



Innovative
Research
Universities

Our strategy 2009-2011

Charles Darwin University
Flinders University
Griffith University
James Cook University
La Trobe University
Murdoch University
The University of Newcastle

Our purpose

Innovative Research Universities (IRU) is a network of seven comprehensive universities committed to conducting research of national and international standing and applying their collective expert knowledge, capabilities and resources to enhance the outcomes of higher education.

IRU aims to deliver value to its member universities, students and stakeholders through the pursuit of three key objectives:

1. To build profile and a strong voice with government and other influential bodies
2. To enhance quality through the sharing of policy and practice
3. To create opportunities for students and stakeholders through collaboration and partnership.

Our history

In 2003, a group of universities sharing common origins established a collaborative network for the purpose of enhancing the outcomes of higher education. Each were established as research-intensive universities during the 1960s and 1970s, a dynamic period characterised by massive expansion in higher education and extensive innovation in educational design and delivery – hence, the network name of 'Innovative Research Universities'. The founding universities included Flinders University, Griffith University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University and The University of Newcastle.

In 2007, the network was joined by another institution of similar origin and research intensity - James Cook University - established in 1970 to bring university education and research expertise to the communities of northern Queensland.

In 2009, the network welcomed Charles Darwin University, a research university founded on 50 years of post-secondary education tradition in the Northern Territory and IRU's first dual sector institution.

Our places

The IRU network has national reach, with an institutional presence in every mainland State of Australia and the Northern Territory. The member universities collectively operate in over 30 different locations reflecting the rich diversity of the nation: capital cities; outer-metropolitan areas; regional cities and towns; and, remote locations. Our members also operate campuses and centres in a number of global locations.

The IRU universities believe that place is critically important to the authenticity, relevance and impact of higher education and research.

The IRU universities are proud to work in many places and with many communities characterised as disadvantaged and with low higher education attainment rates. It is in these places that the transformative potential of higher education and applied research can be most powerfully realised, lifting the spirit, aspirations and outcomes of whole communities.

Our ethos

While each of the IRU member universities have evolved in their own unique ways, their origins, development and locations have led them to share a common ethos: focused on research with impact; innovative; passionate about social inclusion and making a real difference to people's lives; accessible and approachable; flexible; and connected with their communities.

The IRU universities are committed to meeting the highest educational standards and providing individuals and communities with access to the transformative benefits of education. They collectively have a long tradition and outstanding track record in attracting and retaining Indigenous students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Also central to the shared ethos of the IRU members is an emphasis on conducting high quality research recognised for its impact and relevance at the regional, national and international level. Underpinned by disciplinary-specific research expertise, the IRU universities seek to integrate knowledge drawn from multiple disciplines to address important societal problems and opportunities.

The IRU universities place a priority on connectedness - community outreach and engagement, regional development and collaboration with the end-users of research. They emphasise the importance of building international connections to enhance access to higher education and promote global knowledge exchange.

With a shared ethos, the IRU member universities work collaboratively, building on their collective strengths to advance the interests of member universities, their students, community partners and other stakeholders.

While providing a strong framework for collaboration, the IRU network does not seek to inhibit its members from pursuing their individual missions or participating in other networks and partnerships. Its aim, always, is to expand opportunities for its members, never to restrict them.

Our objectives

Objective 1: To build profile and a strong voice with government and other influential bodies

Governments increasingly recognise the importance of higher level knowledge and skills to economic, social, cultural and environmental development and are driving significant reforms to expand educational access, assure the quality of educational provision and research, and drive efficiencies in the application of public resources.

In developing higher education policy, governments are now influenced by a diverse array of organisations, including: Australian and foreign universities; university groups; private education providers; the vocational education and training sector; State governments; and, industry peak bodies.

In this increasingly complex environment, IRU aims to be a constructive agent of change, influencing debate and policy on the future direction of Australian higher education within a global context. Through IRU, the member universities can achieve a collective and more powerful voice on key higher education and related issues, with greater impact on decision-makers and better outcomes for their students and stakeholders.

The network also offers its members enhanced opportunities for partnering, in areas of mutual interest, with other influential groups and peak bodies both in Australia and overseas.

IRU seeks to achieve its first objective by:

- Providing submissions to government reviews
- Developing policy position papers
- Maintaining strong communication links with Ministers' offices and senior government officers
- Seeking representation on national committees, boards and other relevant bodies
- Providing media comment
- Producing publications promoting IRU and its member universities.

IRU Australia strongly supports the role of Universities Australia as the peak body representing Australian universities to government, industry and other groups and works cooperatively with Universities Australia to advance the development of evidence-based higher education policy in Australia.

Objective 2: To enhance quality through the sharing of policy and practice

IRU member universities, through their policies and practices, have established the highest standards of quality for their educational programs, research, student services and community outreach.

With the rapid pace of change in higher education and an increasingly competitive environment at the local, national and global levels, the member universities recognise the critical importance of remaining at the leading edge in both quality and innovation.

Since its establishment in 2003, IRU has developed into a network with a high level of mutual trust across senior and other organisational levels. This facilitates an open sharing of innovative and best practice approaches which enables all members to contribute knowledge and skills in their areas of strength to the benefit of other members.

The member universities also work together to identify and learn from examples of best practice which exist outside the network, both in Australia and overseas.

IRU seeks to achieve its second objective by:

- Hosting Forums or Workshops, in selected areas of shared interest
- Developing joint applications for funding to support the development of good practice policies, models, systems and programs
- Conducting joint projects in areas of focus
- Developing resources (e.g. web repositories) to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and practice
- Benchmarking the standards and performance of member universities.

Objective 3: To create opportunities for students and stakeholders through collaboration and partnership

The IRU network aims to leverage the expertise, capabilities and resources of the member universities to create new opportunities for students and other stakeholders (e.g. industry/business, staff) which cannot be readily achieved by individual members acting alone. In this respect, the whole can be much greater than the sum of the parts.

IRU aims to establish mutually beneficial partnerships with other educational and industry groups and peak bodies both in Australia and overseas - as a network of seven high quality universities located across all mainland States of Australia and the Northern Territory, it is very well placed to do so.

The development of partnerships and creation of new opportunities which deliver tangible benefits to students and others will bring their own rewards. They will also serve to strengthen IRU's national and international profile.

IRU seeks to achieve its third objective by:

- Conducting collaborative projects, in agreed areas of focus, which deliver tangible benefits to students and other stakeholders
- Partnering with university groups, professional bodies, industry and business peak bodies and other organisations, both in Australia and overseas, to create opportunities for students and other stakeholders
- Where appropriate, securing external funding support for identified projects.

Our areas of focus

To facilitate the achievement of its objectives, IRU has identified four areas of focus for the 2009-2011 triennium.

Social inclusion

The IRU member universities have a strong commitment and track record in the area of social inclusion.

IRU endorses the Australian government's ambition that by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level will be of people from low socio-economic background. As a network, IRU is already very close to achieving this ambition, with some member universities already overreaching it.

Many of the communities served by IRU universities, however, continue to record educational attainment levels significantly below the Australian average. The IRU universities will work together to identify opportunities and strategies for further increasing educational aspiration, access and outcomes for disadvantaged Australians.

The IRU universities also each possess research expertise in a diverse range of social inclusion areas and work in partnership with governments and other stakeholders to support evidence-based policy and practice. IRU aims to leverage its collective social inclusion research expertise to assist in combating economic and social disadvantage.

Research

IRU member universities conduct research of national and international standing and provide high quality research training in their areas of research strength.

The research efforts of the IRU create a stronger and more diverse Australian innovation system and gives those living in some of Australia's most disadvantaged communities the opportunity to participate in cutting-edge research.

The IRU network will pursue opportunities to leverage the collective research strengths, capabilities and systems of its members for the benefit of researchers, research students, government, industry and other stakeholders.

As a network, and as single institutions, the IRU will expand its research portfolio by applying its capacities to issues of practical and theoretical significance. It will create opportunities for cross institutional collaboration that add a genuinely new and distinctive dimension to Australia's research profile. The IRU will seek to form targeted partnerships with industry bodies and other research networks to enhance research outcomes and impact.

Work-integrated learning

Governments, industry, the professions and students are united in their expectation that universities will prepare graduates for employment and professional practice. In response to these expectations, and also in recognition of the valuable learning that takes place through exposure to workplace environments, the IRU universities have defined work-integrated learning as an area of focus for 2009-2011.

The members will work collaboratively, and in partnership with industry and business groups, to expand and enhance work-integrated learning opportunities for students and employers.

Course delivery

The government promotes the concept of institutional diversity, urging universities to define distinctive missions and to 'play to their strengths'. At the same time, communities and students have an expectation that universities will make available a comprehensive suite of study programs and units. These conflicting pressures, along with financial constraints, create significant challenges for universities.

In selected fields of education, the IRU member universities will identify and act on opportunities for collaboration in course delivery. Collaboration will bring benefits to IRU students by providing enhanced study options and access to the subject area expertise which exists across the network. It will also benefit the member universities by supporting institutional diversity and resource efficiency.

Our approach to implementation

The further development and implementation of the IRU 2009-2011 Strategy will be led and monitored by the core IRU groups:

- Vice-Chancellors Group
- Academic Group
- Research Group
- International Group.

Within each of its areas of focus, the network will define and conduct specific projects to advance its objectives. Sound project management principles will be adopted. For each project:

- A project leader will be nominated from within the member universities
- A project team, with representation from across the network, will be established
- A project plan outlining objectives, approach, milestones, timelines and budget will be prepared for endorsement by the members
- A communications strategy will be developed
- Requirements for reporting progress and outcomes will be clearly defined.

The IRU Secretariat will support the achievement of IRU objectives, giving priority to the agreed areas of focus and identified projects.

In addition to the core IRU groups, other groups (e.g. Indigenous, Library, Research Directors, Marketing and Media, Human Resources) are encouraged to meet and progress collaborative actions consistent with IRU objectives.