

## **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 is 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 as 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.'

#### **How did NSW metropolitan universities perform?**

ACU achieved 4 stars for the Access and Equity category and an impressive 5 stars for Indigenous Participation. UTS also excelled here with 4 stars for Indigenous Participation. Conversely, among the New South Wales metropolitan universities, the oldest and one of the biggest Australian Universities, Sydney scored the lowest rating for Access and Equity. Access and equity aside, as a group NSW Metro universities are culturally amongst the most diverse in the country.

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.

When it comes to the traditional markers of successful universities, New South Wales metropolitan universities are among the nation's best performers. On the whole research income, be it overall (Research Grants rating) or on a per capita basis, (Research Intensity rating) is among the highest in the country with UNSW and Sydney achieving 5 stars in both ratings, Macquarie 4 stars for each and UTS a credible 4 stars and 3 stars respectively. Similarly, Macquarie, Sydney and UTS staff are proportionally among the nations highest number of Phd holders, (5 stars for Staff Qualifications), with ACU only a star behind. Unsurprisingly, nearly all of New South Wales Metropolitan universities are in high to very high demand and whilst UWS may not command the same popularity amongst school leavers it remains one of the very largest universities by total enrolment in the country and is among the most flexible to gain entry to.

Upon graduating, NSW metro students report mixed experiences for employability but on the whole command above average salaries. Metropolitan NSW students' assessment of course, teaching and overall university experience are as diverse as they are, though UNSW turns in a very consistent 4 star performance across the board in these categories. For the most part, students at each of these universities report a mostly positive experience – further investigation of student experience via online ratings website, [www.rateyouruni.com.au](http://www.rateyouruni.com.au) on the whole supports this trend with the majority of students delivering positive feedback.

	ACU	Macquarie	UNSW	UTS	UWS	Sydney
Research Grants	★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★
Research Intensity	★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★
Staff Qualifications	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★
Student Demand	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★	★★★★★
Entry Flexibility	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★★	★
Access and Equity	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★
Indigenous Participations	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★
Cultural Diversity	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
Teaching Quality	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	n/a	★
Getting a full time Job	★★★	★	★★★★	★★	n/a	★★★★
Graduate Starting Salaries	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	n/a	★★★★★

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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](http://www.isubscribe.com.au/hobsons) or by contacting Hobsons on Freecall 1800 682 133 from 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2009.