![Regional Universities Network logo — REGIONAL STRENGTH. NATIONAL SUCCESS.]

RUN Comments on Possible Further Actions for Response in RRR Education issues papers

Below is the Regional Universities Network's (RUN)'s response to possible further actions proposed in the Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Education Expert Advisory Group's six regional rural and remote issues papers.

We generally support the actions, which, if broadly applied, would provide a very comprehensive basis to address the education needs of RRR students and communities.

1. Preparing regional, rural and remote learners for success in tertiary education

- *Careers advice and aspirations: Building on the recently announced National Career Education Strategy, governments to explore practical steps to improve career education in schools and access to careers advice, including:*

    - *Implementation of a regionally based model for independent career advice in RRR locations, separate from - but linked to schools - delivered by professional advisors, tailored to local needs and opportunities, and drawing on strong industry, parental and community engagement.*

    - *Ensure that these professional career advisors are provided with sufficient developmental opportunities to maintain their currency of knowledge and practice.*

    - *Improvements to online portals for providing careers information to students, particularly those in remote areas where access to face-to-face career advice is more difficult.*

    - *Investigate strategies to raise aspirations among students and families such as establishing a RRR ambassador program covering both VET and higher education (similar to the Australian Apprenticeships Ambassadors program and the National Training Awards) and initiatives to build local RRR alumni networks.*

    RUN response: RUN supports these initiatives, and our universities could provide career advisers with professional development opportunities.

- *VET in Schools: Collaborative work by the Australian Government and the states and territories to improve access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools, including mapping current programs to identify and*

share good practice. This work should include consideration of models for delivery of VET courses by external training providers that have been effective in improving local employment outcomes.

RUN response: We support this option, and further note that there needs to be national consistency in the recognition by tertiary admission centres of VET qualifications, and improvement of pathways from VET into higher education. VET programs in schools must be able to facilitate articulation to higher education cognisant of known transition challenges.

- *Teacher quality and support: Building on the Halsey Review, governments to continue to work to improve teaching quality, support and supply in RRR areas, through strategies such as:*
  - *increasing the focus on RRR education practice in pre-service initial teacher training*
  - *providing paid practicums in RRR schools*
  - *additional incentives to train in RRR areas such as guaranteed employment on completion*
  - *allowing experienced teachers more flexibility to move between jurisdictions, and*
  - *consideration of RRR content as part of the 2020 review of the Australian curriculum.*

RUN response: RUN supports these suggestions, and will consider increasing the focus on RRR education practice in pre-service initial teacher training. We note that there will also potentially be additional costs for students arising from this option, and that funding should be made available to assist them with RRR placements.

There is a risk that the current debate on teacher education entry standards may lead to the specific capping of teacher education places, and, potentially, a shortage of teachers working in RRR Australia.

- *Principals and school leaders: As part of the work to improve teacher quality, explore further improvements to training, professional development, mentoring and other support for principals and school leaders in RRR areas, including to prepare them for when they start in these positions.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option and member universities have the capacity to provide context and professional development to teachers. Actions need to be taken from primary through to secondary school.

2. Improving access, opportunity and choice in tertiary education for regional, rural and remote learners

Increasing access to post-secondary education options
- *Enhance the Regional Study Hubs program: Closely monitor the outcomes of the Regional Study Hubs program and consider further enhancements, including:*
  - *Sharing and disseminating best practice between Hubs*
  - *Exploring potential to expand the program, including a flexible range of models including opportunities to integrate hubs with existing TAFE and university campuses.*

RUN response: RUN supports flexible delivery models for study hubs. Community-led models will not work in some towns, and it is important that the option of university- or TAFE-led models are supported, including via integrating hubs with existing university and/or TAFE campuses and/or public libraries.

- *Additional places for regional university providers*: Consider providing additional Commonwealth-funded university places in RRR areas, including for enabling and sub-bachelor courses, which play a particularly important role in supporting pathways and meeting the education and training needs of RRR areas.

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option, and suggests that it also apply to peri-urban campuses where the higher education attainment and participation rate is below the national average. Our preference would be for the uncapping of places, particularly with respect to courses in areas of regional skills need, and including relevant enabling and pathway courses.

- *Internet access:* Deliver access to 21st century internet services, which is crucial to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for RRR students. Building on the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review, investigate current internet access for students and tertiary education providers in RRR areas, to inform ongoing action to enable students to access reliable, high speed and affordable internet services within a reasonable proximity to where they live.

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option.

- *Recognition of prior learning:* Implement a more consistent, transparent and transferrable system of recognition of prior learning and credit transfer to support pathways for articulation between providers, including a national credit points system, informed by the Australian Qualification Framework review.

RUN response: RUN supports the development of guidelines that inform the recognition of prior learning by universities, but does not support a more prescriptive approach. The network will look at applying a more consistent, transparent and transferable system of recognition within and across its member universities.

- *VET service provision:* Collaborative work by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to improve access to high quality VET programs in regional and remote areas, including providing greater flexibility for providers to access subsidies across states and territories and meet the needs of cross border populations.

RUN response: Provision of funded VET enabling pathways (such as those funded for higher education) would open further access to VET studies for those populations.

Improving access to financial support

- *Income support payments:* Building on the Government's recent initiatives to make it easier for RRR students to access Youth Allowance, consider measures to further improve access to income support and address the higher deferral rates for RRR students, such as assistance with relocation, accommodation and travel costs for higher education and VET students.

RUN response: RUN supports this recommendation, and suggests that there should particularly be improved access for students from low SEIFA areas and drought and/or disaster-affected regions. For all RRR students, the current 14 month period to prove independence should be reduced to 12 months to align with the academic year.

- *Other scholarship programs and accommodation support:* Consider expanding scholarship programs administered in the Education and Training portfolio, including changes to consolidate and simplify the various schemes, or provide additional support with relocation and accommodation costs.

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option. Support should include for students who go to RRR areas for placements/WIL experiences.

- *Information on financial support:* Improve online access to information and provide students/families with more easily understood information on financial support available for higher education and VET studies, by improving existing websites or creating a new portal that consolidates existing information.

RUN response: There is a lack of joined-up support for students, and RUN supports this option.

3.   Retention and attainment of regional, rural and remote learners in tertiary education

- *Enhanced student support: Implement strategies to improve the quality and range of support VET and higher education institutions provide RRR students, particularly those relocating to metropolitan areas, including by:*
  - *identifying and disseminating information on a core suite of best practice intervention and offerings universities should provide to support RRR students, including the following services:*
    - *pastoral care*
    - *specific RRR student orientation*
    - *mentoring/buddy programs*
    - *priority accommodation for RRR students*
    - *academic support, including academic concierge*
    - *regular contact with all RRR students via email, phone and SMS, especially those identified as 'at risk'*
    - *childcare support*
    - *employment assistance*
  - *requiring transparent reporting by institutions, to enable students to see the support services a particular tertiary institution has available*
  - *leveraging existing online platforms aimed at prospective and current tertiary students, such as Study Assist or Course Seeker, to provide comprehensive information to students on adulthood basics, including budgeting advice, time management tips and easy recipe ideas.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option and suggests that "support for students to maintain family/community ties" should be included, particularly for Indigenous students.

- *Enhance Regional Study Hubs: As canvassed in Issues Paper 2, monitor the outcomes of the Regional Study Hubs program and consider enhancement strategies including dissemination of best practice and the potential for further expansion of the program.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option with more flexible delivery options for study hubs as per our previous response to the option in issues paper 2.

- *Financial support: As canvassed in Issues Paper 2, consider further changes to improve financial support for RRR students.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option.

- *HEPPP: As canvassed in Issues Paper 5, consider changes to the HEPPP to enhance the program's focus on RRR students.*

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option. At present, RRR students are not recognised by HEPPP as an equity group. The formula should be adjusted so that they are recognised as such e.g. rather than distributing HEPPP funding to a university based only on the number of low SES students at that institution, there should be some calculation relating to the number of RRR students at that university. e.g. potentially the number of RRR students at a university, divided by the sector total of RRR students, could be added to the number of low SES students at the university, divided by the sector total of low SES students.

There are separate programs for Indigenous students, so they do not need to be specifically considered in the HEPPP formula.

We also suggest that, to give certainty to HEPPP funding, it should be included in the Higher Education Support Act, rather than being at the discretion of the Minister as is currently the case.

- ***Performance-based funding:*** *Governments could explore enhanced performance funding arrangements for university, TAFE and private VET providers to reward success in supporting participation and completions for RRR students, drawing on existing models across jurisdictions.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option, and emphasises the need for all government policy and programs to work in a joined-up manner to lift tertiary educational outcomes for RRR students. RUN's submission to the Performance Based funding for the Commonwealth Grant Scheme discussion paper (available on the RUN website at: https://bit.ly/2EfIZgI) provides more information.

- ***Transport in RRR areas:*** *Ask state and territory governments to consider allowing RRR students travelling to local VET programs and study hubs to access school bus services.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option, and suggests that transport support is also provided for international students studying at RRR campuses.

4.   Enhancing and enabling regional, rural and remote communities

- ***Enhance Regional Study Hubs:*** *As canvassed in Issues Paper 2, monitor the outcomes of the Regional Study Hubs program and consider enhancement strategies including dissemination of best practice and the potential for further expansion of the program.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option with the adoption of flexible delivery models for study hubs as previously outlined.

- ***Additional Commonwealth-Supported places for regional university providers:*** *As canvassed in Issues Paper 2, the Australian Government could consider increasing funding for regionally based universities by targeting future growth in places to non-metropolitan areas, including enabling and sub-bachelor courses.*

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option. Support for, and expansion of, enabling places is important as enabling courses provide a pathway for mature-aged students who need to remain in the regions. Cuts and limited growth capacity for bachelor and other places will further erode the professional employment needs of RRR communities. Consideration should be given to uncapping these places.

- ***Building research capacity:*** *Explore opportunities to support regional university providers to improve their research capacity, for example by:*
  - *Implementing a new grants program to support building research capacity and institutional research infrastructure in regional universities, including networks and partnerships with metropolitan universities, and to help position and encourage them to play a greater role in Australia's future national research infrastructure system.*
  - *Undertaking scoping studies for new national research infrastructure (NRI) investments to identify new opportunities for research in RRR areas.*

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option. The current funding cuts to research will have a detrimental effect on this goal.

- ***Attracting international students:*** *Drawing on the Council for International Education's recent work on* Growing International Education in Regional Australia, *consider initiatives to encourage international students to enrol in regional institutions, such as scholarships and more flexible work and migration pathways.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option. Support for the development of WIL and internship places for international students in the regions would be useful.

- ***Work-integrated learning and internships:*** *Explore opportunities to encourage uptake and provision of work-integrated learning opportunities, for example by establishing a program which supports VET and university students from metropolitan areas to undertake work-*

integrated learning placements in regional and remote areas as part of their course, including internships, mentorships, practicums, research, teaching and tutoring placements.

RUN response: RUN supports this option. WIL or internship places must be secured in the regions, including for international students.

- **VET service provision:** *As canvassed in Issues Paper 2, collaborative work by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to improve access to high quality VET programs in regional and remote areas.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option. Funding and over-regulated processes need to be reconsidered.

5. Regional, rural and remote learners from equity groups

- **Improved targeting of HEPPP funding to RRR learners from low SES backgrounds:** *For example, consider quarantining a component of HEPPP for RRR initiatives, focused on providing longer-term funding for successful evidence-based programs, including delivery of outreach services to school students and adult learners through regionally based collaborative, multi-university, cross-sectoral partnerships.*

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option as proposed in our response to the relevant option in issues paper 3.

- **Better support for RRR Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander learners:** *For example, by exploring opportunities to use the new RRR HEPPP component canvassed above to direct increased funding to successful outreach programs, and provide tailored academic support and mentoring to students in their later years of study and distance learners.*

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option. VET transition support and academic learning support should receive funding to smooth the articulation from VET to HE study.

- **Better support for RRR learners with disability:** *As part of the student support measures canvassed in Issues Paper 3, require universities to provide comprehensive information on support available for learners with disability such as accommodation, inclusive learning environments, facilities and specialised assistance to help students secure part-time employment while studying and full-time employment post-graduation.*

RUN response: RUN strongly supports this option. Further disability funding would allow universities to provide further support.

- **Better support for learners from rural, remote and very remote areas:** *For example, through exploring options to improve income support canvassed in Issues Paper 2; investigating current access to reliable, high speed and affordable internet services for students and providers, also*

canvassed in Issues Paper 2; and university programs to retain students facing hardship due to drought and other climatic events by supporting them to take a break from their studies, similar to support available for elite athletes and defence reserves.

RUN response: RUN supports this option.

- ***Performance incentives:*** *Incentives could be considered to support providers who increase access, participation and retention of RRR learners from these equity groups.*

RUN response: RUN supports this option as previously outlined.

6. Regional, rural and remote education strategy: targets, implementation and monitoring

Possible targets and other performance measures
The following potential high-level targets for attainment in inner regional, outer-regional and remote[1] areas have been identified – with separate targets for each location category:

1. *Halve the disparity in attainment of post school qualifications in inner regional compared to metropolitan areas, outer-regional compared to metropolitan areas and remote areas compared to metropolitan areas.*
   In 2016, post-school attainment rates for 25-34 year olds were around 66 per cent in metropolitan areas compared to 57 per cent for inner regional areas, 53 per cent in outer regional areas and 45 per cent in remote areas[2].

2. *Halve the disparity in attainment of Certificate IV and above qualifications in regional and remote areas compared to metropolitan areas.*
   In 2016, Certificate IV and above attainment rates for 25-34 year olds were around 54 per cent in metropolitan areas compared to 34 per cent for inner regional areas, 31 per cent in outer regional areas and 26 per cent in remote areas[3].

3. *Halve the disparity in attainment of bachelor degree and above qualifications in regional and remote areas compared to metropolitan areas.*
   In 2016, bachelor degree and above attainment rates for 25-34 year olds were around 40 per cent in metropolitan areas compared to 21 per cent for inner regional areas, 19 per cent in outer regional areas and 16 per cent in remote areas[4].

---

[1] Remote includes both Remote and Very Remote location categories. Monitoring Very Remote by itself is problematic due to the small numbers of people and potential volatility involved.
2 Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2018) Internal Analysis based on the Australian Census of Population and Housing, 2016 (accessed through Census TableBuilder), Australian Government, Canberra.
3 Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2018) Internal Analysis based on the Australian Census of Population and Housing, 2016 (accessed through Census TableBuilder), Australian Government, Canberra.
4 Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2018) Internal Analysis based on the Australian Census of Population and Housing, 2016 (accessed through Census TableBuilder), Australian Government, Canberra.

<u>RUN response:</u> RUN supports targets of halving the disparity in attainment <u>and participation</u> by 2030

- of post school qualifications in inner regional compared to metropolitan areas, outer-regional compared to metropolitan areas and remote areas compared to metropolitan areas
- of Certificate IV and above qualifications in regional and remote areas compared to metropolitan areas

- of bachelor degree and above qualifications in regional and remote areas compared to metropolitan areas.

  Progress should be monitored in 2025.

  We consider that participation should be included as well as attainment given the timeframe required for many RRR students to complete a qualification.

- *the Commissioner proposal and potential functions that could be attached to this role,*

<u>RUN response:</u> RUN strongly supports appointing a RRR education commissioner for a period longer than an election cycle to provide some consistent, medium-term advocacy and coordination for the implementation of the RRR Education Strategy.

We support the following functions of the Commissioner:

- report annually on progress with implementing the Strategy and tertiary education participation and outcomes in RRR areas
- be a Champion for RRR education, keeping the issues at the forefront of government and the public and articulating relevance to broader policy and the national benefit
- work closely and engage strategically with peak RRR parent, student and community bodies, universities and regional universities and TAFE/training bodies
- bring together education-related **and other relevant policy** efforts across governments and communities to ensure connection and information sharing between initiatives (joined up approaches), including advocacy and sharing of emerging issues and best practice
- provide advice on regional development issues by working with stakeholders to build partnerships and enhance the contribution of tertiary education to regional development,

- advocate RRR investment and philanthropy as a means of developing national social cohesion, economic development and nation building, and
- assist in the start-up phase of new hubs and other initiatives.

We suggest that the following function is added:

- support RRR communities and industries to engage with universities to identify and deliver relevant research opportunities that support health, social, educational and economic development.