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REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES CRITICAL IN SUPPORTING REGIONAL CAPITALS: SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT

The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee final report into the Future Role and Contribution of Regional Capitals to Australia, released November 24, has found that regional universities perform a critical role in supporting regional capitals to achieve their potential.

The Chair of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), Professor Greg Hill, said that the report provides a number of recommendations as to how the contribution of regional capitals to Australia can be enhanced.

“Regional universities are embedded with their communities, and are fundamental to the regional development and economic prosperity of their regions. Building human capital is as important to regional development as building infrastructure. Through university study and research, students become more highly skilled, and are better prepared to be creative, entrepreneurial and flexible to meet future job challenges.

The committee considers that regional universities can reduce skills shortages in regions as students trained in the regions largely stay in the regions to work,” Professor Hill said.

“For every 1000 university graduates entering the workforce 120 new jobs are created for people without a university degree.

“Further, the report notes that regional universities encourage increased participation rates in higher education in rural and regional areas and provide the only viable option for many students. They provide specialisations relevant to their local communities and businesses and are significant employers. They are important for mature age students who cannot relocate to capitals, and provide other non-educational benefits. They support arts, cultural and sporting activities in their communities, and their expertise can be shared with local government, business and the community, building the capacity of their cities.

“The committee has recommended that organisations like the Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) which supports students in regional capitals should be able to apply direct for funding. Two of RUN’s members, CQUniversity and the University of Southern Queensland, have a presence at GUC.

“RUN strongly supports the Committee’s recommendation that the roll out of the National Broadband Network to all regional capitals is accelerated. RUN has long advocated its support for initiatives to keep students online and accessing the internet via reliable, high speed connections,” Professor Hill said.

“We support the other report recommendations relating to building a national strategy for regional capitals and encouraging their growth.”

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