



National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy

The IRU submission covers the main issues and options we wish to put forward. The following comments on three aspects raised in the Issues Papers.

Issues Paper 4

It is good that the Issues Paper picks up on the need to build research capacity as part of a broader suite of action to strengthen the capability of RRR university operations.

Issues Paper 2

Issues Paper 2 raises the option of targeting additional places to RRR campuses.

The Review needs to grapple with the instruments the Government is currently using to control outlays.

The Issues Paper incorrectly talks of a cap on places. The Government allocates places at the controlled sub-bachelor and postgraduate levels but not for bachelor places. There is a cap on funding for bachelor places, with universities formally able to enrol as many students as they wish, receiving the student payment only for those enrolled once the funding cap is reached.

The Review appears to accept the university argument that the funding cap effectively limits how many bachelor students can be enrolled. Its proposals for action should be clearly written to amend the Government's arrangements to allow for effective implementation.

Hence for bachelor places the Review needs to outline ways to raise a university's funding cap to allow for additional places in RRR campuses.

- This could be through a controlled up front guess of where additional places are most needed leading to a specific increase in a university's cap.
- Better, is for the Government to take the risk and commit to fund all additional enrolments at RRR campuses. The worst case for it fiscally is that the policy is particularly successful and enrolments jump considerably – achieving the aim of greater take up from RRR communities, perhaps aided by city students willing to move to study.

Issues Paper 5

Issues Paper 5 explores options to alter the Higher Education Partnerships and Participation Program (HEPPP).

This program has been much amended since its initial introduction as one of the major changes from the Bradley Review of 2008. See [Improving equity in higher education participation](#)

It is important that any actions concerning HEPPP from the RRR Review do not hamper its positive achievements.

The Bradley Review argument was for a significantly enhancing equity program that moved the focus from small scale funding of local initiatives to an incentives program that would push each university to improve its enrolment and retention of students from underrepresented groups. It chose use of the low SES group as the driver as the best single indicator to improve outcomes for all groups.

It has worked so far, in tandem with demand driven funding for 6 years, to raise the proportion of enrolments for most target groups, but least so for students from RRR areas. The reason it works is the focus on additional funding of substance, aligned to enrolments and letting universities decide what actions most matter.

There are clearly issues concerning access from RRR communities that HEPPP alone is not targeting. This is despite RRR communities being more likely to be low SES than city areas.

Just as the effort to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is supported through the three pronged combination of Commonwealth Grant Scheme, Indigenous Support Program and HEPPP so too should the RRR target group have a specific additional support program that targets those outcomes.

HEPPP is a useful comparator in originally having an outreach element and participation element. Outreach programs have a long term goal and are hard to tie to observed outcomes like enrolments. Funding needs to be for activity, whether generic to a university or a specific set of notable actions.

Support to improve participation comes best from a focus on defined outcomes like enrolment and potentially reenrolment that lets each eligible university use funds as it thinks will work best. The outcomes will then drive future funding, always maintaining the link of funding aligned to students. Tying those funds to specific approved initiatives encourages projects and activity, mostly from a central university unit, over a focus on changing outcomes.

Short summary of the key points

Issues Paper 4: inclusion of building research capacity important.

Issues Paper 2: the proposals to improve funding allocations for RRR campuses must be framed against the Government's cap on Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for bachelor places. It is not a cap on places as such that can be addressed through additional allocations.

Issues Paper 5: Amendments to HEPPP should not risk diminishing the outcomes of the program to date. A RRR focussed program should be additional to HEPPP not an excision from it. Like the Indigenous Support Program it should tie funding to student numbers, assisting universities to raising enrolments and student retention in RRR based campuses.