

## Senate Committee hearing into the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Reverse JRG and End 50k Arts Degrees) Bill 2025*

28 April 2026

Opening statement by Paul Harris, IRU Executive Director

Thankyou Chair, we appreciate the opportunity to participate in this hearing today. On behalf of the members of the Innovative Research Universities, we thank the Committee for focusing on the critical issue of fixing the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) policy.

We agree that there is an urgent need to reduce the most expensive fees for university students, so that a three-year arts degree does not cost the student over \$50,000. If we care about intergenerational equity, fixing JRG must be a priority.

IRU analysis clearly shows the increasing financial and social costs of the JRG policy. Overall, students are paying more, government is contributing less and universities are receiving less funding for their core mission of teaching and supporting students.

Fewer students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are enrolling in university and this decline is much worse in the courses with the highest fees under the JRG policy. We believe that pricing some students out of certain degrees at the point of entry is fundamentally unfair – it undermines their future and also Australia’s future.

We strongly support the goal of the Universities Accord to increase tertiary participation, particularly for under-represented students and communities. But under this policy, we are going backwards. Without reform, the Accord’s central goal – of a fairer education system that can deliver the skills Australia will need in the future – will not be met.

We agree with the need for urgent JRG reform, but the *Amendment Bill* does not provide a comprehensive solution. We understand the Constitutional limitations, but our modelling shows that the Bill would result in a funding cut to universities of \$1.38 billion per annum. This is on top of the \$813 million cut already implemented by the JRG policy. Without increased government funding, this would end degree programs and academic careers – we estimate impacts on up to 8,400 university staff.

Instead of this Bill, we need a comprehensive reform package that includes both student and government contributions. The IRU has set out clear principles and costings for reform.

We support the principles and three-step process outlined in the final Accord report, to unwind the JRG and restore public funding, leaving no student worse off. Our modelling shows that full JRG reform will require a 25% increase in the money government is currently investing in Commonwealth Supported Places. But to proceed step-by-step, starting in the first instance with stage one, would only require a 10% increase.

JRG is creating a two-track education system and society. Genuine reform with increased public funding would be an investment in young people and in Australia’s future.

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