

IRU media release

6 April 2020

IRU members pledge hardship support for students – Government now needs to do its bit

The seven universities of the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group have pledged new support for students facing financial hardship, offering food packages, emergency cash and fee waivers to help students through the COVID-19 crisis.

Some universities have also set up fundraising appeals to support struggling students, already raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for food, rent and study relief over coming weeks and months.

However, the IRU says the Government must also step up its efforts to help students suffering hardship as a result of COVID-19.

While the \$550 per fortnight Coronavirus supplement was a major step, support is also needed for students in hardship who are not otherwise eligible for income support.

The IRU is particularly concerned about the lack of government support for international students, many of whom have lost part-time jobs as a result of business shutdowns.

International students came to Australia under clear rules, the IRU says, but now find major elements of the normal world do not apply. Many have returned home and continue to study online but others remain in the country hoping to complete their study.

The IRU says the Government must give international students access to hardship funds where no other support is available to them.

IRU Executive Director Conor King said:

“Many students are doing it tough so it’s great to see universities stepping up by creating new hardship support mechanisms.

“The Government has a responsibility to support all students suffering financial hardship as a result of COVID-19, domestic and international. We need a fallback program that enables anyone legally in Australia to make a claim to in extreme circumstances.

“International students have lost casual jobs due to the COVID-19 crisis. Providing them with last resort financial hardship payments would enable many to continue studying in Australia. This in turn would protect Australia’s reputation as a reliable and fair country in which to study.”

Student hardship support at IRU universities (listed by university, A-Z)

Charles Darwin University

- The university has launched the Emergency Student Appeal, offering grants of \$2000 for students in hardship as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

iru.edu.au

- The census date has been moved to 7 April to allow students time to adjust to online learning.

Flinders University

- Flinders University has created a \$12.5 million support package for students including emergency support payments. The Vice-Chancellor has personally contributed \$100,000 to the fund, with other members of the university executive contributing a further \$200,000.
- The Student Services and Amenities Fee has been waived for all students.
- Students may apply for special consideration if they withdraw after census date.

Griffith University

- The university has created a COVID-19 Student Support Bursary for students experiencing severe financial hardship.
- 1000 loan computers made available to students.
- Increased flexibility around payment plans for international students.

James Cook University

- The university has launched a food pantry for the benefit of students facing financial hardship, collecting cash and food donations from staff and community.
- A COVID-19 Student Support Bursary has been created.
- The census date has been moved to 14 April to give students time to make changes to their enrolments.

La Trobe University

- A new Student Crisis appeal has been launched to raise \$550,000 for students in need. The fund has already raised more than \$185,000 in its first few days.
- The university leadership is taking a 20% pay cut, with the savings split between university's student support appeal and the university budget.
- Students are being supported by scholarships for IT and living costs.
- Semester one student services fees have been waived.
- The census date has been moved to 15 April to give students time to make changes to their enrolments.

Murdoch University

- The university is supporting international students with food vouchers, foodbank, a hardship fund, \$100 data packages and laptops.
- Students can apply for special consideration if they want to withdraw from a subject after census date.

Western Sydney University

- A 10% fee reduction will be applied to all international onshore students studying a coursework degree.

- The university is supporting international students by providing food vouchers, an emergency fund (staff and alumni contributions) and allowing students to repeat subjects at no cost if they do not pass this semester.
- The university has provided a guarantee that no international student will be left without accommodation.

IRU contacts

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About the IRU

The IRU is 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.