

Media release

28 September 2020

Don't suffocate international partnerships with red tape

Australian universities' international research, commercial opportunities and even student foreign exchange trips will be suffocated by red tape if proposals for a register of foreign activity go ahead as planned, the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group has said.

Under draft laws laid out in [Australia's Foreign Relations \(State and Territory Arrangements\) Bill 2020](#), all universities will be required to inform the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of new and existing agreements with foreign governments or overseas organisations with government links.

The rules as they stand will require registration of hundreds, if not thousands, of arrangements per university, ranging from routine activity like software licensing agreements through to commercial partnerships and multi-country research projects.

The legislation is intended to "protect and manage Australia's foreign relations" including through requiring universities to register all current and future agreements with qualifying foreign entities.

However, the IRU says this will create significant new burdens for Australian universities that are disproportionate to the important risks the Government seeks to mitigate.

In its response to a [parliamentary inquiry into the legislation](#), the IRU says the new legislation could even put otherwise viable international partnerships at risk if the regulatory burden becomes too much for both sides to bear.

The Government should instead use the existing and successful University Foreign Interference Taskforce – a partnership between universities and the Federal Government – to identify and propose a fix for any gaps in the existing rules and regulations around foreign interference.

If universities do remain included within the scope of the new laws, the IRU says the Government must better define what it considers to be risky foreign activity, to ensure routine university work is not caught up in the additional bureaucracy of the new rules.

- [Read the IRU's submission to the Bill committee in full \(PDF\)](#)

IRU contacts

IRU Executive Director, Conor King **M:** 0434 601 691

IRU Marketing and Media Advisor, William Summers **M:** 0434 275 792

iru.edu.au



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.