Regional Universities Network

MEDIA RELEASE

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REGIONAL UNIVERISITES NETWORK TACKLES BARRIERS TO MATHS AND SCIENCE EDUCATION

The Regional Universities Network is pioneering a pilot project to overcome barriers hampering maths and science education in rural, regional and remote Australia.

RUN has been awarded a federal grant of $900,000 for the one-year pilot project: RUN Maths and Science Digital Classroom: a Connected Model for all of Australia.

The grant under the Government's Australian Maths and Science Partnership Program (AMSPP) was announced by the Minister for Higher Education and Skills Sharon Bird today, May 28.

RUN Chair Professor David Battersby said rural, regional and remote Australia faced many impediments to the effective teaching of maths and science.

"Schools in rural, regional and remote Australia struggle to maintain equivalent educational standards in science and maths as compared to those in metropolitan areas," Professor Battersby said.

"Barriers to effective education include lack of infrastructure and support for teachers, high staff turnover, and difficulty filling vacancies with specialist staff.

"The project will address these issues and involve schools in regional and peri-urban Australia where there are high proportions of disadvantaged students, and where, arguably, the challenges and needs are the greatest. However, once developed, the model will be readily scalable and replicable to any educational context nationally."

Professor Battersby said he was delighted with the grant which will lead to RUN's six universities partnering with more than 20 schools, the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI), the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), and the Primary Industry Centre for Science Education (PICSE) to encourage the study and teaching of maths and science in regional Australia.

"This project will create an interest in science and maths amongst regional students and their teachers that can be applied to real world tasks and challenges.

"A virtual centre using existing technology and high-speed broadband, where available, will link Year 9 and 10 students from their classrooms to experts in our universities and partner organisations.

"A range of maths and science activities, including collaborative experiments, will be delivered.

"The virtual centre, complemented by in-classroom training, will form the basis for the professional development of teachers through engagement with experts, building on the well established intensive mathematics education program offered by AMSI.

"A national, two-day teacher professional development program will be held at each of the RUN partner universities and be facilitated through the PICSE program, which encourages the study of agricultural and related sciences.

"The RUN universities have strong track records in the attraction and support of significantly diverse student constituencies that include high proportions of disadvantaged and underrepresented students. Four of the universities have been at the forefront of distance (external) education and outreach for more than three decades and are now leaders in online education.

"RUN forms a powerful, collaborative network which will enhance the study and teaching of maths and science in regional Australia, and hence make a substantive impact nationally," Professor Battersby said.

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