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DEMAND DRIVEN SYSTEM CRUCIAL FOR REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) strongly supports the continuation of the student demand driven system for bachelor places, and extension of the system to cover sub-bachelor places.

The Chair of RUN, Professor Peter Lee, said the network's views were outlined in its submission to the Government's review of the demand driven system.

"It is imperative to increase participation in higher education by regional Australians so that the regions have similar higher education attainment rates to the capitals.

The demand driven system is playing a key role by enabling growth in student numbers and enhancing opportunities for people from low SES, regional and Indigenous backgrounds. Its extension to sub-bachelor places would assist in providing pathways for less well prepared students," Professor Lee said.

"In 2012, more than 30 per cent of RUN universities' commencing domestic bachelor students were from low SES backgrounds and, between 2009 and 2012, low SES enrolments grew by around 26 per cent. Students from regional backgrounds make up around half the commencing domestic bachelor students at RUN universities and their numbers grew by more than 13 per cent between 2009 and 2012. In 2012, Indigenous students comprised 2.6 per cent of commencing, domestic, bachelor students at RUN universities.

"Uncapping student places has allowed RUN universities to introduce new courses in allied health or health science, engineering, social welfare, law and agrifood to meet regional skills needs.

"Our universities are supporting students who are less well prepared for university both while they are enrolled and through a range of pathways to higher education.

"We have not yet had any graduates from the demand driven system to judge the quality of the outcomes. However, internal surveys at RUN universities have shown that student satisfaction with courses has been maintained since the uncapping of places.

"RUN considers that it is important to address the inequities in the distribution of the Commonwealth-supported postgraduate coursework places in Australian universities that have developed over time," Professor Lee said.

"While noting that Australia is 25th out of 29 advanced economies for public investment in universities as a percentage of GDP, RUN recognises that the

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Government currently faces serious budgetary constraints. If the Government considers it necessary to re-examine the mix of government / private contributions to higher education or any other modifications to the student loans scheme, the examination should carefully consider the impact on any change on low SES, regional / rural, indigenous participation.”

For media enquiries:

Dr Caroline Perkins, Executive Director, Regional Universities Network, 0408 482 736

Issued by: Aaron Hall, RUN Media Adviser, 0408 482 736

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