilingual teaching program;
- teaching and maintenance of Aboriginal languages;
- basic skills instruction;
- Aboriginal studies within and beyond the school environment; and
- nutrition and health programs.

(Source: CSC and NAEC, 1984, pp.12-16)

6.25 A range of cooperative activities in Aboriginal education among the Commonwealth, States and other organisations can be noted. These include:

- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander element of the Commonwealth's Capital Grants Program which, with State and system contributions, provides for the construction of new schools and teaching areas or the renovation of existing schools. Major building programs have been undertaken in remote area schools of the Northern Territory, especially homeland area schools; the provision of buildings to provide post-primary programs in remote communities of Western Australia; and a rebuilding program for Torres Strait Island schools in cooperation with the Queensland government;
- tri-State discussions to determine areas for cooperation in the provision of education services, in the central reserves area of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia (eg. curriculum development and teacher inservice arrangements);
- the use of radio and television broadcasting as an educational medium for students and adults in central Australia and elsewhere. The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) and Imparjie Aboriginal organisations based in Alice Springs have taken the major initiatives in this area, supported by government agencies; and
- the establishment of the Remote Area Teacher Education program in the Northern Territory, and its equivalent in South Australia and Western Australia, to train residents of Aboriginal communities as teachers, with a considerable portion of their studies being undertaken in their communities.

The Northern Territory

6.26 Two particular developments in the Northern Territory are of interest in this discussion. The first development is the result of some 20 years of movement back to their homeland areas by Aboriginal people in that Territory, in many cases leaving the settlements to which they moved some decades ago as a result of government or church action. This homeland area movement represents a desire by these communities to maintain their traditional lifestyles and cultures in their homelands, while at the same time having contact with the wider Australian society to the extent they choose. There are now over 400 homeland centres in the Northern Territory. The recent report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, **Return to Country: The Aboriginal Homelands Movement in Australia** (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1987) identified a total of 588 homeland centre communities nationally, with a total population estimated at 9500.

6.27 This has produced a unique set of circumstances for the provision of education services in remote areas, even though provision for the education of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children on isolated pastoral properties and in small remote towns is long established. The approach to schooling in homeland centres in the Northern Territory is based on the appointment of a nominated community member to the position of teaching assistant who is supported by an itinerant liaison teacher from a 'central' community school. The liaison teacher visits each homeland school at two-weekly intervals or more frequently depending on location. Special curricula and materials have been developed for the teaching program in these schools.

Panel 30

Schooling for Aboriginal Students

School and further education authorities must develop an education theory and pedagogy that takes into account Aboriginal epistemology. Only when this occurs will education for our people be a process that builds on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identity.

In promoting the need for educational processes to work from an Aboriginal world view, we must emphasise the growth of the person as a whole. We further recognise the need for educational processes to develop the academic and technological skills so necessary for our people to take their place in the Australia of today. To be effective, the acquisition of those skills and learning must be acquired in harmony with our own cultural values, identity and choice of lifestyle, whether we reside in an urban, traditional community or homeland centre.

The NAEC believes that Australia will never develop its true nationhood until it recognises the prior ownership and the culture of its indigenous people and their descendants. We therefore consider it essential that a knowledge of this be given to every Australian. To do this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island studies must become part of the curriculum in early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education. It must be taught with a high level of respect and understanding so that an accurate knowledge of Australian history and indigenous culture can be obtained.

The NAEC further contends that a corollary of Aboriginal Studies would be the promoting of programs for cross-cultural understanding. These programs must aim to develop understanding, tolerance and respect for the differing cultural viewpoints held by the peoples of Australia. In doing so the uniqueness of our people becomes the core of such studies from which will grow the cross-cultural awareness so important in a multicultural Australia.

(Source: NAEC, 1985, p. 4)

6.28 As might be expected, expansion in the number of these schools draws heavily on the resources of the education authorities involved in meeting the operating costs, including the costly servicing arrangements. Access for staff to these schools usually requires negotiating difficult road or 'track' conditions, or boat or air travel. Costly maintenance and servicing arrangements are required. For example, a central community school which services a number of homeland area schools requires four-wheel drive vehicles and a boat if water transport is needed. Air transport is arranged by charter. The servicing and maintenance of these means of transport, the storage required, and the work spaces for the liaison teachers and for inservicing of the teaching assistants from the homeland area schools put extreme pressure on space available to most central community schools. The additional teacher accommodation required in these communities can also put pressure on system resources and community services.

6.29 Construction in homeland areas of basic school buildings which are designed appropriately for their location has been funded by the Commonwealth Government for the last four years. Building costs in homeland areas can be up to twice capital city prices. The operating costs of these schools is reflected in the higher costs generally of providing education in the Northern Territory. In 1985-86, this was approximately \$3800 per primary student and \$6000 per secondary student, compared with a national average of \$2400 and \$3600 respectively. Specific costs per student in homeland areas in 1983-84 ranged from slightly above \$4000 per annum to over \$7000, depending on location and services provided.

6.30 The second important development in the Northern Territory is the endorsement by the Northern Territory Minister for Education of a twelve-point plan for improvements to the education provided for Aboriginal students. The plan, put forward by Feppi, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, includes the following measures:

- the Aboriginalisation of teaching in community schools;
- increasing post-Year 7 education opportunities in Aboriginal communities;
- increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers with award qualifications;
- improved housing for Aboriginal teachers; and
- an improved staffing formula for Aboriginal schools.

This plan represents a renewed effort in the Northern Territory to increase the number of Aborigines qualified and employed in community schools, including in executive positions, and improved opportunities for Aboriginal students and young people to extend their education into secondary school level studies and work training programs.

Panel 31

Literature Production at Yirrkala, Northern Territory

School Situation

Yirrkala Community School is situated on the north-east tip of the Gove Peninsula. We have an enrolment of 250 children, half of whom live at their Homeland Centres. All our pupils have an Aboriginal language (or languages!), as their first language. We are a bilingual school, with Gumatj being the major language of instruction up until Year 4 where the students bridge to English. After this time, English is the language of instruction, with the Vernacular Program running concurrently to ensure that students' proficiency and extension of their first language is achieved.

Project objectives

- To enrich our Vernacular Language Program by producing higher quality books in the Vernacular.
- To translate and make Big Books from the NT Government's *Tracks* series, and the *Pee-Wee* stories. (These stories cover from Transition to stage 6 in our Language Program).

Project details

Yirrkala School received its new Toshiba photocopier and punch binder in February this year. Since that time the Literacy Production Centre has been hard at work producing new materials for the Vernacular Program. To date we have produced a full set of Transition Big Books from the *Tracks* readers — this involves translating the books into the Aboriginal language, computerising the text, blowing up the pictures and colouring them and finally putting them all together. We are now involved in producing *Pee-Wee* stories for stages 1 to 6. We have already produced 5 Big Books in this series.

(Source: Northern Territory Department of Education, 1986, p.21)

Students in rural towns

6.31 Another major group of Aboriginal students important in a study of rural schooling is the students enrolled in government or non-government schools in the many towns located in rural Australia, especially those in isolated locations. Of all Aboriginal students in Australian schools, it is estimated that 70 per cent live in towns and settlements outside the metropolitan areas. In some 240 government and non-government schools nationally Aboriginal students are the majority student group.

6.32 The major schooling issue in these towns is the provision of secondary education opportunities, including upper secondary school provisions. Attending a boarding school for secondary education is not a realistic or relevant option for most Aboriginal students. Of all Aboriginal students who receive ABSEC assistance, only some 10 per cent attend school away from their homes, but

relatively few towns and cities in remote areas provide Year 11 and 12 study. Similar limitations exist in access to post-secondary provisions, although a recent increase in TAFE provisions in rural areas is benefitting many Aboriginal students.

6.33 Recent developments in rural schools include a small increase in the appointment of Aboriginal staff to schools, especially Aboriginal teacher aides, home/school liaison staff and persons involved in cultural and language teaching. There have been a number of attempts to increase the role of Aboriginal communities in the operation of rural schools. A key challenge for schools enrolling Aboriginal students is the establishment of a rapport with the Aboriginal communities they serve, but this must occur if the schooling provided is to reflect the cultural backgrounds and learning needs of the students. Community expectations for the education provided to students need to be met, and a realistic role for communities established. In cases where this has occurred, the benefits to students are beyond question.

6.34 This brief overview of some recent developments in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has been included to indicate some of the advances that have been made in this area in the last decade. Despite these promising and important developments, it is widely acknowledged that Aboriginal students continue to be the most needy student group in Australia, and a major effort by school authorities and governments is required to provide many of them with educational experiences that are the equal of those available to other students. This particularly applies to Aboriginal students in remote areas.

Access and the quality of teaching

6.35 The remaining discussion in this section focuses on the two report themes of access to schooling and the quality of teaching. These themes are particularly important in any consideration of schooling for Aboriginal students. Access for these students involves more than the availability of a school. It involves the pattern of student attendance at school, the effects on students of the extent of isolation experienced, the distance of their homes from a school, and the nature of the schooling available to students. Because of cultural and social factors, it also involves wider issues such as student health, family support and expectations for schooling, the level of conflict between school and community educational objectives, relationships within communities, and relationships between communities and authorities beyond the local school. An understanding of this wider meaning of the concept of access is important for ensuring effective education for Aboriginal students in rural areas.

Panel 32

Schools at Groote Eylandt

Groote Eylandt is located in the Gulf of Carpentaria off the coast of Arnhem Land. Parts of the island receive a barge service every 4-6 weeks and are over 700 km from Darwin. Three very different towns were surveyed in this case study.

Alyangula is a mining town inhabited mainly by whites. Teachers are often miners' wives who stay for about 3 — 4 years in parallel to their husbands' employment. The high school has no Year 12 students and only three Year 11 students. Retention rates drop significantly as each year of secondary education passes. Because of race relations, the school is not attended by the regional black students from Angurugu and Umbakumba. Aboriginal students used to attend Dhupuma College near Gove for later years of education but this College has been closed. The Groote Eylandt Mining Company, (GEMCO) provides resources and assistance to the school at Alyangula.

Angurugu has a new well equipped school but there is a lot of disadvantage due to the gaoling and alcoholism amongst the largely Aboriginal population. Both Angurugu and Umbakumba offer some post-primary education but most students have to leave the area to continue schooling.

Umbakumba, also an Aboriginal town, is more remote than the other towns. It has a school catering mainly for primary students of which there are 200. It usually has a very good attendance rate. However, housing and services in the town are extremely poor and unreliable. A breakfast program for students is provided through the GEMCO trust which provides funds on a submission basis. Improved attendance and success amongst those participating in this program has been reported. The community decided that alcohol would be available on a restricted basis in the town (four nights a week was agreed to). Teachers with a commitment to remote Aboriginal teaching seem to be attracted to the area; however, Aboriginal studies in language and culture are needed for students and for all staff coming to the area. The region needs to attract and maintain mature age staff as role models for younger staff.

One of the consequences of high staff turnover at the Aboriginal schools is that there are inadequate records of classroom programs. Comprehensive and localised cultural information is not provided and nor are appropriate resources. There is a lack of contact with the wider teaching community for staff on Groote Eylandt and induction is often not available when teachers actually arrive (frequently at 'odd' times during the year).

Remote area teaching programs and Aboriginal teacher training at Batchelor College are seen as essential for the quality of education in the region — the development of first language programs encourages Aboriginal teacher involvement and maintains and assists student success at school as well as community faith in the schools.

(Source: Developed from Crowther and Kale, 1987)

Access to schooling

6.36 *School provisions.* An important determinant of access to schooling for Aboriginal students is the availability of appropriate school provisions. It has been estimated that at least 1200 and possibly 1500 children living in homeland areas in the Northern Territory do not have access to schooling. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) estimates that, nationally, from 10 000 to 12 000 Aboriginal youth aged 12 to 15 do not have access to a 'recognised' school facility. In many towns with small populations, secondary education is not available locally or, if it is, it is available only to Year 10. In the central and western areas of Australia, secondary education is less likely to be available than in other areas, and, where it does occur, may be of a 'post-primary' nature which does not prepare students for tertiary study or employment training. These arrangements often result from the lower educational standards reached by Aboriginal students during the primary level education available to them.

6.37 In considering the evidence on the lack of access to education for these students, it is important to note that approaches to educational provision which are relevant to non-Aboriginal children are not always suitable, without modification, for the education of Aboriginal students. For example, few Aboriginal students are enrolled in correspondence schools. Few, if any, are enrolled in school of the air programs. Only small numbers of Aboriginal students attend boarding schools in provincial centres or capital cities to obtain a secondary education. Where they do, it is generally because of a long-standing church/community relationship, or for attendance at a school operated by an Aboriginal organisation. The bussing of Aboriginal students to schools in nearby towns has seldom been found to be a satisfactory solution to school access. The inadequacy of these approaches for Aboriginal students can be traced to factors including the lifestyle of their communities, economic circumstances, and the inadequacy of the education available to their parents, on whom many of these educational options depend. It is important to recognise that the widely used alternative means of providing education for isolated non-Aboriginal students are not always suitable options for Aboriginal students living in remote towns and communities. This is particularly true of the content and nature of the educational programs provided, rather than the means by which they are made available (see Panel 33).

6.38 Among the non-government schools which provide for Aboriginal students is an important group of community-operated schools which have been established in recent years. The approach taken by the schools includes an emphasis on Aboriginal cultures, traditions and learning styles, but with a view to improved educational standards for students in order to achieve new opportunities in employment and in the wider Australian society. The existence of a number of these schools indicates a desire by Aboriginal communities to provide a religious basis for the education of their children which reflects their own experiences as young people in church mission settlements. These community-operated schools have significantly improved the attendance of Aboriginal children at school. The major regions in which they have been established are northern and central Western Australia, but there are also independent community schools in other States and the Northern Territory. These schools number at least 15, apart from associated homeland area schools. There is also a similar number of community schools operated by special arrangement with school systems, especially the Catholic education system in Western Australia.

Panel 33

Nature of Schooling for Aboriginal Students

Primary Education

Primary education should give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the opportunity to develop their academic potential. It should provide a basis for a broad education, and adequate academic and social preparation for future educational achievement, by developing a positive self-identity and by promoting our own cultural mores.

For primary schools to achieve these objectives, there are a number of important issues that must be considered. Educators in the primary sphere need to realise what the social and cultural aims of primary education are within their home school. They also need to understand the philosophical aims necessary for the students' growth. Because of the cultural differences of Aboriginal children, educators must understand the negative impact on Aboriginal students of their inflexibly enforcing rules, aims and standards.

Secondary Education

Secondary education provisions must be relevant to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and must ensure opportunities for achievement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society as well as in the general community. Secondary education must develop pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, continue understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society, encourage self-confidence and personal autonomy, and offer opportunities for competence and achievement in intellectual, academic and technical skills.

Authorities responsible for providing secondary education must encompass the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in secondary schools. For instance, the realistic aims of a rural community may not be met if the curriculum and approach taken are those chosen for a densely populated, inner city area. Cultures should be maintained and reinforced. Given the formal structure of secondary education it appears more difficult to accommodate cultural maintenance.

The principle of cultural maintenance should be included in school policy. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be involved in day-to-day school activities. Aboriginal society and issues should be promoted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers, teachers and parents who should visit the school frequently.

Secondary schools should encourage Aboriginal and Islander children and adults to succeed in personal development, academic advancement and technical skills. They should give Aboriginal students a sense of pride and identity, and an understanding and appreciation of the values of Aboriginal society.

(Source: NAEC, 1985, pp.13-15)

6.39 *School and community.* A major lesson to be learned from developments in schooling for Aboriginal students in recent years is the importance of the close involvement of Aboriginal communities in achieving improvements in education. Without community interest, support and regular participation in school activities, the full benefits of schooling are unlikely to eventuate for students. The first challenge to any school serving Aboriginal students must be to establish good working relationships between the school and the community. With strong support from an Aboriginal community, a school ethos can develop that will have positive effects on students' learning and, ultimately, their future. These relationships will be improved if the school is also interested in, and participates in, activities intended to advance the development of the community itself. Many Aboriginal parents only had access to a limited schooling as young people. Their own personal development, and the social and economic development of their community, can be contributed to significantly by support from the school for the continuing education of adults. This must, of course, include a respect for and a valuing of Aboriginal cultures and traditions.

6.40 There are other ways in which school and community relations can be strengthened. These include:

- the involvement of Aboriginal groups in school management, including participation in decisions about the ways in which school resources are allocated and decisions on access to resources available outside the school;
- the inclusion of Aboriginal parents and community members, and Aboriginal teaching and support staff, on school councils and committees; and
- ensuring that a school, by its decisions and activities, is accountable to all parents or groups represented in a community, including Aboriginal parents.

6.41 *Health issues.* The health needs of Aboriginal students have been referred to in many reports in recent years. The evidence, however, suggests that health needs continue to be an outstanding issue, despite recognition of the effects health factors have on these students. The major health needs of nutrition and conditions affecting hearing and vision, all require regular assessment and remedial or preventative action.

6.42 These health needs must be addressed by both the school and the community if the students are not to be disadvantaged in their schooling. This generally means that a high level of collaboration needs to be developed between schools, the communities and agencies such as community health centres and welfare services. The Aboriginal communities are crucial to the success of these efforts, which requires strong community leadership and active community involvement in health education programs. The emphasis in these programs needs to be on the relationship between good health and the achievement of personal, social and community goals. The place of preventative activities should be emphasised. It is noted that Feppi, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, recently organised a series of pilot health education workshops at Yuendumu, with assistance from education, health and community services personnel. The workshop covered hearing and visual problems, nutrition, and other health aspects, and parents were able to participate in the testing and screening of their own children for health problems.

Panel 34

Curriculum Relevance

Maintown is surrounded by a flood levee bank which is said to keep people in as much as keeping flood waters out. It does seem that Maintown High School has made progress on one of its aims, that of having students consider futures beyond the levee bank.

The establishment of a camp, 75 km from Maintown, is of particular significance for two reasons. It is an attempt to address some of the most difficult problems facing both the high school and the Maintown community. It is a vehicle for moving teaching out of the classroom and for integrating curriculum across traditional subject boundaries. Some key features of the camp are noted below.

The camp needs to be seen within the context of problems within the Maintown area in so far as these affect the high school. A substantial proportion of children are exposed to home conditions which include long-term unemployment, alcoholism, unstable and sometimes violent family relationships. For such children, supervision can be minimal. Educational aspiration for children is often low, as is the valuation of education itself. In such circumstances, a number of children are inevitably 'at risk' in areas such as drugs, health problems, and trouble with the law. Crises emerging from such background factors periodically erupt within the schools, particularly Maintown High School. Seemingly minor situations, such as change in routine or a flippant comment, can result in a student 'going off the air', sometimes violently. The initial objective of [the camp] was to provide a calm, non-threatening environment removed from both the source and trigger of such behaviour.

[The camp] is in a rural setting located on the fringe of an opal mining area, an area which includes Aboriginal sacred sites. Building of the camp commenced in mid-1986. The camp comprises five log cabins and a multi-purpose centre. The camp was the initiative of a high school teacher in conjunction with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

(Source: Baker, 1987)

6.43 Other examples of progress in this area include the development of education programs for drug and alcohol education for Aboriginal students, programs to treat inner-ear infections among school children, and community initiatives such as locally produced pamphlets providing information on health matters. However, some of the health needs in Aboriginal communities are of such magnitude that concerted community health programs, and active follow-up procedures to these activities and to the treatment provided, are essential to their success. There are many areas of rural Australia in which Aboriginal health services are not available, and where a school may be the only source of health support or the most appropriate base for the delivery of health services.

6.44 *The personal development of Aboriginal young people.* A number of influences on the personal development of Aboriginal students important to their schooling and personal futures should be noted. These include the development of a positive self-esteem and a strong identity as an Aborigine. Personal development in these areas depends on a sound school philosophy and practices to advance the development of students, as well as the expectations held by a school and community for each Aboriginal student. A positive view of the capacity of Aboriginal students to achieve in education, to reach high levels of academic performance, and to meet the standards required for future employment or future study is important. Benefits will come from the use of role models among Aboriginal people and the use of 'both ways education', which counteracts a devaluation of Aboriginal cultures. A further aspect which supports strong personal development in students is the adequacy of the career advice available in schools (Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs, 1985). An important outcome of schooling which has these features is a high level of social awareness and responsibility in students in relation to both their own community and the wider Australian society.

6.45 However, there are a number of negative influences on student development which need to be noted. One of these is the extent of poverty and social disadvantage which persists in Aboriginal communities, and its effects on successive generations of students. Aboriginal communities and families tend to rate lower than the general population on all economic indicators. These are clearly set out by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (1984) in its publication on social indicators. Aborigines experience very low levels of participation in employment, health and housing programs, and have low average incomes. The evidence for this is undisputed, as are the effects. Aboriginal students will continue to be disadvantaged personally, in education, and in their life chances as a result of the relative poverty of their families, until effective measures are taken to overcome the endemic circumstances described. Schools cannot of themselves overcome such circumstances, but there are ways in which they can help compensate for many of the conditions while not seeking to 'compensate' for students' Aboriginality. The relationship between the factors referred to above and the personal development of Aboriginal students cannot be over-emphasised (see Panel 34).

6.46 *Provision of a full education.* Earlier sections of this discussion have referred to gaps in provisions which place the goal of a full education beyond many Aboriginal children and young people. One of these gaps is a lack of provision in early childhood education. Early education is acknowledged as a critical provision for all children, but it has particular significance for children from disadvantaged circumstances. In a number of urban centres its importance has been recognised, and programs have been established by Aboriginal community associations. These culturally appropriate provisions have the advantage of not requiring young Aboriginal children to adapt to another culture's requirements in the areas of child and adult relationships, language acquisition, and conceptual and skills development, during this critical early education stage. Early childhood education also provides Aboriginal children with opportunities to relate to groups of adults and children, to acquire language, develop concepts and skills, and develop and maintain an interest in self-motivated learning (NAEC, 1985), all of which are important to their future educational success. The Commission proposes that Commonwealth education funds should be available to support this important early stage of education for these children. It is noted that in 1983 the Commonwealth Government agreed to a Commission proposal that funding

already being made available for the education of disabled school-age children should also be available for expenditure on services for disabled children from birth to school entry, because of the significance of developmental experiences in those early years to the futures of the children. Aboriginal children, in a similar way, are dependent on early education intervention programs that build on the skills and concepts already acquired by them for successful development in their school years. The Commission proposes that the eligibility of Aboriginal students to benefit from the various Commonwealth-funded programs for schools should be extended to Aboriginal children of pre-school age for the purpose of providing early education programs.

6.47 Secondary education provisions are clearly an important part of a full education for students. Earlier chapters of this report have discussed at length issues of access to secondary schooling, and the curriculum needs identified in this study. In paragraph 6.36 the question of access to education was discussed specifically in relation to Aboriginal students, and gaps in secondary school provision noted. The lack of access to secondary schooling referred to should be considered in the knowledge that the geographical nature and population distribution of Australia make it inappropriate to suggest that a full range of education provisions based on traditional delivery arrangements is possible for all children in remote areas, including Aboriginal children. However, at the same time it must be emphasised that secondary schooling can be provided by using alternative strategies for the delivery of programs (see Chapter 5). In addition, correspondence courses are available, but correspondence study is not currently always a relevant option for Aboriginal students (see paragraph 6.37) because of the nature of the materials used.

6.48 The Northern Territory Open College of TAFE has been established to develop and provide courses of a distance education nature for Aboriginal young people and adults in remote areas. This will be complemented by a series of Community Education Centres in remote Aboriginal communities. These centres are intended to provide the 'second stage' of education for community young people, and employment training for adults, by combining post-primary and technical and further education programs with the objective of integrating education and training arrangements in communities. Progress with the establishment of the new Community Education Centres will be of interest to other education authorities. It can be noted that the New South Wales government recently announced a combined secondary school and TAFE facility at Boggabilla with similar objectives. It is important in all of these developments that access to secondary school level education enables students to proceed to further education and training, should they so choose.

6.49 One key question concerning access to a full education remains, and it is relevant to many towns in rural Australia: that is, how to extend secondary education provisions beyond Year 10 to provide increased years of schooling for Aboriginal students? Elsewhere in this report reference was made to the important development of extending primary education to include the first one or two years of a general secondary education in a local rural primary school. Reference was also made to ways of adding Year 11, or Years 11 and 12, to the primary/lower secondary school programs which are currently a feature of many rural towns. These measures, while supporting small numbers of students, are of great importance to students who are dependent on increased years at school for their future employment and life chances, and for whom secondary or senior secondary study would not otherwise be available. This is especially true of Aboriginal students.

6.50 *Attendance and participation rates.* While some Aboriginal students have good attendance levels at school, many others, especially those living in disadvantaged circumstances, have low levels of school attendance. At times there are sound cultural reasons for non-attendance at school, but other factors also result in low attendance rates. These include parent attitudes to education resulting from their own lack of educational opportunities; parent and community views of education being inappropriate for Aboriginal students due to a lack of perceived curriculum relevance and cultural benefit; a lack of family expectation for students to attend and achieve at school; and lack of student motivation. Attendance patterns and ways to increase school attendance, are therefore major issues in some schools. As has already been indicated, however, efforts to improve attendance, and hence to provide increased schooling opportunities, must also address the many disadvantages experienced by large numbers of Aboriginal students. Irregular attendance also affects student participation rates.

6.51 Figures on ABSEC allowance recipients provided by CDEET indicate that the number of Aboriginal students attending secondary school has risen considerably over the period 1976 to 1986. As indicated in Table 22, the number of ABSEC allowance recipients in Year 10 increased from 2270 in 1976, to 4356 in 1986. Table 22 also shows that over the same period the number of ABSEC allowance recipients in Year 12 increased from 177 to 882. It is worth noting that much of the recent increase in Aboriginal enrolments in Year 12 occurred in Queensland (see Table 23).

6.52 There have also been substantial increases in the age participation rates of Aboriginal young people, as measured by the number of students of a given age in receipt of ABSEC allowances, as a proportion of the total number of Aborigines of that age in the population. Figures in Table 24 indicate that the age participation rate for 15 year-old Aborigines has increased from 48.0 per cent in 1976, to 56.0 per cent in 1981 and 65.7 per cent in 1986. While this indicates that there has been a substantial improvement in the school participation rate of Aboriginals in that age group, the 1986 rate is still well below the rate for all 15 year-olds in Australia. A similar pattern is found with regard to the age participation rates for 16 and 17 year-old Aboriginal students (see Table 24).

Table 22
Number of Aboriginal students in Years 8, 10 and 12
in Australia, selected years^a

Selected years	No. of students		
	Year 8	Year 10	Year 12
1976	4226	2270	177
1978	4578	2601	237
1980	4980	3011	325
1982	5182	3540	454
1984	5640	3970	656
1986	5860	4356	882

(a) Figures are based on the number of students in receipt of ABSEC allowances as at 30 June of each year

Source: Derived from data provided by CDEET

Table 23

Number of Aboriginal students in Years 8 and 12,
by State and Territory, selected years

	No. of students in Year 8		No. of students in Year 12	
State/ Territory	1977	1982	1981	1986
NSW	1206	1427	86	147
Vic	176	250	22	32
Qld	1391	1690	220	509
WA	763	997	45	86
SA	285	271	28	40
Tas	80	126	7	24
NT	358	407	9	40
ACT	2	14	4	4
Total	4261	5182	421	882

(a) Figures are based on the number of students in receipt of ABSEC allowances as at 30 June of each year

Source: Derived from data provided by CDEET

Table 24

Age participation rates for Aboriginal students and
for all students, Australia, selected years

Age	Aboriginal students ^a			All students
	1976 %	1981 %	1986 %	1986 %
15	48.0	56.0	65.7	90.1
16	17.6	26.6	40.5	67.0
17	5.0	7.9	18.3	39.6
18	0.8	1.6	5.1	7.2
19	0.2	0.4	0.8	1.2

(a) Figures are based on the number of Aboriginal students in receipt of ABSEC allowances as at 30 June of each year

Source: Derived from data provided by CDEET; CDE (1986c, p.25); CDEET (1987a, p.21)

The quality of teaching

6.53 *Teachers and teaching.* Teachers have an important role to play in the education of all students. To a large extent they control access to knowledge and the learning processes in classrooms. They also influence classroom interpersonal relationships on which much learning depends, and have a profound influence on the outcomes students gain from their schooling experiences. Teachers of Aboriginal students are of particular importance because of the cultural factors which influence Aboriginal students' schooling and particular learning needs.

6.54 The quality of teaching for Aboriginal students is dependent on a number of factors, including:

- understanding of and sensitivity to Aboriginal cultures among school staff;
- the appointment of Aboriginal staff members to schools;
- the quality of school leadership;
- an understanding of Aboriginal pedagogical issues by teachers;
- community involvement in school programs and the extension of the school program into communities; and
- ensuring the academic and cultural relevance of the school curriculum.

6.55 The level of understanding and sensitivity to cultural factors achieved by teachers needs special mention. Cultural understanding is one of the most important characteristics needed by teachers of Aboriginal students. While it is not important for them to have significant cultural knowledge, they need to understand cultural differences, the basic aspects of Aboriginal culture and their importance, and to be sensitive to the role these have for people with cultural backgrounds which are different from their own. Teacher sensitivity to Aboriginal culture is also important to community relationships. With the establishment of strong relationships between teachers and a community, the community will provide the cultural knowledge and information required for a culturally relevant and effective school program. Cultural differences must be valued by teachers, and must be seen to be valued. Only then will teachers have the full confidence of students and parents.

6.56 Schools become more culturally relevant to Aboriginal students, and more personally valued by them, when Aboriginal people are included among the school staff. Aboriginal teachers in Australia are few in number and it will be some time before sufficient numbers can be trained and placed in schools, even those with high Aboriginal student enrolments. But the appointment of Aboriginal people to teaching and other positions in schools brings considerable benefit to students and the Aboriginal community. It places value on Aboriginal cultures and traditions. It demonstrates the achievements of Aboriginal people. Their employment contributes to the economic circumstances of local communities. In addition to teaching and leadership positions, Aboriginal people can be appointed as teaching assistants or aides, home/school liaison officers, cultural officers and counsellors, and in other support positions available in schools. Employment in these support roles, however, should be accompanied by provisions for their own personal development and continuing education. These study programs should be linked wherever possible to credits for award courses or other recognised qualifications. Aboriginal people can also contribute significantly to the inservice development of non-Aboriginal teachers, particularly those working in schools enrolling Aboriginal students.

6.57 As was indicated in paragraph 6.30, the Northern Territory Education Department has adopted a policy of moving toward the Aboriginalisation of the teaching staff in community schools and, as a beginning, a 'mentor' system has been established at the Yirrkala school. Aboriginal staff have been appointed to senior positions assisted by non-Aboriginal advisers. While this may need to be a medium-term project, it is an important development. Moves to achieve at least partial Aboriginalisation of the teaching staff in all schools in Australia which have a considerable Aboriginal enrolment would be beneficial to Aboriginal students. It also needs to be recognised that the appointment of Aboriginal staff in schools more generally would be of benefit to all students in those schools.

6.58 School principals have a critical role in ensuring that meaningful education is available to Aboriginal students. In recognition of this, some school systems have instigated 'special fitness' appointments of principals to Aboriginal schools by ensuring that they have specific backgrounds and competencies for the position. It is important that Aboriginal communities be involved in these appointments and that they have an opportunity to meet with senior school staff before appointments are made. These are measures that would greatly assist the development of school/community relationships (see paragraphs 6.39 and 6.40).

6.59 All teachers, however, should achieve a measure of 'special fitness' for teaching Aboriginal students through the inclusion of Aboriginal studies in their pre-service teacher education programs. There are few schools in Australia where teachers teach in a mono-cultural setting. The multicultural nature of student groups and most communities means that teachers must be prepared to teach in a multicultural environment. In the case of schools where students from Aboriginal families are enrolled, the cultural differences are such that special preparation measures for teachers are required. Of particular assistance to teachers-in-training is the experience of teaching Aboriginal students as part of teacher preparation courses.

6.60 *Curriculum issues.* Earlier discussion in this report has repeatedly emphasised curriculum relevance and the importance of the community in the education of rural students. The point is again emphasised here in regard to Aboriginal students. 'Aboriginalisation' of the curriculum by recognising Aboriginal history, arts and contemporary issues is not sufficient in this sense. Non-Aboriginal students, as well as Aboriginal students, need to understand the important place of Aborigines and their cultures in Australian society, and value their contribution to Australian traditions and achievements before and following European settlement. Without an approach to schooling of this nature, Aboriginal students will not gain as fully as they might from their school experiences (eg. through enhanced self-esteem and a strong identity), and Aboriginal communities will not value schooling for their children and for their own futures.

6.61 Aboriginal students must, in effect, be bicultural to take their place in Australian society. This is a concept that needs to be more widely understood and accepted. A first step to a bicultural education in some remote schools has been the introduction of bilingual teaching programs, where students learn English as a second language. In many communities a bicultural education is important if Aboriginal students are to support the cultures and aspirations of their own communities, while also being able to compete and work in the wider society. Aborigines have demonstrated their capacity to compete academically and reach the highest levels of achievement in Australian society. This will be true of more Aboriginal young people if the school environment is receptive of their cultures and actively values their traditional and contemporary backgrounds.

6.62 A major step toward curriculum relevance for Aboriginal students has been the introduction of Aboriginal studies in schools. The implementation of these courses is enhanced when Aboriginal people are included among the school staff responsible for them, and when they contribute to the development of curriculum materials. These materials should recognise the wide range of traditions, lifestyles and circumstances of Aboriginal people across the nation. The development of local curriculum resources is important, as no part of the nation is devoid of Aboriginal traditions. Aboriginal people live in all parts of the continent. They can be an important resource for schools which, in turn, are well placed to support Aboriginal people in research projects to locate, record and analyse evidence of local Aboriginal history, traditions and achievements.

6.63 *Innovation.* Earlier paragraphs in this section have emphasised that the availability of a full secondary education for Aboriginal students remains a key issue in many parts of Australia. Primary-level schooling is the extent of the education available to many Aboriginal students, due to isolation and small numbers of students of secondary school age in remote communities. For many other Aboriginal young people, their opportunities for post-primary education will end at about 14 or 15 years of age (paragraph 6.36). The Commission believes that it will require special measures and innovative solutions to meet the educational needs of many of these students. During this study of rural schooling examples of such approaches were located, including the addition of one or two years of secondary school studies to existing primary school provisions in remote towns, providing additional years of schooling that would otherwise not be available to local students. In a number of locations nationally, post-primary studies have been added to the primary schools in Aboriginal communities to provide at least two additional years of academic studies, coupled with instruction in industrial and home arts. Recently this has been a particular project of the Education Department of Western Australia with assistance from the Commonwealth's Capital Grants Program for schools. Of particular importance to many of these communities are subjects in building, mechanics, bookkeeping and similar areas which help meet community needs and employment requirements. The addition of senior secondary studies to schools in townships with programs currently ending at Year 10 is another particular challenge. There are examples of innovative provisions of this type for non-Aboriginal students (see Chapter 5). Similar developments should be actively explored in towns with large numbers of Aboriginal students who do not have alternative access to Year 11 and 12 studies.

6.64 These innovative approaches should seek to utilise both 'establishment' resources (resources allocated to schools on the basis of enrolments and existing provisions) as well as local resources. Some communities in Western Australia and Queensland, for example, developed independent secondary programs where formal system provision was not made, using local resources. In the main, variations of long-established, urban education practices have been unsuccessful in areas with very small school populations, and new approaches based on student and community needs, and student abilities and aspirations, need to be developed.

6.65 One further priority deserves mention. In many States Aboriginal young people are an over-represented group in correctional facilities. This situation often results from underlying social conflicts and the high levels of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal communities. Concerted attempts should be made to rehabilitate these young people using education and training programs as a vehicle for their re-establishment in the community. This issue is not confined to rural Australia, but a high proportion of these youths are from the provincial and remote areas under consideration in this report.

...

6.66 This section on rural Aboriginal students has emphasised the need for them to be given special educational provisions. This is particularly necessary for secondary school students, and for those currently without any access to educational opportunities. It has also referred to important developments in Aboriginal education in recent years, including the introduction of ABSEC, increased numbers of Aboriginal teachers, improvements to school facilities, and the appointment of Aboriginal support staff. These measures continue to help meet the needs of Aboriginal students. Earlier discussion has also emphasised the need for improved induction of teachers to the task of teaching Aboriginal

students. This important measure could be achieved through a well-prepared inservice program for principals and teachers of Aboriginal students. A Commonwealth funded project for the preparation of such a program is therefore proposed. The inservice program would take the form of a series of booklets and other material supported by audio-visual resources. They would be developed as a project of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), linked to the Aboriginal Pedagogy Project currently being undertaken through that Centre. It will be necessary to recognise regional differences in student and teacher needs in preparing the program.

6.67 Recommendation 6: It is recommended that Commonwealth funding of \$0.2m per annum over two years be made available through the Curriculum Development Centre for the development and dissemination of a comprehensive inservice package for teachers and principals on effective practices in the schooling of Aboriginal students.

6.68 The CDC's role in the development and dissemination of this inservice package will be similar to its role in regard to the Rural Schools Curriculum Development priority area proposed in Recommendation 3. The CDC would coordinate and administer relevant activities, commission out developmental work and assist with the dissemination of the package.

6.69 The education of Aboriginal students continues to be a central issue in rural areas, and a concern of Aboriginal communities. Of all aspects of education, this is one for which the Commonwealth must take a substantial responsibility. A number of measures have the capacity to significantly improve educational outcomes for rural Aboriginal students. Some of these measures have been outlined in this report. Others have been taken up in more detail in previous Commission reports (eg. see CSC and NAEC, 1984). The Commission reasserts its support for a Commonwealth specific purpose program in Aboriginal education, with the funding capacity to address the restricted access of many Aboriginal young people to appropriate educational services.

The educational needs of rural girls

6.70 The Commission has recently placed considerable emphasis on the importance of recognising the educational needs of girls. Through discussions undertaken in developing a national policy for the education of girls and the preparation of the final report, **The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools** (CSC, 1987b), the need for schools to consider gender issues in schooling and the manner in which they will influence the life chances of girls as adults has been strongly stated. Little evidence exists on the educational implications of gender for girls and boys in rural schools. However, the Commission, in the above report, drew attention to adverse effects on rural girls' educational experiences arising from rigid social attitudes to the role of women in society generally, and practices limiting the participation of girls in education and work, and the expectations held in rural communities of girls' futures.

6.71 In the early paragraphs of this chapter, emphasis was placed on the particular circumstances of rural students and the manner in which they interact with student characteristics, requiring action. One of these characteristics is gender. Although rural circumstances of distance and isolation act on their own, they also interact with other circumstances and, through a compounding effect, become of greater importance. This was illustrated in paragraph 6.3 in the case of disabled and non-English speaking background students, where the circumstances that produce their particular educational needs were seen to interact with, and be

compounded by, rural isolation through a general lack of availability of specialist support and services. In **The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools**, this process was emphasised with regard to girls with special needs. The Commission also stated that:

Responses to specific forms of educational disadvantage which do not take into account the related and interactive effects of gender are unlikely to be fully effective. The Commission believes that special measures are needed to ensure that those programs designed to combat educational disadvantages relating to poverty, to cultural differences or to other factors such as geographical isolation or intellectual or physical disabilities, serve the needs of girls and boys equitably (CSC, 1987b, p.16).

6.72 This principle should apply generally in providing schooling for rural girls. Among the factors that affect the educational development of rural girls, particular attention needs to be given to subject choice and participation, the elimination of sexism in curricula and in school practices, the need to broaden options for girls through links between school, work and further study, and the need to address gender issues and the needs of rural girls in initiatives to provide a full secondary education for all rural students. It is emphasised that the objectives of the national policy for the education of girls were developed for implementation by all schools and systems in Australia. A particular challenge to rural schools and teachers is to address these objectives in a manner that is both relevant and sensitive to rural circumstances and rural students. These objectives are to raise awareness of the educational needs of girls; provide equal access to, and participation in, appropriate curriculum; provide a supportive school environment; and, ensure equitable resource allocation.

Summary

6.73 This chapter has considered a range of special needs of students in rural schools. Reference was made to students who are disadvantaged by disabilities, non-English speaking backgrounds and itinerancy. The urgent need to ascertain effective ways of providing support services to improve the education of these students in rural schools was highlighted. Most attention in the discussion was given to Aboriginal students, however, and information on recent developments in their education was followed by discussion of a number of limitations Aboriginal students experience in regard to access to appropriate schooling and/or the quality of teaching they receive. The Commission's view that Aboriginal students continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged in the nation, and that the introduction of a specific purpose program in Aboriginal education is urgently required to support their schooling, was reiterated.

Teachers and Rural Schooling

Introduction

7.1 Teachers in rural schools face special challenges and conditions not necessarily experienced by other teachers. These involve their living circumstances, their relationships within the communities, the professional tasks assigned to them in small schools, the level of professional support available to them, the financial implications of short-term or long-term service in remote schools, restricted access to their families and friends, and the educational and social needs of their own children. This chapter examines the specific nature of some of these challenges, and ways in which teachers might be assisted in effectively meeting them. It also considers ways in which schooling for rural students might be improved through addressing teacher-related issues.

7.2 One challenge often faced early in the rural school experience of teachers arises from the expectations that parents and communities have of them. The Commission has had an opportunity to examine these expectations. Ideally, from a community perspective, teachers should be enthusiastic about their task, well-educated and possess a range of teaching skills. As well, they should understand and be able to relate to rural communities and have a sufficiently broad grasp of their area of professional expertise to be able to integrate community interests and values and locally relevant materials into their teaching. Teachers should live in the local community rather than commute to it from a nearby centre, and they should participate in local organisations and contribute to community life. They should act as appropriate role models for young people in the local area and maintain appropriate standards of behaviour, both professionally and socially. Given that many teachers appointed to rural schools are young and relatively inexperienced, and will have grown up and undergone teacher education programs in an urban environment, it is not surprising that many find that meeting these expectations can be a difficult task.

7.3 The change in social lifestyle associated with taking up a rural appointment can also provide a major challenge. Teachers from urban backgrounds are generally accustomed to having access to a wide range of cultural and recreational facilities, to having had a fairly anonymous life in their neighbourhood, and to living in a well settled region with an equable climate. The transition to a climate that is particularly extreme and to a community initially perceived as small, isolated and perhaps unattractive can be very daunting. Few of the community facilities previously taken for granted may exist, and radio and television reception may be poor. Considerable personal resources will be required

to make an adequate adjustment to these and similar circumstances. Crowther, Diamond and Reichelt, in their case study report on Normanton-Karumba, point out that the high visibility of teachers in small communities means that 'Students are in a position to know very much more about their teacher than is comfortable for many teachers' (1987, p.10). They also record an instance of a young single female teacher who, on appointment to a remote town, found herself to be the only such person in the town and thus immediately became the centre of attention and comment. They point to the tendency for emotional tensions to build up amongst teachers in small towns who, on meeting for the first time, must live, work and socialise together for long periods of the year.

7.4 There are, of course, positive aspects about teaching in a rural school. Most teachers find that the community values their presence for the work they do for the children, and because teachers are an important community resource, in both social and economic terms. Teachers find that there is a general tolerance of those who are slow to 'adapt' to rural life, provided there is a perception of genuine endeavour on the part of a teacher. Many teachers come to appreciate rural life and its opportunities, and some spend the major part of their teaching career in rural areas. The majority become very involved in community activities and organisations, finding a high level of personal satisfaction in the local social and recreational life.

7.5 The economic contribution teachers make to a community is detailed in a paper by Harrold and Powell (1987) prepared for this study. They point out that teachers support local businesses and provide an income base for local retailers that is independent of the seasonal or economic conditions which may periodically adversely affect many rural industries (p.78). They also emphasise that:

Schools provide facilities and meeting places for non-government, voluntary groups and agencies and are used as a means of communicating with families about local events and projects. School personnel sometimes initiate development activities themselves, by organising meetings with outside experts or sponsoring seminars to discuss issues of local concern. School teachers often assist local development activities directly by participating in and sometimes assuming leadership roles. Teachers also support development indirectly when they reinforce local norms and attitudes in their classroom teaching (1987, p.77).

In these circumstances rural school teachers become an important part of the communities they live and work in, and contribute to the general well being of a community.

7.6 There are important professional implications for teachers working in rural schools. Some of these arise from the demands made on teachers by the teaching and other tasks likely to be required of them in a rural school, and the extent to which professional support is available. All of these personal and professional matters influence the length of time teachers stay in a rural school, and thus the continuity students find in their curriculum and learning experiences (Panels 35 and 36). A successful adjustment by a teacher to a rural appointment clearly rests on a number of interdependent factors. These factors include their preparation for rural teaching prior to appointment, their recruitment and induction into rural living and teaching, the level of support available to them in rural schools, and prospects of a future transfer to a preferred location.

Panel 35

Challenges to Teachers

Because of small class numbers and the problems of getting access to classmates outside of school hours, country scholars probably need rather more intellectual support than does the average student. There is no doubt of the good job that is being done by our rural schools and, by our teachers, but there is also no doubt that this is being done despite difficulties. There is the problem of providing a full range of subject choices; shortage of resources; difficulty for school managers in appointing only qualified, experienced teachers to every position; problems of competition, extension, and stimulation; what best to do for isolated high achievers; the need to change the content of the curriculum so as to better reflect the experiences and understandings of rural pupils; teachers having to teach multi-level classes and multi-class classrooms and the need to design and provide a system of professional support for rural educators. If you grow up on a farm or in a little country town then your parents will find it difficult to provide a rich intellectual environment and an adequate supply of role models and sufficient examples.

(Source: Submission from J McFaul)

...

The town of Normanton itself and its public and business life is dominated by whites. At the school in Normanton there is little music, sport or visits from artists available to students. An Aboriginal community school syllabus is used which means that there is mainstream disadvantage to Aboriginal students even though curriculum is more accessible and appropriate. As a consequence of this curriculum, most white students leave the school at Year 7. Staff turnover is high with new teachers often having no subject head due to school size. This compounds with their inexperience to make their teaching very stressful. Lack of availability of inservice courses associated with new syllabi is another problem.

Most of the continuity at the school is derived from the Parents and Citizens Association rather than the teachers, because of the high teacher turnover. While Aboriginal parents are not involved to the extent of white parents, some Aboriginal parents do hold senior positions on the P & C.

(Source: Developed from Crowther, Diamond and Reichelt, 1987)

Preparation for rural teaching

7.7 A particularly strong view which emerged in the visits and consultations undertaken for this study is that teachers appointed to positions in rural schools are not adequately prepared for rural teaching. This view was usually expressed in recognition of the importance of the teacher to students learning. The same view has been expressed recently by teachers (eg. Watson, Hatton, Grundy and Squires, 1986; Lake, 1986) and education authorities (eg. Education Commission of New South Wales, 1983). Teachers feel, or are, ill-equipped to face the realities of living and working in rural and remote areas.

Course content

7.8 Adjustment to rural teaching can be facilitated through improved pre-service teacher preparation, but teacher training institutions have generally failed to acknowledge the need for special preparation of teachers for rural appointments, at least in recent years. Information on relevant practices in teacher education institutions in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory is set out below. Teachers in these States can be expected to be appointed to geographically diverse and isolated non-urban communities at some stage of their career, as well as to provincial cities and towns, yet their pre-service training does not specifically prepare them for this.

7.9 A sample of New South Wales teacher education students at three metropolitan and three rural institutions was recently surveyed by Watson et al (1986) during the final weeks of their training. A total of 884 students participated in the survey; 408 were completing primary teacher qualifications and 476 were completing secondary teacher training. Of the primary teaching students, only 12 per cent reported that they had undertaken any course components specifically preparing them for rural teaching. Of the secondary teaching students only seven per cent reported undertaking such a component. Amongst those who had completed a relevant unit of study, only a minority (12 primary and 13 secondary teaching students) reported that it had been a compulsory unit. The survey report did not provide any details about the specific content of courses, and disguised differences between institutions, but about half the secondary teaching students and slightly fewer of the primary teaching students reported that they either felt 'ill-equipped' or 'poorly equipped' to teach in country towns or isolated rural areas after graduation. The teachers in training tended to be placed in schools within the region in which their training institution was located for their practice teaching assignments. In metropolitan institutions, where 90 per cent of secondary teachers are trained in New South Wales, very few students reported any practice teaching experience in rural areas.

7.10 Final year teacher education students at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education (WACAE) can elect to do one unit in rural teaching from four available during their course. About 25 per cent of them undertake such a unit. It should be noted that the policy of the Education Department in that State, as with most States, is that all teachers should serve a number of years in a rural or remote appointment at some stage of their career. Because of the size and population dispersion of the State there are few major provincial cities, but many small rural communities and it is quite likely, therefore, that graduating teachers will be offered a rural appointment. It should be noted, however, that teacher education students at WACAE who do not enrol in an elective rural education unit are required to undertake an eight-hour module on rural teaching in the final semester of course work. Opportunities exist for practice teaching in rural schools. In their second year of study all teacher education students complete two weeks of practice teaching, and a high proportion do so in rural areas. In their third year, all students undertake a twelve-week block of practice teaching, and students who live in rural areas generally do this close to their homes. Those students, however, are the minority of students undertaking teacher preparation. The Claremont campus of WACAE, in collaboration with the CAP State committee has a pilot scheme operating in 1987 whereby a group of eight urban-based students is being supported to do a 12-week block of practice teaching in more distant rural schools.

7.11 The University of Western Australia and the Curtin University of Technology have no specific subjects or units in rural education in their teacher education courses, although the former institution expects that in 1988 a relevant unit being developed for its B Ed course will be available to B Ed and Dip Ed students. Both institutions report that no students are placed in rural schools for practice teaching, principally because of the additional costs involved. Murdoch University does not offer any courses in rural education for teachers in training (Lake, 1986).

7.12 An approach taken in the Northern Territory offers a contrast to that taken in New South Wales and Western Australia. The undergraduate teacher education course at the Darwin Institute of Technology (DIT) prepares students to teach the core curriculum designated for Northern Territory schools, and seeks to equip all graduates to teach in the range of schools in the Territory, including remote community schools. The course focuses on teaching in cross-cultural settings, and specific preparation for rural teaching is provided. In addition, final year students can choose to undertake a major teaching practice period in an Aboriginal community school. If the option is taken, students complete a compulsory unit to prepare them for that element of the course. Some 35 per cent of DIT students undertake teaching practice in community schools. Graduate students of the Institute preparing for primary-level teaching are also required to undertake a major teaching practice session in Aboriginal community schools. Recently the Commonwealth Government, through its Scheme for Placement of Teachers in Aboriginal Schools, has supported teachers in their final year of teacher education in South Australia and other States to do a block teaching practice session in a Northern Territory community school. Of the six teachers who participated in 1986, four returned in 1987 to take up full-time teaching appointments in these communities. In 1987, there are 18 teachers in training undertaking teaching practice in the Northern Territory during their final year's training, under the Scheme.

7.13 Further information on teacher preparation for rural teaching is available from a study by the Queensland Board of Teacher Education (1983) which looked specifically at the preparation of teachers to teach in rural and isolated areas of that State. The study report indicates that tertiary institutions recognise geographic isolation as an important characteristic of many teaching locations, but few offered subjects or study units concerned with teaching in isolated areas or with the needs of rural or isolated students. Rather, they reported dealing with these aspects within other subjects. Of the eight institutions surveyed, one required students to undertake school experience in a multi-grade situation typical of small rural schools, and six provided students with the opportunity to gain experience in country schools or in multi-grade teaching. Three of the institutions reported that they offered other ways for teachers in training to gain information on teaching in isolated schools. It is noteworthy that 29 per cent of Queensland final year teacher education students in 1982 were reported to have lived the majority of their lives in towns and settlements with fewer than 10 000 residents, representing 25 per cent and 40 per cent of teacher education students in metropolitan and non-metropolitan institutions respectively.

Panel 36

Teacher Development Needs

The larger of the State schools, Smithton High and Smithton Primary, and the independent Roman Catholic School, St Peter Chanel, have a core of experienced teachers who live in the area and have taught for ten years or more either at the one school or in the other schools in Circular Head. Smithton Primary School, for example, has 12 teachers with over ten years experience who have worked in the school for more than six years. There are seven, however, who are in their first year at Smithton Primary School.

The smaller rural schools have difficulty attracting and keeping teachers owing to the problems associated with living and working in a small, isolated community. Forest Primary School has a staff of seven, three in their first year and four in their second year at that school. Edith Creek has five teachers new to the school and one in their second year. Teacher turnover, especially of young, inexperienced teachers, is therefore a major problem in most of the schools.

The age range in a single class can cover as many as four years. The primary schools at Stanley, Redpa, Edith Creek and Circular Head have only composite classes. Forest and Smithton Primary have some composite and some full year classes. St Peter Chanel School is the only primary school with no composite classes.

Access to staff development is restricted by the distances involved in travelling to seminars. Attendance at a one hour seminar in Burnie involves paying a relief teacher for a whole day to provide cover for the staff member. Small schools find the cost prohibitive to allow one or more teachers to avail themselves fully of staff development opportunities;

(Source: Tasmanian Department of Education, 1987)

7.14 The content of teacher education courses that will adequately prepare teachers for rural school appointments is a matter needing considerable discussion and early action by training institutions. The Commission considers that content elements in pre-service training might include: rural culture and social conditions; Aboriginal culture and the multicultural nature of rural society; knowledge about the natural conditions of rural and especially remote areas, including climatic conditions; the nature of small town life; mechanisms for adapting to local resources and limited services; and multi-grade teaching approaches, as well as the provision of teaching practice in rural and remote areas. To help achieve a new approach to this matter, teacher education institutions might consider the development of regional and community links to provide a source of advice and information, and to enable fully collaborative activities to be planned and implemented with school authorities and communities. Institutions might also consider providing inservice teacher education courses and upgrading opportunities in cooperation with school systems and education region personnel, as an extension of the specific content developed for pre-service courses. It may be necessary for some of the content proposed for pre-service teacher education programs to be presented in inservice courses.

7.15 Other suggestions for improvements to teacher preparation arising from this study of rural schooling include the following:

- greater attention to the inclusion of a rural perspective in course units wherever possible and appropriate. This does not refer to units especially directed to providing rural teaching content in courses, but to the inclusion and recognition of a rural culture (together with other cultural positions) and rural views on schooling in a range of course units;
- the need to increase the familiarity of prospective teachers with communication technologies and their use in meeting the special needs of students in rural and remote schools; and
- an increased focus on the community development role of the school in pre-service teacher education and the encouragement of positive attitudes towards school-community cooperation.

A rural teaching perspective

7.16 While the information provided in paragraphs 7.8 to 7.13 lends support for the position that little emphasis is placed on the preparation of teachers for work in rural schools in most Australian teacher education courses, it does not adequately clarify all aspects of the students' training experiences. More needs to be known about the actual content of course units relating to rural teaching, and about the ways in which the prospect of rural service is presented by staff in teacher training institutions. A study by Watson et al (1986) reported that when teacher education students were asked about their sources of information on conditions of employment in rural areas, they revealed that friends and relatives who had been teachers, and teachers currently employed, were their most important sources (p.44). These rated well ahead of representatives of the employing authorities or staff of training institutions. However, it is noted that some regional education authorities in the States do have comprehensive and effective programs to attract teachers in training to undertake practice periods in rural areas, or to encourage them to seek appointments in rural schools. These regions include the North-West and Western Education Regions of New South Wales.

7.17 The Commission believes that there is considerably more that teacher training institutions could do to encourage their students to consider teaching in rural areas, especially those students who show a predisposition towards an appointment to remote schools. Given that graduating teachers have been shown to express greater willingness to teach in areas with which they have some familiarity (Watson et al, 1986, pp.21-26), a strong case can be put for training institutions to ensure that teacher education students are able to study aspects of rural schooling and gain experience of rural living and rural teaching conditions. This should have the effect of increasing the available 'pool' of teachers available for rural teaching and increasing the number of teachers who are successful in rural appointments.

Off-campus teacher preparation

7.18 The introduction of arrangements for mature age students to enrol in pre-service teacher education courses offered away from the main campus of a training institution has been noted by the Commission. For example, the Remote Area Teacher Education scheme (RATE), operated through Batchelor College in the Northern Territory provides residents of Aboriginal communities the opportunity to obtain teacher qualifications without the need to move to a teacher education institution for the full period of their training. The cultural benefits of this approach are especially important for traditionally-living Aboriginal people. These arrangements allow Aboriginal teaching assistants to study at least the equivalent of the first year of a Diploma of Teaching within their own community, by attaching a training unit to the community school. A similar arrangement by the South Australian College of Advanced Education is made for Aborigines resident in the central desert area of Australia. An extension of this provision for traditionally-living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in western, central and northern Australia was recently recommended by the CTEC/CSC Joint Committee on Teacher Education (1986), and was proposed by CTEC for implementation (CTEC, 1987) through the Commonwealth's tertiary education funding arrangements (see also Panel 37).

7.19 The second off-campus model also has considerable merit and could be widely applied to rural areas. It has been demonstrated in a number of towns in the Kimberley region of Western Australia through programs of the Mt Lawley campus of the WCAE and Signadou College, ACT. In these programs, mature age Aborigines undertake a full teacher education program in their local town, working as a group of six to eight students with tutorial support. The respective college provides a staff member to organise the local course and provides some of the subjects within the course, the facilities, and the course materials, and provides for visits by college lecturers to the student group and periodic student visits to the institution. Teaching practice is undertaken in local rural schools. The students have the opportunity to gain a qualification without leaving their homes and travelling long distances for college study, an opportunity which would not otherwise be available to them.

7.20 This off-campus model of teacher training, now utilised in Australia in a limited way, should be considered as a means to increase the number of 'local' staff in rural schools by training residents of rural towns as teachers. The Commission envisages that these off-campus programs would be rotated among rural cities and towns in which from six to ten mature age residents wish to train or re-train as teachers. Each program would operate for some four years before moving to another location. It would be supported by an on-site tutor who would teach some subjects and supervise other subjects using distance education materials compiled for the purpose, and by periodic visits to the responsible tertiary education institution by the students and to the students by college staff. The students would receive the award of Dip T of the institution operating the program on successful completion of the course, but would not be guaranteed employment in a local school. The approach also has the advantage of providing a tertiary education program for short periods in towns which are some distance from tertiary education facilities, and therefore can be seen as an equity provision for rural residents. It is not envisaged that the approach would become a 'mainstream' model for the preparation of teachers, but rather a special provision for mature age rural residents. It could be expected that rural women in particular would benefit from the program.

7.21 The Commission proposes that this model of teacher education should be examined for introduction into rural towns. In summary, its advantages include the following:

- it provides an opportunity for local rural residents to qualify as teachers;
- it provides for an increase in the number of rural teachers who are established local residents, which in time will help alleviate staffing difficulties;
- it enables students to relate to teachers who are long-term local residents as well as those who are appointed from elsewhere in a school system; and
- it provides a tutor-based tertiary education program in successive rural towns.

7.22 **Recommendation 7:** It is recommended that the Commonwealth encourage the development of and provide financial support for off-campus teacher education programs for mature age students in rural towns, designed to help increase the proportion of teachers in rural schools who are long-term rural residents.

Recruitment of teachers for rural schools

7.23 Teacher preparation is only one approach to seeking increased continuity of teaching in rural areas. Notwithstanding the actions proposed in previous sections of this chapter for teacher education institutions, the Commission recognises that some teachers are more willing than others to consider appointments to rural and remote schools. For this reason it is important that schools and school systems, as employers, look to their recruitment policies and practices to see if they can improve the procedures used to fill vacant positions with teachers who are adequately equipped for and favourably disposed towards rural teaching (Panel 38).

Panel 37

Professional Development of Aboriginal Teachers

D-BATE, the Deakin-Bachelor Teacher Education Program, is designed for Aboriginal teachers from community primary and post-primary schools to up-grade their qualifications from an Associate Diploma of Batchelor College to a Bachelor of Arts in Education of Deakin University. School assignments are undertaken in their communities and at Batchelor College. Ten teachers are involved in 1987. The project supports Northern Territory policy to transfer control of schools in Aboriginal communities to Aboriginal people.

The D-BATE Program, with its strong community orientation, is designed to raise the level of students' own educational achievement and to help Aboriginal teachers improve their teaching of Western components of the curriculum. But its fundamental aim is to help Aboriginal communities to develop ways of expressing their culture within the curriculum of the school. The basic commitment of the D-BATE Program is to explore in practice with Aboriginal teachers the idea of 'both ways education' ... a guiding theme of the D-BATE Program.

Aspects of both ways education include practical ideas in teaching students kinship systems and how these affect the way in which community life is conducted, taking students on field trips to learn bush skills and associated language, and comparing the roles of symbols and icons in Western art with Aboriginal ceremonial life. At another level, problems include the ways in which the logics accessible through English language differ from the logics accessible through Aboriginal language. This problem surfaces (from a Western perspective) in the practical task of Aboriginal language extension to make Western mathematics more accessible to Aboriginal first language speakers. Appropriate forms of bilingual education are being explored, especially in communities where the number of speakers of an Aboriginal language is insufficient to inspire a commitment to funding a fully-fledged bilingual program. Students have also begun exploring and helping to develop the distinctive character of Aboriginal social and organisational relationships between school and community.

(Source: Developed from information provided by R McTaggart, Deakin University)

7.24 Special nationwide registers of teachers with an interest in taking up appointments in rural areas have frequently been suggested to help with recruitment. This would enable appointments to be made directly from a pool of teachers likely to accept and be successful in positions in rural and remote schools. This approach was introduced by the Commonwealth in 1986 to help staff schools in Aboriginal communities. The Scheme for Placement of Teachers in Aboriginal Schools is currently supporting teacher appointments to schools which largely enrol Aboriginal students in Western Australia and South Australia. Teachers from all States and Territories have the opportunity to register their interest in teaching in these schools.

7.25 Some education systems and regional administrations have also taken initiatives in an effort to improve the placement of teachers in vacancies in rural schools. For example, a scheme to attract students to rural areas for practice teaching and appointment after graduation is operated by the North-West Education Region of New South Wales, in collaboration with regional teacher education institutions in Armidale. The scheme involves close cooperation between school authorities, training institutions, schools and local communities. It is strongly supported by school authorities because of its important contribution to teacher recruitment in rural regions.

7.26 Another scheme was recently introduced in New South Wales to assist in making appointments to the senior staff of identified Aboriginal schools (see paragraph 6.57). Procedures followed are intended to determine the 'special fitness' of teachers for leadership positions in schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students. A scheme recently adopted in Western Australia provides for Aboriginal educators to be members of committees which recommend teachers to be appointed to schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments. In addition, a number of States are moving toward increased school-level responsibility for the appointment of teachers in recognition of the need to recruit teachers who complement the existing staff profiles of schools and in order better to meet student needs. Although this is a radical departure from the more usual staff recruitment and appointment approaches in Australian school systems, the increased involvement of local school staff and community is seen by the Commission to be a useful means of improving staffing resources in rural schools.

7.27 The Commission therefore supports recruitment procedures which allow for inputs of information from a school and its community about school staffing needs, including the skills, backgrounds and other characteristics of new appointees that would best fit into or complement the existing staff profile. The arrangements proposed for government schools in Western Australia can be noted here. Responsibility for decisions about staffing needs and recruitment procedures will be shared between the central administration, which sets the overall staffing establishment, and the school's management committee which controls allocations within the school of staff workloads and the range of duties for each staff member, thus shaping a school staff profile to meet the identified needs and priorities of the school. There are examples of similar procedures in other States, for example, Victoria. The overall effect of the practices includes assisting prospective teachers to feel as if they have been selected for an appointment because of particular personal and or professional qualities, rather than having been selected in an impersonal way, possibly as a result of seemingly unplanned staff allocation or rotation.

7.28 In remote areas of Australia, teachers often have an opportunity to compare and contrast among themselves the methods by which they were recruited, and compare the conditions and support they receive from employers and communities with that of people employed in other government agencies, private organisations or industries in the same area. The small staff numbers in most rural schools, and the closeness with which they work in those schools and in the community, assists this form of comparison. If the results of the comparisons are unfavourable, they can easily lead teachers to feel they are not highly valued or respected. This can have serious implications for their work, especially if other difficulties also are being experienced in adjusting to a new community or school. School systems, as employers, may find that the procedures and practices used by other employers for the recruitment and support of staff could be beneficially applied to the staffing of rural schools.

7.29 Considerable improvements in the capacity of rural schools to attract and hold staff could follow the participation of local community members in staffing plans. The Commission has been made aware of examples of local communities contributing to staff recruitment. These examples include community assistance for teachers undertaking pre-service teaching practice in rural schools with a view to their returning to take up a full-time appointment. Some school authorities, in cooperation with local community representatives, also prepare material that gives accurate information on employment and living conditions in particular rural areas for presentation to prospective teachers. Local community organisations also make themselves available for discussions with teachers deciding whether to accept a rural appointment.

Support for teachers in rural areas

7.30 The amount of support available to teachers who take up a provincial or remote area appointment is a matter which merits close attention. The amount of teacher support has particular relevance to the length of time teachers serve in rural schools. While some of the factors influencing rapid teacher turnover can be dealt with by changes in pre-service teacher preparation and recruitment procedures, many teachers also report a need for improvements in the range and nature of support provided after their appointment to a rural school.

7.31 School systems, as employing authorities, at times provide financial and other incentives to teachers in provincial and remote areas, as part of their conditions of service. This assistance may include a locality allowance, additional vacation time, assistance with vacation travel costs, assistance with housing, more generous accrual of leave and transfer entitlements, and the provision of airconditioning in school buildings and teachers' residences in areas where the climate is extreme. These measures are appreciated by teachers, but the Commission believes that other forms of support are needed in order to attract more teachers to rural areas, or to induce them to stay in these areas for longer periods of time. To achieve these ends it is necessary to ensure that teachers feel adequately prepared, appropriately placed in their position, and have adequate professional and social support. They also value personal support as they seek to establish themselves in an unfamiliar environment.

Panel 38

Teacher Appointment and Promotion

General opinion is that the processes of recruitment of teachers to the East Arnhem Region have improved considerably in recent years. Nevertheless several reports were given of the experiences of teachers who had obviously been misinformed. For example, a teacher appointed to a remote school on Groote Eylandt was informed he would not need a motor vehicle and that a push bike would suffice. The school was Umbakumba which is 50 km from a 'major' centre. Regional representation in recruitment is an obvious answer; and information compiled by local people should be used.

There was general agreement among teachers and regional office staff that the recruitment processes would be improved by using recruiting officers who know the Northern Territory (or preferably the individual education regions) in terms of history, social organisation, economics and industries, cultural life, and education. It is claimed that too many involved in recruitment have general ideas about life in particular places, but not enough of the fundamental aspects of living and teaching in particular communities and towns.

...

There is within the East Arnhem Region (as in the Barkly Region) a real stigma associated with teaching in Aboriginal schools and being labelled a 'black' teacher. For the promotion of teachers within the service it is considered important for them to return to white schools periodically and progressively back into urban white schools.

There are those who are highly critical of the fact that promotion is difficult within schools identified as Aboriginal. The argument of those who feel a strong and long-term commitment to Aboriginal education in community schools and outstation schools is that there should be provision for promotion (long-term) on the basis of this service. Their basic argument is that the teaching is different and while of less academic challenge, is of no less (probably much higher) professional and intellectual demand.

(Source: Crowther, 1987)

Inservice education for teachers

7.32 A particularly important part of teacher support concerns professional growth. Teachers in rural schools need inservice activities which provide professional development and continuing familiarity with changes in administrative and curricular matters. These teachers, especially those who are appointed to remote schools, frequently find that participation in inservice education programs or the pursuit of higher educational qualifications, assumes some urgency in that they are helped to meet the teaching demands of rural appointments, or because of the extra opportunities to set aside study time in remote locations. Studying under these conditions, however, is not always easy.

Feelings of professional isolation in remote schools can be compounded by long distances to travel to attend inservice education courses, and by the fact that in small schools the number of colleagues a teacher has is limited, and access to staff in other schools is generally more restricted than in urban areas. Unless ways are found to ameliorate the difficulties arising from these circumstances, feelings of professional isolation are likely to flow through to attitudes and behaviours that could substantially influence the effectiveness of teachers.

7.33 One factor which particularly affects the availability of teachers in rural areas for participation in inservice education activities is the appointment of relief or replacement staff. Many schools in small towns report that it is often not possible to find staff for short-term or casual appointments to replace those who are away on inservice activities. Even where a replacement teacher is available, the funding allocated may be inadequate to cover the days a teacher attends a course as well as the time required for the teacher to travel to and from the course venue. With these difficulties in mind, it is important that the particular needs of remote schools are recognised when provision for inservice professional development is being considered. Some employing authorities maintain a pool of designated relief teachers, or available staff who can provide casual relief for teachers absent from their schools for professional development activities. This practice is supported by the Commission.

7.34 Attempts by school systems in recent years to contain the costs of State-wide or regional programs of professional development have led to some useful attitudinal and organisational changes. These have resulted in a greater role for in-school programs, despite limited funds for consultancy and specialist support. These programs build on the skills available among school personnel, and unlock the capacity of a staff group to define their own needs and find creative solutions to local educational problems. Given appropriate leadership, groups working in this way can achieve outcomes that are both personally satisfying for the participants, and likely to lead to long-term changes in the extent to which schools can help meet their needs for professional support. The Commission has elsewhere emphasised ways by which schools can achieve effective school-based inservice education (CTEC and CSC, 1986). Where teachers work in isolated or remote areas this approach can be supported by the formation of semi-formal 'clusters' of schools which are part of a given geographical area. School cluster arrangements operating as part of the Rural Education Project in western New South Wales provide one example of how this approach can be applied. There are, however, difficulties in using this approach in remote areas where the distance between schools makes regular staff contact impractical (see also Panel 45 in Chapter 8).

7.35 Undertaking further education provides another avenue by which teachers can engage in professional development. School systems, technical and further education colleges, and other tertiary institutions in all States offer a range of study programs in which teachers can participate on a part-time or correspondence basis. These programs meet a significant need of teachers in rural areas. However, teachers who participate in them may require support, especially where geographic and professional isolation make their participation difficult. Distance education measures can be employed to overcome some of these circumstances, including the use of communication technologies which can provide telephone tutorials, electronic transmission of written material to overcome postal delays, and computer interfacing, as well as the loan or exchange of audio-visual materials and video cassettes. A wider use of communication technologies to provide teacher inservice education and professional support is

recommended in Chapter 8 (see also Panel 39). In some cases these activities can be supported by the employment of itinerant tutors who visit students in their local areas, or by the operation of learning centres or sub-campuses by tertiary institutions in regional centres. A number of tertiary institutions operate university or college centres providing support facilities for students in major provincial towns. There also are education or teachers' centres in rural towns, many of which have been supported financially through the Commonwealth's Education Centres Program.

7.36 Other forms of support for the professional development of teachers may, however, be appropriate in some circumstances. Teachers who have completed significant periods of service in isolated or remote areas could be given professional development leave to enable them to undertake specific projects away from their school, or to accelerate their progress towards higher professional qualifications. This could be in addition to opportunities for special leave and subsidised travel for rural teachers to visit a larger centre where specialised resources or equipment are available. Watson et al (1986, p.60), in their study of the attitudes of prospective teachers to country service, found that the provision of additional inservice education opportunities and of study leave were two among a very few proposals perceived as likely to encourage a willingness in teachers to accept 'inland' appointments.

7.37 Evidence provided to the Commission during this study suggests that inservice education support for teachers in rural schools requires a range of approaches which should include a regional as well as system inservice education plan which specifies the support to be provided for rural teachers; a range of regional activities including school-level support; and systematic efforts to provide curriculum assistance and support activities for new teachers to rural schools, and for those teachers teaching outside their specialist subject areas. A proposal to help put initiatives such as these into effect is detailed in Chapter 9, paragraphs 9.82 to 9.85. Linking school-level inservice education activities to those provided by tertiary institutions would be another important approach. The objective of all these activities should be to increase the professional support available to teachers, and the length of time teachers stay in rural appointments, and hence the quality of the education received by rural students.

Panel 39

Teacher Development using Technologies

A program, Remote and Isolated Schools Teleconference Study (RISTS), was established in 1986 by the Tablelands Education Centre at Atherton, Queensland, to serve remote schools in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It provides teacher development activities to schools by teleconference, offering 90 minute sessions on a number of inservice topics in its first year. The technique ensures teacher participation by forwarding pre-reading material to the participants. Tasks for each participant are built-in to ensure interaction. All resource persons for the sessions provided have easily adapted to this mode of presentation.

The project has found that distance inservice education (DIE) is not automatically successful because electronic equipment is used. Without an understanding of teachers' likely response to change proposals, and knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of various types of electronic communication, the activity is likely to fail.

(Source: Developed from information provided by the Tablelands Education Centre)

7.38 Reference was made to the place of inservice provisions in assisting teachers to keep abreast of curriculum developments, and in improving teachers' presentation of the curriculum in schools. It could be argued that this is the main purpose of teacher development, even though there clearly are personal and professional benefits to teachers as well. The curriculum ultimately is the medium through which students learn, acquire knowledge and skills, and develop their own capacities for further study and employment in adult life. Because of the clear relationship between teachers and curriculum presentation it must be acknowledged that the continuity of teachers in rural schools and curriculum presentation are inextricably linked. Dislocations to students' learning will inevitably occur when teachers are absent, or relocate to other schools at frequent intervals.

Induction of teachers

7.39 One critical area for action arising from this study is the implementation of comprehensive induction procedures for new staff members. While teacher induction is mainly a school responsibility, in some schools local community members have assisted in the preparation and presentation of orientation courses for teachers taking up appointments in rural areas. The objectives of these courses are to increase teachers' familiarity with the social and cultural characteristics of local communities; to provide mechanisms by which teachers can be involved in the social and cultural life of communities; and to increase teachers' sense of belonging to a community, as well as a team contributing to the maintenance and development of a community. This community role is important in rural areas, because in many provincial and remote schools the smallness of the staff, and the likelihood that a high proportion of them could start at the school at the same time, limits the capacity of the school to be fully effective in the task of teacher induction. There is also a good case in

these circumstances for more specific support from employing authorities. Orientation and induction, however, should be contributed to by all groups associated with a school. Many education regions provide for new teachers to spend a period of time in a local teachers' centre or other location where an intensive program of induction is offered. In the Northern Territory, teachers appointed to remote or isolated schools return to an education centre for an intensive induction and orientation program after they have spent six weeks in the school to which they are appointed, and have gained some experience of the conditions and tasks associated with their appointment.

7.40 However, teachers need to be aware prior to arrival at a school of the local conditions in which they will live and work. These include the nature and adequacy of the accommodation available for them, and the distance they will live from large population centres and the availability of medical, dental, banking and other services. Information on local and nearby towns, and social and recreational opportunities is important for personal reasons. A full statement on the school to which a teacher is appointed, the teaching responsibilities to be undertaken, and the resources available at the school are important for professional preparation and performance on arrival.

7.41 Ultimately, however, a large measure of responsibility rests with the school principal to ensure that induction activities meet the particular needs of each teacher. In turn, there must be adequate support for principals, especially in schools where it is common for a number of inexperienced or beginning teachers to arrive at the school at the same time, or where the principal is also a new arrival. This is a direct responsibility of regional authorities.

Housing provisions

7.42 In isolated and remote areas, teachers' living conditions are as important as the teaching conditions in schools. Adequate teacher housing is generally one of the major conditions sought by teachers in provincial and remote areas, and a number of education systems have paid particular attention to teacher accommodation in recent years. The importance of adequate housing is strongly endorsed by the Commission. Living conditions need to be at an acceptable level for teachers' personal needs. In areas of extreme climatic conditions this should include adequate heating and/or cooling.

Increasing staff continuity

7.43 The discussion in earlier paragraphs has commented on the important matters of teacher recruitment and support. These are closely linked to the length of time teachers actually remain in the rural schools to which they are appointed. This generally ranges from two to three years in remote areas depending on the location of a school. In most rural schools of Australia the continuity of teaching staff in a school is seen as a major educational issue. Education systems in the past have generally developed practices and improved teaching conditions in ways which are proving to be of benefit. From this study the Commission has concluded that at least three critical conditions must be present for successful teacher placements in rural areas, and, if achieved, they will help increase the average length of time teachers stay in rural schools. These are adequate living conditions, the availability of personal and professional support, and the certainty of a transfer to a preferred location at the end of a period of service in rural schools.

7.44 There are, of course, some provincial areas of Australia which are greatly preferred as places to live. These include most coastal areas and closely settled rural districts where favourable climatic conditions prevail. In areas such as these there may be little staff turnover. The major need to increase teacher continuity in schools is in the remote areas of Australia. These remote areas dominate the continent on the basis of size, but enrolments in remote schools are small compared with metropolitan and provincial areas. Teacher numbers are also relatively small in remote areas, which gives an opportunity for special attention to be given to finding ways of increasing the length of time teachers stay in these schools.

7.45 An important factor to consider here is the high cost of relocating teachers to take up each new appointment. These transfer costs are especially high in remote areas, while support services to teachers are generally limited due to contracting education budgets. The Commission suggests that funds which are presently being expended on frequent teacher transfers could be redeployed to provide more appropriate levels of teacher support and thus increase the length of time teachers stay in each appointment. An example can be taken from the Northern Territory. The average cost to recruit and locate each teacher in the Northern Territory is between \$9000 and \$10 000, but at times the figure can be much higher for particular appointments. High staff turnover in the Northern Territory is endemic. The lack of teacher continuity causes most dislocation and interruption to teaching in remote schools as a result of staff turnover, small school size and an inability to cover for teacher absences.

7.46 The Commission emphasises that increasing the time teachers stay in each appointment is an essential condition for improving the quality of teaching in remote schools. It also emphasises the potential that exists for a marked increase in the level of support to teachers in these schools by offsetting the costs of adequate support services from funds saved in transfer costs. The Commission believes that school systems should seek to develop special contractual arrangements for the small proportion of the teaching force working in remote areas whereby they would be guaranteed an adequate level of living conditions and professional support, and a future transfer to a preferred location, in return for continuing in a remote appointment for at least 50 per cent longer than the current expectation for each location. This would result in increased teacher and curriculum continuity in these areas and in significant educational advantages for remote area students. The financial savings should be used to provide the necessary level of professional support and the conditions negotiated as part of the arrangements, and give preference in relocating these teachers at the end of their planned period of stay.

Summary

7.47 There are several important measures that can be taken to improve teaching in rural schools. These include the development of more relevant pre-service courses for teaching in rural schools, and improved recruitment procedures and professional support for teachers during a rural appointment. These measures will help to solve the most pressing issues in rural schooling — how to increase the continuity of teaching in these schools and increase continuity in presentation of the curriculum. The Commission considers these to be vital areas for action by school systems and teacher education institutions.

7.48 Other teacher development measures which are appropriate for the Commonwealth to consider are outlined elsewhere in the report. These include support for the teacher inservice education projects discussed in Chapter 6, and for the rural regional initiatives in teacher development and the curriculum outlined in Chapter 9. Another proposal for Commonwealth action is designed to provide support for the increased use of communication technologies to help meet the professional needs of teachers (Chapter 8).

7.49 The Commission believes that its proposal for school systems to review the contractual arrangements under which teachers are appointed to remote schools (paragraphs 7.43 to 7.46), with a view to extending the length of time teachers stay in those schools, is an important one. This proposal, together with the other matters raised in this chapter, is considered to be a measure that will significantly improve the quality of the education provided to students in the remote schools of the nation.

Rural Schooling and the Use of Technology

Introduction

8.1 Communication technologies* have long made a major contribution to the education of rural students. They have been involved for a number of decades in supplementing the lessons provided to isolated students by correspondence schools, and in the establishment of schools of the air in all mainland States except Victoria. Schools of the air have used written lessons supplemented by daily radio broadcasts which allow direct teacher contact with students and some interaction for groups of students living hundreds of kilometres apart. Increases in the means of communication now available, and improvements in the quality of communication using radio or telephone lines, are together providing new opportunities to meet the challenges of rural schooling and to develop a range of solutions to problems of access and curriculum presentation. Today, distance education is being used increasingly by the school and post-school education sectors, utilising a greater number of communication technologies.

8.2 The dependence of isolated children on technologies is as real today as it has been in past decades. Distance from school still prohibits many children from attending daily. These same distances, together with climatic and atmospheric influences, also make radio or radio-telephone links unreliable and at times inadequate for instruction purposes. However, where technical improvements have been made to high-frequency (HF) radio equipment and broadcasting of school of the air programs, better quality reception and better provisions have been achieved. High quality telephone links utilising land-lines, radio and microwave links enable a wide range of technological devices to be attached to them, including teleconferencing devices, facsimile machines and computers. These have enabled group teaching to be undertaken, the group discussion of issues, the instantaneous transmission of visual material over long distances such

* The major use of technologies with which this chapter is concerned is the communication of information, curriculum material, and news between schools, administrators and schools, and between isolated students and teachers. Communication technologies therefore are the major interest. They can also be used advantageously in rural areas to provide social interaction among students and teachers, access to an education for some students, and inservice activities for teachers in remote areas.

as printed documents and illustrations, and student access to information sources or data banks by computer to aid study in specific curriculum areas. More recently, these communication links have been used to provide Telememo services to schools, and between schools and administrators (Panel 40). However, as these developments are dependent on high quality telephone links they are not available to all schools. A number of rural schools still have no access to a telephone, or they depend on inadequate telephone or radio links. Many of these schools will be isolated in this way until satellite communication is more widely available.

Panel 40

An Electronic Mail System in Small Rural Schools

In 1985, members of the Bemboka cluster of schools involved in the Country Areas Program on the South Coast of New South Wales, foresaw the possibility of using computers as a means of communication between isolated schools. With the advent of suitable hardware and software this became a reality that culminated in the production of a computerised school cluster magazine, compiled by transferring children's writing saved on disc to a central school, which then printed the stories and formed them into a magazine.

The introduction of Telememo, Telecom's electronic mailing and bulletin board system, opened the way for more rapid, powerful and easy to use data transfer. Access to remote databases also became easier. With improved skills in computer use, pupils were ready to use databases as a source of information retrieval and as a basis for research and social studies skill development. A system of electronic pen pals was introduced in New South Wales in which children exchange letters and information between a number of schools. The service expanded, and several schools began experimental contacts with interstate schools, in South Australia and Queensland. Some fortunate schools were offered contacts in the United States through OTC's commercial network, although they were expected to meet their own on-line costs. 'Schools Across Australia', a Bicentennial project aimed at linking a number of schools throughout Australia, has been the means of making other contacts between schools in the Bemboka cluster and schools in New South Wales and Queensland.

Perhaps the most interesting contact has been with the Brighton Centre for hearing-impaired children in South Australia. This contact has been a most effective way of students learning more about people's disabilities and how they cope with them. It has served to evoke the interest of the total school population and many community members. After initial introductions and biographies, children of all grades now correspond regularly with these students.

This electronic mail program has been and still is a most valuable demonstration of how technology can break down the barriers of distance and isolation and enable children to master a new set of skills. It is highly motivational, maintains a high interest level among students, and provides both teachers and children with unique and exciting educational experiences. For teachers, the professional contacts that are available through this medium help them to overcome isolation. The capacity for rapid data transfer adds to the value of the system as a tool in modern education and its administration.

(Source: From material provided by the Working Group on Technology)

8.3 These circumstances have been partly addressed by Commonwealth funded CAP activities in each State. The CAP encourages initiatives in education which address local circumstances, and provides support for students and teachers in remote locations (see Chapter 3). The Commonwealth has also provided additional support for these schools through the Loan Video Program. The establishment of this program in 1982 emphasised Commonwealth support for the introduction of communication technologies into rural schooling. Technologies have long been used in supporting students involved in distance education programs (Fasano, Hall and Cook, 1987, p.32). Their incorporation and adaptation by the different state correspondence schools and schools of the air into existing services has served to accentuate the marked improvement in teaching materials used in correspondence teaching. Fasano et al have also suggested that:

The introduction of technology into distance education has drawn more dedicated and forward-looking teachers into this field and consequently improved educational programs geared to utilise information technology are emerging (p.32).

Many of the developments in distance education which are based on communication technologies provide increased social interaction among students, generally considered to be one of the most limiting aspects of schooling in remote areas.

8.4 Distance education services have undergone major development in recent years. Based on mailed lessons covering the curriculum appropriate to each isolated student, correspondence study generally is now enriched by radio and television broadcasts (see Panel 41) where these can be received; camps and excursions; regular attendance for a day or half-day at a contact class or school in a nearby town; support for home tutors; and visits to students by itinerant teachers. Distance education centres in some states are also offering support of this kind to students enrolled in small rural schools but with access only to a limited curriculum. Students can undertake studies not available locally by correspondence, usually supported by frequent contact with distance education teachers using telecommunications.

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- Land-line systems. Telephone links utilising land based links such as cables, microwave transmission or radio links. Usually compared with telephone links using satellite systems.
 - Microwave systems. Use of micro-magnetic waves to link two points. Used by Telecom as part of its telephone network, in conjunction with cables. Television microwave links between schools have been used in Victoria between Orbost and Bairnsdale and in South Australia between Smithfield Plains and Elizabeth. These are one-way video links to expand curriculum offerings in schools.
 - Teleconference. Using regular telephone connections which are linked together with a 'bridge', all parties connected can hear and speak to each other. It is useful for meetings, inservice courses and discussions on administration. It has been used successfully for class discussion by distance education teachers.
 - Facsimile. Facsimile machines linked by telephone lines can transmit and receive pages of written information, diagrams and photographs.
 - Telememo. Telememo is the name of Telecom's electronic mail service. Electronic mail provides rapid communication between participants with 'mailboxes'. Group of schools in remote areas can be linked in this way (see Panel 40). There have recently been many trials of the use of electronic mail by distance education centres, including linking correspondence school teachers and students in small rural secondary schools studying part-time by correspondence. Isolated students studying at home are also involved. Some 80 isolated students are currently linked to their teachers in Sydney using Telememo. Electronic mail participation requires a computer with appropriate software and modem, linked to a reliable telephone line.

Panel 41

Radio Broadcasts

Radio is an established practical means of communication for educational use. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) provides a radio schools broadcast service of high quality, although the number of programs has decreased in recent years. Some State departments of education are investigating radio broadcasts for professional development programs for teachers, such as INSERT radio programs broadcast over public radio stations in New South Wales.

The increased use of talk-back radio demonstrates the power of the medium when radio and telephone are combined. The use of 008 toll-free numbers for listeners to call into a program while it is on air is an effective means to ensure interaction between the program presenters and listeners.

...

Television Broadcasts

The ABC provides a national program of school television broadcasts. Each broadcast is accompanied by curriculum support material for use by teachers as part of their teaching program. Some State departments of education are investigating the use of other television broadcast channels. In Western Australia, the Golden West Network broadcasting with the Remote Commercial Television Service (RCTS) licence in that State provides an education program composed of contributions from all sectors of education. One service included in the program is the broadcast of film and video material for off-air recording, and later use. The Queensland Department of Education is also providing a similar opportunity on its Q-NET service (see Chapter 5).

(Source: From material provided by the Working Group on Technology)

8.5 Special mention must be made of the facilities provided to schools through the Australian Schools Catalogue Information Service (ASCIS). ASCIS is a company limited by guarantee and owned by the Ministers of the States and Territories, the Commonwealth Minister and the most senior officer of the National Catholic Education Commission and of the National Council of Independent Schools. ASCIS was established to provide all Australian schools with access to cataloguing information for their libraries. Information can be obtained 'on-line' or on microfiche. Additional services such as library cards are also available. In recent years ASCIS has become a mechanism for expanded services to schools, with electronic mail and specialist noticeboard services being made available. The CDC uses ASCIS to provide the Australian Curriculum Information Network (ACIN) and most States and Territories similarly use it for their local curriculum information networks. The CDC will soon add the National Software Database. ASCIS is a service to Australian schools which is, in effect, owned by the schools. It is an effective service to all schools and systems, including schools in rural areas.

8.6 Previous chapters have highlighted many of the circumstances that are of importance in providing a quality education to rural school students. These include their isolation from large centres of population, transportation difficulties and a widely dispersed population. The needs generated by these circumstances have been addressed in the past by educational services devised to enable all children and youth to receive an education regardless of their location. However, developments have not solved all the problems of schooling for students in provincial and remote areas. Issues remain in regard to continuity of teaching (Chapter 7) and the breadth of curriculum offerings (Chapter 5). Providing access to a full secondary education for rural students is a major challenge being addressed (Chapter 9). Professional support for teachers, including in new areas of the curriculum remains a major issue for teachers in rural areas (Chapter 7).

8.7 With the development of new means of communication, it has become evident that objectives such as access to education for all, equity in education opportunities, and an increased secondary education retention rate for rural students can be addressed from a new perspective. These objectives are among the most important for rural schooling. Fasano et al (1987) recently reported that the use of information technology has been taken up in some form by two-thirds of the nation's rural schools. They state that the use of technology in schools was started from within education systems with equipment funds made available through government programs which were added to by schools and their communities.

8.8 This chapter discusses how communication technologies can contribute to the resolution of rural schooling issues, considers the potential uses of technologies already available and presents a brief scenario of technological developments most likely to influence rural schooling in the years ahead. It further discusses how schools, school systems and education authorities generally must ensure these developments are utilised in rural schooling and school provisions generally. The emphasis in the chapter will continue to be on the curriculum. Technology and technological devices are viewed as but one approach to meeting rural school needs. However, they present new ways of providing or supporting educational programs and thus have the potential to improve educational opportunities for rural students.

Needs of rural schooling

8.9 As background to later discussion in this chapter, a brief summary of the major needs in rural schooling and the manner in which education systems seek to meet those needs is provided. Briefly these are as follows:

Overcoming Isolation

Isolation due to geographic circumstances is a major barrier to children obtaining an education. School systems have attempted to overcome this isolation by the provision of correspondence school study, schools of the air, special units to deal with the specific needs of isolated students (for example, disabled students), regional distance education centres, and complementary provisions such as the Loan Video Program.

Improving the Curriculum

Strategies adopted to provide more appropriate curriculum in rural schools have included widening access to correspondence school study, alternative provisions for secondary students, clustering of schools, the use of hub schools to provide some subjects for students from cluster schools, special support schemes for rural secondary schools, and improved access to external courses offered by the

technical and further education sector. Access available to correspondence school materials and personnel by small rural secondary units in some States has been supported by facsimile material, Telememo and teleconferencing facilities. An example of a school cluster providing increased local curriculum offerings is that between Pinaroo, Lameroo and Geranium Area Schools in South Australia. Senior secondary students are transported daily by express bus from the smaller schools offering study to Year 10 to Lameroo Area School where Years 11 and 12 are provided.

Meeting Special Needs

Many rural students have special needs which may be accentuated by their geographical isolation. These needs usually mean that the students require increased personal and educational support. Aboriginal students, those who are disabled or have specific learning difficulties, those from non-English speaking backgrounds or from itinerant families, or female students, may be in this group. Provisions made to assist these students include support from specialist units, attendance at special purpose schools, or correspondence school enrolment. In general, however, the needs of these students and their teachers are not being fully met by the support services available.

Teacher Development

The regular upgrading of teachers' knowledge and skills is important to the provision of adequate educational experiences for rural students. Inservice programs cover curriculum and policy changes as well as new methodologies for use in face-to-face teaching or in using distance education services. Using communication technologies to assist teaching programs is another area for teacher development. Some examples of teacher development programs for rural teachers in the above areas are available. These include programs relating to the Early Literacy Inservice Course (ELIC) (see Panel 45), and college courses in distance education and technological developments.

Community Development

The development of community resources and community support for schools through educational programs is an important issue in rural education. Existing means by which schools contribute to communities in these areas include providing information on available educational activities for parents. Provisions may include TAFE courses, parent/teacher activities and teacher inservice courses, and courses offered locally by schools. An interesting example of an educational facility promoting community development is the sponsorship by the Naracoorte College of TAFE of a group of study centres located in nearby schools for parent and community access to its courses. These centres are equipped with computers, facsimile machines, video recorders and telephones for communication with the central college campus.

Communication

Reliable, frequent and efficient communication between schools and administrators is important to educational programs for rural students. This is necessary for dissemination of information on curriculum policies, administration matters and support of school programs. Recent developments in telecommunications, including computer-based communication, teleconferencing and broadcasting, have been used to improve communication among schools and administrators.

Use of communication technologies in rural schooling

8.10 Most of the needs outlined above have been addressed in some rural locations by approaches which utilise communication technologies. In the last few years almost all States have trialled equipment and teaching strategies and have established programs in at least one of these needs areas which are based on the use of technological devices and telephone lines or a satellite link. Examples of these activities are described below.

Provision of senior secondary studies

8.11 Kangaroo Inn Area School, in South Australia is a district school that has recently offered Year 12 through the use of distance education. The school is situated in an isolated rural region; not in a country town but at the junction of three roads. It is 38 km to the nearest town. The school relies on ten buses to bring all its students to school from the 9000 square kilometres of its catchment area. Most of the 23 staff also travel long distances to school. The problem for the school was to strengthen its capacity to retain students from Year 11 to Year 12, and to provide academically oriented courses for Year 12 students continuing to tertiary studies. The first Year 12 students enrolled in the school in 1985.

8.12 By using a combination of DUCT* system, computer, facsimile machines and Telememo, the school has enabled students studying Year 12 by correspondence to achieve the academic goals set for them. All Year 11 students intending to continue to Year 12 study one Year 11 subject by distance education mode. The practical effect is that students have learned how to budget their time, undertake correspondence study, organise resources, get assignments in on time and especially, how to negotiate for extra time with their correspondence teacher, before beginning Year 12. Access to teachers at the correspondence school is readily available. The use of Telememo has enabled correspondence students studying the same subjects at this school and other schools to contact one another. Training for teachers in using technologies has also been provided by the school. The school accesses a number of databases for the use of students in their studies.

8.13 The school has recently proposed to develop and write a school-based curriculum module in geology as a publicly examined subject in that State. This would involve experienced school staff, in collaboration with staff from the South Australian Correspondence School, developing and implementing the course, using distance education methodology. The proposal has been initiated by people who have been involved with distance education and technology for the past four years. The long term aim would be to develop a bank of school-developed courses for rural students in subject areas currently not available from the South Australian Department of Education's central sources.

Electronic mail facility

8.14 The Technology Services Unit of the Queensland Department of Education initiated a major communications project early in 1986, centred around Telememo. It allows the exchange of text information using computers connected to the telephone network. With nearly 500 'mail boxes', the Telememo project is the largest educational electronic mail network in Australia. The system is used by students, teachers and departmental personnel in schools throughout Queensland from Thursday Island to the New South Wales border. The project

* DUCT. A particular type of teleconferencing device developed in South Australia for educational purposes. Means 'Diverse Use of Communications Technologies'. Other devices for teleconferences have been developed elsewhere.

was originally provided as a service to a group of schools which offered a computer course in practical computer methods during 1986. It was later extended to include computer consultants, support services and other schools willing to provide the resources necessary. Schools are actively encouraged to incorporate the use of electronic mail into existing curricular activities.

8.15 Students use electronic mail to share writing ideas, swap survey information and reach a wider group of people than could ever visit their classroom. Primary students write to other students about themselves and their lives as part of the study of the lifestyles of Australians. The 'Schools Across Australia' project involves students interacting with other students from around Australia to share information and ideas (see Panel 40). Students are using this new medium in studying the subjects, 'Information Processing and Technology' and 'Practical Computer Methods'. They gather information from a wide variety of sources and analyse the results to develop skills in information handling.

8.16 Teachers also use the network to share teaching ideas, exchange curriculum information and obtain help with problems arising from classroom use of computers. After school hours, teachers use the system to organise and conduct professional development activities including the shared development of papers and reports. Teachers can post messages to a bulletin board facility on the system, seek advice of a technical nature or advertise availability of resources and dates for meetings and events. This mode of information distribution is interactive in that teachers can reply immediately, or directly seek further information. Through this project, teachers and students have learned the practical potential of communication technologies for teaching and learning.

Curriculum expansion for remote students

8.17 From August 1985, the Northern Territory Correspondence School conducted a regular program of lessons in mathematics and English by telephone with Year 8 students in the Aboriginal community of Oenpelli. Each Wednesday, a group of five students attended a half-hour lesson in each subject and another group of eight did so each Thursday, using equipment loaned to the Oenpelli School by the Educational Technology Unit of the Department of Education. The components in use in the classroom at Oenpelli included a modified loudspeaker telephone, a microphone mixer with four microphone input sockets, four microphones, shared between the students, an infra-red headphone transmitter and a plug pack power supply, one infra-red headphone for each student, and a facsimile machine.

8.18 The essential feature of the classroom telephone used at Oenpelli was that there was no voice-switch, and the teacher in Darwin could hear the students all the time. Brief answers by the students could be heard clearly by the teacher as well as murmurs of puzzlement, discussions between the students, their comments, and their reaction to the teacher's instructions, jokes or questions. Similarly, the students continued to hear the teacher even when there is a high level of environmental noise. The equipment was an experimental combination of devices, but a prototype including all the essential elements in one unit has been completed. The project obtained limited results due to the correspondence materials not having been prepared for children from a non-English speaking background. In addition, the cost of the required infrastructure to maintain activities of this kind was seen as a deterrent to more widespread application of the approach.

Teaching languages using technology

8.19 The Lock Area School, a rural farming community in the Eyre Peninsula of South Australia, services 150 students from reception to Year 11 on an integrated campus. Forty students are in the secondary section of the school. Schools such as Lock and Kangaroo Inn (see paragraph 8.11) generally have difficulty presenting a secondary curriculum of adequate breadth. Relatively low demand subjects, such as languages and business studies, usually cannot be staffed with the number of teachers appointed to small schools. To enable two Year 8 Lock Area School students to study German, the Adelaide High School agreed to provide a teacher and class to host the students, via a telephone link.

8.20 The two students from Lock became members of the Year 8 German class at Adelaide High School and received all lessons, assignments and assessments from that school. The other subjects studied by the students were supplied by staff in normal classes at Lock. The procedure posed some problems because of the need to align the timetables of the two schools, and the simplest solution in this case was for the school at Lock to adapt to the timetable constraints imposed on the much larger school in Adelaide. DUCT terminals and facsimile machines were the major pieces of equipment used. The facsimile was introduced to the program a short time after it commenced, and proved to be a cost-effective means of providing a useful and effective link between the teacher and the students. The requirements made of host teachers in following this mode of teaching can be expected to cause stress in the first stages of the program but, in this case, the knowledge that the classes were extremely important to the students receiving the lessons, tended to provide a high level of interest and motivation for the teacher as the program progressed.

Computers to assist study by correspondence students

8.21 A project of the Audio Visual Education Branch of the Department of Education in Western Australia addresses the needs of senior students in isolated areas who complete their senior secondary school years by correspondence study. In 1984, students undertaking Years 11 and 12 with the Distance Education Centre commenced to attend District High Schools to undertake correspondence studies. District High Schools normally only provide teaching to Year 10. Using this approach, the senior secondary students gained access to school facilities, and were able to seek advice from a nominated staff member. Lesson materials and assignments continued to be prepared in units and delivered by mail from the correspondence school. The project was initiated to investigate the possibility of offering an alternative mode of study to isolated young people in their final years of schooling.

8.22 To assist the Years 11 and 12 students working in District High Schools, a communications network was set up by the Schools Computing Branch of the Department using DECMail (an electronic mail system). At that time modems were installed in a number of District High Schools where computers were already in service, which allowed them to access the central computer used by the Schools Computing Branch. This gave students and staff use of AUSTPAC (a software package) to access DECMail, and communicate through the use of electronic mail and bulletin boards. In 1986 a graphics tablet that allowed text and graphics to be prepared on a screen and stored on a disk became available. The graphics tablet was used for transferring student assignments to the Distance Education Centre and returning completed work using a 'mail box' located in the central computer. This was designed to reduce the turnaround time of correspondence school materials between teachers and students and provide a

more immediate response to student problems. In addition, lesson disks could be prepared using the graphics tablet, which allowed graphs and diagrams as well as text to be electronically transferred to schools. These were recorded and stored in the 'mail box'. Students at the schools could then obtain them from the 'mail box' using the school computer. They could print off the assignments set out, use the graphics pad to complete them, and return the completed work through the central computer to the distance education centre staff for marking. Turnaround time for student work was reduced to a few days, compared with mail delivery of several days or weeks. Operating costs were not excessive when compared with mailing costs.

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8.23 When investigating the range of communication technologies available for use in schools, including in rural areas, it is important to decide first on the communications network and the terminal equipment to be used, and the form in which the information is to be used in the learning situation. This information has a wide bearing on the use of technologies in schooling. Already in this chapter mention has been made of different terminal equipment available such as radio, telephone, facsimile machine or computer. The form that the information might take has also been referred to, such as voice, data (especially numeric or diagrammatic data in print form), and vision (video material). The use of technological equipment to provide and receive information depends on the communications networks available to transmit from one point to another, such as from a broadcast station, regional office or correspondence school, to a number of receiving locations (schools or students) at the same time. The available communications networks and their uses are summarised in Table 25.

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- **Modem.** A special switching device to connect a telephone to a communications device.
 - **Software.** A program for a computer, or other interchangeable material for different uses of a computer.
 - **Disk, disc.** A thin circular plate for computer use. Programs or data can be stored on a disc for use in learning situations or leisure.

Table 25

Available communications networks and their uses

Communications networks	Provided by	Uses
Broadcasting		
Terrestrial based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VHF (1) • UHF (2) 	Various groups	One-way voice or video transmission
Satellite based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ku band (3) 	Various groups	One-way voice, video or data transmission. Interactive voice transmission also possible
Telecommunications		
Terrestrial based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • telephone lines using analogue (4) or digital (5) • DRCS (6) • ISDN (7) 	Mainly Telecom	Interactive voice or data transmission technology Interactive voice or data transmission Interactive voice or data with one-way vision
Satellite based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ku band (3) • L band mobile (8) 	Mainly Aussat	Interactive voice and data transmission

(1) VHF. Very high frequency transmission.

(2) UHF. Ultra high frequency transmission.

(3) Ku band. The frequencies used by present Aussat satellites (12-14 Ghz). Interactive voice capacity allows all parties to speak and hear others speak, using special switching equipment.

(4) Analogue. A standard form of switching and transmission for telephones now being superseded for high quality links.

(5) Digital. Use of new technology for switching and transmission. Enables a wider use of additional services via telephone lines.

(6) DRCS. Telecom's Digital Radio Concentrator System is a new development in digital technology which has permitted the extension of modern telephone services to remote areas. The DRCS is capable of connecting up to 120 customers over a path up to 600km from an exchange, using a series of connecting towers between 30 and 50km apart. Solar power can be used for DRCS. The service is very reliable.

(7) ISDN. Integrated Services Digital Network is a fully digital communications service capable of handling voice and non-voice transmission at high standards so that a single network can provide voice, text, data, facsimile, Telememo and, potentially, video. Digital transmission and special equipment are required. ISDN will be available progressively from 1988.

(8) L band. A UHF frequency band used for mobile telephones in rural areas. Provides the equivalent service to cellular mobile telephones in the cities. One advantage of L band mobile telephony is the low cost of the portable earth stations (hand-sets) to communicate via a satellite link.

Source: Information provided by the Working Group on Technology

8.24 It is not necessary to make a choice between using satellite based or terrestrial based communications networks and between forms of satellite use. For many educational purposes in Australia, a combination of these can make best use of existing and new facilities to help meet the needs of students. As a general principle, a terrestrial based network for sole use is the best option for a few, relatively close schools or students involving a high level of communication. The advantage of satellite based networks is that they are independent of distance, and provide communication from one source to any number of schools or students. Satellite based networks can be configured to connect isolated small groups of students in ad hoc networks, which is not always possible using terrestrial based networks, such as the line of telephone cables, or they can be used in association with the latter network if required. In supporting rural education services, satellite communication systems can:

- provide two-way communication between centres that have inadequate or no communication links that are terrestrial based; and
- provide broadcast services associated with the use of existing networks, together with interactive communication if required.

The most economic use of satellite systems is achieved when large numbers of schools or groups of learners enable simultaneous teaching in different classes to take place. Where television is used with voice communication, a satellite transponder usually can only transmit a single program because of the large number of channels required to transmit vision, thus limiting its application to a single topic and group of learners. Voice and data applications, however, use fewer channels in comparison, and therefore provide the opportunity for multiple groups to be connected at the same time.

8.25 The telecommunications trial currently in progress at Mount Isa, Queensland utilises satellite links for an interactive voice and data network to provide lessons to isolated students. It illustrates clearly that schooling via satellite is feasible and effective. A fortnightly interactive video program broadens the scope of the daily teaching activities. Overseas experience, particularly in the United States of America, demonstrates that satellite links to provide schooling for isolated students and teaching support for rural schools can be used on a wide scale, including to small one- and two-teacher schools in rural areas. A fully interactive satellite education network that has been operating for 18 months within the USA, demonstrates that satellite education can be both cost effective and efficient. A similar development is currently being proposed to service educational organisations in Australia on a national basis. One private company behind such a proposal plans to install a satellite education network, with interactive terminals at each participating school or place of education. The technologies for the delivery of the education courses will provide a combination of one-way full motion video with two-way voice communication; two-way voice communication; broadcast with both video and voice; and an interactive data and facsimile capacity. It is being proposed that schools and educational organisations nationally lease the interactive terminals. The terminals would consist of a television monitor, video-recorder, a number of mobile hand-pieces for interactive voice communication, a facsimile machine to receive and transmit print or graphic material and a printer. School systems would be responsible for the education program including the teaching of lessons and course content, and would pay a fee to the company for operating expenses, such as transmission time, maintenance and administration. This proposal illustrates the nature of a system that would be required to provide satellite based school provisions.

Panel 42

A Rural Secondary Support Scheme

A support scheme in Queensland aims to provide opportunities in secondary education to students in rural schools where such opportunities are very limited or non-existent; provide a range of curriculum support services for students and teachers in these locations; and develop a scheme in which each educational region is integrally involved in organisation and development.

The scheme has two components. The first component consists of the services that are offered by the Secondary Correspondence School, involving both Secondary Schools Board and registered secondary school subjects, and a limited number of TAFE courses.

The second component of the scheme consists of the establishment of regional support networks for small rural secondary schools. The nature of these networks is largely determined by the regions and the support structures are developed as a result of negotiations between the regions and the Rural Secondary Schools Support Scheme (R4S) project committee.

The participating schools are as follows:

1. Primary schools retaining secondary Years 8 and 9 students: Chillagoe, Dunwich, Karumba.
2. Secondary departments to Year 10: Burdekin Falls, Biggenden, Inglewood, Rosedale, Cooktown.
3. Secondary departments to Year 12: Babinda, Cunnamulla, Eidsvold, Glenden, Hughenden, Moura, Texas.

A total of 120 students are supported by the program.

While the core content of courses studied continues to be in printed form, the following curriculum support services are provided:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Teleconferencing | —for the direct teaching of students at the rural schools by teachers at the Secondary Correspondence School;
—for the support of teachers at the rural schools by Correspondence School colleagues. |
| Electronic mail | —for communication of tasks and responses between teacher and student. |
| Document transfer | —for transmission of completed tasks and assessments between student and teacher;
—for professional support of teachers. |

(Source: From material provided by the Working Group on Technology)

8.26 The use of communication technologies to improve rural schooling in the future will depend on a number of important developments. These include:

- establishing the communications networks to be available to service schools and communities;
- refining the ways in which the application of technologies is available to schools, such as access to electronic mail and teleconferencing, and improved distance education curriculum materials (see Panel 42);
- development of the terminal devices that allow schools to link into available communications networks, and identification of the characteristics of each type of equipment that affect the ease with which teachers and students can make use of the terminals; and
- application of the teaching and learning strategies that are used in distance education to provide improved opportunities for students in rural schools.

Improvements through use of technologies

8.27 Following an overview of the current educational uses of technologies in the previous sections (see also Panels 43 to 45), the question of how to achieve an increased use of technology to help meet the challenges of rural schooling is considered here. There are several possible impediments to achieving improvements in rural schooling supported by communication technologies. Some of these affect individual schools and systems, such as the technological compatibility of equipment, and the funds available for an increased range of technological equipment and its use in schools. Others have national implications because they involve achieving collaborative actions by national agencies and school authorities.

Coordination

8.28 In the federal political system in Australia, in which the States have the responsibility for the provision of school-level education, the coordination of effort in areas where a national approach to educational development is likely to be most beneficial can prove to be difficult. The curriculum is one such area. Determining the curriculum for schools is a school system responsibility. Curriculum content can differ from State to State. Developments in some curriculum aspects, and in the use of communication technologies in schooling, however, are areas where national action is generally considered to be desirable. To date, all States have been investigating and trialling the use of communication technologies in rural schooling and distance education. This activity has resulted in considerable practical experience and information being available. There is an increasingly large body of knowledge and expertise available which is generalisable to all school systems on the ways in which technologies can contribute to solutions to complex educational problems.

Computer Learning Across the School

Campbell Town, Tasmania, is a small town approximately one hour's travel from Launceston. The K-10 district school has a student population of 320, half of which are in the primary school and half in the secondary classes. The school population has declined from 400 over recent years. About 50 per cent of the children travel more than one hour each way by bus to attend school.

As a result of the purchase of a number of computers for the school by the parent body, and parent interest in the possibility of introducing the computers into the whole school and across a wide range of subject areas, rather than being used solely for computer studies by secondary students, a management committee was formed to develop an initiative in the use of technologies in the school. The committee regularly trains a small number of staff to operate the computer network to ensure that expertise with the system is retained. One of the school's objectives is to use technologies to create in students an awareness of the outside world, to help increase students' self-esteem, and to increase their capacity to be competent users of computers.

The initiative has been important to the image of the school and local parents have been drawn to participate more fully in the school activities. Each child in the school is able to use the computer system daily, either as part of a group or as an individual. Each of the computers is in operation for approximately 80 per cent of the school day. The system is becoming a part of the normal school program, and teachers use it as much as possible in their normal teaching. Experience with computers in school has helped students to see more options for a career than was the case in the past. The computer network has broadened the cultural and social outlook of students through an increase in their awareness of the possibilities that exist for them in the future.

The use of computers in class activities from kindergarten to Year 10, and an increase in individualised instruction, is now considered possible. The school also has an interest in their use in part-time post-school courses for the 60 per cent of students who leave school after Year 10. It is expected that a combination of computer applications and distance learning could provide a senior secondary program for these students.

(Source: Developed from Fasano et al, 1987)

Panel 44

Videotex

This term refers to services such as Teletext and Viewdata. Teletext provides pages of print broadcast with regular television programs. It is a one-way service and the pages of information on news, sport and financial matters can be accessed using a specifically adapted television set. Using this service, the Australian Caption Centre provides captioning to assist hearing impaired people. Viewdata is an interactive service providing pages of print and graphics from a central data base using a modem to connect a telephone to an adapted television set or special terminal. Only registered users can access the information. There are many private systems, but Telecom provides a publicly available network, VIATEL. The Correspondence School in New South Wales has trialled the use of Viewdata for distance education. It gives access to a large data base of interest to students and teachers.

Videodisc

This is a new technology which combines the advantages of audio-visual teaching and computer assisted instruction into learning packages where the student has control of the lesson. A laser disc is employed and is played on a special videodisc player. As yet there is little use of this technology in homes or for education. The Australian Caption Centre and the Western Australian Department of Education have produced a videodisc on careers.

(Source: From material provided by the Working Group on Technology)

8.29 These activities have provided information on the utility of various communications networks and items of electronic equipment suitable for teaching and administrative use, and some agreement on their potential to improve aspects of rural schooling. They have also demonstrated the need for continual monitoring of the educational and cost effectiveness of the communications systems and devices used and under development. There is general agreement that there are advantages in a national approach to the organisations which provide communications systems and networks, such as Telecom, Aussat and private companies, and advantages in national efforts to achieve the economies of scale that may be possible from joint purchase of equipment and transmission time. This would also avoid unnecessary duplication of effort by school systems in areas such as systems development and the refining of approaches to teaching in rural schools or for isolated students which use communication technologies.

Policy development

8.30 The Commission considers that it is important that collaboration in policy development be achieved at the national level. The use of technologies to improve rural schooling must begin with decisions on the communications systems to be employed. In Australia to date, telecommunications are provided mostly by public agencies such as Telecom and Aussat, but increasingly private companies will become involved in the future. Two matters relating to communications systems would benefit from a coordinated national approach to policy development. These are the use of public and private communications networks and the benefits to be gained from them, and the design of network capacity to support the provision of educational services in the future series of satellites, and through Telecom's DRCS network and ISDN services (see Table 25).

8.31 The Commonwealth is in a particularly good position to play a coordinating role in these matters, especially as it has responsibility for telecommunications. A coordinated approach would facilitate joint negotiation with public and private agencies to achieve high quality and reliable communications channels able to provide for comprehensive educational activities. An emphasis should be given to the needs of rural schools and isolated students generally. Establishing these networks will require negotiation on a nationwide basis about their structure and capacity, and the associated services to be provided. It would be appropriate for the Commonwealth to collaborate with the States in developing a national communication technologies plan for educational purposes to be negotiated with the major telecommunications providers. The development of educational programs including courses and materials is appropriately a matter for the States, but efforts should be made to achieve collaboration in curriculum areas wherever possible. Recent developments in curriculum collaboration, including those in which the CDC is involved, and the inquiries established by the Australian Education Council, indicate that increased collaboration in some matters may occur in the near future. In paragraph 8.37 the Commission recommends the establishment of a task force to advise on policy, curriculum and other matters involving the use of communication technologies, including members from Commonwealth and State education authorities and national education bodies. The task force should also include representatives of rural groups, including rural women.

Cost factors

8.32 In all discussions of educational developments, cost factors need to be considered. In the case of technological applications they are particularly important because of rapid change in technological knowledge, and the capital and recurrent costs of utilising these developments. The position taken in this report has been to emphasise the use of existing and low-cost communication technologies. It is considered that there is a much greater capacity to improve rural schooling using existing communication technologies than has yet been realised. The more sophisticated and complex applications now available can be employed when necessary, for example to meet specific needs of students or localities. In all cases, the cost effectiveness of the technologies employed, as well as the educational effectiveness of their use, should be regularly under review.

8.33 To maximise the educational benefits of new technologies certain cost factors need to be recognised. These are:

- Cost of infrastructure equipment. This is an important and often decisive factor. School systems and governments face the task of funding a range of capital needs, including the provision of technological equipment. Alternatives to providing these funds include the leasing of equipment, and this could become an important option in the years ahead. National collaboration along the lines discussed in paragraph 8.31 may help provide ways to off-set or reduce these costs.
- Cost of maintenance and depreciation. These are related costs to that discussed above. For efficient use of technological facilities, adequate maintenance arrangements need to be provided, including for the maintenance of equipment in remote schools and that used by isolated students. Depreciation arrangements help to off-set the costs of replacement equipment in later years.
- Cost of using technologies. While capital and maintenance costs are of importance, so too are the costs of using communication technologies. Generally these are school-level costs, and must be met out of school budgets; for example, the cost of consumable items, software, and of long distance telephone links for teleconferencing or instruction of students by a teacher located at another school. The possibility of negotiations to bulk-buy land-line time should be explored.
- Cost of materials development. The provision of course materials for students and associated teacher materials is basic to the use of technologies in rural schooling. Most materials used in correspondence programs need modification for use in this way. In addition, using available technologies to provide expanded educational opportunities in rural schools requires the complementary development of teaching materials, for example in the areas of languages and music, or subjects developed to broaden secondary education opportunities at all year levels.
- Cost of special services. Special services are often necessary when using technologies to provide educational programs. These include special network services, such as dedicated telephone lines for sole use of a group of schools. These special services mean extra costs.

8.34 While it is recognised that the costs associated with the use of communication technologies to improve rural schooling may be high, depending on the networks and equipment used, there are considerable benefits to be gained by the students. There will be times when the costs can be off-set against the cost of alternative provisions in schools, but this will not always be the case. It is to be expected that increased collaboration between the States, and systems, referred to in paragraph 8.31, will provide more economical use of technologies. One further approach advocated by the Commission is interdepartmental cost-sharing. As with cost-sharing among schools, systems and State education authorities, cost-sharing among government departments should be fully explored. There are several ways in which this could be achieved. In particular, areas for immediate consideration include equipment purchase and sharing, special services already available, and equipment maintenance. Actual broadcast and transmission costs should also be examined for cost-sharing advantages. Interdepartmental cost-sharing is a feature of the Q-NET arrangements in Queensland and a similar system in Victoria.

Summary

8.35 The use of communication technologies should provide major improvements in the provision of schooling in rural areas. The Commission believes that technologies currently available could be profitably used to realise a number of improvements in rural schooling, but also considers that the application of these technologies for educational purposes needs to be well planned to produce the maximum benefits for students. Areas where the effective use of technologies has been demonstrated include schooling for isolated or special needs students, expanded curriculum offerings in small schools, information sharing among schools and students, administration, and teacher inservice education. To encourage further developments of this nature it is proposed that the Commonwealth should contribute support in four key areas:

- the development and sharing of existing and new curriculum materials for secondary students which are designed for use with technological devices. The materials need to be appropriate to the needs of the full range of students in rural areas and free of cultural and gender bias;
- the development and sharing of teacher inservice and teacher support materials using distance education methods (see Panel 45);
- investigation of the provision of high quality communication links to schools through broadcasting, telecasting and land-lines, and the increased use of satellite links where these are required; and
- action to ensure that the next generation of satellites is designed and constructed to provide for the full range of educational purposes.

Panel 45

Teacher Inservice and Technology

During 1986 the delivery of a telecourse based on the Early Literacy Inservice Course (ELIC) was trialled in Queensland. ELIC is a national professional development initiative provided in each state, largely funded through the Commonwealth's Basic Learning in Primary Schools Program. It is usually provided as a face-to-face course by an instructor in each participating school. Participants in the telecourse were able to view satellite delivered television transmissions, participate in audio-conferences with tutors in Brisbane, read specially prepared course books and receive personalized support from a tutor. All participants were located in rural schools in isolated locations, and would otherwise not have had access to the inservice program for some time.

Participation in the telecourse enabled groups of teachers in remote areas to keep abreast of current theories and ideas on children's literacy learning and development. They were able to question, on the basis of the course, their own practices and make changes to their teaching to provide more meaningful experiences for students. The trial has demonstrated that long term, interactive professional development programs can be successfully provided to teachers and administrators working in rural areas by the use of communication technologies.

(Source: From material provided by the Working Group on Technology)

8.36 A national approach to these matters will ensure that educational services are supported by comprehensive and reliable communications networks, including services to rural communities. In addition, action at Commonwealth level is proposed to address the following developments in tertiary institutions:

- the establishment of courses in teacher education institutions in distance education techniques, including instructional design and the uses of communication technologies. These courses should be at the pre-service education and post-graduate levels. These could be established in centres of excellence, but should be made available to teachers throughout Australia by distance education; and
- the setting up of investigations into the role technologies play in influencing teaching strategies, and the ways students learn in situations which use a range of technological devices.

8.37 **Recommendation 8:** It is recommended that the Commonwealth provide funding of \$0.5m per annum for three years to:

- (i) establish a task force to
 - advise on the development of teacher inservice materials and curriculum initiatives designed to support rural schools and education services to isolated students, through improved and economical access to communication technologies;
 - investigate and report on the provision of high quality communication links to schools through broadcasting, telecasting, land-lines and satellite links;
 - coordinate efforts among governments and education authorities to ensure that the next generation of satellites is designed and constructed to provide for the full range of educational purposes; and
 - encourage collaboration among the States and Territories, and between them and the Commonwealth, in efforts to use technology more effectively in rural schooling.
- (ii) provide support funding for initiatives relating to the development and sharing of existing and new curriculum materials for rural secondary students, and materials for the inservice education of rural teachers, which can be delivered using communication technologies.
- (iii) provide support funding for initiatives which address the special needs of students in the remote areas of central and northern Australia, especially for a curriculum that acknowledges the bilingual needs and traditional lifestyles of Aboriginal students.

8.38 It is envisaged that this task force would comprise representatives of Commonwealth and State education authorities and national education bodies. It should also include representatives of rural groups as well as persons involved with the development of communication technologies more generally. The initiatives funded might be undertaken by persons or organisations associated with government or non-government education authorities or other persons or organisations less specifically associated with education.

Raising School Retention Rates

Introduction

9.1 For some years there has been concern about the considerable proportion of young Australians who leave school before completing a full secondary education. Students from rural areas have been identified as one group which tends to leave school early. The facts about school participation by rural young people are discussed later in this chapter, as are factors which influence their school participation. First, however, it is appropriate to discuss why it is important that more young people from rural Australia stay on at school to complete their secondary education.

Importance of staying on at school

9.2 In the past, many young people living in rural areas left school early to take up employment or to help run a family property or business. Many young people and their parents would have seen completion of a full secondary education as unnecessary for such purposes. A successful adult life was possible, after all, without completing secondary school.

9.3 Labour market conditions, however, have changed markedly since the mid-1970s. The declining economic position of Australia has meant that the overall unemployment rate has been high for some time. The unemployment rate for young people has been particularly high, due to changes in the structure of the labour market and the relatively low competitiveness of young and inexperienced people in a highly competitive job market. Rural and metropolitan young people alike have been affected by these changes. For many rural young people, however, the situation has been made especially difficult by poor local economic conditions, by quite narrowly based local labour markets or by the need to leave their usual place of residence in order to increase their employment opportunities. Rural towns which have experienced the closure of a local abattoir or mine provide examples of how local circumstances can detrimentally affect the employment prospects of young people in rural Australia.

9.4 Harrold and Powell (1987, pp.90-91) point out relevant characteristics of rural labour markets. They note that:

- these markets are specialised and export-dependent, making employment within them potentially unstable;
- links between sectors of the rural economy are such that employment instability in a key sector is transmitted to other sectors within the region;
- rural labour markets are ‘thin’, that is, while people may be employed in a wide range of occupations, the number employed in a particular occupation is often small. Should people lose their jobs, there may be few other opportunities for employment in their chosen occupations in the local area;
- change of residence may be necessary in order to change employment, as there are limited opportunities within commuting distance;
- the self-employed are highly represented in rural markets; and
- increasing flexibility in terms of part-time employment and employment conditions, is evident in rural labour markets.

9.5 Young people living in rural towns often face limited local employment opportunities. An appropriate full secondary education can improve their long-term employment prospects in several ways. Firstly, it can improve their chances of competing successfully for those jobs which do become available. Secondly, it is likely to help make them more adaptable workers and better able to undertake subsequent re-employment or retraining. Thirdly, it provides a sound basis and often the formal entrance qualifications for post-secondary education and training.

9.6 Mention was made in Chapter 1 of the likely increase in the importance of tertiary industry in the rural economy of the future. It was noted that tertiary industry will require well educated and skilled employers and employees. The young people of rural Australia should be better able to contribute to and share in the benefits of the rural economy of tomorrow if they have gained a good foundation for subsequent learning and personal and social development through a full secondary education.

9.7 Even for those young people in rural areas who wish to help run the family farm or become otherwise employed in the agricultural industry, circumstances have changed. As noted in Chapter 1, farms have been becoming fewer in number and larger in size. The number of people in on-farm employment has decreased since the 1950s, although this decline may now have ceased. There has been an increase in the use of part-time employees on farms. Farm operators and/or members of their household often take part-time work off their farm. The family property may not be able to provide a livelihood for a son or daughter when they leave school. For those young people who can work on the family farm, times and conditions have also changed. A knowledge of new agricultural products and techniques is increasingly necessary to keep a property economically viable. Similarly, a knowledge of marketing and business practices is increasingly needed. Graziers and farmers now need to be able to adapt to changes in the demand for products, changing business practices, and new marketing circumstances, just as do business operators in rural towns (see Panel 46). An appropriate full secondary education can help develop this adaptability, as well as providing the foundation for more specific learning necessary for effective modern-day farm and business management.

9.8 The importance of completing a full secondary education has been discussed so far in terms of employment prospects and maintaining a livelihood, because those matters often dominate young people's thoughts and decisions. But an appropriate full secondary education should provide returns to the individual in other areas as well. Education contributes to personal development and provides the foundation for further non-employment related, as well as employment related, learning. It also provides the foundation for participation in cultural and recreational activities and community life. Personal development is especially important for many rural young people, as self-sufficiency is needed to cope with the demands of living in small rural towns or more remote locations. Personal development is also important for the many young people growing up in rural Australia who will have to move to a larger centre of population in order to further their education or training, or to increase their employment opportunities.

9.9 It is also important, at the national level, that more rural young people complete an appropriate full secondary education. The proportion of young Australians staying on at secondary school to Year 12 has increased considerably in recent years. The Commonwealth's Participation and Equity Program (PEP) has contributed to this increase. The twin objectives of PEP were to increase education participation and to introduce greater equity into the provision of education (CDEYA, 1983, p.3). The program was an outcome of the Commonwealth Government's desire:

...to achieve a situation whereby at the end of this decade most young people complete the equivalent of a full secondary education, either in school or in a TAFE institution or in some combination of work and education (CDEYA, 1983, p.1).

9.10 Retention to Year 12 has increased quite dramatically in recent years. In 1976, retention to Year 12 was only 34.9 per cent (CDE, 1986c, p.22), that is about 35 per cent of the young people who had started secondary school in 1971 (or 1972 in some systems) stayed on to be in Year 12 in 1976. By 1986, the Year 12 retention rate had risen to 48.7 per cent, an increase of almost 14 percentage points (ABS, 1987a, p.56). A considerable amount of this increase occurred in the last few years. To illustrate, the Year 12 retention rate increased by some eight percentage points between 1983 (when it was 40.6 per cent) and 1986 (when it was 48.7 per cent) (CDE, 1986c, p.22; ABS, 1987a, p.56).

9.11 Despite the increases which have occurred in Year 12 retention, the Commission recently called for a national effort to raise the Year 12 retention rate to 65 per cent for the nation as a whole by 1992. The reasoning behind the Commission's call indicates the importance to the individual students involved and the nation of increasing the proportion of young Australians who complete a full secondary education. The extract from *In the National Interest* (CSC, 1987a) presented in Panel 47 outlines that reasoning. More recently, the Commonwealth Government released a policy statement titled *Skills for Australia* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987d). That statement listed increased participation in education and training as an area requiring action and stated the Commonwealth Government's goal of a Year 12 retention rate of 65 per cent by the early 1990s.

9.12 Increased retention alone, however, is not the crucial aim. The more essential aim is the increased participation by young people in a high quality secondary education which is relevant to their needs and the needs of the nation. Furthermore, increased participation in secondary education and the quality of that education are inextricably linked, as the Commission has noted elsewhere (1987a, p.124). High quality education is needed to encourage increased retention, but retention needs to be increased for progress to be made towards reaching the goal of all young people completing a high quality secondary education.

9.13 To meet the national target of 65 per cent retention to Year 12 by 1992 and to reduce inequities in education provision, efforts must be made to increase upper secondary school participation by young people from groups which have traditionally tended to leave school early. One such group is the subject of this report, that is the young people of rural Australia.

9.14 The economic future of rural Australia, both in terms of on-farm and off-farm economic prosperity and employment, will depend considerably on the skills of the people living in rural Australia. As the Commission has argued previously, completion of a good general education gives a foundation for the skills required for mainstream employment in advanced economies (CSC, 1987a, p.64). Such skills will be needed increasingly in rural Australia, especially if, as seems likely, tertiary industry grows in importance in the rural economy.

Facts on school retention/completion

9.15 The Commonwealth Department of Education's (CDE) annual monographs on apparent retention rates and age participation rates are a much used source of information on school retention in Australia. The way in which retention rates are calculated in these monographs is best described through an example. The 1986 Year 12 retention rate for New South Wales is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in Year 12 in that State in 1986, by the number of students who were enrolled in Year 7 in that State in 1981 (the secondary school 'intake' year) and converting the result into a percentage. A method of calculation is used for the other retention rates reported in the CDE monographs (eg. rates for other States and for Australia as a whole) (see CDE, 1986c).

9.16 The retention rates reported in the CDE annual monographs are 'apparent' rates because they are not adjusted for population changes or other factors which can influence the percentages calculated. Apparent retention rates for a State could, for example, be lowered if for some reason a considerable number of students migrated out of that State after having entered secondary school. Migration into a State could have the opposite effect of increasing apparent retention rates for that State.

9.17 The apparent nature of these retention rates is highlighted when rates for different school systems are examined. Retention rates to Years 10 and 11 in the 'other non-government school' sector (ie. the independent school sector) are sometimes greater than 100 per cent, due to students transferring into this sector after the relevant intake year. The 1985 Year 11 retention rate for 'other non-government schools' for Australia as a whole was, for example, 103 per cent (CDE, 1986c, p.22).

Panel 46

**The Need for Change in Farm Practices:
Farmers Told put Girls on Land**

By rural writer
Julian Cribb

Australian farmers should consider letting their daughters take over and run their farms rather than their sons, a leading farm business adviser has suggested.

Mr Peter Poolman, principal of Poolman Partners, said the Australian family farm was self-destructing and faced disintegration because of poor business management — including what he termed ‘farm nepotism’, the practice of ensuring the property passed on to a son.

Many farmers still insisted on the son taking over, even when it was clear their daughter was better equipped, qualified and motivated.

‘This is one of the outdated practices and great business inefficiencies of rural industry,’ Mr Poolman comments in his book **Strategies for Survival**, which is soon to be published.

‘The days of brawn being the main requirement for farming have gone. Today, farmers must be smart — and an increasing range of skills are needed for farm management. There is no reason why girls cannot possess these skills.’

Mr Poolman said evidence was available already that, Australia-wide, leading family farms were being broken up or faced bankruptcy.

Several factors had exacerbated this situation, such as domestic, economic and world trade problems, but the more deep-seated and fundamental cause was to do with management.

(Source: **The Weekend Australian**, August 1-2, 1987, p.7)

Panel 47

**Reasons for Aiming for a Higher Rate of
Retention to Year 12**

The Commission believes that a retention rate of 55% to year 12 by 1992 is too low and that a higher rate of retention should be aimed for. The reasons for this conclusion are as follows:

- there are good grounds for believing that the levels of education and training in a population are important factors in international competitiveness amongst developed economies. Recent OECD figures show that, in the early 1980s, Australia ranked 14th out of 18 OECD countries in the population of 17 year-olds enrolled in either full or part-time education which includes apprentices. The gap at that time was substantial between Australia with only 59% of 17 year-olds enrolled, and the top six OECD countries (Japan, West Germany, US, Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland) all of whom exceeded 80% enrolled. For 19 year-olds the comparison was not nearly as disadvantageous to Australia indicating that sharp drops in enrolment in education occur in Australia at a much earlier age than in other developed economies;
- the mainstream of employment in advanced economies requires a strong base of general education in the population. Completion of a full secondary education provides the foundation for multi-skilling and the social skills which contribute to decision-making, productivity improvement and technological change. Conversely, the labour market for early school leavers has sharply contracted and this is likely to continue;
- the completion of a good general education makes an important contribution to personal development, provides lifelong benefits for the individual and is a foundation for further learning, recreation, and participation in the arts and community life;
- early school leaving and the disadvantages which flow from it are not randomly distributed. They fall most heavily on families of low socio-economic status. Gains in school retention are gains for equity;
- Australian democracy will be strengthened by a better-educated population. The institutions, practices and conventions of a democracy need a generally well-educated population for their preservation and development whereas intolerance, prejudice and irrationality thrive on ignorance.

(Source: CSC, 1987a, p.64)

9.18 The CDE annual monographs give retention rates for Australia as a whole and for each State and Territory, by school system and by sex of students. The monographs do not provide retention rates for regions within States and Territories. Were they to do so, the rates for particular regions would be very much 'apparent', because they would not reflect the considerable number of students who leave one region to complete their schooling elsewhere. Were retention rates to be calculated for a remote area, for example, the number of students staying on at school in the remote area would not include those who through either necessity or choice went to school elsewhere to complete their secondary education.

9.19 Facts on secondary education participation in rural Australia therefore need to be obtained from other sources. The recently published report of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (CDEET), **Completing Secondary School in Australia: A Socio-Economic and Regional Analysis** notes that 'A considerable number of survey-based studies over the years have found that students from outside the metropolitan regions are less likely than their city counterparts to stay on to the end of Year 12 (CDEET, 1987b, p.48).

9.20 One of the studies cited by CDEET is the recent Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) monograph, **Participation in Education**, written by Williams (1987). This monograph examined the rates of participation in various forms of education of groups of young people who took part in the ACER's longitudinal study of young people in transition. In the monograph, education participation rates are reported for two groups of students — an 'older sample' and a 'younger sample'. The results of interest here concern rates of Year 12 completion for the older sample by the time its members were aged 19 (1980) and for the younger sample, by the time its members were 19 (1984).

9.21 Williams determined Year 12 completion rates for quartiles (ie. groups each comprising about one quarter of the sample) within each of the samples, with the young people being allocated to a quartile according to the 'rurality' of where they lived in 1975. As Table 26 shows, whereas some 31 per cent of the young people in the 'most rural' quartile of the older sample had completed Year 12 by age 19, the comparable figure for those in the 'least rural' quartile was 34 per cent, suggesting a slight rural disadvantage. This disadvantage is greater, however, in the case of the younger sample. By age 19 some 34 per cent of the 'most rural' quartile of the younger sample had completed Year 12, but the comparable figure for the 'least rural' quartile was 42 per cent.

9.22 Writing of his findings on rural participation in different forms of education more generally, Williams states that, regarding the question of whether there is a 'rural disadvantage':

The answer seems to be in the affirmative. The data presented suggest lower participation rates by rural youth in most forms of education. In some cases the rural-urban differences in participation rates may be as much as ten percentage points, but in most instances four to five per cent fewer rural students enter post-compulsory education. (For isolated children these participation rates may be much lower; however, we are unable to look at this question as isolated children are not part of these samples.) The exceptions are TAFE and apprenticeships which see participation rates favouring rural persons. Other than these two instances participation rates of rural youth are often lower but never higher than those of urban youth. Living in a rural area it seems, is something of an impediment to furthering one's education beyond the compulsory years (1987, p.78).

Table 26
Observed Year 12 completion rates by rurality

Sample	Least rural 25% %	Second quartile %	Third quartile %	Most rural 25% %	Total %
Ever completed Year 12					
Older sample ^a	34	41	37	31	36
Younger sample ^b	42	35	37	34	37

- (a) Figures show the percentage of the older sample who had completed Year 12 by age 19 (1980)
- (b) Figures show the percentage of the younger sample who had completed Year 12 by age 19 (1984)

Source: Adapted from Williams (1987, p.76)

9.23 While Williams' findings are of interest, his Year 12 completion results are now somewhat dated, despite the monograph's 1987 publication date. Recent developments or influences are therefore not reflected in his findings.

9.24 The Education Commission of New South Wales report, **Listening and Responding**, concluded from an examination of government school enrolment data, that '...retention rates for Sydney [government] schools were higher than those for rural areas' (1983, p.16). The retention information presented in **Listening and Responding** has recently been updated by the Education Commission of New South Wales and made available to the Commission. The results, presented in Table 27, show that while the Year 12 retention rate for government schools in inland areas of New South Wales has increased in recent years, the rate is still well below the rate for government schools in that State.

Table 27

Apparent retention to Year 12 in New South Wales
government schools, 1982 to 1986^a

	Inland regions ^b (1)	(per cent)	State average (2)	Difference (2-1)
1977-82	24.1		28.4	4.3
1978-83	27.4		32.0	4.6
1979-84	30.4		36.0	5.6
1980-85	31.4		36.1	4.7
1981-86	34.5		39.2	4.7

(a) Calculated from Schools Census data

(b) Department of Education Regions 'west' of the Great Dividing
Range (Riverina, North-West and Western)

Source: Information provided by the Education Commission of New South Wales

9.25 The Education Commission of New South Wales, in forwarding its updated information to the Commission, also reported on retention from Year 7 to Year 10 and from Year 10 to Year 12. As Table 28 shows, for both types of retention the rate for government schools in inland regions is consistently below the respective rate for government schools in New South Wales as a whole. The finding regarding lower retention to Year 10 for inland schools is worth attention here, as it suggests that inland schools have a relatively high rate of student 'drop out' or 'transfer out' at the lower secondary school level. Efforts to increase school retention therefore need to be made at that level, as well as at the upper secondary school level.

Table 28

Apparent retention, Year 7 to Year 10 and Year 10 to Year 12,
in New South Wales government schools, 1982 to 1986^a

	Year 7 to Year 10		Year 10 to Year 12	
	Inland	State	Inland	State
	(per cent)			
1977-82	80.5	83.9	30.0	33.8
1978-83	81.4	84.7	33.7	37.8
1979-84	82.5	86.6	36.8	41.6
1980-85	85.5	88.8	36.7	40.7
1981-86	85.2	89.6	40.4	43.7

(a) Calculated from schools census data

Source: Information provided by the Education Commission of New South Wales

9.26 It should be noted that the retention results in **Listening and Responding** and the updated information provided by the Education Commission of New South Wales refer to apparent retention rates and therefore have the limitations mentioned in paragraphs 9.16 to 9.18.

Year 12 completion rates recently published by CDEET

9.27 A valuable source of information regarding levels of upper secondary education participation in rural Australia is CDEET's study of Year 12 completion rates, the results of which are reported in **Completing Secondary School in Australia: A Socio-Economic and Regional Analysis** (1987b). The study analysed data provided by State and Territory education authorities on the number of students in each postcode area who had sat for end-of-Year 12 examinations in specified years. The 'by postcode' organisation of the data meant that Year 12 completion rates for selected geographic areas could be calculated, making possible rural/urban comparisons and comparisons between selected rural areas*.

9.28 It is important to note that the postcodes used in the CDEET study are from the addresses to which examination/certification results were sent and can be expected to reflect the locations of the students' homes. This means that students from rural areas who boarded away from home to complete their schooling are likely to have been classified according to their home, and hence rural, address.

9.29 The study compared Year 12 completion rates for metropolitan and non-metropolitan education administration regions within each State and the Northern Territory. The results of this analysis are presented in Appendix I. The typical finding was that Year 12 completion rates were markedly lower in non-metropolitan regions compared with metropolitan regions. While this pattern was found in all States and the Northern Territory, within-State differences between non-metropolitan and metropolitan rates were greatest in New South Wales and Victoria and less marked in South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. In the Northern Territory, Year 12 completers were mainly concentrated in Darwin. (See CDEET, 1987b, p.24)

9.30 Analyses of female compared with male Year 12 completion rates by administration region were also undertaken. The pattern which emerged was that:

Females, in all state and territory administrative regions, exhibit noticeably higher Year 12 completion rates than their male peers, with the difference between the male and female rates being greatest in country areas. Further, in all states except Tasmania the discrepancy between the completion rates for metropolitan males and non-metropolitan males is greater than that between the rates for metropolitan females and non-metropolitan females. In other words, female students from non-metropolitan regions generally are more likely to complete Year 12 at a rate comparable to their metropolitan counterparts than are males (CDEET, 1987b, p.24).

* To obtain the Year 12 completion rate for a given area, CDEET divided the number of Year 12 completers in the area by the estimated total number of Year 12-aged young people in the area and converted the resulting figure into a percentage. It should be noted that CDE's Year 12 apparent retention rates are based on mid-year school census figures. In contrast, CDEET's Year 12 completion rates are based on the number of students who sat for end-of-Year 12 examinations.

9.31 In the CDEET study, analyses of Year 12 completion rates for selected rural areas were also conducted. Analyses were conducted for:

- five mining towns which shared a number of common features (Broken Hill, New South Wales; Mount Isa, Queensland; Whyalla, South Australia; Kalgoorlie, Western Australia; and Queenstown, Tasmania);
- eight major regional centres which had a more varied economic base (Dubbo and Wagga Wagga, New South Wales; Wangaratta, Victoria; Rockhampton, Queensland; Renmark, South Australia; Bunbury, Western Australia; and Burnie/Devonport, Tasmania);
- six centres with a major tourism orientation (Port Macquarie, New South Wales; Bendigo, Victoria; Cairns and Mackay, Queensland; Mt Gambier, South Australia; and Geraldton, Western Australia); and
- six agricultural centres (Tamworth, New South Wales; Hamilton, Victoria; Longreach, Queensland; Port Lincoln, South Australia; Narrogin, Western Australia; and Circular Head, Tasmania).

9.32 Results of these analyses are presented in Appendix I. Specific findings of note from the CDEET report were that:

- the Year 12 completion rates varied, even between mining towns which shared a number of common features (p.35);
- the major regional centres tended to have a higher Year 12 completion rate than their surrounding areas due, to a considerable extent, to the higher rate of completion for males in the centres compared with males in their surrounding areas; the populations of the centres also tended to be of higher socioeconomic status than the populations of their surrounding areas; the existence of a college of advanced education (CAE) in a centre did not necessarily coincide with higher Year 12 completion rates (eg. the completion rate for males in Wagga Wagga was very low, despite the presence of a CAE) (pp.36-37); and
- tourism may depress Year 12 completion rates, possibly because of the informal and unstructured nature of the tourist industry which enables it to more readily provide jobs for young people (pp.37-38).

9.33 The CDEET report on the study stresses that simple rural-urban comparisons of Year 12 completion rates are insufficient, as such rates vary between rural regions. The report states that:

What the present study has shown, however, is that it is not enough to establish that on average city students are more likely than students from other parts of the country to complete Year 12. There are marked variations between non-metropolitan regions in terms of their Year 12 completion rates, even where those regions have basic social and economic characteristics in common. Generalisations about participation in post-compulsory education in country as opposed to city areas, it is clear, can no longer be regarded as adequate. What is required now is a more precise knowledge of patterns of educational participation in specific localities (1987b, p.48).

9.34 The report also addresses the matter of whether the local economy influences Year 12 completion. It comes to the conclusion that ‘...the completion rate for a given area cannot be attributed in any straightforward way to the nature of the local economy’ and notes that in regard to completion rates’...many factors interact, making generalisation about causes a risky undertaking’ (CDEET, 1987b, p.49). The report adds that:

Among the points which need explanation is the relatively high female Year 12 completion rate in many country areas. There is some evidence that females from non-metropolitan areas have higher career aspirations than their male counterparts, who tend to be attracted to apprenticeships rather than jobs requiring higher education (such as teaching and nursing which attract many of the girls)... Yet frequently those higher aspirations are not translated into actual participation in higher education. One possible explanation of the higher rates of female retention in rural areas is that for a significant proportion of females in country localities staying on at school to the end of Year 12 serves as an **alternative** to, rather than preparation for a career: they complete Year 12 because there are no other options available to them locally. Girls from country areas also tend to marry at an earlier age than those from the major cities ... While in general participation in post-compulsory education correlates with later marriage, it may well be that this does not always apply in the case of some female Year 12 completers outside the metropolitan centres. Completion of a full secondary education followed by early marriage could be regarded by them and their families as a legitimate ‘career path’ in the absence of work and further study opportunities for women in country regions (pp.49-50).

School retention/completion and the rural economic crisis

9.35 In the light of recent school retention/completion rates, what can be said about the possibility, raised in the Commonwealth Government’s statement **Economic and Rural Policy**, that senior secondary school participation in rural areas might decline as a consequence of the rural economic crisis? Of relevance in addressing this question are recent trends in retention/completion in rural areas and the extent to which local economic conditions influence retention/completion.

9.36 Generally, Year 12 retention/completion rates in rural areas have been increasing. The figures on Year 12 government school retention rates in New South Wales inland regions provided by the Education Commission of New South Wales show that the inland rate has increased from 24.1 per cent in 1982 to 34.5 per cent in 1986 (see Table 27). Results from the CDEET analysis of Year 12 completion rates in education administration regions presented in Tables I.1 and I.2 of Appendix I also show increases in completion in many, but not all, rural regions. Table 29, however, presents 1984 and 1985 Year 12 completion rates calculated by the CDEET for overall rural and urban areas within each State and the Northern Territory. These results show increased school completion in rural areas of the Northern Territory and all States except Tasmania. As noted in paragraph 9.34, the CDEET’s detailed analysis of Year 12 completion rates suggests that there is no clearcut relationship between completion rates and local economic circumstances.

9.37 Increases in retention/completion in rural areas in recent years and the lack of a clear cut relationship between completion rates and local economic circumstances suggest that the rural economic recession has not resulted in reduced senior secondary education participation in rural Australia as had been feared. It should be acknowledged, however, that difficult economic conditions may have influenced school retention/completion rates detrimentally in certain areas or locations. It is also possible that rural economic conditions have had a limiting effect on increases in rural school retention/completion more generally; that is, the increases which may have occurred may have been even greater had rural economic conditions been better. On the other hand, difficult economic conditions may have contributed to the general increase in rural school retention/completion, by reducing the employment opportunities for would-be early school leavers and thereby reducing their incentive to leave school to take a job.

Table 29

Estimated Year 12 completion rates for urban and rural divisions,
by State and Territory, 1984 and 1985

State/Territory	Area	Year 12 completion rates	
		1984	1985
		(per cent)	
NSW	Urban	43.7	43.9
	Rural	31.1	32.8
Vic	Urban	49.0	52.2
	Rural	35.3	39.0
Qld	Urban	60.6	62.9
	Rural	40.9	45.0
WA	Urban	46.3	50.5
	Rural	33.7	39.2
SA	Urban	52.9	54.2
	Rural	39.7	46.2
Tas	Urban	33.6	30.3
	Rural	24.0	21.1
NT	Urban	32.4	41.5
	Rural	14.1	16.9

Source: Adapted from data provided by CDEET. The definition of rural Australia given in Chapter 2 of this report was not strictly applied in developing this table.

Factors influencing school retention/completion

9.38 A considerable amount of research has been undertaken and much has been written on the factors which influence whether Australian students complete a full secondary education or leave school early. Much of the literature on this topic is general in nature, rather than being focused on rural students, but it provides an appropriate starting point for discussion. The discussion will then turn to rural students and the factors which influence their school retention/completion rates. Some studies have been undertaken, however, on factors influencing the educational decisions of rural students and relevant results are noted in paragraphs 9.45 and 9.46.

9.39 Two excellent overviews of Australian literature on factors influencing school participation are available. The first is that of Hayden (1982) who outlines the general factors influencing staying on at school as follows:

The factors associated with continued participation by young people in the post compulsory years of secondary schooling are in many respects similar to those associated with participation in higher education. In general terms those who remain at school longer are more likely to have positive parent and teacher encouragement with regard to their studies, friends remaining at school, higher occupational and educational aspirations and expectations, a better than average ability with studies (and certainly less experience of academic failure at school), and a higher than average family socioeconomic status background. In addition, they are more likely to attend a non-government school, to find their schoolwork interesting and relevant to their needs, to accept the authority structure of the school, to have good relationships with teachers and other students, and to live in a metropolitan rather than a country area. There is, of course, a degree of correlation between these factors so that, for instance, young people from a higher socioeconomic background are more likely to have higher educational and occupational aspirations, and so on (1982, p.144).

9.40 Hayden goes on to summarise his findings, making special reference to the influence of high youth unemployment rates on participation in upper secondary schooling. He writes that:

In summary, participation by young people in post-compulsory secondary schooling is influenced by a range of factors, many of which are similar to those which influence participation by young people in higher education. A recent factor is the emergence of substantial youth unemployment, and this may be causing some young people (particularly young females) to remain longer at school, while at the same time, causing other young people (particularly more able young males) to leave earlier (1982, p.147)

9.41 The second overview of factors influencing school participation is that of Blakers (1983), whose conclusions are consistent with those of Hayden. Blakers stresses the importance of the perceptions people have of '.... the value and purpose of schooling and of education generally' (p.23) as a broad determinant of school retention and participation rates. She discusses how positive parental attitudes to schooling for their child can influence staying on at school and notes that '... the traditional perceptions of schooling as leading to occupational advantage which have been responsible for expanded participation in schooling in Australia in the post-war decades' (p.26). Blakers goes on to note, however, that:

[These perceptions] still exert a powerful influence; but current economic conditions, unemployment and, in some cases, present financial constraints are already affecting these well established perceptions and the patterns of school participation (p.26).

9.42 Blakers (p.26) expands on her comments on the influence of economic conditions by referring to Miller's (1981) 'conventional wisdom' :

...that when unemployment is high teenagers tend to remain at school rather than enter a depressed job market; when unemployment falls and job opportunities increase young people leave school to enter the labour market (pp.26-27).

She also notes a research finding by Miller which indicates that high unemployment can reduce the capability of families to keep their children at school (p.26).

9.43 Other factors mentioned by Blakers are family background (high family income and high parental occupational status and education are associated with staying on), the educational achievement and aspirations of the student, the occupational aspirations of the student and the school experiences of the student (those who 'fit in' stay on; '... those who find school unrewarding as a present experience or as a means to future success and satisfaction' (p.39) tend to leave early).

9.44 Mention should be made here of the reasons young people themselves give for leaving school. A number of surveys have been conducted on these reasons (Delin, Saunders and Inshaw, 1979; Stoessiger, 1980; King, 1983; ABS, 1984; Harris, 1985). Such surveys have tended to find that job-related or 'pro-job' reasons (eg. the desire to have a job or to earn money) dominate as the reasons given for leaving school. Such surveys have also tended to find, however, that 'anti-school' reasons for leaving school are often given by young people (eg. being 'fed-up' with school or being tired of studying).

9.45 Special mention should be made here of Stoessiger's (1980) survey, for he surveyed rural school leavers in Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania. Stoessiger found that:

In all States the 'pro-work' reasons for leaving [school] are ahead of the 'leave-school' reasons which in turn are well ahead of all other categories. The desire to get a job is a powerful impetus for leaving school (p.21).

Stoessiger summarised his findings as follows:

In summary, getting a job and earning money was the major reason given by rural students for leaving school. A dislike of school and not feeling good enough were also important reasons, more so in Queensland but less important in Tasmania. Financial difficulties were of some importance in Tasmania and were important to a number of Queensland students (p.21).

9.46 Harris (1985) also examined the reasons for leaving school given by rural students. In a 1981 survey of potential school leavers in the North-West Education Region of New South Wales, Harris asked students about the main reason why they were planning to leave school when they intended. About half of the sample gave reasons related to '... having the necessary school qualifications for a particular job or training ...', while 14 per cent replied that they would have completed Year 12 by that time (p. 36). Harris reports that 'Very few (less than 3 per cent) gave reasons which were primarily concerned with escaping from school rather than getting a job' (p. 36).

9.47 Except for the preceding two paragraphs, the discussion so far on factors influencing participation has been general in nature. It is now necessary to focus more specifically on rural students. While many of the factors identified in the general literature as influencing school participation are relevant for rural as well as for metropolitan students these factors can take on a somewhat different character and/or significance for rural students, especially those from remote areas. The reasons for this relate to the nature of rural life, as well as to the circumstances and quality of rural schooling. Special mention should be made here of two points concerning physical access to education facilities.

9.48 The first point concerns physical access to school, a topic focused on in Chapter 4. That chapter emphasised that while most rural students have ready daily access from their home to a school appropriate to their year-level, some have to travel extensively each day to get to school, while for others daily school attendance from home is impossible. This latter group must generally either study at home using distance education services, or live away from home to attend school. Either alternative has its special problems and drawbacks, as does extensive daily travel to school. These physical access difficulties need to be kept in mind when considering the factors influencing the school retention/completion of rural students.

9.49 The second point concerns access to tertiary education institutions. This point is particularly relevant here because the lack of proximity to tertiary education institutions may act to restrict the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of rural students. This may not only adversely affect their rate of tertiary education participation, but may also contribute to the generally lower rate of full secondary education completion in rural compared with metropolitan areas.

9.50 Young people in rural Australia often have difficulties concerning access to tertiary education institutions. These difficulties are more pronounced with regard to higher education institutions (ie. universities and CAEs) as relatively few of these institutions are located in rural areas. According to figures provided to the Commission by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC), of the 19 universities in Australia only five are outside capital cities, while of the 47 CAEs only 16 are outside capital cities. Many rural students therefore have to live away from home in a metropolitan area to go on to higher education. As was emphasised in rural visits undertaken during the Commission's study of rural schooling, this means that rural young people who go on to higher education often have to contend with the considerable cost of living away from home in a city, as well as with the adjustment difficulties which moving to a city can entail.

9.51 TAFE facilities are more broadly distributed across Australia than higher education institutions. Access to TAFE facilities for rural young people therefore tends to be easier than access to higher education institutions. In its **Review of TAFE Funding**, the CTEC reported that there are 215 major TAFE institutions in Australia, 124 of which are in non-metropolitan locations (CTEC, 1986, pp. 6-7). Table 30 shows the number of major TAFE institutions in each State by metropolitan/non-metropolitan location. While the number of non-metropolitan major TAFE institutions is high in New South Wales and substantial in Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia, there are only eight major TAFE institutions in non-metropolitan areas in Western Australia and four

in Tasmania. The CTEC (1986, p. 8) points out, however, that the major TAFE institutions control some 1300 ancilliary centres or annexes. While many of these annexes are only centres for the teaching of preparatory and adult education courses or for the delivery of special programs, some are centres of significance and have a permanent staff and offer a range of TAFE mainstream courses. These ancillary centres or annexes broaden the reach of TAFE into rural Australia, but still come short of offering to rural young people the ready access to TAFE available to their metropolitan counterparts.

9.52 The development of new styles of institutions offering tertiary study should be noted here. In particular, community colleges offering both secondary and TAFE courses, such as those in Hervey Bay and Alexandra Hills, Queensland, may prove to be a useful institutional model for improving the access of rural students to tertiary education facilities. The recently announced plan for similar arrangements to meet the special educational and training needs of Aboriginal and other residents of the Boggabilla region of New South Wales is also noteworthy in this context. Generally, however, the more restricted access of rural and, more especially, remote students to tertiary education institutions is a consideration which should be kept in mind when examining factors influencing the school retention/completion rates of rural students.

Table 30
Distribution of major TAFE institutions
between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas,
by State and Territory, 1986^a

State/Territory	Number of colleges	
	Metropolitan	Non-metropolitan
NSW	27	69
Vic	21	13
Qld	12	15
WA	12	8
SA	11	12
Tas	2	4
NT	1	3
ACT	5	0
Total	91	124

(a) CTEC (1986, p.8) refers to major TAFE institutions as ‘... those with TAFE as the predominant function and which have a full-time principal officer’

Source: Adapted from CTEC (1986, p.7)

9.53 It is to these factors that the discussion now turns. For convenience, the discussion which follows is organised under five headings:

- family background and parental influence;
- educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of the student;
- financial and emotional costs to families;
- early school experiences; and
- school offerings.

Family background and parental influence

9.54 The family backgrounds of rural students may help explain the generally lower school retention/completion rates in rural compared with metropolitan areas. Many rural parents would themselves have left school early and grown up in a rural area at a time when employment was less dependent on educational qualifications. In terms of occupation, many rural parents, including those of high socioeconomic background, are likely to be in occupations which are not highly dependent on educational qualifications. For example, rural parents in high status occupations are likely to be graziers or farmers, rather than doctors, lawyers or architects. The family background of many rural young people, and the accepted pattern of educational participation within their family, may be such that they are encouraged to leave school early. Family background and parental attitudes can strongly influence the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of young people. The part such aspirations and expectations play in influencing the educational participation of rural young people is discussed under the next heading.

9.55 Many rural parents, especially those living in areas with a narrow industry base or in areas hard-hit by the recent downturn in the rural economy, recognise that their children may have to leave the local area to increase their employment or further education and training opportunities. They also recognise that secondary education provides the foundation for such a move. Traditional family or regional patterns of low secondary school completion are, however, hard to overcome. Furthermore, compared with metropolitan families, rural families are likely to incur greater financial and emotional costs in having their child complete a full secondary education or go on to higher education (see paragraphs 9.60 to 9.67).

9.56 Parental income is another aspect of family background which may help explain the generally low school completion rates in rural Australia. This aspect of family background overlaps with financial costs and their influence on school completion, so the two aspects will be treated together under a subsequent heading.

Educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of the student

9.57 The sometimes limited educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of rural young people can detrimentally affect school retention/completion rates in rural areas. The aspirations and expectations of rural young people can be limited as a result of:

- parental influences;
- the 'brain drain' which occurs in some rural areas (see Chapter 4);
- the limited social and other experiences available in small provincial towns or remote communities;
- the 'out of sight — out of mind' nature of many educational and occupational options; and
- the fact that furthering their education or training, or entering certain occupations, would necessitate leaving their home area and incurring the financial costs and the emotional costs and tensions involved.

9.58 Panel 48 presents extracts from submissions which are broadly relevant to aspects of rural life which may limit aspirations and expectations. Panel 49 presents observations on attitudes influencing retention in rural Tasmania.

9.59 Raising the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of young people in rural Australia is an important pre-condition to increasing rural school completion rates. Without raised aspirations and expectations, sustained increases in school completion rates are unlikely to occur in rural Australia. As paragraph 9.77 points out, this report urges the broadening of the educational and social experiences of rural young people, in part to help raise their aspirations and expectations.

Financial and emotional costs to families

9.60 Financial costs incurred by a family in having their child complete a full secondary schooling are basically of two main types. The first type is income or help foregone by the family in order to keep the child at school. The second type is the actual expense which may be involved in having the child attend a school. Consideration of the two types of financial costs incurred in keeping a child at school can help explain how family income may influence school completion rates.

9.61 Costs associated with income or help foregone by keeping a child at school may often be of greater relevance for rural families than for families in metropolitan areas. Harrold and Powell (1987, pp.90-91) point out in their discussion of rural labour markets that rural communities and small towns contain quite a high proportion of self-employed people. Such people, especially those on farms may have to forgo valuable help their child could provide in order for that child to complete a full secondary education. In other cases, the income which could have been earned through employment undertaken by the child, even if in a relatively unskilled and/or seasonal job, may have to be forgone. The especially low school completion rates for boys in many rural areas may be attributable in part to families choosing to have their son help on the family farm or in the family business, or to have him take other employment if it is available, rather than to forgo such help or income while he completes secondary school.

9.62 The second type of financial cost to the family involved in a child completing a full secondary education is more immediately apparent. There are costs associated with schooling (eg. books, special fees, excursion expenses) regardless of location. Rural families, however, often face additional costs of considerable magnitude. This is especially the case for families living in remote areas. There may, for example, be costs associated with the child travelling daily to school, transported either by a parent or by school bus. Where no daily access to school is possible, considerable costs associated with living away from home to attend school may be incurred.

9.63 Living away from home and travel costs, as well as other difficulties associated with living away from home to attend school and extensive daily travel to school, have been discussed in Chapter 4. As noted in that chapter, considerable financial cost can be incurred by families when their child lives away from home to attend school, despite the financial assistance provided through the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC).

Panel 48

**Aspects of Rural Life Affecting
Aspirations and Expectations.**

Although low retention is a general problem, this is particularly so in isolated areas where going on to Years 11 and 12 can mean physical removal from the community. The desire to continue must be stronger and we believe that children in rural areas need special counselling concerning the need for continuing education.

(Source: Submission from Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, New South Wales)

...

The one great negative implied by the word 'remote' is distance from Adelaide and the cost of getting there. Those who cannot get to the city occasionally are culturally deprived. School trips help but they cost money. 'Access' in this sense, especially for tertiary study or courses, has a significant bearing on the lack of retention beyond Year 10 in rural areas.

(Source: Submission from Port Lincoln Business Professional Women's Club)

...

There seems to be a tendency in some rural areas for children to lack the value of attaining higher levels of schooling. This is often evident even in very young children who see little reason to be at school. This results in children leaving school at the minimum age. The Centre could have a vital role here in educating the community by providing personnel to work in small communities with parents, teachers and primary aged children.

(Source: Submission from Southern Tablelands Education Centre, Goulburn)

...

We feel that a combination of small schools with few teachers and small classes, and possibly the low educational expectations of parents living in remote areas, leads to a lack of motivation to attend school beyond the compulsory age level.

(Source: Submission from the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria)

Panel 49

Attitudes Influencing School Retention in Rural Tasmania

Historically, the major economic activities in the isolated areas [of Tasmania] have been of a primary nature, namely mining, fishing, forestry, power generation and agriculture. An attitude has consequently developed that education is not important in gaining employment, as the ambitions of students were limited to those that could be fulfilled locally.

The perspective of girls has been traditionally limited to the dependent role, oriented towards early marriage and limited employment opportunities. The absence of any appreciation of the importance of education to motherhood tends to reinforce the problem in the long term.

Boys have tended to limit any thought of their future to apprenticeships in the traditional areas of employment, with little appreciation of the importance of education in achieving this or in providing an increased opportunity for transferring to another area of employment if this becomes necessary, in the future.

The advent of the micro-computer and the present harsh realities of economics have altered this attitude slightly among the young. But there is still a significant lack of appreciation among the older generation of the value of education. This is a major obstacle for those children who seek further education after high school, a problem that has become self-perpetuating.

This is compounded by the difficulty of access to further education. Major inhibiting factors are problems with accommodation, transport and a reluctance by students to leave home to face life in the city. This reluctance is based on the 'fear of the unknown' previously mentioned and is the reason that many area committees see the need to allocate a substantial proportion of their funds for travel on a regular basis.

(Source: Submission from P R d'Plesse, Principal, Tarraleah Primary School, Tasmania)

9.64 Rural families on relatively low incomes may find the cost of having their children complete a full secondary education burdensome and may opt to have them leave school early. Even in families in which meeting the cost is not a problem, awareness of the cost, coupled with less than positive attitudes concerning the importance of schooling, may lead the parents to make the same choice. The relevance of the financial cost of schooling to school completion in rural Australia was noted in submissions made to the Commission (see Panel 50).

9.65 There are often emotional costs for rural parents and children associated with a child completing a full secondary education. Many geographically isolated families who do not have daily access to school from home consider it necessary to have their children live away from home while undertaking their secondary schooling, rather than have them study at home using distance education services. For these families, having a child complete a full

secondary education involves additional years of financial cost, as well as the emotional costs related to family separation. These emotional costs can be great for both parents and students. One submission to the Commission, in discussing the living away from home problems of upper secondary and tertiary students from remote areas, noted that:

The pressures on young adults or mid teenagers when they are uprooted from their familiar environment and put in a totally new social environment is seldom appreciated, and is a major cause of students dropping out. (Submission from Port Lincoln Business and Professional Women's Club).

9.66 The emotional costs associated with a child living away from home have been discussed more fully in Chapter 4. These emotional costs are not restricted to geographically isolated families who have to choose between having their children study at home using distance education services or having them live away from home to attend school. They are also experienced by rural families who have daily access to school, but who choose to have their children attend a school other than the local one. These families have the choice of incurring the financial and emotional costs of having their children live away from home to attend school, or of having them attend a local school the family considers inappropriate. Faced with this choice, the parents may well opt instead to have them leave school early.

9.67 More generally, many rural families feel ambivalent about their children completing a full secondary education, because it could be the first step to them leaving the rural area permanently. On the one hand, a family may realise that there are limited local employment prospects and that the child's future may have to lie elsewhere. On the other hand, that realisation brings with it the emotional costs associated with anticipated long-term separation.

Early school experiences

9.68 Early school experiences can influence whether a student eventually completes a full secondary education or leaves school early. It is important that early school experiences provide a sound basis for later learning, especially in literacy and numeracy, as well as positive attitudes to schooling. Where this foundation is not laid, early learning difficulties, low levels of educational achievement and negative experiences at school, can be hard for a child to overcome in later years. Difficulties of this type can also make a child ill-disposed to school and keen to leave school at the earliest age possible. These influences can be important for metropolitan-based as well as for rural students. Certain aspects of rural schooling, however, may put rural students at greater risk of having early school experiences which may limit their longer-term educational achievement and attainment.

9.69 Lack of specialist services in remote areas can mean that learning difficulties or disabilities likely to impede learning, are not identified in the early years of schooling. The limited experience of many teachers in rural schools may also be a factor contributing to the lack of early diagnosis. Similarly, a lack of specialist services and other factors can make remediation hard to provide. High teacher turnover in some rural schools can also mean that a child is taught successively by a number of teachers, some of whom may be quite inexperienced. High teacher turnover can also lead to discontinuities in a student's learning program or, to repeated presentations of the same material by new teachers who are not aware of what a class has already been taught. Teacher/student conflicts or

misunderstandings may be exacerbated due to the smallness of rural schools, and the unavailability of contact between the teacher and the student. Where there is staff continuity, multi-grade teaching arrangements in small rural schools can mean that a student will have the same teacher for several years. While this can have advantages, difficulties can occur for the student if there is conflict with the teacher. Students in multi-grade classes will benefit from the strengths of their teacher, but any teacher weakness in key areas such as the teaching of mathematics or reading can have a considerable impact on their short-term and long-term learning achievements.

9.70 Difficulties relating to physical access to school, such as the need to travel extensively each day to get to school or the need to live away from home to attend school, may also have an adverse influence on the early school achievements and attitudes to school of some rural students. Furthermore, transition problems often arise for rural students when they transfer from a small rural primary school to a relatively large secondary school, or when they need to live away from home to attend secondary school.

9.71 The effect of attending a rural primary school and the educational achievements of students is hard to determine. Available evidence is neither extensive nor particularly conclusive. Turney, Sinclair and Cairns (1980) examined reading comprehension test scores for a sample of Years 4, 6, 7 and 8 students attending Disadvantaged Country Areas Program (DCAP) schools in the far western region of New South Wales in 1977. The researchers found that a very high proportion of the students (from a minimum of 46.4% to a maximum of 65% for the eight 'sex by year level' groups) fell in the lowest quartile (ie. 25%) of the New South Wales norms for the reading test used (1980, pp.71-72). Turney et al point out that reading comprehension seemed to worsen as year level increased, and suggested a possible '... effect of student failure, lack of motivation and decreased interest and performance as the student progresses through the school system' (p.72). It should be noted, however, that schools receiving assistance through the DCAP in 1977 would have been disadvantaged schools. They also point out that 'inner-city disadvantaged pupils' performed slightly worse than the DCAP students on the reading comprehension test (p.72).

Panel 50

Financial Costs and Education Participation

Does it come back to ACCESS? Perhaps the parents could not afford to pay boarding fees, and the local school only went to Year 10. Perhaps there were no hostel places, so the parents would have had to accept the added burden of having to pay tuition fees if the child attended an Independent Boarding School.

Source: Submission from Federal Isolated Children's Parents Association)

...

In our Tasmanian study we have found that a substantial minority of District High School students may be classed as 'unintended leavers' who could not continue studies because of family socioeconomic circumstances or other aspects of material disadvantage. It is therefore important ... that in times of fiscal restraint government allowances be directed to 'those families most in need'.

(Source: Submission from Professor Phillip Hughes, University of Tasmania)

9.72 Williams, Batten, Girling-Butcher and Clancy (1981) examined 1975 data for 10 and 11 year-old primary school students and found that in terms of word knowledge, literacy and numeracy, 'Other things being equal, students attending rural primary schools seem disadvantaged in contrast to their urban counterparts' (p.54). Williams et al raised the question, however, of whether these findings were the result of a statistical artifact (pp.54-55) and also reported that 'family rurality' (as distinct from 'school rurality') was related to numeracy mastery only, with the difference favouring children from rural families. They also refer (pp. 54, 58) to their examination of similar 1975 achievement data for secondary students aged about 14 years, reported in Williams, Clancy, Batten and Girling-Butcher (1980). That examination found that 'Other things equal, rural schools — as we have defined rural schools — do not disadvantage their students significantly in either verbal or numerical skills' (Williams et al, 1980, p.60). This finding could indicate that any earlier disadvantage regarding achievement does not necessarily carry over into the secondary schooling of rural students. The examination of 1975 achievement data also found no differences in terms of achievement for secondary school students from rural compared with urban families (p.63).

9.73 Despite the rather limited and inconclusive evidence available as to whether rural primary school students in Australia are disadvantaged in terms of educational achievement, it is still appropriate to keep in mind that the seeds for lifelong educational achievement and attainment may often be sown early. Attempts to improve school retention rates, therefore, should not be focused only at the secondary school level. One submission emphasised this point as follows:

So often the attention to increasing retention focuses on senior Years 11 and 12. The role of the primary school in influencing school habits as well as the early post-primary years cannot be underestimated in terms of assisting with increasing retention. (Submission from Victorian Country Education Project).

School offerings

9.74 The curriculum in rural schools has been discussed in Chapter 5. In general, curriculum offerings are quite broad in most rural schools, but there is sometimes a lack of appropriate levels of teaching within particular subject areas, and specialist subjects (eg. music) are sometimes unavailable. A curriculum which meets the needs of rural students, but which also broadens their educational, social and employment horizons, is central to efforts to increase school retention rates in rural Australia.

9.75 Despite the considerable curriculum breadth in most rural schools, some submissions to the Commission pointed to restricted curriculum offerings as a factor contributing to low school retention rates in rural areas (see Panel 51). Even in rural schools with broad curriculum offerings, some parents may, however, perceive the curriculum to be inadequate due to their belief that rural schools are somehow 'second best'. Where curriculum offerings are limited, approaches such as those described earlier in this report can be adopted. Where parental perceptions are the issue, the provision of more information to parents about curriculum offerings and the achievements of rural schooling may be beneficial. Greater involvement of community members in curriculum development and other aspects of school decision-making may also be beneficial in this regard.

9.76 The educational and general life experiences of young people in small provincial towns and more remote areas can often be limited, as already noted, and can lead to low educational and occupational aspirations and expectations, and problems for those students who eventually leave their local area. Difficulties associated with transition to a larger centre may need to be reduced in order to help increase school retention. Appropriate 'outreach' by schools can help overcome these transition problems. Reacting to the claim that the Tasmanian upper secondary college system (which makes it necessary for many rural students to live away from home in order to continue at school beyond Year 10), has contributed to rural student dropout, Hughes noted that:

... this barrier is now being overcome. Determined 'outreach' by the colleges themselves in relation to rural District High Schools and increased 'orientation' and 'socialisation' has been just as influential as the provision of facilities and 'appropriate' curriculum. Physical access and social access must go hand in hand. (Submission from Professor Phillip Hughes, University of Tasmania).

9.77 A broadening of the life experiences of rural young people may help raise their aspirations and expectations, while also easing any transition to living in a larger centre of population which they may be required to make. For these and other reasons, the broadening of the educational and social experiences of young people in small provincial towns and more remote areas is encouraged in this report. A fuller discussion of this topic is given in Chapter 5, along with two recommendations (Recommendations 4 and 5) aimed at broadening the experiences of rural students.

Approaches to increasing school retention rates

9.78 Given the importance of increasing the proportion of young Australians who complete a full secondary education, and given the relatively low levels of full secondary education completion evident in rural Australia, the Commission considers that greater effort is needed to increase school retention rates in rural areas. Central to such efforts must be improvements in access to schooling and in the quality of schooling available in rural areas. Much of the content of this report has been concerned with these topics.

9.79 Financial and emotional costs were referred to in the discussion of factors influencing school participation. Such costs are especially great, and hence more likely to influence school retention when physical access to a school presents difficulties. The earlier discussion of access to schooling provided in Chapters 4 and 6 therefore take on added significance. Chapter 4 argued for and recommended (Recommendation 1) Commonwealth financial support for more localised accommodation facilities in rural areas so that the costs incurred by rural families when a child has to live away from home to attend school are reduced. Reducing these costs should help increase rural school completion rates. Similarly, Chapter 4 emphasised the importance of an extensive network of schools throughout rural Australia, and urged that small schools be kept open wherever feasible. It also suggested ways of increasing the viability of small schools by innovative approaches to teaching arrangements and the increased and improved use of technology. Possibilities in these areas were canvassed further in Chapters 5 and 8. Recommendations in those chapters indicate ways in which the Commonwealth could help improve the curriculum offerings available to rural students (see Recommendations 3 and 8). A strengthening of curriculum offerings will help increase school retention, both by making schooling more attractive to students and by increasing the confidence of rural families in their local school.

Panel 51

Curriculum Offerings and School Retention

One reason for poor retention rates in country areas is the failure of the curriculum to provide relevant subject choices. More research needs to be carried out to determine the types of subjects sought and studied and the extent to which lack of subject choice and depth of subject taught affects the life options of country students.

(Source: Submission from Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, New South Wales)

...

Students in small rural towns sometimes have a choice of Government or Non-government schools but lack of choice of subjects. Schools are not big enough to offer a wider curriculum so mainly concentrate on the academic subjects that will gain entry into Universities and Colleges. Students who do not want to enter that stream lose interest and drop out.

(Source: Submission from Victorian Federation of Catholic Mothers Clubs and Parents Associations)

9.80 There are encouraging indications from the rural case studies undertaken for the Commission that the local provision of upper secondary schooling and broadened curriculum offerings, including provisions and offerings made possible by the use of technology, can increase school completion rates in rural areas. The Smithton case study refers to the positive impact on school retention of the introduction of a Higher School Certificate (HSC) unit at Smithton High School in Tasmania. The case study report describes the situation as follows:

Before the HSC unit was established at Smithton High School all students going on to Year 11 had to go to Burnie and the Year 10 to Year 11 retention rate was below that of the State as a whole. However, in 1984 it increased by over 50 per cent indicating that students who would previously have completed their education at Year 10 were attracted by the local provision of HSC courses. In February 1987 68.9 per cent of students going on to Year 11 attended Smithton High HSC Unit and 24.6 per cent went to Hellyer College in Burnie. (Tasmanian Department of Education, 1987, p.9).

Similarly, the Western Area Directorate of South Australia case study report noted that:

There has been substantial growth in secondary school based enrolments. This growth has been at the rate of 33% approximately per annum since approval was given for students from area and special rural schools to enroll as bona fide correspondence students where student needs could not be met locally. This has expanded access to Year 12 curriculum options. (Sullivan, 1987, p.17).

9.81 Chapter 7 discussed ways of improving the quality of teaching in rural schools and discussed the preparation, recruitment and support of teachers taking up rural appointments. That chapter emphasised the need to increase teacher continuity in rural schools and encouraged education authorities to explore ways of increasing the length of time teachers stay in rural appointments. In order to increase the number of long-term rural residents who are qualified teachers, the Commission recommended (Recommendation 7) the introduction of off-campus pre-service teacher education courses in rural towns. While teacher continuity is important at the secondary school level, it is also of importance at the primary school level where high rates of teacher turnover may detrimentally affect the early educational experiences and achievements of students, setting them on a path to early school leaving.

Regional initiatives

9.82 In considering approaches to improving rural school retention rates, the Commission has become aware of the importance of regional initiatives organised throughout education administration regions in improving curriculum offerings and general provisions in rural schools. All Australian education systems have regional administrative structures and some systems have recently made changes to these structures aimed at increasing the responsibilities of regional authorities. Regional structures have demonstrated their effectiveness, within the resources available to them, in providing curriculum and teacher support. Regional initiatives have included the development of regional inservice programs and support schemes for schools and teachers. Some regions have effective programs to attract teachers-in-training to rural schools, and to provincial or remote placements on graduation. A regional approach is advantageous in fostering initiatives intended to broaden curriculum offerings through school networks,

ease student transition problems, assist teacher induction or promote parent and teacher involvement in the planning and implementation of school improvement projects.

9.83 While many schools and school communities are currently supported through the Commonwealth's Country Areas Program (CAP), additional support on a regional basis is needed to help improve rural school retention rates. This support should be directed to regional education administrative bodies in rural areas, especially in those regions which include remote areas, and should be available to both government and non-government schools. Assistance should be provided to develop curriculum support projects and materials, and to support teacher development activities likely to have a positive effect on student retention. Several positive initiatives of the type which could be supported have been identified in Chapters 5 and 7.

9.84 Recommendation 9: It is recommended that funds of \$2.65m per annum, additional to current allocations, be provided for three years to fund a specific element within the Country Areas Program (CAP) to support regional initiatives aimed at improving school retention rates in rural areas.

9.85 The Commission envisages that State CAP Committees would advise on the allocation of funds from the element. The joint government school/non-government school nature of CAP would apply to the element. The education regions participating would not necessarily correspond to the areas designated under CAP. The Commission believes that funding would generally have most effect if maintained in a region for the three-year life of the element. Within a region, however, some shorter-term activities may also be appropriate.

Increased funding for the CAP

9.86 In its report, **Quality and Equality**, the Commission stated that unanimous support for CAP had been received during consultations (1985a, p.105). In that report, the Commission noted the finding of the **Review of the Commonwealth Country Areas Program** which had been undertaken on its behalf by Tomlinson et al (1985) that excellent projects were being supported through CAP (p.104). During this present study of rural schooling, the Commission again found widespread support for CAP. The opportunities for community involvement in school-related decision-making provided by the program and its capacity to support initiatives tailored to the needs and circumstances of participating schools and communities are viewed by the Commission as highly desirable features of CAP. For these reasons, the Commission reaffirms its belief in the value of CAP as a specific purpose program.

9.87 In the Commission's view, CAP provides an effective and efficient mechanism through which the Commonwealth can help improve the quality of rural schooling while also helping to increase school retention rates in rural areas. It is appropriate to note here that improvements in the quality of primary level rural schooling may ultimately be as important, if not more important, than improvements in the quality of secondary level rural schooling. As previously discussed, early school experiences can influence the subsequent school achievement and participation of students.

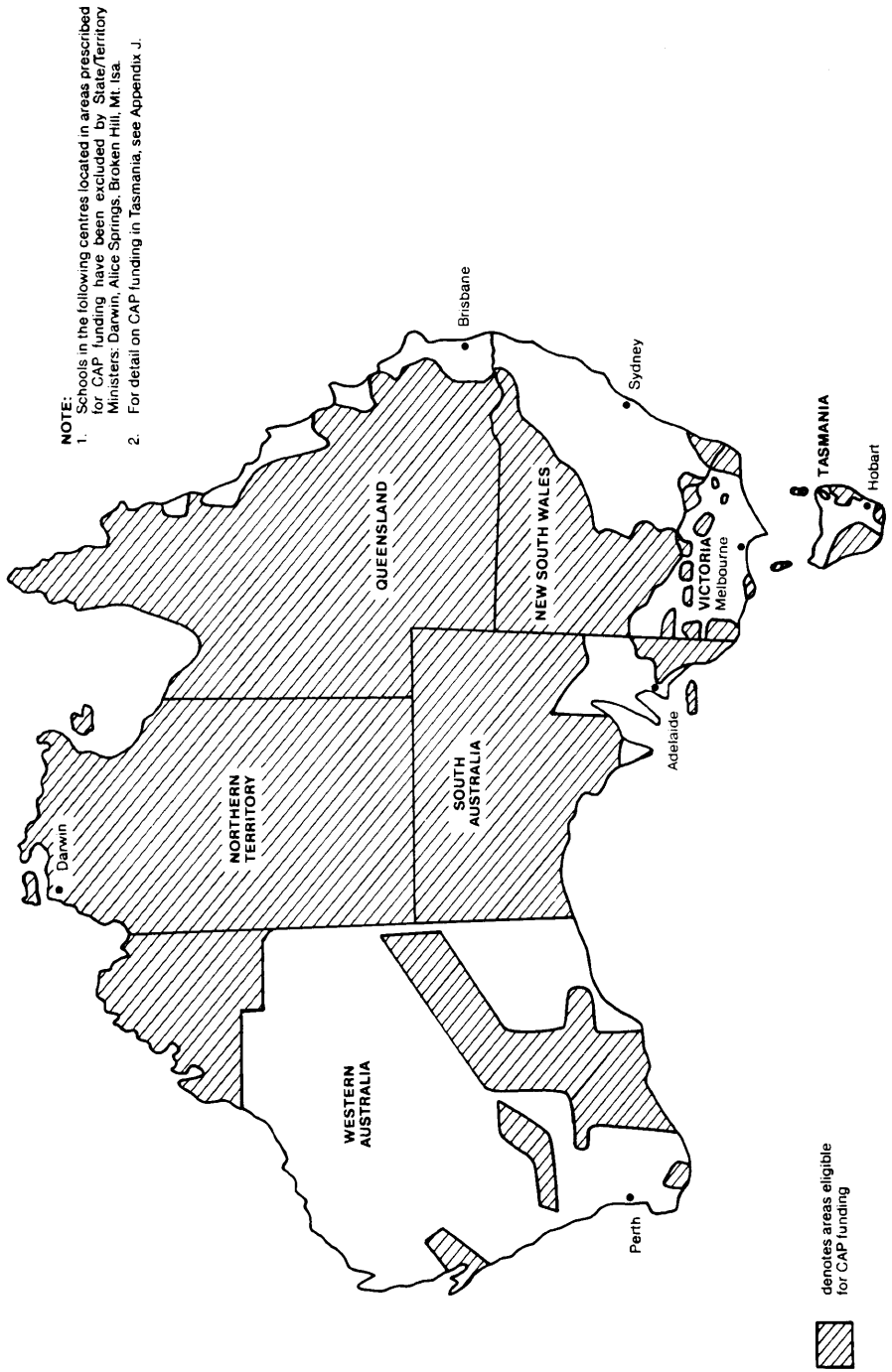
9.88 The total annual funding allocation for CAP has not increased in real terms since the program was established in 1982. Indeed, funds for the program were cut by just over four per cent in real terms in 1986, and funding in 1987 was maintained at the 1986 level in real terms. Furthermore, the current level of funding (\$10.92m at June 1987 price levels) is such that support through CAP has to be spread thinly over the designated CAP areas which make up approximately 70 per cent of Australia (see Figure 5). The adequacy of current funding also needs to be considered in the light of the many challenges facing schools in rural Australia, as outlined in this report. Additional funding provided through CAP would help strengthen rural schooling, including at the formative primary school level, and would lay the groundwork for increased school retention rates in rural Australia. The Commission therefore proposes an increase to CAP funding for 1989 in the order of \$2.2m (ie. a 20% increase).

9.89 **Recommendation 10:** It is recommended that the funding for the Country Areas Program (CAP) be increased by 20 per cent for 1989 to make possible new activities and the intensification and expansion of particularly successful existing activities, this increase to be in addition to any increases to the CAP's funding allocation resulting from Recommendations 5 and 9 of this report.

Summary

9.90 Year 12 retention/completion rates are generally lower in rural areas compared with metropolitan areas. This is a matter of national concern. There are many factors which influence whether students complete a full secondary education or leave school early. Improvements to rural schooling, including more ready access to school and improved curriculum offerings, will help to raise rural school retention rates. Regional initiatives have an important role to play in this regard. Efforts to increase rural school retention rates should not be focused solely on the secondary level of schooling. The quality of rural primary schooling is also relevant. Retention rates to Year 12 in rural secondary schools in the 1990s will be influenced by the quality of the schooling available to rural primary students today.

Figure 5
Areas prescribed for CAP funding, 1987



Improving Schooling in Rural Australia

Introduction

10.1 This report is the outcome of a major study of schooling in rural Australia undertaken by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1987. Rural Australia includes over 95 per cent of the nation's land surface and is home for around one-quarter of its population. One-half of the nation's schools are located in rural areas; together they provide primary and secondary schooling for one-third of the nation's school students. This report has reviewed influences on the schooling of these students, discussed major issues in rural schooling and examined ways by which improvements can be achieved.

10.2 The report emphasises two major themes: student access to schooling, and the quality of teaching in rural schools. Access to schooling is achieved in a number of ways. Rural students who are not able to attend school because of geographic isolation study at home using distance education services. For primary and secondary level students, study through distance education is available in most States and in most major subject areas. Some 4500 rural students studying at home use these services. Some 10 500 rural students live away from home to attend school because of geographic isolation. Most rural students, however, have daily access to schools in the towns and small communities of rural Australia, and undertake all their schooling in these areas.

10.3 The challenges relating to the physical access of students to school are many. In regard to students who cannot attend school each day from home due to geographic isolation, the challenges centre around improving distance education services and reducing the difficulties for families and students associated with living away from home to attend school. Other challenges relating to access concern how to minimise the number of rural students who do not have daily access to school from home, and how to reduce the travel and other demands made on many rural students in attending school. The maintenance and extension of the network of schools, and the studies they provide, throughout rural Australia is crucial to meeting such challenges. Part of the desired extension of this network involves increasing the number of rural schools offering upper secondary studies.

10.4 The quality of teaching in rural schools depends largely on the comprehensiveness and relevance of the curriculum, and on the continuity of the teaching provided. Major curriculum concerns in rural schools largely centre on the secondary level of education, but at both primary and secondary levels several matters arise. One is providing the range of experiences considered necessary

today for a balanced educational program (eg. studies in literacy, numeracy and the social and physical sciences, and opportunities for personal, social and cultural development). Another relates to those curriculum changes required to encourage increased school retention of rural students into senior secondary school.

10.5 Despite significant changes in recent years in rural schooling and school system policies, staffing difficulties arise from a number of circumstances continually faced by school authorities. These include lack of specific preparation of teachers for rural school appointments, the recruitment and retention of qualified staff in rural schools, and provision in rural schools of effective teaching in subject areas where there is a general shortage of teachers (such as in music, art and languages). A further difficulty is the high attrition rate of rural teachers, which can be up to 50 per cent annually in some remote areas. The difficulties which this attrition rate presents for school program continuity, and its effects on efforts to provide systematic staff development are important considerations.

Improving rural schooling

10.6 Actions in response to these and similar challenges are the shared responsibility of governments and education authorities at the Commonwealth and State levels, and of tertiary education institutions. This section draws out conclusions from the study on major issues in rural schooling. It also summarises the directions for improvements, and lists ten recommendations of the Commission. These recommendations refer to areas in which the Commission considers the Commonwealth has a direct responsibility, or is in a particularly good position to initiate collaborative activities with school authorities.

10.7 In the following paragraphs the directions which the Commission considers will result in improvements to rural schooling are set out. The Commission emphasises that these directions are no less important than those which are the subject of the recommendations addressed to the Commonwealth.

Continuing support for local schools

10.8 As indicated in paragraph 10.2, rural students gain access to schooling by attendance at a local school, by correspondence study assisted by a parent or tutor, or by living away from home in a boarding school or other residential facility which gives access to school. While recognising the value and importance of boarding schools in providing access to schooling for many students from remote regions, the Commission strongly supports the place of rural schools as the major means of providing rural students with access to primary and secondary schooling. The network of schools across rural Australia is crucial for hundreds of thousands of students. It supports students by providing schooling which is as close to their homes as possible. For many students the existence of local schools and the extent of the schooling provided in them is a major determinant of the level of education they will complete. Level of educational attainment, in turn, significantly determines a student's subsequent employment prospects and life chances.

10.9 The Commission argues that the network of rural schools should be maintained, or even extended, wherever possible. Proposals to assist small rural schools to remain viable include the use of distance education courses to expand school curriculum offerings where school size or lack of staff prohibit the teaching of subjects. The use of communication technologies is another way of broadening and enriching the curriculum. The report also proposes that a greater range of

facilities be made available for students living away from home. This expansion of accommodation facilities in rural towns will help minimise access difficulties, increase enrolments in rural schools and hence their viability, and raise school retention rates in rural Australia.

10.10 An Accommodation Support Scheme is recommended to the Commonwealth to help achieve these results, especially by providing financial assistance for small, locally based facilities (Recommendation 1). The Commission takes the view that small group home facilities have the potential to provide major benefits to rural students, and that this student accommodation sector has so far lacked an appropriate level of government and school system support. Small group homes can be readily located where families seek regional accommodation and can be easily redeployed if necessary. They do not require the same level of capital commitment as larger accommodation units. Attention, however, needs to be given to ensuring strong management, as well as adequate supervision and pastoral care for students.

10.11 The Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) has provided financial assistance since 1973 for families who for reasons of distance from school, or access to an appropriate curriculum for their child, choose to have their child live away from home to attend school. Many thousands of students have been assisted by AIC to undertake a school-based education. Given the passage of time and changes in rural conditions and circumstances, the Commission has recommended that it is now appropriate for the Commonwealth to examine the Scheme's eligibility criteria, allowance levels and general contribution to the schooling of rural students (Recommendation 2).

Curriculum developments

10.12 While the view that rural schools tend to have more restricted curriculum offerings is often put forward, this study has not found this to be a major curriculum issue. Size of schools is not the major influence on curriculum offerings, but it does influence wider curriculum provisions. In general, the Commission has found curriculum offerings in rural schools to be quite broad, especially given their circumstances. Small schools often provide better teacher/student ratios, enable the individualisation of student learning, and promote student understanding through the employment of a range of teaching approaches and innovations.

10.13 A more important issue is the provision of a curriculum that is locally and culturally appropriate to students and which meets the learning needs of all students. This may not require an increase in curriculum breadth, but rather necessitates attention being given to the detailed content of subjects and the ways in which they are taught. Efforts currently being made to have the curriculum better meet the full schooling needs of rural students are commended. One important challenge to school systems is the development of ways to provide teaching in subject areas which are difficult to staff. There is a general lack of opportunities for students in rural schools to study languages, music and other culturally relevant subjects. Difficulties also arise when only one level of teaching is provided in core subject areas, especially as the level usually provided is that designed to prepare a minority of students for further study.

10.14 The Commission proposes that to a significant extent this curriculum issue can be addressed by the use of innovative and flexible approaches including the use of recent developments in communication technologies. These approaches will result in important benefits to rural students. Approaches described in the

report include alternative teaching arrangements, identification of community curriculum resources, utilising locally available expertise, distance teaching to provide the study of languages and other hard-to-staff subjects, and support to students using correspondence materials in small rural schools (Recommendation 3).

10.15 A further issue in the area of the curriculum, concerns the breadth of educational and social experiences available to rural students. Rural students can often benefit from experience outside the regions in which they live. These experiences will help them expand their knowledge of Australian society and their capacity to cope with social change or other new circumstances. This capacity can be especially useful should they move from their home regions for employment, further study, or other purposes. The Commission has recommended two schemes to the Commonwealth which would enable students to broaden their educational and social experiences (Recommendations 4 and 5).

Student needs

10.16 Students in rural schools tend to have the same range of learning needs as those in metropolitan schools, but in some cases these needs are more pressing due to limited student support services in rural schools. Support from health and welfare agencies, which may be crucial to meeting the needs of some students is also lacking in some rural areas. Concerted attempts to identify and implement more adequate student support arrangements are proposed in the report. These should build on approaches already found to be effective, but which are presently limited in their impact by lack of resources.

10.17 Access to an adequate education remains a major issue for many Aboriginal students, especially at the secondary education level. Even when these students have access to a school, their participation in education can be restricted by poor health, curriculum irrelevance, staff who do not have experience of Aboriginal cultures and a lack of community involvement in school activities. A recommendation is made for the Commonwealth to support the development of a teacher inservice package to support teachers in their work with Aboriginal students (Recommendation 6). These courses need to recognise regional differences in the needs and circumstances of Aboriginal students. The report calls for the development of ways to improve access for Aboriginal students to secondary education studies. Studies at this level are not available to large numbers of Aboriginal students in remote areas of Australia, including the Northern Territory and north-west region of Western Australia. A major national challenge, the provision of appropriate education services to Aboriginal children in homeland areas, has been highlighted in recent reports and is emphasised by the Commission again in this report. The special needs of Aboriginal students, however, should be the target of a Commonwealth specific purpose program.

Teacher preparation and continuity

10.18 There is a widely held view that pre-service teacher education institutions have not responded in recent years to the need for students undertaking teacher training to engage in studies and experiences which will specifically prepare them for rural teaching. Generally, teacher preparation is oriented to the needs of teachers appointed to urban schools. This study of rural schooling has concluded that content changes and experience of rural teaching

would be of most benefit to teachers who take up rural appointments. Content changes need to cover the strengths, challenges and inconveniences of rural life, and appropriate teaching practice. A recommendation is made in the report for the introduction of off-campus pre-service teacher education courses in rural towns to enable mature age rural residents to train as teachers (Recommendation 7).

10.19 In the search for solutions to the high teacher attrition rates in many rural areas, and especially in remote regions, the Commission has noted that adequate teaching and living conditions are not sufficient to overcome staffing difficulties. The Commission believes that, in addition to more appropriate teacher preparation, teacher induction and support during rural teaching appointments are critical factors. Induction and support are the responsibility of employers, schools and school communities, and should be a major area of action. School and regional plans for inservice teacher education can provide the basis for strengthening support in this important area.

10.20 A proposal concerning teacher continuity in remote schools is included in the report. The Commission believes that teachers' length of stay could be increased if school systems were able, among other things, to provide increased levels of teacher support. This would be possible by redeploying funds currently expended on frequent transfers. The Commission is also of the view that teachers would be encouraged to stay longer in remote schools if appropriate contractual arrangements were devised. These arrangements would ensure for teachers, adequate living conditions, professional support, and a guarantee of transfer to a preferred location, in return for teachers agreeing to stay in remote appointments for at least 50 per cent longer than the current expectation for a particular location. It is also important to provide career paths for teachers who choose to stay for long periods in teaching positions in rural schools.

Technology and rural schooling

10.21 In recent years improvements to schooling in rural areas, including study at home, have been achieved by utilising communication technologies. Increased use of this resource is considered by the Commission to be practicable, particularly to widen the provision of secondary education opportunities in rural Australia. Communication technologies can also assist in the provision of secondary schooling for students who would not otherwise gain the benefits of a full secondary education. Aboriginal students are a group to whom this particularly applies, as many of them do not see schooling away from home as an acceptable alternative.

10.22 The curriculum benefits which can be made available to rural students by the use of communication technologies can be complemented by linking teacher inservice education activities to technological provision where this is appropriate. Teacher support is one of the most important ways of improving rural schooling. The use of technologies to increase teacher development and support is a resource that is almost untapped. The report proposes national collaboration in this area, through Commonwealth support for a task force responsible for helping achieve developments in rural schooling through the use of technologies (Recommendation 8). In addition, national collaboration can be expected to lead to reduced costs in using technological means of providing services, and to important advances in curriculum availability and teacher inservice provisions in rural schools. Reducing the recurrent and capital costs of using communication technologies for these purposes is a matter requiring urgent attention.

Rural school retention rates

10.23 The report draws together information on Year 12 retention and completion rates, which indicates that these rates are generally lower in rural compared with metropolitan areas. Given the importance to the future prospects of individual students of a full secondary education, as well as the recognised importance to the nation of increasing school retention rates, low rates of full secondary education completion in rural Australia are a matter of concern. The report discusses factors influencing whether students complete a full secondary education or leave school early, paying particular attention to likely influences on rural students. Approaches to increasing school retention in rural areas were considered in that context. The importance of regional initiatives aimed at improving retention is emphasised and a recommendation that the Commonwealth provide funding through a specific element of CAP for regional initiatives intended to increase school retention rates in rural areas is made (Recommendation 9). A general increase to the CAP allocation is also recommended, as this additional funding would help strengthen rural schooling, including at the primary level, and thereby help lay the groundwork for increased rates of school retention in rural Australia (Recommendation 10).

Recommendations

10.24 Recommendations made to the Commonwealth are listed below.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the Commonwealth establish an Accommodation Support Scheme to provide annual per capita subsidies to hostels, group homes and boarding schools in rural areas, to support the provision of living away from home facilities for students who are geographically isolated from an appropriate government school. Under this scheme an annual per capita payment should be paid to approved accommodation facilities located in rural areas, for each student accommodated who meets the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme's (AIC) geographic isolation criterion. To encourage the development of small-scale, adaptable facilities, the payment for hostels, group homes and small boarding schools (ie. those boarding schools accommodating 40 or fewer boarders) should be set at a higher rate than that for large boarding schools (ie. those accommodating more than 40 boarders), with the initial levels of payment being \$500 per annum and \$200 per annum respectively. (Paragraph 4.49)

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the Commonwealth examine the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) to determine ways of making the Scheme a more effective means of the Commonwealth providing support for the schooling of remote area children. This examination should consider the Scheme's eligibility criteria, especially the specifications concerning distance and students undertaking special courses, its allowance levels, and the contribution it makes to the education of rural students. (Paragraph 4.88)

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the Commonwealth provide funding of \$0.6m per annum for three years to the Curriculum Development Centre, for the establishment of a priority area in Rural Schools Curriculum Development. Projects supported through the priority area should be directed at subject areas which are difficult to staff in rural locations, distance education materials for secondary students studying at home or in small rural schools by distance education means, and curriculum materials for senior secondary study. (Paragraph 5.54)

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that two changes be made to AUSTUDY provisions as applied to students who have undertaken all of their secondary schooling in remote areas and who, having just completed Year 12, undertake an additional year of secondary schooling in a larger centre of population in order to facilitate their transition to employment or further study:

- (i) for students in this situation who are aged 16-18 in their additional year of schooling and who are otherwise eligible for AUSTUDY, the living allowance should be payable at the 'away-from-home' rate applicable to tertiary students of their age; and
- (ii) for students in this situation who are aged 19 or over at 1 January of their additional year of schooling, the prohibition against AUSTUDY assistance being paid to adult secondary students repeating a level of study should be waived. (Paragraph 5.61)

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that the Commonwealth establish a Rural-Urban Student Exchange Scheme to encourage exchanges between students in the middle years of secondary schooling in remote areas or small provincial towns and students at the same level of schooling in large provincial centres or metropolitan areas. The scheme should be trialled for a three-year period and should operate through 'sister school' or 'sister area' arrangements. The student exchanges should be for periods of from one month to one school term. Commonwealth funding of \$1m per annum should be provided to support the scheme during the trial period. (Paragraph 5.66)

Recommendation 6: It is recommended that Commonwealth funding of \$0.2m per annum over two years be made available through the Curriculum Development Centre for the development and dissemination of a comprehensive inservice package for teachers and principals on effective practices in the schooling of Aboriginal students. (Paragraph 6.67)

Recommendation 7: It is recommended that the Commonwealth encourage the development of and provide financial support for off-campus teacher education programs for mature age students in rural towns, designed to help increase the proportion of teachers in rural schools who are long-term rural residents. (Paragraph 7.22)

Recommendation 8: It is recommended that the Commonwealth provide funding of \$0.5m per annum for three years to:

- (i) establish a task force to
 - advise on the development of teacher inservice materials and curriculum initiatives designed to support rural schools and education services to isolated students, through improved and economical access to communication technologies;
 - investigate and report on the provision of high quality communication links to schools through broadcasting, telecasting, land-lines and satellite links;
 - coordinate efforts among governments and education authorities to ensure that the next generation of satellites is designed and constructed to provide for the full range of educational purposes; and
 - encourage collaboration among the States and Territories, and between them and the Commonwealth, in efforts to use technology more effectively in rural schooling;

- (ii) provide support funding for initiatives relating to the development and sharing of existing and new curriculum materials for rural secondary students, and materials for the inservice education of rural teachers, which can be delivered using communication technologies;
- (iii) provide support funding for initiatives which address the special needs of students in the remote areas of central and northern Australia, especially for a curriculum that acknowledges the bilingual needs and traditional lifestyles of Aboriginal students. (Paragraph 8.37)

Recommendation 9: It is recommended that funds of \$2.65m per annum, additional to current allocations, be provided for three years to fund a specific element within the Country Areas Program (CAP) to support regional initiatives aimed at improving school retention rates in rural areas. (Paragraph 9.84)

Recommendation 10: It is recommended that the funding for the Country Areas Program (CAP) be increased by 20 per cent for 1989 to make possible new activities and the intensification and expansion of particularly successful existing activities, this increase to be in addition to any increases to the CAP's funding allocation resulting from Recommendations 5 and 9 of this report. (Paragraph 9.89)

Appendixes

Support Projects Associated with the Schooling in Rural Australia Study

Support Projects	Researchers
Commissioned papers	
Impact of the Rural Economy on the Provision of Educational Services: An Economic Perspective	R I Harrold R A Powell
Information Technology and the Provision of Education Services in Rural Areas	C Fasano N Hall J Cook
Isolated and rural community case studies	
An Isolated Education Region: The Western Area Directorate, Education Department of South Australia	W Sullivan
Hillston and Hay, New South Wales	Benalla Education Centre
North-West New South Wales	R A Baker
Ouyen and Environs, Victoria	Benalla Education Centre
Normanton-Karumba, Queensland	H I G Crowther A Diamond M Reichelt
Charters Towers, Queensland	H I G Crowther P G Travis
Two Case Studies of Rural Communities in Western Australia: Mullewa and Tom Price	M Lake I Kerr L King
Smithton, Tasmania	Tasmanian Department of Education

Support Projects	Researchers
Case Study of the Gove Peninsula and Groote Eylandt Areas of the East Arnhem Education Region, Northern Territory Part 1: Gove Peninsula Part 2: Groote Eylandt	H I G Crowther H I G Crowther J Kale
Tennant Creek and Barkly Education Region Case Study	H I G Crowther
Education Centres projects	
Professional Development for Teachers in Country Schools	Warwick Education Centre
Educational Needs of Girls in Rural Australia	Port Pirie Education Centre
Investigation of the Needs of the Schools and Students in Rural Areas	Tablelands Education Centre

List of Submissions to the Schooling in Rural Australia Study

National organisations

- Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
- Isolated Children's Parents Association Federal Council

Individuals, State organisations and other bodies

New South Wales

- Mr Graeme Bell, Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
- Berridale Primary School
- Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales
- Isolated Children's Parents Association
- Dr Noeline Kyle, University of Wollongong
- Mr John McFaul, Central Tilba
- New South Wales Teachers' Federation
- Southern Tablelands Education Centre
- Sydney College of Advanced Education, St George Institute of Education

Victoria

- Association of Independent Schools
- Catholic Education Commission
- Country Education Project
- Ministry of Education
- Victorian Association of Rural Small Secondary Schools
- Victorian Federation of Catholic Mothers Clubs and Parents Associations
- Victorian Parents Council

Queensland

- Association of Independent Schools
- Department of Education
- Isolated Children's Parents Association
- Mount Isa Education Centre
- Mrs M J O'Brien, Mount Garnet
- Queensland Catholic Education Commission
- Queensland Teachers' Union
- St Joseph's Convent Parents and Friends, Julia Creek
- Mrs M Scholes, Julia Creek
- Toowoomba Education Centre
- Mr Ian Whelan, Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education

Western Australia

- Association of Independent Schools
- Catholic Education Office, Geraldton Region
- Christian Brothers Agricultural School, Tardun
- Distance Education Centre
- Isolated Children's Parents Association
- Mr Derrick Tomlinson, Rural Education Research Unit, University of Western Australia

South Australia

- Directorate of Lutheran Education
- Education Centre for the Western Region
- Isolated Children's Parents Association
- Port Lincoln Business and Professional Women's Club
- South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools
- South Australian Correspondence School
- South Australian Independent Schools Board
- South Australian Institute of Teachers

Tasmania

- Catholic Education Office
- Mr P R d'Plesse, Tarraleah Primary School
- Professor Philip Hughes, University of Tasmania
- Isolated Children's Parents Association

Northern Territory

- Department of Education
- Feppi (NT Aboriginal Education Consultative Group)
- Isolated Children's Parents Association

Australian Capital Territory

- Mr John Nicholas, Canberra CAE

Visits to Rural Communities Undertaken as Part of the Schooling in Rural Australia Study

Commissioners, officers of the Commission and members of the Steering Committee of the study visited communities throughout Australia. During these visits, talks were held with school staff, students and parents, as well as community members and organisations.

New South Wales

Broken Hill, Wilcannia, Cobar	Dr R Andrews Mrs P Mitchell	4-7 May 1987
Eden, Bombala, Nimmitabel, Cooma, Jindabyne, Berridale	Mr W Cook Ms J Brown Mr B Corish	23-27 March 1987

Victoria

Mortlake, Hamilton	Dr R Andrews Mr D Maher Dr S King Mr J Willis	11-13 March 1987
Beechworth, Woragee, Stanley, Dartmouth, Mitta North, Mitta Mitta, Eskdale	Ms J Brown Mr B Corish Mr W Cook	23-27 March 1987

Queensland

Mount Isa, Julia Creek, Cloncurry	Dr R Andrews Mrs P Mitchell	31 March- 2 April 1987
Townsville, Charters Towers, Mingela, Woodstock, Burdekin, Ayr, Home Hill, Clare, Ingham, Trebonne	Ms J Brown Mr D Maher	21-23 April 1987

South Australia

Port Lincoln, Cleve	Dr R Andrews Mr D Maher Mr A Williams	9-11 March 1987
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Western Australia

Pemberton, Albany, Borden	Dr R Andrews Mr M Bromilow	10-13 May 1987
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Tasmania

King Island, Sheffield

Ms L Connors

27-28 April 1987

Mr E West

Mr M Howell

Mr G Veal

Ms J Lundberg

**Avoca, Rossarden, St Marys,
St Helens, Winnaleah,
Scottsdale**

Mrs P Mitchell

Mr V Davy

**Smithton, Tarraleah,
Bronte Park**

Ms J Brown

Mr V Faulkner

**Tullah, Zeehan, Strahan,
Queenstown, Rosebery**

Dr R Andrews

Sr J Redden

Campbell Town, Oatlands

Mr B Corish

Organisations Consulted in the Schooling in Rural Australia Study

The Commission held consultations in capital cities with the following organisations to discuss the major issues arising during the study.

National

- Australian Council of State School Organisations
- Australian Teachers' Federation
- Isolated Children's Parents Association
- National Catholic Education Commission
- National Council of Independent Schools

New South Wales

- Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee
- Association of Independent Schools
- Catholic Education Commission
- Education Commission of New South Wales
- New South Wales Department of Education
- New South Wales Teachers' Federation
- Parents and Citizens Association

Victoria

- Aboriginal Education Association
- Association of Independent Schools
- Catholic Education Commission
- Federation of Catholic Mothers Clubs and Parents' Associations
- Federation of State School Parents' Clubs
- Ministry of Education
- Victorian Council of School Organisations
- Victorian Parents Council
- Victorian State Board of Education
- Victorian Teachers' Federation

Queensland

- Association of Independent Schools
- Catholic Education Commission
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee
- Queensland Department of Education
- Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations
- Queensland Teachers Union

Western Australia

- Anglican Schools Commission
- Association of Independent Schools
- Catholic Education Commission
- Council of State School Organisations
- Isolated Children's Parents Association
- Ministry of Education
- Priority Country Areas Program Committee
- State Schools Teachers' Union of Western Australia
- Western Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

South Australia

- Association of School Parents Clubs
- Association of State School Organisations
- Education Department of South Australia
- Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Independent Schools of South Australia
- Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of South Australian Catholic Schools
- Isolated Children's Parents Association
- South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools
- South Australian Independent Schools Board

Tasmania

- Association of Independent Schools of Tasmania
- Catholic Education Office
- Council of State Schools Parents and Citizens' Associations
- Education Department of Tasmania
- Federation of Parents and Friends of Catholic Schools
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Advisory Council
- Tasmanian Teachers' Federation

Northern Territory

- Catholic Education Office
- Council of Government School Organisations
- Feppi (Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group)
- Isolated Children's Parents Association
- Northern Territory Department of Education (including Distance Education Unit and Alice Springs School of the Air)
- Northern Territory Teachers' Federation

List of National Review Workshop Participants

Project Steering Committee

Dr Robert Andrews	Chairman
Ms Joan Brown	
Mrs Patricia Mitchell	
Mr David Maher	
Mr Brent Corish	
Mr Robert McNamara	Project Director
Dr Susan King	
Mr John Hunter	

Secretariat

Mr Ray Costello
Mr Leo Otorepec
Ms Stephanie Chapman

Consultants to Project

Mr Don Squires
Ms Margaret Barbalet

Organisations and Interest Group Representatives

Mr Cliff Cowdroy	New South Wales Department of Education
Mr David Levens	Victorian Ministry of Education
Mr Ron Boxall	Queensland Department of Education
Mr David Wright	Education Department of Western Australia
Ms Wilma Sullivan	Education Department of South Australia
Ms Beverley Richardson	Education Department of Tasmania
Ms Heather Gillies	Northern Territory Department of Education
Sr Miriam McShane	National Catholic Education Commission
Mr Adrian Sexton	National Catholic Education Commission
Br Tony Dally	National Catholic Education Commission
Ms Jill Cavanough	Australian Teachers' Federation
Ms Sharon Burrows	Australian Teachers' Federation
Ms Ann McLeish	Australian Council of State School Organisations
Ms Christine Fry	Independent Teachers Federation
Mr Leo Dunne	Australian Parents Council
Mrs Patricia Fitzgerald	Isolated Children's Parents Association
Ms Marie Dale	Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia

Ms Madeleine Jones
Rev Christopher Bullock
Dr Peter Harris

Department of Primary Industries and Energy
National Council of Independent Schools
National Council of Independent Schools

Others

Mr John McFaul
Mr Derrick Tomlinson
Prof Henry Crowther
Mr Neil Hall

Members of the Working Group on Technology

Mr Peter Barnfield	Education Department of South Australia
Ms Robyn Bishop	New South Wales Department of Education
Mr Don Christie	Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
Mr Lloyd Lacey	Queensland Department of Education

Centres in Rural Australia with a Population of Approximately 50 000 or more

The following centres have a population of approximately 50 000 or more, estimated at June 1984:

Townsville	100 530
Launceston	88 890
Albury-Wodonga	79 400
Ballarat	76 190
Toowoomba	73 360
Darwin	66 100
Cairns	64 840
Bathurst-Orange	64 100
Bendigo	62 890
Rockhampton	56 520
Wagga Wagga	49 650
Mackay	48 760
Bundaberg	42 050

(Source: ABS, 1986b, pp. 15-16)

Details of Selected Commonwealth Education Allowances

H.1 The Commonwealth makes a substantial contribution to educational provision in Australia through the allowances it provides for students. Current allowance schemes vary in their purpose and conditions. AUSTUDY, for example, is an allowance scheme which is general in nature. AUSTUDY assists people aged 16 years or more who are undertaking secondary or tertiary level studies. Rural young people can and do benefit from AUSTUDY. Some Commonwealth education allowance schemes are more specific in nature. Rural young people often benefit from these more specific schemes. Certain of these more specific allowance schemes, however, are particularly likely to assist rural young people because of the eligibility criteria of the schemes. An example of such a scheme is the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC).

H.2 This appendix provides an overview of Commonwealth education allowances which are available to assist rural young people gain an education. Its emphasis is on Commonwealth education allowance schemes applicable to school students, especially those schemes which are most likely to assist rural young people. Issues relating to rural education provision associated with the existing education allowance schemes are also mentioned briefly.

AUSTUDY

H.3 AUSTUDY, as previously noted, is a Commonwealth education allowance scheme which is general in nature. The Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (CDEET) administers the Scheme. The information booklet on AUSTUDY (CDE, 1987a, p.1) notes that AUSTUDY provides financial assistance to needy students to complete their education, providing assistance, on a non-competitive basis, to students aged 16 years and over who are undertaking approved full-time secondary or tertiary studies.

H.4 AUSTUDY commenced only in 1987, but it had forerunners in the Secondary Allowances Scheme (SAS), the Adult Secondary Education Assistance Scheme (ASEAS) and the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme (TEAS) (see CDE, 1987a, p.1). AUSTUDY is the product of attempts to simplify and rationalise youth allowances. Removing disincentives to education which may have resulted from unemployment benefits being higher than some education allowances was an important feature of the desired rationalisation. The desire to rationalise and simplify youth allowances led to AUSTUDY being developed as an age-based allowance scheme, with a minimum age level for eligibility of 16 years and allowance levels pegged to age. In contrast to AUSTUDY, the SAS and TEAS were activity-based schemes, the activities being upper secondary school or tertiary study respectively. AUSTUDY eligibility is restricted to Years 11 and 12 students and tertiary students, with students receiving different levels of allowance depending on whether they were in secondary or tertiary study.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE SCHEMES	WHO CAN APPLY	BASIC CONDITIONS OF ELIGIBILITY
ASSISTANCE FOR ISOLATED CHILDREN AIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PARENT/GUARDIAN of a student who must live away from home to attend school, or study by correspondence because of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —geographic isolation from suitable government schooling because of distance, transport service or temporary isolation; —a disability or handicap which prevents students from living at home and attending school daily; —the need to undertake a remedial or special type of course away from family home; —the need for special diagnostic testing; —itinerant family occupation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student and parent/s must be Australian citizens or have permanent residence status. • Must be in full-time attendance at an approved institution and undertaking an approved primary or secondary course or an approved full-time course of correspondence study. • Must normally be under 19 years of age at 1 January of year of study. • Must be dependent on his/her parents and normally live with them during school vacations. • Must not have completed one or more years, either full-time or part-time, of a tertiary course.
AUSTUDY Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STUDENT aged 16 years or over undertaking full-time secondary Education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be an Australian citizen or have permanent resident status. • Must be enrolled in an approved secondary school, technical college or correspondence school. • Must be aged 16 years or over unless already receiving benefits in 1986 from SAS.
AUSTUDY Adult Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STUDENT aged 19 or over at 1 JANUARY of the year of study and undertaking full-time secondary education or approved Tertiary Preparation course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be an Australian citizen or have permanent resident status. • Must be undertaking full-time studies in an approved course. • Must be 19 by January 1 1987. • Must not be enrolled in a level of study undertaken within the last 3 years. • Cannot be in receipt of assistance from certain other Commonwealth study schemes. • Must not previously have received assistance for the same year of study from ASEAS.
AUSTUDY Tertiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STUDENT aged 16 years or over undertaking approved full-time post-secondary or tertiary courses including postgraduate bachelor degrees and diploma courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be an Australian citizen or have permanent resident status. • Must be undertaking an approved course. • Must be aged 16 years or over unless already receiving benefits in 1986 from TEAS. • Must satisfy certain academic eligibility requirements. • Cannot be in receipt of assistance from another Commonwealth study scheme.
ABORIGINAL SECONDARY ASSISTANCE SCHEME ABSEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PARENT of a student who is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and is a full-time student at an approved secondary school, or at an approved primary school if aged 14 years, or special school if aged 13 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. • Must be under 21 years of age on 1 January of the year of the award. • Must be enrolled and attending school. • Cannot be in receipt of assistance from another Commonwealth study scheme.

Source: Commonwealth Department of Education

Table H.1
Select guide to Commonwealth educational allowances, 1987

TYPES OF ALLOWANCES PAYABLE	RATES OF ALLOWANCES (1987)		INCOME TEST (1987)																																													
<p>• BOARDING ALLOWANCE (ie where the student is boarding in a school, hostel or in a private home).</p> <p>• SECOND HOME ALLOWANCE (ie where the student's family has established a second home to allow daily access to school).</p> <p>• CORRESPONDENCE ALLOWANCE (ie where the student lives at home and is studying by correspondence).</p>	<p>Minimum Allowance (no income test) • BOARDING ALLOWANCES Less than 16 There is a minimum allowance payable, (income-test-free) of \$989 p.a.</p> <p>16/17 As above 18+ As above Short term boarders Have access to normal income-tested boarding allowances as above or minimum \$22 p.w.</p> <p>• CORRESPONDENCE/SECOND HOME ALLOWANCES Less than 16 There is a minimum income-test-free allowance of \$500 payable for correspondence students. Minimum payment also of between \$989 and \$2,522 for second home families.</p> <p>16/17 As above</p> <p>18+ As above</p>	<p>Maximum Allowance (income tested) Senior Secondary \$54.68 p.w. Junior Secondary \$50.00 p.w. Primary \$45.00 p.w. \$73.28 p.w. \$80.00 p.w. \$1000 p.a. \$40.00 p.w. under AUSTUDY \$45.00 p.w. under AUSTUDY</p> <p>Parent only Both parent and student Both parent and student Both parent and student Both parent and student</p>	<p>THE INCOME TEST APPLIES AS FOLLOWS *See box below in AUSTUDY for income definition</p> <p>Upper limit \$23,194#</p> <p>\$22,224#</p> <p>\$21,174# \$27,074# \$28,474#</p> <p>\$17,754# Corresp. \$15,794# Second home \$22,094# Corresp. \$20,134# Second home \$23,134# Corresp. \$21,174# Second home</p> <p>• Parental income is for financial year 1985/86. Maximum benefit is payable if family income is below \$15,745. Benefits are reduced by \$2.50 for every \$10 of income above \$15,745.</p> <p>• Student's income. Benefit will be reduced by \$1 for every \$2 of income exceeding \$2,000 earned by the student in the year of study.</p> <p>• State Education living-away-from-home allowances are regarded as student income and will reduce entitlements by \$1, for each \$1 in excess of \$500</p>																																													
<p>• AGE-RELATED LIVING ALLOWANCE Three Categories: (1) Independent Rate (2) At-Home Rate (3) Away-from-Home Rate</p> <p>• DEPENDENT SPOUSE ALLOWANCE</p> <p>• DEPENDENT CHILD ALLOWANCE</p> <p>• FARES ALLOWANCE</p> <p>• ADMINISTRATION CHARGE ALLOWANCE</p> <p>• STUDENT PENSIONER STUDY ALLOWANCE</p> <p>NOTE: Away-from-Home Allowance and Fares Allowance are not available for general secondary students.</p>	<p>An income test applies to the students' own income (see Student's Income AIC) and to parents' or spouse's income depending on circumstances. *See box below for income definition.</p> <p>• LIVING ALLOWANCE Maximum for 1987 is payable on family incomes up to \$15,745. Benefits are reduced by \$2.50 for every \$10 of parents' income or \$1 for every \$2 of spouse's income above \$15,745. A partial allowance is payable where parent's/spouse's income does not exceed the indicated figures in brackets.</p> <p>NOTE: Where there are 2 or more eligible students, the upper limit for parental income may be higher.</p> <table><tr><th></th><th>Secondary Maximum Allowance</th><th>Partial Allowance Cut-off</th><th>Tertiary/Adult Maximum Allowance</th><th>Secondary Partial Allowance Cut-off</th></tr><tr><td>16-17 Years old</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>At-Home</td><td>\$40.00 p.w.</td><td>(\$23,894)</td><td>\$50.00 p.w.</td><td>(\$25,974)</td></tr><tr><td>Away-from-Home</td><td>—</td><td>—</td><td>\$73.28 p.w.</td><td>(\$30,834)</td></tr><tr><td>Independent</td><td>\$73.28 p.w.</td><td>(\$23,287)</td><td>\$73.28 p.w.</td><td>(\$23,287)</td></tr><tr><td>18+</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>At-Home</td><td>\$45.00 p.w.</td><td>(\$24,934)</td><td>\$55.00 p.w.</td><td>(\$27,024)</td></tr><tr><td>Away-from-Home</td><td>—</td><td>—</td><td>\$80.00 p.w.</td><td>(\$32,234)</td></tr><tr><td>Independent</td><td>\$80.00 p.w.</td><td>(\$23,987) (Spouses' income)</td><td>\$80.00 p.w.</td><td>(\$23,987) (Spouses' income)</td></tr></table> <p>• DEPENDENT SPOUSE ALLOWANCE \$42.70 p.w. • DEPENDENT CHILD ALLOWANCE \$17.00 p.w. per child. • ADMINISTRATION CHARGE ALLOWANCE \$250.00 where applicable. • STUDENT PENSIONER STUDY ALLOWANCE \$15 p.w. for approved pensioner students.</p>				Secondary Maximum Allowance	Partial Allowance Cut-off	Tertiary/Adult Maximum Allowance	Secondary Partial Allowance Cut-off	16-17 Years old					At-Home	\$40.00 p.w.	(\$23,894)	\$50.00 p.w.	(\$25,974)	Away-from-Home	—	—	\$73.28 p.w.	(\$30,834)	Independent	\$73.28 p.w.	(\$23,287)	\$73.28 p.w.	(\$23,287)	18+					At-Home	\$45.00 p.w.	(\$24,934)	\$55.00 p.w.	(\$27,024)	Away-from-Home	—	—	\$80.00 p.w.	(\$32,234)	Independent	\$80.00 p.w.	(\$23,987) (Spouses' income)	\$80.00 p.w.	(\$23,987) (Spouses' income)
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Away-from-Home	—	—	\$80.00 p.w.	(\$32,234)																																												
Independent	\$80.00 p.w.	(\$23,987) (Spouses' income)	\$80.00 p.w.	(\$23,987) (Spouses' income)																																												
<p>• LIVING ALLOWANCE</p> <p>• BOARDING ALLOWANCE</p> <p>• BOOKS & CLOTHING ALLOWANCE</p> <p>• PERSONAL ALLOWANCE</p> <p>• FEES, FARES, SCHOOL EXCURSIONS</p> <p>• TUTORIAL ASSISTANCE</p>	<p>• LIVING ALLOWANCE (1) \$636.90 p.a.—years 11 & 12 (2) \$445.94 p.a.—other secondary years.</p> <p>• BOARDING ALLOWANCE (1) Up to \$32.15 p.w. private board. (2) Up to \$23.18 p.a. school or hostel board.</p> <p>• BOOKS & CLOTHING ALLOWANCE (1) \$400 p.a. for years 11 & 12. (2) \$330 p.a. other students.</p> <p>• PERSONAL ALLOWANCE (1) \$132 p.a. for years 11 & 12. (2) \$66 p.a. for other years. (3) \$176 p.a. for approved boarders years 11 & 12. (4) \$110 p.a. for approved boarders other years.</p>		<p>NO INCOME TEST IS APPLIED</p>																																													

H.5 Other noteworthy changes introduced under AUSTUDY, compared with SAS and TEAS are:

- the allowance levels paid under AUSTUDY generally represent increases over the previous levels;
- AUSTUDY allowance and income-test levels are indexed to retain the real value of the allowances;
- AUSTUDY payments are usually made to the student, whereas under SAS the allowance was paid to parents; and
- AUSTUDY payments are income taxable for the recipient and are also personally income-tested, with the allowance being reduced for income earned over \$2000 per annum.

(See Commonwealth Minister for Education, News Release, 19 August 1986.)

H.6 The basic details concerning AUSTUDY, as well as other selected Commonwealth education allowances are presented in Table H.1. It is worth noting some of the allowance levels under AUSTUDY, because these levels show the amount of financial assistance provided under the Scheme and also because allowance levels under other schemes are often linked to those of AUSTUDY. AUSTUDY allowances currently range from \$40 per week for a 16-17 year-old secondary student living at home, to \$80 per week for independent students aged 18 or over. It should also be noted that some allowances under AUSTUDY still vary according to the educational status of the student (ie. secondary or tertiary), but that these differentials are being removed in favour of the age basis for allowances mentioned in paragraph H.4.

H.7 Large numbers of students throughout Australia have been assisted to continue their education by AUSTUDY and its forerunners SAS and TEAS. Table H.2 shows the number of students assisted and the outlays under SAS for selected years. It is expected that in 1987 some 110 000 young people will be assisted through the general secondary component of AUSTUDY, at an outlay of some \$148m (figures provided by CDEET). Young people from rural areas will be among those assisted by AUSTUDY to continue their secondary education. Unfortunately, figures are not available on the number of students from rural areas who have been assisted through the general secondary component of AUSTUDY or its forerunner, SAS.

H.8 Some 112 000 tertiary students were assisted through TEAS in 1986 and the outlay on TEAS in that year was \$314.2m. Estimates for the tertiary component of AUSTUDY are that some 124 000 students will receive assistance through that component in 1987 and that the outlay on the component in 1987 will be \$389m (figures provided by CDEET). Again, rural young people will be among those assisted, but figures on the actual number of rural young people assisted through the tertiary component of AUSTUDY or through its forerunner, TEAS, are not available.

Aboriginal secondary assistance scheme (ABSEC)

H.9 ABSEC is intended to help '... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students take full advantage of educational opportunities at secondary school' (CDE, 1987b, p.2). Details of ABSEC are presented in Table H.1. The Scheme provides financial assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are under 21 years of age at 1 January and in secondary school, or who are at least 14 years of age at 1 January and in primary school.

Table H.2

Number of students assisted and the outlays under the SAS,
selected years, 1978 to 1986

Year	No. of students	Outlays \$m
1978	19 000	9.0
1980	24 000	10.7
1982	27 000	16.8
1984	62 000	54.7
1986	73 000	114.9

Source: SAS statistics collection, CDEET

H.10 Through the ABSEC, several allowances are paid, namely:

- a Living Allowance for students living at home, or in special circumstances, a Boarding Allowance for those approved to live away from home to go to school;
- a Personal Allowance,
- a Book and Clothing Allowance; and
- an Excursion Allowance.

Other forms of assistance are also available through the Scheme (eg. assistance with fees and fares (see CDE, 1987b).

H.11 To give an indication of what financial assistance available through ABSEC can total, two examples are outlined here. The first example is that of a hypothetical Year 10 student who is attending an approved non-government boarding school in a non-remote area. The assistance for such a student could add up to \$3248 per annum comprising: \$2318 per annum towards school boarding costs; \$330 per annum for books and clothes; \$110 per annum as a personal allowance; \$180 per annum for school excursions; \$110 per annum for home/school return travel fares; and \$200 per annum to cover compulsory tuition fees. The second example is that of a hypothetical Year 10 student living at home and attending a government school in a remote area. As 90.4 per cent of ABSEC allowance recipients live at home, while 88.5 per cent attend government schools (see Table H.4), this example is more typical of ABSEC allowance recipients than the previous example. The assistance for such a student could add up to \$1176.94 per annum comprising: \$445.94 per annum living allowance; \$330 per annum for books and clothes; \$66 per annum as a personal allowance; \$280 per annum for school excursions; and \$55 per annum for school fees.

H.12 Considerable information is available on the number and characteristics of ABSEC allowance recipients. As Table H.3 shows, the number of students assisted through ABSEC has increased markedly in recent years. In 1978, the number assisted was 15 052; by 1986 the number assisted had increased to 25 100. Table H.3 also shows how the outlay on ABSEC has increased during the 1980s, from \$15.3m in 1980 to \$32.4m in 1986. Table H.4 shows details of

students assisted through the ABSEC in 1986. Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory have the highest number of ABSEC allowance recipients, in keeping with their relatively large Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander populations. Most ABSEC allowance recipients are at the junior secondary level of schooling (80.3%), attend government schools (88.5%), attend a school in a non-metropolitan area (73.3%) and live at home (90.4%). Girls and boys are about equally represented among ABSEC allowance recipients.

Table H.3

Number of students assisted and the outlays under the ABSEC,
selected years, 1978 to 1986

Year	No. of students	Outlays \$m
1978	15 052	12.5
1980	17 509	15.3
1982	19 964	19.2
1984	23 180	27.2
1986	25 100	32.4

Source: ABSEC statistics collection, CDEET

H.13 That ABSEC provides assistance to many young people from rural areas is indicated by the fact that 73.3 per cent of ABSEC allowance recipients in 1986 were attending a school in a non-metropolitan area (see Table H.4). It is also indicated by the following information provided by CDEET on the distribution of home locations of 1986 ABSEC recipients:

- for some 25 per cent, home location was in a metropolitan area;
- for some 30 per cent, it was in a regional centre;
- for some 29 per cent, it was in a country town; and
- for some 16 per cent, it was in some other area (presumably a rural location, but not within a regional centre or town).

According to these home location figures, some 55 per cent of 1986 ABSEC allowance recipients lived either in metropolitan areas or regional centres. According to information provided by CDEET, however, only some 41 per cent of the Aboriginal population lives in these areas. In contrast, some 45 per cent of 1986 ABSEC allowance recipients lived in country towns or other rural locations, whereas approximately 59 per cent of the Aboriginal population is so located (figures provided by CDEET). These comparisons suggest that Aboriginal young people in rural towns or less-populated rural areas are not utilising, or are not able to utilise, ABSEC assistance to the same extent as their metropolitan or regional centre peers.

Table H.4

Details of students assisted under the ABSEC, 1986

	No. of students	%
State/Territory		
NSW	7 492	29.8
Vic	1 279	5.1
Qld	8 047	32.1
WA	3 771	15.0
SA	1 416	5.6
Tas	837	3.3
NT	2 149	8.6
ACT	109	0.4
Total	25 100	100.0
Level of schooling		
Senior secondary	3 838	15.3
Junior secondary	20 162	80.3
Primary and ungraded	1 100	4.4
Total	25 100	100.0
Type of school		
Government	22 204	88.5
Non-government	2 896	11.5
Total	25 100	100.0
Location of school		
Metropolitan	6 714	26.7
Non-metropolitan	18 386	73.3
Total	25 100	100.0
Sex		
Male	12 484	49.7
Female	12 616	50.3
Total	25 100	100.0
Place of residence		
Living at home	22 682	90.4
Boarding		
• school	883	3.5
• hostel	703	2.8
• private	477	1.9
Non-approved board	355	1.4
Total	25 100	100.0

Source: ABSEC statistics collection, CDEET.

Aboriginal study assistance scheme (ABSTUDY)

H.14 ABSTUDY assists Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who want to study after having left school (CDE, 1987e). The Scheme assists with study at universities, CAEs, technical, agricultural and Aboriginal colleges and other educational institutions. It also assists people who wish to undertake secondary school studies after having left school (CDE, 1987e). ABSTUDY assisted some 20 000 people in 1986, of whom only some 1800 were undertaking secondary school studies (figures provided by CDEET). As the emphasis in this report is on assistance to school students, little more will be said about ABSTUDY. It is noteworthy, however, that the Scheme has been used recently as a means to assist Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders undertake teacher training. In 1987 an additional 100 teacher training awards were made available under the Scheme (CDE, 1987e, p.4).

Assistance for isolated children scheme (AIC)

H.15 The AIC is '... designed to assist students who do not have reasonable daily access to an appropriate government school because they live in a geographically isolated area' (CDE, 1987c, p.1). It provides assistance for both primary and secondary school students. Three types of allowance are payable through the AIC:

- a Boarding Allowance for students who live away from home in a boarding school or hostel, or in private board, in order to attend school;
- a Correspondence Allowance, for students studying at home by correspondence; and
- a Second Home Allowance, to help towards the cost of maintaining a second home which enables the student to have daily access to a school (CDE, 1987c, p.1).

Allowance levels and conditions vary across the three types of allowances. The allowances are income-tested, but a noteworthy feature of the Scheme is that its various allowances have an income-test-free minimum level of payment.

H.16 From the beginning of 1987, the AIC was changed to be more consistent with AUSTUDY provisions. The changes to AIC included:

- relaxation, for boarders, of the income test provisions to bring them into line with AUSTUDY, with the level of adjusted family income at which the maximum allowance could be paid being increased by 15.6 per cent (Note: there is still an income-test-free minimum allowance of \$989 per annum);
- allowances for boarders aged 16 years and over were made equal to the level of AUSTUDY allowances for like-aged tertiary students living away from home; allowances were no longer dependent on actual boarding costs incurred and were made subject to a personal income-test;
- allowances for boarders aged under 16 years were increased for primary and secondary school students; while allowances for such students are still dependent on boarding costs, the claimable amount for incidental expenses was increased from \$100 to \$250 per annum;
- students aged 16 or over and studying by correspondence or living in a second family home, now apply for assistance through AUSTUDY (Note: If family income makes the AUSTUDY payment insufficiently high, the 1986 AIC income-test-free level of allowance can be paid); and
- allowances are no longer paid for pre-school children studying by correspondence.

(See Commonwealth Minister for Education, News Release, 19 August 1986.)

H.17 Most States and Territories also provide allowances for isolated children. These allowances were outlined in Chapter 3. Financial assistance provided through such allowances is treated as student income in the income testing of AIC allowances (see Table H.1).

H.18 To give an indication of the amount of financial assistance which can be obtained under the AIC, two examples will be given. The first example is that of a hypothetical Year 10 student, aged 15, who attends a boarding school because of the geographical isolation of his/her own home from a government school. If no reduction in benefit on the basis of family income is applicable, the Boarding Allowance under AIC could provide \$2607 per annum, or boarding costs plus \$250, whichever is the lesser amount. Should family income be such that only the minimum income-test-free allowance is payable, the amount received would be \$989 per annum, regardless of the actual boarding costs. The second example of the level of assistance available under AIC is that of a hypothetical Year 10 student, aged 15, who is living at home and studying by correspondence. Should no reduction of benefit on the basis of family income be applicable, the Correspondence Allowance under AIC would be \$1000 per annum. Should family income be such that only the minimum allowance is payable, the allowance would be \$500 per annum.

H.19 The number of students assisted and the outlays under the AIC for selected years are presented in Table H.5. Recipient numbers have remained fairly stable over the period 1978 to 1986. Table H.6 provides details of students who received AIC allowances in 1986. Some 30 per cent, 27 per cent and 26 per cent of recipients came from Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia respectively; most recipients were at either the junior secondary (42%) or senior secondary (28%) levels of schooling; a large percentage (44%) of the recipients attended regular government schools, but a considerable percentage attended Catholic (17%) or other non-government (23%) schools; males constituted a larger percentage of the recipients (55%) than did females (45%); and, some 72 per cent of the recipients received the Basic Boarding Allowance.

Table H.5

Number of students assisted and the outlays under the
AIC, selected years, 1978 to 1986

Year	No. of students	Outlays \$m
1978	18 965	13.9
1980	19 031	11.9
1982	19 838	18.2
1984	21 651	22.9
1986	20 665	24.4

Source: AIC statistics collection, CDEET

Table H.6
Details of AIC allowance recipients, 1986

	Number	Students assisted	Per cent
State/Territory			
NSW	5 470		26.5
Vic	765		3.7
Qld	6 255		30.3
WA	5 331		25.8
SA	914		4.4
Tas	719		3.5
NT	1 163		5.6
ACT	48		0.2
Total	20 665		100.0
Level of schooling			
Pre-school	679		3.3
Primary	5 547		26.8
Junior secondary	8 669		42.0
Senior secondary	5 770		27.9
Total	20 665		100.0
Type of school			
Government	9 172		44.4
Catholic	3 532		17.1
Other Non-govt	4 837		23.4
Special schools	3 079		14.9
Technical college	45		0.2
Total	20 665		100.0
Sex			
Males	11 317		54.8
Females	9 348		45.2
Persons	20 665		100.0
Type of basic allowance			
Basic Boarding	14 837		71.8
Second Home	816		3.9
Correspondence	3 626		17.5
Short-Term Boarding	729		3.5
Pre-School Correspondence	657		3.2
Total	20 665		100.0
Additional benefits			
Additional Boarding ^a	5 860		39.5

- (a) Additional Boarding Allowance is only available to students receiving the Basic Boarding Allowance. The percentage is the number receiving the Basic Boarding Allowance. The figure has been estimated. In 1986 the Additional Boarding Allowance was payable in regard to recipients of the Basic Boarding Allowance with adjusted family incomes falling below specified levels (ranging from the lowest being \$18 782 for a primary student with no other eligible students in the family, to much higher levels, for example, \$35 792 for a senior secondary student with two other eligible students in the family) and with boarding costs of at least \$904 per annum.

Source: AIC statistics collection, CDEET

Further Information on Year 12 Completion Rates, 1982-1985

I.1 In Chapter 9, Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training's (CDEET) findings concerning rates of Year 12 completion were discussed. The findings come from the report **Completing Secondary School in Australia: A Socio-Economic and Regional Analysis** (CDEET, 1987b). Further results from that report are presented in this appendix.

I.2 As noted in paragraph 9.29, CDEET compared Year 12 completion rates for metropolitan and non-metropolitan education administration regions within each State and the Northern Territory. The results of this analysis are presented in Tables I.1 and I.2.

Table I.1

Estimated Year 12 completion rates in education administration regions
in New South Wales and Victoria, by sex, 1982 to 1985^a

Regions	1982		1983		1984		1985	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
(per cent)								
New South Wales	29	34	32	36	36	39	36	40
Metropolitan								
East	41	40	44	42	47	46	45	46
North	48	50	51	52	55	55	53	55
South West	24	27	28	32	30	33	29	32
West	27	34	30	36	39	37	34	38
Non-Metropolitan								
Hunter	17	24	20	28	21	26	20	26
Riverina	19	25	21	28	23	31	24	36
North Coast	21	30	23	32	29	31	29	34
South Coast	19	27	24	29	25	31	25	30
Western	23	34	27	34	28	38	29	38
North Western	26	33	32	36	34	39	38	41
Victoria	30	42	32	47	36	50	39	53
Metropolitan								
East	54	64	52	67	57	68	58	72
North	31	38	34	48	38	55	44	57
West	29	41	37	49	38	54	39	55
South Central	42	49	44	54	52	59	53	63
Outer Metropolitan								
Tullamarine	27	38	29	42	33	47	34	47
Westernport	20	32	22	39	25	38	27	40
Maroondah	34	48	35	56	41	57	43	60
Rural								
Barwon South West	21	35	23	42	26	44	31	47
Goulburn North East	18	37	21	41	27	48	28	47
Gippsland	22	36	23	39	24	40	29	42
Loddon Campaspe —								
Mallee	20	33	23	37	27	41	34	43
Wimmera Central								
Highlands	21	32	23	40	26	40	28	43

(a) Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number

M = Males; F = Females

Source: Adapted from CDEET (1987b, pp.30-31)

Table I.2

Estimated Year 12 completion rates in education administration regions
in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania
and the Northern Territory, by sex, 1984 and 1985^a

Regions	198		1985	
	M	F	M	F
Queensland	44	49	47	50
Metropolitan/Outer Metropolitan				
Brisbane	57	58	59	59
Moreton	36	38	36	39
Wide Bay - Burnett	40	41	39	44
Rural/Coastal				
Darling Downs	44	50	51	56
South West	34	40	30	50
Fitzroy	24	48	27	42
Mackay	30	36	35	42
Rural/Isolated				
Central West	19	36	23	37
Northern	39	45	47	44
Far North	27	43	36	39
North West	18	40	28	39
South Australia	44	53	47	54
Metropolitan				
Central Eastern	57	61	61	65
Central Northern	39	47	40	46
Central Southern	52	62	53	61
Central West	45	51	48	51
Rural				
Murraylands	37	61	41	71
Riverland	34	53	38	47
South East	32	50	32	51
Yorke-Lower North	38	52	43	54
Remote				
Eyre	39	40	31	58
Northern	27	41	40	48
Western Australia	39	42	42	45
Metropolitan				
North West	49	45	53	49
South West	35	38	38	38
South East	44	48	47	53
North East	36	40	37	43
Rural				
Country South West	30	35	37	47
Great Southern	38	53	42	51
Upper Great Southern	44	51	38	62
Yilgarn	45	59	44	55
Midlands	25	51	36	43
Remote				
Goldfields	30	34	35	41
Geraldton	23	27	24	28
Pilbara	10	22	11	20
Kimberley	5	8	12	9
Tasmania	22	28	21	23
South	30	31	26	29
North	22	30	21	22
North West	15	21	16	20
Northern Territory	20	32	28	35
Darwin	26	35	37	44
Alice Springs	17	24	21	27
Remainder NT	8	20	11	17

(a) Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number

M = Males; F = Females

Source: Adapted from CDEET (1987b, pp.31-33)

1.3 Analysis of Year 12 completion rates for selected rural areas was undertaken by CDEET, in order to explore possible local variations in completion rates. Completion rates were calculated for five towns which are mining centres, namely: Broken Hill, Mount Isa, Whyalla, Kalgoorlie and Queenstown. These towns also had in common that they were 'company towns', that they were very geographically isolated and that they were very economically dependent on the mining industry (CDEET, 1987b, p.34). Table I.3 presents the results of this analysis. The CDEET report points out that there is a wide variation in the completion rates which '... indicates that it would make little sense to talk of a typical mining town completion rate' (CDEET, 1987b, p.35).

Table I.3
Estimated Year 12 completion rates for selected
mining centres, by sex, 1985*

	Completion rates									
	Mining centre			Remainder of region			Region			State average
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	P
	(per cent)									
Broken Hill	11	23	17	9	20	14	11	22	16	38
Mount Isa	32	47	39	34	44	39	31	43	37*	49
Whyalla	30	36	33	40	64	51	31	41	36	50
Kalgoorlie	28	33	30	37	39	38	36	39	37	49
Queenstown	8	13	10	11	15	13	9	13	11	22

(a) Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number

M = Males; F = Females; P = Persons

* In some cases the aggregate regional completion rate appears greater than the rates for the regional centre and the 'remainder' due to the application of compounded population growth rates to the individual elements of the region

Source: CDEET (1987b, p.35)

1.4 An analysis of Year 12 completion rates in major regional centres which had a more varied economic base (ie. not reliant on a single industry) and which were growing communities was also undertaken by CDEET. In this analysis completion rates were calculated for the region as a whole, for the regional centre and for the remainder of the region outside the centre. The results are presented in Table I.4.

Table I.4

Estimated Year 12 completion rates for selected
regional centres, by sex, 1985^a

	Completion rates									State average
	Regional centre			Remainder of region			Region			
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	
	(per cent)									
Dubbo	36	36	36	33	39	36	34	39	36	38
Wagga Wagga	25	43	33	21	34	27	23	37	29	38
Wangaratta	40	54	47	28	46	37	31	48	39	46
Rockhampton	50	38	44	26	44	34	28	45	35	49
Renmark	50	57	53	31	48	39	33	48	40	50
Bunbury	37	44	40	35	45	40	36	45	40	49
Burnie/	17	19	18							
Devonport	24	30	27	17	21	19	19	23	21	22

(a) Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number

M = Males; F = Females; P = Persons

Source: CDEET (1987b, p.36)

1.5 Completion rates in centres with a major tourism orientation were also examined by CDEET, again with 'centre' and 'remainder' comparisons being made. The results of this analysis are presented in Table I.5. CDEET also examined completion rates for agricultural centres, again using the 'centre' and 'remainder' approach. The results of this analysis are presented in Table I.6.

Table I.5

Estimated Year 12 completion rates for selected
tourist centres, by sex, 1985^a

	Completion rates									
	Tourist centre			Remainder of region			Region			State average
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	P
	(per cent)									
Port Macquarie	23	35	29	28	34	31	26	34	30	38
Bendigo	37	41	39	40	44	42	39	43	41	46
Cairns	50	47	49	36	39	38	39	41	40	49
Mackay	30	31	31	37	46	41	36	44	40	49
Mount Gambier	29	52	41	32	50	41	31	51	41	50
Geraldton	37	44	41	24	44	33	32	44	37	49

(a) Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number

M = Males; F = Females; P = Persons

Source: CDEET (1987b, p.37)

Table I.6

Estimated Year 12 completion rates for selected
agricultural centres, by sex, 1985^a

	Completion rates									State average
	Agriculture Centre			Remainder of region			Region			
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	
	(per cent)									
Tamworth	40	42	41	39	43	41	39	42	40	38
Hamilton	18	43	30	31	41	36	26	42	33	46
Longreach	30	37	33	25	40	31	25	40	31	49
Port Lincoln	31	53	42	33	68	50	32	62	47	50
Narrogin	15	38	25	39	67	51	32	58	44	49
Circular Head	*	*	*	*	*	*	17	20	18	22

(a) Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number

M = Males; F = Females; P = Persons

* Region has not been disaggregated because of small population

Source: CDEET (1987b, p.39)

Areas and Isolated Schools Included in the Country Areas Program, Tasmania, 1987

Isolated Areas Sub-Program

Area	Schools
Cleveland	Savage River District High Waratah Primary
Far North East	Branxholm Primary Gladstone Primary Ringarooma Primary Winnaleah District High
Furneaux	Cape Barren Island School Flinders Island District High
King Island	Grassy Primary King Island District High Reekara Primary
Lyell	Murray High (Queenstown) Queenstown Central Primary St Josephs (Queenstown) St Fursaeus (Zeehan) South Queenstown Primary Strahan Primary Zeehan Primary
Murchison	Rosebery District High St Josephs (Rosebery) Tullah Primary
St Marys-St Helens	Avoca Primary Bicheno Primary Fingal Primary Mathinna Primary Rossarden Primary St Helens District High St Marys District High
Upper Derwent	Ouse District High Tarraleah Primary Wayatinah Primary

Isolated Schools Sub-Program

**Bruny Island District High
Dover District High
Strathgordon Primary
Swansea Primary
Tasman District High**

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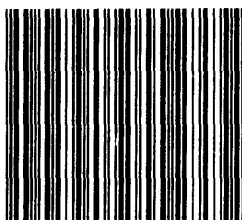


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