

**30 OCTOBER 2013**

## **REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES STRONGLY PLACED TO ADDRESS SKILLS SHORTAGE**

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) considers that regional universities are uniquely placed to address the existing and anticipated skills shortages in regional Australia revealed in a report released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Non-School Qualifications in Regions, on October 30.

Commenting on the report, the acting Chair of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), Professor Jan Thomas, said there was still a large educational gap between regional and metropolitan Australia and that regional universities had a key role to play in addressing this.

"Education is the key to regional development and national prosperity," Professor Thomas said.

"The further away you travel from capitals, the lower the post-school education attainment. In capital cities, and in particular, in the affluent suburbs, 60-70 per cent of people have a tertiary educational qualification. Rural and remote areas have the lowest rates e.g. outback Queensland has a rate of just over 30 per cent.

"A third of Australia's population lives outside capital cities, and, without a professionally trained populace, it will be difficult for regional Australia to effectively participate in the modern economy."

Professor Thomas said that "despite common misconceptions, the population in regional Australia is rising. Between 2007 and 2012, the population outside of the major cities rose by 6.6 per cent."

"People with post-school qualifications have greater opportunity for employment, earn more, and in general have better health and make a greater broader contribution to society than others.

"Regional universities play a fundamental role in educating regional Australians. The student demand driven system is playing an important role in enabling regional universities to educate more students, including through flexible learning. Growing participation in higher education should be a priority for the Government in the regions where relatively few people have university qualifications.

"Students who study in regional areas tend to remain in the regions after graduation and provide a ready supply of professionals to fill critical regional posts

"Five years after completing their course, 66 per cent of graduates from regional higher education institutions remain in regional areas for employment," Professor Thomas said.

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