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THE NUMBERS TELL THE STORY - REGIONAL AUSTRALIA MATTERS

Universities are proving to be an increasingly powerful economic engine room for regional Australia, delivering jobs and driving new innovations.

The six members of the Regional Universities Network (RUN) together contribute more than \$2.1 billion in gross domestic product, \$1.2 billion household income and more than 14,000 jobs to the Australian economy annually.

And through collaboration between members, government and private enterprise, their impact is set to grow as they set out new possibilities for the future of regional Australia.

“Around one-third of Australia’s population lives outside of the capital cities, so it’s vitally important we have a vibrant and effective higher education sector servicing regional Australians,” RUN Chair, Professor Jan Thomas, said.

“Regional communities also face unique challenges, which is why our members are coming together next week for the RUN Regional Futures Conference in Rockhampton to share their ideas and find new solutions to regional issues.”

RUN was established in 2011 with six founder members; CQUniversity, Southern Cross University, Federation University Australia (formerly University of Ballarat), University of New England, University of Southern Queensland and University of the Sunshine Coast.

More than 150 delegates will attend the conference to be held at CQUniversity Rockhampton from June 21 to 24. The conference will address the challenges facing regional Australia and draw attention to the ways in which universities can work with government, community and industry, to drive innovation, engagement and research, and create vibrant, successful futures for regional economies and communities.

The program will feature presentations from research students, academics, politicians, community and industry representatives under five theme areas of Economic, Healthy, Sustainable, Digital and Creative futures. It will also feature keynote talks from Dr Geoff Garrett, the Chief Scientist of Queensland; Jack Archer, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Australia Institute (RAI); and Nick Behrens, Director Advocacy & Workplace Relations, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ).

Professor Thomas said RUN’s six member universities together teach about 110,000 students, or nine per cent of enrolments in Australian public universities, across more than 60 campuses and study centres.

www.run.edu.au

“The quality of research conducted at RUN universities is also world class and improving,” she said. “The 2015 Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) outcomes showed a three-fold increase in disciplines rated ‘well above world standard’ compared with 2012, and a more than six-fold increase in disciplines rated ‘at above world standard’.”

Professor Thomas said regional universities were retaining this knowledge and skill within their local areas, with research showing students who study in regional areas tend to remain and work in the regions after graduation, providing a ready supply of professionals to fill crucial roles.

“There are many advantages related to living in regional Australia, including its towns and cities, such as affordability and liveability,” she said.

“There is also an upside for the national economy in encouraging the growth of regional centres, with every additional 100,000 Australians who choose small cities over big ones releasing an extra \$50 billion into the national economy through avoided housing and congestion costs.”

For more information and to register to attend the Regional Futures conference, go to <http://conference.run.edu.au/>

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