

Media release

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IRU calls on Parliament to amend and pass the Job Ready Graduates legislation

Further changes to the Government's Job Ready Graduates (JRG) legislation are vital before it is passed, the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group says.

Rejecting the bill is not an option. The current university funding system cannot continue, with university funding covering fewer students each year. Demand for university places is now rising further due to population growth and the added hit of COVID-19 demand.

The Government's recent changes to the proposed cost of Social Work and Psychology units are welcome but the current twofold difference between the lowest and highest student charges will be increased to a historic fourfold difference under this legislation.

Indigenous and female students will pay more

Indigenous students and women will pay substantially more for higher education under the JRG. New analysis released by the IRU today shows that if the legislation is passed without amendments:

- average charges for Indigenous students will increase by 15%;
- average charges for female students will increase by 10%;
- regional and remote students will be paying an average of 5% more even though the Government wants to increase university attainment in these areas;
- 40% of Indigenous students will be paying the top charge of \$14,500 (compared to 18% paying the top charge of \$11,355 now).

See IRU briefing ['How JRG student charges impact different groups of students'](#) for more details about how the new charges will affect different groups.

How to improve the package

The IRU has been consistent in its suggestions for improvement of the JRG package and calls on the Parliament to:

1. rework the student charges so that no unit is subject to a charge higher than the current highest rate. The IRU has provided modelling which shows this is possible (see ['Improving the rates: government funding and student charges'](#)).
2. ensure that universities do not receive less funding per student than currently. The current package has the Government saving 15% of its funding with students paying 7% more.
 - Total revenue per student in nursing will *decrease* by \$1,729.
 - Total revenue per student in agriculture will *decrease* by \$3,194.

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– Total revenue per student in engineering and science will *decrease* by \$4,758.

3. provide additional growth places to meet the COVID-19 increase in demand for tertiary education. The current number of additional places will not be adequate towards the end of this decade.

Schedule 4 of the Bill should be deleted or at least stripped back. It is not related to the Job Ready Graduates package and is contrary to this Government's commitment to reduce red tape.

Enforcing and regulating a 50% pass requirement, rather than relying on university student progress rules which already target the individual needs of students, will create more conflict for very little impact on reducing HELP debt. It will be harshest on students who are least confident of their place in higher education.

Commenting on the JRG legislation, IRU Executive Director Conor King said:

“Charging students different amounts for different disciplines has long been shown to have little to no effect on student choices and enrolment.

“Australia requires graduates across a range of disciplines to ensure a well-balanced graduate workforce with a mix of knowledge and skills. Against a post COVID-19 world where little is certain, supporting each person pursue her or his natural strengths makes the most sense.

“Changes in need for higher education due to COVID-19 and general rising need for tertiary qualifications is not catered for in this legislation, nor is there provision for growth in demand from the older student cohorts.

“Over the longer term to 2030, the additional 100,000 university places is a useful step but will fall short of meeting the likely demand.”

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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.