

Media Statement

12 July 2022

IRU universities engines of opportunity for future skills and jobs

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) welcomes the announcement by the Prime Minister and Treasurer of a national Jobs and Skills Summit to be held in early September. We share the government's commitment to a future in which all Australians – regardless of their background – can access the education and training needed to secure meaningful employment and play a productive role in an innovative economy.

Universities play a critical role in future jobs and skills and the IRU looks forward to participating in the Summit and White Paper process. The IRU brings a distinct perspective as a group of universities focused on broadening participation and addressing barriers to access and equity in higher education.

Already 50% of our students are the first in their family to attend university. We also have higher than average participation rates for low-income, regional, remote and First Nations students. But there is unfinished business in addressing equity in higher education. Expanding access to education will pay large dividends as the nation struggles to address critical skills shortages.

The IRU has a distinct international profile among Australian universities and we can contribute a unique perspective to the discussion about the relationship between international education and skilled migration. Australia should make it easier for graduates with relevant skills to stay and work, but this must be balanced by a long-term approach to building reciprocal relationships with partners in our region. For example, the IRU is committed to strengthening links with Pacific Island Nations.

In our 2022 IRU [pre-election policy statement](#) and in our March [joint statement](#) with the Australian Technology Network of Universities, we set out specific recommendations and commitments to support innovation in addressing skills shortages and participation, placing opportunity at the heart of plans for Australia's social and economic recovery.

Quotes attributable:

Professor Carolyn Evans, IRU Chair and Vice-Chancellor, Griffith University

“The IRU will be part of the solution to national skills shortages and creating the jobs of the future. We know that over half of the million new jobs created across the country by 2025 will require a university-level education, and our universities are engines of the new economy.”

“We have committed to working closely and constructively with partners in government, industry and the broader education and training system to ensure an innovative and sustainable approach to the nation's most significant economic challenges.”

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Mr Paul Harris, IRU Executive Director

“The government’s approach to Jobs and Skills, when combined with Minister Clare’s commitment to addressing equity in education, presents a major opportunity to achieve progress on participation and productivity.”

“The IRU has a record of success in traditionally under-served areas and regions and we will continue our critical role in skills development for a more innovative, inclusive and equitable economy and society.”

About the IRU

The IRU is a group of eight universities across Australia committed to inclusive education and innovative research that advances our communities.

The history of our member universities goes back to the 1960s and early 1970s when, under both Liberal and Labor governments, there was an expansion of new forms of higher education and research to meet the needs of the nation.

Across the IRU, our 16,500 staff now teach over 237,000 students at 34 locations in every mainland State and Territory. Our eight universities are representative of the nation and provide excellent partners for piloting and trialling new approaches.

Through constructive engagement in public policy, collaboration, innovation and international engagement, the IRU enhances the impact of our universities for the future of Australia.

IRU contact

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