

Originally published in *The Australian* <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/dawkinsled-overhaul-needs-an-update/news-story/4c23ee8543e453021516edff73ca7b34>

## Dawkins-led overhaul ‘needs an update’

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- THE AUSTRALIAN
- MAY 4, 2016 12:00AM



New book analyses the effectiveness of Dawkins-era policies in today's higher education system.

Landmark social equity reforms introduced during the Dawkins-led higher education overhaul have become outdated and need to be reset to reflect the sector's changing landscape, the explosion of international student numbers and postgraduate demand, a new book argues.

Marking the 25th anniversary of the much lauded “A Fair Chance for All” reforms, which set a targeted funding framework for disadvantaged students, the book — *Student Equity in Australian Higher Education: Twenty-five Years of A Fair Chance for All* — critically analyses the effectiveness of those policies in today's higher education system.

Launched last night, the book argues the policy was successful in enabling greater participation for disadvantaged students but has become outdated.

In 1990 under the Dawkins reforms, the A Fair Chance For All policy was introduced to help change the balance of the student population to “reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole”.

For the first time, it identified six student equity groups — people from low socio-economic backgrounds, indigenous Australians, people from regional and remote areas, people with disabilities, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and women in non-traditional areas — and included funding and participation targets.

Edited by the director of La Trobe University’s Access & Achievement Research Unit, Andrew Harvey, the book claims the policy has successfully endured despite huge changes and resulted in wide diversity across the sector.

Speaking to the *HES* yesterday, Dr Harvey said despite the success of the policy, it needed to be updated to reflect the realities of the modern higher education system. He said A Fair Chance For All failed to recognise that a quarter of the entire higher education cohort was made up of international students, that 25 per cent of all students now studied at a postgraduate level, the prevalence of non-university and private providers, and the fact that women now made up a majority of those in the sector.

“The higher education landscape is very different now to what it was then but the social equity framework has not changed,” Dr Harvey said.

“Policy makers need to revisit the framework in light of the massive changes over the past 25 years.”