

17 May 2017

IRU STATEMENT 11/2017

IRU endorses opposition to Government Package

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) endorses the collective decision of Universities Australia and its members to oppose the Government's higher education package. The package cuts university funding and increases the student charge.

"How can we ask students to contribute more to get less in return?" asks Professor Colin Stirling, IRU Chair and Vice-Chancellor of Flinders University.

"The Government's rhetoric that the package merely gets the balance right making the system fairer and more equitable, does not match their measures in this package. The Australian Government investment in Universities is low by international standards while our students are already paying some of the highest fees in the world for public university education" he said.

IRU members are troubled by the impact on students in regions that traditionally have lower participation rates in higher education. "The benefits of a university education should be available to all those aspiring to improve their prospects" said Professor Stirling.

"The argument that Universities could afford these cuts is simply wrong. Universities do not make profits but endeavour to create annual surpluses that are then used to invest in the infrastructure that will enable us to educate the graduates our economy requires into the future" Professor Stirling said.

There has been no regular source of capital funding to universities since 2012, the same year that the demand driven system came into full effect. The Education Investment Fund has already been removed from universities contributing \$3.9 billion to budget repair. Annual surpluses are an essential means with which to maintain the international competitiveness of our universities.

Students being asked to pay more for ageing facilities and fewer staff is just a poor deal.

"Is there a performance problem that needs fixing? Universities have steadily improved retention of students, particularly from first year to second years as the Government's cohort study shows. We will continue to improve. Some incentives to do so would be effective.

"Putting at risk 7.5% of funding would be punitive. Universities are already held accountable for quality by the national regulator (TEQSA). The case has not been made that withdrawing more funding would be likely to improve standards further.

"Introducing vouchers for postgraduate places, convertible at any higher education provider, is a major unheralded change. There is no transparency in putting an undeveloped concept into the legislation and hoping the detail can be worked through in time.

“We will be disappointed to lose the positive elements in the Package, notably the expansion of sub-bachelor places and an indexed Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) rate for each low SES student. But these and the other useful changes do not outweigh the impact of reduced funding per student.

“If our schools need funding at a reasonable resource per student then so too do universities. This Package does not deliver it” Professor Stirling concluded.

END

For comment contact

Professor Colin Stirling, (08) 8201 2101

IRU Executive Director, Conor King M: 0434 601 691