

MEDIA RELEASE
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Regional focus in job-ready graduates legislation could be strengthened

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the regionally-focussed measures in the Job-ready Graduates package and draft legislation, and has suggested ways that the bill, and some elements of the broader package, could be strengthened to provide better outcomes for regional Australia.

Chair of RUN, Professor Helen Bartlett, acknowledged the commitment of the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, and the government more generally, to improving the higher education outcomes for regional Australians.

“We understand that significant effort has been made crafting the package in a difficult environment,” Professor Bartlett said.

“We particularly welcome the funding for growth in places in regional and outer metro campuses, the flexibility to trade non-designated, as well as designated, places between universities, demand driven funding for Indigenous students, and the range of specific measures for regional students and universities, most of which will be included in other legislative instruments.

“We have proposed some changes to provide better outcomes for regional communities.

“Regional students should be encouraged to study social work, behavioural science and mental health in regional areas to meet community needs in times of crisis.

“Seven out of ten of RUN’s graduates work in the regions and greatly contribute to regional economies and social outcomes. The placement of the relevant disciplines in Band 1, which attracts the highest student contribution, could be a disincentive for students to take up these areas of study,” Professor Bartlett said.

“Moving the disciplines into Band 2, which has roughly half the level of student contribution and includes allied health, would be appropriate.

“Alternatively, some sort of loading could be applied to encourage students to study the disciplines at regional campuses, or the Rural and Regional Enterprise scholarships could be prioritised for regional students studying the relevant subjects in the regions.

“With respect to defining what the progression rate should be for students to access HECS-HELP or FEE-HELP, RUN questions why any legislation would need to be so prescriptive.

“While the objective of the proposed measure is reasonable, we would not support reducing the autonomy of universities to determine their own student progression

requirements. Universities already have course progression rates and procedures in place which could easily be linked to eligibility for continued funding support.

“We welcome the decision to grandfather all students who commenced studies prior to January 2021,” Professor Bartlett said.

“Although it is not included in this bill, we consider that some sort of incentive should be applied with respect to the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to encourage regional students, including Indigenous students, to study at regional or outer metro campuses, e.g. the full \$5000 TAP should only be accessible if a regional student moves to study at a regional or outer metro campus, or has to move to an inner metro campus to study a particular course that is not available at a university within 100 km of their residential address.”

The RUN submission is available at http://www.run.edu.au/cb_pages/policy.php

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