

Media release

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Research capacity will be permanently damaged without short-term gap funding, says IRU

University research capacity will be permanently damaged if long-term funding reforms are not coupled with short-term support to plug funding gaps, the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group has warned.

Education Minister Dan Tehan has convened a 'research sustainability' group to look at new ways of funding university research in the wake of the coronavirus crisis and universities' sudden loss of revenue from international students.

The IRU fully supports the objectives of that group but is concerned its outcomes may come too late to plug big holes in the research funding model.

Without short-term gap funding, the IRU says, significant areas of research will have to cut back putting jobs at risk, before changes to the funding model can be implemented.

The IRU points to the UK as an example of what could be done in Australia, with the UK Government [offering to cover up to 80% of the value of the missing international income](#) that would otherwise be spent on research by each university. The gap funding in the UK will comprise of low-interest loans with long pay-back periods as well as a smaller amount through government grants. A longer-term [UK research and development roadmap](#) has also been announced by the UK Government.

If capacity is lost in Australia's research system now, the IRU says, it will not be easy to quickly ramp it up again if and when adequate funding is found in the future, as experienced research professionals may have already moved into other non-university jobs.

IRU Executive Director Conor King said:

"It is clear the research funding model needs a long-term solution. However, the more immediate concern is keeping research and researchers going now. We need to flatten the curve of university revenue reduction across 2020 and 2021 to keep research going.

"The IRU is calling on the Government to make short-term funding available to plug the gap while a longer-term solution is worked out."

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About the IRU

The IRU is a network of seven comprehensive universities committed to inclusive excellence in teaching and research in Australia. Its members are Charles Darwin University, Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University and Western Sydney University.