

MEDIA RELEASE

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Parliamentary Inquiry confirms benefits of increased investment in university research

IRU Australia welcomes the Interim Report of the Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities being conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation.

“This is the second major review in the last two months calling for increased investment and reform in Australian university research and innovation. The recommendations contained within the Interim Report echo many of those emerging from the Cutler Review of the National Innovation System”, IRU Australia Director, Lenore Cooper said today.

“Both investigations have affirmed the critical need for Australia to increase its expenditure on research and development to match the levels of investment within leading OECD economies. While figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics last week provide welcome news that expenditure on R&D in Australia is on a growth trajectory, we need to invest far more if we are to rise to our potential as an innovative nation within the new global economy,” Ms Cooper said.

“While the ratio of Gross Expenditure on Research and Development to GDP exceeded 2% for the first time in Australia in 2006-07, the ratio for OECD countries as a whole has exceeded this level for each of the last 25 years. Small nations like our own, such as Finland, Korea and Sweden are reaping the rewards of their investments in R&D which substantially exceed 3% of GDP.

“Both the Parliamentary Inquiry and the Cutler review have confirmed the views of the six IRU Australia member universities – Flinders, Griffith, James Cook, La Trobe, Murdoch and Newcastle - that increased government funding for university research and research training will provide an essential platform for the nation’s future prosperity and productivity growth.

“This includes the need for the full funding of university research and research training, increased and fully indexed stipends for federally funded postgraduate research scholarships and extensions to the Australian PhD candidature period,” Ms Cooper said.

“We support the government’s moves to bring forward national infrastructure funding as one key strategy for addressing the impact of the global financial crisis on the Australian economy. We must also take a longer term view, however, and pay attention not only to developing our physical infrastructure but also to building our human capital and innovative capacity. This will safeguard Australia’s resilience in the event of future global financial shocks.

“IRU Australia urges the government to respond proactively to the recommendations of both the Cutler report and the final report of the Parliamentary Inquiry when it is released”, Ms Cooper concluded.

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