

Curtin University's response to the Discussion Paper, Redistribution Pool of Medical Places Policy

Curtin University appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the Discussion Paper on the redistribution of Commonwealth Supported Places for medical students to facilitate greater regional and rural outcomes.

Curtin University Medical School, as outlined in its mission, is strongly committed to enhancing rural and regional outcomes through the provision of medical professionals who are from rural and regional areas, study in rural and regional areas and return to rural and regional areas to have a positive impact on these communities.

While there may be a relative oversupply of medical graduates in some parts of Australia, there is an ongoing undersupply of doctors in both rural and outer metropolitan areas of Western Australia, particularly in terms of those engaged in general practice. This undersupply continues despite Western Australia having the highest rate of importation of overseas-trained doctors in Australia.

2016 data from the Western Australia Department of Health and the Western Australia General Practice Training Provider indicate that there will be a continuing shortage of general practitioners in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas, with a maldistribution of 3:1 compared with metropolitan Perth suburbs through to 2025.

We are very supportive of the need to address the existing medical professional workforce challenges in rural and regional Australia and appreciate that this is also a priority for the federal government.

To address this workforce shortage communities, government, the health sector and universities will need to work in partnership to understand the needs and how best to address them.

We are concerned that the objectives and options outlined in the Discussion Paper will not significantly enhance rural and regional outcomes and in fact may be counterproductive to the strategies and programs already in place at universities that aim to address these issues.

This means that the proposed changes may negatively impact rural and regional strategies and programs already underway in those institutions that experience a reduction in allocation as they will have less EFTSL available to utilise.

We are not supportive of the policy for redistribution being progressed as outlined and would like to provide the following points of feedback for your consideration:

- Given the current review of the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program it may be more prudent to await any findings/recommendations from that review prior to going ahead with CSP redistributions and to allow for an alignment to the National Medical Workforce Strategy.
- A simple redistribution does not address the complex nature of encouraging students to undertake study in rural and regional settings nor does it recognise the complexity of encouraging students to then continue their careers in these locations. The policy provides little support in achieving these outcomes. In essence redistribution is a very blunt and unrefined instrument which may not have the desired impact.

- Administering the redistribution scheme will create a costly layer of administration at both government and institutional levels – funds that would be better directed at strategies and programs already in place at institutions aimed at improving rural and regional outcomes.
- The proposed timing is considered unrealistic and would not allow universities adequate time to plan for the impact of any redistribution in relation to their current cohorts or make adjustments to rural and regional strategies and programs.
- The discussion paper suggests that Universities could increase their international student enrolments to compensate them for any CSP losses due to the redistribution scheme. The paper does not address how new Medical Schools, such as Curtin, who are not yet permitted to enrol international students would be able to do this. This will need to be addressed to ensure these Universities are not disadvantaged.

We appreciate that the federal government has budget constraints, however, we would be more supportive of a program that does not redistribute, but rather introduces a new pool of CSP that would only be available for rural and regional usage. This approach would provide a further catalyst for existing and new strategies and programs at universities designed to impact rural and regional outcomes.