



Media Statement

4 November 2024

Supporting students requires action on the cost of degrees

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) supports measures to reduce student debt, but these must be paired with immediate action on the underlying cost of doing a degree. Changes to HELP loans proposed by the Albanese Government will benefit students with a current debt, but more action must also be taken now to support future students.

In September, the IRU released [updated modelling](#) to underpin a plan for reform of the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) policy package in line with the recommendations of the Universities Accord. JRG shifted more of the cost of education onto students and made student contributions more unequal, complex and socially regressive. The IRU called for reform of the JRG to be a priority for the upcoming mid-year Budget update.

Quotes attributable to IRU Executive Director Paul Harris:

“The government’s proposal to cut 20% off all existing student loans will provide relief for current and former students in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. But the primary driver of student debt is the cost of doing a degree and the cost is still rising.”

“We agree with the Prime Minister that we should be focusing on intergenerational inequality and creating a smarter country, where the doors to tertiary education and training are open as wide as possible. The IRU strongly supports the government’s goal of lifting tertiary education participation, with a particular focus on students from under-represented backgrounds.”

“Students are paying more now for their degrees than in the past and we know that the JRG policy has a disproportionate impact on students from low-SES backgrounds, female students and Indigenous students. We won’t be able to meet our targets without action on JRG reform, and the longer we leave it, the harder it will get.”

“International evidence clearly shows that increased participation and public investment in tertiary education and training delivers benefits right across the economy for all taxpayers. These benefits include greater productivity, lower inequality, improved social cohesion, increased innovation and better health and wellbeing.”

About the IRU

The IRU is a network of seven comprehensive universities across Australia committed to inclusive education and research with impact. 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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