

Professor Pip Pattison AO

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)
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Friday, 15 March 2019

The Hon Dr Denis Napthine
Chair, Expert Advisory Group
National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy
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Dear Dr Napthine,

The Expert Advisory's Group Six Issues Papers regarding the development of a Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy

The University of Sydney welcomes the opportunity to continue being part of this important discussion to develop a National Education Strategy for Regional, Rural and Remote Australia. While we are metropolitan-based, we are very committed to supporting regional and remote Australia and to advancing educational opportunities for students from these areas. As we stressed in our initial submission to the Review, we have longstanding educational and research activities in regional NSW and believe that for any RRR Strategy to be successful it will need to be based on strong partnerships between RRR and metropolitan education providers and other organisations.

We have noted the recent release by the Review of its six Issues Papers outlining key possible areas for action to address the challenges facing tertiary education in RRR areas. We were pleased to see the considerable alignment emerging through these papers and priority areas we (with other stakeholders) identified in the initial round of submissions. For example, key areas of alignment include:

- Confirmation of the need for close monitoring of outcomes of the Regional Study Hubs program to determine enhancements and or potential expansion.
- Confirmation of the potential value of expanding the Regional Study Hub Program.
- Acknowledgement of the importance of student support services, especially for RRR students who need to relocate to major regional or metropolitan areas to pursue their studies.
- Recognition of the importance of improving access to suitable and affordable accommodation for students from RRR Australia as this remains one of the key barriers to them achieving educational equality.
- The commitment to explore options to improve access to financial support for RRR learners. We note, however, that the funding question for this suggestion remains unaddressed.

General recommendations and comments:

- Issue paper No. 4 suggests that future investments in research infrastructure could be targeted to RRR areas. We support this proposal and endorse the argument that regional health research should preferably be undertaken by researchers already embedded in existing infrastructure such as our rural clinical schools. The focus should be strengthening existing capacity, for example, by building on the considerable health and medical education infrastructure already in place in RRR through the Commonwealth Department of Health supported national network of rural clinical schools, medical regional training hubs, and university departments of rural health.
- Issue paper No. 2 suggests that future allocations of new Commonwealth-Supported Places (CSPs) could be targeted to support students from regional areas (particularly for enabling and sub-bachelor courses). This argument aligns broadly with proposals we have made recently to the concurrent review of the allocation of designated Commonwealth-Supported Places (enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate). However, the process by which these allocation decisions are made must be transparent and consistent with the overall approach the Government adopts for the future distribution of enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate CSPs.
- We strongly support the continuation of the HEPPP National Priorities Pool (NPP) to provide funding to support research, evaluation and pilot projects that support the more effective implementation of widening participation strategies nationally. Regionally-based universities, TAFEs and other tertiary education providers play vital roles in providing local access to post-school education for students who grow up in regional, rural and remote communities. Unfortunately, current funding and policy settings encourage metropolitan universities to compete with their regional counterparts when it comes to recruiting talented students from regional areas, and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Policy settings could be adjusted to provide financial incentives for metropolitan universities to collaborate with regional education providers to boost overall levels of educational participation and create more and better study pathways for students from RRR communities. Key success factors of the HEPPP program are the strong partnerships and collaborations supporting it. While in principle we support the suggestion of targeting a certain component of HEPPP funding to support RRR learners it is equally important to ensure that provider autonomy is not compromised and the general underfunding of universities' outreach and support programs is addressed.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss any of the ideas or projects mentioned in our submission.

Yours sincerely,

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Professor Pip Pattison AO
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