

## IRU STATEMENT 14/2013

3 September 2013

### Labor delivers; now we need the Coalition to confirm its position

The Labor Innovation policy confirms the major improvements in the support for higher education and research outcomes over the past six years. The policy rightly emphasises the Government's achievements and sets out further elements to be pursued if returned to Government.

The Coalition has stated its broad support for the major changes introduced by the Government. It now needs to release its higher education and research policy to confirm that support and outline the particular initiatives it proposes. This bi-partisan support is crucial to supporting universities as they provide the education and research that Australians need to underpin a prosperous and successful society and economy.

The IRU is pleased that Labor will continue to drive ahead with the demand driven funding system for university students. The IRU among other universities, made clear over past months that this major transformation must remain in place over the coming decade to ensure all capable and interested Australians can access a university education. As the Labor policy indicates there is no conflict between quality of university education and access.

However, the Policy is silent about the impact of the cuts to university funding in 2014 and 2015 and reductions in support for students. The next Government will have to legislate for those cuts – or decide not to pursue them as The Greens propose.

The major gap in Government programs and commitments from all parties is to address long term investment for university infrastructure both the everyday and useful, and for the major cross institutional research facilities needed to be part of international research.

Universities are rapidly taking up the opportunities to reshape everyday teaching through digital technology. This needs extensive reworking of teaching spaces designed for a past century and investment in the technology that underpins the changed approach. There is no Government investment in this, while the efficiency dividend simply reduces the capacity for base funding to support it.

Labor states a principled desire to continue with investment on research infrastructure which it will pursue through a review by the Chief Scientist to determine how to fund such facilities. This may be the mechanism to achieve the outcome needed – of a long term steady investment in research infrastructure. However, what we have now is widespread agreement of the need and no Party willing to commit the funding.

Labor is creating 12 Australian Innovation Partnerships, many of which involve IRU members. These are important initiatives to improve university interactions with industry. It is important that these are allowed to demonstrate their potential whichever party wins Government at the election.

The IRU endorses the Labor commitment to 'act on' the Report on university regulation which identified major weaknesses in the application of quality regulation and the relationships among the various parties involved. Addressing the recommendations of the Report should be a prime focus for the early months of the next Government.

International education is a major contributor to Australia's economic wellbeing and to our interaction with many neighboring countries. Labor will respond to the report on international education which the Chaney committee prepared. Support for international education needs a major refresh which the Labor commitments will support.

The IRU also welcomes Labor's proposed support for international research engagement, which has been a patchy area for Government, with previous programs focused at supporting the universities already engaged in target countries rather than assisting all capable researchers to make the links that will advance their research.

Attached is a summary of the commitments to higher education, research and related areas from all parties to date in the 2013 election campaign.

## Contact

### **Professor Barney Glover**

Chair IRU, Vice-Chancellor Charles Darwin University

08 8946 6040

0418 954 052

[barney.glover@cdu.edu.au](mailto:barney.glover@cdu.edu.au)

### **Conor King**

Executive Director IRU

0434 601 691

03 9479 5181

[Conor.king@iru.edu.au](mailto:Conor.king@iru.edu.au)

## Pre-election Policy Announcement Summary

Updated: 3 September 2013

### Higher Education Funding

Funding cuts via the efficiency dividend announced by **Labor** are yet to be legislated. The **Coalition** has indicated support for the efficiency dividend, with Christopher Pyne stating that the Coalition 'cannot promise to reverse the...cuts to higher education.' The **Greens** have committed to reversing the cuts.

The **Coalition's** *Real Solutions for All Australians* document commits to the continuation of current arrangements for university funding as well as a long-term source of infrastructure funding.

The **Greens** have committed to providing an additional 10% of base funding by 2017.

**Labor** has committed to 'negotiating mechanisms to distribute Commonwealth Supported Places to the sub-degree level' to support this initiative as part of its commitment to establish a network of University colleges (see below). Further, Labor will use Compacts process to enable universities to make the case for the distribution of Commonwealth Supported Places to the post-graduate coursework level.

**TAFE Directors Australia** are advocating for access for non-university providers to Commonwealth Supported Places, the expansion of demand driven funding to pathway programs and the recognition of TAFE's capability to deliver higher education through a special category in higher education provider standards.

### Regulation

**Labor**, in its Innovation Guarantee, has committed to reducing the regulatory burden for universities, noting 'the pivotal role of autonomy and responsibility to the operation of our universities.' Labor has proposed to reform and strengthen Compacts to drive differentiation and to balance autonomy with responsibility (to deliver and report).

**Labor** has further committed to harmonising regulation affecting international education provision, including the TEQSA and ESOS Acts.

The **Coalition**, in its *Real Solutions for All Australians* document has also committed to reducing red tape, regulation and reporting in the sector.

### Student participation and support

**Labor** has committed \$2.5 million to feasibility studies into establishing new pathway colleges to expand access to tertiary study in areas of need, with Gosford, Eastern Perth and Outer Eastern Melbourne reported as potential sites. This is described as moving towards establishing a network of University Colleges around the country to address barriers to access and participation. The **Greens** have attacked the specific locations announced for feasibility studies as pork barrelling.

The **Greens** are campaigning to reinstate Start Up Scholarships as scholarships rather than income contingent loans. This change was announced in the budget. The Greens have also committed to increase Student Youth Allowance by \$100 per fortnight.

The **Coalition** has announced plans to extend income contingent loans to apprentices, with \$20,000 available over four years, repayable at the same income thresholds as FEE-HELP.

The **Coalition** has further committed to developing Northern Australia as an education hub through investment in infrastructure and the promotion of Northern Australia as an education destination for domestic and international students.

The **Nationals** will seek to introduce a scheme to refund the fees of graduates who work in regional areas of need. The Nationals support a review of HECS-HELP indexation and the possible application of 2% cap.

The **Nationals** have further proposed a new, targeted program for regional and rural students who cannot remain at home while pursuing university study, including:

- a non-means tested Tertiary Access Allowance for students for whom public transport is not reasonably available within 90 minutes of their place of study, replacing the current Relocation Allowance;
- assistance for universities to establish more residential hall accommodation specifically dedicated to regional students;
- a low interest loan scheme for students who elect to study at regional institutions;
- removing the parental income test for regional students applying for independent youth allowance; and
- family reunion travel passes for students returning home for family visits.

The **Nationals** appear to support the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), or a similar scheme, stating that ‘university councils should have the power to include, in...fees, an amount to cover a limited range of student services. This is point of difference with the **Liberal Party**, which has consistently opposed SSAF.

### **Health and Medical Education**

The **Coalition** will fund an additional 100 medical intern places annually in private hospitals and ‘non-traditional settings’ and work with stakeholders to improve national coordination of intern positions.

The **Coalition** has further committed to doubling the Practice Incentive Payment, which provides an incentive payment to general practices for teaching medical students. General practices will also matching infrastructure grants to general practices to expand facilities, including teaching spaces. Grants will target rural and remote locations.

A **Coalition** government will fund an additional 500 scholarships to nursing and allied health students and professional for undergraduate and postgraduate study, again targeted at rural and remote areas.

The **Nationals** have committed to the establishment of the Murray-Darling Medical School. The Nationals also support naming those universities who do not meet a target of 25% of medical students from a rural background.

### **Teacher Education**

The **Coalition** has committed to developing ‘best practice guidelines’ for admission standards into teaching degrees, based on both academic achievement and other factors potentially including interviews, a community work portfolio and application essays. The Coalition has rejected suggestions of setting an ATAR floor for teaching courses. The Coalition will promote more flexible pathways into teaching degrees and encourage a greater focus on language education, including adding language teachers to the Skilled Occupation List for migration.

### **Student Mobility**

The **Coalition** has announced its New Colombo Plan (NCP) which will support and promote Asia-Pacific mobility for Australian university students with an initial commitment of \$100 million over five years for implementation and the launch of trial programs. A proposal for the NCP has been developed by a Steering Committee chaired by Mr Kevin McCann with Professor Sandra Harding as Deputy-Chair. The proposal, which Mr Abbott notes has been accepted by the Coalition, includes:

- 300 NCP Scholarships per annum. This is the elite component of the plan, with scholarships including all fees, travel and living costs for undergraduate students undertaking a semester or year-long study program. Internships are a core component of the program;
- A larger program of NCP grants and loans available more broadly. This combination of grants and loans is similar to existing OS-HELP and AsiaBound schemes. Universities would apply for grants for specific programs, as with AsiaBound;
- Objectives focussed on encouraging semester or year-long programs for all students. However, funding for short-term and cohort based options would be supported at least initially;
- A focus on undergraduate students, with potential future expansion to postgraduate and VET students;
- The consolidation of existing schemes (AsiaBound, OS-HELP, Endeavour Awards etc) while maintaining the availability of funding to students undertaking mobility outside of Asia; and
- DFAT (or its successor department) to be the lead agency for the plan.

### **International Education**

Fairfax has reported, based on statements from Christopher Pyne, that the **Coalition** would introduce post-study work rights for international graduates of VET programs.

The six international education peak bodies (including the **International Education Association of Australia**, representing universities) have released a joint communique calling for:

- Streamlining visa application processes;
- Full implementation of the Knight Review recommendations (26 of 41 recommendations have been implemented thus far);
- Greater government support for marketing Australian education internationally; and
- Easing the compliance burden and associated costs.

The **Coalition** has taken this communique as a repudiation of **Labor's** record on international education, but has made no specific commitments beyond 'better co-ordination of government decision-making and more vigorous overseas promotion.'

As part of its Innovation Guarantee, **Labor** has committed to the following:

- Appointing an International Education sector supplier advocate;
- Allowing international education providers to access Enterprise Connect;
- Using Austrade to expand education marketing efforts in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa;
- Establishing an Industry Innovation Council for International Education;
- Extending streamlined visa processing to non-university providers;

- Conducting an international student survey in 2014 and 2016 and a new survey focussing on graduate outcomes; and
- Conducting a stocktake of off-campus student accommodation.

### **Research and Innovation**

As part of its Innovation Guarantee, **Labor** has committed to the following:

- Establishing a National Innovation Council, which will:
  - Develop a model to assess the performance of the Australian innovation system, and
  - Oversee re-established Industry Innovation Councils, which will develop a series of 'transition plans for the 2020s'
- The continuation of ERA, but without mention of any impact assessment component;
- Establishing 12 Australian Innovation Partnerships (formerly Industry Innovation Precincts) as part of the Plan for Australian Jobs. 11 have been announced so far, nine during the campaign. Sophie Mirabella has stated that the **Coalition** does not, and has never supported the Government's Plan for Australian Jobs. It is therefore unclear whether Innovation Partnerships these would be abandoned under a Coalition government;
- Continuation of open and competitive research funding, with smaller universities being given the opportunity to develop in areas of strength;
- Commissioning a strategic review into Australia's International Science and Research engagement effort;
- Commissioning a review of the most appropriate ways to secure funding research infrastructure facilities, chaired by the Chief Scientist;
- Implementing the key findings of the Chief Scientist's *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in the National Interest: A Strategic Approach* paper, including a 'renewed Social Compact that articulates the collaborations required between governments, community and industry;' and
- Critical research initiatives, including:
  - The establishment of a Floating Systems Research Centre of Excellence in Perth (\$30 million),
  - Identifying antibiotic resistance as a priority area for the next CRC round, and
  - The establishment of a Centre for Rural and Regional Futures at Deakin (\$5 million)

**Labor** has released a McKeon Research Package including:

- the establishment of a Medical Research Innovation Fund, a matched funding program with \$125 million from the Commonwealth to be matched 1:1 with private capital. Fund managers will be determined through a competitive process;
- streamlining NHMRC grants processes;
- the establishment of four Integrated Health Research Networks, with potential expansion after an impact evaluation; and
- establish four new Centres for Research Excellence addressing the strategic priorities of indigenous health, national clinical trials, international health and genomics.

**Labor** has committed to the creation of Australian Universities Press, which will include a production platform, a searchable e-book catalogue and a fund to ensure publicly funded research and writing reaches a much wider audience.

The **Coalition** has committed to quarantining health and medical research from cuts, while streamlining grant application and clinical trial approval processes as per McKeon. While the Coalition has indicated that the McKeon Review would inform future health and medical research policy, it has not committed to any of the specific recommendation beyond the two above. The *Real Solutions for All Australians* document commits to a review and restructure of research funding and to a stable, long-term source of infrastructure funding for the sector.

The **Coalition** will review access to R&D tax support for business, examining the potential to create a 'second stream of the existing R&D Tax Incentive, based more closely on the definitions and eligibility criteria of the former R&D tax concession.' **Labor** has committed to making quarterly payments for R&D Tax Incentive.

In its Vision for Northern Australia document The Coalition has also committed to establishing a Cooperative Research Centre for Northern Australia. No reference to universities or research was made in **Labor's** Northern Australia Plan.

The **Nationals** have committed to providing resources to regional universities through a Faculty of Excellence Program to allow them to focus on areas of expertise. The Nationals have further proposed an Agricultural Research Fund.

The **Greens** Science and Research Policy commits to:

- increasing Research and Development investment to 3% of GDP, including:
  - an additional \$750 million to the ARC, NHMRC and CRCs,
  - funding for indirect costs for health and medical research (\$141 million),
  - reversing the cuts to SRE (\$342 million),
  - three additional years of future fellowships funding (\$100 million), and
  - establishing Integrated Health Research Centres, per McKeon (\$120 million);
- moving towards five year grants; and
- the establishment of a National Research Infrastructure Council to distribute an additional \$230 million in NCRIS funding over three years.

The **Australian Academy of Science's** election statement advocates for the following:

- a stable research funding environment, with ongoing investment in major infrastructure;
- ongoing research career development, with a review of ARC and NHMRC fellowship schemes; and
- reducing administrative burdens in grant application processes.

### **Indigenous**

**Labor** has committed to three new *Closing the Gap* targets, including one aimed at increasing participation in higher education. No funding was attached to this new target as part of the announcement.

The **Coalition** has committed to the creation of a Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council and to training 1000 Indigenous people for guaranteed jobs in collaboration with the Australian Employment Covenant and GenerationOne.

### **Skills**

**Labor** has announced the *Step into Skills* program which commits \$35 million over three years to provide foundation skills training to 16 to 24 year olds, primarily via TAFE. Labor has also committed

to \$35.6 million to deliver training to 6800 workers in the manufacturing industry through the *Manufacturing Skills Plus* program. Training will be brokered by Manufacturing Skills Australia. Labor has further announced 137 new Trade Training Centres targeting secondary school students in the latest round of this program.

**Labor** has further announced new TAFE Australia National Partnership which would require States and Territories to at least maintain TAFE funding in real terms. Failure to do so would result in the Commonwealth funding TAFEs directly.

The **Greens** have proposed a 'TAFE Rescue Package' of \$1.2 billion over three years.

### **Industrial Relations**

The **Coalition** has committed to amending Fair Work laws to ensure that enterprise agreements cannot restrict the use of Individual Flexibility Arrangements, retaining the Better Off Overall Test for such arrangements.

The Coalition will further legislate to ensure that protected industrial action can only take place if the Fair Work Commission is satisfied that there have been 'meaningful talks between workers and business.'

### **Machinery of Government**

In its Manufacturing Policy, the **Coalition** described the 'super department' as unworkable and stated that the Industry Department's structure would be simplified. It is currently unclear which department/s Tertiary Education and Research would be incorporated into under a Coalition government.

In an interview with Michelle Grattan, Mr Abbott that the **Coalition's** ministerial portfolios will remain 'more or less as they are' should the Coalition win government.

3 September 2013