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University numbers growing fast, Indigenous even faster

New data from the Australian Census shows that the growth in university students in Australia over the five years from 2006 to 2011 was the fastest recorded for at least the past 20 years, according to a research briefing by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The latest ACER *Joining the Dots* research briefing analyses data from the 2011 Census, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in August 2012, to provide insight into the characteristics of Australian university students and how they have changed since the previous Census and in the first decade of the 21st century.

The analysis revealed that the number of Indigenous students enrolled at Australian universities has grown by over 40 per cent since 2006, and there has been substantial growth in the number of Australian university students born in developing nations.

The analysis, by ACER Senior Research Fellow Dr Daniel Edwards and ACER Research Fellow Ms Eva van der Brugge, revealed there was a notable increase in the number of Indigenous students between 2006 and 2011 (from 7057 students to 10 128 students), with enrolments growing by about 43 per cent. However, Edwards and van der Brugge note that Indigenous students are still considerably underrepresented in Australian higher education. While Indigenous people made up 2.5 per cent of the Australian population in 2011, only 1.09 per cent of university students were Indigenous.

Overall university student numbers grew by 25.1 per cent between 2006 and 2011 (from 745 445 students to 932 526 students). This increase contrasts with the previous five-year period (2001 to 2006) where the university student population only grew by 3.2 per cent. No other Census period in the past 20 years has recorded the rate of growth identified in this new Census data.

Edwards and van der Brugge said that while the precise reason for this growth is not clear, changes in government policy aimed at increasing participation in university and a new emphasis on higher education which began with the Bradley Review of Higher Education in 2008 were likely to have had a positive impact on the appeal of university.

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The research briefing found that growth in the number of university attendees between 2006 and 2011 was recorded in all age groups, suggesting that the increasing appeal of university appears to be occurring across generations.

The report also found that after a decline in the number of people aged 25 and above in university between 2001 and 2006, the growth in mature age students between 2006 and 2011 was as large as the growth in students aged below 25.

The Census analysis also revealed interesting patterns in the birthplace of higher education students. Overall, the 2011 Census shows that just over one-third of all university students in Australia were born overseas. While the number of students born in Australia grew by about 24 per cent between 2006 and 2011, the growth rate for students born in other countries was almost 27 per cent.

Among students born overseas, the largest growth between 2006 and 2011 was for those born in Africa and the Middle East. While their absolute numbers are still small, the African regions recorded an average of around 52 per cent growth in student numbers, equating to an increase of 8665 students between 2006 and 2011, and the Middle East recorded around 83 per cent growth with 7611 additional enrolments.

The research briefing also reveals:

growth in university student numbers was recorded in every age category, meaning the average age of university students remained similar between 2006, when the average age was 26 years and 10 months, and 2011, when the average age was 26 years and 11 months

the share of women among university students continues to increase in Australia, comprising around 57 per cent of the student population, with the largest growth among part-time students where women make up almost 61 per cent of the population, and

university students in Australia are most likely to be living with their parents (29 per cent) or with a partner (27 per cent), while 15 per cent are living in share houses and 7 per cent live alone.

Joining the Dots is a subscription-based resource provided by ACER to those with an interest in Australian higher education. Details for subscriptions are available at www.acer.edu.au/jtd or by emailing .(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address)

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Reporting Indigenous outcomes

An ACER review of a national report on the key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage found it would benefit from a focus on Indigenous strengths and achievements.

In April 2002, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commissioned the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to produce a regular report against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. The resultant *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* (OID) report informs Australian governments about whether or not their policies and programs are achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous people.

After five editions, and given changes in the external policy environment and the emergence of other publications reporting on government performance, in 2012 the Steering Committee engaged ACER to assess the usability and usefulness of the OID report and make recommendations for improvements. ACER's review involved document reviews, a literature review and consultation with the widest possible range of stakeholders whose organisations were known to be users of, or contributors to, the report.

It is not surprising, given the range of organisations and users consulted, that there was a variety of views in relation to the OID report. On the one hand the report was generally considered to be meeting its purpose in reporting on the performance of Australian governments in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. On the other hand, a proliferation of other government performance reports in recent years has led to some questioning of the relevance of the OID report.

ACER found that, while there is some overlap with other government performance reports, there are also two key features that make the OID report unique amongst these others: its focus on outcomes and its whole-of-government perspective.

The OID report was found to reflect international 'best practice' in several respects, most notably in its reporting against specific targets. Key strengths of the report included the breadth of the information provided, time series analyses, clear identification of progress towards reaching targets, information around successful initiatives, and provision of information at different levels of detail and in different formats to meet the needs of a variety of users.

The most commonly identified limitations were around the reporting of data, the need for greater analysis of the interconnections and linkages between indicators, and the need for a more strengths-based approach in the reporting of Indigenous experience. This latter finding highlights an inherent tension between the purpose of the OID report – which reports on an explicitly endorsed COAG 'Closing the Gap' agenda – and a desire on the part of a significant number of stakeholders for a more positive report that recognises achievements, strengths and the positive dimensions of Indigenous experience.

The consultations provided a range of practical suggestions for improving the quality, reach and usefulness of the OID report, such as the inclusion of evidence-based case studies and reporting on sub-groups within the Indigenous population.

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Importantly, ACER recommended that the Steering Committee examine ways in which information about Indigenous strengths such as connectedness to land and country, resilience, Indigenous leadership and language can be incorporated to help shift the balance of the report from a negative focus on disadvantage to a more positive focus on overcoming this disadvantage.

While the OID report is used in a variety of ways, including as a reference, for presentations, writing submissions and briefings, teaching and by some for policy purposes, ACER's review suggests there is limited use of the report among Indigenous stakeholders. ACER therefore recommended that the Steering Committee investigate further the reasons for the apparently low level of use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, with a view to adjusting the OID report to better accommodate their policy and research needs, and that they increase the level of Indigenous representation on the OID Working Group and publish the membership of the OID Working Group in the OID report to raise awareness of this group among stakeholders.

The full report, *Review of the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators report*, is available from www.pc.gov.au/gsp/indigenous/oid-review-2012

English language proficiency in higher education

Higher education institutions must support the English language development of students with a non-English language speaking background to ensure that they graduate with the English language skills required for society and the workplace, according to Professor Sophie Arkoudis, Dr Chi Baik and Dr Sarah Richardson, the authors of *English Language Standards in Higher Education: From entry to exit*, a new book from ACER Press.

'The issue of English language learning outcomes of graduates will increasingly challenge universities as the sector expands and broadens participation within a demand-driven system,' said Professor Arkoudis.

'English language acquisition is central to academic success, and to the success of graduates in the workplace, and this requires continuous and systematic development,' she said.

'Universities have a responsibility to ensure the English language proficiency of students is not only present at the time of entry, but upheld and enhanced throughout their tertiary studies.'

Globalisation has had a monumental impact on the diversity of the higher education student population. Australian government figures show that there were more that 378 000 full-fee-paying international students in the country last year, contributing $15.7 billion to the Australian economy. Many international students do not have English as their first language.

However, English language proficiency is not only an issue for many international students. It also concerns domestic students who have English as an additional language, and the numerous higher education institutions in non-English-speaking countries that now choose to offer education in English. Leaders and educators in all higher education institutions need to get serious about the English language learning outcomes of their graduates.

According to Simon Marginson, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, in his Foreword to the book, '(English language proficiency) is a key issue that teachers and their institutions must address, one that is integral to standards in tertiary education, and affects domestic as well as international students.' A second key issue, according to Marginson, concerns the work readiness of international as well as domestic graduates, particularly in terms of English language proficiency. As Marginson notes in the Foreword, 'The plain fact is that higher education institutions have been unable to make (English language proficiency) a priority.'

English Language Standards in Higher Education suggests that all graduates should be operating at professional levels of English language competence. As Dr Sarah Richardson noted, 'This outcome will not be obtained without coherent institutional policies and it is important that methods to improve English language skills are built into all curricula and assessment requirements in higher education for the benefit of all students for whom English is an additional language.'

English Language Standards in Higher Education is designed as a resource to support lecturers, language policymakers, researchers and senior administrators to develop students' English language proficiency. It outlines practical approaches for the classroom, as well as frameworks for pedagogical planning at an institutional level.

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English Language Standards in Higher Education can be purchased from the [ACER Online Shop](#) or by contacting customer service on 1800 338 402 or via email on [.(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address)](#)

Bring your own technology – now

The use of mobile devices by young people is surging, and schools that continue banning their students from using their own technology inside the school gates will be swamped, according to the authors of a new book on the Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) model in schools.

'The question is not whether the BYOT wave comes over schools, but how schools can ride that wave,' said co-author Mal Lee.

Innovative schools are now harnessing mobile technologies for learning. The keys to doing that are addressed in *Bring Your Own Technology: The BYOT guide for schools and families* written by Lee and co-author Martin Levins, published by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and launched by Professor Michael Hough at the Leading a Digital School Conference on the Gold Coast in September.

'Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) is a school technology resourcing model where the home and the school collaborate in extending children and young people's 24/7/365 use of their own digital technologies into the classroom,' explained Lee.

'The technology that young people use intimately as a normal part of their daily lives and in their everyday learning and self teaching will in the not too distant future become a normal part of classroom teaching,' Lee said.

According to Michael Hough, the book investigates the global trends, shows what BYOT looks like in a group of pathfinding schools in Australia and beyond, and provides key lessons for all schools, just as the BYOT wave is hitting.

The Cisco Visual Networking Index Global Mobile Data Traffic Forecast Update indicates the scale of that wave. According to Cisco, there are now 17 billion devices connected to the internet, with the rapid growth being in mobile devices, and by the end of 2012, the number of mobile-connected devices will exceed the number of people on earth.

Bring Your Own Technology explains how schools can ready themselves to ride that wave by pursuing individual school solutions, ensuring equity, normalising the use of digital technologies in teaching, developing close collaboration between the home and school, ceding some control over technology to students and ensuring they have in place the relevant technological infrastructure.

Bring Your Own Technology: The BYOT guide for schools and families can be purchased from the ACER Online Shop or by contacting customer service on 1800 338 402 or via email on .(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address)

Literacy and the most marginalised children

A recent roundtable brought together researchers, practitioners and policy makers interested in the field of inclusive education to discuss synergies across the Australian and international development education policy arenas regarding literacy interventions for the most marginalised children.

ACER hosted the roundtable in conjunction with children's development organisation PLAN Australia at the State Library of Victoria in September.

Themes from the Roundtable included literacy acquisition and mother tongue instruction, cultural diversity and pedagogy, teacher and teaching quality, and student voice.

Deputy Executive Dean of the College of Education at the University of South Africa, Professor Veronica McKay delivered the opening address, presenting on the South African Department of Basic Education's workbook development project that currently provides 'lesson-a-day' learning materials in all 11 official languages for approximately six million children from Grade R to Grade 9.

Professor McKay explained that South Africa has achieved a number of the indicators attached to Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3, regarding universal education and gender equality in education, and is now addressing the issue of quality. The workbooks are designed to address the low levels of learner performance in a range of national and international student achievement tests. The conceptualisation of the workbook packages are based on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which seeks to enhance the status and development of the 11 official languages in South Africa, through the use of an additive bilingualism model.

The workbooks are designed to be as colourful and vibrant as possible so that children are excited to open and read the books. Similarly, all of the workbooks include activities in the back on separate pages, such as finger puppets and stickers.

'With really poor children, one of the teachers said to me that when the books arrive it's like Christmas because they know they are going to get fun things to do,' said Professor McKay.

In another presentation, Academic Director of the International Projects Group at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Professor Merv Hyde, discussed research from Indonesian Papua. Professor Hyde discussed how diversity can be embraced and supported within the education system, using his research in Indonesian Papua as a case study. The study drew a representative sample across the remote and diverse Indonesian province, and identified the social and cultural patterns of young school children and their communities. Classroom observations were conducted within schools to gain a further insight into the pedagogical approaches commonly used within the province.

Professor Hyde then discussed a four-year teacher enrichment program, funded by AusAID for 100 senior teachers and principals in Indonesian Papua. The program saw Indonesian Papua's position on a national ranking of teacher competence rise to 9th out of the 33 Indonesian provinces from its previous position of 31st.

The roundtable was an opportunity to activate shared learnings and insights across the international and domestic domains. Other case studies shared included:

- Dr Adrian Beavis (ACER) presented the findings of an evaluation of a teacher quality improvement program in Bangladesh that surveyed 100 000 teachers and conducted classroom observations across the country seeking to evaluate the extent to which teachers understand and use interactive teaching.
- Dr Paul Molyneux (University of Melbourne) discussed the benefits and challenges of bilingual education programs operating in Victorian schools, with a focus on an English-Karen language program at a school in Melbourne's outer-western suburbs. His research clearly articulates the centrality of student voice, identity and belonging in culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia.
- Trish Bremner (Catholic Education) shared her experiences as a literacy project officer in Australia's Kimberley region. Her research evaluated an accelerated literacy program aimed at increasing Aboriginal student's abilities in Standard Australian English.
- Katherine Fell (PLAN Australia) described a PLAN Australia project that created picture story books using local knowledge to introduce text based literacy to isolated communities in the Philippines.

Joanne Webber from international development organisation CBM gave a presentation about the need for a human rights approach to inclusive education in order to support those marginalised by disability. Webber advocated a 'twin-track' approach to disability inclusion whereby the learner is empowered in their own capacities at the same time as the school removes barriers to inclusion.

'No matter how many barriers we move, if we don't have student empowerment, we don't have inclusion,' Webber said.

The roundtable continued a conversation that began at the AusAID-sponsored Australian National University and Save the Children Forum in March on Aid Effectiveness, Education and Inclusion. One of the themes that emerged from that forum was the need to consider the synergies between issues that face education policy workers in Australia and issues that face education policy workers in the aid sector. This theme was articulated by David Howes in his 'Education and development: a modest proposal for a TEPID network' post on the Development Policy Blog.

The roundtable *Literacy and the most marginalised children: A dialogue on Australian and international experience*, hosted by ACER with PLAN Australia, was held at the State Library of Victoria on Tuesday 11 September 2012. ACER is writing a concept note based on the proceedings of the roundtable. Podcasts, videos and slides from the roundtable will be made available over the coming weeks at www.acer.edu.au/international

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Grey literature conference

ACER is working in partnership with Swinburne University of Technology, Victoria University of Technology, the National Library of Australia, the National and State Libraries Australasia and the Eidos Institute on a three-year Grey Literature Strategies research project. Grey Literature Strategies is an ARC Linkage project that aims to provide best practice guidelines for producing and managing grey literature, reports and documents produced outside commercial publishing channels, particularly in the area of public policy.

As part of this project, a conference will explore the opportunities for increased access to knowledge and research communication as well as the challenges presented in producing, disseminating, evaluating, collecting and accessing policy grey literature. ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Gerry White will present on grey literature in relation to educational reform and digital technologies. *Where is the evidence? Policy, research and the rise of grey literature* takes place in Canberra on 10 October. Further information about the research project and the conference is available from http://greylitstrategies.info/

Higher education student engagement conference

ACER and the LH Martin Institute are co-hosting the 2012 National Student Engagement Conference, on the topic 'Enhancing retention and outcomes in a competitive environment'. The conference will bring together stakeholders from across the sector to discuss how Australian tertiary education can assure and enhance students' engagement in effective educational practices to boost quality and productivity.

The conference takes place in Melbourne on 30-31 October. Two half-day pre-conference workshops will address using technology to engage students and using student voice data for change. Further information, including a list of speakers and registration details, is available from www.acer.edu.au/highereducation/courses-and-conferences/

Designing learning in the digital age

ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Gerry White is the keynote speaker at the 2012 Designing Learning in the Digital Age program starting in Adelaide on 25 October, where he will present the latest digital educational research trends. The goal of the program is to enable participants to facilitate 'disruptive' and transformative learning experiences in their own organisations.

Modelling a 'flipped classroom' approach, participants will actively curate their own learning and will take away something more tangible than just 'new knowledge'. The one-day event will be followed by four weeks of synchronous and asynchronous activities so that participants can continue their learning, sharing and networking. Further information is available from www.designinglearning.com.au

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Advanced Masterclass Workshop with Dr Mark Majors

Highly regarded psychometrician Dr Mark Majors will present an Advanced Masterclass workshop on personality assessment at ACER in October.

Dr Majors will give insights into:

- connecting the information in these scales with personality dynamics
- integrating all features of the results into a more complete profile
- seeing how barriers to the expression of natural personality affect relationships and performance in the workplace
- developing skills to use this information in applied coaching or counselling situations, and
- applying this knowledge to further team and organisational effectiveness.

The Advanced Masterclass Workshop takes place in Melbourne on 29 October and in Sydney on 30 October. Further information is available from http://www.acer.edu.au/press-events/markmajors

Excellence in Professional Practice Conference

ACER invites you to share and learn with the best in the profession at the inaugural Excellence in Professional Practice Conference for teachers.

The conference addresses the theme, 'Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Excellence and innovation in the classroom' by drawing together teachers from across Australia to share their professional practice and expertise, and learn from one another about best practice in teaching the Australian Curriculum from classrooms across the country.

The Excellence in Professional Practice Conference takes place on the Gold Coast on 17 and 18 March, 2013. Further information is available from http://www.acer.edu.au/eppc

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