



Innovative
Research
Universities



Innovative Research Universities

Strategy 2022-2027

CONTENTS

Chair's Foreword	2
Acknowledgement of Country and Respect for Indigenous Cultures	3
Mission Statement	4
History and Values	5
Strategic Context	6
Priorities for the Future 2022-2027	7
How we will deliver	8-9



Chair's Foreword

Almost twenty years ago, a group of young Australian universities came together to form a new network – the Innovative Research Universities. The members shared a commitment to the idea of universities as a force for good in their communities, combining excellence in teaching and research with a commitment to inclusion and social transformation.

In 2022, these ideas are as important as ever, and this Strategy sets out the shared values and priorities of the seven universities in the IRU, along with our shared commitment to putting them into action in the years ahead.

Today our members span the country, serving communities in metropolitan and regional areas alike. By working together, our universities scale up their impact and have a truly national voice. Over the last twenty years the IRU has built a reputation for thoughtful and constructive contributions to public policy and this will continue to be a priority.

Nearly three years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia now faces a number of major geopolitical, demographic and technological shifts. These will have significant impacts on the ways in which universities operate, and higher education, research and innovation will also be critical to the ability of our communities to respond.



The Australian Government's commitment to implement the Uluru Statement in full and to hold a referendum to constitutionally enshrine an Indigenous Voice to Parliament highlights the importance of education and open, informed and culturally respectful debate across society. Through our Strategy, the IRU commits to Indigenous advancement and reconciliation.

Across our new strategic initiatives and our public policy work, the IRU will be guided by the values and priorities set out in this document. As we approach our 20th anniversary in 2023, we will work together and with our partners to ensure that our universities fulfill their role in Australia's social and economic development.

Professor Carolyn Evans
Chair, Innovative Research Universities
Vice Chancellor and President, Griffith University



Western Sydney University

Acknowledgement of Country and Respect for Indigenous Cultures

The IRU recognises Indigenous peoples across Australia as the traditional owners of the unceded lands upon which our campuses sit today. Indigenous peoples are the first educators and innovators, with long-held philosophies of Country. As institutions of knowledge, our universities are proud to play a role in continuing this tradition.

We believe that education and research play an important role in reconciliation, recognition, justice and Indigenous advancement. Through our strategy, we will prioritise work to advance participation, equity and cultural respect, and we will reflect this in our contributions to public policy.

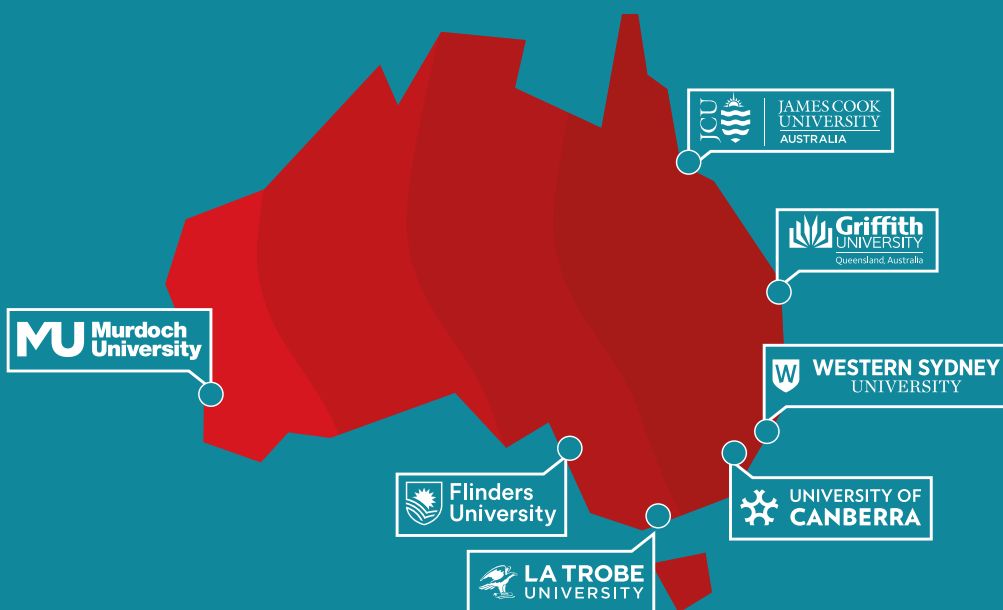
MISSION STATEMENT



Innovative
Research
Universities

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

Through collaboration, constructive engagement in public policy and partnerships, both domestically and across the Indo-Pacific region, we enhance our impact for the future of Australia.



Griffith University

History and Values

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. As capital cities and regional centres grew, new universities and colleges were established to open up access to students.

The public universities in the IRU trace their history to this moment in Australia's social and economic development. Our members are young and dynamic universities, with a shared commitment to innovative models of education and research that serve their communities.

From their founding, IRU members pioneered new forms of inter-disciplinary teaching and research, for example in environmental studies. Today, our members are multi-campus universities with a continued commitment to sustainability and social transformation.

Our universities were the first in the country to establish schools of modern Asian studies and the IRU remains committed to strengthening understanding of, and engagement with, our region for the future of Australia. Through our strategy, we will prioritise work to deepen key partnerships across the Indo-Pacific.

The IRU was established in July 2003 as a coalition of comprehensive research universities, with a commitment to innovation, that aimed to build upon their connection to local communities for a more collaborative and coordinated approach at the national level.

As we approach our 20th anniversary in 2023, the IRU strategy will be driven by an ongoing commitment to shared values:

- **Innovation:** an openness to new ideas and to working together to develop new approaches, so that education and research contribute to social progress.
- **Mutual Respect:** to underpin effective collaboration across IRU members and to support constructive engagement with communities, policy-makers and other partners.
- **Inclusion:** a focus on equity in all aspects of our work, to ensure that education and research are as accessible as possible to the community.
- **Integrity:** in our work with academic colleagues and policy-makers, we commit to sharing quality information, rigorous analysis and evidence-based policy.

Flinders University

Strategic Context

In 2022, more than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, its effects are still being felt. Student and staff wellbeing and retention will continue to be major issues in the years ahead. The pandemic has also highlighted the challenges for universities stemming from larger, longer-term shifts in society, which have a direct bearing on our strategies for the future:

- Technological change: the pandemic has accelerated changes in learning and work, and these will continue. New technologies will drive new hybrid models of teaching, learning, research collaboration and international education.
- Demographic change: Australia will experience an 18% increase in its tertiary-aged population between 2020 and 2030. Around the world, student numbers are increasing in the global south and decreasing in the global north.
- Constrained public funding: the pandemic has stretched government finances, with the government's 2021 Budget analysis projecting at least a decade of deficits.
- Geopolitical change: global patterns of knowledge production are shifting, with the Indo-Pacific region experiencing rapid growth. At the same time, the re-balancing of global power and hardening of competition between the US and China are having direct impacts on universities.
- Cultural change: universities are on the front lines of changing community expectations and values as well as a questioning of deeper inequalities.





Murdoch University

Priorities for the Future 2022-2027

i. Opening up access to higher education, with a focus on equity

We will continue to prioritise access and participation and advocate for measures to support student success and to address Australia's unfinished business in achieving equity in higher education.

ii. Innovative research, with a focus on translation and delivering impact for our communities

We will prioritise high-quality, problem-focused and multi-disciplinary research across all fields, with a focus on translation and impact. In addition to strengthening engagement with industry, we will advocate

for the importance of social innovation and universities delivering impact through collaboration with the public and community sectors.

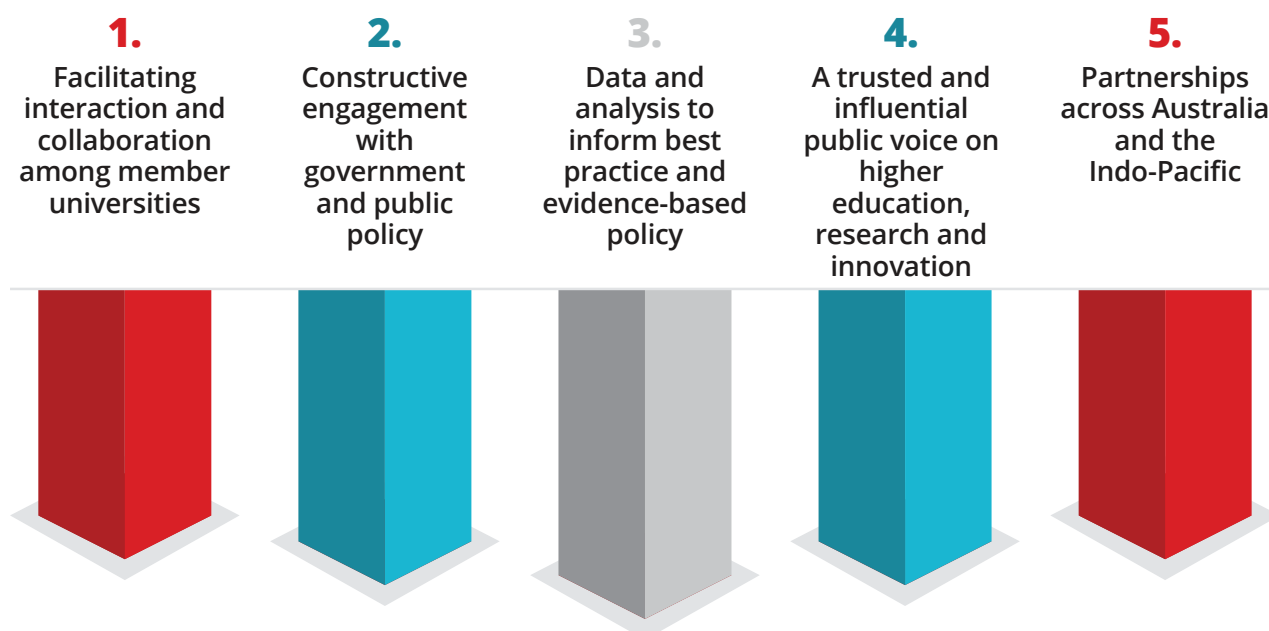
iii. Strengthening international engagement, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific

IRU members will work together on international engagement at scale, with a distinctive focus on our region through new initiatives focused on India and the Pacific. We will advocate for the importance of education and research collaboration in a positive role for Australia in the world in the 21st century.

How we will deliver

The IRU will deliver on its mission and priorities through its five core pillars and a set of new strategic initiatives.

CORE PILLARS



MEASURES OF SUCCESS:

1. Facilitating interaction and collaboration among member universities

The IRU will support standing committees at senior levels as well as ad-hoc working groups on specific issues and annual in-person forums. We will take an active approach to information sharing and benchmarking between members, with internal projects contributing to IRU priorities. We will create an active feedback loop between IRU committees and our government and public policy engagement.

2. Constructive engagement with government and public policy processes

We will prioritise government and policy engagement in line with our values and priorities. The IRU will add value

to member universities' government engagement by providing a coherent voice and national perspective, ensuring a seat at the table. The IRU will respond to all major Australian Government consultation processes relevant to our universities, maintaining broad networks of trusted relationships to provide intelligence and ensure influence.

3. Data and analysis to inform best practice and evidence-based policy

The IRU is committed to an evidence-based approach to both internal best practice and our engagement with policy. Our data gathering and analysis will be responsive to the needs of members and support proactive engagement with government.

4. A trusted and influential public voice on higher education, research and innovation

In addition to internal collaboration and our engagement with government, the IRU will take a public position on key issues for the nation. We will amplify communication by member universities, scaling up local impact to the national level. We will enhance the distinctive public profile of the IRU through thought-leadership and more proactive communications and media engagement. We will use the 20th anniversary of the IRU in 2023 to launch a signature public event to draw greater attention to IRU priorities.

5. Partnerships across Australia and the Indo-Pacific

The IRU will strengthen partnerships in line with our values and priorities to enhance our impact. We will team up with other university groups such as the Australian Technology Network of Universities and ensure a more coherent voice to government. We will build relationships with peer organisations and thought-leaders in our areas of priority. And we will invest in a small number of international partnerships – for example, strengthening IRU engagement with India – for long-term collaboration and impact.

In addition to the core pillars, over the period 2022-2027, the IRU commits to the following new strategic initiatives to deliver on our mission and priorities:

- ***Evaluating what works in supporting student equity and success***

The IRU is committed to broadening access to higher education, with a particular focus on groups such as Indigenous students, students from a low-SES background and first-in-family students. In order to more effectively share best practice in supporting students for success, and to provide the most effective input to government on future policy settings, we will commence a project to evaluate our own performance. In partnership with the new National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), we will share the findings to create the broadest positive impact.

- ***Developing the next generation of Indigenous researchers and leaders***

Despite gains made in recent years, more support and funding is needed for Indigenous researchers, to ensure participation at all levels and Indigenous-led research. The IRU will establish an

Indigenous Academy across member universities to provide training, networking and support to Indigenous PhD students and early-career researchers. This will also connect to other training programs for IRU staff and HDR students and to the IRU's advocacy to government for policy change.

- ***New strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific***

Deeper engagement with key partners in our region will be crucial for the future of Australia. Individual IRU member universities already have strong links with Asian and Pacific partners, but there is a need to broaden two-way exchange and establish a lasting framework for collaboration. We will begin with a focus on the Pacific and India. Over time, our Pacific initiative will incorporate support for increased student and staff exchange as well as research collaboration and the sharing of perspectives and best practice. The India initiative will focus on an IRU consortium approach to the joint delivery of teaching and an in-country presence to strengthen partnerships and pathways.



University of Canberra

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