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Developing a rural teacher education curriculum: responding to the needs of pre-service teachers
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A decade ago, a report commissioned by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, (2000) highlighted that Australia faced a national crisis in attracting and retaining teachers and other professionals in rural areas. Since that report a number of research projects have been initiated to address this issue, in particular the TERRAnova project, an Australian Research Council grant aimed at improving Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia. Findings from this project made it clear that teacher education is well placed to address this crisis in better preparing teachers for rural careers. However research in this project (White, Reid, Green, Lock, Hastings & Cooper, 2008) also indicated that the majority of universities have had relatively little explicit focus on rural education in their teacher education programs; have often random and ad hoc rural practicum opportunities and no obvious link to any of the various State-based financial incentives across Australia to encourage graduates to work in rural areas. Based on this evidence a successful application was made for an Australian Teaching and Learning Council grant which aims to address this gap and provide explicit advice and resources to teacher educators related to curriculum renewal to address these issues and assist universities to make best use of and embed existing and new resources.

This paper will outline the current theoretical and conceptual framework of the ALTC funded project titled Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum drawing on key research findings from the TERRAnova project in terms of preparing rural teachers to be community, school and classroom ready. Data will also be presented from a large qualitative survey conducted by pre-service teachers who had participated in either a university based or State based rural professional experience and the implications of the survey findings for developing a rural teacher education curriculum.