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## IRU STATEMENT 10/2014

### The solution to the university resource dilemma

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) call on the Senate to pass the *Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014*. The Bill, with suitable amendments, offers a solution for university resourcing that supports the future needs of Australia's students.

At heart, the role of universities is to educate and to develop knowledge. To do this well universities need more resources.

Numerous reviews have shown the gap now between the resources required and the income from Government and students. Governments of both sides have made clear they will not commit the additional funds needed.

We need a new approach.

"Proposals for free education are reckless and unrealistic, dangling an unfounded hope in front of future students. They do not provide a plan but obfuscation, a ploy to avoid resolving the structural problems in Australian higher education. They risk creating the under resourced university sectors of some countries where entry is easy but good student learning is hard" said Professor John Dewar, Chair of the IRU.

"Equally, maintenance of the current funding model offers no lasting solution but signs up to a slow death from ever reducing resources."

The Governments package will significantly change how universities are resourced but not alter their commitment to education, which has lasted many decades under many different funding systems. More significant is that, since 2012, universities are open to all who wish to attend who have the required learning.

"We need to be clear. The situation since 1974 remains: students need no money in hand to enrol, or to enrol in any university they choose. Access to university will not be tied to family wealth. All students will have HELP to cover the fee they agree to, which they will repay based on their future income."

The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee report supports the need to pass the Bill. It confirms important areas for change:

- not imposing the ten year bond rate to index all HELP debts and
- the need for a structural adjustment fund to support the transition for all universities.

It is unfortunate, given the recent flurry of claims about the proposed Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme, that the Committee avoided the options to make it workable. The IRU continues to support the need to pool the funds for Commonwealth Scholarships so that universities have funding for scholarships in line with their enrolment of students needing financial support.

"The scholarships should not be about a small number of high value scholarships for some lucky students but a means to provide additional support to the whole group of eligible students. This will reduce the barriers potential students now face, which are not about the HELP deferrable fee, but the day to day challenge combining study and life" said Professor Dewar.

**END**

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