

# REPORT ON PERFORMANCE

## HIGHER EDUCATION

Queensland has nine universities teaching approximately 140 000 students — of which approximately 21 000 are international students. More than 14 000 people are employed by the higher education sector in 26 campuses across the state. In addition, there are 13 private providers of higher education catering to approximately 4500 students. Public universities bring around \$1 billion into the state's economy from Commonwealth Grants, student fees, and other earnings.

The department will manage the Minister's portfolio responsibility for higher education. This includes setting standards in legislation for institutions under the title 'university', accrediting university-level awards offered by non-university providers and approving the operation of overseas higher education institutions in Queensland. State policy positions on major higher education issues will also be developed by the department, and negotiated with universities through the Higher Education Forum. The department will also administer state funding to assist people in regional and isolated communities to have access to higher education institutions through communications technologies. The coordination of marketing higher education and training internationally will be assisted through the Office of Higher Education.

*Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001–2005, p. 18*

## Planning and policy

Queensland continues to sustain a strong and diverse higher education system. During 2001–2002, the department provided policy advice to the Minister for Education on matters pertaining to individual universities, regional concerns, cross-government issues, and made contributions to major state and national studies.



*Queensland continues to sustain a strong and diverse higher education system.*

## Funding higher education

**Strategy:** Negotiate with the Commonwealth so that funding responds to the needs of Queensland's young and expanding population, and that growth in the higher education sector is directed to areas of greatest need within the state.

**Strategy:** Develop a new strategic plan for the state's role in higher education, which will identify priorities for system development and state funding.

*Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001–2005, p. 18*

Commonwealth funding provided an additional 835 commencing places in Queensland universities in 2002. This followed the State Government's submission to the Senate inquiry into the capacity of public universities to meet Australia's higher education needs. While this addressed the state's expanding population in the short term, the Commonwealth Government has not made a further commitment to funding growth despite the state's sustained population increase. The State Government is pressing for a further commitment to increase higher education participation as part of its education reforms.

In 2002, the Commonwealth Government announced a major year-long review of the Australian higher education system to discuss how it was administered and funded, and how it related to the community and other education sectors. The department prepared a state submission to the review and highlighted the need for further Commonwealth Government-funded growth in Queensland universities, the importance of regional universities, and the key issues in Commonwealth–state relations.

The Commonwealth review and the State Government's reforms for schooling and educational pathways will form the basis of a state strategic plan for higher education. This plan will provide a blueprint for the relationship between the State Government and the higher education sector and will be linked to whole-of-government objectives.

The State Government's Higher Education Capital Program granted \$17.67 million for the purchase of additional land at the Griffith University Gold Coast campus, and for relocation of the Central Queensland Conservatorium of Music and the Australian Catholic University.



A dispersed population makes providing access to higher education in regional areas a priority — Central Queensland University (Rockhampton) pictured.

For the past decade, the capital program has been directed at improving participation in higher education in Queensland, enhancing access in the state's fastest growing regions and attracting matching Commonwealth funding.

## Regional higher education

**Strategy: Improve access to higher education for people living in rural and remote areas by securing continued government commitment to funding of the Learning Network Queensland.**

*Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001–2005, p. 18*

Sustained high population growth and a highly regionalised population have made providing regional access to higher education a major task. During the past decade, the State Government has acquired land for 10 new campuses across Queensland, funded construction and services, and negotiated a commitment from the Commonwealth Government for future developments. While the proportion of the state's population living in regional communities has remained generally unchanged at between 54 and 55 per cent, the share of students in regional campuses grew steadily from 34 per cent in 1992 to 39 per cent of the total university student population in 2001.

The learning support structure Learning Network Queensland — formerly the Queensland Open Learning Network — plays a key role in helping people in regional and isolated communities access tertiary education.

In 2001–2002, implementation of a series of reforms to Learning Network Queensland commenced. These reforms stem from a study into the network by Professor Malcolm Skilbeck — former Deputy-Director of Education at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Professor Skilbeck completed the department-commissioned study in April 2001. His report, *Return to*

*Learning: A review of the Queensland Open Learning Network*, identified that the network, with approximately 50 learning and information centres, was a unique infrastructure delivering educational opportunities to adults and improving the participation of young people in education and training.

## Legislation

**Strategy: Enable Queensland universities to develop their sources of non-government funding by negotiating amendments to the authorising legislation.**

*Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001–2005, p. 18*

The State Government is responsible for enacting the laws that establish universities and authorise their operations. The Government is also responsible for overseeing universities' compliance with legislative requirements, for their financial powers and probity, and for the standard of their local laws. Public universities are state statutory bodies and are subject to a wide range of state laws and processes. Monitoring and overseeing amendments to this legislation is an ongoing responsibility of the department.

As universities explore new ways to earn funds, there has been a corresponding need for the State Government to provide a flexible operating environment, while still protecting taxpayers from inappropriate risk. To this end, work on amendments to the legislation commenced to clarify how universities undertake commercial activities. As part of the process, universities and relevant state agencies were canvassed, benchmarking was carried out against national reports on university governance and commercial activities, and the relevant legislation in other states examined.

Concurrently, a number of other legislative amendments requested by universities were progressed during 2001–2002.

## Regulation and quality

**Strategy: Ensure that Queensland complies with the new national protocols for higher education approval processes. This will assure the quality of higher education provision in the state.**

*Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001–2005, p. 18*

The State Government sets standards for recognising institutions as universities, for accrediting university-level awards offered by non-university providers, and for the operations of overseas institutions in the state. These processes, managed by the department, help ensure that Queensland's higher education system achieves and maintains a standard recognised nationally and internationally.

During 2001–2002, the Minister accredited or reaccredited 39 higher education courses offered by private institutions. While this was a marked increase compared with 2000–2001, one provider offered 20 of the new courses. Details are summarised in appendix 7.

Two of the approvals — for the Australian College of Theology and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners — were assessed using a nationally agreed concurrent application process for private providers delivering courses in more than one state or territory.

As at 30 June 2002, 13 providers were accredited to deliver 72 courses in Queensland. Enrolments in accredited courses offered by private non-university providers in Queensland totalled more than 4500 students as at 31 March 2002. During 2001–2002, the Office of Higher Education responded to 25 general inquiries about the higher education course approval process.

The provision of private, non-university higher education in Queensland has increased significantly in recent years. From 1996 to 2002, there was a 160 per cent increase in the number of providers and a 300 per cent increase in the number of courses available.

### Higher education audit

A comprehensive review of the department's higher education approval processes commenced with an audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) during 2001–2002. This was the first time an Australian government accreditation agency had voluntarily undergone external scrutiny of its activities. The audit commended the department, finding that the accreditation, support, and advisory activities provided by the Office of Higher Education enhanced the quality of the private higher education sector in Queensland. The review also suggested some areas for improvement which are being addressed.

Another important outcome of the review was the development and implementation of a quality system to enhance transparency, consistency and responsiveness.

### Website

A higher education website — <http://education.qld.gov.au/office/higher-education/> — was launched in September 2001. The site, developed and maintained by the Office of Higher Education, provides details of the *Higher Education (General Provisions) Act 1993* and higher education approval processes in Queensland, a public register of all accreditation activities undertaken by the Office on behalf of the Minister for Education, and a link to the AUQA audit report.

## Promoting higher education internationally

**Strategy:** Contribute to the new state structure for promoting Queensland education and training internationally.

*Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001–2005, p. 18*

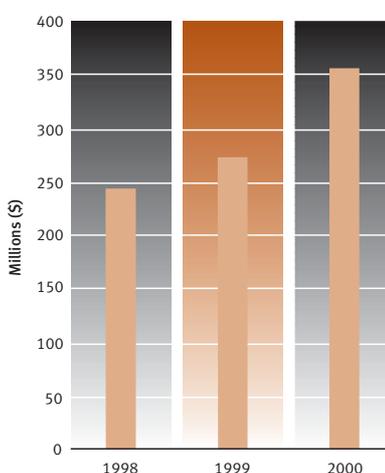
The department works with universities and other government agencies to promote the higher education sector internationally as a provider of high quality education and research expertise. The Higher Education International Initiative (HEII) program manages a range of promotional and marketing activities. The program also represents the interests of Queensland higher education at government level — within Queensland, throughout Australia and internationally.

Following extensive research commissioned by the department into how to better export education services, Queensland Education and Training International (QETI) was established to lead a whole-of-industry and whole-of-government strategy to promote Queensland education and training. HEII, which has been operating for four years, acted as the higher education reference group for QETI, enabling the department's higher education international strategies to complement and reinforce the overall Queensland strategy.

There were 21 291 international students studying at Queensland universities in March 2001. This represents an increase of 31.8 per cent compared with 2000 and an increase of 89.7 per cent since 1997.

Expenditure by international students, measured for the year 2000, increased to \$358 million, 30.7 per cent more than in 1999. Queensland's share of the Australian market in international higher education increased 1 per cent to 18 per cent in 2000.

**Figure 34: Expenditure by higher education international students in Queensland**



## Research and innovation in Queensland higher education

Strategy: Support the research and innovation activities of Queensland universities in collaboration with relevant government departments and other agencies.

*Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001–2005, p. 18*

As part of global economic restructuring, governments in advanced economies have focused on knowledge and innovation as the bases of new industries. Universities have an important part to play by providing a skilled workforce and undertaking research and development. The State Government manages a number of schemes and programs to support this aspect of university work.

During 2001–2002, the department contributed to initiatives in this area including the development of a Queensland Research and Development Strategy and participated in discussions on national research priorities. The department also advocated securing greater bandwidth for regional universities.

## OUTLOOK 2002–2003

The department will:

- provide accurate, comprehensive and timely policy advice on higher education
- participate in the national review of higher education and liaise with the Commonwealth Government on national policy directions
- oversee governance reforms to Learning Network Queensland
- enhance university operations by overseeing legislative amendments
- work in cooperation with universities and QETI to promote Queensland's higher education sector to the international market
- finalise the review of higher education approval legislation and implement reviewed guidelines
- participate in the development of a Queensland Research and Development Strategy and in setting national research priorities.