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REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES' LEADERSHIP ROLE TO BE DEBATED: RUN-INFORMA CONFERENCE

The role of regional universities in the nation's economic and social development and the opportunity for increasing participation in a more connected education system will be debated at a conference in Coolangatta next week.

Organised by the Regional Universities Network (RUN) and Informa, the two-day Regional Universities Conference will take place 14-15 November at the Gold Coast Campus of Southern Cross University.

Vice Chancellors and academics from RUN's six member universities will be joined by speakers from other Australian and international universities.

RUN Chair Professor Peter Lee said he anticipated a lively discussion and sharing of ideas about regional universities and their broad contribution to society.

"Regional universities have a fundamental role to play in the development of the nation," Professor Lee said. "They drive regional economic, social, cultural and environmental development, innovation and productivity, and help unlock the full human potential of their regions."

Professor Lee said RUN was formed in late 2011 to better realise that role.

A highlight of the conference will be the Vice Chancellors' Q&A session on the second day which, like all sessions, is open to the media.

The session will debate issues such as: what the student demand driven system has meant for regional universities; how aligned with regional skills should regional university courses be; where should regional universities collaborate or compete and what role is there for regional universities in the New Colombo Plan.

Vice chancellors from RUN universities will be on the panel to face questions; Professor Scott Bowman, Vice Chancellor, CQUniversity, Professor Peter Lee, Vice Chancellor, Southern Cross University (and Chair of RUN), Professor David Battersby, Vice Chancellor, University of Ballarat, Professor Jim Barber, Vice Chancellor, University of New England, Professor Jan Thomas, Vice Chancellor, University of Southern Queensland and Professor Greg Hill, Vice Chancellor, University of the Sunshine Coast.

Professor Lee said despite common misconceptions, the population of regional Australia was increasing.

www.run.edu.au

“Between 2007 and 2012, the population outside of major cities rose by 6.6 per cent and by 2026 is expected to grow by 26 per cent.”

However, young people in regional Australia still lag behind in higher education attainment.

“By improving opportunities for people to access higher education, RUN universities help unlock the full human potential of regional Australia,” Professor Lee said.

Among the topics to be discussed at the conference is the focus on increasing participation in the regions and the buzz words that come with it – access, attainment and completion.

Speakers including Professor Birgit Lohmann, Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of the Sunshine Coast, and Professor Andy Smith, Deputy Vice Chancellor Schools and Programs, University of Ballarat, will examine the links between schools, universities and TAFEs in delivering education which will create a skilled workforce for regional growth.

“Regional plans should be evidence-based and grounded in local realities, not just be aspirational,” Professor Lohmann said.

Professor Smith said there was a need for a more seamless approach to tertiary education in regional Australia.

“There is a need for vocational education providers, particularly TAFE institutes and universities to work in a much more integrated way in the regions,” Professor Smith said.

Professor Mike Hefferan, Pro Vice Chancellor Engagement, University of the Sunshine Coast, will tackle the issue of how regional universities can play a pivotal role in developing their regions and thus building a stronger nation.

“RUN universities, by their nature of being in regional locations, can translate a body of knowledge about contemporary regional development that others cannot,” Professor Hefferan said.

“A university is better placed than just about anyone to see the large picture of how our region is developing and what are its attributes and what are its failings and it can do that with a level of credibility, independence and knowledge that a chamber of commerce or a local authority could not have.”

“We see ourselves as providing a level of leadership that goes beyond being a university.”
RUN-Informa Regional Higher Education Conference, 14-15 November.

For the full program and registration see www.run.edu.au or <http://www.informa.com.au/conferences/education-conference/regional-universities-forum/agenda>.

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