

Media release

5 November 2020

International research and education remain at threat from proposed foreign relations laws

Research and education partnerships between Australian universities and international institutions remain at risk following the publication of the [parliamentary inquiry report](#) into the proposed Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Bill 2020, the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group has said.

The Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee report, published today (5 November), considers the major problems for universities but does not recommend removing universities from the scope of the legislation.

Instead, the committee's majority report attempts to address some weaknesses of the bill, including:

- exempting some minor administrative or purely logistical matters from the legislation.
- adding a definition of 'institutional autonomy' into the Bill.

IRU welcomes those two proposed changes but they do not go far enough to rectify the significant problems with the bill.

The Labor minority report proposes limiting the scope of the bill to agreements of sufficient standing to affect foreign policy or be an avenue for foreign interference.

In its [submission to the inquiry](#), IRU called for universities to be exempt from the legislation, given the huge administrative burden of registering thousands of international arrangements including routine activity like student exchange visits and corporate licensing agreements.

IRU says if universities remain within the scope of the legislation, a spectrum of risk should be applied to each arrangement to ensure DFAT does not disproportionately focus its resources on routine and low-risk activity at the expense of proper monitoring of higher risk activities.

IRU looks forward to working with DFAT and the Government to get this Bill right as it progresses through Parliament.

Commenting on the publication of the inquiry report, IRU Executive Director Conor King said:

"IRU is concerned that, without significant changes, this legislation will signal death by red tape for many international research and student education partnerships.

"We have made a case that universities should be exempt from the new laws. If they continue to be included, the scope of the regulation needs to be considerably tightened to ensure the Government focuses its resources on high risk foreign agreements, not routine activity."

IRU contacts

iru.edu.au



IRU Executive Director, Conor King **M:** 0434 601 691

IRU Marketing and Media Advisor, William Summers **M:** 0434 275 792

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.