



Submission from the Regional Universities Network on the Draft Legislation to implement the Australian Job-ready Graduates Package

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the measures relevant to regional students, universities and communities contained in the draft legislation on the Job-ready Graduates package, the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020, and the other elements which will be included in other legislative instruments.

We particularly welcome the funding for growth in places in regional and outer metro areas, the flexibility to trade non-designated places between universities, the Tertiary Access Payment, demand driven funding for Indigenous students, regional students driving 45 per cent of the funding under the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships program, the new \$49 m research fund for regional universities, the National Priorities Linkage Fund and the Regional Education Commissioner.

However, we consider that the following changes to the draft legislation and broader package would provide better outcomes for regional Australia:

- Changing the student contribution for social work, behavioural science and mental health studies (s.93-10 of the draft legislation). 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. 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.
- We support the indefinite grandfathering arrangements for students who commenced a course prior to 1 January 2021 (22).

- With respect to defining what the progression rate should be for students to access HECS-HELP or FEE-HELP (s. 104-1A, 36-13), RUN questions why any legislation would need to be so prescriptive. While the objective of the proposed measure is reasonable, RUN 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.
- Although it is not included in this bill, when the relevant legislative instrument is drafted, 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.
- We note that, while a Maximum Basic Grant Amount (MBGA) will exist for the new category of “higher education courses” (s 33-5(2)), there is no constraint on where the Minister may set the MBGA – unlike the current MBGA for non-designated places which can’t be less than last year’s MBGA. We suggest that the draft legislation is amended to make the arrangements consistent with those that currently apply.