

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 2
Output Group: 2.4 – Funding for higher education

DEST Question No. E319_04

Senator Harradine asked on 5 June 2003

Question:

Page 35 of the Our Universities document states that "While significant improvements in participation and access have been made for some of these disadvantaged groups, the participation of other groups remains a concern." Please give details of which groups have improved and which remain a concern, along with some statistical detail of why, both for Tasmania and for Australia as a whole?

Answer:

Equity groups

The quote from the *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* document refers to the equity groups as defined under the Higher Education Equity Programme (HEEP). The progress that these equity groups have made since 1990 has been varied. While the number of students from equity groups who are participating in higher education has increased significantly, so has the number of higher education students overall. Women have improved their access to, and participation in, higher education generally and have made inroads into non-traditional areas of study. The proportion of students with disabilities who are enrolled in higher education has also been increasing. However, for other equity groups, while numbers have increased their share of the domestic student population has not.

The pattern of women's participation has changed to such an extent that their representation remains low only in engineering, architecture and some areas of science, such as information technology. In 1991, women made up 40 per cent of domestic students completing higher degrees by research and 44 per cent of those completing higher degrees by coursework. In 2001, women made up 50.2 per cent of domestic students undertaking higher degrees by research and 50.5 per cent of higher degrees by coursework.

National statistics on students with disabilities have been collected only since 1996. Since then the number and proportion of students with disabilities in higher education has been steadily increasing. Students with a disability comprised 3.4 per cent of all higher education students in 2002, up from 3.1 per cent in 2001. The number of students with a disability enrolled in higher education has risen significantly in 2002 - by more than 10 per cent since 2001, an acceleration of the upward trend of the past several years.

The following tables provide statistics on the participation of equity groups in higher education in Australia and in Tasmania.

Table1 Share of students from equity groups participating in higher education - Australia, 1991 to 2002

Equity Group	1991		2002	
	Number of students	Share of domestic students (%)	Number of students	Share of domestic students (%)
Indigenous students	4,790	0.9	7,912	1.2
Students from low SES background	74,309	14.7	97,156	14.5
Students from a non-English speaking background	20,769	4.1	22,271	3.3
Students from rural areas	92,998	18.4	116,578	17.6
Students from isolated areas	9500	1.9	8,933	1.3
Students with a disability	*		22,592	3.4

Source: Higher Education Statistics Collection

* Data on students with disabilities was not collected before 1996.

Table 2: Share of students from equity groups participating in higher education – Tasmania, 1991 to 2002

Equity Group	1991		2002	
	Number of students	Share of domestic students (%)	Number of students	Share of domestic students (%)
Indigenous students	140	1.3	230	1.7
Students from low SES background	3,515	30.2	4,547	30.7
Students from a non-English speaking background	154	1.4	96	0.7
Students from rural areas	4,864	44.5	5,564	41.1
Students from isolated areas	63	0.6	68	0.5
Students with a disability	*		639	4.7

Source: Higher Education Statistics Collection for the University of Tasmania and the Australian Maritime College.

* Data on students with disabilities was not collected before 1996.