

Dear External Advisory Group,

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the New Colombo Plan.

RUN is a national collaborative group of seven regional Australian universities: Charles Sturt University, CQUniversity Australia, Federation University Australia, Southern Cross University, University of New England, University of Southern Queensland, and University of the Sunshine Coast.

This submission reflects the positions of RUN institutions, and in doing so, also aims to represent the views of those students and communities which RUN universities serve; the one-third of Australians who live outside of metropolitan centres in regional, rural and remote locations. RUN fully supports the submission made by Universities Australia.

The current New Colombo Plan is not delivering equitable outcomes to the students of regional universities, with disproportionate allocations being awarded to the students of metropolitan Australia. In the most recent allocations (2024), the New Colombo Plan provided 90.6 per cent of all scholarships to the students of metropolitan universities which represented 92.3 per cent of all New Colombo Plan funding. This is despite over a third of all Australians now living in regional Australia and close to 20 per cent of all domestic university students in Australia being from regional, rural and remote Australia.

The outcomes of the New Colombo Plan are unduly rewarding Australia's metropolitan students. This not only undermines the effectiveness of the program, but further entrenches disadvantage in Australia's regions.

One contributing factor to fewer regional students participating in the New Colombo Plan could be the current age eligibility threshold of 28 years (with the exception of First Nation students) which disadvantages the student cohorts of regional universities, who are more likely to be mature age (25 years+).

Recent changes to the New Colombo Plan, risk reducing the ability of regional students to participate in the program, and further cementing the New Colombo Plan as a program only accessible to metropolitan based Australians, or those with family supports. A four-week program duration, removing shorter-term mobility opportunities, while increasing the preference for language students for mobility programs in 2025 is already have a devastating impact on the modest involvement of regional universities in the New Colombo Plan. RUN universities have already seen reduced student interest and have made decisions not to apply for New Colombo Plan rounds in 2025 as a direct result of these changes.

The shift away from shorter programs makes the New Colombo Plan less accessible and less affordable than it already was for regional students, students from low-SES backgrounds, mature-age students, part-time students, and students living with a disability. This is a retrograde step for regional universities and regional Australia.

Please do not hesitate to contact the RUN Secretariat on 0408 482 736 or via e-mail at [ceo@run.edu.au](mailto:ceo@run.edu.au) to any element of this submission further.

Yours sincerely,



Alec Webb  
Chief Executive Officer

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