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HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS WILL DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACT REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Drawing on evidence given by the Regional Universities Network (RUN) and other regional universities to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the HESLA Bill, the Labor and Greens dissenting reports have found that the proposed higher education reforms will disproportionately, negatively impact on regional universities.

The Chair of RUN, Professor Greg Hill, said that the dissenting reports found that the Bill should not pass in its current form, which was the network's position.

"RUN is opposed to the reforms because of the potential for negative impacts on our institutions, students and communities. We are concerned about the potential lowering of student participation at university in regional Australia, and broader detrimental economic and social impact on our regions," Professor Hill said.

"Regional universities are proportionally more reliant on government funding (around 40 per cent for RUN members) than older metropolitan universities (e.g. less than 20 per cent for the Group of Eight). About 10 or more per cent from our base funding goes towards research, innovation, and engagement with our communities, including sporting and cultural activities and facilities – these would potentially be the first things to be put at risk with the proposed efficiency dividend or cut to the Commonwealth Grant Scheme. We do not get separate funding for regional development, and much of our research funding comes from the base funding.

"Our concern that an increased student contribution, lower repayment threshold for student loans, and the proposed new student contribution towards enabling places will discourage participation in higher education has been acknowledged in the committee reports.

"The insufficient level of detail about how many of the reforms, including performance funding, and changes to enabling and postgraduate places will be implemented has also been noted," Prof Hill said.

"RUN supports elements of the package, including retaining the demand driven system, the legislation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), and the expansion of the demand driven student system to some sub-bachelor places which will give additional pathways for students less well prepared for university to assist their chances of success. The Labor dissenting report proposes separately legislating the HEPPP, which RUN supports."

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