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Joint IRU and RUN statement on international education

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) and the Regional Universities Network (RUN) have joined together to call for strong political leadership to rectify the damage done to Australia’s higher education sector by Ministerial Direction 107.

The rumoured defeat of the ESOS Amendment Bill means that Ministerial Direction 107 – which the Government and Opposition both acknowledge has disproportionately affected smaller regional and suburban universities – will continue as the default policy.

If the ESOS Amendment Bill does not pass, the IRU and RUN will call on the government to immediately revoke Ministerial Direction 107 and to put in place new processing for student visas.

IRU Executive Director Paul Harris said that the evidence was clear this year that Ministerial Direction 107 unfairly impacted students applying to IRU and RUN universities.

“Ministerial Direction 107 undermines equity, undermines diversification and undermines the ability of our universities to invest in new models of international education”, he said.

RUN Chief Executive Officer Alec Webb said that while both networks recognise the role of Government in managing international education as part of the overall migration program, there must be a better approach than the current system.

“Regional and outer metropolitan universities do the heavy lifting when it comes to opening up access to higher education and educating students from equity cohorts, and yet it is our students and universities that have been the worst hit by Ministerial Direction 107”, he said.

While commencements across the higher education in total are up for 2024, this has not been shared equally among universities, with new commencements at the IRU and RUN down by a quarter and a third respectively from 2023 to 2024.

Despite acknowledging that the Ministerial Direction 107 is *‘undermining diversity’* and *‘is hurting smaller universities in the bush,’* Minister Clare has said the flawed policy *‘will*

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remain in place (should the ESOS Amendment Bill not pass) to allow the Government to achieve its goal of reducing the level of migration’.

IRU and RUN are collectively calling on the Minister and this Government to work constructively with the sector to immediately implement a more balanced and improved approach to visa processing, based on the principles of transparency, repeatability, and institutional equality.

In formulating and implementing a better solution, we believe that the Government should recognise the damaging impacts of recent Government policy and ensure that institutions most impacted by Ministerial Direction 107 are granted visa processing priority.

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