

IRU MEDIA RELEASE

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Major reforms prospering but remain incomplete

The Government's rejection of a significant additional investment in funding per student, as recommended by the Lomax-Smith review of university base funding, leaves the major reforms resulting from the 2008 Bradley review incomplete.

"The Base Funding Review is an opportunity missed" said Professor Barney Glover, IRU Chair and Vice-Chancellor Charles Darwin University.

"The Government has overseen a major change in university education through funding universities for all students they enrol. This has allowed a major expansion in access to university which will lead to a better skilled and more knowledgeable workforce in coming years" he said.

"The key question left unfinished is a funding structure that provides the right amount of funding, designed to ensure universities can support a wide range of students across all disciplines".

"The base funding review confirmed the need for additional investment and highlighted the disciplines most badly affected. It also highlighted the need to support contemporary learning spaces as universities actively engage with the challenges of the digital world. The Government acknowledges the Review's conclusions but argues there is no fiscal capacity to respond."

"In the absence of additional investment IRU universities will continue to offer a wide range of places, consistent with their commitment to higher education. This will become harder. Further, the community has rising expectations of universities' contributions to social and economic prosperity. Without the base funding adjustment it will remain difficult to meet fully those expectations."

The Review also recommended structural changes to student charges which the IRU opposed. The Government has rightly rejected tying the student contribution to a set proportion of the notional cost of the course. The IRU has argued for a single student charge as most likely to encourage students to pursue their individual preferences as the best basis for a well-balanced graduate population with a mix of knowledge and skills. Continuation of current arrangements will suffice but leaves unresolved the problems the review highlighted.

"The Base Funding Review will remain a useful source for future Governments determining university funding. The IRU will continue to argue for additional investment" Professor Glover concluded.

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