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## **Equity and diversity should figure in any rankings system**

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**When we rank universities we aren't only seeking to prove which universities are the best, we're also creating a picture of what a university should be.**

This carries significant power to drive university behaviour. Academics can be competitive by nature, and on the release of any ranking or rating naturally will seek to ensure their own work is duly recognised. It's instructive to remember that university executives are usually academics too.

Ranking systems, national and global, are endemic to this sector and will continue to lead university behaviour. So why not conceptualise a ranking system that truly reflects the character and aspirations of a modern Australian university? To do so we need to focus on three themes: quality, equity and diversity. We must consider them not as separate domains, rather as a series of interactions during a period of growth and widening access. It could prove to be a pivotal assessment of the relevance of university education.

Bringing equity and diversity from the margins into the mainstream is important. Increasingly, they are factors that strengthen quality itself; a model of inclusive excellence. The highest quality education is likely when students come from different backgrounds, races, ethnicities, classes and genders. Different views enable an effective marketplace of ideas to be created, enabling richer and more challenging learning and research environments.

Equity and diversity are notably absent from international university rankings. Instead, standard measures of so-called quality are used, at times to reflect and reinforce a culture of educational elitism. An alternative league table based on a combination of research output, teaching quality, student equity and institutional diversity, however, would provide very different results.

Using existing data, we created a QED league table, a ranking of inclusive excellence. To do this, we examined universities by their teaching quality, research quality, institutional diversity and student equity. As with all institutional ranking systems, there are a range of limitations and a variety of metrics that could have been included. We adopted composite measures where relevant but tried to keep the metrics as simple and transparent as possible.

For student equity, we included participation rates of students who are from regional, indigenous or low socioeconomic backgrounds and students with a disability.

For teaching and learning quality, we combined individual rankings for domestic student retention and success.

For research quality, we considered the proportion of ERA fields rated at 5 out of active ERA fields and the total amount of research revenue.

For institutional diversity, we examined participation rates of non-English speaking background students; international students as a proportion of all students; female students; and female senior academics (above senior lecturer) as a proportion of all senior academics.

The results are striking. The top five universities across all measures are themselves representative of the great diversity of institutions in the sector.

Of course, the rankings consider only compositional diversity and not the way universities actually support student equity and diversity through their curriculums and structures. Nevertheless, the table provides some indication of how universities might be assessed if broader measures of quality were adopted.

QED provides a transparent mechanism to bring equity and diversity out of the margins and recognise their centrality to universities' legislative and strategic missions.

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