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RUN: ENHANCE THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The contribution of regional universities to regional development could be greatly enhanced by their formal recognition in regional development policy and place-based programs, the Australian Local Government Association conference was told on June 18.

The Executive Director of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), Dr Caroline Perkins, said that in Australia until now there had been little recognition of the place-based importance of universities in education, research or innovation programs and funding.

"This is in contrast to the accepted practice in the UK and Europe where, as anchor institutions committed to and embedded in their regions, universities are recognised as key players in city deals, growth deals, and smart specialisations," Dr Perkins said.

"In these initiatives, stakeholders agree on programs that build on existing regional advantages and business strengths, as well as developing expertise and infrastructure in areas of growing need. Place-based economic development policies offer the communities the sort of hope that only a collaborative plan created from the bottom up can give.

"We are starting to see universities involved in the first wave of Australian city deals, and the place-based importance of innovation is being considered by the Precincts Advisory Committee, which will report to the Minister for Industry, Science and Innovation later this year.

"Much can be achieved by drawing various initiatives together under a holistic framework which is specifically targeted to individual cities and regions," Dr Perkins said.

"For the sake of national cohesion and prosperity, Australia cannot afford to leave entire regions, cities and towns behind."

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