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### Labor back on track

Innovative Research Universities (IRU) welcomes the release of Labor's higher education policy proposals promising higher public investment in universities.

"These proposals build upon the groundwork that Labor had put in place when in government. We endorse in particular Labor's commitment to continue the demand driven system and to augment government funding per student. We look forward to further clarity on the extent of the additional funding per student, the key issue in university funding," says Conor King Executive Director of the IRU.

"This proposal puts Labor back on track with the credible alternative that we have been seeking. We need two strong credible policies driving our major parties."

Expanding access does not mean lowering completions or undermining student learning outcomes. Australia has a high level of completion, with recent data showing levels comparable to those of the past two decades. Labor is right to point to the lower level from students from some backgrounds, students whom the IRU is committed to educate as part of our focus on inclusive excellence. We need to keep improving those outcomes, with incentives from Government one element to doing so.

The challenge for the proposed Higher Education Productivity and Performance Commission is to make meaningful a process of university agreements, a weakness in past arrangements. Targets must be grounded in each university's students and history.

The plan to rework the proposed Higher Education Participation Program into a Higher Education Access and Growth Strategy is an opportunity to make better use of the program, which has been subject to too many adjustments over recent years.

Labor needs to keep open the potential to extend the number of sub-bachelor places a university can provide. These are an important mechanism to assist people with lower initial academic skills test their capability for completing a degree.

Higher public investment in Australia's universities entails not just increased investment at undergraduate level but underpinning Australia's world standard research capability. We will await Labor's research and innovation policy framework to complement today's announcements.

IRU looks forward to an inclusive process of consultation on the Labor proposals, to ensure they would produce a sustainable system that will stand Australia in good stead for the years ahead should Labor be in Government.

**END**

**For comment contact**

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