



Queensland University of Technology

**Submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee inquiry into
The Emergency Response Fund Bill 2019 and
The Emergency Response Fund (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2019**

26 September 2019

The Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Bills to establish an Emergency Response Fund, and particularly on the proposal to dissolve the Education Investment Fund and associated accounts.

Universities Australia (UA) has made a detailed submission on behalf of the sector, and we agree with their approach. Our comments are designed to supplement UA's remarks.

QUT is supportive of the initiative to place federal emergency response capabilities on a more secure financial footing through the creating of a perpetual fund. The continent of Australia is particularly vulnerable to natural disaster and incidents seem likely to escalate in frequency and severity, given the association between extreme weather events and climate change, combined with the continuing expansion of the built environment.

A good deal of the knowledge that underpins that statement was produced through research conducted, and by students educated, in facilities funded by the Education Investment Fund and its predecessor, the Higher Education Investment Fund. If we wish to continue to push back the horizons of our knowledge of the natural world – as well as of health, society and technology – in order to protect ourselves from disaster and to shape for future generations a viable, productive and more peaceful world, we need to continue to invest in education and research facilities, as well as in attraction of the very best researchers and students.

The EIF has a role to play in securing Australia's knowledge future in two ways. If it is put back into service, it can resume the hard work of laying the foundations of our education and research capability with substantial, long-term, collaborative capital investments. At the same time, it can take the pressure of the research budget to attempt to meet that need alone, allowing the Government to target those resources more directly at international talent recruitment and leading-edge industry investment attraction.

We offer one local example in support of these general remarks. In Round 2 of EIF funding (2009), QUT was awarded \$75 million from the fund towards our Science and Technology Precinct, including the world-first technology access and immersion facility, The Cube. Without the EIF investment, the Precinct would have been a bunch of science labs – very functional and up-to-date science labs, it's true, but not much more than that. Instead, EIF funding enabled the creation within a cutting-edge research and education facility of a wildly successful collaboration and outreach space that has become most powerful magnet for STEM engagement in Brisbane, if not south-east Queensland.

The award-winning facility – largely through the visitors it attracts – has utterly transformed QUT's Gardens Point Campus. It houses some of the nation's most advanced electron microscopes in a \$17 million analytical research facility, and provides a site for transformed learning and teaching practices and student showcasing of new entrepreneurial approaches.

The Precinct has hosted royalty, prime ministers and presidents, premiers, ministers federal and state, ambassadors, captains of industry, leading scientists, early career researchers, artists-in-residence, high-schoolers on the cusp of career choices, younger school children embarking on lives of curiosity and discovery, and tens of thousands of day visits from the curious public of all ages. The Cube is a keenly sought-after venue for teacher professional development intensives, school tours, product launches, science-related demonstrations and announcements, and reel footage for backdrops of science television news stories. Registered attendees to events within the Precinct average well over 10,000 per annum since its opening in 2013, with casual visits in the order of ten times that. This flagship public outreach and STEM education function was only possible because of the Commonwealth's investment through the EIF.

The EIF did not fund the Science and Technology Precinct in its entirety – the project was a \$230 million collaboration, but with its own anchoring investment QUT was able to leverage further funding once the EIF contribution was locked in. Universities are willing to invest substantially from our own resources in our sector's estimated \$10 billion of capital requirements over the coming decade, but we cannot cover it all. Indeed, arguably it is the institutions most in need of advanced facilities (or at least access to shared facilities) that are the least able to raise this kind of money. Public partnership is required and reasonable, given the public education and research mission of our public institutions.

QUT therefore respectfully asks the Committee to recommend to the Government that it reconsiders its plans to dissolve the EIF, and instead resumes the prudent deployment of EIF funds to the benefit of education and research nationally, through a process of rigorous, reasoned and arms-length investment advice.