
New European Union Centre: Focus on Outreach, Teaching and Research

An IRU Australia consortium has been awarded approximately \$1 million by the European Commission to establish one of only three European Union Centres in Australia. The new Centre formally came into existence on 15 March.

The Innovative Universities European Union Centre (IUEU Centre) will be jointly managed by La Trobe University and Macquarie University, with the other four IRU Australia universities – Flinders, Griffith, Murdoch and Newcastle – as partners.

'The Centre is driven by the basic principle that increased knowledge of Europe and of European integration is important to Australia's international role and its long-term economic and cultural interests', said Professor Brian Stoddart, the Chair of the Centre's Advisory Board.

'The Centre will aim for improved understanding in Australia of contemporary Europe, its structures and world significance', he said.

'It will be a national voice in Australia for the European Union', he added.

At the forefront of the Centre's strategy will be teaching about the European Union, through an undergraduate subject available to students in all six universities, and through Masters courses informing people in business and the professions about the EU and its significance for Australia.

'Teaching an undergraduate subject across different universities will be a first in Australian tertiary education', according to the Melbourne-based Director of the Centre, Dr Philip Bull, 'and the European Union subject will provide a new model for co-operative teaching ventures'.

The Deputy Chair of the Advisory Board and interim Sydney-based Director, Professor Christina Slade of Macquarie University, said that the new Centre would encourage and support research activity across the IRU Australia network. Research will focus on such areas as population flows, human rights, and security as well as the environment, the media, and education. These are all urgent issues with which the European Union, as the only contemporary transnational governance structure, is dealing. Comparing European and Australian experience will be highly productive. Scholarships will be offered for Ph.D. projects in these areas.

Professor Slade went on to note that links between the member universities and universities in China, Thailand, Korea, India and other Asia-Pacific countries will facilitate significant partnerships in the development of multi-national understanding and of research projects on issues and interests important to both Australia and the European Union.

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In addition to curriculum development and research within the member universities, a priority for the Centre will be to link with business and the broader community. The Centre will sponsor public lectures and seminars by experts on areas of the EU's activities, and by visitors to Australia from the EU. An initial conference is already being planned on the theme of 'Living with Cultural Diversity' and the Centre will explore the experiences and needs of European diaspora groups across Australia.

The geographical coverage of the IRU Australia group will position the Centre ideally for undertaking its outreach function to the Australian community. With five of the universities located in mainland capital cities, the sixth in the country's largest regional city, and with several campuses in other regional areas, the Centre will touch much of Australia's population.

The participating universities all have existing links, both in research and student exchanges, with European universities and it is expected that these will be consolidated and extended through the auspices of the new Centre.

The Centre will receive EU funding for an initial period of three-and-a-half years, and will be fully operational by September 2006.

Other EU Centres in Australia will be located at the Australian National University and Monash University.

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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-focused 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.