

MEDIA RELEASE

Growth in number of Indigenous university students, but still underrepresented

4 September 2012: 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, according to a new analysis of Census data by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The latest ACER *Joining the Dots* research briefing analyses information 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, 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. This growth was significantly larger than the overall growth in the number of students in higher education in Australia, which increased by 25 per cent between 2006 and 2011.

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.

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 students 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.
- University students in Australia are most likely to be living at home 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 jtd@acer.edu.au

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