



Office of the Vice Chancellor
Professor Peter Lee, Vice Chancellor FTSE

Monday, September 22, 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: The Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission regarding the Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014 (the HERRA Bill). In addition to endorsing the comments made by the Regional Universities Network (RUN) submission, I would like to make the following additional comments.

Southern Cross University (SCU) comes to this debate with a strong focus in supporting students from regional/remote (60% of domestic students), Indigenous (3%), and low socio-economic (26.4%) backgrounds. Around 50% of our students are 25 years plus, and around 60% study part-time. Sixty nine percent of our students are the first in their family to go to university. Clearly, as a regional university, we are not only operating in a 'thin market' (as developed further in the RUN submission), we are also drawing students from regional communities that are often more disadvantaged than many metropolitan areas.

Even within our own institution, some of our markets are 'thinner' than others. SCU has a unique partnership at Coffs Harbour (in the mid-north coast of New South Wales), through the Coffs Harbour Education Campus, where we share facilities and operations with a senior college (high school) and North Coast Institute of TAFE. In considering whether additional support is needed for regional universities, I urge the Committee to reflect on the resource-intensiveness needed to support these smaller campuses. A smaller campus such as Coffs Harbour not only remains critical to its immediate footprint, it is integral to the University as a whole, and part of our legislative mission to serve the north coast region of NSW (which also encompasses campuses in Lismore in the Northern Rivers up to the Tweed/Gold Coast regions).

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SCU, just twenty years old this year, is also proud of its research performance as shown in the 2012 Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) outcomes. I raise this because I am concerned about the changes to the Research Training Scheme (RTS) and the ability to charge student contributions as a means to subsidise the cuts in funding. This will particularly impact on the capacity of universities such as SCU to grow our emerging research cultures; furthermore, we are less able to subsidise this reduction through alternative funding sources. Australia should be providing more incentives to encourage high-performer students to undertake HDR degrees and as such, I would urge that this proposal be abandoned, and full funding for RTS places reinstated.

In conclusion, I make no apologies for 'special pleading' if it means that regional students, regional communities and the regional universities that support them are given a fair go in this reform package. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with the Committee.

Yours sincerely

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Vice Chancellor

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Attachment A: Excellence in Research Australia: 2012 Outcomes

Southern Cross University (SCU) was evaluated in ten specific fields of research (4 digit field of research codes) and in six of these we were rated at world standard or above.

The highest possible rating of 5, which translates to "well above world standard", was achieved for geochemistry (0402), zoology (0608), crop and pasture production (0703) and forestry sciences (0705). Further to this, at the broader discipline level (2 digit field of research codes) we also received the highest possible rating, of "well above world standard", for earth sciences (04) and agricultural and veterinary sciences (07).

We achieved the rating of "above world standard" for nursing (1110) and in the broader field of biological sciences (06). A rating of "at world standard" was achieved for tourism (1506) and for the broader field studies in arts and creative writing (19).

In the areas in which we are rated "well above world standard" (a rating of 5) in a field of research we are pleased to note the following:

- We are one of five universities to achieve the highest rating for the field of research geochemistry (0402) from the total of 10 assessed.
- We are one of three universities to achieve the highest rating for the field of research zoology (0608) from the total of 21 assessed.
- We are one of two universities to achieve the highest rating for the field of crop and pasture production (0703) from the total of 11 assessed.
- We are one of three universities to achieve the highest rating for the field of forestry sciences (0705) from the total of six assessed.
- We are one of five universities to achieve the highest rating for the broad field of earth sciences (04) from the 19 assessed.
- We are one of four universities to achieve the highest rating in the broad field of agriculture and veterinary sciences (07) from the 23 assessed.