

Vocational Education and Training in rural schools: education for the community

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What happens when the ‘visionaries’ in small rural communities develop partnerships with local secondary schools to help their regions to prosper, encourage young school leavers to stay in their community and provide pathways from school to work in the local area? What sort of challenges face District High Schools which are the only local providers of training for many post school age students who must undertake training as a requirement of the ‘youth allowance’ scheme? What new opportunities can ‘online’ VET modules provide for school students in rural and remote Australia?

Provision of vocational training in secondary schools in rural areas has provided a number of opportunities and challenges for individual students, the schools and local communities. A series of case studies in 3 rural locations in Tasmania has shed light on some of those opportunities and challenges. This paper sets out the findings from interviews with students and school staff.

Rural schools are the central focus of activity within small rural communities. Their role can potentially be much broader than in urban locations. Schools provide education for students but they can provide an important function in fostering sustainable communities. Closure of the local school can precipitate the demise of small communities. For schools to play a more proactive role in community and regional development, the purpose of schools and schooling needs to be re-conceptualised.

Establishing VET in rural schools can provide an opportunity to assist with the creation and enhancement of links between people living in rural communities, as well as developing the skills of individuals in the communities. There is potential for developing mutually beneficial partnerships between schools, local businesses and regional industries and the wider community.

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