

**8 SEPTEMBER 2014**

## **RUN AND GO8 URGE SENATE TO PASS HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS WITH SAFEGUARDS FOR LOW-INCOME GRADUATES AND STRUCTURAL SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES**

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) and Group of Eight (Go8) urge the Senate to pass the Government's Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014 with changes to make it fairer for students and universities.

In support of the leadership of Universities Australia, RUN and the Go8 call on the Government to revisit its proposal to introduce a real interest rate on HELP debts. Compounding real interest rates would have regressive effects for lower income earners, particularly for women whose workforce participation may be interrupted and graduates serving communities with concentrations of disadvantage.

The Chair of RUN, Professor Peter Lee, said that deregulation of student fees was the only way that the sector could maintain quality and access and remain internationally competitive, as significant, additional government funding is unlikely, irrespective of political party composition.

"In this environment RUN supports deregulation of student fees, but advocates changes to the Government's reform package to recognise the particular circumstances of different universities," Professor Lee said.

The Chair of the Group of Eight (Go8), Professor Ian Young, said that the Bill would be strengthened by targeted measures to assist regional universities. "Deregulation will allow all universities to play to their strengths. Regional universities should be able to attract some students on the basis of niche specialisations, life-broadening learning experiences, and price competitiveness. However, there is no tradition of significant numbers of students moving from metropolitan areas to the regions for university. The Government has a community obligation to provide structural adjustment assistance to regional universities that face revenue raising and delivery disabilities, especially those in thin markets, to remain viable in a more open higher education market," Professor Young said.

Professor Lee said structural adjustment assistance would make the reforms more effective, and increase opportunities for students. "Targeted support for regional universities will help a diverse and competitive market to develop, and support these institutions to offer attractive options to students."

RUN and Go8 jointly call for a regional adjustment assistance package which should give the different regional universities flexibility to respond to change. Such a package should include a regional scholarships program. An eligibility threshold for the Higher Education

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Participation Program (HEPP) would ensure that funding is allocated to those universities with relatively high proportions and significant catchments of low socio-economic status (SES) students. Go8 universities, accepting that they will forfeit future funding from that program, commend this option for the consideration of the Parliament.

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