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REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES PROPOSE BOLD REFORMS FOR AUSTRALIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Regional Australians will benefit from a major recalibration of the nation's higher education landscape that will see far greater access to university facilities, qualifications, research and the hosting of international students, under bold policy reform put forward by the Regional University Network (RUN).

Executive Director Alec Webb said RUN's submission to the Commonwealth's Higher Education Accord Panel would signal the most dramatic and long overdue pivoting of tertiary policy towards the regions in Australia's history led by the development of a Universal Higher Education Service Obligation.

"RUN advocates for the Commonwealth to adopt a Universal Higher Education Service Obligation that recognises all Australians, regardless of postcodes or background, deserve access to the life changing benefits of higher education and enable regional universities to continue providing the life changing impacts of higher education.

"As a highly advanced economy, Australia can and must ensure regional Australians have comparable access to higher education opportunities, attainment, infrastructure, research, and globalised classrooms and the Universal Higher Education Service Obligation is vital to ensuring this occurs," said Mr Webb.

Regional Australia is diverse, complex, and bursting with potential, but it has been left behind by decades of 'one-size-fits-all' higher education policy that has been calibrated almost exclusively to the needs of metropolitan Australia, through rewarding institutions who can grow the largest in urban markets.

The one-third of Australia's population who live outside of major cities are less than half as likely to gain a bachelor's degree or higher qualification by the time they are 35 years old, compared to metropolitan citizens which has major impacts on regional workforces and critical skills shortages.

"RUN's bold policy reforms argue that modern Australia – including its regions – has now reached a threshold of prosperity and technological capability where it is now both viable and overdue for the access and opportunities of university studies to be equitably distributed to all citizens, not just those living within reach of major capital cities.

"It is simply not good enough for regional Australia to enter the second quarter of this century with tertiary attainment rates so far behind the OECD average, while metropolitan Australia sits so far in front of the OECD pack," said Mr Webb.

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RUN is advocating for a broad suite of targeted reforms as part of the Commonwealth's Accord process that seek to lift the participation and success rates of underrepresented groups – which includes regional and remote Australians – in our national higher education system and is also calling for a more balanced redistribution of other aspects of Australia's higher education system to regional Australia.

RUN's reform package includes:

- An uncapping of funded student places at regional universities, and an uncapping of funded enabling (preparatory) student places, to boost regional university attainment.
- Greater support funding for students from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Greater financial support to assist students with the cost of study and study placements.
- Policy changes that incentivise more international students to undertake study in Australia's regions.
- A more equitable calibration of research activity, research infrastructure and research-trained workforces for regional Australia.
- A research and workforce transition fund that seeks to build regional Australia's understanding of, and ability to respond to, the opportunities and challenges of the net zero energy transition.
- Greater support for university facilities and infrastructure (including digital and cyber security infrastructure) in regional Australia.

RUN's full submission can be accessed at [here](#).

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