

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Universities play a nation-building role and have a transformational effect on individuals and communities**

A defining characteristic of a modern university is its ability to apply research and scholarship to assist communities deal with cultural, commercial, educational, environmental, ethical, health, social, scientific and technological issues. Community engagement is an essential element of a university irrespective of its status as research-intensive or teaching-only.

This view was adopted yesterday by the Vice-Chancellors of the Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRU Australia) in relation to the issues paper, *Building University Diversity*, released last week by the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson.

"Universities play a nation-building role and have a transformational effect on the individuals and communities that they serve," said Professor Anne Edwards, Convenor of the IRU Australia.

"The universities of the IRU Australia Group have addressed community needs since their inception by performing innovative and practical research, and by providing access to high quality university education for a generation of Australians previously denied such opportunity, thus playing a vital role in the nation's development," she said.

"Modern universities such as ours link research, scholarship, learning and teaching activity with a strong culture of community and regional engagement where the needs of individuals, communities, commerce, industry and government inform the nature of our teaching and research," said Professor Edwards.

"This is evident in the leadership shown by universities in community debate and policy-making about the issues that matter most such as health, the environment, national security, and breakthrough innovations that transform the lives of all Australians," she said.

The IRU Australia supports a revision of the National Protocols provided that any new model calls upon higher education providers who seek the status of being an Australian university to fully contribute in this way," said Professor Edwards.

**END**

**Further comments may be obtained from:  
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**About the Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRU Australia)**

The IRU Australia is a national group of student-focussed and research-intensive universities formed with the intent of promoting collaboration between members in areas such as research, education, resource and information sharing. Members of the group are Flinders University, Griffith University, La Trobe University, Macquarie University, Murdoch University, and The University of Newcastle.