



**Australian Government**

**Department of Education and Training**

# **Discussion Paper on Implementation of Regional Study Hubs Initiative February 2018**

## **Background**

The Regional Study Hubs Program has been developed in response to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee Senate Report on the Future Role and Contribution of Regional Capitals to Australia<sup>1</sup> (November 2016). This report found that the Australian Government should look at options to increase the number of rural and regional students attending tertiary institutions.

### **What is the Regional Study Hubs Program?**

The Government has committed \$15 million over four years to assist in the establishment and maintenance of up to eight community-owned, regional study hubs across regional Australia.

A Regional Study Hub (RSH) is a community facility providing support for regional students to locally study courses delivered by distance from an Australian university.

This initiative responds to a key gap in university provision for remote students who wish or need to remain in their local regional area for study, but where enrolments are not sufficient to justify a university establishing a campus.

### **What are the objectives of the Regional Study Hubs Program?**

These hubs will support regional students to study courses locally delivered by distance from any Australian university by providing greater access to study support and infrastructure. This commitment will provide some support for upfront costs and the fixed costs of operation which do not fit a university funding model based on per student contributions.

The level of financial support provided to each successful applicant may vary depending on the individual business cases.

### **Who is eligible to apply for funding?**

Funding for Regional Study Hubs is provided through item 11(c) of Other Grants under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (Grants for activities that support open access to higher education across Australia). To be eligible for funding through this program, the organisation needs to be a Table A provider under Higher Education Support Act (HESA) or a body corporate. It is not a requirement that the organisation be a university to receive funding under this program.

### **On what basis will Regional Study Hubs be selected?**

Stakeholder feedback is sought on the following criteria which are proposed for use in the selection of successful applicants.

It is proposed that applications for Regional Study Hubs (RSHs) should include a feasibility study and will be judged against the following criteria:

---

<sup>1</sup> The full report is available at [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Rural\\_and\\_Regional\\_Affairs\\_and\\_Transport/RegionalCapitals45/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Rural_and_Regional_Affairs_and_Transport/RegionalCapitals45/Report).

- Formal relationship with one or more higher education institutions – this will be a threshold requirement for study hubs.
- Level of higher education provision in the region – would a study hub enhance provision? Is there a gap in existing offerings in the region?
- Distance to university campuses or education providers – while it is not proposed that there be a specified proximity from established providers, study hubs aim to meet a need where a traditional university campus is not viable.
- Financial and in-kind support from third parties (state and territory governments, community organisations and businesses) – it would be a threshold requirement that there is some third party commitment. Contributions can be in cash or in kind (for example, donation of land by the Council, subsidised rental of premises or office equipment, etc).
- Number of potential enrolments – proponents will be expected to be able to provide some evidence of demand. Is there a minimum viable level of participation for a study hub?
- Governance structures – there is no specific model, but proponents would be expected to be able to demonstrate clear and robust governance arrangements.
- Financial viability – proponents will need to provide a sound business model and business plan and demonstrate financial viability, including key dependencies and risks.
- Human resources – the availability and involvement of people with relevant skills to support the work of the regional study hub.
- Educational resources – the availability, and level of access to, electronic and physical resources which support student learning.
- Services to be provided – applicants will be assessed on the number and type of services that they provide. For example, providers who deliver pastoral, technical and social services in addition to educational support will be viewed more favourably than those that offer fewer services.

## **Timeline for consulting and applications**

Comments on this paper are due by COB 5 March 2018. Please email to: [equity@education.gov.au](mailto:equity@education.gov.au)

The Department will then open the call for applications on 9 March with instructional guides.

Applications will be due to the Department by COB 13 April 2018.

Applications will be assessed in late April and early May 2018 with an announcement of the successful applicants to be made by the Minister in June 2018.

## **What will the Program fund?**

There are two stages in the Regional Study Hub establishment process - Establishment and Ongoing Assistance Funding. Applications may include one or both stages.

### Stage 1 – Establishment

Funding assistance will be provided to assist in the establishment of these centres. This could include contributions to lease and fit-out for a facility.

## Stage 2 – Ongoing Assistance

The Government will provide a contribution to the ongoing costs of the hub. This could be used to support teaching infrastructure and administrative expenses.

In some circumstances, funding may be provided to assist with the ongoing maintenance and running costs of the hub.

For both elements, proposals that enable hubs in more than one location are welcomed (and existing facilities can be supported as well as new facilities).

### **What are the ongoing requirements?**

Successful applicants will be expected to contribute towards the overall cost of establishing the hub and will be responsible for the ongoing operation, management and maintenance of the hub.

No additional fees are allowed to be charged to students (other than those that the student would normally be expected to be charged for their course) for attending the Regional Study Hubs.

The hub will be required to report annually on performance.