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## **RUN: WATT REVIEW OF RESEARCH FUNDING AND POLICY SENDS IMPORTANT SIGNAL**

The Watt Review of Research Policy and Funding Arrangements, released today by the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, sends an important signal that universities need to improve engagement and collaboration with business and other end users.

The Chair of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), Professor Jan Thomas, said that the review made some key recommendations that the Government should adopt to encourage collaboration, innovative commercial outcomes, and greater economic returns.

“While, if implemented, the review’s recommendations will assist in promoting engaged research, it is only part of the answer – we hope that the Government’s Innovation Statement will address broader incentives for collaboration. All parties, universities, industry and Government, must play their part in boosting Australia’s innovative capacity,” Professor Thomas said.

“RUN supports the Watt review’s recommendations, including the streamlining of the research block grants, with the caveat that there should be no significant, unintended negative consequences resulting from the changes to the funding. While we acknowledge that the review has proposed substantive transitional arrangements, it is important that universities will not be substantially disadvantaged by any changes, including by the removal of the research student load from the funding formulae.

“We are pleased with the recommendation that additional funding of \$50 million per annum from 2018 (or sooner) be provided to increase the level of engagement activities under the new research block grant model.

“RUN is delighted that the review has recommended funding for 700 new PhD business placements, at a cost of \$12.5 million per year. We hope that the Government takes up this proposal, and, as RUN suggested in its submission to the review, ensures that a significant proportion of these scholarships are allocated outside capital cities, including to small and medium enterprises, to drive regional development.

“We note that the review has recommended that Australia should implement an impact and engagement framework, drawing on lessons from the UK model. All universities should be fully consulted on the methodology and potential impact of any new mechanism to measure engagement before it is introduced, particularly if there are any funding implications.

“We support the proposed changes to the arrangements for the ARC expert panels and

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Linkage Grants, and making IP more openly available,” Professor Thomas said.

“Regional universities undertake outstanding fundamental research, as indicated by ERA 2015, which is strategic and regionally engaged. RUN universities have grown by about 300% in research which is above, and well above, world standard since 2012.

“It is vital for regional industry, innovation, communities and the nation as a whole that a new framework is put in place to further encourage research collaboration between all players in regional Australia to promote social and economic development.”

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