

Media release

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Four things to fix in JRG legislation: IRU

Senators must fix four major weaknesses in the Job-Ready Graduates legislation before letting it pass through Parliament, the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group has said.

In a written submission to the Senate Inquiry into the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020*, the IRU says it recognises the strengths of the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) package but calls for amendments to be made to address four key areas, outlined below.

Rejecting the Bill outright will not be a positive outcome for Australia's higher education sector. The current university funding system cannot continue.

However, the IRU has consistently called for Parliament to amend the Bill before it is passed.

It has put forward detailed proposals to improve various aspects of the reforms, published at iru.edu.au/JRG.

Four major weaknesses to be fixed:

1. The JRG reduces revenue per student for universities.

The Government will save 15% of its funding, with students paying 7% more.

Unless Parliament amends the Bill, total revenue for most disciplines the Government wishes to grow, such as engineering, nursing and agriculture, will decrease.

Conversely, revenue for disciplines the Government considers less important such as law, business and humanities, will be increased.

- Total revenue per student in engineering and science will decrease by \$4,798.
- Total revenue per student in nursing will decrease by \$1,729.
- Total revenue per student in agriculture will decrease by \$3,444.

The IRU solution is to rework the funding and charges in the new JRG groups of disciplines to ensure that universities do not receive less funding on average per student than currently.

2. Student charges will increase from a two-fold difference (lowest to highest) to a historic fourfold difference.

Through the JRG changes, the Government seeks to reward students for choosing certain careers – however, previous attempts to predict long-term workforce needs have failed.

The proposed new lower and higher rates are not necessary. They have the potential to punish people for pursuing their career interests.

iru.edu.au

Instead, the IRU solution is to maintain an approximate two-fold spread, that supports all students pursuing their considered preference, the best-known guide to setting the needed workforce skills for the future.

This change can be done independently of any increase to total university revenue to address the first weakness.

3. JRG does not allocate enough growth places to meet the Covid-19 jump in demand.

The planned growth for university education only just covers population growth in the younger cohort for the coming years but will fall well short by the end of the decade.

The IRU solution is that the Government provides an additional 10,000 National Priority places to meet the Covid-19 jump in demand for university education and the demand from the older student cohort needing to reskill for the future workforce.

4. The new accountability measures outlined in Schedule 4 of the Bill are micro regulation contrary to the Government's commitment to reduce red tape.

There is no evidence that the Commonwealth requires the additional powers to ensure universities act responsibly.

The proposed provisions would insert a hard rule onto the complex set of individual circumstances, rather than let universities and other higher education providers work with their students.

The 50% required pass rate measure would have the harshest impact on groups of students who take some time adjusting to university life, including Indigenous students, students from rural and regional areas and students with disabilities.

The only additional power required is for the Secretary of the Department of Education, Skills and Employment to be able to determine that a student is not genuine and hence not eligible for further Commonwealth support.

[See the IRU's full submission to the Senate Inquiry \(PDF\)](#)

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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.