



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University



FACILITATING AN INNOVATIVE FUTURE THROUGH EQUITY

2016 National Research Forum Summary

Make tomorrow better.

FACILITATING AN INNOVATIVE FUTURE THROUGH EQUITY

A National Narrative

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) hosted the Facilitating An Innovation Future Through Equity Forum at the National Press Club in Canberra on 28 November 2016. The Forum brought together some of Australia's most prominent researchers, policy analysts and equity practitioners with the goal of advancing equity in higher education. Twenty-six of Australia's 37 public universities were represented, along with executive members from Universities Australia, the Group of Eight, the Australian Technology Network of Universities, the Innovative Research Universities, the Regional Universities Network and Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia. Colleagues from the Grattan Institute, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the Australian Council for Educational Research and the Australian Government Department of Education and Training were also in attendance.

The Forum contributed to a reinvigorated public policy dialogue for equity in higher education in three ways: by summarising some of the key lessons learned from 24 research reports funded by the NCSEHE; by demonstrating the achievements of future equity leaders emerging from the Equity Fellows Programme; and by launching 'The Ten Conversations' to initiate the process of coalescing different perspectives on equity into more focussed narratives in which all stakeholders have shared ownership.

Lessons from NCSEHE research reports have been synthesised into five reports which focused on important areas of equity. The five areas are: Low Socioeconomic Status (LSES), Indigenous, Disability, Scholarships and Graduate Outcomes. The reports present a wider research perspective of discrete areas of equity policy, summarising

the research that has been conducted, highlighting key trends and issues, and constructing recommendations for policy and practice. In taking a broader view, these summary reports provide a more holistic view of the five areas of research which may facilitate the identification of further areas for research.

The Centre's three inaugural Equity Fellows provided presentations on their research from their Equity Fellows Programme funding. The Equity Fellows Programme is an important Australian Government initiative, funded through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) and managed by the NCSEHE. The goal of the Equity Fellows Programme is to produce future equity leaders as well as significant research projects to advance equity in higher education. Summaries of the work of the three Equity Fellows for 2016 appear in the Forum's supplementary compendium, *Facilitating Student Equity in Australian Higher Education*.

The Ten Conversations was an initiative of developing dialogues to unravel complex and often multidimensional issues and forge a consensus through 82 equity experts' opinions assembled at the Forum. The conversations selected for the Equity Forum were: 25 Years of Equity in Australia; Students from Low SES backgrounds; Students from Regional and Remote Areas; Students with Disability; Students from Indigenous backgrounds; Scholarships and Support Systems; Defining Success; Evaluating Performance of Equity Programs; Higher Education Data and Equity Policy; and Re-defining Equity Groups. These are not the only conversations we must have, but together they represent a significant contribution to building a collective national narrative on equity.

The common themes running through these research report summaries, Equity Fellows research reports and the Ten Conversations position policy makers, researchers and equity practitioners to engage in a constructive dialogue that informs strategic policy decisions and equity practices, with all stakeholders sharing and owning a narrative that promotes equity in higher education.

Professor Sue Trinidad

Director

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education





Ms Monica Ann Attard OAM, Master of Ceremonies



Aunty Agnes Shea OAM, Ngannawal Elder

After acknowledging the Welcome to Country and welcoming the many speakers and delegates from academia, government and equity practice, NCSEHE Director Professor Sue Trinidad outlined the day's proceedings.

In setting the framework for the Forum, Professor Trinidad reminded the delegates of the three key ways in which NCSEHE assisted in closing the gap between equity policy, research and practice:

- Supporting and informing evaluation of current equity practice, with a particular focus on identifying good practice;
- Identifying innovative approaches to equity through existing research and the development of a forward research program to fill the gaps in knowledge; and
- Translating these learnings into practical advice for decision-makers and practitioners.

Professor Trinidad emphasised that there are many possible strategic goals, highlighting four in particular:

- Achieving a long-term and bi-partisan commitment to equity in higher education – accompanied by targets for equity groups, plus a sustainable financial commitment to supporting them;
- Developing a more transparent national evaluation for measuring the performance of equity support programs and equity performance of educational institutions;
- Seeing success in higher education as part of a spectrum – from identifying early childhood disadvantage through to measuring real outcomes in relevant and meaningful employment and assisting people reach their potential – and embedding this 'equity philosophy' into the way we see social mobility creating a better and more productive society;
- Re-imagining how we define education and its role in society as we move into a world of technology-driven disruption in jobs, industries and markets – and re-consider changing relationships: between employers and education; between the VET sector and universities; and between generic and occupation-specific work skills – and what 'life-long learning' means for the individual and society through economic and social well-being.

In pursuing equity goals we need to be mindful of key considerations. We have to continue to promote and encourage evidence-based policy. We need to promote a narrative, beginning with the simple proposition that equity

matters because it is transformative for individuals, families and communities.

There are three areas of focus for data and information – access, analysis and communication:

- Access: The Productivity Commission have recently highlighted the importance of data access, integration and management in policy making. Initiatives such as the National Centre for Longitudinal Data and the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project provide a roadmap for how similar efforts can occur in equity in higher education.
- Analysis: It is important that the higher education system has suitable capacity to undertake research and analysis of emerging data sets to better describe and understand equity policies. This can occur through a variety of alternative mechanisms such as the Australian Government Department of Education and Training's National Priorities Pool program or the NCSEHE's external grants program. Ultimately, it is also important to ensure that these efforts do not operate independently of one another.
- Communication: The findings from an analysis of equity issues in Australian higher education need to be communicated to providers, policymakers and practitioners in order to ensure that the benefits of research are realised. The National Centre has filled a void here. It is also important that communication is a two-way process with these groups also informing analysis and research in what is an ever-changing operating environment.

It is also important to remind ourselves that there are many developments in equity in higher education of which we can be proud, and that we celebrate our successes. The NCSEHE's Forum was an important opportunity to stand back from the whirlwind and create a long-term vision rather than short-term imperatives.

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Full house for critical discussions about facilitating an innovative future through equity #fifte16 @NCSEHE Never been more important.



Professor Barney Glover, Universities Australia Chair, provided an update on equity focussing on access and participation in universities.

The themes discussed related strongly to the Keep It Clever policy statement issued by Universities Australia (UA). Professor Glover emphasised that the policy settings to support a nimble, adaptive and flexible university sector to meet the expectations of its students, the community and employers should be guided by principles that transcend politics, time and the economic circumstances of the nation.

These included:

- **Accessibility.** All Australians regardless of their socio-economic background, postcode, ethnicity, gender, disability or religion with the ability to successfully complete a university qualification should have the opportunity to do so.
- **Affordability.** While the higher education system should be financially sustainable and affordable to the taxpayer, cost must not deter any capable student from pursuing a university education.
- **Quality.** The education provided and the research performed should be of the highest quality, benchmarked internationally.
- **Research capability.** Australia's universities should be acknowledged as major contributors to Australia's research capability and a crucial source of ideas, breakthroughs, inventions and discoveries that underpin our national wellbeing.
- **Resourcing.** The resources for both teaching and research should be sufficient, sustainable and predictable to enable universities to deliver on the expectations of students, employers, the community and governments.
- **Accountability.** Both universities and government should be accountable to the Australian people for the amount and effective deployment of public funding for universities.

- **Autonomy.** Universities should be autonomous, self-accrediting institutions with responsibility for their own affairs.
- **Policy stability.** Universities require a stable policy environment in order to plan and deliver in students' and the nation's best interests.

Professor Glover said that the commitment to equity was developed through the UA Equity Forum held in August 2016, which included aims such as:

- Supporting access and participation
- Developing an integrated approach to participation through school, VET and tertiary sectors by developing relationships and strategies.

Professor Glover emphasised that more funding for long term

sustainable approaches is required and that the government has responsibility for fostering best practice and sharing information. UA had a concern about the narrowing focus in equity and he believed that widening participation needed to include enabling programs and adult learners.

Other areas of concern included consistency in enabling and pre-tertiary programs; developing best practice in admissions transparency for students from equity groups; and defining success in different ways (not just completion) because some students from equity groups can take longer to complete.

Professor Glover also believed it is important to identify the issues and interventions that work. He cited UA's response to the HEPPP inquiry and the importance of HEPPP for partnerships and participation.



Emeritus Professor Lesley Parker, as Chair of the Equity Fellows Programme Selection and Reference Committee, introduced the Forum's segment on the Equity Fellows Programme. Professor Parker noted that one of the successes of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) has been the funding of the Equity Fellows Programme – a research program into equity issues that is managed by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education.

The aim of the Program is to support Fellows to undertake strategic, high-impact, high-profile leadership projects targeted, sector-wide, at improving the access, participation and success in higher education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As part of the Fellowship, Fellows spend a period of time working in and with the Department of Education and Training facilitating mutually beneficial engagement between the Department and the sector.

The size of the grant, length of the research period, the highly competitive nature of the selection process, and the fact that the Fellows work with the Department of Education and Training, means that the quality of research is very high and also very practical.

Equity Fellows, through their projects, are expected to have direct influence and impact on equity in the higher education sector. Applicants must demonstrate how their Fellowship and proposed project will advance the following objectives of the Equity Fellows Programme:

- Identification of equity issues that affect the Australian higher education system, and the development and facilitation of approaches to address these issues;
- Sector-wide leadership in promoting, enhancing and developing good practice in improving access,

participation and success in higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds;

- The development of a collaborative arrangement for the ongoing exchange of knowledge between the sector and the Department to inform the delivery of government programs and policy concerned with equity in higher education.

The Equity Fellows projects are also designed to:

- Raise the profile in higher education institutions of efforts to widen participation among students from disadvantaged backgrounds; and
- Establish and build on national and international partnerships and collaboration in widening participation.

The inaugural three Equity Fellows commenced their work in January 2016. The Fellows are: Dr Nadine Zacharias, Dr Erica Southgate and Dr Cathy Stone.

All three projects will make a positive impact on shaping equity in higher education.



Emeritus Professor Lesley Parker, Chair, Equity Fellows Programme Selection and Reference Committee

Dr Nadine Zacharias, Deakin University

Dr Nadine Zacharias is an equity practitioner with research expertise in the fields of equity policy and program management, inclusive teaching and learning in higher education and gender equity in employment. In her substantive position, Nadine is Director of Equity and Diversity at Deakin University.

The Fellowship

Dr Zacharias' project is titled: The Australian student equity program and institutional change: paradigm shift or business as usual?

No systematic analysis of HEPPP had been produced since its introduction in 2010. Nadine's project investigated the impact of HEPPP on institutional equity policy, practice and thinking and asked whether it is the best funding mechanism to achieve greater participation and success of diverse learners.

The approach to the Fellowship project has been collaborative, using a qualitative methodology which includes five interrelated pieces of work and an engagement strategy with key stakeholders:

1. Analysis of HEPPP annual progress reports (2010-2015) to produce a typology of institutional approaches to HEPPP implementation.
2. Interviews with policy makers at the Department of Education and Training to establish their aspirations and experiences in implementing HEPPP.
3. Review of institutional performance data (2010-2015) with regard to access, participation, retention and success rates of students from low SES backgrounds.
4. Three institutional case studies illustrating additional document analysis and interviews with key decision makers, equity practitioners and program partners in the chosen universities.

5. Five student equity workshops with practitioners in our capital cities to explore how universities have designed, implemented, evaluated and improved student equity programs since the introduction of HEPPP.

For a summary of Dr Nadine Zacharias' project see ncsehe.edu.au/australian-student-equity-program-institutional-change/



Dr Nadine Zacharias

Key Findings

Context matters in a diverse sector

- HEPPP provided universities with the flexibility to develop and implement bespoke programs which best fit their institutional profile and priorities
- Case study institutions were chosen for their differences
- Outcome: typology illustrating diverse approaches to implementing HEPPP
 - Deliver at scale
 - Principles and partnerships
 - Targeted and personalised
- HEPPP program design and implementation were assessed as having worked well overall
- Some key challenges and scope for program reform were apparent at an early stage of the Fellowship:
 - Increased accountability
 - Annual funding allocations
 - Very large numbers of initiatives and little evidence of reform
 - The need for systemic support on evaluation, collaboration and sharing of leading practice.

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Key Findings (continued)

Targets and success: Untangling the impact of twin policies

- Attempt to link different types of institutional structures to student and program outcomes has methodological and practical challenges:
 - Interrelationships between demand-driven funding and HEPPP
 - Low SES participation rate as the key measure
 - Outcome versus process measures
- Proposed solution: shift collective focus to get a more nuanced view on achievements and challenges:
 - Access, retention and completion rates
 - Total numbers in the system
 - Add process measures

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Key Findings (continued)

A more equitable HE system?

- HEPPP fundamentally changed the scale, scope and approach to student equity work in universities
- Examples of systemic changes: outreach work, admission systems and student support
- HEPPP-funded work touched most areas of universities while not necessarily altering them in fundamental ways
- HEPPP-funded interventions identified as catalysts for whole-of-school transformations
- Partnership work a "triumph"
- First substantial increase in low SES participation rates since the 1990s: 16.3% in 2009 to 17.9% in 2014
- Significantly more students in the system: 124,429 in 2014 compared to 90,447 in 2009, an increase of 38%
- However, at both ends of the spectrum, universities have seen declines in participation rates: effect of demand driven funding.
- Rapidly growing evidence base enables equity practitioners and university leadership to make strategic decisions informed by solid evidence.

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Dr Erica Southgate, University of Newcastle

Dr Erica Southgate is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle Australia. She has wide experience in conducting qualitative, ethnographic and mixed method research on social disadvantage and marginalisation in the fields of health and education.

The Fellowship

Erica's project is titled: Fair connection to professional careers: Understanding social difference and disadvantage, institutional dynamics and technological opportunities. This Fellowship project aimed to provide a targeted and theoretically informed examination of the factors that impede access to high status degrees for students facing disadvantage.

The Fellowship explores the complexity surrounding access to high-status degrees for young people experiencing disadvantage, with special attention paid to the potential of new and emerging digital technologies as a means of creating authentic, early connection to high-status professions.

The Fellowship comprises three interrelated components. The first involved analysing data from existing projects. The second component was a national scoping of barriers and enablers to high-status professions through interviewing experts in the field. The final component was a road map to existing and emerging digital technologies and their potential application for K12 education and career exploration. Further information

For a summary of Dr Erica Southgate's project see ncsehe.edu.au/fair-connection-professional-careers/



Dr Erica Southgate



In her Fellowship, @EricaSouthgate leveraged the Aspirations Longitudinal Study dataset engage.newcastle.edu.au/aspirations-lo... #FIFTE16



Aspirations Longitudinal Study

Now in its second year, the University of Newcastle's Aspirations Study gains insights into how children form career and education goals.

engage.newcastle.edu.au



Dr Cathy Stone

Dr Cathy Stone, University of Newcastle

Dr Cathy Stone is a Conjoint Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Work at the University of Newcastle Australia. She has many years' experience in developing and managing programs and strategies to improve student success and retention for on-campus and on-line students in the Australian higher education sector.

The Fellowship

Cathy's project is titled: Opportunity through online learning: improving student access, participation and success in online higher education.

This Fellowship project investigated the range of practices, supports and retention strategies currently being used in online learning at Australian universities and at the Open University in the UK. The project examined their effectiveness in terms of access, retention and academic success, and the extent to which they meet the different and complex needs of a diverse range of students.

The project will lead to the development of a set of national guidelines, informed by research evidence, for improving the access, academic success and retention of students in online education.

For a summary of Dr Cathy Stone's project see ncsehe.edu.au/opportunity-online-learning/



L-R: Ms Vicki Thomson, Professor Simon Marginson and The Hon. Simon Birmingham



L-R: Dr Erica Southgate, The Hon. Simon Birmingham, Dr Nadine Zacharias and Dr Cathy Stone

The NCSEHE was fortunate enough to welcome the Hon. Simon Birmingham, Federal Minister for Education and Training, to speak at the Forum. Minister Birmingham's speech is faithfully reproduced below.

Thank you very much. I want to thank you all for the chance to be with you here at the National Press Club today. It's nice to be at the National Press Club in friendlier surrounds than the National Press Club sometimes [indistinct] ...

Can I acknowledge the traditional owners of the Canberra region, the Ngunnawal people, but also all of Australia's Indigenous people, and in doing so as I often say as Education Minister, acknowledge the fact that in the nation we continue to learn much more about the knowledge of Indigenous peoples, from the knowledge of our Indigenous peoples, and build upon that knowledge [indistinct] country.

I recognise Sue Trinidad, the director of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, the members of the advisory board, and particularly Erin Watson-Lynn, who has recently been appointed as the new chair, and congratulations to Erin. Vice-Chancellors, experts, distinguished guests all, thank you so much for the chance to be here and to recognise the work of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, and the work that it undertakes to inform policy design and implementation, to ensure no matter the background or circumstances of an Australian that they are not excluded from participation in our higher education system, provided they have the capacity to succeed.

Today is an important opportunity to help translate research into innovative practice. The centre has an important role, not just to generate knowledge and understanding, but to transfer that knowledge across the sector and into the community. The 2017 Equity Fellows, who we will announce and celebrate shortly, will play a key role in doing

so. Maintaining equity of access is an essential element, of course, of our Government's policy objectives, our national ethos, and of my personal commitment as Minister for Education and Training.

My own background is one of parents who were never tertiary educated, of attending a low SES high school, and of having an opportunity to access tertiary education, and of recognising that those educational opportunities made a significant difference in my life in a range of different ways. So that equity of access is a lynchpin of my values, a lot of my Government's values, and I would say of the Australian expectation in relation to higher education policy.

We've come a very long way in ensuring that as a nation we provide some of the best, most equitable access to higher education in the world. Our generous and world-leading student loans program, which ensures that there are no upfront barriers in terms of fees for participation, coupled with government assistance for financing tertiary study, such as Study Assist and Student Income Support Benefits, are helping to remove financial barriers to higher education. Of course, we always face challenges to make sure that they are working in the most optimal way and to ensure that they are actually delivering the type of equity of access we aspire to, and especially outside of the loans program and fee structure those aspects of barriers that relate to the cost, cost of living, cost of moving, access for especially rural and regional Australians, are issues that continue to be a focus and a pressure point for our Government, and a factor that we are looking closely at in terms of those policy settings.

But pleasingly, in recent times our universities have hosted record numbers of students from low SES backgrounds, Indigenous Australians, people with disability, and those from regional and remote Australia. Since 2009, we've seen a 43 per cent increase in low socioeconomic undergraduate student enrolments. Over the same time, enrolments in

domestic undergraduate students generally have increased by 31 per cent. So growing 43 per cent in that target equity group compared with 31 per cent in general. We know that having a higher education qualification is more likely to lead to positive employment outcomes, with unemployment rates for graduates still sitting at only 3.2 per cent, well below the general population unemployment rate of 5.6 per cent. These achievements are heartening. They give us great scope to have confidence that we are doing many things very well already.

But there's still work to be done. People from disadvantaged backgrounds are still underrepresented at university. For instance, in 2015, 16.6 per cent of students at Australian universities were from low SES backgrounds, while of course 25 per cent of Australians comprise the bottom quarter of low SES populations. 14.4 per cent of Australia's working-age population were identified as having a disability, but only 5.8 per cent of Australian students do. 1.6 per cent of university students identify as Indigenous, when Indigenous Australians represent 2.7 per cent of our working-age population.

The success and retention rates of these groups are also consistently below those of the overall student population. This is despite \$1 billion being invested through HEPPP initiatives to date, and with a further \$550 million in the program in the forward estimates. We have to make sure that our policy settings, and the use of those dollars, addresses the many factors in terms of the progression of a potential student – ambition in home, school, and the community, expectations – before you get to questions of admission and enrolment, before you then worry about matters of progression and support, and ultimately hopefully getting to the point of completion and graduation.

We of course don't just want to funnel all people into tertiary education for the sake of it. The courses they undertake must pay dividends, not only for the individual, but for the economy as a whole. Institutions must be able to enrol students in courses that are appropriate to their aspirations and preparedness, to the needs of their local economies and communities, and which can allow for progression to other

qualifications, or back into the workforce if desired. This is a challenge not just for our universities, but for other tertiary education providers, and indeed for our schools. We share a responsibility across the education system to ensure young Australians are prepared appropriately to make the best possible choices about their tertiary education options.

In seeking to get our policy settings right, we are looking very closely at all aspects of higher education policy. We know that money for funding is important, but it's not an end in itself; we have to ensure it is used to create the right incentives for optimal engagement by universities, other tertiary education providers, and to actually get the best possible outcomes.



The current evaluation of HEPPP is considering whether we can more effectively support participation of students from more backgrounds. It's received 136 written submissions, undertaken 121 university staff interviews, and 359 survey responses, 30 student interviews, and 3544 student survey responses. I'm looking forward to seeing the final report

after it's completed towards the end of this year, and we will consider the recommendations in the context of our overall higher education reforms in policy settings. Any changes to HEPPP wouldn't begin before 2018, when we expect other higher education reforms to potentially start. They must work in an integrated way to create those optimal settings that actually do ensure we address issues of ambition, through to expectations that respond to the Higher Education Standards Panel report around admissions, through of course to those other factors of then progression and completion.

The Standards Panel report, which I released to the Financial Review's Higher Education Summit recently, is welcome. It provides advice on how we can improve transparency of admissions processes, how we can ensure that potential students, their families, their schools, their teachers, have a clear understanding of the type of expectations they must meet to be accorded with a university admission. The report confirmed that while the demand-driven system has enabled greater choice and access for students, that many potential students and their families struggle to decipher information on where and what to study.

Within the next few weeks, we'll provide an official response to the panel's 14 recommendations. We want to ensure that students and their families are provided with the information they need, on an easily accessible and understood platform, in a format that is comparable and consistent across jurisdictions to ensure they make informed decisions about their future. I welcome the fact that many institutions have been moving in tandem, if not ahead of the work of the Standards Panel, and they're striving to ensure that the sector addresses these issues upfront. But ultimately, we want to make sure that occurs across the board, across all institutions, across all admissions practices, so that students and those who advise them can have complete confidence in the future, and in their engagement with higher education.

All of that brings me to, of course, the happy reason that we're here today. The Australian Government has invested \$1.54 million in the 2016 and 2017 Equity Fellows. I understand that earlier today you heard from those just



L-R: Associate Professor James Smith, Ms Louise Pollard, Mr Matt Brett and The Hon. Simon Birmingham

completing their Equity Fellowships. And sadly, it sounds like I missed some outstanding presentations that demonstrated the benefit of these programs, and some great ideas, evidence-based thinking as to how we can improve outcome and participations in the future. The Equity Fellows who will begin their projects next year, I'm pleased to say, are Associate Professor James Smith from Charles Darwin University, Matt Brett from La Trobe University, and Louise Pollard from the University of Western Australia. These fellows, leaders in equity research, will help to raise the profile of equity practice so that over time strategies to engage potential students from disadvantaged backgrounds will become business as usual in our universities.

James, I understand, will bring expertise from working with six remote Indigenous communities to his work. His aim is to strengthen evaluation and develop national principles for evaluation in Indigenous higher education. Matt's aims are to generate an evidence-based equity performance and accountability framework, while Louise will analyse the factors impeding participation and success for remote students. She will define good practice for assisting such students, work which will nicely dovetail into analysis we

have underway to look at how we better assist rural and regional students in particular.

In doing so, can I congratulate those who made their presentations this morning. You have added to our knowledge of what works or can work in this space. To Dr Nadine Zacharias, whose investigations in how universities have operationalised HEPPP Program funding since it started, along with the findings of the HEPPP Evaluation will certainly help us to improve the HEPPP Program or its successors.

Dr Erica Southgate has looked at what stops disadvantaged students enrolling in degrees like medicine, law, and engineering, work which will help us to better understand student choices and aspirations; while Dr Cathy Stone's assessed the effectiveness of online learning in terms of access, retention, and academic success. People from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those in rural and regional Australia, are increasingly studying online so her findings on what causes attrition will be particularly useful as we seek to make sure that we make the best use of technology, take and seize the opportunities afforded by remote access, but also maintain the types of standards and quality and assistance we expect.

I congratulate all of those current fellows, previous fellows, and of course those who are about to commence their work. I want to close by thanking each and every one of you for your participation here today, a demonstration of your commitment and dedication to improving the participation of some of our most marginalised or disadvantaged people. We see around the world at present much discussion about how it is we can best ensure that all people in nations, advanced nations like Australia, are able to enjoy and reap the types of benefits that come from economic growth, from change across our economies.

Your work is critical to ensuring that we do present not just a story but also have clear policy settings that help to ensure those who may otherwise feel marginalised, disadvantaged, or disgruntled, with not just their governments – though as a Government it's important that we make sure people like us –

but equally those who may seriously feel marginalised from our nation, from other Australians, from the benefits that they see some Australians enjoying, have the opportunity to see that they too can enjoy those benefits. That their children, that people in their communities should be aspiring to participate in those more diversified aspects of our economy which are challenges we face in future to keep diversifying, to keep growing, but of course to make sure the human capital is there to support that growth, and that human capital comes from across our nation, not just from a narrow basis or section of interest.

So, thank you so much for commitment and work in doing so. I wish you every success with the remainder of today's discussions.



 **Sally Kift**
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@NCSEHE 2016 & 2017 Equity Fellows w
@Birmo Impressive bunch of dedicated equity
researchers pursuing critical Aust HE sector
work #FIFTE16





Professor John Phillimore, NCSEHE Program Leader, Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program

Professor John Phillimore, Program Leader for the Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program, provided the forum with an overview of the grants program and the work which has been done as a result of the NCSEHE's funding.

When we first proposed hosting the Centre at Curtin, we were very conscious that there is a great deal of relevant expertise and research excellence in student equity in higher education around Australia, and that as a National Centre we wanted to tap into that. As a result, we set up a national research grants program, commencing in 2014 and repeated again in 2015 and 2016. The grants were competitive.

We funded 12 grants in 2014, another 12 in 2015, and 10 earlier this year – 34 in total. The amount per grant has fluctuated depending on the budget available, but in total over \$1.4 million has been granted over the 3 years. Twenty different institutions have been successful in leading winning applications, and a further six have been partner institutions. In total, over 100 researchers have been involved in research grants funded by the NCSEHE, thereby expanding the network of equity researchers in Australia.

Every project funded in the first two rounds has been successfully completed and a report published. You can find them all on the NCSEHE website. Many of them have received national attention. The third round projects are also all on track.

We have been keen to ensure a good mix of projects in terms of equity group focus, as well as method and approach. We've had projects from education, from economics, from policy, and sociology. We have always had a good number of projects on low SES and indigenous issues. After the first round, the Advisory Committee and Board agreed that we didn't have sufficient projects on disability, and so emphasised that in 2015. We also re-emphasised our desire

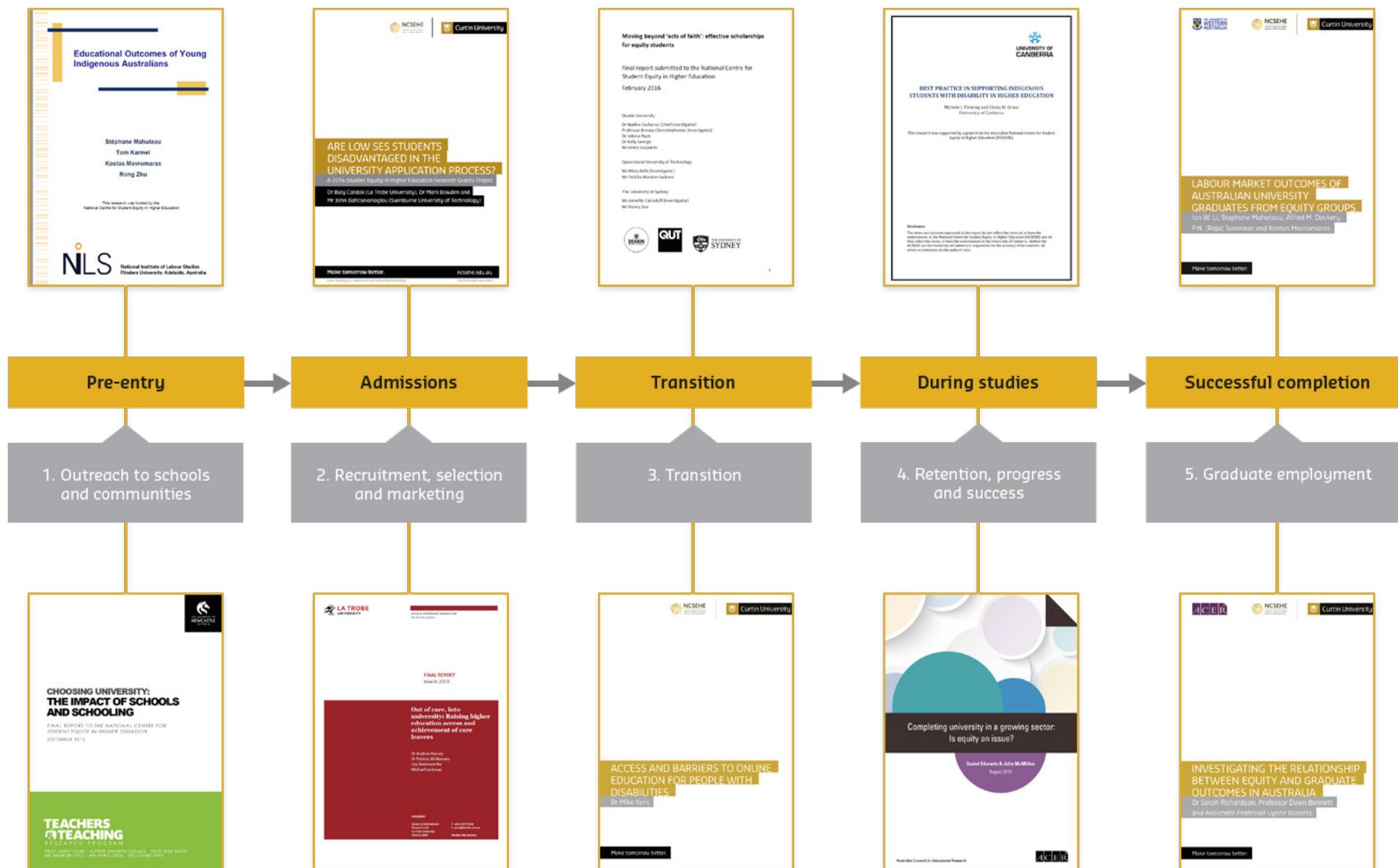
to have applications involving equity practitioners. This year, we prioritised regional and remote issues. Topics and equity groups that had been less examined, such as out-of-home care students, and refugees, have also been funded. In your forum packs, you will find reviews of five distinct areas of research funded by the grant program – low SES, indigenous, students with disability, scholarships and graduate outcomes. These reviews list the relevant research projects funded by the Centre, and summarise their findings and recommendations. They show that the national student equity research community has advanced our knowledge and evidence base as well as providing many practical suggestions for government and universities alike.

The grants program has funded projects across the student life-cycle – from high school, to admissions, to graduate outcomes and post-university destinations. The grants haven't been evenly distributed, and you may well have some thoughts on where we should place more emphasis in our future research. That might be something you can discuss in the next session.

At this stage, we are going to hold off having any more grants while we wait on three things:

1. The report of the government's HEPPP review;
2. The report of the ACIL Allens' review of the NCSEHE; and
3. The outcomes from today's forum.

Once we have these inputs, we will be in a position to recommend to the Board at its meeting in March how we can best continue to fund research nationally that contributes to the Centre's objective of closing the loop between equity policy, research and practice. For now, I hope you find the reviews useful, and we can all look forward to the publication of the reports from the third round of grants over the coming months.



Student Equity Research

Forum Master of Ceremonies, Ms Monica Attard OAM, introduced the next segment of the Forum, The Ten Conversations. All delegates were invited to participate in analysing the past and present trends in equity and to help shape the future of student equity in higher education in Australia.

The future of higher education – and the role of equity in it – is complex and multi-faceted. This complexity has produced diverse opinions, policy positions are often polarised, and as a consequence we often have a fragmented policy stance towards equity rather than a cohesive and strategic view of it.

The idea of The Ten Conversations was to unravel some complex issues to forge a consensus on the way forward for equity in higher education and, in the process, come up with policy directions and initiatives that will facilitate the development of a better and fairer education system.

Most of The Ten Conversations developed are not single issues, rather they are a tangle of several related issues. Furthermore, the selection of The Ten Conversations identified are not the only important issues in equity today but collectively they cover a large sweep of the challenges for equity in higher education.

Some of the conversations tended to overlap – given the multi-dimensional nature of the issues discussed, it is impossible to totally separate them – but each Conversation does have a clear central focus.

Each of the ten tables was provided with briefing notes on a Conversation. The notes were informative thought-starters and set the scene for discussions. The notes each set out a Conversation; followed by some insights from Centre research reports; then the consequences and implications of those Insights; and finished with ‘issues’ or rhetorical

questions which participants might have found helpful in developing the Conversation.

Each table had a ‘Pop-Up Panel equity expert’ to lead discussions, assisted by a representative from the Centre who took notes for the Pop-Up Panel Member, specifically new ideas that were proposed.

The outcome being sought was to get ‘30 Policy Ideas’ from each table that will take equity forward.

Participants were asked for three substantial policy ideas that can make a difference to equity in higher education – not generic ideas like conducting more research into a specific area – only specific policy initiatives (great or small) that will make a difference. The resultant policy ideas are presented in the following pages.

The Ten Conversations: Pop-up Panel



Dr Andrew Harvey
25 years of equity in Australia



Mr Andrew Norton
Students from Low SES backgrounds



Professor Marcia Devlin
Students from regional and remote areas



Mr David Fintan
Evaluating performance in equity programs



Mr Craig Ritchie
Students from Indigenous backgrounds



Ms Mary Kelly
Scholarships and support systems



Professor Peter Noonan
Defining success: student performance, retention and graduate outcomes



Dr Ann Stewart
Funding support and reporting



Ms Belinda Robinson
Higher education data and equity policy



Dr Lin Martin
Redefining equity groups

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25 Years of Equity in Australia

Australia has widely been seen as successful in promoting equity in higher education as an embraced reform for over 25 years. We need to promote excellence in equity. How can we do that? What lessons have we learnt from the past which can be applied to equity policy and program support in the future?

Policy ideas:

- The Graduate Outcomes Survey needs to be reshaped. We need more accurate data on graduate outcomes and to consider if we can link to Australian Taxation Office data. We also need to improve the utility of QILT as a tool to assist prospective students.
- There is a need to raise awareness of key issues amongst Vice-Chancellors.
- Change metrics/indicators to make them more accessible to people from low socio-economic status backgrounds, e.g. school type. Can we push universities to increase diversity, especially in high status courses, and educate academic staff to have a better understanding of the pedagogical needs of low

SES students? To this end, the return of the Office for Learning & Teaching might be useful.

- Consider equity in relation to international students; 25% of students are international and there are equity issues amongst this group.



Foreground L-R: Professor Simon Marginson, Dr Andrew Harvey, Dr Diane Costello and Ms Erin Watson-Lynn

2 Students from Low SES Backgrounds

Higher education for students from low socioeconomic (low SES) backgrounds is transformative for individuals, their families and communities. For this reason, it is important that universities are relevant to finding employment in an economy in which jobs and skills are being re-shaped by technology and where other options exist, including vocational education and training (VET). How do we continue to build on recent successes in low SES students accessing and completing higher education?

Policy ideas:

- Enabling and sub-bachelor programs: what are they delivering? They should be included in the Demand Driven System so that universities move beyond historical funding.
- Graduate outcomes are at historic lows, but we need more research on what works and what doesn't in terms of getting employment.



Mr Andrew Norton and Dr Andrew Harvey

3 Students from Regional and Remote Areas

The proportion of regional and remote students in the overall student population fell between 2011 and 2015. The main challenges for regional and remote students – developing positive narratives, extra cost of living burdens and the ‘psychological dislocation’ of leaving home – all remain issues. Are these issues so entrenched that they can only be ameliorated at the margin or are significant new cost-effective initiatives that increase regional and remote participation possible?

Policy ideas:

- Rather than a generic model, the focus should be on building ‘specific regional development’ – where all key community level stakeholders (e.g. local councils, schools, businesses, libraries, rotary) are coordinated and resourced to promote access and success for higher education of students in regional and remote areas which are diverse in context.
- Provide up-to-date training and resourcing to

careers’ advice providers to ensure that students and communities have access to the latest information. Career advice personnel are too busy undertaking numerous roles and the focus should be on the whole school/community providing access to vital information.

- Use of virtual reality technologies is encouraged to provide students with career experiences.
- Currently the higher education policy arena is ‘metro-centric’ which requires the regions going to the city. This requires a flip to policy-making by building up regional places as the place to be (e.g. La Trobe - Silicon Valley). This involves using and building up existing infrastructure as part of a learning community hub. This may involve librarians and libraries who are seeking to grow their responsibilities in the community by providing information on HE access and funding of scholarships. HEPPP needs to be continued to allow multi-level partnerships to create a community portal to information and including social capital networks.



Professor Marcia Devlin

4 Students with Disability

Universities face a challenge of adequately supporting the complex multi-dimensional issues of a growing number of students with disability. The range of built environments in educational institutions and the different disability initiatives put in place by universities, in some cases poorly communicated to equity practitioners across the sector, makes it difficult to know what constitutes best practice, a concept which itself is constantly changing. How do we progress best practice across all educational institutions in a cost effective manner?

Policy ideas:

- We need data collection standardisation and coordination amongst institutions.
- We need higher education standards that provide the opportunity to ensure compliance.
- Universities should make use of free online Disability Standards for Education training programs for academic and administrative staff, available from University of Canberra.
- International students with disability are lacking access to disability support.



Mr David Fintan

5 Students from Indigenous Backgrounds

An increasing number of Indigenous people are entering higher education, but this group are consistently under-represented in higher education and face numerous economic, social and educational disadvantages. They are less likely to go to university, less likely to complete university, less likely to be employed soon after graduating and more likely to receive lower incomes from employment. Are current initiatives 'closing the gap' or do we need to re-think program design, coordination and funding?

Policy ideas:

- Embed cultural competence in universities among all relevant staff and stakeholders.
- Develop an Indigenous alumni network.
- Clarify administrative and policy arrangements for Indigenous higher education – it's not all about schools and early childhood.
- Provide supplementary assistance to universities to support accelerating building Indigenous academic workforce from professions.
- Embed place-based learning for all students across universities.



Professor Colleen Hayward and Ms Gina Milgate



Mr Craig Ritchie

6 Scholarships and Support Systems

Institutional equity scholarships exist in the context of a national income support system (Centrelink) which includes Commonwealth Scholarships; and the Commonwealth Indigenous Scholarships scheme (soon to become part of the ISSP). Institutional scholarships have proliferated and vary widely in amount, duration and eligibility, catering to local interests and conditions, but appear to have a strong retention effect; a modest success effect; and a modest recruitment effect, acting as an affordability signal to low-SES prospective students. Students have access to a means-tested, nationally-consistent, transparent, Commonwealth-funded income support system, and also to institution-specific, but often less-transparent institutional schemes. How should the Commonwealth income support scheme and university scholarship schemes be most optimally structured and targeted, and how should they best work together to attract and support low-SES students?

Policy ideas:

- For Institutions: a) scholarships should also be offered on a needs basis to supplement Commonwealth income support; b) Institutional equity scholarships should target financial poverty and time poverty, assessed through a multi-factor approach; c) continue to use equity scholarships and the Commonwealth income support in outreach work to address the myth of unaffordability of university study.
- The Commonwealth should retain scholarships, i.e. the re-location grant and reinstate 'Start-up' as a grant to provide a cash based equitable grant at the start of the university journey which is the most critical time of financial need.



Ms Mary Kelly and Dr Nadine Zacharias

7 Defining Success: Student Performance, Transition, Retention and Graduate Outcomes

Equity students fare less well than non-equity students in terms of degree completion, employment and earnings, and further study. They are more likely to concentrate in educational subject areas that result in lower paid jobs. Are equity students more disadvantaged than the data suggests? What constitutes 'success' for equity students? How do we measure and report success?

Policy ideas:

- We need better measures of learner intent and achievement that links to intent. We also need more information on non, slow and irregular completions (maybe a survey, but this is not to replace institutional reporting)
- We need much better use of big data and data matching, including the ATO if possible. Or we need to extend longitudinal surveys. Current surveys are too close to graduation. Better sharing of information is also needed.
- There is a risk of narrowly defining success as 'universities and degrees'. We need to look across the tertiary sector as a whole – if it's too narrow it distorts how we perceive what we need.



Professor Peter Noonan

8 Evaluating Performance in Equity Programs

Equity support programs have expanded in number, range and objectives as a larger number of institutions reach out to a greater number of equity students. The standard of evaluation of those programs varies widely and comparing one program or institution with another can be difficult because of different analysis and reporting methodologies. How can we improve the evaluation of equity support programs as well as the transparency and reporting on those programs so we can encourage the development of best practice in equity support programs across Australia?

Policy ideas:

- We need to track people, e.g. by using an identifier number like CHESSN.
- Greater rigour and standardisation is needed to enable comparisons of programs. There is a need for a stocktake of current reports to provide a national framework of evaluation. We need to avoid being rigid and acknowledge flexibility. We need national and nuanced data. We may need to align the framework with the Australian National Audit Office?
- We need minimum standards and a rigorous evaluation framework in all applications for program support. NCSEHE could act as a critical friend and support institutions in this.
- Data needs to be made public – more transparency is needed, e.g. a data dashboard.



Dr Ann Stewart

9 Higher Education Data and Equity Policy

To close the gap between equity policy, research and practice, we need to ensure that policy has a solid evidence base. How can we ensure that data from higher education, and perhaps education in general, is used to evaluate policy?

Policy ideas:

- Data access and discoverability needs to be improved – across government departments; universities; and at the unit record data level.
- Data linkage and integration and data sharing of administration datasets – acknowledge the work that the DET is doing to link the HEIMS and ATO; also the Multi-agency Data Integration Project.
- There is a need to adopt new options: Unique Student Identifier is covering all education sectors; COAG in 2012 covered VET intentions to expand; useful analysis of pathways through systems including relationship between prior participation; and better data on graduate outcomes, equity program evaluation and the release of annual completion data. A definitive review of equity groups is also proposed.



Ms Belinda Robinson

10 Re-defining Equity Groups

Shifting demographic and economic trends have implications for equity in higher education and the way equity groups are categorised and become a focus for support. Are the current equity groups the right ones to focus on? Is there a case for 'more but focussed' groups or 'fewer but wider issues' based groups? How do we manage changes to equity groups while maintaining long-run datasets?

Policy ideas:

- Revise the conceptual framework of equity groups in a way that allows broad level equity groups to be defined and changed, while using individual level data as the basic unit of information. This will allow definitions of groups to change as well as deal with the challenge of multi-disadvantage among some students.
- Develop a new focus on outcomes so this will identify issues within equity groups and possibly help define them.
- Recognise the barriers to equity and social mobility up front and this will then assist with the way equity groups are defined and aspirations and outcomes are recorded.



Dr Lin Martin



L-R: Ms Louise Pollard, Mr Geoffrey Mitchell and Ms Claudia Santangelo



L-R: Ms Emma Burrell and Dr Wojtek Tomaszewski



L-R: Associate Professor Michele Fleming, Dr Laura-Ann Bull and Ms Elizabeth Capp.



Erin Watson-Lynn
@ErinLynnAus



The 10 conversations about equity in
#highered @NCSEHE #FIFTE16
@PressClubAust



This segment examined the global dimensions of student equity with two leading international experts on equity, Professor Simon Marginson and Professor Bruce Chapman.

Professor Simon Marginson is Professor of International Higher Education at the UCL Institute of Education, University College London, UK, and a professorial associate of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne.

Professor Bruce Chapman is an Australian economist and academic known for being the architect of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme loans system. He is currently a Director and Professor at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University. He received an Order of Australia in 2003.

This session was essentially a question and answer segment, providing attendees with an opportunity to ask questions of two experts on international student equity policy for insights and lessons for Australia.

Professor Simon Marginson covered some of the global comparisons between Australia and other OECD countries:

- On social mobility through education, Australia has higher social and economic outcomes for mobility, which are better than the US and UK. Australia and Canada are comparable but don't do as well as the Nordic countries.
- On participation and completion in tertiary education, Australia is good in terms of access but not so good in terms of completions.
- On tuition fees, loans and support, tuition fees in Australia are high but access to income-contingent loans means more people can participate in higher education. Higher education is relatively egalitarian in Australia compared with the UK and US. Nordic countries provide better student support to students to free them up to study.

- The degree of stratification of higher education institutions in terms of learning quality and social standing is important but there is a need to develop proper measures around this. The lower the stratification in quality and value, the higher the degree of equity in the system. Australia has failed to do this well, especially with VET.
- On the issue of entry to elite higher education institutions, the UK considers the issue more, but Australia deals with the issue better than the US and UK, mainly as a result of its loans program.

Can stratification be undone? If so, we need to increase the proportion of places at university for equity students, which would increase employability and social standing and address the quality of learning for equity groups.

However, there is some concern about making universities solely responsible for employability. Government has the capacity to manage labour markets and intervene in the labour market directly rather than universities.

Professor Bruce Chapman spoke about student choice being less about loans and more about student family background. He noted that Australia's system is much fairer compared with other countries especially those student loans that are essentially like mortgages. In some countries students can be spending 80% of their wage repaying debt.



Erin Watson-Lynn
@ErinLynnAus



Prof Simon Marginson & Prof Bruce Chapman Q&A panel - global perspectives in student equity in #highered #FIFTE16



Vicki Thomson
@ThomsonVicki



Unis should not be responsible for grad employment rates - Simon Marginson tells national equity conference #fifte16 @NCSEHE @groupofeight

Professor Sue Trinidad closed the Forum with some key observations for the day:

- It was a constructive Forum, with stimulating ideas that were inspiring.
- There has been a great sense of ‘collective commitment’ – a willingness to share ideas and work together – and that positive attitude has taken us a long way in making things happen in equity.
- Many new ideas came though and the challenge is to communicate these ideas and keep the conversations going.
- Importantly, the Forum demonstrated that we can develop consensus on equity through national conversations.
- We know that successful interventions take time.
- We need to keep this ‘coalescing of ideas’ advancing. That means working together – equity policy makers, researchers and equity practitioners.
- We need to continue with our evidence-based approach to work, and this requires more data and an openness and transparency about how we measure equity.
- One aspect of this focus on evaluation and transparency is the need for a more cooperative and coordinated approach to equity between institutions.
- As we can achieve success on these fronts we build a positive national narrative on equity.

Finally, Professor Trinidad thanked the many participants for facilitating a renewed enthusiasm for constructing a national narrative on equity.



Sally Kift
@KiftSally

Follow

@NCSEHE Sue Trinidad wraps up #FIFTE16 Social mobility is a game changer. Equity needs a national narrative. Accessible & affordable HE.



Sally Kift
@KiftSally

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And the final panel #fifte16 @Fern_Lecuna Capturing a big day for Equity in Australian HE.



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Our 2016 cohort of Equity Fellows were fantastic today #FIFTE16. It has been such a pleasure to work with them this year.



rickizalgate @EricaSouthgate

Thanks to @NCSEHE for the opportunity to speak at the Press Club & dream big on #SocialJustice for #education. Time for energised action!



Paul Nicholls
@curtiniect

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Thanks @NCSEHE for organising a diverse day of amazing speakers, conversations and engagement through a collaborative approach #FIFTE16



Renee Hindmarsh
@renee_hindmarsh

Follow

Empowering to see so many people @PressClubAust discussing the critical issues of access and equity today, hosted by @NCSEHE @CurtinUni

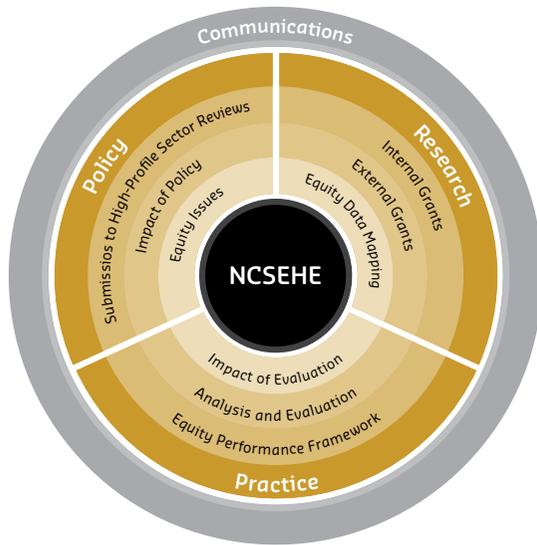


Belinda Robinson @bel_robinson_

@Birmo: access and equity linchpin of the Australian expectation of Australian #highered @NCSEHE #FIFTE16

NCSEHE OBJECTIVES

The NCSEHE aims to inform public policy design and implementation and institutional practice, to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people.



Objectives:

- to establish a reputation for high quality products that inform public policy dialogue about equity in higher education
- to 'close the loop' between equity policy, research and practice by:
 - supporting and informing evaluation of current equity practice, with a particular focus on identifying good practice
 - identifying innovative approaches to equity through existing research and the development of a forward research program to fill gaps in knowledge
 - translating this knowledge into practical advice for decision-makers and practitioners alike.

Closing the gap with interlinked programs of activity:

- Research – sharing knowledge, providing evidence and foundations for policy and practice
- Practice – trialling, implementing and benchmarking research outcomes
- Policy – using research and practice outcomes to evaluate the impact of initiatives and advise on policy.



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