

## Media Release

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# Four recommendations to better support students and achieve a fairer higher education system

The 2025-26 Federal Budget is a critical next step towards the goal of a fairer higher education system that puts students first, as recommended by the Australian Universities Accord.

In its pre-Budget submission, the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) is focusing on four key recommendations that need action this year if Australia is to continue to support students with the cost of living and to deliver on the government's priorities.

The IRU strongly supports the vision of the Universities Accord for a bigger and fairer higher education system, and the government's commitment to increasing participation in tertiary education and training to meet the future needs of our economy and society.

To meet these long-term goals, the four immediate priorities for this year's Budget process are:

### 1. Reform the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) policy

In 2024, IRU released updated modelling of options for JRG reform. This modelling set out a step-by-step approach in line with the recommendations of the Universities Accord, with the first step (to reduce the highest student contributions) benefitting 300,000 students.

**IRU Executive Director Paul Harris:** "Reform of the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) policy stands out as the most significant piece of unfinished business in the Accord agenda. The primary driver of student debt is the cost of doing a degree, and JRG made these costs more unequal, complex, and socially regressive."

### 2. Increase support for PhD students

The Accord final report found that the current PhD stipend of \$32,192 remains a significant obstacle for potential candidates and must be increased in order to deliver on the National Science and Research Priorities, the government's Future Made in Australia agenda, and the National Reconstruction Fund.

**IRU Executive Director Paul Harris:** "We need to support PhD students, as we have other students, to maintain a pipeline of home-grown R&D talent. This is essential to boost productivity, sustain our international competitiveness, and foster innovation."

### 3. Support Indigenous-led research

The IRU recommends that 5% of total funding through the Australian Research Council's National Competitive Grants Program be committed to go to Indigenous researchers, to match the target already set for the Medical Research Endowment Account.

[iru.edu.au](http://iru.edu.au)

This should be tied to additional support for Indigenous PhD scholars and post-doctoral fellows to grow the pipeline of Indigenous researchers and future leaders at our universities.

**IRU Executive Director Paul Harris:** “We need an increased focus on Indigenous knowledges to open the door for new ways of thinking about innovation and so that education and research better support Indigenous communities across the country towards the larger goal of self-determination.”

#### 4. Targeted relief for international students

The IRU recommends that exchange and other priority groups of international students are immediately exempted from the visa fee increases announced in 2024. This measure should be prioritised in the 2025-26 Budget while a longer-term strategy for sustainable and equitable growth in international education is developed in genuine partnership between government and universities.

**IRU Executive Director Paul Harris:** “We are already hearing from key international partner countries that higher visa fees mean they may no longer be able to send exchange students to Australia. Without immediate action, this will further undermine the diversity of our international student cohort and reduce opportunities for Australian students to study abroad.”

## Attachments

IRU 2025-26 Pre-Budget Submission.pdf

## About the IRU

The IRU is a network of seven 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.

## IRU contact

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