

Carr hails success as Australian unis join the global elite

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Kim Carr says 'the federal government fulfilled its end of the bargain'.
Picture: Ray Strange. *Source: The Australian*

RESEARCH Minister Kim Carr has claimed the performance of Australian universities in this week's world rankings is a victory for his strategy to reorient higher education culture towards global competitiveness.

"The federal government fulfilled its end of the bargain and it's quite clear that the university system is fulfilling its end of the bargain," Senator Carr said.

However, higher education analyst Frank Larkins said there was plenty of evidence to suggest that universities did not have sufficient funding to conduct research and were increasingly diverting money intended for teaching into enterprises that boost research reputation measures, such as rankings.

"Universities are doing it because it's critical to attract international students and collaborations," Professor Larkins said.

Ross Milbourne, vice-chancellor of the University of Technology, Sydney, which made its debut in the top 500 universities in the Academic Rankings of World Universities, said "it shows what the Australian system can produce with the limited resources we have." "Think how much better we could be if resources were at the right level," Professor Milbourne said.

The federal government commits \$9 billion a year for research, up 43 per cent since 2007.

While the ARWU, also known as the Shanghai Jiao Tong, listed 19 Australian universities in its top 500, including two new ones, Griffith and UTS, not all results were happy, with ANU

down 11 to 70th in the world. A spokeswoman said there would be no comment from the university.

Sydney also slid, by four. Melbourne topped the local league at 60, up 32 places since the rankings were first published in 2003. Vice-chancellor Glyn Davis's acknowledgement of this success reflected the ambivalence towards rankings that is typical across university administrations. "While university ranking is not a precise science, colleagues at Melbourne welcome a result that recognises the efforts of the team," Professor Davis said.

Senator Carr also reflected the sector's unease with rankings. "Ranking of entire universities is not our preferred measure," he said, taking the opportunity to boost the government's Excellence in Research for Australia audit. "Our preferred measure, through ERA, is excellence at the discipline level. We can provide indicators that are useful and consistent sources of data. "These types of generalised rankings are not able to provide that level of detail and utility."

US institutions took 17 of the top 20 places, with Harvard yet again at the top of the list. Stanford University retook second place from the University of California, Berkeley, which fell to fourth behind the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Three British universities made the top 20, with Cambridge in fifth place, Oxford in 10th and University College London at 20th. The highest-rated European institution was the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, at 23rd. France's University of Paris XI came in 40th place and Pierre and Marie Curie University at 41.

The University of Tokyo, at 21, was the top-ranked Asia-Pacific institution. China's Hong Kong University and Tsinghua University were in the top 200, as was the National Taiwan University.