



Media release

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Keeping Australia's research system balanced

Analysis from the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) shows that overall growth in university research over the last 20 years masks significant shifts in different kinds of research and different universities.

In the first of a series of discussion papers designed to help inform the Universities Accord process, the IRU has analysed 20 years of research income and expenditure data to identify key trends.

While research expenditure by Australian universities has grown, investment by the government and business sectors has remained flat in recent years. Australian research and development (R&D) as a percentage of GDP is declining, as is Australia's share of global R&D.

Major shifts have also happened across Australian universities over the last 20 years. Applied research and experimental development now make up the majority of university research activity, with a shift away from basic research that is particularly prominent in outer-metropolitan and regional universities. The research block grant, which underpins the dual funding system for university research, has been cut in half. And research is increasingly concentrated in a small number of universities.

IRU Executive Director Paul Harris said that the Universities Accord provides an important opportunity to examine these trends and the implications for Australia if they continue.

"The universities in the IRU were established to expand access to higher education and deliver high-quality research connected to the needs of their communities."

"Our vision for the Universities Accord is a system with greater equity in both education and research. Delivering to the needs of the nation in the 21st century will require a balanced approach to research across the country, across disciplines, across basic and applied research and across partnerships with the government and community sectors as well as with industry".

Mr Harris said the IRU, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2023, has a proud history of constructive, evidence-based contributions to public policy.

"As we mark our anniversary, it is useful to look back at what has changed over the last 20 years and think about what that might mean for the future," he said. "This evidence will help to inform discussions about the Universities Accord and a new era of partnership between universities and government."

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iru.edu.au

Attachments

IRU discussion paper: Major trends in university research income and expenditure, March 2023

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About the IRU

The IRU is a network of seven comprehensive universities across Australia committed to inclusive education and research with impact that advances our communities. Its members are Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University, University of Canberra, and Western Sydney University.