



REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES NETWORK (RUN)

Submission on the draft Possible Key Elements of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) Guidelines

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) makes the following comments on the Possible key elements of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) Guidelines.

Conditions that Apply to Grants under the HEPPP

1.10

HEPPP reporting

We assume that the proposed evaluation framework will be used to evaluate the impact of HEPPP-funded initiatives and that spending has been in line with approved and funded plans. RUN would suggest that a streamlined version of the current reporting requirements is retained until such time as the proposed evaluation framework is in place and there has been opportunity to test its effectiveness in steering the intended performance and outcomes of HEPPP-funded initiatives.

Grants under the Access and Participation Fund

1.20

We have some concern about the fact that a small proportion of Australia's universities, such as RUN's members, do the 'heavy lifting' in terms of providing access to students from low SES backgrounds. This is not recognised in the document. In order to stimulate demand across the country to shift the proportion of students from this background entering university and to reach the national low SES target, the effort needs to be shared across all universities.

There should be some acknowledgement in the guidelines that a "reasonable" contribution must be made by providers to outreach activities – that is, notionally, more than around 20 per cent.

We suggest that a requirement to undertake outreach in collaboration with other universities should be a condition of eligibility for an Access and Participation grant.

Extra conditions of eligibility to receive a performance funding grant

1.25 (Conditions with which a provider must comply)

RUN universities have high proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These include students from low SES backgrounds, regional and remote students, students with disability and Indigenous students. These students have complex lives, competing priorities and are time poor; university is part of that complexity. Students who are struggling to meet the demands of academic study and remain employed (often in insecure or casual jobs), and meet family responsibilities are often advised about the benefits of withdrawing from units before census date. So too, to a lesser extent, students are advised to withdraw from units after census date, particularly if they have other urgent priorities, cannot fit all the work for the subjects they have taken into a crowded schedule of responsibilities related to paid work and family, and wish to avoid having low marks or a fail grade on their official transcript. The financial penalty for withdrawing after census is a natural disincentive for this strategy but it is a useful strategy for some students who are focused on high academic achievement and on their formal longer-term outcome.

Given that withdrawing from a unit or units is a positive strategy, ideally implemented before census date but in difficult circumstances implemented after census date, consideration should be given to changing the definition of 'success' from:

the proportion of the effective full-time student load (EFTSL) of units passed to the EFTSL of units attempted (passed, failed and withdrawn).

to:

the proportion of the effective full-time student load (EFTSL) of units passed to the EFTSL of units attempted (passed and failed).

While the impact on trend data is acknowledged (although this could be overcome by using both definitions of success at least initially), including the number of units from which students have withdrawn in the denominator of this calculation will disadvantage and punish regional and other universities with high proportions of mature aged students with life responsibilities outside of university and for whom withdrawing from a unit or units is a tactical and positive strategy that assists the student.

National Priorities Pool objective

1.40

Having used NPP funds to design and carry out high-quality research projects that have provided evidence-based advice to the government and sector, some of which is currently being used to revise policy, we are disappointed to see that expert input was not sought on

the nine NPP projects recently approved by the Minister. We propose that a proportion of the NPP funding is made available for competitive tender and a panel of experts provide advice to the Department on priorities for NPP-funded projects.

We welcome the role of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education in bringing together the NPP grants scheme into the evidence base and utilising their now effective and influential presence in the sector to provide a consolidated repository of resources.