

MEDIA RELEASE

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Is there any good news in higher education?

It would seem that the Australian education sector is in the spotlight almost constantly of late. Unfortunately not all of the attention has been positive. Barely a day seems to go by without the performance of our educational institutions and the quality of the education they offer being critiqued and even attacked.

Completely eclipsing any other education related issue is the battering of the reputation of our education system arising from the recent spate of horror stories experienced by international tertiary students. Assaults on public transport, lack of student support, abuse of the skilled migration process, collapsing private institutions, substandard course delivery and the list goes on. All tarnishing the quality of an Australian education, both here and abroad. All detracting from some of the good news.

And there has been good news that unfortunately can't seem to rise above the bad. One particularly bright light on the horizon is the Government initiative to improve access to higher education for young people who otherwise would not contemplate going to university. In June Education Minister Julia Gillard announced new low socio-economic participation targets that Australian universities will have to meet by 2020. The Government expects that by 2020, 20% of university enrolments will be by students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The announcement of the participation quotas has been received with caution and perhaps skepticism by some universities. That's hardly surprising given the vast differences that exist from university to university and state to state.

So how do Australian universities fare and compare when it comes to providing access and equity to disadvantaged students? We posed this question to the publishers of the recently released 2010 edition of *The Good Universities Guide*.

'At present the burden of reaching the target falls heavily upon the shoulders of metropolitan universities' says Davorin Vrdoljak, General Manager for Publishing with *The Good Universities Guide*. 'For example, five of the most elite Australian universities are currently enrolling under 10% of students from a low socio-economic segment. Where as, regional universities enrol on average 25%. This indicates that metropolitan universities have a long way to go in meeting the Government's expectations.'

According to the 2010 *Guide*, there are currently 14 universities above this 20% threshold, although only two are located in metropolitan areas – Victoria University and the University of Western Sydney. The overall national average for participation by students from the low socio-economic backgrounds is currently 15.7%.

'The regional universities are really taking the lead on this one' says Davorin Vrdoljak, 'In fact the top three institutions for enrolling from low socio-economic background are actually CQUniversity, University of Tasmania and the University of Southern Queensland. It will be interesting to see how quickly Australian universities are able to respond to the Government's call for an increased focus on access and equity.'

Highlights of the 2010 edition of The Good Universities Guide

Access and equity: how accessible really are our universities?

Regional universities top the charts in this very topical and extremely important area. Fields such as indigenous participation, cultural diversity and entry flexibility paint an interesting picture for the future, particularly for the metropolitan and larger sized institutions.

RATING	★★★★★ Performance
Access by Equity Groups	Avondale, CQU, CSU, SCU, UNE, CDU, JCU, USQ, Flinders, UniSA, Tasmania, Curtin, Murdoch
Cultural Diversity	CQU, Macquarie, Sydney, UNSW, UniSA, Monash RMIT, VU
Entry Flexibility	CSU, Southern Cross, UWS
Indigenous participation	ACU, Newcastle, Southern Cross, UNE, CDU, JCU, Tasmania, Deakin, Curtin

Employment Opportunities and Starting Salaries

Clearly Access and Equity is only one aspect of university performance that goes into decisions about where and what to study. *The Good Universities Guide* continues to rate universities as well as fields of study across more than 30 separate criteria.

We've heard the Federal Governments national initiative drive to increase the number of teachers, particularly in the areas of Science and Maths, but how does this compare for students in being able to find a job with a decent salary in these fields? Similarly, Australia is in desperate need for nurses, but how does the picture look for those students considering a career in this field? Interestingly, starting salaries for those in the Maths, Science and Teaching fields look promising with graduates experiencing above average salaries for their first year out of university. Unfortunately the story is quite different for Nursing students.

Field of Study	Getting a Job	Starting Salary
Maths	★★★	★★★★★
Science	★	★★★★★
Education and Training	★★★	★★★★★
Nursing	★★★★★	★★

Similarly, the age old question – how tough is it to actually get into university, and is it actually worth it once you finish your degree. It is interesting to see in the 2010 edition of *The Good Universities Guide* that there is not too much change at the top of the table. Most of the tougher courses such as Medicine, Dentistry and Law continue to remain the most well paid after graduation. The story at the other end of the scale is quite different.

Field of Study	Toughness compared	Starting Salary
Architecture	★★★★★	★
Dentistry	★★★★★	★★★★★
Law	★★★★★	★★★★★
Medicine	★★★★★	★★★★★
Pharmacy	★★★★★	★
Veterinary Science	★★★★★	★
Business and Management	★	★★★
Education and Training	★	★★★★★
Humanities and Social Sciences	★	★★★
Nursing	★	★★
Social Work	★	★★★
Tourism	★	★

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Book orders *The Good Universities Guide* will be available to the public through newsagents and online at www.isubscribe.com.au/hobsons or by contacting Hobsons on Freecall 1800 682 133 from 10th August, 2009.