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BUDGET DELIVERS REGIONAL PROMISE BUT FUNDING IS ALWAYS A DAY AWAY

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the cost of living and student support measures outlined in the 2023-24 Budget, but we are disappointed to see the cut in funding to the Regional Research Collaboration Program.

Executive Director of RUN, Mr Alec Webb, said that the measures outlined in the Budget demonstrate a welcomed commitment to assisting students in undertaking their studies.

“Increasing the base rate of working age and student payments for students on Youth Allowance, Austudy, and ABSTUDY will provide welcome relief to regional students looking to undertake, and complete, the life changing experience that a university education provides,” said Mr Webb.

Despite the positives for students, this budget did not provide the reassurance that regional universities and regional communities seek, with only allusions to the promised day of much needed funding while cutting program funding that was having meaningful impact on regional Australia.

“While the Budget unveiled the Regional Investment Framework which guides the Australian Government’s approach to the design and delivery of regional initiatives, the delivery of this framework has neglected the investment needs of regional universities and the communities they serve.

“Announced in the October 2022 Budget, the \$400 million regional Precincts and Partnerships Program remain sight unseen, and the \$600 million Growing Regions Program restricts universities from leading bids limiting the potential impact of the program,” said Mr Webb.

Most disappointing for Australia’s regions is the freezing of ongoing rounds in Regional Research Collaboration Program which was linking universities with regional businesses to solve real world challenges that matter to regional Australians while building workforce capability.

RUN universities, in a collaborative bid, were previously awarded \$3.7 million to partner with regional industry to build place-based research capacity to improve mental health in regional, rural, and remote Australia, an important endeavour that addresses a vital community need.

Other previously successful individual RUN university projects included: addressing the research of energy transition, the development of hydrogen applications for regional

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industries, and the development of a water engineering and river management hub.

“Projects funded under the Regional Research Collaboration Program were addressing the needs of regional Australia, creating more resilient local economies and communities, and enabling regional Australians to reach their full potential.

“It is disappointing to see the Regional Research Collaboration Program discontinued while the Budget refers to improving regional outcomes and investing in regional initiatives.

“Investment in regional Australia is an investment for the entire nation, and while the amount of this program may appear small, the multiplying effect of regional investment transforms communities, creates opportunities, and increases the prosperity of regional Australia.

“This Budget was strong on intent and big on promise for regional development, however in reality regional Australia continues to be viewed as tomorrow, with the much-needed investment remaining a day away,” said Mr Webb.

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