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DEMAND-DRIVEN SYSTEM WORKING TO HELP REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

The full benefits of the demand-driven higher education system have not yet begun to flow through to regional communities, and it would be a great loss to end a visionary policy which is otherwise set to transform regional Australia, according to the Regional Universities Network.

The Chair of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), Professor David Battersby, said any proposal to move away from the demand-driven system, or to move away from participation targets, should be carefully considered.

"The introduction of the demand-driven system by this Government was a bold nation-building move that was welcomed by regional Australia," Professor Battersby said.

"It is allowing more regional Australians to attend university – many from disadvantaged backgrounds – which will see the crippling disparity in capital city vs regional community higher education participation rates narrow.

"It is also giving regional universities the signals they need to invest millions in new courses and learning infrastructure in critical-need areas like allied health, producing more highly-skilled graduates to our communities.

"However the wave of university investment in new courses and infrastructure that we have seen across regional universities, much of which was supported by Commonwealth investment, will never pay dividends unless the caps remain off for a little longer yet," Professor Battersby said.

Many of the new courses introduced by regional universities under the demand-driven system are only into their first or second year. Unless the uncapped growth is allowed to pipeline through to the final year of study, many regional universities will fail to see the full benefit of the demand-driven system as it was intended.

"We have invested in our growth, and to stop now will have a hugely negative impact on our communities and the strength of our regional universities.

"If the caps were to be put back on right at this point, we'd see an enormous opportunity for regional Australia to catch up with metropolitan Australia vanish.

"The demand driven system is working. It is helping regional universities tackle educational inequality. It is allowing us to develop a range of new programs that were not previously available.

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We are still seeing growth in student numbers and an increase in participation from groups that have previously missed out on a university education.

“But we are yet to see the first graduate come through a demand-driven system.

“The best way to keep graduates in regional Australia is to train them in the regions – on average three in four graduates from RUN universities work in the regions. We also know that the graduate employment rates from the regional universities are extremely high indicating that employers are highly satisfied with the skills and competencies of our graduates.

“We urge consultation with the sector on any proposed changes, and careful consideration of the impact on regional Australia,” Professor Battersby said.

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