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RUN RESPONSE TO REVIEW OF STUDENT DEMAND DRIVEN SYSTEM

If the demand driven system is to be reviewed, it is pleasing that the Terms of Reference are broad and the review will investigate policies regarding the allocation of sub-bachelor and post-graduate places, as well as evidence that the demand driven system is improving access and meeting skills needs, according to the Regional Universities Network (RUN).

Responding to the announcement of the review by the Minister for Education, The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, the Chair of RUN, Professor Peter Lee, said that while RUN recognises the Government's right to call a review and will constructively participate in it, the student demand driven system only commenced in 2012, and it will be too early to review any graduate outcomes from the system.

"The first students will graduate under the system from a three year Bachelors' degree in late 2014. The quality of an award should be judged by the quality of the graduate - it is the outcomes that are important not the inputs. The standards of professional courses such as engineering and allied health are set by professional bodies.

"With respect to the issue of quality, the intake of students to courses with lower ATARs is not a sign that standards have declined. ATARs are a rank not a score. They are also strongly correlated with socio-economic advantage of students. ATAR admission standards are also an indicator of course demand, not necessarily the required skills and attributes to succeed at University.

"Many students can succeed at university despite being less well prepared in high school. Over half the students who enter university on ATARs lower than 60 successfully complete degrees. Overall, attrition at Australian universities has declined over the last few years despite more students entering on the basis of relatively low ATARs.

"RUN universities flexibly educate students who have entered university from a variety of pathways. Many students, 70 per cent or higher for some of our universities, enter on the basis of direct application and not on ATAR. Students also undertake enabling courses to bridge the gap between school and university," Professor Lee said.

"The demand driven system is about deregulation and letting the market work, which is something the Government should support. It has fostered a more even balance between supply and demand in the Australian higher education system. It has allowed universities in regional Australia grow courses and student numbers which will contribute to the productivity and economic growth of regional Australia and the nation."

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