The NSW Department of Education will be running a series of forums and meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders across NSW to help shape the future of rural and remote education.

The purpose of this paper is to provide background information to complement the consultation process.

We value your contributions and would like to hear your ideas, suggestions and solutions to improve educational outcomes in regional and remote areas to inform the development of a rural education strategy.

We encourage you to please read this paper before participating in any of the forums, meetings or prior to responding to the [online consultation survey](#).
Background

Rural Australia is undergoing significant change including ongoing environmental, economic and social change which continues to impact regional and remote communities and the sustainability of schools. Many NSW rural centres are experiencing long term economic uncertainty. As populations move to larger communities to seek greater financial security there is often a decline in essential services in smaller communities. This has a flow on effect to our regional and remote schools.

Strong and effective schools are a foundation stone for vibrant and productive rural communities and their long-term sustainability. The focus on NSW rural and remote education has never been stronger and the need to have high performing regional and remote schools never more important.

Our results show that gaps still exist in the learning achievements for students from regional and remote schools compared to students in metropolitan areas. We are committed to working alongside our stakeholders to continue to drive the innovation and change required to improve educational outcomes as well as ensuring that our students’ academic, social, emotional and health/wellbeing is at the centre of our decision-making.

We need your support to rethink rural and remote education and find solutions and alternative approaches that can make a difference and have a positive impact on students, staff and families.

There is strong support to create agile approaches that create the lift in performance required and acknowledges that rural and remote education requires different and tailored approaches to address the challenges that distance, disadvantage and isolation present.

Now is the time for a shift in thinking, to align systems, policies and resources, to provide sustainable long-term strategies. Any approaches or strategies must support and enable our leaders and staff to deliver success in the context of their school and communities.
What we have learned so far

We know our students fulfil their potential when they feel known, valued and cared for. Our rural and remote school communities have a proud tradition of care, innovation and commitment to educating students and preparing them for rewarding lives as engaged citizens in a complex and dynamic society.

The first phase of stakeholder consultation began in August 2019 by seeking feedback on what works, what needs to change and solutions for the future. Through stakeholder consultation to date a range of issues emerged and are identified as four key areas proposed to lift rural and remote education:

1. **Investing in and valuing our people** - this is about (but not limited to):
   - Our rural and remote workforce is of the highest calibre
   - Access to professional learning is increased
   - Access to health and wellbeing support is available
   - Our public schools are great places to work

2. **Strengthening quality teaching and learning** – this is about (but not limited to):
   - Focusing on early year’s education
   - Supporting and enhancing quality learning and teaching
   - Accessing advice, resources and professional learning to better support the curriculum delivery.

3. **Enabling learning environment** – this is about (but not limited to):
   - The need for a managed and supported digital learning platform for staff and students
   - Further improving digital connections and equitable access to fit for purpose technologies to enable learning and teaching
   - Improving learning environments for students and staff
   - Expanding curriculum provision and flexibility and choice for staff and students on how, when and where they learn.

4. **Building productive partnerships** – this is about (but not limited to):
   - Working across the department to support rural and remote schools /staff
   - Leveraging partnerships with our stakeholders and industry associations to expand opportunities for rural students
   - Working with other government agencies to maximise services / support for rural and remote families.
Building on the work already done

We will take an informed approach - building on the work already done, as well as seeking stakeholder ideas and suggestions that embrace new ways of thinking to develop local solutions to maximise educational outcomes.

This process builds on the learning from the Rural and Remote Education – A blueprint for action and Phase Two: Human Resources and Information and Technology Division.

Research indicates that gaps still exist in rural and remote student learning outcomes, equity and knowledge, compared to metropolitan peers. To close these gaps and ensure rural and remote students have access to the curriculum options and quality teaching as their metropolitan peers’ experience we need to examine ways of working and locally contextualised approaches.

We will review and build on learnings from past approaches, programs and initiatives to help determine where change is most needed and where the greatest impact on student learning outcomes can be achieved.

It requires ongoing input and commitment from all stakeholders to deliver equitable access to the same high-quality education and support services that students in metropolitan areas enjoy.

We know that if we lift rural and remote education, we will lift NSW.

Have your say about rural and remote education

After attending the engagement forum or meeting, we would like to hear your suggestions so we can prioritise areas to optimise outcomes for our students and staff in rural and remote areas. We invite you to please provide your feedback by completing the online consultation survey.

Please email RuralandPathways@det.nsw.edu.au if you would like assistance with completing the survey.

Feedback closes 17 July 2020

We thank you for your participation and feedback!