

21 SEPTEMBER 2015

RUN WELCOMES RELEASE OF ALP HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the ALP's commitment to increasing student funding from 2018 by more than 27 per cent or \$2,500 per student, per year, or \$4 billion over four years under a "student funding guarantee".

The Chair of RUN, Professor Jan Thomas, said that the additional funding and commitment to increasing the participation and completions at university by equity groups would assist regional universities and their communities.

"As well as increased funding per student, the ALP has proposed a new Higher Education Access and Growth Strategy to lift equity and improve student outcomes which will assist regional universities and their communities," Professor Thomas said.

"Better pathways and preparation for students before they embark on bachelors degrees are important in boosting university degree completions. We are therefore disappointed that the ALP will not extend the demand driven system to sub-bachelor places as is proposed by the Government.

"Given the high proportion of low SES, mature age and part-time students at regional universities, raising the completion rate is a complex and challenging task. Mature age students often have to deal with the complexities of life, whether as caregivers or workers, and as such have to make decisions to stop their university studies for specific reasons, only to re-commence at a later date. With the best support in the world, some may never complete, but they deserve to be given the opportunity.

"Issues remain about where the additional funding for the ALP policy would come from, over and above that obtained from savings by scrapping some of the Government's proposals, what real guarantee there would be that increased funding would be sustainable, and how the incentive scheme to lift completions would work, including whether there would be payment to universities on student completions.

"While we support assisting students to complete their degrees, there is no evidence that the demand driven student system has led to an increase in attrition rates. Many mature age students take significantly more than four years to complete, and may drop in and out of study. The demand driven system has given many a chance, and most will successfully complete university study.

"Very few students are admitted on the basis of very low ATARs. Giving students the opportunity to study for a degree doesn't mean that academic standards are at risk: there is no inherent conflict between equity of opportunity and maintaining academic integrity.

www.run.edu.au

“RUN welcomes the proposal to establish an independent Higher Education Productivity and Performance Commission, and the proposed increased funding for the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency,” Professor Thomas said.

“We look forward to further consultation with the ALP on its higher education policy, including, should it win Government, via the green and white paper processes.”

For media enquiries:

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

Issued by: Diana Streak, RUN Media Adviser, 022 536 064

www.run.edu.au