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BUDGET 2019: COMMITMENT TO REGIONAL STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITIES

Budget 2019-20 outlines the government's previously announced commitments in the Plan for Australia's Future Population and MYEFO for regional students and universities.

The Chair of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), Professor Helen Bartlett, said that the network was pleased with the support regional students and higher education will receive.

"We recognise the government's commitment to encourage more students, including international students, to study at regional university campuses, and inclusion of regional education in the broader population package," Professor Bartlett said.

"RUN supports the continued inclusion of education-related initiatives in broader regional development policy, including in future city and regional deals.

"The government's Plan for Australia's Future Population, Destination Australia Program will provide \$93.7m over four years for 4,720 new scholarships, each up to \$15,000 pa, for both domestic and international students to study at regional campuses. International students will be attracted to study in regional Australia both by the scholarships, and by the offer of an extra year of temporary residency in Australia if they study in the regions (\$14m over 4 years).

At MYEFO, the government announced \$134.8m over four years to support more students at regional universities, including scholarships, enhanced facilities, and additional study places, and the development of a National Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Education Strategy.

"In its submissions to the RRR Expert Advisory Group who are developing the RRR Education Strategy, RUN has advocated for uncapping enabling and sub-bachelor places as well as demand driven bachelor places for regional and peri-urban campuses; better recognition of RRR students in the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program; initiatives to encourage more international students to the regions; and establishment of a RRR commissioner to be an advocate for regional education.

"We look forward to future initiatives arising from actions proposed by the RRR Expert Group," Professor Bartlett said.

"RUN welcomes the \$3.4m of STEM initiatives announced in the budget to address the under-representation of women, including extending the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) initiative.

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“RUN excels in excellent and high impact science, technology, engineering, mathematics and health research, and our endeavours will benefit from the greater participation of women,” Professor Bartlett said.

Also included in the budget is the remission of HELP debts incurred for recognised teaching qualifications after teachers have been placed in very remote locations for four years (\$70.6m).

Additional measures include \$15.8m to help the government to better understand and support students across tertiary education by extending the Unique Student Identifier from VET to all higher education students; and \$2.5m to give students access to all of their higher education qualifications in a centralised digital learning repository.

Further, the government has provided significant new investment in the \$5b, ten-year investment plan for the Medical Research Future Fund.

A new skills package, Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow, will provide \$525.3 million over five years from 2018-19 to further improve the quality of the Vocational Education and Training system. The funding will establish a National Skills Commission; trial of 10 national training hubs supporting school-based vocational education in regions with high youth unemployment; and expand second chance learning in Language, Literacy and Numeracy and Digital skills.

“The investment in skills will benefit regional students,” Professor Bartlett said.

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