

Department of Education, Skills and Employment  
GPO Box 9880  
Canberra, ACT, 2601

9 April, 2021

## ***RE: Consultation on University Research Commercialisation***

IHEA thanks the Department of Education, Skills and Employment for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the government's development of a model for university research commercialisation.

IHEA is a peak body for Australia's registered and accredited independent higher education providers, including independent universities. Our university members will make direct submissions regarding the specifics of the proposed model but we would like to take the opportunity to comment more generally on the government's initiative.

The principles behind the government's development of a model for university research commercialisation are well understood and supported by IHEA's members. To maintain the respect of the international community and to ensure maximum benefit is derived to the Australian public, universities need to conduct and disseminate world class research. Australians also have the reasonable expectation that they will receive a return on the public investment made in universities and so research that can provide a direct benefit to Australian society is, and should be, highly valued.

There is, however, reasonable concern surrounding the concept of involving industry too closely in the development, conduct and funding of academic research. A level of caution is necessary in the development of the model to encourage and incentivise research commercialisation while assuring the independence of higher education providers and universities is retained. If research funding and recognition is too closely aligned to industry and it is only commercial interests and not a broader societal interest that becomes the driver of research outcomes, then Australia's higher education sector, and its global reputation, will suffer.

While mission-driven research is and will be an important way to renew focus on research commercialisation, there is a need to recognise and implement appropriate limits on government and other external stakeholders' ability to determine the mission. The mechanisms developed to decide research priorities need to be carefully designed to avoid unintended consequences arising from constraints on pure and academically driven research and requirements to define the mission of the research too narrowly and prescriptively.

Independent higher education providers are largely self-funded and rely on finely tuned offering to student and industry markets. In this context research commercialisation is central to their activities. As the government develops a model for research commercialisation, the focus should be on the linkage and connection between the research laboratory or academic's desk and industry. Ensuring there is sufficient infrastructure, funding and opportunity for appropriate connections to be made between university staff, academics and industry so that the pathway to commercialisation is made easier and more accessible will be the key to the success of any incentivisation program. Other submissions made by universities will no doubt present more specific ideas and suggested

reforms in this area, and they are better placed than IHEA to do so, but this broad principle should guide the development of new research commercialisation schemes.

In terms of the governance arrangements for a research commercialisation scheme, while government oversight of tax-payer funded research is obviously necessary, this needs to be balanced with the above mentioned need to also ensure independence of universities and their academics is maintained. Without this independence, the integrity of research conducted at Australian institutions is not compromised.

IHEA welcomes the government's focus on research commercialisation. Creating and incentivising deeper connections between Australia's universities and industry in the right way will be an important way forward to securing the sustainability of academic research into the future and ensuring Australia's higher education system retains its hard-earned global reputation for excellence.

IHEA, again, thanks the Department of Education, Skills and Employment for the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper on university research commercialisation and looks forward to the next steps in the scoping study to develop a model to increase and incentivise partnerships between businesses and universities.

If there are any questions or issues that need to be followed up, please don't hesitate to contact the IHEA team on the details below.



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