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## IRU STATEMENT 04/2016

# Budget provides higher education clarity from the Government

Higher education needs certainty for the future, with clarity for the coming decade about the balance of Government and student investment.

The 2016 Budget provides the needed clarity about the Government's long-term intention following the failure of its previous higher education packages to gain the support of the Parliament.

Implementation of major changes from 2018 gives the time to get the settings right. Set against the Labor position to buttress public investment in universities the electorate has a clear choice in deciding the next Government in the coming election.

The higher education discussion paper provides a solid basis to focus on adjusting the higher education funding system to achieve the outcomes required.

Ruling out a full system of higher education provider driven charges, the emphasis returns to which combination of Government and student contributions will generate the resources needed at levels Government and student will sustain. The 'trilemma' remains.

The discussion paper rightly proposes fundamentally rebooting the grouping of funding and charges to suit current and future expenditure needs. This is not glamorous nor will it be easy but it is necessary.

The paper devotes much space to the trials of HELP, responding to reports released over the past year. It is important to review its operations but the outcome should hold to its core intent: a system to ensure all Australians can access undergraduate university education suited to their aspirations without concern about fees.

The budget also contains decisions to buttress the quality assurance system including provision of information to prospective students.

These come at the expense of cuts of over 20% to the Higher Education Participation Program (HEPP). The HEPP cut risks undermining a program critical for educating all students well. Following review it is essential that the long term program in the 2018 package sustains the incentive to enrol all suitable students regardless of background.

The loss of the Office for Learning and Teaching, with a commitment to maintain national Teaching Awards, marks the demise of yet another scheme to improve cross sector understanding of how to deliver higher education well. We now need a discussion about how to maintain the focus on good education delivery that leads to improvements within each institution as part of the delivery of national education outcomes.

The Budget also confirms that the various Indigenous support programs will be combined as IRU has long proposed. This sets each institution the challenge to continue to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes.

**END**

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