



Media Statement

18 December 2024

IRU welcomes Budget measures to expand higher education equity and participation

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) has welcomed announcements in today's Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) that will support a bigger and fairer higher education system to meet the needs of Australia's society and economy into the future.

IRU Executive Director Paul Harris said that today's announcements of additional Australian Government funding show commitment to the major reforms recommended in the Universities Accord.

"We agree with the Accord's focus on increasing tertiary education participation to set Australia up for the future, with a particular focus on supporting students from under-represented backgrounds to address unfinished business on educational equity," he said.

"The introduction of Needs-Based Funding, backed up by extra student places and additional resourcing to universities for community outreach and engagement, will support our universities in delivering on their mission to expand access and opportunity for students across the country."

The IRU supports the move to a new Managed Growth Funding System that can ensure sustainable and equitable growth over time, supported by a new Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) that can provide independent advice to government, engage deeply with universities and improve the evidence base for tertiary education.

"There is a lot of work to do to implement these new measures, and we look forward to engaging constructively with government in 2025 to ensure that the new funding model and ATEC support our shared goals of an expanded tertiary education system, and a more equitable and innovative Australia," Mr Harris said.

In 2023, the Productivity Commission found that existing government funding was insufficient to support expanded participation and equity in the higher education system. Today's announcements are a welcome step towards an effective and equitable university system that is set up for the future. The IRU also supports targeted measures to reduce student debt and support students with cost-of-living pressures, but the biggest driver of student debt is the cost of doing a degree and these costs are still rising. Urgent reform of the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) package is still needed to ensure that future Accord targets for participation and equity can be met. In September this year, the IRU published [updated modelling](#) of options for JRG reform in line with Accord recommendations. Our modelling shows that JRG reform can be done step-by-step, with the first step benefitting 300,000 students.

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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. 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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