

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 all that 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 scepticism 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 the regional universities' says Davorin Vrdoljak, General Manager for Publishing at Hobsons. 'As a group they provide a participation rate of just over 25% with five of the most elite Australian universities currently enrolling under 10% of students from a low socio-economic segment.'

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 regional universities are really taking the lead on this one' says Richard Evered, Ratings Manager for *The Good Universities Guide*, '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 respond to the Government's call for an increased focus on access and equity. It remains to be seen if the enrolment of students from low socio-economic areas will increase rapidly enough to fulfil the Federal Government's target.

Northern Territory highlights: CDU focused on its community

For the second year running, CDU has achieved a 5 star rating for Access by Equity Groups, which measures the proportion of students commencing undergraduate courses from each of the six recognised equity groups. The university has once again achieved top ratings for Gender Balance, Credit Provided for TAFE studies and Indigenous Participation.

For the fourth year in succession, CDU has maintained its 4 star rating in Entry Flexibility and Research Intensity. The university's libraries are well resourced with above average electronic support. And for the fifth successive year CDU has achieved an above average result for Student Demand – a very commendable achievement. "All in all CDU continues to strengthen its position as an institution that ensures that its doors are open to all students" said Richard Evered, Good Universities Guides' Ratings manager.

	Charles Darwin University
Access by Equity Group	★★★★★
Indigenous Participations	★★★★★
Graduate Starting Salaries	★
Research Grants	★★
Research Intensity	★★★★★
Entry Flexibility	★★★★★
Student Demand	★★★★★
Cultural Diversity	★★★
Teaching Quality	★
Getting a Job	★★★
TAFE Credit	★★★★★
Gender Balance	★★★★★

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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.