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RUN: NEW TEACHING AND LEARNING ENTITY MUST ACT FOR ALL

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) has told the Department of Education and its expert adviser that the new Teaching and Learning Institute should act for the entire sector, during a consultation session on July 29.

The Chair of RUN, Professor Peter Lee, said that a new entity must have a national focus and a separate identity from any host.

"It is vital that any new body has a national focus, strategic priorities that reflect the diversity of the Australian higher education sector in the 21st century, and be governed by and act for all the sector. While much is good about the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT), including aspects of its governance and the role of expert and specialist panels, the consultations to inform the formation of a new teaching and learning body provide an opportunity for improvement," Professor Lee said.

"Teaching and learning is of great importance to regional universities – while we excel at supporting our students in higher education, many of whom are from low SES backgrounds or first-in-family to university, our endeavours must be recognised, encouraged and supported by appropriate programs, projects and awards.

"It is essential that independent panels and peer review processes are maintained in any new teaching and learning entity to ensure robust governance and that quality projects are supported. The OLT specialist panels are relatively small and do not adequately represent regional universities. Under any new arrangement, there should be broader representation from the regions and chairs of various panels should be rotated to ensure representation from a range of universities.

"Adequate funding for projects must be available to help ensure that our universities are able to address the issues of importance to our student cohort. The magnitude of cash and in-kind contribution that individual institutions are able to provide should not negatively impact on any support of projects that they receive under the new body," Professor Lee said.

"Under the OLT, the Australian Awards for University Teaching, the grants and project support and the fostering of networks have made a major contribution to the national conversation around the significance of teaching in higher education. These initiatives must be continued in the new body."

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