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# Unis' plan to build skills

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STATE EDITOR

**INCREASED** funding, including a HECS remission scheme, has been proposed by five of the nation's hi-tech universities as part of a plan to ease the skills shortage.

The universities want targeted funding to combat skills shortages in areas such as engineering, maths, science, innovation, nursing and information technology.

Queensland University of Technology, Sydney's University of Technology, RMIT Melbourne, the University of South Australia and Curtin University in Western Australia make up what is known

as the Australian Technology Network.

Their nine-page plan for creating more opportunities in the skills area was released yesterday.

It calls for:

**INCREASING** the number of postgraduate scholarships by 500 over two years to renew the academic workforce.

**A** HECS-debt repurchase or remission scheme to attract and retain graduates in key sectors such as engineering, teaching and information technology.

**INCREASED** infrastructure investment to improve research, teaching and learning.

**A** commitment to increase the Higher Education Endowment

Fund investment by \$5 billion with effect from 2009.

**A** reformed income support system for students to ensure access for students who seek a university education and to support their ability to participate fully in that education.

"Providing higher education that competes at an international level is not an option but core to Australia's needs," the network says. "Yet Australia still lags behind many countries in terms of funding per student."

The universities say there is also a critical need for high-quality teaching infrastructure.

"The new professions cannot be adequately developed in last century's buildings," they say.