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COORDINATED APPROACH AND SUFFICIENT AND TARGETED RESOURCES NEEDED FOR REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

In accepting all recommendations from the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey Review) the Government has acknowledged that a place-based approach is needed for regional education, and that a one-size-fits-all policy does not work.

The Chair of the Regional Universities Network, Professor Greg Hill, said that establishing a national focus for regional education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in the regions was the first step.

“A coordinated approach, and sufficient and targeted resources are also required to realise the vision that every student deserves the opportunity to succeed, no matter where they live” Professor Hill said.

“While the Halsey review largely focussed on school education, post-school transitions were also considered. In the 2018 Budget, the Government went some way to responding to post-school recommendations with additional funding for new sub-bachelor places, places at regional study hubs, and changes to Youth Allowance. However, regional higher education is a major contributor to the economic, social and cultural development of regional Australia, and the flexibility of a demand driven student system for both bachelor and sub-bachelor places is needed to grow opportunities for regional students and communities.

“The Government has commissioned a project to undertake an annual assessment of the support that universities offer regional, rural and remote students on transition to university. The outcomes of this work should be useful in supporting student success.

“It has also indicated that it will explore options to expand regional program funding eligibility to incorporate funding to vocational educational providers to ensure that they remain eligible to access a range of regional programs. We note that higher education providers should also be eligible for funding under regional programs, and that we welcomed the recent opportunity to apply for funding under the Regional Growth Fund.

“While RUN welcomes the Government’s commitment to report annually through the Regional Ministerial Statement on progress in delivering improved access, outcomes and opportunities for regional, rural and remote Australians in education, employment and training, we are of the view that a more coordinated strategy, which includes higher education, could facilitate better outcomes.

“In 2017, RUN proposed a National Regional Higher Education Strategy Framework, which suggested a joined-up approach to policy and programs relevant to regional higher

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education.

“In his report, Professor Halsey suggested some actions which could assist a more connected approach, including: a national regional, rural and remote education strategy and associated taskforce to drive greater coherence, coordination and access to high quality education and training in the regions; and funding a major Renewing the Regions national education and training initiative for at least 5 years to grow regional, rural and remote employment opportunities and build the human capital required for vibrant, productive and sustainable regional communities.

“In its response to the review, the Government has indicated that conversations around the proposed actions will continue to flow from the report” Professor Hill said.

“RUN hopes that these include a new and coordinated approach to regional education, including higher education. We would be pleased to be involved in relevant discussions.”

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