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## Higher Education Policy a Mixed Outcome

Details of the Federal Government's forthcoming higher education policy package offers both positive and troubling outcomes for a sector that has already contributed \$3.9 billion to Budget repair since 2011/12.

Charles Sturt University (CSU) Vice-Chancellor Professor Andrew Vann expressed concern that the policy proposals from Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham will further stress budgets across universities, and impact disadvantaged students.

"CSU has a particular responsibility to serve rural and regional students, including first in family and Indigenous cohorts.

"We are concerned that these efficiency dividend cuts will stress resources vital to our mission of extending a university education to Australians previously excluded," said Professor Vann.

"The Lomax-Smith Review (2011) established the principle that funding for the delivery of teaching and learning also supports research and community engagement, and the new report from Deloitte does nothing to dispute this.

"There has been little to no infrastructure capital funding in recent years, indeed the Education Investment Fund was closed, with universities expected to cover such costs within their funding.

"Universities have rightly sought over recent years to improve their efficiency, and best use the public money provided to us, however this has increased pressure on staffing levels and workloads.

"We understand the importance of undertaking Budget repair, but further squeezing budgets can only have a negative impact to our ability to serve our regions, at a time when we need to help rural and regional Australia expand and grow in the Australian economy," added Professor Vann.

However, Professor Vann stated the policy package contains a number of important, positive outcomes for CSU, and the sector as a whole.

"We are pleased to see the government acknowledge the critical role HEPPP plays for disadvantaged students, and move to guarantee this fund in recurrent legislation," Professor Vann stated.

"Along with the extension of the demand system to sub-bachelor programs, both measures will have positive impacts across rural and regional Australia.

"Likewise, moves to extent the clinical loading to dentistry and veterinary science students recognises the increased cost of delivering such degrees, and the vital role graduates in these professions play in their communities," added Professor Vann.

Professor Vann also expressed concern regarding the impact of increased student fees and repayment rates.

"We understand the Government's need to address budget repair. However, at a time when the Government is pursuing substantial corporate tax cuts, we remain concerned that increased costs will be borne directly by students.

"It is particularly troubling that students will pay more while universities receive less," said Professor Vann.

"Having said that, particularly for a university that leads the sector in terms of employment rates, higher education will still represent a very positive investment of both time and money for graduates.

“We trust that these changes will not deter students from less privileged backgrounds,”

“Finally, the move to make 7.5% of government funding at risk in relation to performance metrics will require extensive discussion to ensure it really does support universities to do better work. We note that one of the cuts that has already been applied to the sector is the removal of additional performance funding.

“However, the University will continue to examine the package as a whole, and looks forward to continuing to work with the Government on a number of measures,” Professor Vann added.

**Media note:** Contact CSU Media to arrange interviews with Professor Andrew Vann.

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**Further information:** Bruce Andrews, CSU Media on phone (02) 6338 6084 or [bandrews@csu.edu.au](mailto:bandrews@csu.edu.au). Read CSU News [www.csu.edu.au/news](http://www.csu.edu.au/news)