

National Regional Higher Education Strategy Framework

Regional Universities Network

The following document is a framework for a National Regional Higher Education Strategy. Detailed policies and programs sit within the framework, and will evolve over time.

Introduction

A National Regional Higher Education Strategy will put regional university campuses at the centre of integrated policy and programs across education, research, innovation, employment and regional development to enhance the economic, social and cultural development of regional Australia.

As anchor institutions for their regions, regional universities contribute to:

- human and intellectual capital;
- research and innovation;
- global connectivity;
- regional solutions; and
- exporting regional expertise.

The already significant contribution will be further enhanced through a strategy which better harnesses the capacity of regional universities to be facilitators of economic and social regeneration. This is happening internationally, with universities playing a major role in many of the UK's City Deals and Europe's Smart Specialisation strategies. The model has been adopted in Tasmania, with the University of Tasmania now playing a leading role in the state's development, including via the Launceston City Deal. In another Australian example, two universities, James Cook University and CQUniversity, are major partners in the Townsville City Deal.

Regional universities make a major contribution to their regions through:

- being major employers across a wide range of occupations, purchasers of local goods and services, and contributors to cultural life and the built environment of towns and cities. Investment in regional university campus infrastructure to support the core business of teaching and research directly helps regions. Higher education is a major "value add" industry in regional Australia;
- developing human capital and skills through their graduates, and attracting talented employees to regions. About three-quarters of those graduates who study in the regions stay in the regions to work, boosting regional economies;
- contributing to research and innovation;
- their missions to 'give back' to the communities in which they operate, including facilitating the social, cultural and community development of the regions through widening participation, including of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,

contributing to health, arts, culture and sport, and through international links, including via staff and students; and

- engagement of staff and students in local and civil society, and by contributing to regional governance and planning.

The National Regional Higher Education Strategy is relevant to other current or recently proposed strategies/approaches/reviews/inquiries including:

- Professor John Halsey's Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, which is due to report to the Minister for Education and Training by the end of 2017;
- the House of Representatives Select Committee's Inquiry on Regional Development and Decentralisation;
- the Nick Xenophon Team's proposal for a broad and comprehensive review of tertiary education;
- Professor Glyn Davis' proposal, contained in his speech to the Australian Financial Review's Higher Education Summit on 30 August, 2017, *Postgraduate Education and the Risks of Uniformity*, to allow universities in communities not yet at a 40 per cent participation rate to continue to retain the demand driven student system, and be empowered to configure their student load in ways that best serve their communities; and
- Innovation and Science Australia's 2030 Strategy.

The National Regional Higher Education Strategy

The National Regional Higher Education Strategy would:

- take a "place-based" approach, where appropriate, to existing tertiary and secondary education, research, innovation, employment and regional development policies and programs to enhance and tailor their delivery to better suit the needs of regional Australia, and ensure that the initiatives work together in a consistent and joined-up manner across portfolios and governments;
- support integrated plans, agreed by key stakeholders, for the development of specific regions through initiatives such as City Deals or Growth Deals including, where appropriate, new funding for infrastructure and related initiatives.

In summary, the National Regional Higher Education Strategy would include the following elements:

(a) Strategies to support the provision of higher education in regional areas, including

- retaining Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for regional campuses with no efficiency dividend;
- retaining the demand driven student system with flexibility for regional universities to mix their load from diploma and associate degree to post-graduate coursework places as required; and

- increasing funding for the regional loading and reviewing the current arrangements to provide greater funding certainty for campuses outside capital cities which largely serve regional Australians.

(b) Strategies to increase the representation of regional students in higher education, including

- legislating the Higher Education Partnership and Participation Program (HEPPP) at levels at least equivalent to those proposed in the 2017 Budget. This would ensure the continuation of outreach activities to schools in regional areas, the provision of scholarships, and initiatives to help retain higher education students;
- additional funding incentives for regional university pre-service teachers to be placed in rural and remote schools; and
- implementing initiatives for regional schools that may arise from Professor Halsey's Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

(c) Strategies to address the sustainability of rural communities and the declining population of young people in regional centres, including

- encouraging regional university campuses to keep a larger proportion of young graduates in the regions – about three-quarters of people who train in the regions stay in the regions to work. Universities would be embedded in specific, place-based policies for regional growth, including city and regional growth deals etc.; and
- helping regions to 'grow their own' workforce in professions that have difficulty in attracting employees from metropolitan areas by supporting the growth of funded enabling programs.

(d) Strategies to provide greater support for those transitioning between secondary and higher education, including support to stay in a regional area, including providing

- more and better scholarships for regional students who study at regional campuses, to cover the costs of education, accommodation and living expenses; and
- additional funding for VET in Schools programs, which engage senior students in their learning while providing them with articulation opportunities into tertiary education.

(e) Strategies to ensure there is recognition of the workforce and economic development requirements of the community in developing higher education policy, including

- encouraging the development of qualifications that are relevant to local employment needs or emerging areas of need, including those identified in any overarching strategy for regional development. This would apply to qualifications at all levels, that is sub-degrees, degrees, post-graduate qualifications and micro-credentials; and
- supporting social innovation programs to connect universities, school students and community partners.

(f) Strategies to support the role of regionally based higher education providers in creating diverse and resilient regional economies, taking into consideration other relevant policies and programs, including

- embedding universities at the core of City or Growth Deals or other integrated strategies, developed by key regional stakeholders, to address areas of natural strength or emerging need. Universities would be eligible for funding under other regional development programs, such as the Regional Growth Fund;
- playing a major role in social innovation and tackling some of the big, intractable social challenges faced in communities, such as homelessness, loneliness in the elderly and youth unemployment;
- providing facilities for community organisations to operate that otherwise would not be able to afford to function;
- undertaking research which is focused on the needs of regional communities which otherwise would not be done by metropolitan universities; and
- bringing researchers to regional communities.

Further detail is provided in the Attachment.

Additional information about elements of the National Regional Higher Education Strategy Framework

Higher education

Universities and campuses in regions with less than 40 per cent participation rate would continue the demand driven student system, and be empowered to configure their student load in ways that best serve their catchment(s). They would not have an efficiency dividend applied to their Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding, in view of their regional development mission.

Student load would include:

- diplomas and associated degrees including those aligned to existing or emerging industries;
- bachelor places;
- post-graduate coursework places; and
- vocational degrees.

Additional CGS-supported enabling places would be allocated to regional campuses, distributed according to regional need and demand.

The Higher Education Partnerships and Participation Program (HEPPP) would be legislated at levels at least equivalent to those proposed in the 2017 Budget. Activities funded would include:

- outreach activities to schools and community groups to raise awareness of, and aspiration for, university study. These activities demystify higher education and build confidence that 'people like us' can go to university. They involve key influencers: parents/carers and teachers, student role models/mentors and importantly, offer experiential learning activities;
- activities that promote access to university and include pathways on-campus programs, admissions procedures and aimed at promoting enrolment at university;
- support for students once they have accepted an offer and including scholarships, to increase affordability and relieve some of the (non-HECS related) financial burden; and
- professional development for school teachers and careers advisors, either on a formal basis or via exposure to information about higher education pathways and opportunities, and current entry requirements.

Support would also be provided for:

- social innovation programs involving universities, school students and community partners;

- provision of funding for regional campus infrastructure, including study hubs where appropriate, to provide safe, affordable and accessible access to learning resources and support; and
- an enhanced regional loading element within the CGS of \$50m over 4 years to assist in the provision of regional higher education. A review should be undertaken of existing arrangements to provide greater funding certainty for those campuses outside capital cities which largely serve regional Australians.

Scholarships and Income Support for Higher Education Students

Scholarships should be available for regional students who study at regional campuses, to cover the costs of education, accommodation and living expenses, including regional, undergraduate teacher education scholarships to take up at regional campuses, and scholarships for regional teachers for relevant post-graduate qualifications.

Vocational Education and Training

Steps should be taken to:

- promote better articulation of students between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education providers;
- provide quality vocational programs, especially in areas of industry and community need;
- make government and industry facilities available to vocational students and training organisations; and
- address skills gaps in regional areas.

Research

Steps should be taken to:

- provide funding to develop centres/initiatives relevant to regional strengths and developing needs, including for infrastructure. Matching funding from other sources, including industry, should be encouraged; and
- deliver a priority round for Collaborative Research Centre Projects at regional campuses.

Innovation

Steps should be taken to support:

- the development and growth of innovation precincts on regional university campuses, including with funding for infrastructure. Business, including start-ups, and government agencies should be co-located, and provide opportunities for work integrated learning for students, employment opportunities for graduates and partners for collaborative research with the university. Entrepreneurial activities should be encouraged, and incubators developed which would spin off start-up companies.

Secondary Education

Steps should be taken to support:

- programs and funding for professional development for teachers and careers advisers at regional schools;
- access to high quality professional development opportunities for teachers;
- recognition of quality teaching service in regional, rural and remote communities;
- additional incentives for regional university pre-service teachers to be placed in rural and remote schools; and
- the implementation of initiatives from Professor Halsey's Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

Employment

Steps should be taken to support and encourage:

- the development of qualifications that are relevant to local employment needs or emerging areas of need, including those identified in any overarching strategy for regional development. This would apply to qualifications at all levels, that is, sub-degrees, degrees, post-graduate qualifications and micro-credentials.
- work integrated learning opportunities, including in start-ups located at university innovation precincts; and
- entrepreneurialism.

Regional Development

Steps should be taken to give greater focus to:

- human capital development in regional development policy as advocated in the Smith Review of Regional Development Australia Committees. Universities should be eligible for funding under programs such as the Regional Growth Fund, and as part of City or broader Regional/Growth Deals.

Scope – University campuses

The Strategy would include all university campuses that are eligible for regional loading and other campuses as determined by the Minister. The latter group is expected to include campuses that largely serve regional students and where the higher education attainment rate is less than a 40 per cent amongst 25-36 year olds.

Other key stakeholders

Other key stakeholders would include the Commonwealth Government; State Governments; Local Government; Regional Development Australia committees (that now have a new mission to pro-actively target, seek and negotiate with private companies, not-for-profits and governments of all levels to bring jobs and investment to regions); VET providers; primary and secondary schools; regional businesses; Indigenous groups; and other community groups, etc.