Rank and file

Australia’s top university in 2010, measured in terms of research quality and citation counts, graduate employability and teaching quality, according to the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, is Australian National University, ranked 20th. In terms of ‘university system strength,’ Australia is ranked fourth overall, behind the United States, first, Great Britain, second, and Germany, third.

Australia’s top 10 universities according to QS, are: the University of Sydney, ranked 37th; the University of Melbourne, ranked 38th; the University of Queensland, ranked 43rd; the University of New South Wales, ranked 46th; Monash University, ranked 61st; the University of Western Australia, ranked 89th; the University of Adelaide, ranked 103rd; Macquarie University, ranked 220th; and RMIT University, ranked 224th.

Internationally, the top-ranked universities in order are: the University of Cambridge; Harvard University; Yale University; University College London; Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Oxford University; Imperial College London; the University of Chicago; California Institute of Technology; and Princeton University.

According to John O’Leary from QS World University Rankings, budget cuts and lower endowments may affect the capacity for leading US and British universities to remain competitive.

Up for the challenge

Students from St Michael’s Grammar School, Melbourne, last month won the inaugural Victoria University Hillary Challenge, a national outdoor adventure race held in and around Eildon, Victoria, for secondary students.

The event format was originally developed in New Zealand by the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuit Centre in 2000 and was brought to Australia this year by the not-for-profit Outdoor Education Group. The Outdoor Education Group will be holding a qualifying event in May, 2011, with the finals scheduled for November, and expects St Michael’s will face some strong competition in defending its title. Schools must enter teams of four boys and four girls – with single-sex schools permitted to form a team with another single-sex school. The race is open to Australian secondary students in Years 10, 11 and 12 aged between 15 and 18 years.

LINKS:
www.oeg.net.au/content.php?region=148

Picture courtesy the Outdoor Education Group.
National curriculum

THE NEW NATIONAL CURRICULUM WILL BE READY FOR IMPLEMENTATION FROM 2011, OR BY 2013, MAYBE.

STEVE HOLDEN REPORTS.

The final version of the national curriculum for English, mathematics, science and history to Year 10 will be presented by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to the Council of Ministers of Education in December this year.

Speaking at Ironbark Ridge Public School, Sydney, in September, Commonwealth Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth Peter Garrett said state and territory education ministers have agreed that the national curriculum will be phased in from 2011, towards ‘substantial implementation’ by the end of 2013.

‘The curriculum ensures that from next year, students across all states and territories will begin to be taught the same knowledge, skills and understandings,’ Garrett said.

‘Feedback from the trials of the new curriculum in English, mathematics, science and history up to Year 10 is being used to finalise the curriculum.

‘There has been and will be considerable consultation on the new draft curriculum and I welcome the debate that has been going on across jurisdictions and schools. This debate will help ensure we get this right for implementation from 2011’ – or for substantial implementation by the end of 2013.

The 2011 or 2013 implementation date is no small matter. In her prepared response in May, Australian Science Teachers Association President Anna Davis asked, ‘What does “substantial implementation” mean?’

‘Teachers need to know the timelines that they will need to work within,’ Davis wrote.

In his prepared response in June, Australian Association for the Teaching of English President Guy Bayly-Jones said, ‘The short timeline for the development of the new curriculum remains a significant issue,’ and suggested the 2011 version be considered as a draft, ‘prior to the publication of a revised more definitive version for 2013.’

ACARA Chair Professor Barry McGaw explained in a statement in September, ‘Once ministers endorse the curriculum in December, it will be available for implementation from 2011 by those jurisdictions and schools wanting to commence implementation in 2011. Ministers have previously agreed that the nature and timing of implementation is a matter for individual jurisdictions and schools as long as there is substantial implementation in all schools by the end of 2013.’

Ways and means

Debate is warming up over the Commonwealth government’s Review of Funding for Schooling for ‘a funding system for the period beyond 2012 which is transparent, fair, financially sustainable and effective in promoting excellent educational outcomes for all Australian students.’

In their public submissions to the review panel, headed by David Gonski, most stakeholders have so far agreed on the need for a fair, transparent funding system in which government provides a quality education for all children. If the way is clear, the means by which a funding formula might reach it is not.

The key question for Gonski’s panel is how to replace the existing, but fraught, socioeconomic status funding formula introduced by John Howard in 2001. The Commonwealth already has in place a new measure, the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), used on its My School website. Using the ICSEA or a version of it to weight funding for disadvantaged schools is something Gonski’s panel will no doubt consider long and hard.

It’s expected that the ICSEA will soon include a measure of school resources in terms of operational costs, but not assets. Speaking of assets, the Australian in October reported that Melbourne Grammar has net assets of $128.3 million, Scotch College, Melbourne, has $116.6 million and Geelong Grammar has $108.9 million.