

MEDIA RELEASE

Australia achieves above OECD average tertiary participation: ACER research briefing

27 July 2012: Australia's higher education is more accessible than in many other OECD countries, especially when age is considered, according to a research briefing paper released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The ACER *Joining the Dots* research briefing paper also revealed that Australia's relatively high bachelor degree attainment levels are now above the OECD average. This is a recent phenomenon compared with other nations that have been achieving higher attainment for a number of generations.

"The Australian Government has set ambitious targets for its higher education system, aiming to substantially broaden and improve it by increasing participation and transforming funding arrangements. This move is beginning to bear fruit," said Dr Daniel Edwards, ACER Senior Research Fellow and co-author of the research briefing paper.

Dr Edwards said higher participation has been achieved despite the fact that, as a proportion of GDP, Australian expenditure on tertiary education has been in decline for the past two decades. "We need to keep in mind that declining expenditure on tertiary education could have adverse consequences down the track," he added.

The research briefing paper, titled 'Australia in context: an international perspective on our higher education system', also makes the following observations:

- Individuals across a broader range of ages access higher education in Australia than in many other OECD countries
- Higher education increases employment prospects, and the impact of financial downturns is smaller for higher education graduates than others, and
- While women are accessing higher education at a much greater rate than men in Australia, female graduates have lower salaries relative to male graduates. This is particularly marked at higher levels of qualification. This outcome is not a feature of many other developed nations.

Dr Edwards added that in terms of employment access and remuneration, there remain obvious gender differences in Australia, with women appearing to have less favourable outcomes when compared with men who have similar qualifications.

"While Australia is not alone on this point, the fact that the discrepancy in earnings between men and women is larger among the more highly qualified cohort is of concern and is not replicated in a number of other countries," Dr Edwards said.

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 jtd@acer.edu.au

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