



Regional Universities Network (RUN)

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities on the role of Government in the development of cities

Introduction

By promoting growth in new and transitioning sustainable regional cities and towns, Australia should achieve a more balanced, stronger and resilient national economy. Growing, sustainable regional cities enjoy strong economic, employment and population growth, and are often characterised by the presence of a regional university.

Regional universities are one of the largest, most visible assets in their regions. They make a fundamental contribution to Australia through their teaching and learning activities; research and innovation; and regional development and service functions. Regional universities help to educate their communities' future professional workforce and enhance the social and cultural amenity of their regions through the contributions of their students, staff and facilities.

Healthy, vibrant regional universities help to make healthy, vibrant regional cities and communities. Support for regional universities will help to promote regional development, attract private investment, new businesses, inward migration and a more diverse and resilient regional economy. Achieving more balanced growth will help to alleviate some of the pressure on our capital cities and their associated infrastructure. (It is estimated that growing congestion in the capital cities will cost Australians \$53 billion per annum by 2031¹.)

This submission outlines how the universities of the Regional Universities Network (RUN) are contributing to their regional cities and communities.

The contributions of RUN universities

RUN comprises six universities with headquarters in regional Australia: CQUniversity, Federation University Australia (Fed Uni), Southern Cross University (SCU), the University of New England (UNE), the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), and the University of the Sunshine Coast

¹ Infrastructure Australia Audit, 2015.

(USC). RUN universities play a key role, educating over 112,000 students², employing more than 7,300 staff³, and managing annual revenues of \$1.7 billion and combined assets of \$3.6 billion⁴. They deliver services through more than 60 campuses and learning centres, encompassing all states except Tasmania. They are among the leading employers in their communities.

RUN universities are comprehensive institutions that offer a diverse range of teaching and learning programs, undertake research and innovation, and serve their communities. They have made strategic decisions to invest in those areas of education and research that resonate with the needs of their regions and which enable them to make strong contributions to regional development. RUN universities recognise the importance of translating research outputs to benefit Australians. Much of the research undertaken at RUN universities is applied and is performed in close partnership with the users of the research. They make a fundamental contribution to regional innovation.⁵ Two RUN universities have innovation centres or technology parks which host a large number of employers.

RUN universities play an important role in helping to address the significant gap in educational attainment that exists between Australia's major cities and its regions. Educational attainment has been improving across Australia but the proportion of young, working age people with a bachelors' degree or higher, living in regional or remote Australia, remains at about half that for people of a comparable age living in major cities.

This differential has economic and social consequences for individuals and their communities. Individuals and communities with comparatively poor educational outcomes typically have fewer employment opportunities, lower incomes, and poorer health outcomes. Much of Australia's employment growth is occurring in highly skilled jobs in fields such as health care and social assistance; education and training; and professional, scientific and technical services. Many of these jobs are dispersed across Australia's major cities and regions, and require higher education qualifications.

RUN universities are helping to improve educational attainment and opportunities, helping to train regional Australia's future professionals, and enabling regional industries to diversify and grow. Sixty to eighty percent of RUN graduates are employed in regional Australia within months of graduating. By contrast, students who leave their communities to take up university studies in major cities are much less likely to return upon graduating.

RUN universities are significant distance education providers, providing students who would otherwise be unable to participate in on-campus study with the opportunity to pursue university studies in a flexible manner that accommodates their family, work and other commitments. RUN universities are also leaders in mature age and professional education, providing opportunities for life-long learning and enabling graduates to respond to changing skills needs in the workplace.

Regional universities diversify and strengthen their regional economies. They are a great "value add" industry and encourage the development and economic growth outside capital cities. A report

² Department of Education and Training, 2016, Selected Higher Education Student Statistics, 2015

³ Department of Education and Training, 2016, Selected Higher Education Staff Statistics, 2016

⁴ Department of Education and Training, 2016, *Finance 2015, Financial Reports of Higher Education Providers*

⁵ RUN, 2015, *RUN research, regionally embedded, globally engaged*. Available from http://www.run.edu.au/resources/Research_Brochure_2015.pdf.

by Cadence Economics for Universities Australia has estimated that for every 1,000 university graduates entering the workforce 120 new jobs are created for people without a university degree.⁶ Regional universities therefore boost regional employment more broadly than just through their graduates.

Government needs to support regional research which will produce start-up companies, new technologies and new processes to improve productivity. It is only when a university is seen to be at the forefront of development, commonly in niche areas, that the best people are attracted to the regions. Currently, investment is focussed on large, well established capital city universities. Unless we see a policy shift this will continue, and skilled people will be lost from or will not be attracted to regional universities and regional cities.

⁶ Cadence Economics, 2016, *The Graduate Effect: Higher Education Spillovers to the Australian Workforce*. Report for Universities Australia. Available from <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/Media-and-Events/commissioned-studies/The-graduate-effect--higher-education-spillovers-to-the-Australian-workforce>