

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.'

Tasmania scores in the national ratings!

The University of Tasmania is again in the top 20 per cent of Australian universities across all six equity indicators. This puts UTas ahead of all the elite Australian universities, known as the Group of Eight, in this area.

However there are many aspects to choosing a university, undoubtedly different for each student wanting to obtain a bachelor degree. Employment prospects for graduates from UTas are not great except if you graduate from Medicine, or Pharmacy where 100 per cent of graduates gained a full-time job as did nearly all those graduating in the Health Services field. Medicine at the University of Tasmania demands an entry score of 95 or greater and with this being consistent from last year it is no wonder that the graduate starting salary from this course is a high \$61 800.

The University of Tasmania continues to be a magnet for international students, drawn perhaps by the Teaching Quality (4 Stars) or the strong research reputation combined with the relatively low cost of living. “The big numbers of international students come from China, and they study Computing and then Business, with significant numbers from the Middle East taking Engineering courses” said Ratings Manager, Richard Evered. “The surprise was the number of overseas students coming from the USA taking science courses”, he added.

	University of Tasmania
Access and Equity	★★★★★
Cultural Diversity	★★★
Entry Flexibility	★★★★
Getting a Job	★
Graduate Starting Salaries	★★
Indigenous Participations	★★★★★
Research Grants	★★★★
Research Intensivity	★★★★
Student Demand	★★★★
TAFE Credit	★★★★
Teaching Quality	★★★★

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.