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FEDERAL BUDGET AND FUTURE HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

The Rudd Gillard Government swept into power in 2007 on the back of a promise of an education revolution. This revolution is clearly a work in progress and some will debate its success or otherwise in transforming that nation's university sector.

But one thing is quite apparent – the Government remains committed to a university sector which has a central role to play in our nation's economic and social development. The 2011-12 Budget reaffirms the Gillard Government's commitment, in difficult fiscal circumstances, considering the sector was saved from major cuts to funding. While speculation was rife that indexation could be deferred – and certainly some in Treasury argued for that to be the case – the Government and importantly the Minister held the line delivering the sector 3.8% indexation. The Government has also delivered on its promise to fund an expanded sector, which will see more students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering university.

The skills development initiatives are just as important. The **Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)** – with its focus on working with industries and the professions – will be looking closely at the role of the newly established Workforce Development Agency, which will take over from Skills Australia. This agency will include stakeholders from employee associations, unions and the like. Universities must also be included as an integral part of this debate.

With the 2011-12 Budget done and dusted, with no major surprises, we will now be looking towards future budgets - which in stronger economic times must deliver on key initiatives for the sector. For example, there are a number of long-term priorities listed in the Governments Research Workforce Strategy that will require a substantial financial commitment in order to be met. The ATN believes it will be critically important for the Government to address and pursue its research workforce agenda in the 2012-13 Budget.

The ATN firmly believes that the Government must strengthen its commitment to the higher education sector, in next year's budget and beyond, to ensure our universities are fully equipped with the capacity to provide the people and ideas that inform, stimulate and ultimately help grow the Australian economy.

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