

Gillard innovates in education with super ministry: Cabinet shuffle

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JULIA Gillard's creation of a super ministry to equal Foreign Affairs and Trade in this afternoon's cabinet reshuffle is widely endorsed across the education industry.

Greg Combet takes on demoted minister Senator Kim Carr's innovation functions, while maintaining his climate change responsibilities in a new Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. Senator Chris Evans continues as minister responsible for higher education while losing industrial relations.

The new structure ensures higher education, research and innovation continue to have two voices in the cabinet room.

The new structure was immediately welcomed by Michael Gallagher, Executive Director for the Group of Eight, the lobby group for the elite research universities.

"We are pleased that innovation will now be viewed more comprehensively, embracing the development of graduates as well as research," Mr Gallagher said.

FUTURE leadership rivals Greg Combet and Bill Shorten will be promoted in a Cabinet reshuffle.

"We are pleased to see responsibility for research training re-integrated with higher education."

Other industry groups also endorsed the new arrangement. The Innovative Research Universities organisation welcomed the appointment of Senator Evans as Minister for Tertiary Education, Science and Research saying it, "will ensure that the Government can focus on the full role of universities removing the incipient tensions emerging between teaching and learning and research policies."

And the Australian Technology Network "is relieved to see" higher education covered by the new department.

"It is critical for the future of Australia that the innovation and productivity agenda continues to be aligned with research produced by the university sector," ATN Executive Director Vicki Thomson said.

The training sector also welcomed Senator Evans continuing engagement with post school education, with TAFE Directors chief Martin Riordan calling him a vocal supporter for vocational education reform.

The new super department follows Senator Evans's win in securing bipartisan support for a new university funding scheme, which will see Canberra pay universities for every qualified undergraduate they choose to enrol for next year.

However the future for research reforms being contemplated by Senator Carr, notably his proposal to include community impact in research funding audits are no longer assured. University research performance measurement has been controversial during Senator Carr's tenure, with one major assessment scheme abandoned earlier this year.

Even so, Senator Carr was farewelled effusively yesterday with Chief Scientist Ian Chubb telling *The Australian*, "he was a complete champion for science, research and innovation."

Universities Australia Chair Professor Glyn Davis praised Senator Carr for securing a funding boost for the research sector following the 2008 Cutler review. "While this injection received relatively little local media at the time, it was recognised throughout the world as a bold and most enviable announcement," he said.