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## **HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS MUST WORK TO SUPPORT REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES AND STUDENTS**

The Government has delivered higher education reforms in a difficult budgetary environment which will have both a positive and negative impact on regional universities and their students.

The Chair of RUN, Professor Greg Hill, said that, in particular, he welcomed the continuation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), and the extension of the of the demand driven system to sub-bachelor places.

“Providing regional students with more alternative pathways through sub-bachelor programs will improve student success. HEPPP plays a vital role in funding the support which assists our students to succeed. It supports outreach activities which raise aspiration for university study. We are relieved that the program will continue to help lift the higher education attainment of regional students,” Professor Hill said.

“However, we are concerned that the proposed increase in student contributions may deter students, particularly mature age students who make up a large proportion of RUN’s student cohort, from university study. Financial circumstances have been shown to be a major contributor to students dropping out of university. The decrease of the threshold for the repayment of student loans from around \$52,000 to \$42,000 is a significant change and has the potential to disproportionately affect low income households.

“The efficiency dividend on Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding will be significant for regional universities. We use the funding for regional development and community support as well as teaching and learning. We must attract students from outside the regions and internationally to sustain ourselves and our contributions to regional development and viability.

“The introduction of performance measures provides an opportunity for Government to incentivise a more place-based approach to university funding which recognises the role of universities as anchor institutions for the economic and social development of their regions.

“We have spoken to Government about using performance metrics to pursue a more integrated approach to regional development. It is interested in exploring these ideas further, including in the context of possible City Deals,” Professor Hill said.

“We are heartened that the Government is committed to full consultation prior to the adoption of performance metrics, and is moving towards a more holistic policy which sees universities more broadly in the context of regional development.”

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