

Guiding Principles

The Universities

The Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRU Australia) is an association of six universities - Flinders, Griffith, James Cook, La Trobe, Murdoch and Newcastle - founded during the period of higher education expansion in the 1960s/1970s. All six were established as universities with responsibilities for teaching and research across a comprehensive range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. Located in capital cities, or in two cases in a major regional city, all were originally on single-campus sites in outer suburban areas. Serving some of the fastest growing regions of Australia, the six universities are playing increasingly important roles in developing the social and economic fabric of the 21st Century.

The IRU Australia Ethos

From the outset, IRU Australia universities were research intensive, committed to pursuing new areas and applications of knowledge, responsive to their communities and aware of the changing roles of universities in an increasingly complex society. The member universities stress the importance of a strongly student-focussed learning environment, with schemes to promote access, equity, and diversity, and emphasise multiple modes of delivery, integrating the new educational technologies with high quality face-to-face teaching.

Focus and Aims

The IRU Australia will use the resources of the six universities to increase and extend the activities of the member universities in research, learning and teaching, international programs, commercial enterprises, regional initiatives and engagement with business, professions and communities. Joint activities will include combined bids for major projects, benchmarking and policy development. The IRU Australia will advance the interests of its members to ensure high quality, well-resourced higher education contributing effectively in a global environment.

Guiding Principles

The following principles will guide the Group in its dealings with the Government and other stakeholders.

1. Learning and Teaching

The IRU Australia regards a high-quality learning environment, informed by the latest research, and backed up by excellent student support services as a basic right for all students.

The IRU Australia supports an increase in contestable funds to reward excellence in learning and teaching.

The goal of increasing national higher education participation rates from the current level of almost 50 per cent to 60 per cent by 2020 should be supported by pro rata increases in base allocations and proper indexation.

2. Research and Research Training

Research and research training must remain core activities of all universities.

Research funding should be increased through greater recognition of research excellence and funding for top-class research.

Areas of research excellence should be developed systematically in all universities. The IRU Australia support and will work towards a clearer recognition of the national importance of basic ‘public good’ research including research in the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

3. Collaboration with Publicly Funded Agencies

The IRU Australia strongly supports collaboration between universities and other publicly funded agencies where there is obvious benefit to Australia and the partners involved.

4. Engagement with Business and Industry

The IRU Australia welcomes funding that supports knowledge transfer between universities and business but is concerned about attempts to over-engineer desired outcomes. The national innovation system should recognise both the complexity and (often) random nature of commercialisation.

5. Shaping the Future with the Community

The IRU Australia believes that a core responsibility of universities is community engagement. Community engagement extends and enhances teaching and research activities in ways that address social, cultural and economic needs.

Communities may be defined geographically or by community of practice or community of interest.

6. Access and Equity

The IRU Australia supports a breaking down of the social, physical, economic and other barriers to higher education such that all Australians have comparable access and potential to succeed.

Students should not be deterred from pursuing a university education by excessive financial contributions at the point of entry, during their studies, or following graduation.

Universities should be funded adequately by the Government so that disadvantaged students receive realistic support for university studies.

7. Internationalisation

As research universities of international standing, the members of IRU Australia universities have a history of partnering with overseas institutions to educate students from abroad and to create international opportunities for Australian students. The academic staff members are international in background and outlook, sensitive to the particular intellectual traditions of different countries, but committed to maintaining the highest academic standards. The IRU Australia advocates the setting of high academic and ethical standards for Australian universities in their activities overseas.

8. Relationship with Universities Australia (U.A.)

The IRU Australia strongly supports the role of Universities Australia as the peak body representing Australian universities to government, industry and other groups. The IRU Australia will complement the U.A. in this role by providing a coordinated view on particular issues.

9. Mission, Governance, Autonomy, and Funding

All universities, private and public, should be required to conduct research, teaching and community service broadly across their areas of activity.

The IRU Australia advocates the distribution of public resources for teaching, research and community engagement, using methodologies that recognise the diversity within Australian higher education.

The IRU Australia supports a public funding model that is stable and transparent, which is indexed at appropriate levels, and which allows universities to operate with a high degree of freedom to pursue their individual missions.

The members of IRU Australia strongly encourage entrepreneurial activity within the sector, but believe this should not be a substitute for adequate public funding. Universities should be provided with sufficient opportunity and funding to plan, develop, and refine their distinctive institutional profiles.

The IRU Australia supports the right of each university, within an appropriate legislative framework, to self-govern and to direct the allocation of resources according to their strategic directions and community needs.