

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL MIDNIGHT Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2009**



### **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.'

#### ***Highlights of the 2010 edition of The Good Universities Guide***

##### **NSW the land of regional opportunity**

Regional New South Wales universities are clearly doing an outstanding job when it comes to Access and Equity with all universities receiving above average ratings (4 or 5 stars) for this field. Delving deeper into this category, each institution also received 3 or more stars for Indigenous Participation, Entry Flexibility and credit for past TAFE studies – an outstanding and admirable achievement.

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.

CSU and the University of Wollongong received above average results in the areas of employment prospects and the all important area of Graduate Starting Salaries, while Newcastle University excelled in the area of Research, achieving a 4 star rating.

The University of Wollongong is the place to go for careers in Accounting, Business and Management, Education and Training, Engineering and Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences and Sciences. Students from all these fields have rated their courses extremely favourably. Each of these fields also see Graduate Starting Salaries well beyond the national average, in some cases by almost \$6000!

	CSU	Newcastle	SCU	UNE	Wollongong
Access and Equity	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★
Indigenous Participations	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★
Graduate Starting Salaries	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Research Grants	★★	★★★★	★	★★	★★★★
Research Intensity	★	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★★
Entry Flexibility	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★
Student Demand	★★	★★	n/a	★★★	★★★
Cultural Diversity	★★	★★	★★	★★	★★
Teaching Quality	★	n/a	★★	★★★★★	★★★
Getting a Job	★★★★★	★★	★★	★	★★★★★
TAFE Credit	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

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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.