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The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) provides the following submission to the Exposure Draft Legislation to implement the Australian Job-Ready Graduates Package.

USQ is supportive of the measures relevant to regional students, universities and communities contained in the draft legislation package, the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020, and the other elements that will be included in other legislative instruments.

In particular, the University is supportive of:

- funding for growth in places in regional and outer metro areas;
- flexibility to trade non-designated places between universities;
- the Tertiary Access Payment;
- demand driven funding for Indigenous students;
- regional students driving 45% of the funding under the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships program;
- the new \$49 m research fund for regional universities; and
- the National Priorities Linkage Fund and the Regional Education Commissioner.

However, USQ advocates strongly for the following changes to the Exposure Draft, and the package more broadly:

- Changing the student contribution for social work, behavioural science and mental health studies (s.93-10 of the Draft Legislation). These areas will continue to be in high demand as the impact of the pandemic continues to be felt, particularly in regional communities. Regional students should be encouraged to study social work, behavioural science and mental health in regional areas to meet community needs. However, the placement of the relevant disciplines in Band 1, which attracts the highest student contribution, will operate as a disincentive for students to take up these areas of study. Moving the disciplines into Band 2, which has approximately half the level of student contribution and includes allied health, would be appropriate. Alternatively, some sort of loading could be applied to encourage students to study the disciplines at regional campuses, or the Rural and Regional Enterprise scholarships could be prioritised for regional students studying the relevant subjects in the regions.

- With respect to defining what the progression rate should be for students to access HECS-HELP or FEE-HELP (s. 104-1A, 36-13), USQ is not supportive of the legislation being prescriptive in this manner. While the objective of the proposed measure is reasonable, USQ seeks to maintain the autonomy of universities to determine their own student progression requirements. USQ has procedures already in place that provide an effective and efficient mechanism for managing course progression rates. If required, these could be linked to eligibility for continued funding support, whilst maintaining the University's autonomy in the determination of progression requirements.



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