



4 February 2019

Dr Denis Napthine

Chair

Regional Education Expert Advisory Group submissions to the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group, released in December 2018.

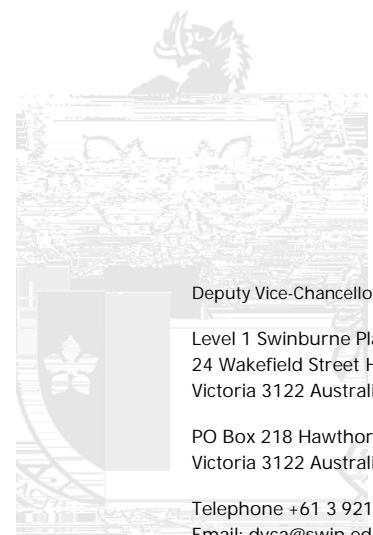
Swinburne is pleased that the expert panel has identified that regional students are more likely to engage in off-campus study, and that online learning is an effective way to enhance educational access to online education.

For certain rural learners, on-campus study at a university is an impossibility, which has historically impeded access to higher education for many.

For most, access to high-speed internet has largely overcome distance by providing access to an increasing array of online learning options. While earlier models of distance education involved correspondence with teaching staff and few opportunities to discuss the curriculum, online education connects students and teachers, and students with classmates in fully immersive ways only made possible by recent technological advances.

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While much has been made of the apparent higher risk of attrition of online study, research from the Grattan Institute finds that when controlling for other factors, the risk of dropping out of off-campus study was only 2 per cent higher than on-campus study.<sup>2</sup> Work, children, family responsibilities and juggling study and life commitments mean that part-time learners often do not follow a linear progression from start to finish of their qualification. Swinburne strongly believes that such learners should be encouraged to pursue higher education by the means most convenient and practical for them, rather than precluded from study.

The technical skills developed during online study are well known, and online study is also a perfect environment to hone the soft skills required for future work roles such as; communication, working in virtual teams, time management, keeping motivation when working independently and remotely, critical thinking and creative problem-solving.

### ***Swinburne Online***

Swinburne Online is a joint venture between Swinburne and Online Education Services (OES) to deliver higher education and VET programs to students around Australia. Through Swinburne Online, we have been able to significantly increase our offering to regional and rural students. 21% of our online students access our courses from a rural or regional setting, compared to roughly 10.4% of our on-campus students who join us from the country. We believe this access is vital, and the popularity of and satisfaction with this delivery is a testament to the fact that these are quality, accredited courses with content developed and approved by Swinburne's Academic Senate.

In an increasingly digital world, the importance of online education will only grow, and Swinburne is pleased that through our status as Australia's largest university provider of online education, we are creating opportunities for students which previously did not exist. Swinburne and OES strongly believe that online education plays a significant and often underappreciated role in overcoming the barriers which have led to the lower participation rates of rural and regional students seen at all levels of education. Online education has the additional benefit of enabling regional students to stay located within their communities whilst they study without the associated travel and location costs of attending an on-campus location. For regionally based students, placements and industry-based projects can be supported in regional locations, furthering the connection between Higher Education and regional communities.

In order to provide a highly connected experience for online students, Swinburne Online ensures 24-hour response times from tutors via a dedicated online platform, and opportunities to discuss and interact with both academic staff and fellow students via purpose-built units that foster social engagement as a key part of the learning experience. In addition, Swinburne Online provides general educational, administrative and technical support via telephone, chat and email seven days a week over extended hours, to ensure our non

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