



## Implications of the Proposed Low SES Participation Target for Australian University Enrolments

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**Project undertaken on behalf of the Australian Technology Network of Universities**

### Project Overview

This study examined proposed enrolment targets for low socio-economic status (SES) students in Australian higher education. The federal government aims to increase participation in universities and an important part of that strategy was for 20% of higher education domestic enrolments at undergraduate level to be from low SES backgrounds. This compares to their historical share of around 16%.

This influential study highlighted the difficulties of achieving uniform rates of low SES enrolment across states and universities. It also provided evidence on the efficacy of such a target in view of the imperfections of the low SES status measure itself.

This research is being pursued further as part of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, which is a \$3.25 million, federal government-funded centre established within the Curtin Business School in May 2013.



### Outcomes

The findings from this research contributed directly to a subsequent federal government policy change to performance funding guidelines. The research also:

- identified current trends in low SES enrolments on an institutional and state basis
- provided evidence on how the national measure distorted both the true level of low SES incidence across states and potential measures of progress on low SES enrolment. In particular, as the share of low SES enrolments varies enormously by state, a uniform 20% target was unattainable and illogical for some states and universities
- provided policy alternatives, including the introduction of state-specific targets for low SES enrolment goals