



Skills Report Position Paper 3: Family Drift

REPORT FINDINGS

A large number of families, particularly those with mobile employment (police, banking staff, teachers, nurses) completely leave rural towns in this region (or the region altogether) when their children reach high school age. These people do not come back to these communities. So the recruitment cycle continues, leaving not only skills gaps, but also community gaps. In these cases, we sometimes lose two professionals from a small town. When this becomes a trend, there is a reduced need for services.

For those families with property interests, or where one parent needs to remain for employment in the region, it is not uncommon for one parent to relocate with the children to a major centre such as Dubbo or Orange during school terms. Whilst this option retains contact with the region, the flow-on effect of family drift away from rural towns is substantial in terms of:

- teaching capacity no longer needed
- medical and other community facilities not being used to capacity and becoming unviable
- reduced spending on groceries and other commodities
- absence of volunteers
- reduced numbers in local sporting teams and other interest groups that bind rural communities together.

The same situation happens in some families due to higher-level sporting commitments where the athlete and one parent move closer to Sydney to accommodate training and competition requirements.


Census data shows 2.2% decline in total population in the Orana region over the past 10 years. While the 2016 Census shows a slight increase, most of that occurred in the larger centres, with Dubbo and Mudgee the main beneficiaries.

A significant trend is population drift in the teenage years when children either move to boarding school or to larger centres with one or more parents. Cobar and Bourke are strong examples. There were 20 less 10 to 14 year olds in Cobar between 2011 and 2016 (a drop of 0.34%) and 47 less 15 to 19 year olds (a drop of 1.08%). There was a corresponding drop of 2.5% in the population of 45 to 49 year olds in Cobar – the age group that is possibly represented by the parents of these teens.

Bourke's 2016 Census data shows a similar trend, with a more pronounced loss of adults in the ages 35 to 44, down by more than 1.5%. The drop of teenagers in the Years 9 to 12 age group was from 162 to 114 over five years. In 2011 there were 202 children aged 10 to 14 but this drops down to 114 in the 15 to 19 age group five years later. That's nearly 100 less children over that period.



| Age | Cobar (A) (2016) | | Cobar (A) (2011) | |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| | Persons | % | Persons | % |
| 0-4 years | 363 | 7.81% | 401 | 8.51% |
| 5-9 years | 372 | 8.00% | 343 | 7.28% |
| 10-14 years | 290 | 6.24% | 310 | 6.58% |
| 15-19 years | 252 | 5.42% | 299 | 6.34% |
| 20-24 years | 259 | 5.57% | 301 | 6.39% |
| 25-29 years | 351 | 7.55% | 368 | 7.81% |
| 30-34 years | 367 | 7.89% | 292 | 6.20% |
| 35-39 years | 294 | 6.32% | 353 | 7.49% |
| 40-44 years | 293 | 6.30% | 259 | 5.50% |
| 45-49 years | 242 | 5.20% | 361 | 7.66% |
| 50-54 years | 343 | 7.38% | 343 | 7.28% |
| 55-59 years | 338 | 7.27% | 284 | 6.03% |
| 60-64 years | 260 | 5.59% | 231 | 4.90% |
| 65-69 years | 208 | 4.47% | 176 | 3.73% |
| 70-74 years | 139 | 2.99% | 157 | 3.33% |
| 75-79 years | 123 | 2.65% | 108 | 2.29% |
| 80-84 years | 85 | 1.83% | 75 | 1.59% |
| 85-89 years | 47 | 1.01% | 45 | 0.95% |
| 90-94 years | 21 | 0.45% | 7 | 0.15% |
| 95-99 years | 3 | 0.06% | 0 | 0.00% |
| 100 years and over | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% |
| Total | 4,650 | 100.00% | 4,713 | 100.00% |



| Age | Bourke (A) (2016) | | Bourke (A) (2011) | |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | Persons | % | Persons | % |
| 0-4 years | 216 | 8.20% | 268 | 9.35% |
| 5-9 years | 220 | 8.36% | 253 | 8.82% |
| 10-14 years | 173 | 6.57% | 202 | 7.05% |
| 15-19 years | 114 | 4.33% | 162 | 5.65% |
| 20-24 years | 168 | 6.38% | 173 | 6.03% |
| 25-29 years | 179 | 6.80% | 185 | 6.45% |
| 30-34 years | 192 | 7.29% | 179 | 6.24% |
| 35-39 years | 142 | 5.39% | 200 | 6.98% |
| 40-44 years | 155 | 5.89% | 215 | 7.50% |
| 45-49 years | 211 | 8.01% | 198 | 6.91% |
| 50-54 years | 199 | 7.56% | 197 | 6.87% |
| 55-59 years | 169 | 6.42% | 155 | 5.41% |
| 60-64 years | 140 | 5.32% | 151 | 5.27% |
| 65-69 years | 111 | 4.22% | 126 | 4.39% |
| 70-74 years | 97 | 3.68% | 64 | 2.23% |
| 75-79 years | 62 | 2.35% | 68 | 2.37% |
| 80-84 years | 44 | 1.67% | 54 | 1.88% |
| 85-89 years | 33 | 1.25% | 17 | 0.59% |
| 90-94 years | 8 | 0.30% | 0 | 0.00% |
| 95-99 years | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% |
| 100 years and over | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% |
| Total | 2,633 | 100.00% | 2,867 | 100.00% |

Reasons identified through our research and by local councils for students and/or families leaving rural communities include:

- standard of education on offer
- gap in NAPLAN results compared to the national standard
- teacher shortages
- limited subject choices for HSC students
- time spent commuting to school each day
- social issues within communities, including unemployment, crime, drugs and alcohol
- perceived lack of employment opportunities for young people after school
- lack of opportunity to participate in sporting and cultural activities at a higher level
- time and travel costs associated with sporting and other extra-curricular commitments.



While most of these factors relate to the education of school students, other family members also face difficulties if they wish to pursue further study. The most significant factors are the expense of running two households when a dependent attends university and the time away from family required for practical experience and training at TAFE. Both of these prove expensive and logistically challenging for many families in regional, rural and remote areas.

"...at the heart of rural education is a critical question about its' purpose, and as a student might ask, 'Am I learning so I can leave my community; am I learning so I can stay locally; or am I learning so I can have a real choice about what I do?'"

- Halsey, 2017

SITUATIONAL REVIEW AND GAP ANALYSIS

RDA Orana's survey findings suggest the following issues that are having an impact on economic growth and causing family drift, as well as community decline:

- There is a clear lag in academic results in rural schools in the region.
- The reputation of local schools within the region is poor in terms of academic offerings and results.
- Schools in all parts of the region are having difficulty attracting and retaining secondary school and early childhood teachers.
- Economies of scale and access to teachers reduce the range of subject choices on offer, particularly for HSC students.
- The working age population is decreasing.

At only 42%, the working age population in the Orana region is 11% below the national figure of 53%. There has been a growing reduction of those in the workforce over the past 10 years, as shown in Census data.

LABOUR FORCE STATUS (2016 CENSUS - PLACE OF USUAL RESIDENCE - PEOPLE)

The total number of people usually resident in Orana RDA zones in all Labour Force Status cohorts on Census Night 2016 was 118,590.

| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Not in the labour force | 33,205 | 32,671 | 31,371 | 33,441 |



| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Employed, worked full-time | 31,904 | 32,691 | 31,191 | 32,169 |



| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Employed, worked part-time | 14,501 | 14,222 | 13,804 | 14,928 |



| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Employed, away from work | 2,967 | 3,232 | 3,350 | 1,658 |



| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|----------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Unemployed, looking for full-time work | 2,288 | 2,110 | 2,362 | 3,090 |



| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|----------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Unemployed, looking for part-time work | 1,203 | 1,002 | 1,096 | 1,108 |



| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Not stated | 9,748 | 5,870 | 5,989 | 3,950 |



| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Overseas visitor | 392 | 343 | 292 | 0 |



| | 2016 Persons | 2011 Persons | 2006 Persons | 2001 Persons |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Not applicable | 24,295 | 24,876 | 26,194 | 0 |



Source: REMPLAN Community, ABS Census of Population and Housing 2016, 2011, 2006, 2001



TEACHER SHORTAGE

According to the 2016 Census, education and training is the fourth biggest employer in the Orana region, at 3.87% of the workforce, or 4,590 people. This has been gradually increasing over the past 10 years. Eight of the 13 local government areas (LGAs) in the Orana region identify teachers (specifically secondary and early childhood teachers) as a critical skills shortage in their area. There is a significant shortage of secondary mathematics teachers—an issue raised by four LGAs, including Dubbo.

FACILITIES AND INCENTIVES

A study released in April 2018 also suggests stronger incentives to bring experienced teachers from metropolitan areas to rural and regional areas, through incentives including extra cash, comfortable housing and a guaranteed right of return. The report's author, education professor and former teacher, Professor John Halsey has urged the federal government to offer more incentives for established teachers to do a stint outside the city, and to break down the stigma around the bush as a place for teachers to work. He urged this to

Under a plan to improve student results in Australia's regional schools, he has recommended experienced city-based teachers should also be given an "absolute, rock-solid guarantee" they can return to their original school. This is a move away from permanent recruitment but could bring experienced teachers to regional areas to support less experienced staff and young graduates for periods of several years. He pointed to models used in mining and engineering industries to lure staff to regional areas by offering "very nice housing", and flying staff and their families free-of-charge to inspect their would-be homes.

Professor Halsey also said there should also be more help for students from regional schools who move to the city for university, where they often struggle to find and maintain property leases. He proposed an "adviser-cum-broker" to help students into affordable student housing where possible, rather than the private rental market.

From June 2009 to July 2017, the Australian Tax Office provided HECS-HELP Benefit for education and nursing/midwifery graduates who took up employment in these professions. This benefit reduced the graduate's compulsory HECS debt repayments. These kinds of incentives are important in attracting graduates across all professions to pursue employment in regional Australia. If also applied to HECS debts for post-graduate studies, they would also encourage people to take on further study and help build the knowledge base within the region and its ability to be more innovative.

LACK OF BOARDING OPPORTUNITIES CLOSE TO HOME

Without a critical mass of students, it is difficult to offer a wide range of subject choices in the senior school environment and to attract quality teaching staff. With more than 300 students in both Years 11 and 12, Dubbo College's Senior Campus is in a position to offer a greater range of options. The school also made history in 2017 with 60 of its students becoming the largest group of Aboriginal students to sit the HSC exams.

But that still leaves students in other parts of the region without an option if there is no boarding school. In a bid to fill this gap, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School has lodged a development application for a boarding house in Dubbo that would complement its existing Kindergarten to Year 12 school. This would give families from western NSW the opportunity to send their children to the school and board in Dubbo.

Currently the nearest boarding facility is at Orange or Forbes, both of which are out of the region, while many families opt for Sydney-based boarding options. Boarding in Dubbo would allow parents to watch their children play sport, participate in musicals or other school activities, and spend the weekend in Dubbo, with the subsequent economic impact staying within the region.

POOR NAPLAN RESULTS

The lag in academic results in rural schools in the region is pronounced viewed by NAPLAN results. Of particular concern are these observations from the 2016 results:

- schools in four LGAs schools failed to reach the national average for the % above the minimum standard across all four years of testing in both reading and numeracy
- Dubbo only met the national average for the minimum standard in Year 3 numeracy – all other all year groups recorded below the national result for both areas
- no LGA recorded a result matching the national result for Year 9 reading
- Cobar LGA recorded 100% of students above the minimum Year 7 standard for numeracy, with no other LGA meeting the national result
- in Year 5 numeracy and Year 7 reading, 11 of 13 LGAs were below the national result
- in Brewarrina LGA, only 55% of students were at or above the minimum standard for Year 7 numeracy – this was 45% below the national result
- only Gilgandra met the national result for Year 5 reading
- Cobar's results were high or above the national result across all areas, with two ratings of 100% at or above the minimum standard.

| Reading NAPLAN Results 2016 | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | % At or Above Minimum Standard | | | |
| Local Government Area | Year 3 | Year 5 | Year 7 | Year 9 |
| Bogan | 95% | 81% | 81% | 85% |
| Bourke | 87% | 67% | 67% | 77% |
| Brewarrina | 63% | 57% | 64% | 70% |
| Cobar | 97% | 82% | 100% | 87% |
| Coonamble | 90% | 69% | 80% | 87% |
| Dubbo | 94% | 88% | 92% | 90% |
| Gilgandra | 94% | 93% | 95% | 91% |
| Mid-Western Regional | 98% | 88% | 92% | 91% |
| Narromine | 91% | 85% | 77% | 92% |
| Walgett | 83% | 74% | 72% | 69% |
| Warren | 96% | 76% | 84% | 73% |
| Warrumbungle Shire | 94% | 83% | 90% | 89% |
| Wellington | 89% | 84% | 84% | 79% |
| National Results | 95% | 93% | 95% | 93% |



| Numeracy NAPLAN Results 2016 | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | % At or Above Minimum Standard | | | |
| Local Government Area | Year 3 | Year 5 | Year 7 | Year 9 |
| Bogan | 93% | 89% | 87% | 96% |
| Bourke | 97% | 93% | 91% | 90% |
| Brewarrina | 92% | 82% | 55% | 80% |
| Cobar | 100% | 87% | 97% | 90% |
| Coonamble | 92% | 88% | 91% | 86% |
| Dubbo | 96% | 92% | 94% | 94% |
| Gilgandra | 98% | 96% | 90% | 95% |
| Mid-Western Regional | 99% | 93% | 95% | 95% |
| Narromine | 92% | 95% | 78% | 88% |
| Walgett | 92% | 84% | 88% | 83% |
| Warren | 96% | 86% | 89% | 92% |
| Warrumbungle Shire | 94% | 87% | 91% | 97% |
| Wellington | 92% | 96% | 90% | 95% |
| National Results | 96% | 94% | 96% | 95% |

While results show a gap in standards when compared to the national average, we know that some schools in the region are performing well and that teachers are dedicated and committed. Add to that the benefits children gain from a country upbringing, with their family rather than being separated. The data suggests a need to build the reputation of regional schools and to help them manage their public relations and recruitment campaigns better.

The NSW Education Department has made an attempt to offer alternatives for high-ability high school students through a selective virtual school, based in Dubbo. In 2010, it established xsel to offer English, mathematics and science for high-ability students to 30 Year 7 student from 16 schools across western NSW.

That program was replaced statewide by the partially selective Aurora College, based in Sydney, in 2015. Its second year of operation in 2016 saw 174 Years 7 to 10 students in 56 classrooms across rural and remote NSW, supported by 33 classroom teachers. This concept is designed to show that distance is no longer a barrier to forming productive working relationships.

However, this is a selective school program, offering extension classes for gifted and talented students. It is not an option for all students and takes children away from the mainstream classroom environment in favour of an internet-based and independent learning model.



RDA Orana Position

RDA Orana is committed to overcoming family drift and to making it easier for families with school-aged children to remain in rural communities.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Work with the Department of Education and private schools to build a strong public relations campaign in support of the quality of the educational experience available within the region.
2. Advocate for tax incentives or other relief for families who chose to relocate to remote communities within the Orana region or remain within their local community.
3. Advocate to have HECS tax relief:
 - a. reinstated for graduates who gain employment in their field of study in remote and rural areas
 - b. extended to apply to all professions, across both undergraduate and post-graduate studies.
4. Advocate for incentives to ease the financial burden of studying and training on apprentices and trainees.