



Recent trends and developments in Australian Higher Education

Education for sustainability and prosperity: reform agenda for higher education

- At a time of significant pressure on governments around the world, in 2009 the Australian Government announced a package of initiatives which put our higher education system squarely in the centre of Australia's response to the global financial crisis.
- These comprehensive reforms aim to ensure the future sustainability of the system itself, backed up by significant new and existing investment, but are also underpinned by ambitious national targets for participation and attainment.
- Higher education is central to achieving the key objectives for Australia's future. These include:
 - **A stronger Australia** – boosting Australia's share of high skilled jobs and productivity growth will require a highly skilled workforce that can rapidly adapt to meet future challenges.
 - **A fairer Australia** – all Australians will benefit from widespread equitable access to a diverse tertiary education sector that allows each individual to develop and reach their potential. Society as a whole will benefit from the widespread application of cutting-edge research.
 - **Capacity to meet future challenges** – acting now to lay down a 10-year reform agenda for higher education will position Australia to deal with future challenges and take advantage of the new jobs and other opportunities that will emerge in the years ahead.
- Self-fulfilment, personal development and the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself; the provision of skills of critical analysis and independent thought to support full participation in a civil society; the preparation of leaders for diverse, global environments; and support for a highly productive and professional labour force should be key features of Australian higher education.
- The Government has committed an additional \$5.4 billion over four years and will commit additional resourcing over the next 10 years.
- The Australian Government has committed to ambitious growth targets which aim to lift higher education participation and attainment rates for undergraduate students.
 - By 2025, 40 per cent of all 25 to 34 year olds will hold a qualification at bachelor level or above.
 - By 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level will be of people from a low socio-economic status background.
- It is critical that the benefits of this commitment to grow the system are shared equitably – that all Australians with the ability to go to university are encouraged and supported to do so.
- These targets will be supported by fundamental changes to the way higher education is funded, with the phasing in of a new system to allocate funding on the basis of student

demand and new arrangements for indexation of funding over time to boost the sustainability of our universities.

- Participation is also being supported and enhanced by changes to student income support arrangements which will ensure that support is targeted to those who most need it and new funding targeted to encourage and support institutions to enrol more students from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- Sustainable investment for research is being supported by a suite of initiatives including changes which will: increase funding for the full cost of university research and enable universities to strive for research excellence in areas of strength; encourage and support collaborative research activities between universities, industries and end users; and assess research performance both across disciplines across Australia and against international benchmarks.
- The Government is making significant investments in our tertiary education infrastructure, via the Education Investment Fund (EIF). By the end of May 2009 the Government had already made significant commitments, totalling \$2.9 billion, from the EIF.
 - A third round of the EIF and a special EIF Sustainability Round were announced in the 2009-10 Budget. These rounds are currently underway. EIF Round 3 is continuing to focus on transforming the higher education, research, and vocational education and training sectors through strategic infrastructure investments. The EIF Sustainability Round provides an opportunity for vocational education and training providers and higher education and research institutions to give immediate practical effect to sustainable design, energy and research. Successful projects are likely to be announced in early 2010.
- A new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency will provide an even stronger foundation for quality assurance and accreditation. It will build on the strong foundation established by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and will lead in establishing objective and comparative benchmarks of quality and performance.
- Work will be undertaken by the Australian Qualifications Framework Council to ensure better connectivity between the broader tertiary education systems to ease movement and strengthen pathways between sectors.

Australian higher education system – a snapshot

Australia's higher education system currently comprises the following higher education institutions:

- 39 universities, of which 37 are public institutions and 2 are private
- 2 Australian branches of overseas universities
- 3 other self-accrediting higher education institutions (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Melbourne College of Divinity and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School)



- non self-accrediting higher education institutions accredited by State and Territory authorities (around 150 listed on State and Territory registers, including a number that are registered in more than one State or Territory).

Participation in higher education – student numbers

- The number of students in higher education in Australia continued to grow in 2008, reaching 1,066,095.
- In 2008, the number of students at public universities grew 2.6 per cent to 1,002,003.
- Domestic students increased to 771,932, up 2.0 per cent from 2007.
- Overseas student enrolments increased 7.7% over the same period to 294,163 in 2008, comprising 223,508 students studying onshore and 70,655 studying offshore.
- The total number of enrolments for Indigenous students in higher education in 2008 increased 1.7% and new enrolments increased 7.1%.

Participation in higher education – field of study

- Increases in commencing student enrolments were seen for most broad fields of education between 2007 and 2008—Architecture and Building (up 15.6%), Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies (up 8.2%), Management and Commerce (up 7.2%), Health (up 5.7%), Information Technology (up 6.3%), Creative Arts (up 5.1%), Society and Culture (up 3.3%), Engineering and Related Technologies (up 2.7%) and Natural and Physical Sciences (up 0.3%).
- Large percentage increases were also seen in commencements for Mixed Field Programmes (47.0%) and Food, Hospitality and Personal Services (56.3%).

