

## Impact of More Students at University – Part 2

The decision to open university undergraduate education to all interested and capable students is intended to ensure that all Australian have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills in the fields that drive them, as the basis for productive contribution to Australia’s future. The decision intentionally expanded the number of higher education graduates.

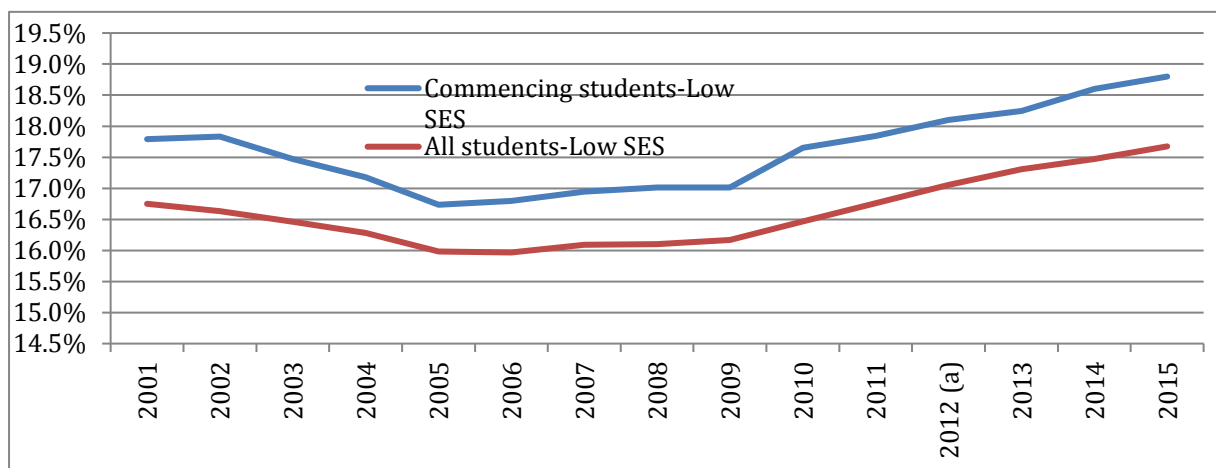
It was also intended to reduce the imbalance of students according to their socio economic background, since the high previous level of High SES access meant the scope for expansion was modest.

If access by any capable person were even students from low Socio Economic regions would be 25% of students. Instead they have been well short of this. By contrast, students from high socio economic regions have been almost twice as likely to attend. The difference is hard to ascribe to differences in interest, let alone to differences in capability.

Some have reversed the intent to argue that if demand driven funding was all about redressing lower access by people from low SES backgrounds it was an expensive way to do so. This argument handily ignores the real growth in the number and proportion of such students while attempting to undermine demand driven access through forgetting its prime intent to increase higher education skills across all groups.

The national data is clear (**Figure One**). Following the rapid expansion of university places across the 1990s the slow growth in places across the 2000s saw universities become harder to access and with that a decline in the proportion of students from low SES backgrounds from 16.8% to 16.0%.

**Figure One: Percentage of students from low SES backgrounds, 2001 to 2015**



Source: *Selected Higher Education Statistics – Student data 2010 to 2015*

Better funding and extra places saw the low SES proportion stabilise in the mid 2000s. From 2009 it grew consistently, such that since 2012 it has been higher than any point earlier in the century, reaching 17.7% in 2015. Of the extra 149,024 undergraduate students between 2010 and 2015, 33,832 (23%) are low SES, almost at the point the parity.

Demand driven access combined with a large, if over regulated, Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) works. If current growth continues low SES enrolment could reach 20% by 2020 – still short of the benchmark of 25% but a notable change.

### Where have low SES students enrolled?

IRU members have been crucial to the growth in low SES student numbers. Consistent with our commitment to inclusive education, IRU members focus on encouraging students from all backgrounds with well-designed programs to attract and support them.

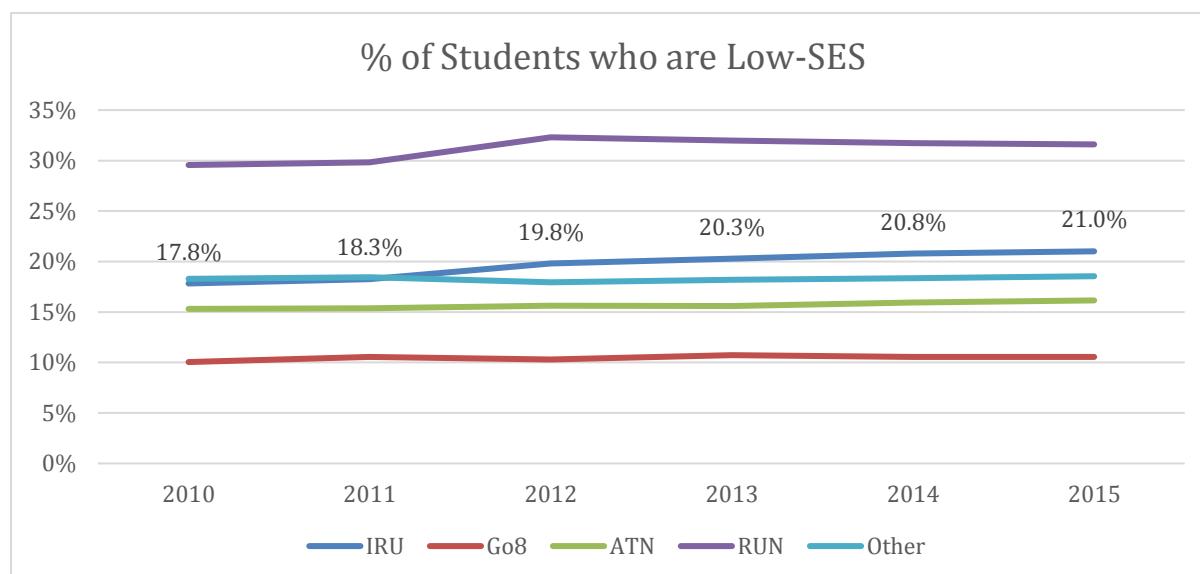
Between 2010 and 2015 IRU members enrolled an additional 15,412 Australian undergraduate students 5,759 (37%) of whom are low SES. This has raised the proportion of low SES students in IRU members from 18% to 21%. Members of the Regional University Network and other universities located outside the inner cities have also had strong growth in the number and proportion of low SES students.

**Table One: Growth in the number of low SES Students 2010 to 2015, by university group**

University Group	Change 2010 - 2015	Low-SES Students					
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>IRU</b>	<b>5,759</b>	<b>14,124</b>	<b>14,854</b>	<b>17,000</b>	<b>18,218</b>	<b>19,316</b>	<b>19,883</b>
RUN	5,895	15,261	16,129	18,509	19,254	19,948	21,156
ATN	5,057	15,220	15,697	17,092	18,059	19,349	20,277
Go8	2,200	15,800	16,858	16,849	18,094	18,110	18,000
Other	13157	37,147	39,546	41,233	44,781	47,482	50,304
<b>ALL</b>	<b>33,832</b>	<b>102,027</b>	<b>107,792</b>	<b>115,903</b>	<b>124,193</b>	<b>130,308</b>	<b>135,859</b>

Source: *Selected Higher Education Statistics – Student data 2010 to 2015* See for 2015 Appendix 2, Table 2.6: All Domestic Undergraduate Students by State, Institution and Equity Group

**Figure Two: Percentage of all students who are low SES, 2010 to 2015, by university group**



Sour *Selected Higher Education Statistics – Student data 2010 to 2015*

In converse, a focus on highly selective entry notionally targeting the best and brightest, even with financial supports for living costs, has made little difference.

Enabling greater access to higher education is in the national interest. As IRU showed in *The impact of more students at University - Part 1* the expansion in students since 2010 has targeted science, health and technology courses, with this data suggesting some correlation with growth in the number of low SES students. It facilitates inclusion and participation, thus contributing to a fairer, more productive society.

The HEPPP is an important part of the suite of funding to encourage universities to educate Australians from all backgrounds. Supporting students who are first in the family, those from geographical areas where few attend university, and those for whom the higher education culture is unfamiliar and too often intimidating, creates its own challenges, but ones that are worth investing in to improve education levels overall.

HEPPP the flagship equity program has never been allowed to become what it was meant to be. Since its inception, it has been the go-to program when governments of both sides wanted savings.

Rather than reducing HEPPP to insignificance, the Government should allow it to reach its potential. IRU has long argued that the main element of HEPPP funding driven by enrolment of low SES students, should be considered as part of the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) on the basis that the focus should be to improve the incentive for enrolment rather than targeting a set of particular projects within universities.

There is no better way for the Government to confirm its support for all Australians to gain the education suited to their aspirations and capabilities.

Conor King  
28 April 2017

**Table Two: Growth in the number of undergraduate low SES Students 2010 to 2015, by university group**

**A. Number of Low SES students**

Group	Growth 2010 - 2015	Low-SES Students					
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>IRU</i>	<b>5,759</b>	<b>14,124</b>	<b>14,854</b>	<b>17,000</b>	<b>18,218</b>	<b>19,316</b>	<b>19,883</b>
RUN	5,895	15,261	16,129	18,509	19,254	19,948	21,156
ATN	5,057	15,220	15,697	17,092	18,059	19,349	20,277
Go8	2,200	15,800	16,858	16,849	18,094	18,110	18,000
<i>Other</i>	<b>13,157</b>	<b>37,147</b>	<b>39,546</b>	<b>41,233</b>	<b>44,781</b>	<b>47,482</b>	<b>50,304</b>
<b>ALL</b>	<b>33,832</b>	<b>102,027</b>	<b>107,792</b>	<b>115,903</b>	<b>124,193</b>	<b>130,308</b>	<b>135,859</b>

**B. The number of undergraduate Students**

Group	Growth 2010 - 2015	All Students					
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>IRU</i>	15,412	79,225	81,337	85,881	89,778	92,917	94,637
RUN	15,350	51,627	54,072	57,295	60,188	62,884	66,977
ATN	26,142	99,423	102,097	109,302	115,712	121,499	125,565
Go8	13,376	157,289	159,749	163,643	168,682	171,691	170,665
<i>Other</i>	68,191	203,041	214,304	229,786	246,015	258,579	271,232
<b>ALL</b>	<b>149,024</b>	<b>619,625</b>	<b>643,066</b>	<b>679,595</b>	<b>717,683</b>	<b>745,733</b>	<b>768,649</b>

**C. The proportion of low SES undergraduate Students**

Group	Low-SES Students as a proportion of growth	Low-SES Students as a proportion of Students					
		2010	2011	2012	2010	2014	2015
<i>IRU</i>	<b>37.4%</b>	<b>17.8%</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>20.3%</b>	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>21.0%</b>
RUN	38.4%	29.6%	29.8%	32.3%	32.0%	31.7%	31.6%
ATN	19.3%	15.3%	15.4%	15.6%	15.6%	15.9%	16.1%
Go8	16.4%	10.0%	10.6%	10.3%	10.7%	10.5%	10.5%
<i>Other</i>	19.3%	18.3%	18.5%	17.9%	18.2%	18.4%	18.5%
<b>ALL</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>17.7%</b>

Source: Selected Higher Education Statistics – Student data 2010 to 2015

**Table Three: Low SES students and Low SES commencing students as a proportion of all students, 2001 to 2015**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 (a)	2013	2014	2015
Commencing students:															
Low SES	31,441	31,155	28,920	28,298	29,055	29,991	31,321	31,878	34,402	38,554	40,158	44,634	47,659	50,288	51,637
All	176,710	174,710	165,504	164,711	173,616	178,559	184,807	187,372	202,229	218,379	225,033	246,569	261,254	270,362	274,674
All students:															
Low SES	86,715	87,924	86,615	85,028	83,829	85,379	88,922	90,467	95,080	102,027	107,792	115,903	124,193	130,308	135,859
All	517,626	528,593	526,094	522,260	524,518	534,719	552,581	561,886	588,016	619,625	643,066	679,595	717,683	745,733	768,649
<i>Commencing students</i>	<i>17.8%</i>	<i>17.8%</i>	<i>17.5%</i>	<i>17.2%</i>	<i>16.7%</i>	<i>16.8%</i>	<i>16.9%</i>	<i>17.0%</i>	<i>17.0%</i>	<i>17.7%</i>	<i>17.8%</i>	<i>18.1%</i>	<i>18.2%</i>	<i>18.6%</i>	<i>18.8%</i>
<i>All students</i>	<i>16.8%</i>	<i>16.6%</i>	<i>16.5%</i>	<i>16.3%</i>	<i>16.0%</i>	<i>16.0%</i>	<i>16.1%</i>	<i>16.1%</i>	<i>16.2%</i>	<i>16.5%</i>	<i>16.8%</i>	<i>17.1%</i>	<i>17.3%</i>	<i>17.5%</i>	<i>17.7%</i>

Source: Selected Higher Education Statistics – Student data 2010 to 2015