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RUN WELCOMES DEMAND DRIVEN REVIEW REPORT

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) today welcomed the release by the Government of the report of the Review of the Demand Driven Student Funding System.

The Chair of RUN, Professor Peter Lee, said that he was delighted with the Review's main findings that the demand driven system should be maintained for bachelor places, and the system expanded to include sub-bachelor places, and post-graduate places in courses with clear community benefit and modest financial rewards such as teaching, nursing and some other health disciplines.

"These recommendations are consistent with RUN's position, and, if adopted by the Government, will ensure that regional universities can continue to work to increase the participation by regional Australians in higher education," Professor Lee said.

"The report also proposes extending the demand driven system to non-university providers that have met the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency registration requirements and course approvals. RUN would extend this requirement to comply with all legislative and data reporting that Universities are subject to. The provision of demand driven places to non-university providers could build on the significant partnerships or dual arrangements that already exist between regional TAFEs and regional universities. More options for higher education study, including sub-bachelor pathways, would be available to regional Australians, including low SES students.

"The reforms would be good for regional Australia. More highly skilled graduates are what our economy and communities need.

"While we are disappointed that the review has supported abandoning the low SES and attainment targets, RUN will continue to be committed to ensuring equity for all students and increased participation in higher education. Extension of the demand driven system to sub-bachelor places would allow universities to be more responsive to the needs of less academically prepared students.

"While the Review has suggested charging a loan fee on the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) and reducing the Commonwealth contribution, RUN advocates that HELP doubtful debt should be addressed. Savings from the latter would be complemented by pegging indexation of the earnings threshold for repaying HELP debt to the Consumer Price Index rather than average weekly earnings, as proposed in the Grattan Institute report Doubtful debt. The rising cost of student loans," Professor Lee said.

"RUN urges the Government to implement the Review's key recommendations in the coming budget of keeping the caps off and expanding the demand driven system to sub-bachelor places and some post-graduate disciplines."

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