



Renewing rural and regional teacher education curriculum

Final Report 2012

www.rrrtec.net.au

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Acronyms

ALTC	Australian Teaching and Learning Council
ARC	Australian Research Council
REFA	Rural Education Forum of Australia
RREAC	Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council
RRRTEC	Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum
R[T]EP	Rural [Teacher] Education Project (R[T]EP)
SiMERR	Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia
SPERA	Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia
TERRAnova	Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia



Abstract

Recruiting and retaining well-prepared teachers for rural and regional schools, remains an ongoing issue faced by all State based jurisdictions in Australia. Based on recent national research, and focused on meeting the needs of teacher educators to better support new teachers to prepare for and experience success as new teachers in rural locations, this ALTC funded project, Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum (RRRTEC) set out to address this issue by investigating what teacher education could do differently to better prepare teachers for rural and regional workforce needs. As a result of this two year study involving further research, materials audits and curriculum development, a website has been created and designed specifically for all teacher educators to publicly and freely access and use. The RRRTEC website is located at www.rrrtec.net.au. The website has been created as an accessible resource for teacher educators, principals, mentors and others supporting new teachers in rural schools. Focusing on the classroom, the school and the community, it provides a range of high quality resources that will provide easy access to rural and regional teacher education research, curriculum resources and pedagogical strategies for their teacher education students.



Executive summary

Recruiting and retaining well-prepared teachers for rural and regional schools, remains an ongoing issue faced by all State and Territory based jurisdictions in Australia regardless of their size. It is a cold reality that the further the school is geographically located away from a capital city the more difficult it is to staff. This problem continues despite a focused effort to provide financial incentive programs to entice teachers to work in rural and regional communities and despite an oversupply of newly qualified teachers each year.

Recent national research from a three year Australian Research Council (ARC) funded grant known as *Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia* (TERRAnova) revealed that teacher education could be the key to unlocking the rural and regional staffing crisis, and is best placed to do more to better prepare graduates for the career and lifestyle opportunities and challenges that they may face. The 2008-2011 ARC study revealed that the majority of Australian universities have no explicit focus on rural education in their teacher education programs; have random and ad hoc rural practicum opportunities and no obvious link to any of the various financial incentives across Australia to encourage graduates to work in rural areas.

Based on this national research, and focused on meeting the needs of teacher educators to support new teachers to experience success in rural locations, this ALTC funded project, *Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum* (RRRTEC) set out to investigate what teacher education could do differently to better prepare teachers for rural and regional workforce needs.

The two-year study involved analysis of three data sets including; a large literature search on rural and regional teacher education studies; pre-service student surveys (n= 263) into their rural professional experiences and; in-depth interviews with teacher educators (n=20) nationally. Based on this data key findings revealed the need to prepare rural and regional teachers to be community ready, school ready and classroom ready (White, 2010) and also informed the development of a conceptual framework design that emphasised the importance of understanding place. Using the framework five themes were identified and formed the basis of a set of curriculum modules to inform the ways in which teacher educators need to explicitly address teachers' work and professional lives in rural and regional communities. The five themes are:

- Experiencing rurality
- Community readiness
- Whole school focus
- Student learning and the classroom
- Professional experience and advice for working in rural/regional settings

A set of resources have also been developed to also equip pre-service teachers for a rural professional experience. Particular advice is provided for all three phases of the experience, including before, during and after. The RRRTEC website which houses all the modules, professional experience advice and a library of 750 high quality rural and regional education resources has been created and designed specifically for all teacher educators, principals, mentors and others supporting new teachers in rural and regional schools to publicly and freely access. Focusing on the classroom, the school and the community, it provides easy access to rural and regional teacher education research, curriculum resources and pedagogical strategies for their teacher education students.

The RRRTEC website is located at <www.rrrtec.net.au>



Project outcomes and impacts

The *Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum* (RRRTEC) project was submitted under the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Priority 2: 'Curriculum Renewal' as it focused on developing contemporary curricula for professional fields of higher education and teacher education in particular.

The RRRTEC project aimed to develop a curriculum that was both inclusive of rural education needs and forward thinking in meeting the growing need of well prepared teachers for a rural and regional workforce shortage. The project sought to enable teacher educators involved in teaching and course program design to access, use and embed a set of resources and exemplars related to rural teaching into their teacher education programs.

As result of this project, curriculum renewal for teacher education courses will benefit Australian higher education learning and teaching in the following ways:

- Students will be engaged with a curriculum that is up-to-date, focused on outcomes and relevant to their learning and future careers of rural teachers.
- Teacher education staff will have access to expert advice on rural education curriculum development and renewal that is based on best practice and the highest quality material available.
- Higher education leaders will benefit from a centralised resource (www.rrrtec.net.au) that can help guide course quality and improve opportunities for rural education to be embedded in course design.
- Teacher education graduates will be 'work-ready' for rural communities, with appropriate theoretical and conceptual understandings to complement their practical skills.
- Benchmarking and the monitoring of academic standards will be possible as the rural curriculum renewal proposed will include a focus on the assessment of student learning.

The RRRTEC project set out to achieve the following deliverables:

- a collation of selected, high quality rural education materials and resources including research publications, practitioner research, audiovisual materials, and advice from principals and teachers placed in rural and regional schools
- a new curriculum package focused on preparing and supporting student teachers to successfully complete their rural practicum
- a new set of curriculum guidelines and strategies for teacher educators to develop a dedicated rural education unit of study and/or to embed rural teaching material within other units of study
- a central data repository (website) of the above three components titled *Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum* (RRRTEC).



The project successfully completed each deliverable.

- i. The first component of the project collated high quality rural teacher education resources and centralised these materials in one place to enable all stakeholders interested in teacher education and rural education to readily access them. The resources were vetted and selected by an expert team (see reference group). Teacher educators as a result are able to select resources and materials that are relevant for their context and to have autonomy in their curriculum planning and development underpinned by materials of the highest quality. As new research is conducted and new resources created, the website will be updated and will therefore be a sustainable resource for the Australian higher education sector.
- ii. The curriculum package now provides resources designed specifically for teacher educators to prepare student teachers for the rural and regional professional experience (practicum). The package provides curriculum advice for the three phases of the practicum: planning for the practicum; being supported on practicum and de-briefing and reflecting after practicum.
- iii. The third component of the resource offers curriculum advice and guidelines to assist teacher educators in Australian higher education in planning, teaching, assessing and evaluating a dedicated rural education unit of study and rural components of other units of study. The guidelines are integrated with the curriculum package outlined above and serve to assist teacher education curriculum developers in making informed decisions about objectives, teaching strategies, learning activities and assessment regimes and tasks.
- iv. All components described above are now located on one easily accessible central data repository site (www.rrrtec.net.au). This enables all involved in higher education to easily locate rural education resources, curriculum guidelines, advice and strategies.

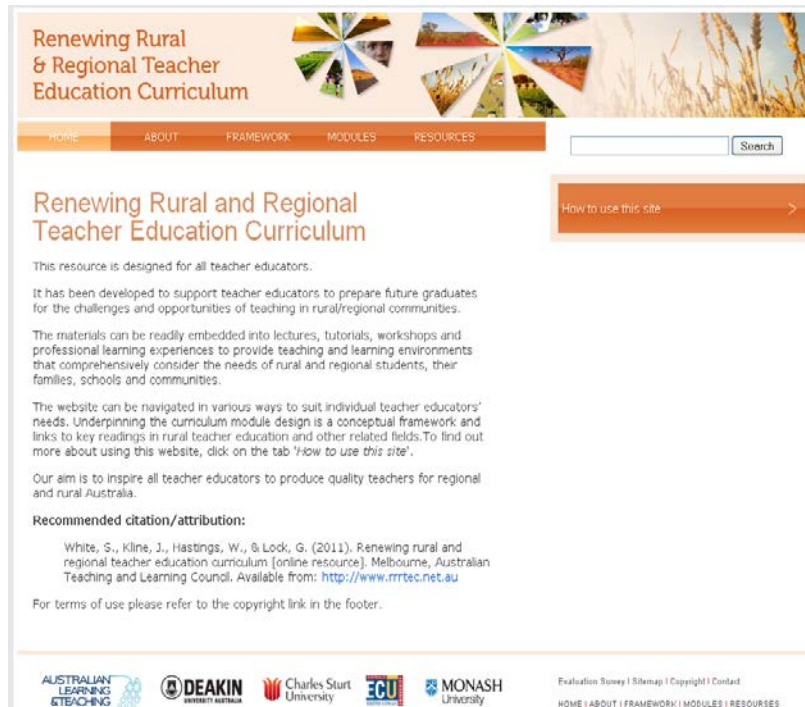


Project outcomes

RRRTEC website

The major output of this project has been the development of the RRRTEC website. All following outputs are all publicly and freely available on the RRRTEC website.

Go to www.rrrtec.net.au



Renewing Rural & Regional Teacher Education Curriculum

HOME ABOUT FRAMEWORK MODULES RESOURCES

Search

Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum

How to use this site >

This resource is designed for all teacher educators.

It has been developed to support teacher educators to prepare future graduates for the challenges and opportunities of teaching in rural/regional communities.

The materials can be readily embedded into lectures, tutorials, workshops and professional learning experiences to provide teaching and learning environments that comprehensively consider the needs of rural and regional students, their families, schools and communities.

The website can be navigated in various ways to suit individual teacher educators' needs. Underpinning the curriculum module design is a conceptual framework and links to key readings in rural teacher education and other related fields. To find out more about using this website, click on the tab 'How to use this site'.

Our aim is to inspire all teacher educators to produce quality teachers for regional and rural Australia.

Recommended citation/attribution:

White, S., Kline, J., Hastings, W., & Lock, G. (2011). *Renewing rural and regional teacher education curriculum* [online resource]. Melbourne, Australian Teaching and Learning Council. Available from: <http://www.rrrtec.net.au>

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Curriculum package

<http://www.rrrtec.net.au/modules.html>

The curriculum package focused on five main themes to better prepare teachers for rural and regional contexts (experiencing rurality) and to help them be community ready, school ready and classroom ready. Seven curriculum modules were each created featuring resources designed to assist teacher educators in either developing a dedicated rural/regional education unit of study or building on current units by picking and choosing sections to embed. Teacher educators can now choose to follow the modules sequentially or select a module that suits their purpose. The sixth module focuses on the professional experience component and the various modes that teacher educators can draw from in the before, during and after cycle of preparing pre-service teachers to take up a rural/regional practicum as well as advice for graduates in taking up a rural career.

The themes and modules are:

1. Experiencing rurality

Module 1 - Understanding rurality

2. Community readiness

Module 2 - Understanding place

3. Whole school focus

Module 3 - Understanding rural teacher identity and teachers' work



Module 4 - Understanding working with rural and regional communities

4. Student learning and the **classroom**

Module 5 - Getting to know rural students' lives

Module 6 - Professional Experience

5. Preparing for a rural career

Module 7 - Advice for working in rural/regional settings

The curriculum module titled professional experience includes a series of suggested modes of learning designed to support pre-service teachers to successfully complete a rural practicum. The modes within Module 6 range from simulations to suggested speakers to an actual field experience. This section incorporates advice from teacher educators across Australia who have trialed a range of strategies to better prepare pre-service teachers for their rural and regional placements.

Modes

- Guest speaker
- Remote contact
- Simulations and scenarios
- Site visits
- Field trips
- Practicum

Short video clips

As a result of the project seventeen short video clips have been developed and incorporated into the modules/modes. Through these clips teacher educators, graduate teachers, principals and rural students provide advice about preparing for rural/regional practicum, and living and working in non-metropolitan settings:

- Key teacher qualities, Country Teaching DVD, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25013185>
- Career advantages and challenges, Country Teaching DVD, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25013063>
- What does a rural school look like? Country Teaching DVD, Deakin University: <http://vimeo.com/25013478>
- Early career teachers taking the big step, Country Teaching DVD, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25012937>
- Michael Kenny, Assumption College Kilmore, Rural and Regional Teacher Education Forum, 2010, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25013654>
- Paul Lomas, Catholic Education Office - Diocese of Sale, Rural and Regional Teacher Education Forum, 2010, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25013615>
- Making a sea change, Country Teaching DVD, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25013426>
- Shirley Richards, University of the Sunshine Coast – Using a wiki to mentor pre-service teachers: http://youtu.be/Sj8_8iioxgQ
- Karen Le Rossignol, Deakin University - Bilby simulation: <http://youtu.be/5ikTCb7G8u8>



- Jan Page, Charles Sturt University - Girraween Flat Public School Simulation:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxXJX3ZUbbg&feature=player_embedded
- What does a rural school look like, Country Teaching DVD, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25013478>
- Jo Russell talks about living in Birregurra and teaching at Forrest Primary School, Country Teaching DVD, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25013265>
- Elaine Sharplin, University of Western Australia - Rural and Regional Field Trips: <http://vimeo.com/25013685>
- Shirley Richards, University of the Sunshine Coast - Coast to Country Field Trip [Audio only]: <http://vimeo.com/25013795>
- Leanne Dawes, Ouyen Secondary College, Rural and Regional Teacher Education Forum, 2010, Deakin University, Australia: <http://youtu.be/01ywsVNBV9w>
- Andrew Robertson, Chaffey Secondary College, Rural and Regional Teacher Education Forum, 2010, Deakin University, Australia: <http://vimeo.com/25013851>
- Mark Newton, Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, Rural and Regional Teacher Education Forum, 2010, Deakin University, Australia: <http://youtu.be/joSG7aiMa1s>

RRRTEC resources

<http://www.rrrtec.net.au/resources.html>

The RRRTEC website is now a gateway to over 750 rural and regional education resources.

It includes:

- Links to rural/regional **professional experience incentives** both state/territory (n=27) and university based (n=39). These links provide information for pre-service teachers about the range of financial and cultural opportunities available to them.

Incentives – state/territory: http://www.rrrtec.net.au/incentives_states_territory.html

Incentives – universities: http://www.rrrtec.net.au/incentives_universities.html

- A **photo gallery** containing 153 photos of rural/regional places throughout Australia. Selections of these photos are geo-tagged via Google maps to create a visual representation of rural and regional Australia.

Geo-tagged images: http://www.rrrtec.net.au/geo_tagged_photos.html

Photo gallery: http://www.rrrtec.net.au/photo_gallery.html

- A **resource library** featuring a catalogue that can be searched by keywords, author, year, and resource type. Users also have access to a **my favourites library** which they can use to build personalised resource lists.

The extensive database that sits behind the library provides details for 750 high quality rural/regional education resources including:

- 25 news articles
- 359 journal articles



- 38 audiovisual materials
- 42 reports
- 55 conference papers
- 75 books/ book sections
- 49 websites

Full text copies of many of these resources are available directly through the RRRTEC website.

Resource library: <http://www.rrrtec.net.au/resources.html>

My favourites library:

http://renewingruralandregionalteachereducationcurriculum.businesscatalyst.com/resources_registration.html

Project impacts

The work of the RRRTEC project has already had a significant impact in contributing to changing the higher education and teacher education curriculum landscape.

A West Australian based project named *Developing strategies at the pre-service level to address critical teacher attraction and retention issues in Australian rural, regional and remote schools*, is a collaboration between five WA universities and is also funded by the ALTC. The project proposes building significantly on the work of RRRTEC in the following ways:

1. undertaking a gap analysis of the modules regarding WA university pre-service curriculum in terms of producing additional modules from RRRTEC
2. using the RRRTEC website to house additional resources developed in WA
3. using the RRRTEC website as a repository for other materials that may be useful
4. uploading the work undertaken on the National Professional Standards (graduate level) in terms of rural, regional and remote teachers to the RRRTEC frame
5. using the modules housed on the RRRTEC site in the pre-service programs of all five partner universities
6. directing stakeholders to the RRRTEC site e.g. the WA reference and project partners group, Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC), Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA), Rural Education Forum Australia (REFA) etc.

Higher Education

The following institutions have indicated they have already begun to examine and consider embedding the RRRTEC resources in the following ways:

Charles Sturt University – This university has developed a dedicated rural education course and have begun to use the resources from this project in the development of this program. Teacher educators from across the multiple campuses will thus be drawing from the resources, curriculum materials to embed into their teaching in their units.

Monash University (Gippsland campus) – This University successfully applied for a State funded project known as *School Centres for Teaching Excellence* – to develop a specific rural teacher education curriculum and embed the resources from the RRRTEC website into the curriculum design and re-accreditation of a new suite of



courses.

Edith Cowan University – This University will be taking up the resources in their current courses and will be engaged with the materials as part of their professional development of their teacher educators.

University of South Australia – This University is specifically examining the RRRTEC resource to see how it can be incorporated as part of an online course for their 4th year programs.

Research approach

The project was completed through four phases:

- i: Consultation (Oct 2009 – Feb 2010)
- ii: Scoping, mapping and collating (Feb 2010 – Jul 2010)
- iii: Development of new materials (Apr 2010 – Dec 2010)
- iv: National dissemination, release and promotion (Jan 2011 – Jul 2012)

Phase i - Consultation

This phase involved the establishment of the reference group and expert curriculum writing team.

Reference group

The reference group was established in November 2009. The group involved a range of expert researchers and practitioners, as well as representatives of key national association bodies around Australia including the Australian Council of Deans in Education (ACDE), the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA) and the Rural Education Forum Association (REFA). The reference group acted as a consultative forum and an advisory group in relation to the development, accessibility and usability of the resources.

Members of the reference group included:

Professor Jo Anne Reid	(Charles Sturt University)
Ms Jan Page	(Charles Sturt University)
Professor Diane Mayer	(Deakin University)
Dr Pauline Taylor	(James Cook University)
Mr Gary Allen	(Rural Education Forum Australia-Chair)
Ms Shirley Gregory	(Rural School Principal)
Assoc. Professor Maxine Cooper	(University of Ballarat)
Ms Shirley Richards	(University of the Sunshine Coast)
Dr Elaine Sharplin	(The University of Western Australia)

Establishment of the reference group served two functions. First, it increased the pool of ideas and suggestions that the project could draw upon in refining the materials. Second, it provided a significant dissemination function. Not only were participating institutions and professional organisations informed of the progress of the project, they were also more likely to value the project outcomes as they had been an integral part of the development process.



The specific functions performed by the reference group included:

- outlining the aims of the project to ensure that there was a shared language and understanding of the project aims
- providing feedback on the materials collected for the repository
- informing conceptualisation of the project framework
- assisting with the framing of the findings from the interviews with teacher educators and surveys from pre-service teachers
- informing the work of the curriculum writing team
- examining and reviewing the curriculum guideline and rural practicum advice resource package
- providing advice for embedding the resource within teacher education programs throughout Australia
- promotion of the project with their home institutions.

The reference group met face to face three times over the project; at the beginning, at the mid-way point, and at the final draft stage of the resource. Members of the reference group were also asked to consider draft resources at other points during the project.

Curriculum writing team

The expert writing team was composed of current leaders in the field who have successfully developed rural education units and trialed various rural professional experience packages.

The expert writing team was formed at the beginning of the project and worked closely with the project team and the reference group. A curriculum writing retreat was conducted in June 2010. During this retreat, the expert writing team began work on the rural practicum curriculum package and curriculum guidelines for teaching about rural education.

Members of the curriculum writing team included:

Professor Simone White	(Monash University)
Dr Wendy Hastings	(Charles Sturt University)
Ms Jan Page	(Charles Sturt University)
Dr Pauline Taylor	(James Cook University)
Dr Elaine Sharplin	(The University of Western Australia)



Phase ii - Scoping, mapping and collating

A number of approaches to the collection of reference materials were employed. A systematic search of relevant databases was undertaken (see 'collating resources' below), the results of which were coupled with resources secured either opportunistically, or identified by the reference group and other stakeholders as high quality research and scholarship in rural education. Various databases including ERIC, A+ Education, Google Scholar, Web of Knowledge, Education Research Complete, Informit (Australian Education Index) and Expanded Academic ASAP were searched using keywords. An example alert developed for ERIC is featured below:

```
DE=("teacher education" or "professional education" or
"competency based teacher education" or "in-service teacher
education" or "pre-service teacher education" or "teacher educator
education" or "education courses" or "knowledge base for teaching"
or "reflective teaching" or "schools of education" or "student teacher
supervisors" or "teacher background" or "teaching experience" or
"teacher education curriculum" or "teacher education programs" or
"teacher educators") and DE=("rural areas" or "rural education" or
"rural schools")
```

Over 1000 resources were considered for inclusion in the repository, which included a selection of audio files, video clips, children's books, sample units of work, teacher testimony and practitioner and academic publications.

Phase iii - Development of new materials

Drawing from phase i and phase ii, the project team, in collaboration with the curriculum writing team, prepared the draft resource package and sought input from the projects' reference group and other interested stakeholders.

Deakin University teacher educators from a range of curriculum areas, reviewed the initial draft materials including a prototype of the website. These teacher educators were:

Dr Bernadette Walker-Gibbs
Dr Muriel Wells
Associate Professor Andrea Allard

Based on their feedback significant changes were made to the website design. A refined package was then piloted with the larger reference group. Trialing two versions of the RRRTEC website in this way raised the project team's awareness of both the user experience and the design features of websites. The need to incorporate highly visual, dynamic and interactive content was identified, as was the importance of the strategic use of icons and intuitive navigation, based on simple and accessible menus.

To address stakeholder feedback a web-designer and user consultant were engaged. Use of the graphic design firm, AdCapital, ensured that the functionality and aesthetic requirements identified through the consultation phase were incorporated (see RRRTEC outcomes for website design features and the module framework).



Phase iv - National dissemination, release and promotion

A series of workshops and presentations have been developed to ensure as many teacher educators know about the website.

As part of the dissemination strategy and to maximize the dissemination and uptake of the resource a launch and workshop were held together on 31 June and 1 July 2011.

The research workshop titled *Mapping Australian rural and regional research* focused on sharing national research projects; strengthening relationships between rural education researchers; building on each others' work and; developing a strategy to maintain and promote the RRRTEC deliverables.

Workshop participants (see page 14 for a list of the participants) were strategically selected to represent national expertise across all aspects of rural and regional teacher education. Participants focused on topics including: place pedagogies; attraction and retention in Australian rural, regional and remote schools; practicum partnerships for rural and regional pre-service teachers; development of sustainable curriculum; incorporation of ICT to enhance academic outcomes for rural and regional students; and renewal of the teaching profession in regional areas through community partnerships.

Research Methodology

There were three key data sources that informed the development of the curriculum materials.

These included:

1. Pre-service surveys
2. In depth interview with teacher educators nationally
3. A literature search into the research into rural and regional teacher education

1. Pre-service survey data

Survey data was collected from pre-service teachers (n=263) as part of the TERRAnova project. TERRAnova is an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project on which the RRRTEC project builds the practical and curriculum work.

TERRAnova sought to discover successful strategies for preparing, attracting and retaining high quality teachers for rural and remote schools in five Australian states. The three-year longitudinal ARC project used annual national surveys to monitor the impact of particular state-based financial incentives designed to support student teachers wishing to undertake a rural placement. Student teachers who took up incentives offered by both universities and employers were surveyed to determine the success of the program in terms of the retention of those who began teaching in a rural school. To avoid duplication, the RRRTEC project drew on these surveys collected through the TERRAnova project (August 2008 - December 2010). The survey is provided (see appendix 1).

Thematic qualitative analysis was undertaken. Twenty seven themes with 43 sub-sets were identified using NVivo8. The key themes to emerge from questionnaires included:

- the importance of building and sustaining relationships



- financial barriers and enablers to rural and regional practicum
- schools as communities and the interconnection between schools and communities
- identification of practicum as a pathway to future employment

2. Teacher educator interview data

Interviews with teacher educators were conducted between April and June 2010. The interview schedule is provided (See appendix 2). Twenty individual interviews took place with participants from Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. The initial plan to conduct 50 interviews changed to 20 once it became apparent that there were a small number of recurring themes, with additional interviews adding little unique information. The possibility of conducting additional interviews exists if the need arises.

The interview questionnaire featured seven open-ended items ranging from questions about individual participants' experiences in rural and regional settings, to questions about the courses they teach and the opportunities, content and materials within these courses that assist with preparation of students for rural professional experience, at both pre-service and in-service level.

The key findings to emerge in the interviews were similar to those that emerged from survey data, including recognition of:

- the relationship between schools and community and the importance of community
- rural and regional professional experience as valuable to considering a rural career
- concerns around preparation of students for rural appointments
- the need for rural education resources and units
- rural and regional aspects that are not always explicitly incorporated into current teaching (but are often considered within discussions about contextual awareness)
- specific place-based teaching/knowledge
- previous experience in teaching and/or living in rural areas as useful for graduates considering rural appointments, as well as for teacher educators preparing students for rural professional experience
- confusion about what counts as rural and where Indigenous pedagogy may fit within the rural curriculum
- initiative and flexibility are important attributes of pre-service teachers seeking rural positions.

3. Literature search

Over the past two decades research into the field of rural and regional teacher education has increased. These studies collectively paint a particular picture of the issues facing teachers and pre-service teachers working and living in rural communities. Based on the literature search, an annotated bibliography was collated and identified both large and small scale research in Australia and internationally that focused on rural teacher education. The literature that has informed this work can be found in the reference section and many studies are easily accessible on the RRRTEC website.



Five particular studies have contributed to the outcomes of this project. These are:

- *Rural [Teacher] Education Project (R[T]EP)* (Green, 2008)
- Research into the rural practicum conducted by REFA (Halsey, 2005)
- *Staffing an empty schoolhouse: attracting and retaining teachers in rural, remote and isolated communities*, conducted by the New South Wales Teachers Federation (Roberts, 2007)
- Perceptions of student teachers views of life in rural communities (Sharplin, 2002)
- *Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia (TERRAnova)* (Reid, White, Green, Cooper, Lock and Hastings, 2008-2011)

As part of the RRRTEC project the studies were analysed to identify the main reasons reported for why the recruitment and retention of teachers working in rural and regional Australia remained an issue.

Some of the key findings from the literature search included the following key points:

- Roberts (2005) in his report of *Staffing the empty schoolhouse* confirmed that Australia's remote, rural and regional schools are frequently staffed with young, inexperienced teachers and teacher turnover is high.
- Geographic isolation, weather, distance from family, and inadequate shopping are reported among the reasons teachers gave for leaving rural areas (Collins, 1999).
- Halsey (2005) highlighted the additional 'social and economic costs' pre-service teachers encountered in completing a rural professional experience.
- Further reasons for rural staffing shortages due to teachers' (both pre-service and in-service) beliefs about geographical, social, cultural, and professional isolation; inadequate housing; and a lack of preparation for multi-age classrooms, which may explain reasons for losing rural teachers have also been reported (Collins, 1999; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; McClure, Redfield & Hammer, 2003).
- Pre-service teachers have often not experienced rural and regional communities and have formed either idealistic or extremely negative views of living and working in rural places (Sharplin, 2002).
- Further, rural teachers need more effective skills for teaching the multi-age and multi-grade classes that often typify rural schools (Page, 2006), as well as the need to better understand rural and regional students' funds of knowledge (González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005) and the virtual school bags that teachers need to unpack (Thompson, 2002).
- Understandings of place (Grunewald, 2003), and skills to develop place-based or place –conscious curriculum that connects students to their communities are simultaneously distinctly important to teaching in rural schools and readily omitted from current teacher education programs (White, 2010; White and Reid, 2008).

Key themes identified

Across the data sets further key themes began to emerge that informed the work of the conceptual framework.

It is evident that teachers who are going to work in rural communities need to:

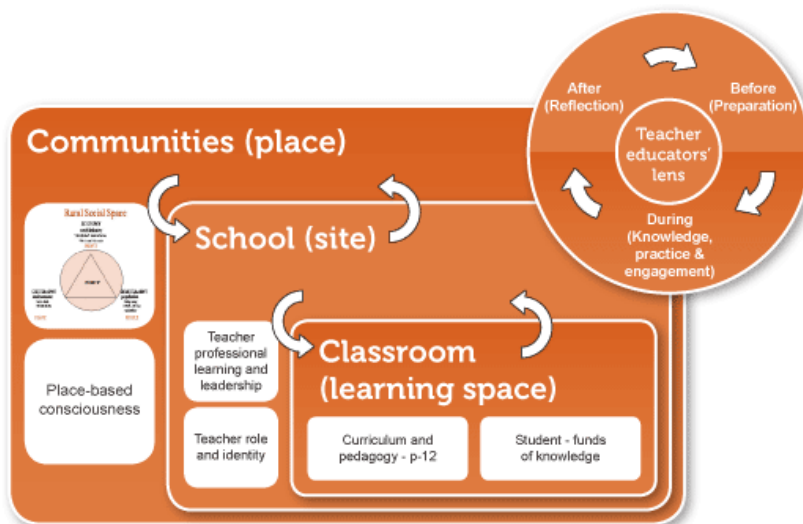
- understand the place and community in which they will be working



- understand the place from many different perspectives including the demography, economy and geography (see Rural Social Space)
- connect the school curriculum in meaningful and authentic ways to the places in which their students live and assist them in turn to connect to 'other' places
- be prepared to know that the community and school in which they work will perceive them as a leader and their professional and personal lives will be more visible because of the nature of their location
- communicate with a range of different 'stakeholders' in a language that can break down rather than create barriers to educational choice and opportunity
- work purposefully in a range of teams both within the school and within the community
- be prepared to teach students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to themselves and to do this not from a deficit discourse
- to acknowledge and match learning experiences that significantly build on the rich and diverse lives of rural and regional students and be prepared to teach different stages and ages in any one learning experience
- to know how to work in teams in and across geographic distances using technology to develop their own professional learning.

Conceptual framework

The key themes provided the theoretical knowledge base from which to consider a new rural and regional teacher education curriculum conceptual framework (known as the RRRTEC model). The RRRTEC model highlights the need for teachers who are community ready, school ready and classroom ready. Rural and regional professional experiences need to include the three phases of before, during and after and encompass the three aspects of community, school and classroom in their design.



Challenges and recommendations

The two year project faced a number of challenges common to large nationally focused research and work. At no stage however did any challenge become insurmountable and this is a credit to the many various people who worked on this project.

The main challenge however for this project lies ahead. The project team have worked hard to ensure all the deliverables were met and from all reports the website has received high praise and clearly has the potential to positively change the ways in which new graduates are prepared to work in rural and regional communities.

The main challenge therefore is to maintain the website and ensure that the resources are kept up to date, links remain open and that the resource is easily accessible to teacher educators. The other challenge lies with the ways in which teacher educators across the country are encouraged and supported to engage with the materials and begin to develop their own.

The following recommendations are provided to ensure both these challenges will be positively addressed in the future. These recommendations were made by a delegation of leading rural teacher educator researchers from across the country following the launch of the RRRTEC website.

The participants were:

Mr Don Boyd	(Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia)
Professor Marie Brennan	(Victoria University)
Ms Briony Carter	(University of South Australia)
Associate Professor Maxine Cooper	(University of Ballarat)
Dr Aaron Drummond	(Flinders University)
Dr Monica Green	(Monash University)
Professor John Halsey	(Flinders University)
Dr Faye McCallum	(University of South Australia)
Dr Michelle Ortlipp	(University of Ballarat)
Professor JoAnne Reid	(Charles Sturt University)
Ms Shirley Richards	(University of the Sunshine Coast)
Dr Phil Roberts	(University of Canberra)
Dr Josephine Ryan	(The Australian Catholic University)
Dr Elaine Sharplin	(The University of Western Australia)
Professor Margaret Somerville	(Monash University)
Dr Pauline Taylor	(James Cook University)
Ms Emmy Terry	(Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia)
Dr Bernadette Walker Gibbs	(Deakin University)

Challenge 1: To maintain the RRRTEC resource

Recommendation 1: Maintain and build on the current RRRTEC website

To ensure that the RRRTEC Website continues to provide relevant, up to date materials, information and approaches, it needs to be maintained and updated. This requires:

- monitoring the site
- gaining feedback from users (and acting on it if needed)
- reviewing new materials and resources that become available over time



- making appropriate decisions on new material to be added and information that needs to be replaced
- gaining permission, copyright clearances to use new materials
- organising to have the new materials loaded onto the site.

Recommendation 2: Establish an ongoing RRRTEC team/reference group

This group would, for example:

- monitor the site
- recommend changes and additions to the site
- coordinate the development of additional materials for the site
- coordinate the promotion of RRRTEC at a range of events
- explore and coordinate funding options for RRRTEC.

Recommendation 3: Employ an RRRTEC assistant

Roles would include:

- managing the administration of the RRRTEC Website
- assisting in the coordination of RRRTEC events and activities
- monitoring and seek answers to RRRTEC inquiries.

Recommendation 4: Identify and pursue funding options

This could include:

- seeking out and lobby relevant government representatives, and other influential groups and individuals
- applying for grants and other sources of funding that become available
- making representation to relevant organisations, businesses and agencies.

Recommendation 5: Continue to explore and access options for promoting RRRTEC

For example:

- placing RRRTEC information and a link to the site on other relevant websites
- including articles in relevant journals and other publications
- directly contacting and or sending information to key stakeholders in different institutions
- extending the information to other sectors (early childhood for example).

Recommendation 6: Form alliances with key groups and governing bodies that can provide support, lobby for RRRTEC or have shared experiences

For example:

- Departments of Education
- Social justice and equity and access groups in rural and regional areas
- Indigenous organisations.



Challenge 2: To ensure teacher educators engage with and embed materials

Recommendation 1: Conduct a series of RRRTEC workshops across Australia in 2012

This involves:

- RRRTEC workshops hosted by one leading teacher education institution and invited participants being held in every state and territory throughout 2012.

Recommendation 2: Implement an evaluation of the workshops and develop case studies of teacher educators who take up the resources

This involves:

- conducting follow up interviews with teacher educators who attend the workshops to evaluate the effectiveness of the resource
- developing a set of exemplars and case studies of the ways in which leading teacher educators build from the resources and create their own resources
- developing more digital stories to add to the growing resource collection.

Recommendation 3: Establish a Rural and Regional Education Wiki

Establish a Wiki or other online, closed collaboration site dedicated to Rural and Regional Education in Teacher Education.

This would enable participants to:

- share ideas, innovative practices, resources and experiences
- conduct collaborative activities together.

Overall recommendation: Develop more resources that promote an understanding of the needs of teachers working in remote communities

Finally while some resources exist that focus on the more specific needs of remote communities the RRRTEC resource currently has focused more on the needs of rural and regional. Further resources are required to prepare teachers to take up positions in remote locations.

Development of these resources requires:

- further work with teacher educators, experienced in working with remote locations, to identify key resources and develop a set of strategies to embed in the current RRRTEC modules
- further research to inform a remote professional experience set of guidelines and strategies to better prepare and encourage pre-service teachers to have positive and purposeful professional experience models.



Evaluation

Salt Group was engaged to conduct the evaluation of this project over the two year implementation period. This evaluation has been formative, gathering information over the full period of the project to inform ongoing planning and practice. It was designed to provide evidence and understanding of the effectiveness of RRRTEC in achieving its goals and objectives, particularly in regard to:

- gaining and managing the input of ideas and resources from a range of institutions, groups and individuals
- developing the draft curriculum resource and associated information,
- raising awareness of the project amongst relevant groups,
- involving and gaining feedback on the draft curriculum from institutions, groups and individuals,
- promoting and disseminating the curriculum resource to relevant institutions, groups and individuals, and
- achieving stakeholder satisfaction with the resulting website and resources contained in it.

The final evaluation report is at appendix 3.



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Appendices

Appendix 1

TERRAnova – Pre-service teacher survey

Appendix 2

Interview questionnaire – Teacher educators

Appendix 3

Renewing Rural and Regional Education Curriculum (RRRTEC)

Final evaluation Report – August 2011



TERRAnova – Pre-service teacher survey

SECTION 1 and 2

- Q1. What was the nature of the incentive scheme or practicum you participated in?
 Q2. What year did you complete your incentive scheme or practicum experience?
 Q3. What was the nature of the incentive and/or experience?
 Q4. If it was not named above, what was the name of the scheme/s and/or incentives that you participated in?
 Q5. For what level(s) of schooling and subjects are you being prepared to teach?
 Q6. What subject areas and year levels did you teach or observe on your rural practicum experience?
 Q7. Name of degree(s) or graduate diploma you are completing to become a teacher. If a double degree, please specify the content major.
 Q8. Your Gender
 Q9. Your Age
 Q10. Area in which you mostly lived prior to commencing preservice teacher education:
 Q11. Do you have any dependents?
 Q12. Did you undertake your rural teaching experience in your hometown?
 Q13. How long was/were your country placement(s) in school days?
 Q14. Did you have a paid job when you undertook your rural practicum/experience?
 Q15. Where do you currently live?
 Q16. In which town did you undertake your rural practicum?
 Q17. Please add any further comments about any of the items in this section:
 Q18. Would you have applied for a rural practicum without the assistance provided by the incentive scheme?
 Q19. What was the nature of the incentive provided by the University?
 Q20. Were you provided with a briefing session prior to undertaking the rural practicum/experience?
 Q21. Was the briefing session valuable?
 Q22. Were you provided with a de-briefing session after undertaking the rural practicum/experience?
 Q23. Was this de-briefing session valuable?
 Q24. Did participation in the incentive scheme encourage you to apply for a rural/remote teaching appointment?
 Q25. How far did you travel (one-way) from your university for your country practicum/experience?
 Q26. How did you travel to your country placement?
 Q27. Where did you stay while doing your country placement?
 Q28. Did you have to pay for accommodation in the location in which you undertook the rural placement incentive scheme?
 Q29. Did you have to pay for accommodation in your home base (where you reside when attending university) while participating in the rural placement incentive scheme?
 Q30. Did you receive any support to take a country placement?
 Q31. If you answered Yes to question 30 briefly describe what kind/amount and from whom.
 Q32. Please add any further comments about any of the items in this section.

SECTION 3

Participation in the rural placement incentive scheme allowed me to develop knowledge and skills about...

- N/A
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree



Strongly Disagree

- Q1. The development of appropriate teaching/learning strategies
- Q2. Characteristics of Students in rural/remote schools
- Q3. Managing student behavior
- Q4. Teaching in multi-age classrooms
- Q5. Support provided for teachers in rural/remote locations: e.g. District Office
- Q6. Staff-student relationships in school
- Q7. Staff-student relationships outside school
- Q8. Community expectations of the school
- Q9. The role of the school in the community
- Q10. General operation of rural/remote schools
- Q11. Staff-staff relationships in school
- Q12. Staff-staff relationships outside school
- Q13. Parent-student relationships
- Q14. School expectations of teachers
- Q15. staff-parent relationships in school
- Q16. Staff-parent relationships outside school
- Q17. School resources
- Q18. Community expectations of teachers outside school hours
- Q19. Acceptance by the community
- Q20. Participation in community activities (sport, clubs, etc)
- Q21. Attitudes and values of people who live in rural/remote communities
- Q22. Rural/remote lifestyle
- Q23. Development of own living skills
- Q24. Please include any comments below, if applicable, about student learning experiences in multi-age classrooms.
- Q25. Please include any comments below about student learning experiences in rural schools
- Q26. Please add any further comments below about any of the items in this section

SECTION 4

- Q1. What encouraged and inspired you to take up a country experience or practicum?
- Q2. What amount of financial support do you think is needed to encourage pre-service teachers to take a country experience or placement?
- Q3. What do you see as the *advantages* of a country pre-service experience or placement?
- Q4. What do you see as the *disadvantages* of a country pre-service experience or placement?
- Q5. Is there any other information or comment you would like to provide about the cost of a pre-service country teaching experience or placement?
- Q6. In what way did people in the town where you undertook your experience make you feel welcome?
- Q7. Were there any ways in which you felt uncomfortable, unwelcome or marginalised? Please explain.
- Q8. Please describe a memorable incident about participating in the country experience or practicum placement.



Interview questionnaire – Teacher educators

Introduction

- The purpose of this project is to investigate the views of student teachers and teacher educators about current rural teacher education preparation, practicum and curriculum support.
- This research will be used to contribute to the improvement of rural professional experience and preparing students for a rural career.
- The questions I will be asking are listed in the PLS.
- Have you received the PLS and signed the consent form?
- Do you have any questions about the information in these documents?
- You will receive a transcript of your responses to review.
- Identifying information will remain confidential.

Questions

1. What do you think are the distinctive features of preparing a student teacher for a rural career?

Prompts:

- What makes preparing a student for a rural career different to preparing a student for a career in a regional or metropolitan setting? What differences are you most aware of?
- Skills?
- Flexibility?
- Supports?

2. Have you ever visited a student teacher completing a rural practicum?

a) If no - why not?

Prompts:

- Would you like to?
- Barriers:
 - Cost?
 - Distance?
 - Number of students?

b) If yes - why and what did you learn about rural education and the specific needs (if any) of students completing a rural practicum?

Prompts:

- Where?
- When?
- What did you learn?
- Common needs?
- What type of needs? Skills, support, prior learning?



3. Do you embed a rural curriculum focus in your teaching?

a) If no why not?

Prompts:

- Crowded curriculum?
- Covered elsewhere?
- Limited knowledge in this area?
- Lack of resources to support this focus?
- Irrelevant/minimal relevance?
- To your knowledge, is there a rural education focus in teacher education more broadly at your institution?

b) If yes - why and what specifically do you teach about and what resources do you use?

Prompts:

- What motivated this inclusion?
- For how long has this been part of your work?
- How did you select these resources? What are you looking for in a resource?

4. Where in your teacher education course (if any) do you believe rural curriculum could/should be embedded?

Prompts:

- Where is it already embedded?
- Where could it be added?
- Policy
- Curriculum
 - Readings
 - Case studies
 - General discussion
 - Practicum handbooks

5. Do you have experience teaching in a rural community? Do you think this is important or a necessary experience in teaching student teachers who might take up a rural career?

Prompts:

- If yes, can you tell me a little about this experience?
 - When?
 - Where?
 - For how long?
 - Highlights?
 - Challenges?
- What are the advantages of having this experience?
- If no, have you spent time in regional or rural communities? Does this experience assist your teaching?



- If no, what else is important?

6. What would you see as key or essential learning materials and content to provide to student teachers thinking about taking up a rural teaching position?

Prompts:

- What do students need to know?
- What do teacher educators need to pass on?
- What materials would you try to provide?
 - Multi-age units of work?
 - Examples of units of work with rural content?
 - Opportunities to meet with teachers from rural schools/ Testimony from rural teachers?
 - Online support?

7. What would you see as key or essential teaching experiences if you knew your student teachers were to take a rural teaching position?

Prompts:

- What preparation do students need for teaching in rural communities?
 - rural practicum?
 - exposure to rural settings?
 - exposure to multiage/stage classrooms?
 - teaching outside subject areas?

8. Do you have any questions or comments you would like to add?

Next steps:

The responses received will be used to inform development of:

- repository
- curriculum
- articles

Unprocessed data can be withdrawn at anytime.

If you have any concerns, the PLS contains contact information for the Project Leader and/or the Office of Research Integrity.



Renewing Rural and Regional Education Curriculum (RRRTEC) Final evaluation Report – August 2011



RENEWING RURAL TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM Evaluation Plan

1. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT TO BE EVALUATED

The Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum Project (RRRTEC) aims to facilitate the development of teacher education curriculum that highlights the particular features and benefits of rural and regional teaching and prepares graduates to teach in these contexts¹.

The project, to be conducted over a two year period, will involve the development of a set of resources and exemplars related to rural teaching. As stated in the grant proposal, these include:

- A collation of selected, high quality rural education materials and resources including research publications, practitioner research, case studies, units of work, DVDs, and advice from principals and teachers placed in rural and regional schools.
- A new curriculum package focused on preparing and supporting student teachers to successfully complete their rural practicum.
- A new set of curriculum guidelines and strategies for teacher educators to develop a dedicated rural education unit of study and/or to embed rural teaching material within other units of study.
- A central data repository (website) of the above three components titled Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum (RRTEC).

All teacher educators involved in teaching and course program design will be able to access, use and embed these resources into their teacher education programs.

The project will move through four phases:

- Consultation,
- Scoping, mapping and collating,
- Development of new materials, and
- National dissemination, release and promotion of the project products.

The Consultation phase involves the establishment of a reference group, involving a range of expert researchers and practitioners in teacher education, as well as representatives of key national association bodies, student teachers and rural principals and teachers. It will act as a consultative forum and an advisory group in relation to the development, accessibility and usability of the resources. An expert curriculum writing team will also be established, composed of current leaders in the field who have successfully developed rural education units and trialed various rural professional experience packages. It will work closely with the project team and the reference group.

The scoping, mapping and collating phase involves the selection and collation of a wide range of relevant, high quality rural education research and materials, which will be categorised for their relevance and usefulness by the project team in consultation with the reference group.

¹ ALTC Grant Proposal submitted 2009

The development of new materials will draw on the work from phase 1 and 2. The project team, in collaboration with the curriculum writing team, will prepare the draft resource package and will seek input from the project's reference group and other interested stakeholders.

National dissemination, release and promotion of the curriculum resource: *Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum (RRTEC)* will involve a targeted strategy directed to institutions, organisational units and individual academic staff. Specific, high level personnel at all higher education institutions will be notified of the launch of the *Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum (RRTEC)* and each will receive information about the website, a copy of the complete suite of resources (CD-ROM) and an accompanying summary booklet. Electronic brochures will be distributed widely and the project promoted through relevant conferences and publications.

By the completion of the project, at the end of 2011, the project team aims to achieve the following goals:

- Every teacher education institution will have been informed about the website and have a greater awareness of the needs of preparing student teachers for rural communities.
- A greater understanding of the needs of rural schools and a rural teacher education curriculum will be collectively developed.
- The website will be easily accessible and navigated with a high satisfaction level in using the website.
- Twenty teacher educators will have trialed using the website and considered where they might adopt some of the curriculum resources. These twenty teacher educators to commit to 'training' another teacher educator about the website and the materials.

2. THE EVALUATION

The Evaluation component of the Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum Project (RRRTEC) is designed to ascertain the effectiveness of the project in:

- Raising awareness of the project amongst relevant groups,
- managing the collection and use of input from various institutions, groups and individuals,
- disseminating the resources and associated information to relevant institutions, groups and individuals,
- involving and gaining feedback from institutions, groups and individuals, and
- achieving stakeholder satisfaction with the website and resources contained in it for various stakeholders.

The evaluation will also explore the likely ultimate impact of the project on the improvement of higher education for rural and regional student learning and graduate outcomes. The extent to which the project goals, detailed in Section 1 above, have been achieved by the end of the project will serve as a benchmark of its success in this regard.

The evaluation will be formative, informing the project team on progress as the project proceeds, which allows them to shape and make adjustments to the initial plan as required. The following plan sets out the predicted strategies and components of the evaluation. As the project develops, these may alter to ensure that significant aspects that arise are explored and unexpected opportunities for data collection are captured.

2.1 Data Collection Stages, Focus and Strategies

Stage 1: Review of all available documentation

Focus: Building further contextual knowledge about the project.

- Accessing all available project documentation and plans.
- Discussion with members of the Project team.

Stage 2: Attendance at the first Reference Group Meeting.

Focus: Level of success in disseminating information to the Reference Group, regarding the project and their role in it, and the degree of Reference Group understanding of and commitment to the project.

- Informal discussions with individual or small groups of Reference Group members re their expectations for the project, areas of expertise.
- Review of information discussed and distributed at the meeting.
- Distribution of a brief online survey to members following the Reference Group Meeting, to ascertain satisfaction with the meeting and resulting plans for future action.

Stage 3: Follow up survey and discussions following the 2nd Reference Group Meeting.

Focus: Satisfaction with the consultation and information management processes.

- The brief survey will explore opportunities available for input of information, contributions by the different stakeholder groups and satisfaction with the overall range and type of information being included in the resources.
- Depending on responses, some further follow up information may be collected from individuals via telephone interviews.
- Discussions with members of the Curriculum Writing Team will be conducted during this stage.

Attendance at the 2nd reference group meeting is also a possibility (if appropriate and if it is being conducted in Melbourne).

Stage 4: Online Survey for Teacher Educators (and other stakeholders where appropriate)

Focus: Level of success in disseminating the information and resources, level of satisfaction with the website and the resources within it, ways in which the resources are being used and initial impact on their teaching.

The survey will include questions that ascertain levels of:

- awareness at the institution level of the website and potential use of the resources,
- awareness of the needs of preparing student teachers for rural communities,
- understanding of the needs of rural schools and a rural teacher education curriculum,
- Satisfaction with the website and resources in terms of accessibility, navigation and usefulness,
- Willingness to continue use of the website and resources in the future,
- Willingness to raise awareness with and train other teacher educators in the use of the website and resources.

The survey will be distributed to all Teacher Educators trialing the resources. Follow up telephone interviews to gain further insight will be conducted where considered valuable.

Stage 5: Online survey to students in selected Teacher Education Institutions trialing the resources

Focus: Student perceptions of the new curriculum, its relevance to them and its impact on their perceptions of rural and regional teaching.

2.2 Reporting

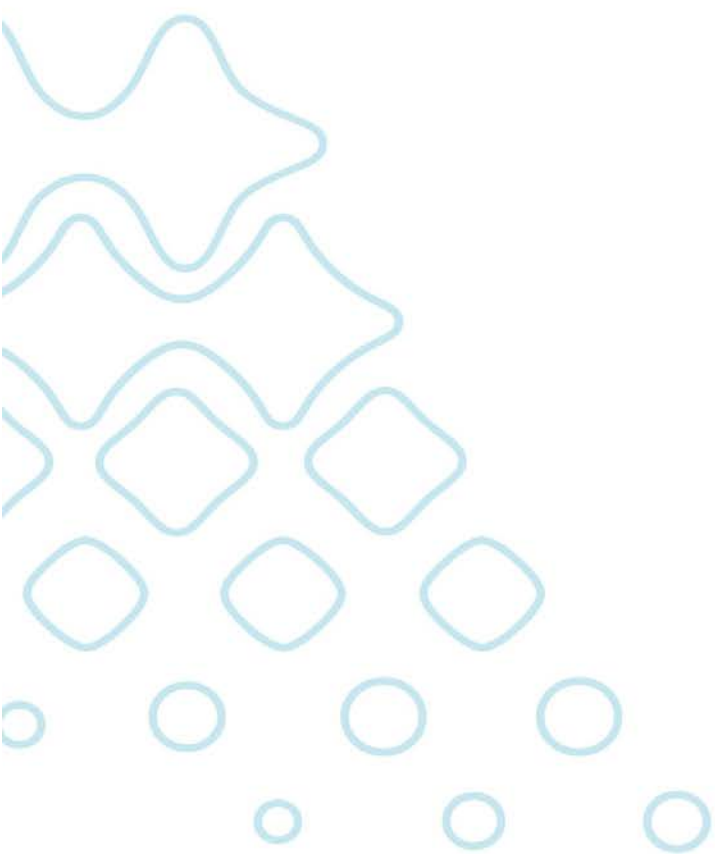
Ongoing verbal reports (or brief written reports) will be provided to the Project Team throughout all stages of the evaluation. A Final Report will include data across all stages with recommendations for future action if required.

2.3 Timeline

Stage	Task	Approx Time
Stage 1	Review of all available documentation, project team discussions	Feb /March 2010
Stage 2	Attendance at the first Reference Group meeting. Discussions & survey	18 Feb 2010
Stage 3	Follow up survey, discussions following 2 nd Reference Group Meeting	TBA
Stage 4	Online survey for Teacher Educators (& other stakeholders where appropriate)	TBA
Stage 5	Online survey to students in selected Teacher Education Institutions trialing the resources	TBA
Verbal Reports	Ongoing analysis of data and verbal reports to Project Team	Ongoing/as required
Collation/analysis of all data	Drawing together and analysing all available data	Oct – Dec 2011
Final Report	Written report with verbal presentation if required	December 2011

3. BUDGET

8 days @750 per day. **Total \$6000.**



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