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RUN SUPPORTS MCGOWAN AMENDMENTS TO HESLA BILL, BUT OPPOSES BILL

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) supports the amendments to the Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (HESLA) Bill to assist regional higher education providers and students, as proposed by Cathy McGowan MP. However, RUN opposes the overall passage of the Bill, as does Ms McGowan.

The Chair of RUN, Professor Greg Hill, welcomed the amendments, which provide for a regional higher education strategy, and relief in debt repayment for students studying at regional campuses.

“RUN strongly supports the proposal for a national, regional, higher education strategy. Such a strategy is consistent with the Government’s consideration of issues relating to regional education participation in the Independent Review of Regional, Remote and Rural Education. The strategy would include measures to increase the representation of regional students in higher education, support transitions, and recognise the role of higher education providers in regional development. A review of regional loading is also proposed,” Professor Hill said.

“Another amendment provides financial incentives for students to study in the regions. Those who study in regional Australia are much more likely to work in the regions.

“The amendment will give students studying at a regional campus a longer Higher Education Loan Program repayment free period on relevant units. Students would not have to start repayments until they reach the 3.5% threshold under the amendment (\$56,205 - \$59,576). This would provide relief for students in low income households.

“Advice provided by the Parliamentary Budget Office to Ms McGowan indicates that the cost of this measure will only be \$21.6 million over the forward estimates to 2020-21.

“RUN congratulates Cathy McGowan on proposing these amendments,” Professor Hill said.

“However, RUN opposes the overall passage of the Bill. The efficiency dividend on university funding will have a disproportionately greater effect on regional universities, and what we can provide to our students and communities. We rely on the Government for around 40% of our funding, compared to less than about 20% for the older, metropolitan Group of Eight universities.”

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