

## Media Statement

31 March 2026

# New era for higher education system with passage of strengthened ATEC legislation

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) welcomes the Senate's passing of an amended bill to establish the new Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC). This is a major long-term reform that will improve stewardship of the system and bring greater focus on the mission of public universities to deliver education and research for their communities.

IRU Chair and Vice Chancellor of Western Sydney University Distinguished Professor George Williams AO thanked Senators for their input to strengthen the legislation to establish the ATEC.

"The amendments have improved the bill and strengthened the capacity of the ATEC to undertake analysis and provide independent advice on the future of the tertiary education system," he said.

"This is a good outcome, consistent with the amendments recommended by the IRU.

"We need a new form of stewardship if we are going to meet the government's long-term goals for increasing participation and equity. We also need reform of the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) policy and we are disappointed that this has been excluded from the ATEC's responsibilities in the legislation. We continue to call on government to focus on this as an urgent priority."

IRU Executive Director Paul Harris said that once the amended legislation clears Parliament, the focus will shift to the ATEC's role in implementing the major policy reforms of the Universities Accord.

"We look forward to working constructively with the ATEC to support a bigger and fairer education system," he said. "The evidence clearly shows that a one-size-fits-all approach won't work for increasing participation and equity. The ATEC will be critical in delivering new mission-based compact agreements with each university, a more joined-up tertiary system and greater transparency."

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## About the IRU

The IRU is a network of seven public universities across Australia committed to inclusive education and research impact to advance 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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