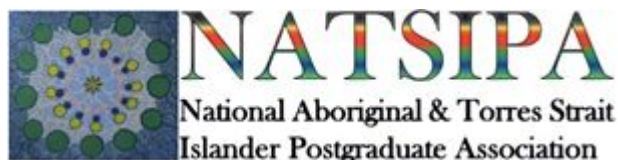


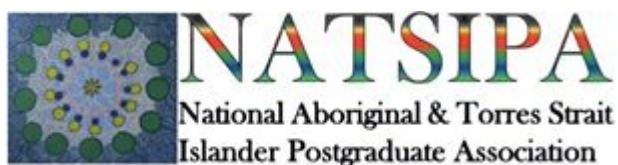


## **Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)**

### **Submission to Inquiry on ‘Education in Remote and Complex Environments’**



February 2020



Compiled with the assistance of the staff and office bearers  
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## Foreword

This is a joint submission of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association (NATSIPA).

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) is the peak body representing the interests of the over 455,000 postgraduate students in Australia. We represent coursework and research, as well as domestic and international, postgraduates. We are comprised of 28 university and campus based postgraduate associations, as well as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association (NATSIPA). CAPA carries out its mission through policy, research, and activism, communicating the interests and issues of postgraduate students to higher education stakeholders as well as Federal and State Governments, Opposition parties, and minor parties.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association (NATSIPA) is the peak representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate students, representing almost 650 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students and over 2200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate coursework students.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education, and Training's Inquiry on Education in Remote and Complex Environments. Our submission focuses on the education of students in/from rural, regional, and remote communities and the role of culture, family, community, and country in delivering better outcomes. We do so particularly in relation to HDR and coursework postgraduates attending regional campuses or those from—or externally enrolled from—rural, regional, and remote areas. We focus especially on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduates and those from equity groups. We recommend a number of measures relating to selected terms of reference. Specifically, we argue there is an urgent need to:

1. Provide adequate income support for HDRs and coursework postgraduates.
2. Make the higher education relocation scholarship (for those moving to/from a regional/remote area) accessible to all those receiving Austudy and domestic postgraduates.
3. Require at least 50% of Student Services and Amenities Fees (SSAF) be received by independent student associations.
4. Extend public transport student concession fares to all full-time students.
5. Improve mental health services, including for off-campus and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
6. Support 'grow your own' initiatives to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to conduct research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, extend Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) funding to HDR students, and provide four-year stipends of at least minimum wage for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctoral students.

## **Postgraduates From and Studying in Remote and Complex Environments**

Within the Australian higher education sector, there has been a great deal of discussion around the importance of university participation and completion rates, including among six groups reported in the Australian government's higher education statistics: NESB students; those with a disability; women in non-traditional areas; Indigenous students; students from low SES locations; and those from regional and remote locations.

National research has focused largely on undergraduates, however, with Department of Education figures (2019a) revealing that certain groups are less likely to participate and be awarded their degrees. This includes a number of the groups this Inquiry concerns: students studying externally, those coming from or enrolled in regional areas, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (see also Devlin & McKay 2017; Li & Carroll 2017).

There is limited data on these postgraduates, and indeed few policy initiatives focusing on inequalities among postgraduates in Australia and internationally (Gonski Institute for Education n.d.). Gale and Parker (2013), for instance, note how little data there is on postgraduates from the aforementioned six groups, yet the available data shows that postgraduate equity students are more likely to experience inequities than undergraduates (Gonski Institute for Education n.d.). Back in 2010, Australia's Group of Eight (2010) universities called for widening participation in postgraduate education, so as to meet Australia's future workforce requirements and secure the nation's position in the global knowledge economy. The Gonski Institute for Education (n.d.) suggests that the cost of postgraduate study plays a role, as government loans, at their maximum thresholds, are often inadequate to cover the cost of postgraduate study, especially degrees like law and medicine.

Nonetheless, Grant-Smith and Mayes (2019) found that over two fifths of Australia's domestic postgraduates fall into at least one equity group, with a large number of students belonging to more than one group. A relatively high proportion of these, 18%, are from regional and remote areas. Yet only 1% identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. It is also important to focus on students' retention and pathways following higher education.

In responding to this Inquiry, it is important to examine regional universities as well as students from/in remote and complex environments. Not only do these institutions have far higher proportions of equity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, they also undertake research and teaching on issues of great importance to those in rural, regional, and remote (RRR) areas, as well as having national and international significance. This includes world-leading research on agriculture, marine environments, health and social services in remote areas, and bushfires, all of which draw on local resources and environments. For instance, Charles Sturt University's program on wine provides unique education and outcomes for the Australian wine industry. Students studying in regional universities also are also more likely to find employment in those areas, improving local skills and quality of life.

## Barriers to Postgraduate Education

Terms of Reference 2: **Key barriers to the education journey, including the effects of environmental factors such as drought on families and communities.**

There are a number of barriers to postgraduate, as well as undergraduate, higher education that are relevant to this Inquiry. Most relevant are the barriers commonly faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, low SES, and regional and remote students, all of whom attend regional campuses or study remotely at higher rates. We include a separate section in this submission relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Research consistently shows that such students face major barriers in their postgraduate studies. These issues have been the subject of a major study of HDR non-completions undertaken by CAPA and the Regional Universities Network (RUN), with findings to be published later in 2020. Previous work shows that common barriers for students at regional campuses include:

### ❖ **Lack of financial resources and support**

Research has consistently shown that postgraduate students lack financial resources and access to income support, and that this has a negative impact on student equity and outcomes (Devlin & McKay 2017; DoE 2019a; Li & Carroll 2017). In previous submissions and reports, we have argued that the Research Training Program (RTP) stipends for HDRs should be universally accessible and set at the minimum wage, and that all postgraduate coursework students should have universal access to income support through Centrelink schemes, subject to means testing. However, only 37% of HDR students hold a directly government-funded stipends, and only 28% of postgraduate courses are eligible to receive Austudy and related payments (CAPA 2018). Processes for awarding RTP scholarships are highly inequitable, with competitive selection processes prioritising students who have achieved research publications or completed Masters degrees. This results in RTP stipends being less attainable for students who have had less opportunity to publish or cannot not afford Masters-level study. Failure to obtain a living stipend or income support regularly results in students being unable to commence and complete their degrees.

Financial hardship is a particular issue for RRR students in higher education (Wilson, Lyons, & Quinn 2013). These students have higher expenses and are less likely to receive financial support from their family or partner compared to students in metropolitan areas (UA 2018). In fact, 38% of regional students have expenses exceeding their income (UA 2018). Higher expenses may partially result from an increased need to relocate for university study, with 57% of regional students relocating (compared to 27% of metropolitan ones) (Baik, Naylor, & Arkoudis 2015). Regional students are also nearly twice as likely to report that their finances cause frequent stress, and, of students who were considering withdrawing, 54% reported financial pressures (Baik, Naylor, & Arkoudis 2015).

Those residing in RRR areas likewise often have very limited local employment opportunities, or need to travel long distances to work. In many cases, regional universities

are the main employers in their local areas, with few opportunities elsewhere. Following postgraduates' studies, there may be a lack of local work opportunities, which deters students from commencing studies if they hope to remain in the area (Relf et al. 2018).

#### ❖ **Relocation or travel into or out of RRR areas**

RRR students, including postgraduates, also experience financial and practical barriers relating to relocation or travel. Recent research by Bronwyn Relf and colleagues (2018) has found that, among regional and remote university students, distance remains a barrier to student participation and engagement. This includes the financial costs of transport, especially where reliable and cheap public transportation is not readily available, as well as time lost to lengthy commutes. Students also reported finding travel difficult for other reasons, for instance, due to unsafe and unpredictable weather conditions in areas across Tasmania (Relf et al. 2018). Moreover, as outlined above, RRR students are often required to move in order to attend universities, which places an additional financial burden on them.

CAPA's member organisations in regional centres like Newcastle, Wollongong and Lismore, regularly inform us that the cost of public transport is a significant financial strain on students. For RRR students, the lack of public transport concessions greatly restricts their ability to travel within their State. For example, in Victoria, V-Line services into suburban or urban areas cost up to \$46.76 per day (PTV 2019).

#### ❖ **Carer or domestic responsibilities**

Postgraduate students tend to be older, and thus more likely to be caring for children, elderly parents, or other dependents than their undergraduate counterparts. In fact, Universities Australia's (2018) research finds that regional students and low SES students are even more likely than others to be supporting dependents. A 2015 survey also found that the average age of Australian postgraduates was 33 years, around the same age that men and women typically have children (Sheedy 2015). In regional universities, those enrolled are more likely to be mature aged. Research shows that mature-aged students are subsequently less likely to complete their degrees (Department of Education 2017; Devlin & McKay 2017; Li & Carroll 2017).

International studies further suggest that postgraduates are more likely to be responsible for their own and others' finances (Crane et al. 2016; Li & Carroll 2017; Litalien & Guay 2015). This points to the inadequacy of current RTP scholarships in particular, which assume that those studying are young, unencumbered, and without any financial dependents.

#### ❖ **External or part-time study**

There are also limitations in the ways that RRR university students are able to study. Department of Education (2017, 2019a, 2019b) figures reveal that students studying externally and part-time are less likely to complete their degrees, and that these kinds of enrolments are much more common within regional universities and among RRR students (see also Baik, Naylor, & Arkoudis 2015). Students may undertake part-time or external study for a variety of reasons, including the need to provide care or financial support for

family and dependents, or due to difficulties accessing campus environments relating to time, distance, or geography.

#### ❖ **Health or mental health difficulties**

Health and mental health difficulties have also been found to impact students' participation and completion. The student mental health crisis has received a growing amount of attention, and postgraduate students are at high risk of experiencing psychological distress, often exacerbated by financial strain (Barry et al. 2018; Levecquea et al. 2017).

### **Supporting Educational Outcomes in Remote and Complex Environments**

**Terms of Reference 5: Effective government initiatives, past and present, that support remote communities to enable greater educational outcomes, including those that have improved attainment in literacy and numeracy.**

In 2018, there were more than 10,000 HDR students at regional universities and more than 30,000 postgraduates from RRR areas (DoE 2019b), greatly contributing to universities' research outputs and positively impacting local communities. Given that research demonstrates that students who study in rural areas are more likely to be employed there later (Shires et al. 2015), it is essential that any strategy to improve educational outcomes among RRR students and in regional universities consists of proposals to attract, nurture, and retain university and postgraduate students. Below we highlight a number of successful government schemes, and point to where they might be improved:

#### ❖ **Research Training Program (RTP) income support for HDR students**

Research Training Program (RTP) scholarships—and the cost-of-living stipends they provide—were initially designed to improve access to higher education and produce more university graduates, preventing low-income students from withdrawing for financial reasons (Daniels 2017). Yet levels of income support have stagnated in recent years, with HDR scholarships going to only a third of commencing domestic students, as outlined above.

Other common problems include the competitive nature of HDR scholarships—advantaging those with prior research attainments who tend to be financially better off—as well as current federal funding rules allowing universities to offer scholarships shorter than the full length of students' candidatures, and at a minimum rate that falls well below the national minimum wage. Indeed, current government guidelines allow universities to provide stipends of *up to 2 years* for Masters by Research students and *3 to 4 years* for PhD students (CAPA 2018).

More than a decade ago, the National Innovation System Review recommended that the Government increase the value of stipends and extend the length of all PhD stipends to four years (Cutler 2008). The Review suggested that this was necessary to 'address this decline in real value and to raise the amount to a level which allows a more reasonable standard of living for recipients' as well as 'to provide greater incentives for high-achieving graduates to consider a research career' (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 85).

Despite this, very little has changed since 2008. While in 2020 Higher Education Providers are allowed to provide stipends of up to \$43,885 per annum, the base rate is \$28,092, with a very small increase of around \$500 per year (DESE 2020). Due to the funding model of the RTP, universities are incentivised to supply the minimum rate and duration, as doing otherwise reduces the number of stipends available. Most offer PhD stipends close to the minimum rate and for 3 to 3.5 years only.

We suggest a number of ways that HDR income support might be improved, that would result in more equitable outcomes for RRR postgraduates and those attending regional universities:

**Recommendation 1: That RTP or equivalent value stipends be made available to all HDR students.**

**Recommendation 2: That RTP PhD stipends be extended to a minimum of 4 years and Masters by Research stipends to no less than 2 years.**

**Recommendation 3: That the minimum value of RTP stipends be increased to at least minimum wage.**

#### ❖ **Centrelink income support for postgraduate coursework students**

Centrelink income support payments for students (including Austudy, ABSTUDY, and Youth Allowance) were likewise designed to improve access, graduate numbers, and achieve more equitable outcomes in education (Daniels 2017). The urgent need for improved tertiary student income support has been raised many times in recent years, and in 2008 the Final Report of the Review of Australian Higher Education—the Bradley Review—noted that:

Current levels of income support are inadequate to support the participation and success of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Reforms to, and better targeting of, income support should enable such students to attain better qualifications in a more timely fashion and are urgently required (Bradley et al. 2008, p. xv).

A recommendation of the Review was that all students enrolled in Masters coursework programs become eligible to receive income support through Centrelink, an initiative then costed at \$186 million (Bradley et al. 2008). More recently, the expansion of income support to all full-time postgraduate students (both coursework and HDR students) has been costed at \$572 million per year over 10 years by the Australian Greens (2018). We recommend the following:

**Recommendation 4: That Centrelink schemes be expanded to include domestic students of all postgraduate coursework degrees (subject to means testing).**

**Recommendation 5: That, where not otherwise covered by an RTP or equivalent stipend (e.g., due to expiration of stipend), all full-time, domestic HDR students be eligible to access Centrelink schemes (subject to means testing).**



While extending Centrelink eligibility is essential in improving access to postgraduate education, another issue is that the current value of income support is inadequate for students, especially those who need to relocate to complete their studies or move large distances to/from RRR areas.

Income support overall is increasingly acknowledged to be insufficient, and there has been a widespread and bipartisan call to raise Newstart payments, the maximum rate of which is slightly higher than both Youth Allowance and Austudy (Harris 2019). In September 2019, the maximum annual Austudy payment available for a single person without children was \$14,381, less than half the minimum wage (DHS 2019). This is wholly inadequate to cover the basic costs of living of students who are reliant on these payments. The cost of university supplied accommodation alone regularly exceeds the Austudy rate, forcing students to rely on other forms of income or family support.

**Recommendation 6: That the Relocation Scholarship, available to those moving to/from a regional/remote area for higher education study, be expanded to include all those receiving Austudy, domestic students of all postgraduate coursework degrees (subject to means testing), and all full-time, domestic HDR students.**

**Recommendation 7: That the rate of Austudy, ABSTUDY, and Youth Allowance be urgently increased by \$75 per week in order to help students afford housing.**

**Terms of Reference 6: Innovative approaches to workforce, including recruitment, professional learning, retention and support, and lessons from communities that could be more generally applied.**

Strong and well-resourced university communities are essential for RRR students, those at regional campuses, and those studying externally or online. Below we highlight a number of successful university, State, and local schemes and resources, and point to where they might be improved:

#### ❖ **Fostering campus culture: SSAF**

Campus communities help new students to feel at home and develop social support networks in their new locales. University-supported, peer-based networks provide unique support for students as they have a lower entry barrier than institutionalised support systems. In most universities, these peer-support networks are formed around university clubs and societies, usually managed by student unions or associations.

Student organisations rely on the university-collected Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF). The ability of student organisations to provide a vibrant on-campus experience and strong social support is thus strongly tied to the amount of SSAF allocated to them by university management. While a 50% minimum allocation of SSAF to student organisations

at public universities is mandated by legislation in Western Australia, there is no minimum legislated allocation in any other State.

The introduction of the WA law, and the increased investment it produced, resulted in a rapid increase in student community activities and support services (CAPA 2019). In other States, university management is free to allocate SSAF as they see fit. Given the demonstrable benefits of investing in student organisations, and particular risks to RRR students and regional universities, increased investment in student organisations will result in an improved student experience and reduced non-completions among these cohorts. These students are less likely to enjoy their first year of study and are more likely to consider dropping out during that time (Wilson, Lyons, & Quinn 2013). Strong student organisations assist students to feel connected to the community and enjoy their university experiences.

Most student organisations, particularly postgraduate ones, are forced to operate on a pittance. In 2018, CAPA found that independent postgraduate associations operate with an average of \$61 per head: only 20% of the maximum SSAF collected from these students (CAPA 2019). Some regional postgraduate associations operate on far less, for example, the Wollongong University Postgraduate Association receives only \$3.50 per student. Moreover, most universities lack independent postgraduate associations, and again this is especially the case in RRR universities, where only four out of 15 have postgraduate associations (see Appendix 1). Others have absorbed postgraduate representation into their undergraduate associations, or lack an independent student association entirely.

**Recommendation 8: That the Commonwealth Government implements legislation requiring at least 50% of Student Services and Amenities Fees be received by independent student associations.**

#### ❖ **Public transport at regional universities**

Across many States and Territories, students have access to public transport concessions. There is an opportunity to reduce postgraduate and international students' living costs by allowing access to public transport concession fares in *all States*. In Victoria, postgraduate students are excluded from student concession fares, while in New South Wales international students cannot access concession fares. CAPA has estimated that it would cost NSW a maximum of \$168.6 million per year to extend concession fares to international higher education students, noting that in 2018 international students bring \$13 billion—nearly 100 times this amount—into the NSW economy (CAPA 2019). It has been estimated that extending public transport concessions to postgraduate students in Victoria would cost a maximum of \$10 million per year (GSA 2018).

As outlined previously, the cost of public transport is a major concern for regional universities' student associations. For example, in Victoria, V-Line services into suburban or urban areas cost up to \$46.76 per day (PTV 2019). Extending concessions to all full-time students would halve this cost, enabling students to travel to other University campuses, meetings, and RRR research sites. This would particularly impact students commuting to campuses in regional areas. With many regional universities in NSW, Federation University

in Victoria, and James Cook University in Queensland, extending public transport to all students would provide much needed financial relief.

Extending public transport concessions would support students to move within their States for research and education. It is important that the Victorian and NSW state governments implement concession fares on their respective public transport networks for all postgraduates. Implementing this at the Federal level would enable concession fares across State boundaries, which would be particularly beneficial to HDRs travelling interstate for fieldwork and conferences.

**Recommendation 9: That student concession fares be extended to all full-time students, including international and postgraduate students, in New South Wales and Victoria.**

**Recommendation 10: That a national public transport concession scheme be implemented such that all tertiary students can access concession fares in all States.**

#### ❖ Mental health schemes

As outlined above, student finances and other structural factors have a significant impact on students' mental health. Universities and the Government must allocate resources—including for remote and external students—to support students' mental health and prevent, address, and accommodate any risks. Policies need to address the structural issues that contribute to poor mental health, including a lack of income support, isolating departmental cultures or external study, understaffing resulting in academic staff overwork, narrow HDR completion timeframes, and poor employment prospects.

**Recommendation 11: That the number of Medicare subsidised psychologist sessions available under mental health care plans be extended from a maximum of 10 to a maximum of 12, for all mental health conditions that are currently subject to the 10 session cap and extended to 15 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.**

**Recommendation 12: That universities increase the number of available counselling sessions at campuses with long waiting lists, and make remote counselling available for off-campus students.**

**Recommendation 13: That universities ensure availability of counsellors trained or experienced in working with LGBTQIA+ students, international students, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.**

### **NATSIPA and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduates**

Terms of Reference 3: **The role of culture and country in learning.**

Regional universities have a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This stems from the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples want to stay on country and close to family and kin. Collectively, the RRR universities have 44% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments in Australian higher education institutions (DET 2018). Success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and for RRR universities more generally, is not just about completion rates or attainment of research funding. Educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples increase self determination, and provide significant financial and social opportunities in remote communities that would not otherwise be available. RRR universities assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to remain on country thereby giving back to their communities.

Research into the health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is primarily undertaken in a university setting, however, not always by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. RRR universities provide education that leads to increased employment. It is vital that RRR universities are funded to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have adequate support to ensure success. Many RRR universities consider it a priority to increase their teaching and research capacity for and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, often outlined in a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). In order to be effective, RAPs must be underpinned by concrete commitments and actions. Mechanisms include employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to provide support, ensuring that the employment targets recommended by Universities Australia and in National Tertiary Education Union enterprise agreements are taken seriously by universities.

With regional universities, attracting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander undergraduate students than their metropolitan counterparts, is essential to initiate and expand ‘grow your own’ initiatives, in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are mentored to progress from undergraduate to HDR study, and then from HDR study to academic research. This creates a pipeline of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics. RRR universities have a strong advantage within ‘grow your own’ initiatives, with RRR students preferring institutions within, or near, their own communities. This provides an opportunity to create a workforce of dedicated researchers embedded within local communities. We note that Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) funding is not available to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR students, and therefore this cohort is significantly disadvantaged as there are few mentors available to assist with progression. ISSP funding needs to be extended to provide support in this area.

These initiatives need to start at the beginning of the educational journey, with alternative pathways into higher education essential to both RRR and metropolitan communities. Alternative pathways set students up to achieve and succeed within higher education. Once in university, the establishment of mentoring programs that support research-directed students allows for growth in research expertise and workforce. There is a need for universities to offer pathways to HDR degrees that are both alternative and accessible. Current alternative pathways programs are often not fit-for-purpose or accessible in practice. Such programs

could be made more accessible by reducing the bureaucratic burden on applicants and by providing ongoing funding to support students to completion. Some HDR programs place unrealistic deadlines on students, for example, a three-year contract to teach, be a research assistant, and complete a PhD. This model makes it impossible to complete in the time allocated, and sets up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for failure. This also relates to our earlier point about insufficient income support for postgraduates.

To genuinely engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within research and through research practices, RRR universities need to invest in this capacity building and supportive initiatives that allow for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers (HDR, early career, and senior) to be the lead researchers and chief investigators on all research that has an Indigenous focus. To place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers as only the ‘cultural experts’ or research assistants, a practice that sadly happens all too often, diminishes the expertise, both academic and cultural, researchers bring to their field. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics/researchers are intrinsically part of their communities and the communities in which RRR universities are situated. Acknowledging and respecting the expertise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students bring to research, and to universities as a whole, embeds RRR institutions into communities and fosters a culturally competent learning and research environment. Capacity building and acknowledging expertise within the institution should also be extended to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in which RRR universities reside. We note that the ARC and some universities provide funding to non-Indigenous researchers to investigate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, harking back to a colonial model of research. This can result in the performance of culturally inappropriate research. We encourage universities to instead fund research conducted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused, community-lead research sadly has a history within higher education institutions as being seen as not as academically rigorous or not having the ability to attract large research funds. Because of these assumptions, many local community-driven research projects, often led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and local government/organisation funded, are often qualified in institutions as ‘consultations’. This is hugely problematic and discourages researchers from taking on this type of research activity. Consultation funds are often almost entirely (80-90%) absorbed into the university, for a variety of reasons, leaving researchers with very little financial benefit for undertaking this work. This in turn leaves researchers without the ability to present this work within their broader academic field, fund field trips, provide community requested resource materials, or offer amenities to community.

RRR universities need to create frameworks that ensure community-led research is framed, funded, and managed the same way as any other research activities. Respectfully acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs and researcher strengths ensures that institutions become valuable members of the community. Creating

strong local links by acknowledging and investing within community not only builds research capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers but also increases studying enrolment, retention, and completion as the University becomes a less alien space. Engaging the community through community-lead research empowers the community themselves. Creating a respectful partnership between community and university research does not simply mean to ‘observe practice’ or write about Indigenous knowledges, but needs to be developed in partnership with communities, conducted in a culturally competent way, and be for the benefit of the community as defined by them. This partnership process creates long-lasting and strong engagement.

**Recommendation 14: That RRR universities continue to support ‘grow your own’ initiatives to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics.**

**Recommendation 15: That RRR universities fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to conduct research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.**

**Recommendation 16: That the Government extends Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) funding to HDR students.**

**Recommendation 17: That universities provide four-year stipends of at least minimum wage for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctoral students.**

## Recommendations

We believe that our joint recommendations will allow the Australian Government to truly put “regional and rural students at the centre of [their] focus” (Dan Tehan, 2020 Universities Australia Conference). Our submission particularly focuses on students in/from RRR communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and regional university students. Our recommendations may be summarised as follows:

1. That RTP or equivalent value stipends be made available to all HDR students.
2. That RTP PhD stipends be extended to a minimum of 4 years and Masters by Research stipends to no less than 2 years.
3. That the minimum value of RTP stipends be increased to at least minimum wage.
4. That Centrelink schemes be expanded to include domestic students of all postgraduate coursework degrees (subject to means testing).
5. That, where not otherwise covered by an RTP or equivalent stipend (e.g., due to expiration of stipend), all full-time, domestic HDR students be eligible to access Centrelink schemes (subject to means testing).
6. That the Relocation Scholarship, available to those moving to/from a regional/remote area for higher education study, be expanded to include all those receiving Austudy, domestic students of all postgraduate coursework degrees (subject to means testing), and all full-time, domestic HDR students.

7. That the rate of Austudy, ABSTUDY, and Youth Allowance be urgently increased by \$75 per week in order to help students afford housing.
8. That the Commonwealth Government implements legislation requiring at least 50% of Student Services and Amenities Fees be received by independent student associations.
9. That student concession fares be extended to all full-time students, including international and postgraduate students, in New South Wales and Victoria.
10. That a national public transport concession scheme be implemented such that all tertiary students can access concession fares in all States.
11. That the number of Medicare subsidised psychologist sessions available under mental health care plans be extended from a maximum of 10 to a maximum of 12, for all mental health conditions that are currently subject to the 10 session cap.
12. That universities increase the number of available counselling sessions at campuses with long waiting lists, and make remote counselling available for off-campus students.
13. That universities ensure availability of counsellors trained or experienced in working with LGBTQIA+ students, international students, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
14. That RRR universities continue to support 'grow your own' initiatives to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics.
15. That RRR universities fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to conduct research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.
16. That the Government extends Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) funding to HDR students.
17. That universities provide four-year stipends of at least minimum wage for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctoral students.

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## Appendix 1: Selected Features of RRR Universities (as at October 2019)

| Name of institution                                  | Regional Universities Network (RUN) | Independent postgraduate association | Number of HDR students |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education |                                     |                                      | 18                     |
| Bond University                                      |                                     |                                      | 230                    |
| Central Queensland University                        | Y                                   |                                      | 406                    |
| Charles Darwin University                            |                                     |                                      | 309                    |
| Charles Sturt University                             | Y                                   |                                      | 524                    |
| Edith Cowan University                               |                                     |                                      | 742                    |
| Federation University Australia                      | Y                                   |                                      | 329                    |
| James Cook University                                |                                     |                                      | 837                    |
| Southern Cross University                            | Y                                   | Y                                    | 330                    |
| The University of New England                        | Y                                   |                                      | 728                    |
| The University of Newcastle                          |                                     | Y                                    | 1870                   |
| University of Southern Queensland                    | Y                                   |                                      | 751                    |
| University of Tasmania                               |                                     |                                      | 1617                   |
| University of the Sunshine Coast                     | Y                                   | Y                                    | 395                    |
| University of Wollongong                             |                                     | Y                                    | 1672                   |