

09 May 2007

FEDERAL BUDGET A COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE NATIONAL WORKFORCE - ATN

The nation's leading technology universities say last night's budget is a commitment to the future generations of engineers, scientists and allied health professionals. This is an investment in the future of our universities.

The Australian Technology Network group of universities (ATN), as universities with a heavy focus on the professions, teaching 26% of Australia's engineering students, 21% of the nation's IT professionals and more computer science and nursing students than any other university grouping, particularly welcomed increased targeted funding in these areas.

ATN Chair and Vice Chancellor of RMIT University, Professor Margaret Gardner AO, said it was encouraging to see the Government beginning to recognise that shortages in the workforce of suitably qualified graduates have the potential to significantly hold back the economic productivity and development of Australia as a knowledge-based economy. "We therefore support increased investment which will have a direct impact on addressing the professional shortages in the nation, Professor Gardner said.

The ATN noted the \$14.5 million investment over three years in a new national aptitude test which will be an additional pathway to assist university entry. The ATN will be piloting a similar test in September this year to encourage more students to consider studying engineering. The initiative is part of CASR-funded project called "Engineering Tomorrow's Engineers."

The Government's announcement to invest \$5 billion into a new Higher Education Endowment Fund (HEEF) to improve capital and research facilities was also welcomed by the ATN.

Professor Gardner said that it is essential that Australia's research agenda be supported by a world-class stock of research infrastructure. "Research of international quality and international impact requires infrastructure of international standards. The Government is also recognising that we can't teach tomorrow's professions in last century's classrooms."

The ATN was also encouraged by the Government's decision to increase the number of Commonwealth Scholarships. ATN universities enrol 20% of the nation's students, 19% of students from low income areas, 14% disabled students and 17% of indigenous students. The ATN therefore places a high priority on ensuring adequate income support is readily available for those students who need it.

"It gives us hope that we will be able to go forward knowing there is quality education and better support for students," Professor Gardner said.

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