

JOBs AND SKILLS AUSTRALIA ROADMAP FOR REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

OCTOBER 2025





ABOUT THE REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES NETWORK

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) consultation process relating to phase one of the Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia (the Roadmap).

RUN is a national collaborative group of seven regional Australian universities: Charles Sturt University, CQUniversity Australia, Federation University Australia, Southern Cross University, University of New England, University of Southern Queensland, and the University of the Sunshine Coast.

This submission reflects the positions of RUN institutions, and in doing so, also aims to represent the views of the communities which RUN universities serve; the one-third of Australians who live outside of metropolitan centres in regional, rural and remote locations.

For further information please contact RUN on 0408 482 736 or info@run.edu.au.

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OVERVIEW

RUN is highly supportive of the scope and intent of the Roadmap and acknowledges the comprehensive and genuine consultation process that informed its development. The Roadmap is an important step forward in setting regional education and employment outcomes as a national interest imperative, and RUN looks forward to contributing to the ongoing direction and effectiveness of the roadmap and its objectives.

RUN believes that all Australians, regardless of background or geography, should have access to an equitable standard of post-secondary educational experiences, opportunities, facilities and research progression opportunities. Similarly, RUN believes that regional labour markets should have equitable access to pools of sustainable, highly-skilled, home-grown workforces.

Australia's regions have experienced high growth in recent years, with nearly four in ten Australians now living outside our largest capital cities in regional, rural or remote Australia. Despite the increasing demand amongst regional communities for highly skilled and educated workforces, regional Australians remain far less likely to obtain a university qualification, or drive national research and innovation priorities, compared to metropolitan Australians. Australia's regions host many high-performing, world class universities and regional Australians rely upon RUN's dispersed network of 38 campuses and 11,000+ staff to deliver essential university services to regional communities. RUN universities are major economic drivers to the local economies they serve, via skilled workforce development, applied research impact, and direct operating activity. The majority of RUN's staffing and expenditure occurs in the regions, for the regions.

RUN universities host the highest proportions of students from underrepresented backgrounds and continue to perform the sector's heavy lifting in terms of transforming underrepresented student cohorts into highly skilled regional workforces.

In 2023¹, RUN enrolled 12 per cent of all domestic students, yet enrolled:

- 25 per cent of all First Nations students
- 31 per cent of regional/rural/remote students
- 23 per cent all low socio-economic students
- 13 per cent of all students living with disability.

Over 70 per cent of RUN's graduates remain living and working in regional areas five years following graduation. RUN is proud that our graduates consistently record higher rates of employment, starting salaries, and satisfaction with their educational experience, than the national (all universities) average.

RUN universities stand ready to work alongside JSA, Government, industry, our communities, and other stakeholders to ensure the continued prosperity of Australia's regions. This submission reflects RUN's support of the JSA Roadmap, and outlines a series of practical, complimentary measures designed to strengthen the university services that regional Australians rely upon.

¹ Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2023 Student data, accessed at <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2023-student-data> on 22 September 2025.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Vision Principle of the Roadmap

RUN supports JSA's overarching vision of a jobs and skills system in regional Australia that is designed to help realise the aspirations of regional Australians. There is strong alignment between the inclusive nature of this overarching vision and the social missions that guide the operations of RUN universities. The five explicit principles that JSA has proposed to underpin the overarching vision enjoys the full support of RUN universities. The principles explicitly acknowledge the existence of barriers to education, training, and employment amongst regional Australians, while identifying the role of support mechanisms in skilling regional Australians for meaningful contributions to their local communities, economies, and cultures. Importantly, the principles also recognise the need for regional workers to access meaningful and fair employment opportunities, and for labour markets to have access to skilled workforces that meet labour demand. RUN believes that these principles provide an effective basic framework to guide the design of an effective regional jobs and skills system.

Evaluative Metrics and Roadmap Ratings

RUN believes that proposed evaluative metrics are heading in the right direction and has confidence that the metrics will continue to evolve over time to remain relevant to regional education and employment outcomes. As the Roadmap itself acknowledges, the indicators may not simply and fully capture each vision principle in its entirety, but they nonetheless provide a useful and important indication of the current state of the regional jobs and skills system. The use of the proposed traffic light rating system will inevitably make the consumption of Roadmap reporting a simpler and more accessible process for a wider group of stakeholders, which is welcomed by RUN.

Ten Policy Designs Principles

RUN considers the 10 Design Principles for the Jobs and Skills System in Regional Australia to be an incredibly effective and well-considered basis for the design of nuanced policy responses to regional contexts. Indeed, RUN would support the 10 policy design principles being utilised as a template for policy/decision makers across a broader range of regionally-facing reform opportunities. It is evident that the voices of regional stakeholders were heard during the consultation phase, and reflected within the 10 proposed design principles. RUN welcomes their inclusion in the Roadmap.

Roadmap as a Framework

RUN is very encouraged by the scope and intent JSA's Regional Roadmap, and the genuinely consultative process that informed its development. As such, RUN would have no hesitation in utilising the roadmap to inform its own strategic planning, or in recommending it to other regional stakeholders as a model framework worthy of consideration. RUN would encourage JSA (and others) to promote the framework as an exemplar model for the effective planning of other key matters or areas of policy where sensible, principled regional nuance and distinction is required.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Enhancing Skills and Jobs in Regional Australia

RUN believes JSA have been incredibly effective in bringing together a diverse range of key regional stakeholders, and in reflecting their distinct needs and issues, in the development of the JSA Regional Roadmap. Any opportunity to extend the collaborative momentum of this process would be welcomed and supported by RUN.

RUN also looks forward to working with relevant regional stakeholders in supporting opportunities and efforts to harmonise the vocational and higher education systems in regional Australia. RUN believes that a more harmonious post-schooling education system has the potential to enhance the education and employment outcomes of regional Australians. As such, RUN will continue to support JSA's work in building upon the outcomes of the 'Opportunity and Productivity: Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap' exercise.

Additional comments

RUN understands the importance of building upon the momentum of JSA's strategic review of, and planning for, regional Australia's unique employment and education landscape. In support of the scope and intent of the JSA Regional Roadmap, RUN would reiterate a range of specific opportunities that it believes would enhance the education/research opportunities and outcomes of regional Australians, and the universities that they rely upon.



COLLATERAL MATERIAL



REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING AND TEACHING OUTCOMES

RUN believes that the most realistic and effective suite of proposals that have potential to boost the tertiary outcomes of regional Australians today are contained within the recommendations of the Australian Universities Accord. The Australian Universities Accord found that the higher cost of regional education delivery, and the diseconomies of scale inherent in providing university services to regional Australians, were major compounding factors in the widening skills divide between metropolitan and regional communities. The Australian Universities Accord made a series of important recommendations that sought to address the various geographic imbalances of our current higher education system. RUN supports the multiple equity-driven initiatives of the Australian Universities Accord, and its long-term agenda to create a stronger, more accessible higher education sector for all Australians, regardless of location. As such, RUN supports the key Australian Universities Accord reforms of Needs-Based Funding, a system of Managed Growth, and student support mechanisms such as HECs/HELP indexation and Commonwealth Practicum Payments. The reforms advocated by the Australian Universities Accord, once fully and effectively implemented, would undoubtably strengthen the university learning and teaching services that regional Australians rely upon. It is important that political and legislative momentum for the implementation of key Australian Universities Accord recommendations remains a bipartisan priority, to enable an accelerated process of implementing its key recommendations.



REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING AND TEACHING OUTCOMES

STUDENT CASE STUDY - UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST

Jeshin Chetty-Sardar enrolled into a Bachelor of Computer Science at the University of the Sunshine Coast after high school. Unsure about his path at first, Jeshin was drawn in by UniSC's new Moreton Bay campus and the Early Offer Guarantee, which eased his transition by offering him a place before receiving final Year 12 marks.

While studying, Jeshin secured a 12-week industry-immersed internship with Dell, facilitated by his program coordinator. He worked on real product development in a remote team setting, applying skills in database design, project sprints, and project management - experiences that counted toward his degree and helped him see how his studies translate into future career work.

Thanks to UniSC's supportive lecturers, strong industry links, and flexible early-entry pathways, Jeshin feels confident about his future.



STUDENT CASE STUDY - FEDERATION UNIVERSITY

Alice Stewart had worked in a steady role for 15 years when a workplace restructure prompted her to take a leap of faith. Choosing redundancy over an unfulfilling promotion, she decided it was time to follow her passion for working with wood.



She enrolled in a Certificate II in Building Construction, Carpentry Pre-apprenticeship at Federation TAFE, where her enthusiasm and strong results earned her the EJT Tippett Outstanding Achievement Award (Vocational Student of the Year).

Alice began a carpentry apprenticeship but soon discovered her true passion lay in furniture restoration. After sharing her projects online, she was offered a role with a women-led upholstery and restoration business. She is completing a Certificate III in Cabinet Making, combining formal training with creative, hands-on work.

With the support of Federation TAFE, Alice has turned redundancy into opportunity - showing it's never too late to take the chance.

REGIONAL TERTIARY INFRASTRUCTURE

The Australian Universities Accord found that the distinct social missions of regional universities – typically characterised by their geographically dispersed campus networks servicing high rates of traditionally underrepresented student cohorts in low-density markets – leaves regional providers with considerably less capacity to build or improve their physical infrastructure. Specifically, the review found that the infrastructure needs of regional universities must be addressed, citing:

"Without adequate investment in new, maintained and replacement infrastructure, there will likely be an exacerbation of the existing financial pressures felt by regional universities as well as further erosion of student load in regional areas. To support overall system growth and greater participation of regional and remote students, the specific infrastructure needs of regional universities have to be addressed.... The Review has also heard of critical infrastructure needs that warrant consideration of direct and more urgent funding, including significant maintenance backlogs affecting regional universities and their ability to deliver and attract students, staff and research funding."²

No dedicated infrastructure funding pool has been available for over a decade, resulting in an accumulation of urgent, unmet infrastructure priorities for regional universities. This not only puts pressure on essential regional teaching/research infrastructure, but public facilities as well. RUN universities frequently host some of their community's few and only vital public facilities, such as community sports fields and infrastructure, business parks/start-up hubs, community health clinics, childcare services, emergency evacuation centres, and school STEM hubs.

RUN continues to propose the establishment of a dedicated Regional Education Infrastructure Fund (REIF). This resource would be designed to meet the immediate backlog of infrastructure needs faced by regional higher education providers, while enabling them to maintain an equitable standard of access to key tertiary infrastructure as that enjoyed by metropolitan Australians into the future. The REIF would accommodate and support the forecast growth in students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, as Australia moves towards the 2050 attainment targets of the Australian Universities Accord. The proposed REIF would be limited to regionally headquartered Australian Universities, and structured to meet three aspects of infrastructure recognised as being in greatest need by regional universities:

1. Education Infrastructure including health education infrastructure, clinical teaching laboratories, technical workshops, disability access upgrades, library and learning spaces, maintenance and refurbishment of existing facilities, and 'community-building' assets such as sporting and recreational amenities, domestic/international student accommodation etc.
2. Digital Infrastructure including enhanced support capabilities for online students, heightened cyber security provisions, updated systems and learning platforms, new hardware/software, digital disability and accessibility provisions, computer labs etc.
3. Research infrastructure including the research infrastructure and facilities required to maintain and expand the research capabilities and research-trained workforces required by regional Australian industries, economies and communities. This would help to diversify the concentration of Australia's sovereign research capabilities being increasingly confined to a small handful of metropolitan universities.

² Department of Education. (2024). Australian Universities Accord Final Report (page 268). Accessed via <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/final-report> on 22 September 2025.

REGIONAL RESEARCH

Australia's research and innovation landscape sees a disproportionate share of its capability becoming increasingly concentrated within a small handful of large metropolitan universities. Additionally, Australia's research funding and research-trained workforces are gravitating towards large urban centres. In an increasingly competitive and volatile global environment, this growing concentration of research talent and infrastructure represents a vulnerability in the diversity, accessibility, and culture of Australia's research ecosystem.

RUN universities host many highly successful and collaborative research clusters that are recognised as performing at, above, or well above world standard in many research areas vital to Australia's national interest. Regional university research efforts and their subsequent impacts are typically targeted and highly applied to the unique social, industrial, and cultural needs of their respective regions. Just as there is wholesale support for the benefits of national degree attainment rates to be more equitably shared amongst regional Australians, there too must be an equal focus on a more equitable distribution of Australia's research capabilities and research-trained workforces towards regional Australia.

RUN continues to propose the establishment of dedicated regional research schemes funded as part of the Commonwealth's research investments. This may include, for instance, a funding round (or rounds) of existing research grants processes set aside for regional universities, or additional dedicated research grant schemes undertaken by regional universities to enable a growth in regional research and innovation.



REGIONAL RESEARCH

RESEARCH CASE STUDY – CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

Rural and regional Australians face persistent health inequalities, with higher rates of chronic disease, limited access to services, and poorer outcomes for First Nations communities. These disparities threaten wellbeing, workforce sustainability, and the long-term vitality of regional economies.



Charles Sturt University's Rural and Regional Health Research Institute (RHRI) is tackling these challenges by generating evidence and co-designing solutions with local communities, health services, and Aboriginal organisations. Early projects address child development, ageing and aged care, mental health, and infectious disease burdens in disadvantaged areas. By embedding culturally safe governance and community partnerships, RHRI ensures research translates into practical improvements in service delivery.

Its focus on data-driven priorities strengthens policy impact and supports more equitable healthcare systems. This work positions RHRI as a world-class centre advancing health equity in rural and remote settings, with lessons that extend nationally and internationally to improve outcomes for underserved populations.

RESEARCH CASE STUDY – CQUNIVERSITY

Seagrass meadows are critical to marine biodiversity and carbon storage - but are vanishing due to coastal development and pollution. In Australia, their decline threatens reef health and the sustainability of the blue economy. Led by CQUniversity's Coastal Marine Ecosystems Research Centre (CMERC), researchers are developing practical seagrass restoration methods suited to urbanised estuaries, such as the Port of Gladstone. The project works with local industries and communities to trial nature-based solutions in sub-tropical, high-pressure environments. Seagrasses offer vital ecosystem services - from supporting fisheries to improving water quality - yet remain understudied and under-protected.

CMERC's research is helping regulators and developers apply evidence-based restoration and offsets with confidence. This work delivers critical insights for coastal restoration worldwide, protecting natural assets while supporting regional economies that depend on healthy marine ecosystems.



REGIONAL INTERNATIONALISATION AND MIGRATION

In an increasingly globalised world, Australia's continued prosperity depends on a citizenship who are informed and engaged members of the global community. Our regions connect Australia to the world by driving two-thirds of all national export wealth. Despite this, regional Australian university campuses lack the same degree of global experiences, opportunities, and perspective as that typically enjoyed by metropolitan university campuses.

Regional Australia's university campuses host just a small fraction of all international students studying in Australia each year, while nine out of every ten Australian students studying abroad on a New Colombo Plan (NCP) scholarship in 2024 came from a metropolitan university. This disparity poses significant vulnerabilities in regional Australia's ability to effectively engage with global opportunities from a position of real-world experience. Regional Australia has the capacity to grow the modest base of international students that it hosts without compromising regional rental vacancy rates via the utilisation of on-campus student accommodation. Regional Australian students also have an appetite for greater offshore student exchanges, when provided the appropriate supports. RUN continues to propose a Regional International Mobility Scheme: a four-year pilot program designed to support four important objectives linked to the global connectivity of regional university campuses via higher education exchange:

1. Supporting international students to study at the regional campuses of regional universities.

Regional universities experience additional barriers to the successful recruitment and settlement of international students to regional communities, and similarly, international students experience unique challenges while attempting to live, study and work outside of Australia's largest cities. International students often rely upon, for instance, robust nighttime economies, public transport linkages, international airport linkages, and diaspora migrant communities – found more readily in major capital cities – to support their successful study journeys.

Since the discontinuation of the Destination Australia program, there has been no funded mechanism to assist regional universities in their efforts to support international students towards regional study. Additionally, regional universities have experienced a disproportionate and ultimately unsustainable fall in international student enrolments since the pandemic, with recent international student enrolments at RUN universities being almost 60 percent smaller than in 2019. It is important that regional universities be allowed to return to sustainable, pre-pandemic levels of international enrolments. It is equally important to acknowledge the role played by the metropolitan campuses of regional universities in achieving a return to sustainable international enrolments. By itself, simply restricting the quantum of international students studying at metropolitan universities will not result in these cohorts opting to study in the regions instead – indeed, many of these students will simply bypass Australia altogether for a competitor country. Put simply: global students have a global choice in their study destination.

RUN acknowledges that a more nuanced, complimentary regional incentivisation scheme – including consideration of more attractive regional migration settings for international graduates of regional universities – would be a requirement for an effective redistribution of international students towards regional campuses. This component of the Regional International Mobility Scheme addresses the specific difficulties faced by the recruitment of international students to regional communities, and the challenges faced by international students living, working and studying outside of our largest capital

REGIONAL INTERNATIONALISATION AND MIGRATION

cities. It is envisaged that the four-year pilot would trial incentivised regional migration settings while making scholarships available to support the attraction and success of international students at regional university campuses, with an eligibility focus upon areas of study representing the highest regional workforce need.

2. *Promoting regional Australia as a world-class destination for higher education and research.*

This component of the Regional International Mobility Scheme aims to promote the world class study and research opportunities at our regional universities, while diversifying Australia's international student cohorts away from our largest capital cities. The development of promotional campaign collateral, designed to showcase the benefits of studying at regional locations to prospective international students, is supported by recommendation 22(b) from the Australian Universities Accord Final Report;

"...support the growth of international education in regional and remote areas, encouraging providers to communicate the benefits of studying and living in regional and remote Australia.³"

The promotional campaign would target prospective students within the Asia-Pacific region, particularly aligned to areas of study identified as being amongst the highest workforce need within the economies of regional Australian communities. The development of high-quality digital collateral promoting the benefits of studying and living in regional Australia would include adverts, case studies, student testimonials, and other digital campaign material. This would be made available to regional providers, their offshore partners, and university stakeholders to assist with the recruitment of international students to regional areas, and the promotion of aforementioned scholarships.

3. *Short-term offshore study opportunities for regional Australian students.*

This component of the Regional International Mobility Scheme aims to develop the global skills and perspectives, the language training, and the international networks of regional graduate workforces. There is a strong case for an overseas mobility program designed exclusively for regional student cohorts, given the failure of the current NCP to effectively engage students from regional Australia. The students of regional universities were awarded just 7.7 per cent of all NCP funding allocations in 2024, due largely to the NCP eligibility criteria being skewed towards the profiles of metropolitan student cohorts. For instance, age thresholds that favour the younger student cohorts found in cities, and longer minimum mobility durations and language preferences that discriminate against regional students who are more likely to come from a lower socio-economic background, and more likely to have had fewer opportunities to study foreign languages. It is envisaged that a regionally targeted mobility program would facilitate the allocation of scholarships, with criteria designed to better match the distinct needs and profiles of students studying at regional universities.

³ Department of Education. (2024). Australian Universities Accord Final Report. Accessed via <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/final-report> on 22 September 2025

REGIONAL INTERNATIONALISATION AND MIGRATION

4. *Developing migration settings to incentivise regional study and settlement of international students.*

Less than 20 per cent of Australia's (pre-pandemic) overseas arrivals settle in regional Australia annually, despite the regions now hosting almost 40 per cent of the nation's total population. RUN believes there is not just a strong case for regional Australia hosting a greater share of Australia's international student cohorts, but for regional Australia welcoming a greater proportion of those international students who choose to remain in Australia post-graduation. The diminished pipeline of domestically educated and qualified international graduates progressing into regional workforces puts regional economies at significant disadvantage. Previous migration policy recognised the acute need for international students and skilled graduates settling in regional Australia, and differential regional migration incentives were set accordingly. While this produced mixed outcomes in terms of realising policy objectives, it is imperative that Australia seek a better understanding of how regional differential policy can be best designed to incentivise a more equitable flow of international students to the regions, alongside incentives for international graduates to remain in the regions post-study. In 2024, RUN provided a series of practical recommendations to the Commonwealth's Review of the Points Test (Migration Strategy) designed to attract more international students to regional campuses, while incentivising regional post-study work rights for the international graduates of regional universities. These recommendations (provided here) should be considered as part of a broader review into the development of effective regional migration settings designed to attract more international students to study, and eventually settle, in regional areas.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUCCESS CASE STUDY – UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

Abinesh "Bobby" Narain, originally from Fiji, earned his Graduate Certificate in Management followed by an MBA (International Business) from the University of New England (UNE).

When a major cyclone devastated his homeland, Bobby was based in Sydney, where he ran a thriving communications-systems business for freight trains. Driven by his desire to give back, he transformed his factory into a makeshift depot – coordinating trucks, forklifts, pallets, donations, and dispatching eight shipping containers and 100 tonnes of emergency supplies via airfreight.

His leadership in this humanitarian relief earned him both a Campbelltown City

Council Australia Day Award and a UNE Alumni Achievement Award. Today, Bobby continues to lead as CEO and Director of Railway Radio Communications, demonstrating how UNE nurtures globally minded leaders rooted in values of generosity and impact.



REGIONAL INTERNATIONALISATION AND MIGRATION

INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDY – UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

Jin Hee, originally from South Korea, came to Australia to study a Bachelor of Business and Commerce at the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ).



While exploring UniSQ's Entrepreneurship and Innovation Program and the Start-Up Club, he discovered the world of start-ups – a completely new concept for him. Inspired to make life easier for his community, Jin Hee went on to launch HappyToo – Toowoomba's first-ever food delivery app – after graduation.

What started as a student idea quickly grew into a business that created jobs, supported local restaurants, and introduced new convenience for Toowoomba residents. Jin Hee credits UniSQ's supportive environment – from mentoring faculty to strong campus networks – for transforming his entrepreneurial dream into a real venture that continues to serve the local community.

INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDY – SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY

Arpan Baral, originally from Nepal, arrived in Australia in 2019 to study a Bachelor of Information Technology at Southern Cross University (SCU). Only months later, the pandemic struck, and with international borders closed, Arpan was unable to return home or see his family for more than three years.

Instead of letting isolation hold him back, Arpan found purpose in study, work, and building community. He balanced full-time study with part-time jobs in hospitality, while excelling academically and supporting fellow international students navigating the same challenges.

SCU's supportive environment – from caring lecturers to a strong international student network – gave him the resilience

and confidence to thrive despite adversity. Now a graduate, Arpan has secured full-time employment in IT and contributes to Australia's workforce and multicultural community.





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