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REGIONAL AUSTRALIA MUST BE PART OF A NEW COLOMBO PLAN

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) supports a new Colombo Plan which would encourage two-way student staff exchanges with the Asia-Pacific.

The Chair of RUN, Professor David Battersby, said the network, along with other university representatives, business and students had participated in a roundtable hosted by the Menzies Institute in Canberra on March 22 to discuss the design of a new Colombo plan.

"We welcome the announcement by the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Tony Abbot MP, at the roundtable, that, if elected, a Coalition government would implement the plan as a priority, signature initiative," Professor Battersby said.

"Giving the policy such endorsement would be a critical element in its success. It is also essential to secure strong support from business to offer internships, and potential ongoing employment to participating students.

"Any new Colombo Plan should involve regional Australian universities and students. RUN strongly endorses the aspiration that, to achieve its goal of developing much stronger links between Australia and the Asia-Pacific, significant numbers of students from a range of universities, backgrounds, and studying a variety of disciplines should participate.

"Implementation of such a plan in RUN universities would be enhanced if an incoming government also adopted the various other policies the network is advocating to attract more international students to regional universities," Professor Battersby said.

RUN is advocating:

- Providing additional bonus points to students towards Australian residency for attending regional campuses, particularly for those studying in areas of regional skills need;
- Extending the work rights of international students who study in non-metropolitan locations; and
- Providing work rights to students who have completed a bachelors or masters at a regional campus regardless of the duration of study.

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