

IRU Submission to the ISSP Post-Implementation Review

The IRU supports the aim of the revamped Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) to give universities greater flexibility to use the funds allocated to achieve the best outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The attached document provides specific responses to the post-implementation review questions.

Individual IRU members will provide responses that give feedback on their experiences with the administration and reporting requirements.

Australian universities have strikingly increased their enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 11,000 students in 2010 to 17,800 in 2016, with a further increase likely in 2017 data once released.

The Government's freeze on the major support for educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, will make further increases that much more difficult.

The ISSP program helps support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in addition to the Commonwealth Grant Scheme funds they generate.

With an annual increase of 1700 indigenous students in the most recent year, the funds available per student are steadily reducing and will in time be insufficient to meet the purposes of the program.

Therefore, the IRU recommends:

- ISSP funding increase in line with numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so that the average funds available maintains value.

In response to the three main purposes of the review:

- the ISSP's transitional measures have been successful in ensuring smooth transition to the new scheme. The IRU has modelled (see table below) the impact of the 15% safety net for the ISSP allocations year to year based on data for the three main drivers at weighting of 33.3% rather than 30%. We do not have the data for remote students that drives 10% of the allocation nor can we allow for funds quarantined for past scholarship allocations. The modelling shows the long-term relevance of the safety net. The universities affected in our modelling tend to be subject to balancing big increases and decreases, hence the safety net serves to keep some regularity across three to four years
- there is limited risk of any unanticipated consequences resulting from the design of the ISSP
- the IRU members have been active in sharing practices for the use of ISSP through a range of formal and informal networks.

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Table: Year-on-year change in ISSP inputs

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
IRU					
CDU	9.9%	-11.1%	20.3%	-15.5%	-1.8%
Flinders	-6.6%	4.0%	9.7%	1.3%	-1.5%
Griffith	-3.4%	-4.9%	1.8%	0.1%	5.0%
JCU	8.8%	2.8%	-4.4%	6.4%	-10.3%
La Trobe	-11.4%	-5.4%	-5.2%	15.2%	4.7%
Murdoch	-19.9%	9.3%	-6.2%	17.4%	-12.5%
WSU	1.9%	17.3%	-2.5%	3.7%	-0.3%
Go8					
Adelaide	-6.8%	3.6%	-0.4%	0.4%	-9.6%
ANU	-4.6%	-2.3%	1.1%	-17.6%	1.4%
Melbourne	-4.3%	-1.0%	-1.3%	14.6%	-16.8%
Monash	15.6%	1.6%	-4.3%	4.7%	-22.3%
Queensland	0.9%	-5.9%	10.8%	3.2%	8.4%
Sydney	4.1%	-10.2%	7.8%	-17.5%	1.1%
UNSW	10.9%	23.1%	-5.4%	-12.7%	4.0%
UWA	11.3%	-15.0%	16.0%	-6.5%	-7.3%
ATN					
Curtin	-31.4%	9.0%	-16.3%	6.2%	-11.6%
QUT	8.7%	3.7%	2.2%	7.6%	1.3%
RMIT	11.0%	-4.6%	-14.5%	9.7%	-4.7%
UniSA	-2.4%	-12.4%	6.0%	-4.8%	-4.5%
UTS	-2.1%	0.1%	-9.0%	-7.5%	-1.9%
RUN					
CQU	-0.5%	-6.3%	13.0%	2.5%	9.5%
Federation	-23.2%	2.7%	3.5%	19.5%	7.1%
SCU	6.5%	-7.5%	8.7%	-4.7%	-0.1%
Sunshine	-7.4%	26.6%	-7.2%	8.7%	10.2%
UNE	-0.8%	1.5%	3.9%	-11.1%	2.4%
USQ	19.7%	-20.7%	2.2%	5.5%	14.2%
Unaffiliated					
ACU	9.0%	0.3%	-7.8%	12.6%	-15.0%
Bond	20.2%	0.0%	17.8%	-2.4%	-2.8%
Canberra	18.1%	3.1%	6.2%	2.3%	-1.0%
CSU	0.9%	16.9%	4.0%	-2.9%	-1.3%
Deakin	-3.8%	7.5%	1.2%	-7.5%	-11.9%
Edith	-0.4%	3.1%	-2.3%	11.9%	1.5%
Macquarie	-12.9%	4.8%	0.3%	3.0%	2.9%
Newcastle	-3.3%	11.9%	-2.6%	2.4%	3.9%
UNDA	-7.8%	18.8%	-0.2%	-2.6%	1.6%
Swinburne	-7.5%	-4.4%	9.3%	16.1%	3.5%
Tasmania	7.2%	17.9%	-21.0%	28.9%	2.6%
VU	32.9%	5.5%	-21.6%	28.0%	-2.1%
Wollongong	17.9%	-15.1%	5.6%	-12.2%	18.7%

IRU responses to specified discussion questions

1 Discussion Question - ISSP Review Process

1(i)	Are there any other processes or methods that the Department should include in the ISSP Review process?
	No. The multi-stage process is suitably comprehensive.

2.1 Discussion Questions – Preserved Scholarships

2.1(i)	Should preserved scholarships continue, as planned, until 30 June 2021?
	Yes. It is sensible to maintain continuity for preserved scholarship holders with the possibility to defer a full year of study.
2.1(ii)	Should the Department require providers to offer a new ISSP scholarship to preserved scholarship holders that change courses or providers?
	No. To avoid complexity and minimise the amount of quarantined ISSP funding it is preferable to move students towards the new system and allow universities to offer ISSP support where they think desirable. Universities will consider the needs of each student.
2.1(iii)	Are there other improvements that could be made to preserved scholarship arrangements or information?
	No.

2.2 Discussion Questions – Funding Safety Net

2.2(i)	Has the funding safety net been effective in providing a reasonable level of funding predictability to universities?
	Yes. The main impact of the safety net is smooth out the impact of high variability. IRU modelling with three ISSP inputs (excluding Indigenous Regional and Remote Weighting for which data was not available) suggests that in a given year most universities have small variations from the previous year but that there are sufficient with larger swings to require the safety net. Over time the majority of universities have a larger change where the safety would come into play. In many cases universities experience a large up and large down effectively balancing out over time, indicating that the safety net smooths out variability over time at both extremes. . Where universities have experienced variability, potentially triggering the funding safety net, it is mostly within the -20% to +20% range, meaning the safety net would redistribute a modest amount of the funds.

2.2(ii) Should the funding safety net be maintained, modified or removed? (Where relevant, include suggestions for improvement)

Maintained. If the ISSP funding were increased to reflect the growth in indigenous participation as the IRU proposes, the upper 15% limit may need to be raised to ensure all funds are allocated.

2.3 Discussion Questions – Scholarship Offer Requirement for Remote and Regional Students

2.3(i) Is the 95% remote and regional scholarship requirement still needed?

No. Remote and regional students are part of the formulae providing additional incentive to enrol these students. Universities should determine the use of the funds, assessing all students for their needs.

2.3(ii) If the scholarship requirement is retained, is the current penalty sufficient to encourage universities to continue making offers to students from remote and regional areas?

The intent of the ISSP reforms was to give universities the flexibility to use funds to best effect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Retrieving some funds when not used in similar amounts to the previous year acts against this intent.

2.3(iii) Are there alternative mechanisms for ensuring continued support for remote and regional students that could work better?

Increase ISSP funding in line with the increased participation of Indigenous students.

2.4 Discussion Questions – Continuity of Support Services

2.4(i) Are there any concerns that previously provided support services have been reduced?

We are not aware that needed services have been reduced. Universities have needed to spread the available funds across more students as they have succeeded in increasing enrolments. The intent of the ISSP is to give universities the control to use funds to best effect. If activities are not suitable to students, enrolled numbers ought to be under pressure – causing loss of future ISSP.

2.5 Discussion Questions – 2017 Transitional Measures

2.5(i) Should the transitional measures be removed as discussed at section 2.5 of the discussion paper from the guidelines? (If not, suggest an alternative treatment)

	Yes.
2.5(ii)	Are there other transitional measures you think should be reviewed? (Please list and suggest a proposed treatment)
	No.

3.1 Discussion Questions – Legislation and Implementation

3.1(i)	Is the program easy to access and simple to administer? Why/Why not?
	<p>The performance based allocation is the tool that ensures universities focus on good use of the funds provided: Hence the IRU remains sceptical that the level of detail in the Program Guidelines is necessary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISSP guidelines, excluding the calculation of the grant amounts, are 20 pages long; compared with • The Guidelines for the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program which are 6 pages long; and • The Guidelines for the Research Training Program, excluding the calculation of the grant amounts, which are 10 pages long.
3.1(ii)	Do the ISSP Guidelines and information on the Department’s website provide sufficient information for providers to implement the program? What could be improved?
3.1(iii)	Have students responded positively to the program?

3.2 Discussion Questions – Provider eligibility

3.2(i)	Are these eligibility criteria resulting in positive changes at the university?
	<p>The performance criteria are the main guiding requirements that should direct university action making use of ISSP and other funds. It is questionable that universities need a requirement for education and workforce strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and staff.</p> <p>The Indigenous Governance Mechanism has led to a considerable increase in the number of positions for senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across Australia,</p>

	with some related turnover in occupants. This now needs to lead to improved outcomes.
3.2(ii)	Are these requirements still needed? Should others be added?
	The requirements are not essential but should remain in place now to see through the full impact over the next three years.
3.2(iii)	Do the requirements need further clarification or improvement?
	The requirements should not be further complicated.

3.3 Discussion Questions –Student eligibility

3.3(i)	Have providers encountered any difficulties with confirming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status? Can anything be improved?
	The IRU is not aware of any university difficulties confirming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status.
3.3(ii)	Have students experienced difficulties in accessing the services funded under the ISSP? Why?
	No
3.3(iii)	Is it appropriate to continue supporting postgraduate students through ISSP?
	Yes. Including postgraduates allows universities to distribute funds over a broader group and supports the representation of indigenous peoples across higher levels of study in universities. However, it is important that the funding quantum be increased in line with the wider eligibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the growth in these cohorts.
3.3(iv)	Is it appropriate to continue supporting Higher Degree by Research students through ISSP?
	Yes. Research higher degree students are essential to supporting pathways to academic careers and achieving population parity on indigenous workforce.

3.4 Discussion Question – Eligible and Ineligible Activities

3.4(i)	Is the mix of eligible and ineligible activities right? (If not, suggest activities that you believe should be revised, added or removed in the guidelines).
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There is no clear reason to define what services are permissible within the spectrum of standard university activities. A harsh split in use of CGS And ISSP can discourage best uses of the full suite of funds.

3.5 Discussion questions – New ISSP Scholarships

3.5(i) Have universities made significant changes to the design and composition of their scholarship offerings from the CSP offering (e.g. total quantum, scholarship amount per student, duration, conditions)?

3.5(ii) Is there evidence that the changes have improved outcomes?

3.5(iii) Are ISSP Scholarships simple to administer? (If not, please recommend improvements to guidelines or processes).

3.6 Discussion Question – Tutorial Assistance

3.6(i) Have providers made changes to the level and type of tutorial support provided to students?

3.7 Discussion Questions – Indigenous Support Activities

3.7(i) Are universities offering different support services than under the ISP?

3.7(ii) Are different types of students accessing support services than previously?

3.8 Discussion Questions – ISSP Funding Formula

3.8(i) Have there been changes in the ways that universities spend or manage Indigenous supplementary funding?

3.8(ii)	Have there been changes in the ways universities spend or manage mainstream funding for Indigenous students?
3.8(iii)	Are the weightings appropriate? Have the focus changed more towards outcomes? Why/why not?
	The weightings offer an viable balance between participation, retention and completion, and regional support.
3.8(iv)	Does the ISSP funding formula support university efforts to not only focus on enrolment, but also on student success and graduation as well as investigating strategies to connect with Indigenous students from regional and remote areas? Why/why not?
	Yes. The formula highlights the importance of supporting students through to completion. The weakness is that it advantages universities that enrol highly capable students only, students whose support needs are low.
3.8(v)	Are there any unintended consequences of the weighting composition?
	Unlikely. IRU members commitment to ATSI education is unlikely to be have been influenced strongly by the weighting composition.
3.8(vi)	Are some universities benefiting to a greater degree under the design of the program? Should changes be made?

3.9. Discussion Questions - Reporting

3.9(i)	Are the ISSP reporting timeframes appropriate?
3.9(ii)	Is the reporting template simple to complete? Can it be improved?
3.9(iii)	Does the ISSP reporting duplicate any other reporting the university is required to complete?

	Universities provide an annual financial report to the Government through the Department of Education and Training that state that universities use the funds they receive for the purposes received. There is remarkably little value to Government from specific acquittal of small programs. The ISSP is driven by student enrolments and completions – the Government should not get too close to how the funds are used to achieve those outcomes.
3.9(iv)	Is there any additional information that is being captured in the reporting process? Is there elements in the reporting that should no longer be included?
3.9(v)	Is the process for reporting simple and efficient?
3.9(vi)	How should ‘other funds’ be reported in the reporting template?
	Other funding if reported must include CGS payments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the student contributions those student pay. These are the prime means by which universities educate those students. Highlighting the Commonwealth Grant Scheme and student revenue streams makes clear that the ISSP supplements mainstream funds, and does not replace them.
3.9(vii)	Are there other aspects of the reporting that are ambiguous? What?

4 Discussion Questions – Best Practice

4(i)	Do you have any innovative or best practice examples of ways the ISSP has been used to improve enrolment, retention and completion for Indigenous Australians?
4(ii)	What is the best method for sharing this information?
	The sharing of practice is best done outside formal program reporting. Formal reporting discourages open honest discussion of good and bad results. Use of various national and local fora and exchange across relevant staff seems best approach.
4(iii)	Are universities already collaborating and/or sharing best practice? How?
	IRU members share experiences and best practices within the IRU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Network, via NATSIHEC and other state based groups.

5 Discussion Question - Other

5(i) Is there any other feedback or information the ISSP Review team needs to be aware of?

Australian universities have steadily increased their enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 11,000 students in 2010, to 17,800 in 2016. The ISSP program helps support these students in addition to the Commonwealth Grant Scheme funds they generate. With an annual increase of 1,700 indigenous students in the most recent year, the funds available per student are steadily reducing and will in time be insufficient to meet the purposes of the program. Therefore, the IRU recommends:

1. ISSP funding increase in line with numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so that the average funds available maintains value.

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