



Uni rankings

Most Australian universities lost ground in the 2008 *Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings*. While 21 are still ranked in the world's top 400, most were ranked lower than last year, although seven still made the top 100.

The Australian National University held steady in 16th place, while the University of Sydney dropped from 31 to 37, the University of Melbourne dropped from 27 to 38, the University of Queensland dropped from 33 to 43, the University of New South Wales dropped marginally from 44 to 45, Monash University dropped from 43 to 47, the University of Western Australia dropped from 64 to 83, the University of Adelaide dropped from 62 to 106, Macquarie University dropped from 168 to 182, RMIT University dropped from 200 to 206, the University of Wollongong dropped from 199 to 207, Queensland University of Technology dropped from 195 to 212, Curtin University of Technology jumped from 235 to 232, the University of Technology, Sydney, jumped from 259 to 234, La Trobe University dropped from equal 205 to equal 242, Flinders University jumped from 351 to 273, the University of Newcastle dropped from 215 to 286, the University of Tasmania dropped from equal 264 to 291, the University of South Australia dropped from 291 to 303, Griffith University dropped from equal 309 to equal 325, and Deakin University dropped from 374 to equal 396.

This year's top 10 were all either American or British: Harvard University ranked first, Yale second, Cambridge University third, Oxford University fourth, California Institute of Technology fifth, Imperial College London sixth, University College London seventh, the University of Chicago eighth, Massachusetts Institute of Technology ninth and Columbia University 10th.

Xavier College suspension

The entire Year 12 class from Melbourne's Xavier College was suspended for the last three days of classes in October before exams following 'reckless' behaviour and alleged damage to property at their end-of-year muck-up day. Some of the suspended students allegedly damaged property in Kew, where the school's senior campus is located.

Writing in Melbourne's *Herald Sun*, Xavier College principal Chris McCabe acknowledged that 'the...poor behaviour exhibited by a number of (Xavier College) students within the community deserves the criticism it is receiving. It is unacceptable for any young adult to be exhibiting this type of behaviour under any circumstance.'

'Beyond the widespread media and public scrutiny aimed at the college, as an edu-

cational institution we are deeply concerned about the impact of this type of behaviour. Like many schools, we have been trying, and continue to try, to understand the origins and management of this behaviour.

'Clearly the school must urgently review why we have not been able to manage this situation better, as other schools have.'

The parent of a Xavier College student told ABC Television *Lateline* reporter Liz Kefford, 'Well I don't know how the school can even control that sort of stuff outside the school.... The parents have got to...know where their boys are, what the boys are doing.'

In a letter to parents, McCabe wrote, 'We in no way condone the behaviour.... We regret that others that behaved appropriately...had their final days spoilt.'

How young people are faring

One in five young Australians are not engaged in either full-time earning or learning, according to the 10th annual *How Young People are Faring* report, commissioned by the Foundation for Young Australians. The report reveals that 10 per cent of 15- to 19-year olds and 20 per cent of 20- to 24-year olds are not engaged in either full-time earning or learning.

The report also shows that early school leavers are still most likely to be from low socioeconomic backgrounds and from regional and remote areas, and are at greater and ongoing risk of labour force marginalisation.

The report also shows that:

- teenagers living in areas of high socioeconomic status are twice as likely to be in full-time education compared with those living in areas of social disadvantage; and
- almost every second 19-year old who lives in a major city is engaged in full-time education, compared with fewer than one in five in regional areas and barely one in 20 in remote areas.

The report raises doubts as to whether the Commonwealth government will be able to achieve its target of a 90 per cent Year 12 completion rate by 2020.

According to Foundation for Young Australians chief executive Adam Smith, the report suggests there has been insufficient full-time job growth in the youth labour market. This is based on the finding that full-time job opportunities for young people have not kept pace with full-time job growth for older Australians, despite economic growth.

'The bottom line is young people who stay in school have chances later in life,' said Dr Lucas Walsh, Director of Research for the Foundation for Young Australians. 'The report tells us very clearly that we need to be paying more attention to areas such as the needs of young people who are living in remote areas, who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and who are finishing school early. We also need to rethink how we provide opportunities to young women, particularly in areas such as training.'

National curriculum

Judging by publicly-reported reactions to the National Curriculum Board's initial advice papers on the curriculum for English, Mathematics, Science and History, released in October for feedback, English, and History are, as they say, contestable, while Mathematics and Science appear to be pretty much agreed upon.

According to Tony Abbott, the Federal Shadow Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the curriculum should include more British history. 'People have got to know where we came from, they've got to know about the ideas that shaped the modern world, and in a very significant sense, the modern world has been made in England,' Abbott said.

Former Coalition Foreign Minister Alexander Downer followed up in an opinion piece with the claim that, 'To be culturally literate (is) to have an adequate knowledge of

our own society; its history, literature, language and scientific foundations.' 'Young people are a little low on cultural literacy these days as our pedagogues force feed vocational courses. Homer, Plato, the *Bible*, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens, Trollope and maybe even Flaubert are examples of writers' – notwithstanding the fact that the *Bible* is not a writer – 'who have moulded our civilisation. We need to know about them.'

Media reports on the initial advice paper for English highlighted a predictable back-to-basics angle. According to the paper, 'A focus on grammar, spelling and conventions of punctuation will be necessary across all stages of schooling.

'Students need to know how to correctly construct a sentence. Many students in their early experiences of books may need systematic attention to phonological awareness and sound-letter correspondences.'

Hard times for ABC Learning

The Commonwealth government is spending \$22 million to keep ABC Learning centres open until the end of this month after the company was placed in receivership last month. As former ABC Learning chief executive Eddy Groves explained at an Ipswich Chamber of Commerce and Industry lunch in October, 'Sometimes you...believe you're well prepared going in, but other things happen that you weren't prepared for.' Groves left the company with a \$1.1 million payout following shareholder pressure at the end of September.

Things looked bad for ABC Learning in August when share trading was suspended by the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX), with shares at 54 cents after a high of \$8.80 in 2006. By October, the Commonwealth government announced it was working on a contingency plan in case the childcare provider collapsed. Commonwealth Minister for Education Julia Gillard told ABC Radio

she didn't want to 'raise any alarm' about the matter because the company was continuing to operate as normal. 'I'm hoping those contingencies will never be needed,' she said.

Also in October, ABC Learning withdrew from a deal to buy 123 Careers, which had a 10-year exclusive agreement to supply recruitment services. ABC Learning advised the ASX it would employ 123 Careers staff directly and ensure all staff are paid.

Shares remain suspended, pending the release of the 2008-09 accounts. Auditor Ernst & Young has been examining ABC Learning's 'creative accounting treatments' from the last three years to disentangle revenue from profit, particularly regarding the way compensation payments from centre developers were counted as revenue. It's believed that the Australian Securities and Investments Commission is also examining ABC Learning's accounts.

In brief

Identify student non-swimmers

New South Wales deputy state coroner Carl Milovanovich has called for a system of coloured wristbands to identify students on school swimming excursions as swimmers or non-swimmers. He made the recommendations at the inquest in October into the death of Amarni Dirani, who was an eight-year-old student at Cambridge Gardens Public School in Sydney's west when she drowned at the Glenbrook Swim Centre in December, 2006. Cambridge Gardens and Glenbrook had provided staff at a ratio that complied with NSW Department of Education and Royal Life Saving Society guidelines, but Milovanovich found that the school had failed to identify the eight-year old as a non-swimmer and had not adequately supervised students, while the swimming centre had not provided a dedicated lifeguard to supervise an inflatable device on which students were playing.

ATOM winners

Winning students in this year's EnhanceTV ATOM Awards were: middle school multimedia, Sarah Lang, St Catherine's School, Melbourne, for *Beast*; middle school video, Alyce Burnett, Immanuel Lutheran College Buderim, Queensland, for *Dropped In*; primary video, Nera Skripic-Vuckovic, Mayfield State School, Brisbane, for *Remote*; primary multimedia, Isabella Horrigan, Methodist Ladies College, Melbourne, for *My Life As A Rain Drop*; secondary animation, Mei-Lynn Wilkinson, Narrabundah College, Canberra, for *Culture Shock*; secondary documentary, Ben Sale, Sandringham College, Melbourne, for *UnAustralian*; secondary fiction, Guy Verge Wallace, NSW, for *Creative Creatures*; secondary music video, Frazer Bull-Clark, Daniel Matthews-Hunter and Jake Allan, Narrabundah College, for *Enough – Faker*; senior multimedia, Sarah McConnell, Firbank Grammar School, Melbourne, for *Zest For Life Fitness*.