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Equity - a shared responsibility

ATN

The **Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)** say today's announcement by the Federal Government that it will support a target of 20 percent by 2020 of students from low-socio-economic background accessing university is a critical first step towards redressing university access and participation.

Making the announcement in Sydney today, the Federal Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, indicated the Government would support the recommendations in the Bradley Review of Higher Education to lift the university participation rates of people from low socio-economic backgrounds.

ATN Executive Director, Vicki Thomson said with the current level at around 16 percent, reaching the 20 percent target would require a collaborative effort.

"ATN universities enrol 20% of the nation's students, 19% of low SES students, 14% of disabled students and 17% of indigenous students. Our retention rate across the ATN of disadvantaged students is above the national average. With more than 180,000 students studying at an ATN University across the nation, the ATN places a high priority on ensuring a university education is available to all whom seek it.

"The ATN strongly endorses target setting as a means to social, economic and cultural development for the nation. Universities are an integral part of local, regional, national and international networks influencing the political, social, cultural and economic climate. They act as catalysts for positive change and development. This change requires the combined efforts and resources of all stakeholders - equity and access is a shared responsibility.

"The ATN seeks a national policy framework which puts the interests and needs of students first and leads to reforms that will act as an incentive for the deterred or discouraged students, be they disadvantaged by income, age or background. This announcement, coming as it does on top of last week's three key announcements around participation rates, funding and the regulatory environment, delivers the foundations for that framework.

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