

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 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.'

SA Universities hold on to national reputations!

South Australia's three universities all scored outstanding results in the national priority area of access and equity with Flinders and UniSA achieving top marks (5 stars) putting them in the top 20 per cent of the country. "This bucks the national trend where it is the regional institutions that have been carrying the burden of meeting the federal government's target" said Richard Evered, Ratings Manager at the Guides.

However there are many aspects to choosing a university, undoubtedly different for each student wanting to obtain a bachelor degree. The table below shows the report card for South Australian universities.

When it comes to both Research indicators, all three universities achieve the national average or above. The University of Adelaide leads the South Australian charge with 5 stars in Research, the Proportion of students entering higher education directly from school, Student Demand and for Student-Staff Ratios.

In terms of student outcomes, All South Australian institutions rate at the national average when it comes to Graduate Starting Salaries, but student ratings of their university experiences are not sparkling. On the plus side, South Australian universities rate well for Staff Qualifications, Student-Staff Ratio and Indigenous Participation.

	Adelaide	Flinders	UniSA
Access by Equity Groups	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Cultural Diversity	★★★	★★	★★★★★
Graduate Starting Salaries	★★★	★★★	★★★
Indigenous Participation	★★★	★★★	★★★★★
International enrolments	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★
Overall satisfaction	★	★	★★★
Research Grants	★★★★★	★★★	★★★
Research Intensity	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★
School Leavers	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★
Staff Qualifications	★★★★	★★★	★★★
Student Demand	★★★★★	★★	★★★
Student-Staff Ratio	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★

Looking at their reports by field of study

International students continue to be drawn to South Australia. The most popular fields are Accounting, Business, Computing and IT, and Engineering where the proportion of overseas students undertaking courses are 56%, 41% and 38% for the last two respectively. These percentages are higher than the national averages for the same fields.

Overall, Flinders graduates in Nursing and in Social work, all found full-time employment, at Adelaide some 47% of all graduates went onto further study and students at UniSA in Architecture, in Creative Arts and in Rehabilitation had very positive experiences in their courses. Top salaries were commanded by Dentistry, Medicine, Economics and Science graduates at Adelaide, and Education, Health Services and Social Work graduates at Flinders.

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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.