

Senate Committee: Education and Employment

QUESTION ON NOTICE Additional Estimates 2014 - 2015

Outcome: Higher Education Research and International

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ15-000197

Senator Carr, Kim provided in writing.

Academic Ranking of World Universities

Question

"In the department's view, does the Academic Ranking of World Universities provide a reasonable measure of Australian universities' world standing? Has the department looked at these ARWU rankings scaled by population and GDP?

Adjusted for these factors, and for the top 100 universities globally, is it the case that:

- In 2014, Australia stood at ninth position; and
- In 2013 Australia stood at fifth position?

Were their unweighted spots were, respectively, 10th and ninth?

For the top 500 globally, similarly adjusted, in 2014, was Australia fourth?

With respect to the increases in numbers of Australian universities in the top 100, 200, 300, 400, and 500 – over the period 2004-2014, in each of these groupings, has Australia increased the number of universities in that grouping? For example, is it the case that, over the last decade, the number of Australian universities in the top 500 has grown from 14 to 19?

Do these figures support the statement that "Australia's universities cannot compete with the best in the world with the current constraints of an outdated funding system"?"

Answer

The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) is one of a number of global university ranking systems. It is important to note that ARWU and similar ranking systems only measure parts of universities' activities. ARWU in particular focusses on research performance and does not address the performance of universities in teaching and learning and community engagement. The two other routinely quoted ranking – Times Higher Education (THE) and QS World University Rankings – have a wider remit but still focus primarily on research performance.

The department has not analysed the ARWU rankings scaled by population and/or GDP and cannot comment on the adjusted calculations included in the question.

While Australia increased the numbers of institutions in the ARWU top 500 from 14 to 19 between 2004 and 2014, it is concerning that Australia's position in the top 100 rankings appears to have plateaued over the past few years at around four to five institutions.

ARWU has been widely cited and employed as a starting point for identifying national strengths and areas for improvement and provided participating countries with a focus on directions for reform in their higher education and research systems (eg Dresler 2008). Examination of the ARWU over time shows that there is intensifying global competition from many nations seeking to raise their universities' performance and rankings. For example, in 2003 there were no Chinese universities in the top 200 of the ARWU. In 2014 this has grown to six.