

Media release

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International education is part of Australian universities' core mission to educate

International education is part of the broad mission of Australian universities to educate people no matter their background, the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group has said in response to today's speech by Education Minister The Hon. Alan Tudge MP.

Mr Tudge's speech explores important issues regarding a major element of universities' mission to deliver education and research to Australia and the world.

We welcome the Minister furthering debate on this important aspect of Australia's higher education sector and look forward to responding to the proposed Australian Strategy for International Education.

The IRU is concerned that in setting out the rationale for international education, the Minister omits the value of universities educating all interested students, providing opportunities to Australians and people from other countries able to pay for access to a world-class education.

IRU members have ensured that international revenue is a realistic proportion of their revenue, drawing on students from multiple countries to ensure a good education outcome for all students, Australian and international.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been tough, leading to a sudden and severe downturn in income from international student fees. The true extent of the impact is only now being seen with low numbers of new students in 2021 and even fewer in 2022 if students cannot enter and leave Australia.

The Commonwealth must work with state and territory governments and universities to develop a clear roadmap for the safe return of international students, beginning with small but scalable pilots in each state and territory.

That the Minister has no such plan to approve on his desk is a sign that developing State-based plans for the return of students have so far proved too difficult to make work. The Commonwealth and the state and territories need to find a simpler way to approve pilot return programs.

The Minister rightly argues the potential to extend online learning to many more people around the world. The Covid year has shown the potential for such study but also raised the challenge of ensuring that students are ready for online learning and have the infrastructure to support it.

In his argument for a more nuanced approach to international education, the Minister endorses the Government's action in 2020 to underpin the Research Support Program. In moderating the contribution to research-led education from international students, the Government will need to extend its investment at a suitable ongoing level to ensure Australia's research capability remains strong.

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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.