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MEDIA RELEASE

33,000 more students for regional Australia – so why stop now?: IRU

The number of students enrolled at university campuses in regional Australia has grown by around 33,000 in five years, according to new analysis by the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) – though further growth will be hard because there is no funding for additional students, the IRU says.

Estimates put together by the IRU based on its analysis of campus-by-campus data show nearly 310,000 students were taught from university campuses outside major metropolitan areas in 2016 (latest figures available).

That represents a growth of 33,000 (12 percent) over 2011 figures.

For the seven IRU member universities, nearly 54,000 students were taught from their regional campuses in 2016 (17 percent of all regional higher education teaching) - around 6,400 more students than in 2011.

Higher education is particularly important for regional Australia, where educational attainment tends to be lower.

University campuses in regional areas also provide a big economic and social benefit to the communities where they are based.

The good news story for regional Australia is set to come to a halt however as universities respond to the Commonwealth Government funding freeze that holds universities to 2017 funding levels.

Regional campuses will be particularly hard hit.

Data on the university funding freeze obtained through a Freedom of Information request and [published recently by the ABC](#) signalled that regional universities are, on average, set to lose more money than their city counterparts.

If the funding freeze is maintained universities will need to reduce places to meet the funding amount or teach students with less than the needed resource.

Commenting, IRU Executive Director Conor King said:

“Getting more people to university in regional Australia is particularly significant because university take up is a lot lower than in metro areas, despite the impressive growth over the past decade. Having a university outside the major metropolitan areas adds variety to the region, drawing in people and setting the base for more diverse economies in those areas.”

“That growth is now set to stop, not because there are not people wanting university places but because universities will not be able to teach them.”

“The Government needs to reconsider its funding freeze. Once it feels the heat from the generation now coming through school we will need a flood of places from the early 2020s.”

About the data

Table 1: Students by Australian Campus Location – 2011, 2016 and change

| Peak Body | Regional & Remote | Major Cities | Total(s): |
|---|-------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Innovative Research Universities | | | |
| 2011 | 47,300 | 123,100 | 170,300 |
| 2016 | 53,700 | 140,500 | 194,200 |
| Change | 6,400 | 17,500 | 23,900 |
| All universities | | | |
| 2011 | 275,500 | 797,300 | 1,072,800 |
| 2016 | 308,400 | 958,600 | 1,267,000 |
| Change | 32,900 | 161,200 | 23,900 |

The figures are based on IRU analysis of official campus enrolment figures.

Regional Australia for the analyses of teaching from regional Australia is defined as any campus outside of the metropolitan regions of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth and the ACT.

For further comment contact:

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About the IRU

The IRU is a network of seven a network of seven comprehensive universities committed to inclusive excellence in teaching and research in Australia.

Its members are Charles Darwin University, Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University and Western Sydney University.