

MEDIA RELEASE

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Senate must back student income support package

The Senate is being urged to pass legislation enabling equitable access and participation in university education through better targeted student income support.

Chair of Innovative Research Universities (IRU) Professor Sandra Harding said legislation needed to be passed now by the Senate to ensure the money starts flowing to students next year.

She said that the *Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009* was vitally important to ensuring that a university education is open to all Australians, including those who are financially disadvantaged or live in rural and regional areas.

“All seven IRU universities particularly commend the introduction of student start-up scholarships for all students in receipt of Youth Allowance or Austudy,” Professor Harding, Vice Chancellor of James Cook University said.

The IRU universities are Charles Darwin, Flinders, Griffith, La Trobe, Murdoch, Newcastle and James Cook.

“This legislation is also strongly supported by the other Australian universities and student bodies and we would urge the Senate to consider the students rather than politics,” she said.

Professor Harding said that students needing to relocate to study will receive a relocation scholarship to assist with costs, valued at \$1,000 per year and \$4,000 for the student’s initial relocation.

“The scholarships are critically important to redressing the decline in higher education participation rates for rural and regional students,” she said.

“IRU applauds the government’s plan to exempt merit and equity scholarships from the social security income test. The exemption will be a huge relief to many low-SES students who have gratefully accepted a scholarship only to find that it erodes their eligibility for government income support.

“It will also encourage universities and private benefactors to fund more scholarships for financially disadvantaged students.”

Professor Harding said that the package of measures will also extend eligibility for income support to the broader student population.

“Through the increase in the parental income test threshold many more students will automatically access Youth Allowance, enabling them to get on with their university study rather than focusing on meeting the criteria for support as an independent”, Professor Harding concluded.

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