

Media statement

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University reforms for a more equitable and innovative Australia

IRU response to the final Universities Accord report

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) welcomes today's release by Education Minister the Hon Jason Clare MP of the final report by the Australian Universities Accord panel.

IRU Chair Professor Simon Biggs (Vice-Chancellor and President of James Cook University) thanked the members of the panel and said that the member universities in the IRU are ready to work constructively with government to begin implementing key recommendations in the report.

"Urgent reforms are needed to address unfinished business with equity outcomes in the higher education system, to set the foundations for universities to deliver on the future needs of the nation, and to deliver on the promise of the Accord," he said.

"We thank Professor Mary O'Kane and the other members of the Accord panel for their diligent effort and the quality of the work that has gone into this final report. It is a major milestone for our sector and we fully support its focus on equitable and inclusive growth."

IRU Executive Director Paul Harris said many of the report's recommendations were in line with recommendations made to the panel and government by the IRU.

"There is a lot to like in this report. We are pleased to see the continued focus on equity and innovation, and the detail about how these will be delivered through increased support for students, a new needs-based funding model and measures to strengthen research uptake and impact," he said.

"We thank Minister Clare for the announcements he has already made to adopt Accord panel recommendations and we look forward to the government's response to the report and action starting in this year's Federal Budget to begin the longer-term process of reform."

Specific IRU recommendations that have been adopted in the final Accord report include:

- The setting of equity targets with the longer-term goal of population parity for key under-represented groups in higher education, with each university playing a role based on its distinct mission and the population it serves.
- Significant funding increase and fairer allocation for fee-free preparatory (enabling) courses.
- Financial support for students undertaking compulsory placements.
- Reform of the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) scheme with simpler and fairer student contributions.
- A new funding model which targets public investment to areas of greatest need, delivered through "mission-based compacts" which will support diversity across the system.

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- New programs to support self-determination in Indigenous higher education and more Indigenous-led research.
- Whole-of-government commitment to research funding reform.
- Increased funding for the Australian Research Council and for PhD stipends.
- A stronger focus on programs and funding to encourage the uptake of university research by governments, industry and community groups, with a new approach to demonstrating research quality and impact.
- A more systematic approach to governance, with a commitment to improved data and to monitoring and minimising regulatory burden.

The IRU believes that these recommendations should be among the first priorities for implementation in the government's response to the final Accord report.

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.

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