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IRU STATEMENT 13/2016

Ensuring all Australians make an informed choice about the best course for them

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) supports the thrust of the Higher Education Standards Panel's report to ensure that all students are firmly at the centre of the admissions process, able to access clear and comparable information about their options.

All potential students need to understand how universities will decide whether they are suitable.

As the report outlines, it is families with less experience of higher education, who are economically disadvantaged or who live in regional Australia who find the current admissions processes harder to navigate. This is not sustainable.

The Australian higher education system has changed. We have "varied entry standards and pathways...giving greater numbers of students the opportunity to benefit from higher education than ever before." The information for prospective students must therefore also change as the Panel recommends.

It is crucial that all Australians with the capability and desire for higher education can gain admission to the course that best meets their needs. Tired assumptions about who should go to university and the difficulty of entry must be countered with clear information about what the requirements are for all the bases for entry to university.

IRU agrees with the Panel's conclusion that an overstated focus on the 31% of applicants chosen by ATARs can be misleading. As the report shows 37% apply based on previous higher education and vocational education study. Indeed, the non ATAR applicants are judged directly on their capability rather than their relative standing to other applicants.

Nevertheless, good information about school leavers' ATARs will show the breadth of entrants to most courses. Already one IRU member has published data on ATAR selection standards for 2016.

For most applicants the focus for admission is now each individual's capability and readiness. It is why over 30% apply directly to the university of their choice. The role of the State based admission centres is not being challenged by the need for a national replica but are being rendered superfluous by most applicants accessing their course of preference at the university they choose.

There is much detail to be worked through to create the proposed national admissions information platform in a way that allows potential applicants to find what is relevant to them.

The Panel's Recommendations should apply to all courses, including all Commonwealth- supported post graduate professional qualifications as much as to undergraduate courses.

The proposed templates will need work to ensure they work for all, avoiding implications that non-school leavers are secondary.

END

For comment contact

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