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Abstract

Australian Government participation targets recommended in the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley In Review of Australian higher education: Final report, Commonwealth of Australia 2008) presented a complex public communication challenge to higher education participation. This research discusses the content of communication messages about Australian universities propagated in the period following the implementation of new national student participation goals. It argues that despite the stated policy objectives and increasing public rhetoric about broadening access to university such messages continued to position universities as elite and exclusive, while vocational training colleges continued to be promoted as having less rigorous academic standards suited to those who aspire to develop trade employment skills. Australian universities are part of a wider communication system that includes other tertiary education organisations including the vocational education sector, State and Federal Governments and the news and information media. The communication of messages about the value of higher education and

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differences between institutions in this system contributes to the formation of public beliefs and attitudes. The paper argues that the persistence of communication practices and messages that promote the superiority of university and the low success rates of students from disadvantaged backgrounds contributes to the persistence of entrenched views about post-secondary education. The limited discursive framing of university education in Australia in those messages is likely to prevent universities from increasing the participation rates of students from non-traditional higher education backgrounds and thus undermine national educational and associated economic goals, while contributing to an increasing social divide where educational achievement is the fault line. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Snowden, Collette, E-mail: collette.snowden@unisa.edu.au