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### Four in five Australians say universities are key to tackling global problems – but challenges remain for the sector – Ipsos and Kings College study to mark 2020 Fulbright Legacy Lecture

**June 29, 2020** — A new Ipsos global study conducted to mark the 2020 Fulbright Legacy Lecture on 2 July by Janet Napolitano, President of the University of California and former US Secretary of Homeland Security under President Barack Obama, shows that 77% of people across 11 countries believe universities have an important role to play in addressing the key challenges the world faces.

The results come as university researchers around the world have played a key part in the response to coronavirus, and as the higher education sector is under significant strain due to disruption caused by the pandemic.

The [Policy Institute at King's College London](#) and [Ipsos](#) surveyed 10,502 people across 11 countries, including Australia, between 20 March and 3 April for the study.

The key **Australian findings** are:

- Just under eight in ten (78%) say research universities have an important role to play in addressing the key challenges the world faces;
- Almost two thirds (64%) say universities have a positive impact on the country;
- There is an appetite for continued expansion of university education in Australia, with three quarters (76%) saying access to universities should be expanded, compared with only 7% who disagree;
- There is a more mixed view on whether the benefits of going to university outweigh the expense of doing so, but Aussies are still significantly more likely to agree than disagree that this is the case (49% vs 24%).

The Australian public has a less favourable view, however, of the value and skills that a university education offers, and are less likely to think universities produce other benefits.

- Half (52%) think universities do not equip graduates with the skills needed to be successful in a career in Australia, twice as many as the quarter (26%) who think they do.
- 55% think a university degree does not lead to a higher salary in Australia, compared with a quarter (24%) who think it does.
- A little under half (45%) say universities have a positive impact on them personally, and 52% and 55% say they have a positive impact on their family and friends and their local communities respectively. However, 20% say universities have a negative impact on them personally in Australia.
- 43% say universities generally help to reduce problems of inequality in Australia, while 28% say they don't.

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- 62% think the value of a degree has declined in the past 10 years in Australia, compared with 17% who do not.
- 49% think the benefits of going to university outweigh the expense of doing so in Australia.

**Ipsos Australian Director – Public Affairs, David Elliott**, said: “This research highlights the range of positive impacts that universities create such addressing the key challenges the world faces. But there is a more mixed view of whether people think going to university is worth it compared to the expense of doing so, and whether going to university has any impact on future earning potential.

“A global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of universities who are at the cutting edge of research and who add significant value to their countries, both economically and socially.”

### International findings

- Three-quarters (77%) of people across the 11 countries surveyed agree that research universities have an important role to play in addressing the key challenges the world faces. 7% disagree.
- Among all countries surveyed, 65% say universities have a positive impact on their country, while smaller majorities see them as having a positive impact on their family and friends (58%), local community (57%) and them personally (54%).
- Of all nations polled, people in France are least likely to say universities have a positive impact across these measures, while people in China are most likely.
- 36% of people in the US agree that the benefits of going to university outweigh the expense of doing so – the lowest of any country surveyed. This is balanced by 36% who disagree that the benefits outweigh the expense.
- Despite people in China being most likely (86%) to say the benefits of a university education outweigh the costs, and being most likely to see universities as having positive impacts, they are also most likely to say that:
  - the value of a degree in their country has declined in the last decade (76%)
  - universities do not provide students with the necessary skills to be successful (77%).

And they are second-most likely (70%) after Spain (73%) to say that a university degree does not lead to a higher salary in their country.

- People in Germany (40%), France (45%) and Canada (48%) are least likely to think that universities fail to equip students with the skills they need to be successful in a career in their country.
- People in the same countries – Germany (41%), France (47%) and Canada (49%) – are also least likely to think that a degree won't lead to a higher salary in their country.



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**King's College London President & Principal, Professor Ed Byrne**, said: "It's clear the public recognises the vital importance of universities in tackling global challenges such as the coronavirus pandemic. Academic researchers around the world have helped guide governments through the crisis, and we would no doubt be much worse off without the evidence, expertise and data they've provided.

"However, British public opinion is more mixed on other aspects of universities' roles. On the positive side, people are more likely to think the benefits of going to university outweigh the costs, and a large majority want access to be further expanded. But two-thirds of Britons think a university degree is worth less than it was 10 years ago, and half think students are not being equipped with the skills they need to be successful in their careers.

"Universities have made a compelling case for the benefits of their expertise in times of crisis. But as the after-effects of the extraordinary measures to control COVID-19 start to be felt, including in tighter government and individual budgets, universities will need to do a better job in demonstrating the direct value they bring to society, communities and individuals."

**University of California President, Janet Napolitano**, said: "I'm proud to join the Fulbright Commission, as well as educators and students across the UK, for a conversation about higher education's role in shaping the future of students and communities around the world.

"This survey makes it clear citizens around the world recognise universities like UC and King's College London play a critical role in developing solutions to our most urgent challenges. But the results also make clear that we all have additional work to do to improve the public's confidence in the value and access provided by universities both in the US and internationally."

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### Notes to editors:

#### Technical details

- These are the findings of a survey conducted in 11 countries via Global Advisor, the online survey platform of Ipsos, between 20 March and 3 April 2020. For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of **10,502** adults aged:
  - 16-74 in Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Italy and Spain;
  - 18-74 in Canada and the United States of America.
- The sample consists of 1,000+ individuals in each of Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and the U.S., and of c.500 individuals in India.
- The data is weighted so each country's sample composition best reflects the demographic profile of its adult population according to the most recent census data, and to give each country an equal weight in the total "global" sample. Online surveys can be taken as representative of the general working-age population in Australia, Canada, France,



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Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain and the United States. Online samples in other countries surveyed are more urban, more educated and/or more affluent than the general population and the results should be viewed as reflecting the views of a more “connected” population.

- Sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error. The precision of online surveys conducted on Global Advisor is measured using a Bayesian Credibility Interval. Here, the poll has a credibility interval of +/-3.5 percentage points for countries where the sample is 1,000+ and +/- 4.8 points for countries where the sample is 500+. For more information on the Ipsos use of credibility intervals, please go to: [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/2017-03/IpsosPA\\_CredibilityIntervals.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/2017-03/IpsosPA_CredibilityIntervals.pdf)
- Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of don't knows or not stated responses.

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### About Ipsos

Ipsos is the world's third largest market research company, present in 90 markets and employing more than 18,000 people.

Our passionately curious research professionals, analysts and scientists have built unique multi-specialist capabilities that provide true understanding and powerful insights into the actions, opinions and motivations of citizens, consumers, patients, customers or employees. We serve more than 5000 clients across the world with 75 business solutions.

Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is listed on the Euronext Paris since July 1st, 1999. The company is part of the SBF 120 and the Mid-60 index and is eligible for the Deferred Settlement Service (SRD).

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