

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL MIDNIGHT Monday, 10th 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 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 Central Queensland University, 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.'

Outstanding access, experiences and outcomes... *Where else but Regional Queensland!*

Regional universities are certainly leading the way in areas of access and prominent amongst the leading regionals are Queensland universities. The *Access by Equity Groups* rating, a measure of the proportion of enrolled students from the six key equity groups, (Low socio economic status being one) delivered the maximum 5 stars to JCU, USQ and CQUni with Sunshine Coast following closely on 4 stars. The only regional Queensland university to fall short of the standard was private university, Bond – 2 stars. Indigenous students are also counted amongst the 6 key equity groups and here again the pattern repeats with JCU achieving 5 stars for Indigenous participation, Sunshine Coast and CQUni, 4 stars respectively. USQ achieved a credible 3 stars for Indigenous participation whilst Bond fell short of its cohort with 1 star. A third equity rating, Gender Balance which measures the proportion of female students in traditionally male dominated fields such as engineering and

commerce, largely confirms Queensland's regional universities as widely accessible – here again only Bond lags behind.

Whilst all students generally enjoy great access to Queensland's regional universities, graduates from these universities also rate their educational experiences highly with Bond and Sunshine Coast each achieving 5 stars for the quality of their teaching and 5 stars and 4 stars respectively for graduates' overall satisfaction. CQUni achieved only modest results for student experience and due to a lack of quality data JCU was not rated in these categories. Both JCU and CQUni did however achieve excellent graduate outcomes with JCU amongst the top 20% of universities for overall graduate employment, (*full time*) and CQUni amongst the nations highest earners.

Richard Evered, *Ratings Manager, Hobsons:*

“The very latest data available on graduate outcomes indicates that in the period leading up to the global financial crisis, graduates from regional Queensland universities as a cohort were among the nations most employed and best paid. Moreover, regional Queensland graduates were as, or more likely to gain employment or progress to further study than any other regional cohort.”

At a field of study level CQUni graduates are also making ground in areas of national priority with nursing graduates recorded amongst the best paid and most employed nationally within their field.. In a traditionally competitive field of study, Bond's Business and Management graduates proved their mettle with equal highest rates of employment and as high or higher salaries than like graduates across the country.

On the whole, access, experience and outcomes are all strong points for Queensland's regional universities however their overall income for research is smaller relative to metropolitan and interstate peers and research income per-capita reveals only JCU as being comparable relative to capital city universities.

	Access by Equity Groups	Indigenous Participation	Gender Balance	Teaching Quality	Overall Satisfaction	Getting a Full-Time Job	Graduate Starting Salary	Research Grants	Research Intensity
CQUni	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★	★★	★★★★★	★	★
JCU	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	N/A	N/A	★★★★★	★	★★	★★★
USQ	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★	★
USC	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★	★	★
BOND	★★	★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★

Media enquiries

Richard Evered, Data Services Manager (QLD, SA, WA, NT and Tasmania related queries)

Ph: 03 9627 4892

Ross White, Data Coordinator (VIC and ACT related queries)

Ph: 03 9627 4839

Davorin Vrdoljak, General Manager – Publishing (National and NSW related queries) Ph: 03 9627 4859

Email: media@hobsons.com.au

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.