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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT ON DEMAND DRIVEN SYSTEM: MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR REGIONAL STUDENTS

In its report the Demand Driven University System: A Mixed Report Card, the Productivity Commission (PC) has found that the system has increased the number of university places, made progress on improving equity of access to university, and been transformative for many with good employment outcomes.

However, the Chair of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), Professor Helen Bartlett, said that, while the report provided some useful insights into the impact of the demand driven system on young people/school leavers, it did not provide the complete picture for students at regional universities.

“Around half the students at RUN institutions are mature age, and this group has not been included in the study which focuses on university participation by age 22 years. Many of our students are part-time, and take longer than 5 years to complete their degrees. Nonetheless, most finish and go on to have successful careers, largely in regional Australia” Professor Bartlett said.

“Regional universities must have the ability to grow places to allow more regional students to undertake higher education and close the gap in university attainment between the regions and cities.

“The PC report states that children growing up in regional or remote areas with the same academic ability as their metropolitan peers continue to be much less likely to attend university, and more needs to be done to improve their outcomes. The report also indicates that: schools need to better prepare young people for university, particularly regional and low SES students in addition to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes; more support is needed to help students to succeed while at university; and that regional students need more help in meeting the costs which are a barrier to university study.

“RUN universities are committed to improving student success and are implementing many programs to do so, but more resources are required to improve retention” Professor Bartlett said.

“We look forward to the recommendations of the Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education, due to report to the Minister for Education in late June, to help regional Australians achieve better educational outcomes”.

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