

THE AUSTRALIAN STUDENT EQUITY PROGRAM AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Paradigm Shift or Business as Usual?

EQUITY FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

Background

The vision of an Australian higher education system that actively widened participation and whose graduates reflected more closely the diversity of the Australian population was articulated in the Bradley Review of Higher Education and adopted as a fundamental aspiration of significant higher education reform implemented from 2010. The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) was designed to encourage the sector to support the Government's aspiration, and has provided significant funding to 37 public universities to implement equity strategies and programs that enable people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds to access and succeed in higher education.

The Fellowship sought to understand how HEPPP had been implemented by universities and whether the sector had acted on the government's aspiration to transform access and radically improve participation for students from low SES backgrounds in higher education. To date, there has been no national investigation of the design and implementation of institutional HEPPP programs in different universities and how these meso-structures contributed to student outcomes at institutional and sector levels.

Fellowship Methodology

The approach to the Fellowship research program has been collaborative. The questions developed in consultation with the advisory group were deliberately broad, did not aim to prove causality or impact and ventured into territory that had not been systematically explored in Australia or overseas. The study used a qualitative methodology which included five interrelated pieces of work, including the analysis of HEPPP annual progress reports (2010-2015) to produce a typology of institutional approaches to HEPPP implementation using the analytical tools developed for the Fellowship and three institutional case studies to illustrate the diversity of institutional approaches to HEPPP. This was complemented by an engagement strategy with key stakeholders, including the Department of Education and Training.

Key Findings and Outputs

This Fellowship was the first national study analysing how different Australian universities designed and implemented institutional HEPPP programs since 2010, and how these meso-structures had contributed to student outcomes and organisational change. The study found that HEPPP has provided an opportunity for universities to develop bespoke equity programs which respond to their institutional profile and strategic priorities. At sector level, the trend of stagnant participation by students from low SES backgrounds has been broken, but outcomes at the institutional level were highly variable. While the impact of institutional HEPPP programs on student outcomes is difficult to establish empirically, strategic intent emerged as an important variable. The volume of HEPPP funding had substantial influence on equity strategy and practice and, in one of the case study universities, was leveraged for transformational organisation change.

The Fellowship has produced a set of diagnostic tools, an interpretive model (Tables 1, 4, 5 and 6) building on Burke (2012), and an *Equity Initiatives Map* (Table 3) extending the *Equity Initiatives Framework* developed by Bennett et al. (2015), to enable analyses of HEPPP program design and implementation in the context of institutional equity strategy and performance. The three case studies demonstrated the application of the tools to identify universities' strategic approaches to HEPPP implementation and the success factors, outcomes and challenges associated with these.

Context Matters in HEPPP Implementation

The case studies illustrated the diversity of HEPPP implementation, which mirrors the (pre-)existing institutional differences in a stratified higher education sector (James et al., 2008) and the importance of institutional context in designing and analysing HEPPP programs:

- Wider organisational values, norms, beliefs and ways of operating shape both the approach taken to HEPPP implementation and the assessment of its success.
- It is impossible to aim for a one-size-fits-all blueprint of 'best practice' or 'what works' in HEPPP implementation across the sector.
- This diversity calls for evaluation approaches which are context-specific and can assess what kind of institutional program works best for a specific university.

The Appropriation of National Policy to Institutional Context

This study found that universities needed to actively translate the policy focus on people from low SES backgrounds into their context which resulted in different approaches to what constitutes 'low SES':

- In practice, 'students from low SES backgrounds' often became the shorthand way for addressing educational disadvantage experienced by all three groups identified in the Bradley Review: students from regional¹ and remote backgrounds, Indigenous students and low SES students, although the cohort could also include additional equity groups.
- A narrow focus on low SES as SA1 misses the broader point that HEPPP funded curriculum and student support initiatives in particular have enabled the retention and success of a much greater share of the increasingly diverse undergraduate cohort in Australian universities.
- Equity practitioners are able to deal with the complexity in their target communities and have developed interventions which address, and often overcome, the structural barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education.

The focus on students from low SES backgrounds as the main target group for the national equity program was universally confirmed by interviewees. The consensus among stakeholders was that people with money have a lot more choices than those without even if they belong to another equity group.

Program Design: HEPPP Expenditure and Effort Across the Student Lifecycle

The sector's response to HEPPP in most cases built on equity strategies and infrastructure which pre-dated HEPPP as well as existing equity programs which were reworked, scaled up and/or significantly expanded by HEPPP funding. The analysis showed that there were consistent trends as well as significant changes in HEPPP implementation between 2011 (Naylor, Biak & James, 2013) and 2015:

- In 2011 and 2015, most HEPPP funding was spent on initiatives in the participation and pre-access phases.
- There has been a significant shift of resources and attention into the attainment and transition out phase between 2011 and 2015, especially for careers and employment support.
- Universities seem to be under-investing in the access phase, especially in light of the excellent results achieved by the case study university in this research which allocated significant expenditure and effort to tailored access initiatives.

The *Equity Initiatives Map* can be used as a diagnostic tool by universities to review their HEPPP programs and optimally align expenditure and effort with institutional priorities and needs.

Implementation: Attributes of Effective and Efficient HEPPP Programs

Universities had very different operational arrangements for central administrative structures to support HEPPP implementation as well as the responsibility for institutional acquittal and reporting on HEPPP funding. The case study analyses found that good management practice and organisational approaches adopted by universities mattered in the implementation of institutional HEPPP programs. It identified attributes that can be regarded as positively contributing to the effectiveness and/or efficiency of institutional

¹ Note that Bradley et al. (2008) use the terms 'rural' and 'regional' interchangeably, however the official term is 'regional and remote' which has been used consistently throughout this report.

HEPPP programs. The interpretive model developed for the Fellowship can be used by universities to analyse their organisational and management approaches to HEPPP implementation and serve as a framework for identifying factors which may further improve program effectiveness and efficiency.

A More Equitable Higher Education Sector

The reform agenda to widen participation in Australian higher education over the past seven years, that is, the introduction of HEPPP and demand-driven funding, has been a demonstrable success and has broken the trend of stagnant participation of people from low SES backgrounds in higher education:

- The sector has achieved the targets identified in the budget papers for 2015-16 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016, pp.54-56).
- In the lead-up to the 2017 academic year, the number of offers to students from low SES backgrounds continued to increase while offers overall stagnated. Increases in participation rates by the target group were recorded at the same time as inequality in wealth distribution in Australia was on the rise, suggesting that the aspiration of the reform agenda for a more equitable higher education sector is being realised.

However, at the institutional level, outcomes for students from low SES backgrounds were highly variable and it is difficult to establish any influence of HEPPP funded work on those outcomes at the program level.

Unpacking the Complex Relationships between Institutional HEPPP Programs and Student Outcomes

The relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and institutional equity performance as defined by the *Martin indicators* are complex and cannot be fully explained with the methods chosen for the Fellowship study. However, the following can be observed:

- The increase recorded at sector level was not at all evenly distributed across the 37 public universities which received HEPPP funding in 2015: some universities contributed disproportionately to the national increase in low SES participation rates.
- The growth and diversification enabled by demand-driven funding have not always gone hand-in-hand with increases in the low SES participation rate: there were no clear correlations between the changes in low SES participation rates over the period 2011-2015, institutional growth, the amount of HEPPP funding received, and the size and diversity of the undergraduate student cohort.
- Put differently, more HEPPP funding did not necessarily result in larger increases of low SES participation rates. In addition, there was no empirical evidence that large increases in participation rates were mainly achieved by strong growth in the total cohort.

This study confirmed the complex relationships between demand-driven funding and HEPPP and it is difficult to untangle the relative impact of each policy empirically. However, their different contributions can be clearly delineated conceptually:

- Demand-driven funding solves access issues at sector level but not necessarily at the institutional level as some institutions and courses remain highly selective.
- Demand-driven funding does not overcome the barriers to access associated with awareness, aspirations, attainment and affordability. These dimensions are addressed by HEPPP funded work.
- Neither policy is able to address the most important barrier to access comprehensively: attainment at school level. This was a particular challenge for the selective universities in this study.

The Fellowship adds to the evidence that, as a policy package, HEPPP and demand-driven funding have achieved demonstrable success in widening participation to higher education.

Strategic Intent as a Variable to Explain Uneven Outcomes

This study suggests that one missing analytical ingredient to explain some of the variation in outcomes is strategic intent. It confirms and simultaneously extends existing findings (Peacock, Sellar & Lingard, 2014) that individual universities sought to attract more students from low SES backgrounds to either grow or diversify their undergraduate student cohort. The three case study universities pursued distinctly different growth strategies under the demand-driven funding system, had different approaches to HEPPP program design and achieved very different outcomes in terms of access and participation rates.

In one case study, the low SES cohort was crucial for achieving the university's ambitious growth targets and it recorded a strong increase in both numbers and participation rates of students from low SES backgrounds. The other two universities aimed for diversification of their undergraduate cohort rather than growth albeit with quite different enthusiasm. One of those achieved some diversification mainly through targeted and attainment-oriented access programs which effectively charted clear and accessible pathways into a selective institution. The third university had developed a collective target to increase applications to higher education providers across the state and the success of its widening participation program was only loosely coupled to institutional equity performance. Thus, it circumvented the instrumental, binary logic proposed by Peacock et al. (2014) and pursued social justice rather than institutional benefits.

Towards a Broader Notion of Success and a National Framework to Measure Progress

The Fellowship enabled conversations about the outcomes and successes of institutional HEPPP programs which collectively challenge policy makers, university leaders and practitioners to conceive of success measures in much broader ways than low SES participation rate. There are a number of important outcomes of HEPPP funded work which are currently invisible to decision makers in universities and government departments, especially those associated with successful school-university partnerships. These outcomes are, however, coherently articulated as the 'Major Aims' in the *Equity Initiatives Map*. The 'Major Aims' capture the known factors that present structural, cultural and financial barriers to access and successful completion of a higher education qualification to people from equity groups across the student lifecycle. They posit that institutional HEPPP programs should aim to:

- Increase awareness of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting, developing and/or maintaining aspirations, expectations and attainment.
- Provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at university, taking into account the degree of selectivity and distance to target communities.
- Address issues of affordability of higher education study: provide information, strategies and financial support to fund student life.
- Enable successful transition, engagement and progression by strengthening engagement and belonging, academic literacies and competencies in discipline area/relevant knowledges developed through inclusive pedagogies.
- Enhance the employability of graduates and facilitate their transition to postgraduate study.

The 'Major Aims' could be used as the starting point for defining more comprehensive measures of success and form the basis for developing a comprehensive suite of evaluation tools in the context of a national HEPPP evaluation framework.

From Initiative-Level to Program-Level Analysis

The *Equity Initiatives Map* is a powerful tool to produce a national picture of HEPPP expenditure and effort, as it enables a lifecycle analysis and consistent terminology across very diverse institutions and HEPPP programs. Investigations at the initiative level on the basis of HEPPP annual progress reports generate useful insights into the design and implementation of HEPPP programs. However, this approach has an important limitation: the focus is placed on the smallest unit of analysis, often artificially separating components of larger projects, which creates an impression of a collection of many small and unrelated activities. Understanding the internal workings and how institutional HEPPP programs 'hang together' and make sense in the wider institutional context are limited by this itemised approach to progress reporting.

The case study approach adopted for this research shifted the analysis from the initiative to the program level and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the greater whole rather than its component parts. With this approach, the structural analysis enabled by the *Equity Initiatives Map* and the equity performance data produced by the Department are contextualised, and the full range of outcomes produced by HEPPP funding becomes visible. Program-level assessments also enable analyses which track progress over time.

HEPPP as a Catalyst of Organisational Change

The Fellowship explored to what extent HEPPP had acted as a catalyst for organisational change in equity strategy and practice between 2010 and 2016. The case studies and equity workshops suggest that HEPPP has fundamentally changed the scale and scope of student equity practice in universities and the power and influence of widening participation practitioners as institutional change agents:

- HEPPP increased the institutional focus on student equity, significantly lifted the level of understanding about the barriers to participation across institutions and created an expert workforce with specialist skills not previously found in universities.
- All of the case study universities pointed to processes of strategic integration of their widening participation initiatives but only one unequivocally called it a fundamental change in approach.
- In two universities, there was evidence of deep changes and processes of integration and innovation in pre-access work and student support. HEPPP funded work touched most areas of the universities while not necessarily altering them in fundamental ways.

Transformational Change

One of the case study universities realised transformational change as defined for the purposes of this study (Eckel & Kezar, 2003), that is, it achieved deep and pervasive alterations to the status quo. This change resulted in an equity strategy that became deeply embedded in the academic enterprise as well as the new strategic priorities, operational structures and institutional culture which emerged. Transformational change was enabled by a number of interrelated factors:

- Change was driven out of one organisational area by a well-connected group of senior change agents.
- These change agents leveraged the energy and opportunities created by the introduction of a new course model and centralised admissions processes to systematically advance a widening participation agenda.
- HEPPP funded initiatives repositioned the equity agenda within the university and turned it into a collective endeavour that senior managers, academics and practitioners could readily buy into.

While the commitment to equity work did not penetrate the entire organisation equally, every faculty was by default impacted and had to respond to the increasing diversity of the student cohort as part of normal business because the equity agenda had been embedded in changes to admissions and course systems.

Drivers of Change

It is possible to identify clear and consistent drivers of change in all case study institutions, although they played out with different emphases across the three universities:

- The volume of HEPPP funding mattered in all cases, including the availability of substantial amounts of competitive funding, which enabled a significant scaling up of equity initiatives and gave strategic importance and visibility to the institutional widening participation endeavour.
- A university's mission and values which positioned equity and merit, social justice and excellence, equity and partnership as dual goals and core commitments were seen as key drivers.
- Influential equity directors and/or senior champions who drove the widening participation agenda across the institution were critical, as were the skills of those individuals to either initiate institutional change and/or leverage the energy generated by changes elsewhere to further the equity agenda.

At the same time, the case study analyses suggested that the national participation target had only limited influence as a driver of change at the institutional level. From the sector's perspective, the key issue appeared to be that there were no perceived consequences of (not) meeting institutional targets.

The existence of a 'national equity target' was not considered as essential for progress into the future by any stakeholder group interviewed for the Fellowship project.

Barriers to Change

The key challenge associated with the design of HEPPP by equity directors and practitioners was that the program was trying to address a long-term challenge with short-term funding. Interviewees reported that the current funding arrangements created inefficiencies and unnecessary anxiety at the coal face which impeded program effectiveness:

- The worst outcome of annual funding allocations and late announcements of funding amounts was exemplified in perpetual staff turnover which resulted in inefficiencies and under-performance.
- At the same time, practitioners and equity directors shared a view that their university would not want to, and not be able to, walk away from core outreach and retention activities.
- A prevalent perception across the sector was that HEPPP funding was continually at risk.
- Current funding arrangements necessitate the continual monitoring and active management of HEPPP funds.

Interviewees in all case study universities commented that the allocation of three-yearly budgets would effectively address these issues. Moreover, the current formula does not account for a university's geographic location and the disproportionate cost involved with delivering outreach activities in large states.

The Importance of Cross-Institutional Partnerships

Widening participation to higher education is a systems issue. The nature and scale of the task require long-term funding and collaboration which should be enabled by Australia's national equity program:

- Universities have demonstrated their capability to work at the earlier stages of the education system to prevent or ameliorate educational disadvantage.
- The imperative for collaboration is increasing rather than reducing: there was evidence in the case studies of attempts to co-opt widening participation programs and practitioners for marketing purposes in the context of increasing inter-institutional competition.
- The HEPPP competitive partnership projects overcame, or at least undermined, the competitive urge and provided a process for constructively working through the intersection between marketing and widening participation activities. This was demonstrated by successful state-wide partnerships in Queensland and Victoria as well as the largest of all collaborative endeavours, *Bridges to Higher Education*, in the Sydney basin. None of these partnerships have stayed fully intact beyond their funding period, illustrating the value of competitive partnership funding that fosters cross-institutional collaboration.
- Providing all universities with HEPPP funding is crucial for preserving student choice and access to elite institutions and degrees for students from equity backgrounds.

This Fellowship has explicitly considered the diversity of the Australian higher education sector in analysing the successes brought about, and challenges associated with, HEPPP implementation. The universities selected had very different starting points on the road to improving low SES participation in terms of the diversity of their student cohort, their equity infrastructure and structural barriers impacting the accessibility of undergraduate courses, including geographic location, their level of selectivity and flexibility of delivery methods. The absence of transformational change does not constitute failure. Instead, this assessment of change can be seen as an indicator of the distance travelled since the launch of HEPPP.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are made throughout this report and are grouped here by audience: recommendations for policy makers, recommendations for the sector, and recommendations for research.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Recommendation 1: Completion and Publication of Institutional Equity Initiatives Maps

The Department should request universities to complete the *Equity Initiatives Map* based on their annual progress reports and publish them on the Department's website. This would provide regular updates on HEPPP implementation to the sector, increase accountability for HEPPP expenditure and effort and provide an efficient mechanism to share good practice and innovations across the sector.

Recommendation 2: Institutions to Provide Overarching HEPPP Narrative

The HEPPP reporting process should invite program-level analysis and reflections over time by asking universities to provide an overarching narrative of its program's intent, structure, achievements and challenges to more fully capture outcomes and persistent issues associated with HEPPP funded work.

Recommendation 6: Stability of Policy Settings

The government should maintain stable policy settings with regard to demand-driven funding and HEPPP to continue the unprecedented improvements in equity group participation.

Recommendation 7: Participation Target

There does not seem to be a strong argument for continuing with a participation target for students from low SES backgrounds. If such a strategy were to be pursued in the future, the mechanisms for meaningfully connecting a national target to institutional sub-targets and desired program outcomes would need to be carefully considered and consistently enforced.

Recommendation 8: Compound Disadvantage

The HEPPP Guidelines should legitimise other equity groups to address compound disadvantage while the focus remains on poverty and the socio-cultural disadvantage it creates. The definition of socioeconomic disadvantage should be extended to include the next quartile up (26-50 per cent of the population) which experiences similar disadvantage in terms of educational attainment and material wealth.

Recommendation 10: National HEPPP Evaluation Framework

The Department of Education and Training should develop an evaluation framework for HEPPP to enable the sector to systematically evaluate the influence of HEPPP funded initiatives on broadly defined student outcomes across the four main phases of the student life cycle. The framework should encourage evaluation approaches which are stakeholder centred, context specific and iterative and combine qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The 'Major Aims' articulated in the *Equity Initiatives Map* could form the basis for developing a comprehensive suite of evaluation tools.

Recommendation 11: Maintain Funding Levels

The government should continue HEPPP funding at current levels to ensure that the scale and reach of institutional programs are maintained. Funding should be allocated for three years to improve the efficiency of HEPPP implementation. HEPPP must remain as a national program, with dedicated equity funding to all Australian universities and an explicit incentive to engage in cross-institutional partnerships.

Recommendations for the Sector

Recommendation 3: Review and Reform Institutional HEPPP Programs

Universities should use the *Equity Initiatives Map* as a diagnostic tool to review their HEPPP programs and optimally align expenditure and effort with institutional priorities and needs.

Recommendation 4: Improvements to HEPPP Program Effectiveness and Efficiency

Universities should use the interpretive model to review their organisational and management approaches to HEPPP implementation and identify any factors which may further improve program effectiveness and efficiency.

Recommendation 12: Ongoing Employment of Core Staff

Staff delivering core outreach or retention activities should be paid out of university operating funds or at least be employed as ongoing staff.

Recommendations for Research

Recommendation 5: Analyse Individual Dimension of Program Success

Future research could include the analysis of the individual dimension, building on Burke's (2012) work, to more fully capture the relationships between individual equity practitioners, leaders or champions and institutional structures and discourses to assess how these relationships influence the success of institutional HEPPP or other equity programs.

Recommendation 9: Definition of the Target Group

The current review of the equity groups should develop a target group definition, or a blended model of group and individualised indicators, which is more accurate and user-friendly in targeting equity interventions at groups and individuals.

1. Introduction

The vision of an Australian higher education system that actively widened participation and whose graduates reflected more closely the diversity of the Australian population was articulated in the Bradley Review of Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008). In its response to the Bradley Review, the then-Labor Government articulated a 10-year reform agenda for higher education and research which declared as the first of its key reforms a commitment to ‘real action for real participation’:

Attainment, access and engagement: *transforming access* to higher education through a major package designed to *radically improve* the participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (low SES) in higher education, and enhance their learning experience. (Australian Government, 2009, p. 9; emphasis added)

The major package designed to realise this aspiration was launched in 2010 in the form of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP). Since then, HEPPP has provided significant funding to 37 public universities to “undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and improve their retention and completion rates” (Department of Education, 2014, p. 10). The Guidelines state that “HEPPP aims to encourage and assist providers to meet the Commonwealth Government’s ambition that, by 2020, 20 per cent of domestic undergraduate students must be from low SES backgrounds” (Department of Education, 2014, p. 10).

Six years on, and following substantial financial investment, it is important to understand how HEPPP has been implemented by universities and whether they responded in the anticipated way, that is, engaged with schools and communities to generate interest in higher education, increased enrolments of students from low SES backgrounds and allocated resources as necessary to ensure retention through to graduation in a whole-of-institution approach. Did the sector act on the government’s aspiration to transform access and radically improve participation for students from low SES backgrounds in higher education? And if so, how was this transformational change achieved?

To date, there has been no national investigation of the design and implementation of institutional HEPPP programs in different universities and how these meso-structures contributed to student outcomes at institutional and sector levels. The concept of macro-meso-micro-level framing of policy design and implementation has previously been used to analyse organisational change in response to national policy interventions (e.g. Pope et al., 2006). For this analysis, the meso-level is defined as a university’s HEPPP funded program of work, with the micro-level consisting of the individual initiatives developed and implemented with HEPPP funding. The macro level includes both higher education policy, as articulated in the 2009 white paper (Australian Government, 2009), and HEPPP as Australia’s flagship equity program which is set out in the Guidelines (Department of Education, 2014).

There is little published evidence on how Australian universities have responded to HEPPP. An important contribution is the doctoral work by David Peacock which compared the responses of two Queensland universities in the context of the state-wide Queensland widening participation consortium (Peacock, Sellar & Lingard, 2014). In a recent paper, Peacock and colleagues found that equity practitioners both activated and appropriated authorised policy for the benefits of the students as well as their own benefits and that of their institutions. The concept of ‘local activation and appropriation of authorised policy’ (Smith, 2005 and Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2009 in Peacock et al., 2014) to explore the different implementation approaches adopted by universities has useful applications for the Fellowship research.

While universities report annually on HEPPP implementation to the Department of Education and Training (the Department), these reports are not made public and any analyses of these reports have not been shared with the sector beyond the publication of the commissioned *Critical Intervention Framework* (Naylor, Baik & James, 2013). Naylor et al. (2013) analysed the 2011 HEPPP annual progress reports to provide a national picture of HEPPP expenditure and effort across the various initiatives contained in their framework. They also analysed the 2011 Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) data for changes in low SES access and participation rates since 2007, and found uneven outcomes across the sector in terms of equity

performance with the reasons behind such unevenness remaining unclear. This research seeks to update and extend the work of Naylor et al. (2013) by analysing the 2015 HEPPP progress reports and the program structures of individual institutions to investigate the drivers behind those uneven outcomes.

Other work providing snapshots of institutional practice are the Critical Intervention Framework Part 2 (Bennett et al., 2015) and two publications by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) (NCSEHE, 2013 and NCSEHE, 2014). They focused on equity initiatives that had been proven effective as well as those identified by each university as innovative or successful, but did not provide a complete picture on how universities responded to HEPPP.

There is also no comprehensive international literature on equity program implementation at the institutional level. The focus of the *Aimhigher* program in England, which has often been drawn on for comparison with HEPPP (e.g. Southgate & Bennett, 2014) due to similar levels of program funding and policy ambition, was on cross-institutional partnerships in the pre-access phase only. With the introduction of *Access Agreements* in the academic year 2012-13, which set out the aims for institutional-level programs (Office for Fair Access, 2016), it is possible to undertake comparative program-level analyses between Australia and England in the future.

1.1 Fellowship Research Questions and Objectives

This Fellowship has explored how the vision of a more equitable higher education system was translated into institutional practice. The key questions framing this exploration were:

1. How have different universities designed and implemented institutional HEPPP programs?
2. Did the sector act on the government's aspiration to transform access and radically improve participation for students from low SES backgrounds in higher education?
3. How did institutional HEPPP programs as meso-level structures contribute to student outcomes at institutional and sector levels?
4. Has the national equity program become a catalyst for driving institutional changes in equity strategy and practice? If so, in what ways?

The major aims of the Fellowship were to:

- Produce analytical tools to describe how universities have designed, implemented and improved student equity programs since the introduction of HEPPP.
- Illustrate the diversity of institutional responses to HEPPP by applying the analytical tools to three university case studies.
- Make an assessment on whether the sector has acted to transform access and radically improve participation for students from low SES backgrounds.
- Link different institutional approaches to student and program outcomes at the institutional and sector level.
- Determine the level of institutional change in equity strategy and practice following the introduction of HEPPP and the drivers behind such change.

To develop the analytical tools, the Fellowship built on past research funded by HEPPP, especially the Equity Interventions Framework developed by Bennett et al. (2015). The Equity Initiatives Framework aimed to identify common and leading practice in widening participation initiatives and establish their effectiveness on student outcomes. I have substantially extended the Equity Initiatives Framework to create an *Equity Initiatives Map* which provides a nationally consistent picture of HEPPP expenditure and effort at the institutional level. The *Equity Initiatives Map* is developed in Chapter 3.

1.2 Fellowship Methodology

The approach to the Fellowship program has been collaborative. The questions developed in consultation with the advisory group to guide my Fellowship were deliberately broad, did not aim to prove causality or impact and ventured into territory that had not been systematically explored in

Australia or overseas. The study used a qualitative methodology which included five interrelated research activities and was complemented by an engagement strategy with key stakeholders². Ethics approval for the research project was obtained through the Faculty of Arts and Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) at Deakin University. The five stages of data collection analysis included:

1. Analysis of HEPPP annual progress reports³ (2010-2015) to produce a typology of institutional approaches to HEPPP implementation using the interpretive model and *Equity Initiatives Map* developed in Chapter 3.
2. Interviews with policy makers at the Department of Education and Training to establish their aspirations and experiences in implementing HEPPP.
3. Review of HEIMS equity performance data (2010-2015) with regard to access, participation, retention and completion rates of students from low SES backgrounds to identify changes over time at sector and institutional levels.
4. Three institutional case studies to illustrate the diversity of institutional approaches to HEPPP and explore three approaches in-depth, including additional document analysis and interviews with executive members, equity directors, equity practitioners, external stakeholders and academic partners in the chosen universities.
5. Five student equity workshops conducted with practitioners in four capital cities between June and October 2016 to explore how universities have designed, implemented and improved student equity programs since the introduction of HEPPP.

The first two phases of data collection were conducted during a four-week placement in March/April 2016 with the Department of Education and Training in Canberra and three follow-up visits. I undertook the interviews at the Department as planned, the data collected were not used in the analysis or reporting for the Fellowship.

Three case study institutions were chosen to reflect the different starting points of universities on the road to improving low SES participation in terms of institutional type, geographic location, student profile and equity performance, as well as the diversity of approaches to HEPPP implementation adopted across the sector. Each university showed distinct differences in the scale of HEPPP programs, the organisational model adopted and the level of selectivity of the institution in terms of both students and partners. I have called the three case studies:

- *Deliver at Scale*
- *Principles and Partnerships*
- *Targeted and Personalised*

All of the case studies were metropolitan institutions although two had a small regional campus. I tried for several months to recruit a regionally headquartered university but was ultimately unsuccessful. Future research building on the Fellowship project could address this gap in the sample.

I conducted 40 in-depth interviews across the case study universities using a tailored, semi-structured interview matrix for each stakeholder group. Core questions aimed to explore:

- how the nature of the problem and policy area was conceptualised at the University
- identifying strengths and weaknesses of the current policy approach
- establishing aspirations for HEPPP at the institutional and national levels
- exploring experiences of implementing HEPPP at the University.

Interviews were transcribed and transcripts thematically analysed and manually coded. Themes were then grouped under four main headings:

² A full engagement schedule and list of presentations given during the Fellowship can be found in the Appendix of this document.

³ Projects funded under the HEPPP competitive grant programs and HEPPP partnership allocations by formula were reported separately to the Department of Education and Training and are not included in this analysis.

- strategic approach to HEPPP implementation
- success factors of the institutional approach
- outcomes of the institutional HEPPP program
- challenges during HEPPP implementation.

Direct quotes were attributed to a group of interviewees, that is, executives, equity directors, practitioners and stakeholders, rather than individual interviewees to protect their identity.

Institutional documents considered for each of the case study universities included:

- strategic and operational plans (2010-current)
- organisational charts (previous and current)
- Mission-Based Compact Agreements
- evaluation reports of HEPPP funded programs
- relevant procedures and operational documents .

Information emerging from the student equity workshops was recorded during each session in a PowerPoint presentation and circulated to attendees for additional feedback. Data were analysed after each session, integrated with previous findings and fed back to the next group using the methodology of the *World Café* approach⁴. This provided an effective mechanism for the dissemination of early findings and feedback on those from the different groups.

This research report details the core concepts and literature relevant to the research question and objectives and summarises the key findings and outcomes of the Fellowship. The institutional case studies collated for the Fellowship are not for public release to protect the anonymity of the case study universities. In consultation with the relevant university, the case study documents may be made available upon request.

⁴ Drawing on seven integrated design principles, the World Café methodology is a simple, effective, and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue. See: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>

2. Background and Policy Context

HEPPP needs to be seen in the context of a long tradition of Australian Governments pursuing student equity outcomes in higher education. In 1990, the Hawke Government released its policy blueprint 'A Fair Chance for All' (Department of Employment, Education & Training 1990). Ever since, Australian higher education policy has included an equity focus, underpinned by the premise that education and training are key to providing opportunities for disadvantaged groups and growing Australia's social and economic outcomes (Harvey, Burnheim & Brett, 2016; Naylor et al., 2013).

'A Fair Chance for All' included strategies and targets to achieve equity in higher education with a focus on access, backed by two funding streams: the Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP), focused on access and successful participation, and the Aboriginal Participation Incentive. HEEP and its successors were relatively small equity programs providing AU\$11.1 million to 39 public universities in 2009 (Commonwealth Government, 2011).

The policy identified six equity groups that experienced disproportionate systemic educational disadvantage and which were further explored and operationalised by Lin Martin and colleagues (Martin, 1994). The notion of equity in higher education has been conceptually defined by proportional representation (Gale & Parker, 2013). These groups are still current but the terminology has been updated (Koshy & Seymour, 2014):

- socioeconomically disadvantaged people (now: low socioeconomic status students)
- women in non-traditional areas of study (now: women in non-traditional areas [WINTA])
- people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin or heritage (now: Indigenous students)
- people from non-English speaking backgrounds (now: non-English speaking background [NESB] students)
- people with disability (now: students with disability)
- people from rural and isolated/remote areas (now: regional and remote students).

'A Fair Chance for All' also first articulated the responsibility of universities to develop contextualised equity plans with reference to a national plan, including indicators and progress monitoring reported annually with reference to performance against targets and progress on equity programs (Department of Employment, Education & Training 1990).

Despite early action on inequitable access to higher education in Australia, there had been few significant shifts in participation rates by students from underrepresented groups by the mid-2000s. The landmark Review of Higher Education (Bradley et al., 2008), led by Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley, stated that Australia had lost its leadership position and found that people from low SES backgrounds, Indigenous peoples, and regional and remote people continued to be underrepresented in higher education. The review's final report recommended sector-wide participation targets and measures in response, making the case that a concerted effort was required to increase overall numbers and widen participation in higher education which would in turn generate economic and social benefits. The review panel also recommended sub-targets relating to success and retention which should be benchmarked against the performance in comparable countries (Bradley et al., 2008).

The then-Labor Government's policy response, Transforming Australia's Higher Education System (Australian Government, 2009), acted on many recommendations articulated in the Bradley Review and formalised ambitious targets for growth in higher education participation. The Australian Government articulated an attainment target that 40 per cent of all 25 to 34 year olds will hold a qualification at bachelor level or above by 2025 (Australian Government, 2009). The government started to deregulate university places from 2010 and fully introduced a demand-driven funding system in 2012 which removed the limits to the numbers of undergraduate students universities could enrol on Commonwealth Supported Places (Kemp & Norton, 2014).

The white paper also set out the then-government's aspiration that the sector would bring about a transformation of access to higher education and radically improve the participation of students from low SES backgrounds with the assistance of significant equity funding by the Commonwealth (Australian Government, 2009). This aspiration found its expression in the 20 per cent participation target for students from low SES backgrounds by 2020.

The target is referenced in the HEPPP Guidelines (Department of Education, 2014) as an objective of the program, to be achieved by increasing access and retention rates of students from low SES backgrounds. Annual milestones to achieve the 20 per cent participation target, in terms of the number of domestic undergraduate low SES enrolments based on the Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1) measure and the proportion of higher education undergraduate students from a low SES background, are detailed in the budget papers for the Department of Education and Training (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016, pp.54-56). Institutional equity performance targets were included in the initial Mission-Based Compact agreements (2011-2013) but not determined in the last update of the Compacts in 2013.

2.1 HEPPP Objectives and Design Features

HEPPP was introduced as the tool to transform access and radically improve participation to higher education by students from low SES backgrounds. It sought to incentivise universities to “undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and improve their retention and completion rates” (Department of Education, 2014 p. 10). HEPPP represents a significant investment by the federal government with AU\$1 billion spent since its launch in 2010 (Minister for Education and Training, 2016). The average equity allocation to a university in 2012 was more than 12 times their allocation in 2009. While this represents a substantial funding increase, it was less than the level initially committed to, that is, four per cent of teaching and learning funding (Australian Government, 2009).

The Other Grants Guidelines (Education) 2012 pursuant to the Higher Education Support Act (HESA) 2003 (Department of Education, 2014) set out:

- HEPPP program objectives and structure,
- funding amounts and distribution mechanisms
- conditions of funding
- reporting to the Department.

From 2010 to 2013, HEPPP had two components: participation, and partnerships funding. Funding under the participation component has always been distributed by formula and funding under the partnerships component was distributed initially as a base allocation to each university and as competitive grants to fund innovative partnership initiatives. From 2013, the partnership component has also been distributed by formula. From 2014, a portion of partnerships funding was used to create the National Priorities Pool component of HEPPP. The focus of the competitive grant process shifted from partnerships to projects of national significance (Department of Education, 2014). HEPPP participation and partnerships funding is currently distributed by formula based on a university's proportion of the total number of low SES students at all eligible universities for one calendar year and must be spent in the year it is received. Institutional allocations are communicated to universities in the last quarter of the previous calendar year by the Department of Education and Training.

The focus on low SES as the key target group for HEPPP was deliberate. The Bradley Review recommended a focus on three particularly underrepresented groups where progress over time had been stagnant or negative: students from low SES backgrounds, students from regional and remote areas and Indigenous students (Bradley et al., 2008). Bradley and others (e.g. Harvey et al., 2016) established that there is significant overlap between these three groups. However, the focus on only one equity group implies that students from low SES backgrounds are the only group of students that need support; and that it is straightforward to identify a ‘low SES student’, both prospective and current, to target for support. I argue that both of these assumptions are deeply flawed.

The technical definition of 'low SES' is based on assigning students' addresses to an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Statistical Area 1 (SA1), with the SES value derived from the ABS' Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Education and Occupation for SA1 areas (Department of Education and Training, 2016d). SA1s in the bottom 25 per cent of the population aged 15-64 are classified as low SES. To calculate an SA1 for each student, addresses are passed through geocoding software and assigned to an SA1.

Thus, a student is identified as the member of a disadvantaged community irrespective of the actual disadvantage experienced by the individual. Gale (2012) argued that too much individual complexity is collapsed into a single indicator. Harvey et al. (2016) pointed out that while some smaller groups, such as most care leavers and students from refugee backgrounds, are technically subsumed under the low SES category, the broad group does not reflect the extent of the compound disadvantage experienced by those individuals. At the most extreme end, Naylor, Coates and Kelly (2016) proposed that the limitations of the existing equity framework warrant a shift from the group to the individual level.

At the same time, low SES as SA1 does not capture the range of non-traditional student categories (Kemp & Norton, 2014), that is, students in need of support that reside in an SA1 which is classified as mid or high SES. This challenge has been highlighted empirically in a study on the effectiveness of equity scholarships (Zacharias et al., 2016) in which none of the participating universities used the low SES as SA1 indicator as a criterion for allocating scholarships or other financial support offers.

These authors argue that it is not possible to reliably identify an individual in need of support to access or succeed at university based on the low SES as SA1 measure alone. The HEPPP Guidelines provide some flexibility in dealing with the limitations of the low SES measure and instruct universities to "tailor their programs to address the specific disadvantage, as appropriate, to the demographics of their low SES student population and applicants" (Department of Education, 2014, p.11), hinting at the heterogeneity of the low SES cohort. This study provided an opportunity to explore current practice on how the case study universities have made the policy focus on people from low SES backgrounds work in their particular context, that is, how they appropriated national policy to local context (Peacock et al., 2014).

2.2 Progress Reporting and Monitoring

The Bradley Review (2008) recommended that additional reporting requirements on performance against equity targets should be placed on universities in light of increases to funding and that the reports should be made public. While annual performance reporting on HEPPP was introduced with the launch of the program (Department of Education, 2014), these reports are not available to the public and there are no formal feedback processes to the sector. Bradley's recommendation on including retention and success targets as well as the idea on international benchmarking were also not picked up in the government's response to the review, but increases in retention and completion rates were included as explicit objectives of HEPPP.

At the national level, progress against participation targets as well as changes relating to access, retention and completion rates are monitored by the Department. Australia's time series on equity outcomes in higher education was established following the work of Martin et al. (1994) and is publicly available through HEIMS (Department of Education and Training, 2016b). These data currently provide the only measure of success for HEPPP at sector and institutional levels in the absence of a national evaluation framework. However there is no effective link between institutional equity performance and HEPPP reporting. The Compacts might have served this purpose but equity performance targets were not updated in the 2013 review of the agreements. This means that HEPPP design and implementation are disconnected from the assessment of student outcomes which makes the program vulnerable in a period of higher education policy uncertainty.

2.3 The Current State of Play: Higher Education Policy Under Review

In 2016, there was fierce debate about the financial sustainability of the current higher education system and policy settings over the next decade. The deregulation of university places and introduction of a demand-driven system of funding resulted in significant growth across the sector; by 34.7 per cent between 2008 and 2015 (Koshy, 2016). Due to its long-standing system of student loans under the HECS-HELP system, the substantial expansion of the system put strain on the federal budget. The intricacies of the current debate are beyond the scope of this study and have been explored elsewhere (e.g. Chapman, 2016). However, sector observers (e.g. King, 2016) have argued that HEPPP has regularly been the target for governments of both sides to achieve savings, including in 2016 when the program was cut by \$152 million over four years, predominantly as an Education portfolio contribution to budget repair.

The government commissioned comprehensive reviews of the effectiveness of the policies introduced in 2010. David Kemp and Andrew Norton reviewed the demand-driven funding system in 2014 and argued that it was achieving its objectives and should be continued (Kemp & Norton, 2014). An external review of HEPPP was commissioned in mid-2016 and carried out by ACIL Allen Consultants (ACIL Allen, 2016).

While not an evaluation of HEPPP, the Critical Intervention Framework project commissioned by the Department and delivered by Naylor et al. (2013, p. 5) identified four underlying factors which they argued had affected access and participation patterns of equity students since the release of the Bradley Review:

- the uncapping or deregulation of the volume of undergraduate places, which has influenced patterns of institutional recruitment, selection and admissions
- the establishment of a national target for low SES participation — a 20 per cent share of places by 2020 — and the inclusion of institutional equity targets in Mission-Based Compacts and the allocation of performance-based funding incentives
- the funding available to institutions for equity initiatives through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships program (HEPPP)
- wider societal trends in community beliefs about the value of undertaking higher education and changing assumptions about entry requirements and eligibility for participation.

The first three factors were considered in this analysis. Naylor et al. (2013) argued that these factors were highly interrelated and that it was difficult, if not risky, to speculate on their relative impact. The authors, like Kemp and Norton (2014) the following year, maintained that the uncapping of undergraduate places had been the major driver behind the growth experienced across the sector since 2010 in terms of total numbers and numbers of students from equity groups.

The available evidence suggests that, as a policy package, HEPPP and demand-driven funding have influenced the behaviour of students and universities. As the current policy regime, and its cost, is coming under increasing pressure, this Fellowship considered how it had changed widening participation strategy and practice in universities. To that end, it is necessary to understand how the challenge of widening participation to higher education by people from underrepresented groups has been conceptualised in Australian policy approaches, that is, at the macro level, and the opportunities and limitations those conceptualisations entail for institutional, or meso-level, change to create a more equitable higher education system.

2.4 Deconstructing Current Policy Discourses on Increasing Participation in Higher Education

In Australia, the dominant discourse on increasing participation in higher education sought to integrate the dual goals of economic growth and social benefits. The ‘common good’ is often conceptualised as an individual’s contribution to national productivity. The Bradley Review illustrates this approach (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 27):

Australia needs to make the most of the talents of all its people. Individuals who participate in higher education are enriched not just intellectually through engagement with local, national and global communities, but also economically by gaining access to challenging, highly-skilled and well-paid jobs. A recently released study calculates that 'over the working lifetime of a university graduate the financial gain generated from income is more than \$1.5 million or 70 per cent more than those whose highest qualification is Year 12' (NATSEM 2008, p. 1). Of course, their success benefits the whole society with its contribution to national productivity. An effective higher education sector which makes greater use of Australia's human capital enhances national productivity and global competitiveness.

Australia was not alone in adopting this approach to widening participation which Penny Jane Burke (2012, p. 30) calls 'the neoliberal project of self-improvement through higher education'. She argued that this 'neoliberal project' is "presented as available to all who have the potential to benefit, regardless of social positioning and volatile economic conditions" (Burke, 2012, p. 30). Erica Southgate and Anna Bennett added to this critique of widening participation policy by arguing that 'the cap(able) individual' and 'the proper aspirant' represent "a quintessential neo-liberal subject who possess 'natural' ability, hope for social mobility and has a highly individualised and entrepreneurial disposition" (Southgate & Bennett, 2014, p. 21). They proposed that this particular framing of the policy problem and the solution, to "*provide opportunities for all cap(able) people who have ability to participate*" (p. 28, emphasis in original), contradict the inclusive discourse of 'opportunity for all' and instead falls back on older discourses and assumptions of meritocracy and the redemptive promise of education and childhood hope. Both Burke (2012) and Southgate and Bennett (2014) questioned the potential of current widening participation policy as a social justice project, that is, as a tool to bring about a more equitable HE sector, because of its neo-liberal framing and the constraints this imposes on all stakeholders to understand and address the problem in its historical, structural and socio-cultural complexity.

This complexity was demonstrated in empirical studies which showed that the underrepresentation of people from low SES backgrounds in higher education involves multifaceted relationships that combine in different ways to prevent opportunities from being realised (James et al. 2008, p. 10) and, in Burke's term, preclude participation in the 'project'. Equity groups disproportionately experience educational disadvantage in the form of systemic barriers, including restrictions of distance and time, the cost of higher education, prior low academic achievement or school non-completion and constraints on student expectations, motivation and aspiration (Gale et al., 2010). Although identified more than 30 years ago, the pre-conditions to higher education proposed by Anderson and Vervoorn (1983), namely availability, accessibility, achievement and aspiration, remain relevant in the 21st century. Kemp and Norton (2014) stressed that prior academic achievement is the key predictor of articulation rates to higher education, noting the strong relationships between prior academic achievement and SES. The same point was made by Naylor and James (2016) in their review of systemic equity challenges. They conclude that it is not just policy makers and universities that are key stakeholders in the effort to bring about a more equitable higher education sector but that schools, vocational education and training (VET) providers and students themselves all have key roles to play and that there are currently challenges at each level.

Recently, the very notion of higher education as an enabler of a more just and productive society was challenged by Simon Marginson. He regards the meritocratic ideal formulated in the 1960s, that higher education can bring about both human capital and economic progress as well equality of opportunity and social justice, as the "founding myths of modern higher education systems" (Marginson, 2015, p. 1).

Marginson argued that human capital theory "created impossible expectations" (2015, p. 5) on higher education by considering it responsible to bringing about both outcomes while having "little control over the economic and social settings that constitute its possibilities and limits" (p.1). Marginson demonstrated that higher education often stratifies existing differences in class and location and, drawing on Thomas Piketty's (2014) work, has the greatest role and success in fostering social mobility in societies which are already relatively equal in terms of income and wealth distribution. Marginson pointed to research which showed that students from low SES backgrounds benefit most from participation in higher education, especially in elite institutions. Yet the paradox is that students from privileged backgrounds attend these institutions in the greatest numbers while relying on them the least for access to careers and social

status. This is in large part because they are more likely to self-select into these universities and more likely to be chosen by them (Hoxby & Avery, 2014 and Bolliver, 2013 in Marginson, 2015).

Talking about the UK context, but acknowledging the application of his argument to other countries in the Anglo-American tradition, Marginson (2015, p. 18) left his audience with a bleak outlook:

What higher education cannot do on its own, despite the supply-side promise of human capital theory, is expand the number of high value positions in society, so as to enable expanded mobility into the middle and upper echelons of society. In the absence of absolute growth in the number of opportunities – or what has always been more unlikely, a redistribution which would reduce the opportunities to some families from the middle and/or upper layers of the SES distribution – competition into and within higher education can only become more intense, as middle class families jostle for position and bring every possible asset to bear on the competition to secure advantage. Until the political economy changes, that is the future of UK higher education.

It is not only families and individuals which compete for position and privilege. In a recent paper, Peacock et al. (2014) argue that student equity policy was entangled in institutional student recruitment agendas which were inherently competitive, that is, that individual universities sought to attract more students from low SES backgrounds to either grow or diversify their student cohort. They argued that this “raises practice-based tensions amongst universities as they strive to raise institutional participation rates of low SES [...] students, whilst simultaneously broadening participation more generally within the sector” (Peacock et al., 2014, p. 379).

The question which brings together the core themes of this Fellowship is whether, and under which conditions, a national equity program can bring about transformational changes in the practices of universities to create a more equitable higher education system. Marginson (2015) proposed that universities tend to reinforce the societal status quo rather than change it. Peacock et al. (2014) posit that equity practice is situated within and shaped by institutional competitive strategies and pressures. The critiques by Burke (2012) and Southgate and Bennett (2014) suggest that current widening participation policy and programs are imperfect tools to bring about transformative change towards greater equity in higher education because they do not conceptualise the problem in its historical, structural and socio-cultural complexity.

To explore this question empirically, I needed three sets of analytical tools:

- one to explore what kind of institutional HEPPP implementation approaches had been adopted across the sector
- one to assess how program design and institutional equity performance were aligned
- a third to investigate whether HEPPP drove transformational changes in institutional equity strategy and practice.

The development and use of these tools are discussed in the next chapter.

3. The Fellowships' Analytical Tool Box: Evaluating Institutional HEPPP Program Design, Implementation and Institutional Change

To provide a sector-wide picture, the Fellowship aimed to produce a typology depicting how universities organised themselves to deliver on policy and program objectives. However, it soon became apparent that HEPPP had provided universities with the flexibility to develop and implement bespoke programs which best fit their institutional profile and priorities. What was missing to demonstrate achievement, advance practice and increase accountability, was an effective approach to evaluating how successful these approaches had been in context. The interpretive model and *Equity Initiatives Map* developed for the Fellowship aim to address this gap in diagnostic tools to assess equity performance, institutional HEPPP program design and implementation.

In this chapter, I am developing three sets of analytical tools:

- an interpretive model in two parts to explore what kind of institutional HEPPP implementation approaches had been adopted across the sector
- an *Equity Initiatives Map* to assess how program design and institutional equity performance were aligned
- a model to investigate whether HEPPP drove transformational changes in institutional equity strategy and practice.

The conceptual framework for the Fellowship, thus, is in three tiers and addresses different aspects of widening participation strategy and practice at the institutional level.

3.1 Curating an Interpretive Model for Analysing HEPPP Implementation at the Institutional Level

The interpretive model for this study to explore what kind of institutional HEPPP implementation approaches had been created across the sector is based on Penny Jane Burke's (2012) research into widening participation practice in the UK. Her overview of widening participation structures and practices became the foundation of my model. Burke (2012) categorised the approaches taken by universities to widening participation work using a number of indicators:

- the size and structure of the widening participation team (renamed for this study: central administrative infrastructure)
- key partners
- institutional targeting strategies
- institutional approaches to widening participation (renamed: organisational model).

Burke (2012) also assessed the individual and institutional orientation to widening participation and recorded the contract classification of interviewees, which I have not adopted mainly due to the large number of interviews conducted for this study. Instead, I developed broad professional groupings of executives, equity directors, practitioners and (external and academic) stakeholders. I have also added a longitudinal dimension to these criteria and tracked changes over time (2010-2016).

To these foundations, I added a number of indicators based on information available in the HEIMS data and HEPPP reports as well as through data collected during the case study field work. The indicators were grouped into seven domains which emerged from the literature. The domains and indicators of the interpretive model are detailed in Table 1.

The final model is in two parts to distinguish between sources of information required for analysis:

1. part 1 presents information which is available to universities either through HEIMS data (Department of Education and Training, 2016b and 2016c) or their annual HEPPP progress reports and associated information (Department of Education and Training, 2016a)
2. part 2 of the interpretative model collates information based on additional institutional data collection and analysis.

Table 1

Domains and Indicators of the Interpretive Model (Parts 1 and 2)

Domain	Indicators
Interpretive Model – Part 1	
Equity performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2015 participation, access, completion and retention rates of domestic under-graduate students from low SES backgrounds (SA1 measure with PC 2011 fall-back) - Retention ratio (2014) - Change in the no. of domestic UG students (2010-15) - Change in low SES participation rates (2011-15 based on SA1)
Size and structure of HEPPP program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HEPPP Participation \$\$\$ received (2015) - % rollover request in 2011 - Structure of 2015 HEPPP program: expenditure / initiatives as per Equity Initiatives Map (n=35) - Number of HEPPP-funded initiatives (2012 and 2015)
Formal power structures: administration of HEPPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Central administrative infrastructure (2015) (n=35) - Responsibility for acquittal and reporting
Interpretive Model – Part 2	
Where is the university going with student equity/widening participation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University Mission as it relates to student equity/widening participation - What was your jump-off point in 2010?
Student equity/widening participation targets and strategic objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic objectives related to student equity/widening participation - Targets cascaded through the university - Institutional targeting strategies
Formal power structures: HEPPP governance and organisational models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governance arrangements: oversight of HEPPP - Key decision makers and processes for allocating HEPPP funding - Collaborative leadership - Status of student equity/widening participation team - Structure of student equity/widening participation team - Organisational model - Key partners - Reforms: has there been major change over time?
HEPPP Administration	
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear processes for administering HEPPP moneys across university - Continuous improvement
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Processes for performance tracking of progress against objectives and budget - Processes for performance review of project managers - Clarity/comparability of performance measures across projects - Consequence management
Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Processes/opportunities for rewarding high performers - Processes for removing poor performers - Capacity building of current staff
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges of the institution in supporting students from equity groups, esp. low SES - Evaluation of HEPPP program or individual initiatives

I also started from an assumption that the quality of management practices matter in assessing the performance of institutional HEPPP programs. I drew on the instrument developed by Bloom and Van Reenen (2007) to measure the quality of management practices in organisations which had previously been applied to higher education (McCormack, Propper & Smith, 2013) and schools (Bloom, Lemos, Sadun & Van Reenen, 2015). It was not possible to use their existing quantitative instrument due to the small sample in this study as McCormack et al. (2013) surveyed 248 departments in 112 universities. However, I adopted their indicators of management practices, which they group in domains of operations, monitoring, targets and incentives, and applied them to the management of institutional HEPPP programs.

The interpretive model, as the first tier of analysis for this Fellowship, will assist in analysing the design and implementation of institutional HEPPP programs across the sector and to explore in some depth how universities have set up their equity infrastructure and program to deliver on HEPPP objectives. The second tier of analysis, operationalised as an *Equity Initiatives Map*, aims to assess how program design and institutional equity performance were aligned.

3.2 Mapping HEPPP Expenditure and Effort Across the Student Lifecycle: Operationalising the Equity Initiatives Framework for Institutional Analysis

The *Equity Initiatives Map* builds on the Equity Initiatives Framework produced by Anna Bennett and colleagues (Bennett et al., 2015). The Framework was released in the early months of the Fellowship and became an inspiration for crafting evidence-based and visually effective diagnostic tools for equity practice.

Bennett et al. (2015) developed the Equity Initiatives Framework, included as Table 2, as part of a commissioned NPP project to extend the Critical Interventions Framework first proposed by Naylor et al. (2013). It aimed to identify equity initiatives across Australia's higher education sector that had demonstrated effectiveness through published impact studies or participation in a custom-built national survey. The report provided a detailed overview of the impact of equity interventions across four stages of the student lifecycle: pre-access, access, participation, and attainment and transition out. The authors argued that the Equity Initiatives Framework may be used as a reference guide for planning, monitoring and evaluating equity programs and for building a stronger evidence base for effective equity strategies.

I have taken Bennett et al.'s (2015) proposition further and extended the Equity Initiatives Framework to operationalise it for the analysis of HEPPP expenditure and effort at the institutional level. Rather than focusing on equity initiatives that have proven effective, the *Equity Initiatives Map* documents all initiatives universities implemented with HEPPP funding at a given point in time. Thus, the *Equity Initiatives Map* could complement progress reports to the Department of Education and Training. Importantly, the extended model includes equity performance indicators to assess the level of strategic alignment of program design with areas of strength and weakness.

The following analytical domains and indicators were included to extend the Equity Initiatives Framework and turn it into a tool for integrated reporting of HEPPP expenditure and effort at program level:

- **EQUITY PERFORMANCE (Year) – HEIMS data:**
 - participation rate % (low/medium/high)
 - access rate % (low/medium/ high)
 - retention rate % (low/medium/high)
 - completion rate % (low/medium/high)
 - proposed category of application rates to tertiary providers by students from target schools.
- **TOTAL INVESTMENT AND NUMBER OF INITIATIVES (Year):**
 - total allocation (or actual and underspend)
 - total no. of initiatives, \$ expenditure / no. of initiatives (% of total expenditure / % of total initiatives) for each of the four phases.
- **COMPETITIVE GRANTS (Year/s): NPP.**
- **CENTRAL ADMINSTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE – from HEPPP report:**
 - \$ expenditure (% of total expenditure)
 - including: Leadership role (e.g. Director, Coordinator), Evaluation Officer, Finance Officer, Admin Officer, Project Officer; Also: General expenditure and reviews of business processes.
- **Renamed KEY PROGRAM TYPES THAT INCLUDE EQUITY INITIATIVES to HEPPP FUNDED EQUITY INITIATIVES.**

Table 2

Equity Initiatives Framework

This framework is a sector-wide guide that should be modified according to context and stakeholders' needs.

STUDENT LIFE CYCLE	PRE-ACCESS: Outreach to Schools and Communities		ACCESS: Pathways and Admissions (Including Enabling Pathways)	PARTICIPATION: Transition, Engagement and Progression (Undergraduate and Postgraduate)		ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT	
	Pre-Access		Access	Participation		Attainment	Transition Out
STAGE	Outreach to Schools and Communities		Pathways and Admission	Transition and Engagement	Engagement and Progression During Studies	Completion	Graduate Destinations
TARGET GROUPS	Infants and primary and school students, teachers and parents	Primary and secondary school students, teachers and parents	Secondary school students and leavers	Commencing/first year students	Continuing later year students	Completing students	Graduates
			Mature age students			Employer groups and professional associations	
			VET students				
MAJOR PRINCIPLES AND AIMS (SPECIFIC ACCORDING TO CONTEXT)	Increase awareness of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting and developing aspirations and expectations		Provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at university	- Engagement and belonging - Academic literacies - Competencies in discipline area/ relevant knowledges developed through inclusive pedagogies		- Employability - Postgraduate study	
KEY PROGRAM TYPES THAT INCLUDE EQUITY INITIATIVES	- Outreach to early years of schooling (Years K–4) - Community outreach	- Outreach to primary and middle years schooling (Years 5–9) - Outreach to senior secondary schooling (Years 10–12) - Pre-university experience programs - Community outreach	- Pathways programs: a qualification that provides entry into university upon successful completion often from enabling, VET or private providers - Foundation programs: programs that provide extra academic development to build skills; may be a separate qualification or part of a degree - Alternative selection criteria and tools in entry requirements - Outreach to VET/adults	- Orientation programs - First year inclusive transition programs	Alternative exit qualifications	Careers and employment support pre- completion	Careers and employment support post completion
			Bridging programs				
			Employment support pre-course completion (including work integrated learning, part-time employment, leadership programs and professional mentoring).				
		- Careers advice regarding educational pathways - Mentoring and role models				Support to continue to postgraduate study (coursework and research higher degrees)	
	- School curriculum enhancement and support and foster skills and capabilities - Professional development for careers advisors and teachers		- Scholarship provision and grants - Engaging and inclusive curriculum/course design - Inclusive pedagogies - Reflexive practice - Embedded literacies and skills development - Contextual learning - Diversity of strategies, including extra-curricular learning development and other programs - Non-academic student services provision (childcare, financial aid, student counselling and health) - Continuing professional development for staff or students (to build capacity and awareness of changing needs) - Provision of engaging and inclusive learning spaces and technology - Social activities				Scholarship provision and grants for postgraduate study
SECTOR AND INSTITUTION- WIDE PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES	- Development and review of federal policies, sector-wide policies and procedures with an equity lens - Review of university policies, procedures and plans with an equity lens provided by equity practitioners and inclusive learning scholars, drawing on insights gained from both practice and research (praxis-approach) - Continuing professional development for promoting inclusive practices and pedagogies - Cultural engagement - Inclusive, non-stigmatising, non-deficit language - Data collection to facilitate provision of support and evaluation - Institution-wide research/evaluation projects - Monitoring at each stage (access, performance, outcomes) utilising inclusive approach and language						
EVALUATION	- Programs that demonstrate impact use evaluation that is stakeholder centred, context specific and iterative. Rich information may be gained from a mixed methods approach (usually combining qualitative and quantitative methods) to understanding the impact of an initiative/suite of initiatives. The following are examples of evaluation methods and data sources relevant to equity initiatives: > Program logic analysis (including plausibility analysis, needs analysis and input/output requirements) > Surveys of student and other stakeholder characteristics and experiences (using qualitative and/or quantitative designs) > Focus groups with students and other stakeholders (for eliciting targeted feedback and information) > One-to-one interviews with stakeholders (for exploring more detailed or complex issues) N.B. Focus groups and interviews may be conducted online or by telephone to overcome challenges of distance and cost > Documentary/narrative/discourse analysis of program information and resources > Documented reflective activities, which may be conducted before and after an initiative to explore its impact > Creative forms of feedback from participants (via journal entries, illustrations, responses to narratives, mentors and other stimuli) > Participant observation of programs in action (e.g. in learning contexts) > Benchmarking (through external program review or comparisons with other initiatives or sectoral and/or institutional norms) > Case studies of specific initiatives (which may involve comparisons between different initiatives) > Analysis of input/output measures (e.g. numbers of participants, qualifications, numbers of scholarships awarded, etc.) > Longitudinal tracking of individual student experience and outcomes > Cohort analysis (comparing program offers, admissions, enrolments, attrition, retention, success and completion rates) > Service process tracking (e.g. changes in contact waiting times) > Web analytics (using the increasing amount of online data to track and analyse student and/or program performance) > Randomised control trials (initially designed for testing new drugs but now being used for educational interventions) > Economic modelling (to estimate economic and community-wide or individual benefit from participating in a program)						

The Equity Initiatives Framework was created as part of the Critical Interventions Framework Part 2: Equity Initiatives in Australian Higher Education: A review of evidence of Impact. Bennett, A., Naylor, R., Mellor, K., Brett, M., Gore, J., Harvey, A., Munn, B., James, R., Smith, M., and Whitty, G. (2015). This was funded by a grant from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. The grant was made under the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program.

The *Equity Initiatives Map* was used as the template to map the 2015 HEPPP progress reports of 35 of the 37 public universities which received HEPPP funding that year. One 2015 report was not available. Another university reported HEPPP expenditure by faculty and did not break down expenditure to initiative level;

therefore mapping onto the template was not possible. During the mapping process, a number of issues emerged that needed to be resolved to ensure an accurate reflection of HEPPP expenditure and effort across the sector. These are outlined in the following:

- Not all initiatives slotted neatly into a distinct ‘phase’ of the student lifecycle. In these cases, the initiative was allocated by intent, for example, an intervention that aimed to provide an alternative access route but also had pre-access and transition elements was categorised as an access initiative.
- The category which was the most difficult to resolve grouped together scholarship provision and grants, inclusive curriculum/course design/pedagogies/learning spaces and technology, non-academic student services provision, continuing professional development for staff or students and social activities. Firstly, it was attributed by colour-coding to the attainment and transition out phase when the intent of the included initiatives, detailed in the body of the CIF II report (Bennett et al., 2015), was to support transition, engagement and progression. Thus, this category was counted as participation expenditure and initiatives in the *Equity Initiatives Map* and colour-coded yellow.
- Secondly, the category did not work for the purposes of mapping HEPPP expenditure in its aggregate form. Arguably, the included initiatives address different barriers and needs of the target cohort and should be conceptually differentiated. This category was disaggregated in the following ways:
 - Retained all of the initiatives that related to inclusive teaching, learning and support practice, namely engaging and inclusive curriculum/course design, inclusive pedagogies, reflexive practice, embedded literacies and skills development, contextual learning and continuing professional development for staff or students (to build capacity and awareness of changing needs).
 - Redesigned the category ‘engagement and progression during studies’ to include academic service provision, non-academic service provision (childcare, financial aid, student counselling and health), social activities and a diversity of strategies, including extra-curricular learning development and other programs.
 - Both of these categories were attributed to the participation phase and colour-coded yellow.
 - Created a distinct row for scholarship provision and assigned the categories to one of the four phases depending on the target group.
- Academic student services provision was not included in the detailed initiatives of the Equity Initiatives Framework and was added to the ‘engagement and progression during studies’ category of the *Equity Initiatives Map* as many universities, including the three case studies, (co-)funded these services with HEPPP moneys.
- Scholarship provision and grants for postgraduate study is not an allowable expense under current HEPPP Guidelines. The Equity Initiatives Framework generally included initiatives that had been proven effective for undergraduate or postgraduate students but only undergraduate expenses were considered for the *Equity Initiatives Map*.
- Community outreach activities was deleted from the older-years school outreach category, but retained in early-years outreach, to avoid double-counting.
- The category including school curriculum enhancement and professional development for careers advisors and teachers as integrated into the ‘older-years school outreach’ category as these activities were mostly embedded rather than stand-alone initiatives.
- ‘Employment support pre-completion’ was a category of activity that could be attributed to two different phases. These were merged and attributed to the attainment and transition out phase.
- Alternative exit qualifications seemed to be better placed in the attainment and transition out phase, rather than participation, so as to align with an emerging broader conception of ‘completion’.

I also extended the ‘Major Aims’ of the four phases by explicitly including the development of school attainment into the pre-access phase and addressing issues around affordability of higher education across the student lifecycle. The final version of the *Equity Initiatives Map* is included as Table 3. The populated *Equity Initiatives Maps* for the three case study institutions are included in the respective case study document. The national ranges for the four phases in the student lifecycle are depicted in Tables 4 and 5 in Chapter 4 and highlight the diversity and complexity of the national picture of HEPPP expenditure and effort.

Table 3

Equity Initiatives Map of HEPPP Program at XYZ University

To be read in conjunction with the 201X HEPPP annual progress report to the Department of Education and Training

STUDENT LIFE CYCLE	PRE-ACCESS: Outreach to Schools and Communities		ACCESS: Pathways and Admissions (Including Enabling Pathways)	PARTICIPATION: Transition, Engagement and Progression (Undergraduate)		ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT (Undergraduate)		
	Pre-Access		Access	Participation		Attainment	Transition Out	
STAGE	Outreach to Schools and Communities		Pathways and Admission	Transition and Engagement	Engagement and Progression During Studies	Completion	Graduate Destinations	
TARGET GROUPS	Infants and primary and school students, teachers and parents	Primary and secondary school students, teachers and parents	Secondary school students and leavers	Commencing/first year students	Continuing later year students	Completing students	Graduates	
			Mature age students			Employer groups and professional associations		
	Community members		VET students					
MAJOR AIMS	Increase awareness of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting, developing and/or maintaining aspirations, expectations and attainment		Provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at university, taking into account the degree of selectivity and distance to target communities	- Engagement and belonging - Academic literacies - Competencies in discipline area/ relevant knowledges developed through inclusive pedagogies		- Employability - Postgraduate study		
			Address issues of affordability of higher education study: provide information, strategies and financial support to fund student life					
EQUITY PERFORMANCE (YEAR)	[PROPOSED: Application rate to tertiary institutions by students from partner schools]		Access rate % (low/medium/high)	Retention rate % (low/medium/high)		Completion rate % (low/medium/high)		
			Participation rate % (low/medium/high)					
TOTAL INVESTMENT AND NUMBER OF INITIATIVES (YEAR) Total allocation (or actual and underspend): X Total initiatives: Y	\$x,xxxk / y initiatives (zz% / aa%)		\$xxxk / y initiatives (zz% / aa%)	\$x,xxxk / y initiatives (zz% / aa%)		\$xxxk / y initiatives (zz% / aa%)		
HEPPP-FUNDED EQUITY INITIATIVES (YEAR)	- Outreach to early years of schooling (Years K–4) - Community outreach	- Outreach to primary and middle years schooling (Years 5–9) - Outreach to senior secondary schooling (Years 10–12) - Pre-university experience programs - School curriculum enhancement and support and foster skills and capabilities - Professional development for careers advisors and teachers	- Pathways programs: a qualification that provides entry into university upon successful completion often from enabling, VET or private providers - Foundation programs: programs that provide extra academic development to build skills; may be a separate qualification or part of a degree - Alternative selection criteria and tools in entry requirements - Outreach to VET/adults	- Orientation programs - First year inclusive transition programs	- Academic service provision - Non-academic service provision (childcare, financial aid, student counselling and health) - Social activities - Diversity of strategies, including extra- curricular learning development and other programs	Alternative exit qualifications	Careers and employment support post completion	
			Bridging programs					
			- Engaging and inclusive curriculum/course design - Inclusive pedagogies - Reflexive practice - Embedded literacies and skills development - Contextual learning - Continuing professional development for staff or students (to build capacity and awareness of changing needs)					
			Careers and employment support pre-course completion (including work integrated learning, part-time employment, leadership programs and professional mentoring).					
			- Careers advice regarding educational pathways - Mentoring and role models					
	Scholarships and prizes for potential students currently at school or in the community		- Scholarship provision and grants for commencing students - Scholarship provision and grants for students in enabling, foundation, bridging or other access programs		Scholarship provision and grants for continuing and completing students		N/A Scholarship provision and grants for postgraduate study	
COMPETITIVE GRANTS IN YEAR/S	NPP in Year/s							
CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE	- \$xxx (zz%) - Including: Leadership role (e.g. Director, Coordinator), Evaluation Officer, Finance Officer, Admin Officer, Project Officer - Also: General expenditure and reviews of business processes							
SECTOR AND INSTITUTION-WIDE PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES	- Development and review of federal policies, sector-wide policies and procedures with an equity lens - Review of university policies, procedures and plans with an equity lens provided by equity practitioners and inclusive learning scholars, drawing on insights gained from both practice and research (praxis-approach) - Continuing professional development for promoting inclusive practices and pedagogies - Cultural engagement - Inclusive, non-stigmatising, non-deficit language - Data collection to facilitate provision of support and evaluation - Institution-wide research/evaluation projects - Monitoring at each stage (access, performance, outcomes) utilising inclusive approach and language							
EVALUATION	Programs that demonstrate impact use evaluation that is stakeholder centred, context specific and iterative. Rich information may be gained from a mixed methods approach (usually combining qualitative and quantitative methods) to understanding the impact of an initiative/suite of initiatives. The following are examples of evaluation methods and data sources relevant to equity initiatives: > Program logic analysis (including plausibility analysis, needs analysis and input/output requirements) > Surveys of student and other stakeholder characteristics and experiences (using qualitative and/or quantitative designs) > Focus groups with students and other stakeholders (for eliciting targeted feedback and information) > One-to-one interviews with stakeholders (for exploring more detailed or complex issues) N.B. Focus groups and interviews may be conducted online or by telephone to overcome challenges of distance and cost > Documentary/narrative/discourse analysis of program information and resources > Documented reflective activities, which may be conducted before and after an initiative to explore its impact > Creative forms of feedback from participants (via journal entries, illustrations, responses to narratives, mentors and other stimuli) > Participant observation of programs in action (e.g. in learning contexts) > Benchmarking (through external program review or comparisons with other initiatives or sectoral and/or institutional norms) > Case studies of specific initiatives (which may involve comparisons between different initiatives) > Analysis of input/output measures (e.g. numbers of participants, qualifications, numbers of scholarships awarded, etc.) > Longitudinal tracking of individual student experience and outcomes > Cohort analysis (comparing program offers, admissions, enrolments, attrition, retention, success and completion rates) > Service process tracking (e.g. changes in contact waiting times) > Web analytics (using the increasing amount of online data to track and analyse student and/or program performance) > Randomised control trials (initially designed for testing new drugs but now being used for educational interventions) > Economic modelling (to estimate economic and community-wide or individual benefit from participating in a program)							

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The identification of approaches taken to HEPPP implementation and their influence on student performance was a core objective of the Fellowship. The third tier of the conceptual framework draws on an existing change model which was slightly modified to investigate whether HEPPP drove transformational changes in institutional equity strategy and practice since its launch in 2010.

3.3 Analysing Change in Higher Education Institutions

Universities have unique characteristics that need to be considered in studying change at the institutional level. Adrianna Kezar (2001), in her comprehensive overview of change models in higher education, provided a set of research-based principles for studying and managing change that mirror and respond to Birnbaum's (1991) unique features of higher education institutions. These include: the fact that higher education institutions are interdependent organisations but relatively independent of their environment (though some areas and some institutions are more exposed than others); the unique culture of the academy which is values-driven and concerned with institutional status; the co-existence of multiple power and authority structures in a loosely coupled system characterised by organised anarchical decision-making; and goal ambiguity and the importance of image and success.

Kezar (2001) argued that rapid transformational change in higher education institutions is rare and is often associated with extreme financial conditions. In later work, Eckel and Kezar (2003) rejected that view and instead observed that transformational changes took place in institutions that were "already in a state of flux resulting from a combination of external pressure and emerging opportunities. Savvy leaders know when to take advantage of externally generated energy and match it to internal desires and goals" (Eckel & Kezar, 2003, p. xi).

Eckel and Kezar (2003) argued that there needed to be evidence of both structural and cultural changes, resulting in deep and pervasive alterations to the institutional status quo, for a change to be classified as 'transformative'. Alternatively, changes could be classified as 'adjustment', 'isolated change' or 'far-reaching change' using depth and pervasiveness as the defining criteria. They identified five requirements which needed to be met to bring about systemic change:

- senior administrative support
- collaborative leadership
- flexible vision
- faculty and staff development
- visible action.

For the purpose of this study, I use the terms transformative, transformational, fundamental and systemic change interchangeably.

Furthermore, Eckel and Kezar proposed that 'institutional sensemaking' was an essential activity of transformational change: "More important to transformation than changing structures, creating incentives, and aligning budgets is getting people to think differently" (Eckel & Kezar, 2003, p. xii). The concept of 'institutional sensemaking' is useful for examining institutional changes in how universities conceptualise the problems associated with widening participation in higher education for students from underrepresented backgrounds and develop approaches for tackling these.

To guide my analysis of whether systemic changes occurred in the case study universities following the introduction of HEPPP, I adopt Eckel and Kezar's (2003) framework of transformational change. It was effectively applied to the implementation of interdisciplinary strategies by Holley (2009) who used case study analysis relying on publicly available documents. I extend Holley's methodological approach by incorporating stakeholder interviews in addition to document analysis and by taking a longitudinal perspective through analysing documents produced in the period from 2010 and 2016.

In the terminology of organisational change theory, HEPPP can be seen as an external driver for institutional change across the Australian higher education sector through providing significant financial resources with binding Guidelines. I will explore if, and under what conditions, university leaders

leveraged the positive energy generated by HEPPP to achieve transformational changes. However, I start my discussion of the findings with setting out how universities designed and implemented institutional HEPPP programs following the introduction of HEPPP using the interpretive model and *Equity Initiatives Map* developed in this chapter.

4. Design and Implementation of Institutional HEPPP Programs: the National Picture and Three Successful Examples in Context

This chapter explores how universities have designed and implemented institutional HEPPP programs since the launch of the national program in 2010. It will investigate the structure of HEPPP programs in terms of expenditure and effort across the student lifecycle using the *Equity Initiatives Map*. I will then summarise the key findings from the case study analysis to illustrate the diverse approaches to HEPPP implementation adopted by universities in response to their unique context. The management approaches in the three case study universities will be compared using the interpretive model to identify attributes of effective and efficient institutional HEPPP programs.

4.1 HEPPP Expenditure and Effort Across the Student Lifecycle: the National Picture

There is currently limited data available at the national level to make informed judgements about the strategic approaches to HEPPP implementation taken by individual universities and to group them into distinct 'types'. In 2010, the first year of HEPPP reporting, the Department included a question on the strategic alignment of HEPPP activities with the university's equity planning in relation to widening participation of people from low SES backgrounds in higher education. Answers to that question yielded some interesting insights as to the approaches universities had taken in setting up their institutional HEPPP programs. They showed that most universities had pre-existing equity programs which were re-worked, scaled up and/or significantly expanded by HEPPP funding. However, not all universities provided comprehensive, or any, responses and the question was not repeated in later years which can be seen as a missed opportunity to encourage program-level reflections.

The Fellowship aimed to analyse what kind of HEPPP implementation approaches had been adopted across the sector and how program design and institutional equity performance were aligned. Part 1 of the interpretive model provides a national overview of equity performance and the design of HEPPP programs which is detailed in Table 4. The table gives a range for each indicator across the sector and identifies the top, middle and bottom third of the 37 institutions which received HEPPP Participation funding in 2015 for each measure. Where categories included variations greater than one institution from the set range (12 or 13 institutions) these are noted in brackets.

The picture which emerges from the analysis of information collated in Table 4 is one of great diversity of approaches to HEPPP implementation. For a start, Australian universities received vastly different HEPPP allocations, between \$374,000 and almost \$11 million in 2015, due to the funding formula which is based on the institution's share of students from low SES backgrounds. This spread meant that universities had very different inputs to design institutional HEPPP programs which is illustrated by the case study universities.

To effectively work with these different allocations, there was evidence of various levels of co-funding of equity programs with institutional moneys in the case studies:

- At *Targeted and Personalised*, the University matched the HEPPP allocation by providing the same amount of institutional funding to pay for the flagship outreach program. The University had also been successful in attracting corporate and donor funding to support its HEPPP funded programs.
- At *Principles and Partnerships*, the University substantially co-funded core components of the widening participation program, including flagship outreach initiatives, equity scholarships and staff development activities as well as early intervention, welfare and other retention measures.
- At *Deliver at Scale*, the large HEPPP allocation covered the University's comprehensive equity program.

Table 4

Interpretive Model Part 1 – Equity Performance and Institutional HEPPP Program Design from a National Perspective

Criteria	National Range (n=37)	Bottom Third (n=12)	Middle Third (n=13)	Top Third (n=12)
Equity Performance				
2015 participation, access, completion and retention rates of domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds (SA1 measure with PC 2011 fall-back) and retention ratio (2014)	Participation: 3.25% – 33.45% Access: 3.33% – 33.55% Completion: 3.34% – 33.18% Retention: 62.72% – 89.07% Retention ratio: 0.93 – 1.01	Participation: low < 13% Access: low < 13% Completion: low < 11% Retention: low < 78% Retention ratio: low < 0.98 (n=10)	Participation: medium 13-23% Access: medium 13-22% Completion: medium 11-20% Retention: medium 78-81% Retention ratio: medium 0.98-0.99 (n=20)	Participation: high > 23% Access: high > 22% Completion: high > 20% Retention: high > 81% Retention ratio: high > 0.99 (n=7)
Change in the no. of domestic UG students (2010-15)	Change: -10% – 141%	Low increase < 16% (n=14)	Medium increase 16-27% (n=12)	High increase > 27% (n=11)
Change in low SES participation rates (2011-15 based on SA1)	Participation rate increase: -5.42 – 5.61 percentage points	Participation rate increase: negative < 0 percentage points	Participation rate increase: medium 0.1-1.3 percentage points	Participation rate increase: large > 1.3 percentage points
Size and Structure of HEPPP Program				
HEPPP participation \$\$\$ received (2015)	\$374,000 - \$10,772,000	Small < \$3m	Medium \$3m-\$4.5m	Large > \$4.5m
% rollover request in 2011	0 – 139%	None	Medium 1-50%	Large > 50%
Structure of 2015 HEPPP program: expenditure / initiatives as per Equity Initiatives Map (n=35)	Pre-access: 0%-58% / 0%-75% Access: 0%-40% / 0%-40% Participation: 3%-92% / 25-89% Attainment: 0%-14% / 0%-20%	Pre-access: 0-15% / 0-20% Access: 0% / 0% (n=9) Participation: 3-42% / 25-43% Attainment: 0% / 0% (n=19)	Pre-access: 16-30% / 21-43% Access: 1-7% / 1-14% (n=13) Participation: 43-62% / 44-60% Attainment: 1-5% / 1-6% (n=7)	Pre-access: 31-58% / 44-75% Access: 8-40% / 15-40% (n=13) Participation: 63-92% / 61-89% Attainment: 6-14% / 7-20% (n=9)
Number of HEPPP-funded initiatives (2012 and 2015)	2012: 9 – 61 2015: 4 – 53 (n=35)	2012: Moderate < 20 initiatives 2015: Small < 10 initiatives	2012: Large 20 – 32 initiatives 2015: Medium 10-20 initiatives	2012: V large > 33 initiatives 2015: Large > 20 initiatives
Formal Power Structures: Governance and Administration of HEPPP				
Central administrative infrastructure (2015)	0% - 67% of institutional allocation	No institutional allocation (n=15)	Moderate 1 – 10% (n=10)	Large < 10% (n=10)
Administration of HEPPP: responsibility for acquittal and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equity Pathways or Outreach Coordinator - Student Equity Manager - Executive Officer - Director, Student Support or Regional Engagement or Planning or Student Recruitment - Equity Director or Equity and Diversity or Widening Participation or Equity Research - Dean of Students - Vice President/Principal (Central Services) - Chief Operating Officer - (Associate) Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity and/or Student Support or Academic or Teaching and Learning) - (Vice-)Provost - Academic Registrar - Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic or Student Experience) 			

Most universities had designed and implemented at least 15 HEPPP funded initiatives in 2015, and some, including *Deliver at Scale* and *Principles and Partnerships*, had institutional programs with significantly more than 15 initiatives. There was some correlation between the amount of HEPPP funding received and the number of initiatives, though there were a few universities that had small or medium numbers of initiatives and large allocations or vice versa. There was a vast range in the scale of HEPPP funded initiatives, from \$1,500 to \$1.2 million, hinting at the challenges involved in managing and evaluating institutional programs.

The *Equity Initiatives Map* provides a framework for analysing the different approaches to HEPPP implementation adopted across the sector. It enables an assessment of HEPPP expenditure and effort across four phases of the student lifecycle to illustrate the structure of institutional HEPPP programs. These will be more comprehensively and qualitatively described for the three case study universities. At the national level, the *Equity Initiatives Map* paints a complex picture in terms of HEPPP program design:

- Two thirds of universities made substantial investments in the pre-access phase (between 16 and 58 per cent of their institutional allocation) with one third of universities investing more than 30 per cent of their allocation into pre-access initiatives.
- Only a minority of universities invested significant amounts, between eight and 40 per cent of HEPPP funding, into the access phase. Nine universities did not have any HEPPP funded access initiatives.
- All universities allocated at least some HEPPP funding to initiatives which supported the participation of their current students and a significant minority of institutions invested more than two thirds of their allocation into participation initiatives.
- 16 universities invested HEPPP funding into attainment and transition out initiatives. Nine of these had substantive programs to provide careers and employment support to current students. However, no university invested more than 14 per cent of their allocation into this phase.
- Universities had very different funding arrangements for central administrative structures with allocations ranging from 0 to 67 per cent. 15 institutions had no central infrastructure paid for by HEPPP whereas 10 universities spent 10 per cent or more of their allocation to centrally support HEPPP implementation.
- Responsibility for institutional acquittal and reporting on HEPPP funding also spanned many levels of the organisational hierarchy. In some institutions, practitioners, such as Equity Pathways or Outreach Coordinators, were named in annual HEPPP progress reports as the responsible officer while others had dedicated equity directors (or related positions) or assigned responsibility to executive managers.

The categories of the original Critical Intervention Framework (Naylor et al., 2013) are not perfectly congruent with those of the *Equity Initiatives Map* but some comparisons can be made between the analyses of 2011 and 2015 HEPPP progress reports:

- In 2011 and 2015, most HEPPP funding was spent on initiatives in the participation and pre-access phases.
- In 2011, Naylor et al. (2013) did not find any investment in careers and employment support. By 2015, almost half of universities had directed HEPPP funding towards initiatives to improve employability and career preparation of low SES students and some institutions did so in comprehensive ways. This represents a major shift in program design across the four years of implementation.
- The earlier study reported that 28 universities had used HEPPP funding on program management expenses, that is, a central administrative infrastructure, and this had dropped to 20 universities by 2015.

Naylor et al. (2013) counted all scholarships in the access phase whereas the *Equity Initiatives Map* breaks up scholarship expenditure by target group where possible, namely prospective, commencing and current students, and provides a more nuanced picture which is appropriate given that many universities had significant investment in scholarships. Naylor et al. (2013) noted that access initiatives did not have to be expensive, which partly explains the lower expenditure in this phase in both years, but suggested that universities should explore more comprehensive initiatives in the access phase.

The *Targeted and Personalised* case study provides an example of sophisticated access programs tailor-made for a selective university. It had directed the highest proportion of HEPPP funding of any Australian university (40 per cent) towards access initiatives and can be regarded as an example of leading practice.

The above findings demonstrate that investigations at the initiative level on the basis of HEPPP annual progress reports provide some useful insights on how universities have responded to the introduction of HEPPP. They illustrate the power of the *Equity Initiatives Map* to produce a national picture of HEPPP expenditure and effort using consistent terminology and a lifecycle approach across very diverse institutions and HEPPP programs.

The *Equity Initiatives Map* can also be used as a diagnostic tool by universities to analyse the level of strategic alignment of their HEPPP funded program of work with its equity performance by integrating both sets of information in the same framework. It can prompt strategic discussions at the institutional level about the challenges for students from low SES backgrounds in accessing a university's course offers and succeeding in their study. The 'Major Aims' articulated in the *Equity Initiatives Map* can serve as a guide in program design or a checklist to assess whether current programs meet the core dimensions of effective equity initiatives. It can assist in reflecting on current outcomes and help prioritise the level of investment and effort across the student lifecycle going forward.

Supplementing annual HEPPP reporting with a request to complete the *Equity Initiatives Map* in its proposed format would provide a nationally consistent approach to assessing the level of expenditure and effort of HEPPP funds across the student lifecycle. Making these *Equity Initiatives Maps* public would up the ante for each institution to take responsibility for equity outcomes and the relationship with HEPPP program design. At the same time, it would improve the sharing of current practice across the sector. In addition, consistent use of the *Equity Initiatives Map* would go some way towards demonstrating the contributions of HEPPP in the context of demand-driven funding by demonstrating the program's ability to address access barriers related to awareness, aspiration, attainment and affordability.

While reporting at activity level generates useful insights into the design and implementation of HEPPP programs, this approach also has an important limitation: the focus is placed on the smallest unit of analysis, often artificially separating components of larger projects, which creates an impression of a collection of many small and unrelated activities. To overcome this limitation, the reporting process could invite program-level analysis or reflections over time and ask universities to provide an overarching narrative of the program's intent, structure, achievements and challenges. Given that HEPPP aims to address systemic disadvantage by developing long-term partnerships with schools, VET partners and community organisations as well as changing internal practice, this would be a more meaningful way to capture outcomes and persistent issues.

The aim is to demonstrate a more holistic process to analysing institutional HEPPP programs which combines the quantitative analysis enabled by the *Equity Initiatives Map* with a qualitative case study method. This approach shifts the analysis from the initiative to the program level and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the greater whole rather than its component parts. With this approach, the structural analysis enabled by the *Equity Initiatives Map* and the performance data produced by the Department are contextualised and the full range of outcomes produced by HEPPP funding becomes visible.

The presentation of the case studies is in two parts. A brief overview is provided of each case study with reference to the national context set out in Table 5 before summarising the approach taken by the respective university and describing the success factors, outcomes and challenges associated with each approach.

Table 5

Interpretive Model Part 1 – Equity Performance and Institutional HEPPP Program Design: The Case Studies in the National Context

Criteria	National Range	Case Study 1: Deliver at Scale	Case Study 2: Principles and Partnerships	Case Study 3: Targeted and Personalised
Equity Performance				
2015 participation, access, completion and retention rates of domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds (SA1 measure with PC 2011 fall-back) and retention ratio (2014)	Participation: 3.25% – 33.45% Access: 3.33% – 33.55% Completion: 3.34% – 33.18% Retention: 62.72% – 89.07% Retention ratio: 0.93 – 1.01	Participation: high > 23% Access: high > 22% Completion: high > 20% Retention: medium 78-81% Retention ratio: high > 0.99	Participation: low < 13% Access: low < 13% Completion: low < 11% Retention: high > 81% Retention ratio: low < 0.98	Participation: low < 13% Access: low < 13% Completion: low < 11% Retention: high > 81% Retention ratio: medium 0.98-0.99
Change in the no. of domestic UG students (2010-15)	Change: -10% – 141%	High increase > 27%	Low increase < 16%	Low increase < 16%
Change in low SES participation rates (2011-15 based on SA1)	Participation rate increase: -5.42 – 5.61 percentage points	Participation rate increase: large > 1.3 percentage points	Participation rate increase: medium 0.1-1.3 percentage points	Participation rate increase: medium 0.1-1.3 percentage points
Size and Structure of HEPPP Program				
HEPPP participation \$\$\$ received (2015)	\$374,000 - \$10,772,000	Large > \$4.5m	Large > \$4.5m	Small < \$3m
% rollover request in 2011	0 – 139%	None	Large > 50%	Medium 1-50%
Structure of 2015 HEPPP program: expenditure / initiatives as per Equity Initiatives Map	Pre-access: 0%-58% / 0%-75% Access: 0%-40% / 0%-40% Participation: 3%-92% / 25-89% Attainment: 0%-14% / 0%-20%	Pre-access: 51% / 55% Access: 4% / 8% Participation: 31% / 28% Attainment: 10% / 9%	Pre-access: 29% / 48% Access: 7% / 9% Participation: 52% / 43% Attainment: 0% / 0%	Pre-access: 7% / 11% Access: 40% / 33% Participation: 53% / 56% Attainment: 0% / 0%
Number of HEPPP-funded initiatives (2012 and 2015)	2012: 9 – 61 2015: 4 – 53 (n=35)	2012: V large > 33 initiatives 2015: Large > 20 initiatives	2012: Large 20 – 32 initiatives 2015: Large > 20 initiatives	2012: Moderate < 20 initiatives 2015: Small < 10 initiatives
Formal Power Structures: Administration of HEPPP				
Central administrative infrastructure (2015)	0% - 67% of institutional allocation	Moderate 1 – 10% 4 headcount	Large < 10% 5 headcount	No institutional allocation No central team
Responsibility for acquittal and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equity Pathways or Outreach Coordinator - Student Equity Manager - Executive Officer - Director, Student Support or Regional Engagement or Planning or Student Recruitment - Equity Director or Equity and Diversity or Widening Participation or Equity Research - Dean of Students - Vice President/Principal (Central Services) - Chief Operating Officer - (Associate) Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity and/or Student Support or Academic or Teaching and Learning) - (Vice-)Provost - Academic Registrar - Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic or Student Experience) 	2010: Executive Officer 2011-2015: Equity Director	Equity Director Stable over time	Student Support Director Stable over time

4.2 Case Study 1: Deliver at Scale

4.2.1 Overview of the Case Study University and its HEPPP Program

The University is a large metropolitan institution with a diverse student cohort. In its mission statement, the University articulates a strong commitment to its region and values of equity, inclusion, participation and partnership. As can be seen in Table 5, access, participation and completion rates of students from low SES backgrounds in 2015 were high. At the same time, these students were retained well (over 80 per cent retention rate). Since the introduction of HEPPP, the University has recorded a high increase in total numbers of undergraduate domestic students (over 27 per cent). It achieved a large increase in the low SES participation rate (by more than 1.3 percentage points between 2011 and 2015) so that students from low SES backgrounds now make up a greater proportion of the student cohort than prior to the introduction of HEPPP.

The *Deliver at Scale* approach was enabled by a large HEPPP allocation, (significantly) more than \$4.5 million in 2015, which the University received due to its size and student profile. The University never requested any rollover of HEPPP funds and spent its full allocation every year.

In 2015, the *Deliver at Scale* HEPPP program consisted of a very large number of initiatives (more than 33) which had been consistent over time. It was distinctive in the breadth of initiatives, target groups and external partners, including the number of partner schools and the comprehensive nature of community partnerships.

Using the categories provided in the *Equity Initiatives Map*, half of the program's investment was in the pre-access phase (51 per cent of initiatives and 55 per cent of expenditure). Transition and engagement initiatives made up a significant part of the program (31 per cent of expenditure), including a university-wide transition project, scholarships and grants, embedded literacies and skills development as well as academic student support provision. There was smaller investment and focus on access initiatives (four per cent of expenditure) and those supporting employment on campus and employability of current students (10 per cent of expenditure).

The investment priorities of the institutional HEPPP program had changed noticeably over time, largely due to the fact that the institution had successfully applied for a large competitive partnership grant in 2011. Thus, the initial investment of participation funding into pre-access activities was quite low (three per cent in 2011, 22 per cent in 2012) but had increased continually since then.

The formal administration of HEPPP, including reporting on and acquittal of funds, initially was the responsibility of an Executive Officer before a dedicated Equity Director was employed in 2011. There was a central widening participation team which consisted of leadership, finance, project and administrative staff in 2015 and made up a small component of the institutional HEPPP allocation (less than five per cent).

4.2.2 The Deliver at Scale Approach to HEPPP Implementation

Deliver at Scale is a large, sophisticated equity program with demonstrable benefits to the University's wider community, prospective and current students, external partners and the University itself. It was driven by the University's mission to partner with its communities for mutual success.

Due to its diverse student profile and existing equity programs and expertise, HEPPP was less of a driver for change at *Deliver at Scale* and the Guidelines provided a rough framework for action. The main impact was in the volume of funding made available to the University which allowed it to significantly scale up existing programs and innovate and diversify its initiatives in collaboration with stakeholders.

The focus of the HEPPP funded program was on partnership initiatives in the pre-access phase and transition and engagement initiatives in the participation phase. The pre-access program was

predominantly delivered by a dedicated widening participation team with some contributions from marketing and schools engagement areas as well as one faculty. The retention program was mainly implemented by expert teams within the same directorate as the widening participation team.

While the widening participation team had responsibility for reporting on HEPPP expenditure and there was a central administrative infrastructure, there was no program-level coordinating function or group across all HEPPP funded activities. Instead, the strategy was to locate program implementation as close to the target group as possible to foster innovation and responsive service delivery. The metaphor used to describe the operating model was that of a 'widening participation ecosystem'.

The approach by the University was grounded in a sophisticated understanding of its local communities, their needs and challenges and the core commitment to use higher education and the resources of a large university to advance the region. Several interviewees described the relationship of the University with its region as 'symbiotic'. The success factors of the *Deliver at Scale* approach can be summarised as follows:

- partnership strategy: based on mutual benefits and respect
- commitment to consultation, innovation, evaluation, continuous improvement and growth
- ability to build momentum and sustain engagement
- opt-in outreach programs: a demonstrable success in increasing articulation rates to university.

The approach achieved some impressive outcomes for key stakeholder groups. For the University itself this included an increase in the low SES access rate, more than double that of the sector, while simultaneously increasing its reputation in the region, and arguably across the sector. The University had demonstrated an extraordinary ability to identify and address the barriers to participation and retention in their community. School partners named changes in behaviours of students and school culture as the main benefits and attributed it to the University's ability to provide a different narrative of aspiration and possibilities. HEPPP funded interventions were seen as catalysts to whole-of-school transformations in two of the most disadvantaged partner schools. There were demonstrable benefits to current students from low SES backgrounds in terms of both improved study outcomes and on-campus employment which brought direct and intangible rewards for students.

As can be expected with a program as large and complex as *Deliver at Scale*, there were a number of challenges in the implementation which related to the design of HEPPP as a national equity program as well as the design and implementation of the institutional program. With regard to HEPPP design, the University struggled with annual funding allocations, which led to perpetual turnover of staff and the need to closely track expenditure across projects. Moreover, HEPPP reporting requirements which were seen as unaligned with continual improvement processes.

The most visible and active internal challenge was the ill-defined intersection between widening participation, marketing and schools engagement areas in the pre-access space. To resolve existing tensions, executive interviewees were aware that an organisational framework needed to be created in which the different areas could productively co-exist to sustain and capitalise on the excellent work done by the widening participation team while pursuing other institutional objectives in related areas. It seemed that the elevation of the formal status of widening participation work as a legitimate and core area of university business was necessary to ensure that it was considered in strategic conversations and that its practice took account of the University's strategic priorities.

To further advance the effectiveness of its HEPPP program, the University could consider a coordinating group which acts as a community of practice and expert advisors to inform strategic planning on HEPPP implementation into the future. In addition, there appeared to be great potential to increase the productivity of the HEPPP funded teams by offering ongoing contracts to staff in core programs.

At sector level, the University was well placed to contribute to discussions around how to make HEPPP a more targeted, sustainable and evidence-informed program. It had created truly leading practice in many areas, especially in parent engagement and opt-in school outreach programs.

4.3 Case study 2: Principles and Partnerships

4.3.1 Overview of the Case Study University and its HEPPP program

The University is a large metropolitan institution with a regional campus and a moderately diverse student cohort. In its mission statement, the University articulated a commitment to widening participation, social justice, collaboration and community service.

As can be seen in Table 5, access, participation and completion rates of students from low SES backgrounds in 2015 were low (less than 13 per cent of the respective cohort) but students were retained very well (over 81 per cent retention rate). Since the introduction of HEPPP, the University had recorded a low increase in total numbers of undergraduate domestic students (< 16 per cent). It achieved a medium increase in the low SES participation rate (0.1-1.3 percentage points between 2011 and 2015) so that students from low SES backgrounds now make up a slightly greater proportion of the student cohort than prior to the introduction of HEPPP.

In 2015, the *Principles and Partnerships* HEPPP program consisted of more than 20 distinct initiatives. Using the categories provided in the *Equity Initiatives Map*, 29 per cent of expenditure and 48 per cent of initiatives were in the pre-access phase. Initiatives consisted mainly of school and community-based outreach. The majority of investment was in transition and engagement initiatives (52 per cent of expenditure and 43 per cent of initiatives in the participation phase), including early intervention and cohort-specific support initiatives, role models and career advice, equity scholarships, non-academic student services provision and capacity-building activities for staff. There was moderate investment in access initiatives, mainly through an adult learner strategy in partnership with a VET provider.

The University's integrated equity unit controlled funds centrally and had a coordinating function to achieve devolved service delivery through strong internal partnerships with faculties and expert areas. The formal administration of HEPPP, including reporting on and acquittal of funds, was always the responsibility of the equity director. The central HEPPP team consisted of evaluation, communication, project and administrative staff in 2015 and made up a sizable component of the institutional HEPPP allocation (more than nine per cent). It is important to clarify here that this included the salary of the coordinator of pre-access projects which would more commonly be reported as part of the pre-access phase. Moreover, the University co-funded staffing for widening participation with \$500,000.

The *Principles and Partnerships* approach is enabled by a large HEPPP allocation (more than \$4.5 million in 2015) which the University received mainly due to its size, that is, the number of students from low SES backgrounds rather than their share of the undergraduate cohort. The University requested the rollover of a large amount of HEPPP funds in 2011 (more than 50 per cent of its allocation) brought about by the late arrival of HEPPP funds in 2010, the receipt of a large collaborative grant coordinated by the University and an internal focus on partnerships which were slower to scale up than participation activities.

The design of the institutional HEPPP program has been fairly stable over time with evolutionary changes made in 2012 and some consolidation in 2014. However, the proportional investment of participation funding into partnership activities had changed quite dramatically over time (71 per cent in 2010 to 29 per cent in 2015) and had decreased continually since 2010. The rationale for a focus on partnership activities was explained in the 2010 HEPPP report:

The balance of funding between outreach and support does not suit [the University]. Ever since Bradley recommended that most of the money go to support (Participation), we have lobbied unsuccessfully for a change. It is vital to retain the allowable passage of funds from Participation to Partnership currently in the Guidelines – that has been very important for us to support the program balance we want, as we have moved significant amounts of money from support to outreach in the first and second years. We anticipate the balance will shift back somewhat in future years.

The *Principles and Partnerships* model relied on internal and external partners centrally coordinated by the equity unit. External partners included more than 30 primary and secondary schools, a VET partner and a number of community organisations.

4.3.2 The Principles and Partnerships Approach to HEPPP Implementation

Principles and Partnerships is a large-scale, integrated and demonstrably effective equity program with benefits to the University's community, prospective and current students, external partners and the University itself. It was driven by the equity director who had given prominence and meaning to the University's commitment to social justice and widening participation and enabled it to act on these aspirations, greatly aided by the availability of HEPPP funding. The metaphor which best describes the approach is that of a 'widening participation orchestra' that came together with great skill and passion to implement a principled and evidence-based equity program to great acclaim.

The University's strategy of HEPPP implementation was to scale-up and integrate into core business existing, proven equity initiatives and bring on new, innovative ones in an effort to use the resources, skills, knowledge and expertise of a university to overcome educational disadvantage experienced by the most disadvantaged students, schools and communities in a defined part of the University's catchment. It had developed an internal set of success measures in the context of a state-wide collaborative outreach project which positioned increases in application rates from partner schools as the key outcome of pre-access initiatives. The University also used the influx of HEPPP funding to work with younger students in junior secondary and primary school. The strategy was based on a deep understanding of the workings of poverty, and how it acts in complex and insidious ways to create systemic disadvantage as well as a belief in the transformative power of (higher) education.

Institutional widening participation plans for outreach and support were drawn up in 2009 by consensus discussion amongst the relevant work areas based on a stocktake of existing equity initiatives and their demonstrated effectiveness. Interviewees did not think that the University's approach to equity and widening participation had changed fundamentally with the introduction of HEPPP. Instead, they expressed the view that the big conversations had been had prior to HEPPP and important decisions about the institutional approach to widening participation had been made 'years ago'. The introduction of HEPPP had not been a reason to revisit these decisions in 2010 or since. The consistency of the institutional approach and the structure of its HEPPP program is noteworthy. It reflected a deliberate decision by the Equity Director which responded to the systemic nature of the problem and was supported by the University's leadership.

By the time HEPPP money flowed, the University was absolutely prepared for it. The *Principles and Partnerships* approach was built on a clear conceptual framework, an internal set of success measures and implementation principles developed by the central equity team and retained over time. The equity unit was persistent in getting every faculty on board despite initial challenges and the amount of time and effort required to achieve active engagement in line with the University's outreach plan.

HEPPP implementation at *Principles and Partnerships* can be described as an orchestrated effort where everyone knew what the problem was and the role they had to play to address it. The success factors of the approach all have a distinctly human element and are summarised as follows:

- the work of a great conductor: analysis, preparation, performance
- partnership strategy: formal relationships with internal and external partners
- success is a team effort: a focus on people, their needs and contributions

The outcomes of HEPPP funded initiatives at *Principles and Partnerships* mirrored those of the other case studies but were more mixed for the University itself. The school partners valued access to opportunities and resources which had resulted in changed attitudes, informed decision-making and successful transitions to higher education by their students. Current students benefited through improved study outcomes and on-campus employment which brought direct and more intangible benefits, in terms of students' sense of belonging, enhanced graduate attributes and employability. The program had increased applications to tertiary providers from partner schools and generated great learnings.

At the same time, the University achieved only a small increase in low SES participation rates since 2011 in the context of a low-growth strategy adopted in response to demand-driven funding. However, at *Principles and Partnerships*, program outcomes in the pre-access phase and institutional performance for access were only loosely coupled which was a unique approach to measuring success among the case study universities. The focus was placed instead on applications to tertiary education providers from partner schools across the state. That means the collective effort and outcomes were seen as more important than institutional increases in access rates.

The University also faced a number of structural constraints which created barriers to access for students from low SES backgrounds, such as the city location of the main campuses, the very selective nature of most courses and traditional methods of delivery. To further advance the effectiveness of its HEPPP program, the University could explore how to tweak the *Principles and Partnerships* approach to address these structural constraints, for example, by considering contextual admissions practices and transformation of pedagogical, curricula and/or assessment approaches. This includes the strategic use of its regional campus, that is, considerations on whether it can deliver sufficient scale to change equity performance outcomes. Increased use of online learning could reduce the need for students to travel or relocate to the city and increase students' flexibility in accessing the University's courses.

The other question was how the University would prepare for looming generational change. The *Principles and Partnerships* approach, including its success measures, rests on a consensus negotiated by a group of senior managers some years ago. Ensuring its sustainability might involve a review process that proactively and deliberately includes the next generation of leaders and practitioners.

The University had terrific internal resources to work through these questions. The central equity team could consider novel ways of consultation to draw on the significant expertise and ideas of the practitioner group and external partners in its strategic planning for the future. Finally, the University should explore how it can share its significant learnings and insights about widening participation strategy and practice with the sector.

4.4 Case study 3: Targeted and Personalised

4.4.1 Overview of the Case Study University and its HEPPP Program

The University is a selective metropolitan institution with a regional campus and a small, fairly traditional undergraduate student cohort. In its mission statement, the University articulated a strong commitment to both equity and merit as well as to its region.

As can be seen in Table 5, access, participation and completion rates of students from low SES backgrounds in 2015 were low (< 13 per cent of the respective cohort). At the same time, these students were retained very well (over 81 per cent retention rate). Since the introduction of HEPPP, the University had recorded a low increase in total numbers of undergraduate domestic students (< 16 per cent). However, it achieved a medium increase in the low SES participation rate (0.1-1.3 percentage points between 2011 and 2015) so that students from low SES backgrounds now make up a slightly greater proportion of the student cohort than prior to the introduction of HEPPP.

The *Targeted and Personalised* approach had to work in the confines of a small institutional HEPPP allocation, (substantially) less than \$3 million in 2015, which the University received due to the size and profile of its under-graduate cohort. However, the University was very successful at winning competitive HEPPP and other external funding which complemented the annual allocation each year since 2009.

The University requested a small amount of HEPPP funds for rollover in 2011. In 2015, the *Targeted and Personalised* program consisted of less than 10 distinct initiatives and was funded in equal parts by HEPPP and the University.

In 2015, the *Targeted and Personalised* HEPPP program consisted of less than 10 distinct initiatives. Using the categories provided in the *Equity Initiatives Map*, 40 per cent of expenditure and three of the flagship widening participation initiatives were in the access phase, which was the most of any university in the sector.

Pre-access initiatives were mostly funded by the University (with more than \$1.5 million) and only a small amount of HEPPP moneys were allocated (seven per cent for one initiative).

The majority of the institutional HEPPP program (53 per cent of expenditure and 56 per cent of initiatives) consisted of participation initiatives, especially a targeted transition project, scholarships and grants administration as well as academic and non-academic student support provisions. There was no investment in attainment initiatives from the institutional allocation but the University had won a competitive grant to develop career support programs.

The investment priorities of the institutional HEPPP program had remained reasonably stable over time, largely due to the fact that pre-access activities had always been predominantly funded by sources other than the institutional HEPPP allocation. In addition, the University consistently had a small number of HEPPP funded initiatives.

The formal administration of HEPPP, including reporting on and acquittal of funds, had always been undertaken by the Student Support leadership which will be referred to as 'equity directors' in this study to use consistent terminology. There was no central widening participation team. Instead, all funding and delivery was centralised in the Student Support division to support the education function and achieve maximum value from a small institutional allocation. HEPPP implementation was coordinated in, and used to support, the University's education function.

4.4.2 The Targeted and Personalised Approach to HEPPP Implementation

Targeted and Personalised is a tailor-made, integrated and demonstrably effective equity program with benefits to the University's community, prospective and current students, school partners and the University itself. It was driven by a group of senior equity leaders and champions who leveraged the energy generated by large-scale institutional change to systematically advance the equity agenda at a selective university. The metaphor which best describes this approach is that of 'pearls on a string' in which the component parts of an embedded equity strategy reinforced each other and provided a clear pathway for prospective students to access a selective institution.

At the same time as HEPPP was introduced, the University undertook a strategic change program which enabled changes to the curriculum, centralised admissions and resulted in an equity strategy which became deeply embedded in the academic enterprise. I argue that these changes were both structural and cultural, resulting in deep and pervasive alterations to the institutional status quo. Thus, they constitute transformational change as defined by Eckel and Kezar's (2003) framework adopted for this study. These changes are more fully explored in Chapter 7.

The *Targeted and Personalised* approach was based on a deep understanding of systemic disadvantage created by poverty and geography and a belief in the transformative power of (higher) education. There were three key factors which underpinned the success of the strategic and integrated approach, which relate to the core management dimensions of program design, funding and staffing.

The approach was built on a sequence of targeted, high profile components which were part of a coherent and embedded equity strategy and, thus, were co-dependent. The program design combined layered outreach initiatives in disadvantaged communities across the state, alternative admission processes and personalised transition support. The consistent focus on attainment was critical to translating outreach efforts into increased participation rates at an elite university.

The national focus of HEPPP and the availability of competitive funding had the greatest impact on enabling the University to address its 'patchy' performance against national equity indicators. Multiple large-scale grants extended capacity and broadened existing offers so that the reach and depth of the flagship pre-access program rivalled that of much larger and more diverse universities.

The *Targeted and Personalised* approach seemed entirely fit-for-purpose for a selective university, due to its focus on pre-access and access initiatives which explicitly aimed to address attainment gaps and connected equity students to the University in personalised ways, and was exceptionally well executed.

HEPPP was seen as having exceeded expectations and the University had made the national program work in its context to universal acclaim.

The outcomes of HEPPP funded initiatives at *Targeted and Personalised* mirrored those of the other case studies. The notable differences were the University's success in attracting and retaining increased numbers of students from low SES backgrounds despite very low growth of the domestic undergraduate cohort. In addition, the changes to course structures and selection processes made a significant difference to the ability of equity students to access high-status professional degrees, especially in medicine. *Targeted and Personalised* was the only case study university which had a significant volunteer program of students and staff to deliver widening participation activities.

Schools highlighted the benefits of a partnership with an elite university which contributed to cultural changes at the school. The achievement focus of (pre-)access programs enabled the schools to foster high achievers and be outcome focused. The ongoing support provided by the integrated *Targeted and Personalised* model was credited for the successful transitions of students to higher education and the University in particular. The positive outcomes for school students accrued further for those who enrolled at the University.

The most obvious and discussed challenge was the small institutional HEPPP allocation. The more substantial challenge, however, related to the sustainability of an embedded equity strategy within a tight financial situation and a significant structural change agenda that was rolling out across the institution. The flagship outreach program was funded out of the University's operating budget, and thus did not enjoy the protections of tied equity funding. Furthermore, the effectiveness and efficiency of the approach relied on staff delivering its component parts to be in the same organisational area.

Decision-making about the future structure and funding of the equity program could start from a consideration of what the University stands to gain by dismantling the existing equity chain; and what it stands to lose. Any structural changes are likely to impact the effectiveness and efficiency of the program going forward. An awareness of the issues the inter-dependent programs are trying to address as well as the often invisible benefits of an embedded equity strategy will best position the University to address these challenges.

Beyond these structural concerns, there appeared to be opportunities for the University to further improve the support of its increasingly diverse student cohort. One ready-made internal research project seemed to be an impact assessment of the new course model on outcomes for equity students. In more practical terms, the University could proactively invest in retention and early-intervention initiatives, anticipating more complex needs of its future undergraduate cohort.

Finally, the University could explore whether it wanted to make a case to the Department of Education and Training to adjust the current HEPPP funding formula so that it accounts for the actual cost of delivering outreach activities in remote areas. Such a change would not only benefit the University but be a service to all universities reaching out to remote communities, especially in the two large states of Queensland and Western Australia.

The case studies illustrated the diversity of HEPPP implementation which is a reflection of the (pre-)existing institutional differences in a stratified higher education sector highlighted in previous research (for example, James et al., 2008). It is impossible to aim for a one-size-fits-all blueprint of 'best practice' or 'what works' in HEPPP implementation across the sector because the institutional context of each university is so different and demands solutions which are responsive to local factors both internal and external to the university. The case studies demonstrated that success of equity initiatives depended significantly on institutional context and the wider organisational values, norms and ways of operating which shaped both the approach taken to HEPPP implementation and the assessment of its success or otherwise. The analysis also shows that

HEPPP has provided universities with the flexibility to develop and implement bespoke programs which best fit their institutional profile and priorities. This diversity calls for evaluation approaches which are context-specific and can assess what kind of institutional program works best for a specific university.

4.5 Execution of HEPPP Funded Programs: Attributes of Effective and Efficient Institutional Equity Programs

The Fellowship started with an assumption that good management practice mattered in the implementation of institutional HEPPP programs. Part 2 of the interpretive model was applied to the three case studies to analyse what kind of organisational approach universities adopted following the introduction of HEPPP and the results are set out in Table 6. Using the model for cross-case analysis enabled the identification of attributes of successful implementation approaches.

When mapping success factors and challenges identified in the case study analysis onto the interpretive model, all domains of the model were confirmed as relevant in determining the strengths and weaknesses of institutional approaches to HEPPP implementation. However, not all of the indicators emerged as strengths or weaknesses in the case study analysis. Potentially, the number of analytical categories could be reduced in future work. However, all of the institutional HEPPP programs included in this study were well-managed and a larger sample might result in more variation across the different indicators.

Targeted and Personalised was the most efficient administrative model in this sample as HEPPP funding and administration was concentrated in only one organisational area. Equity directors there did not have to contend with distributed funds and internal partners in other areas for its institutional HEPPP allocation which added a layer of complexity in the other two case studies.

In summary, and bearing in mind the limitations of the small sample, the following attributes can be regarded as positively contributing to the effectiveness and/or efficiency of institutional HEPPP programs:

- **Strong commitment to equity and the region articulated in the University's mission statement:**

In two of the three case studies, *Deliver at Scale* and *Targeted and Personalised*, the University had articulated a strong commitment to equity and the region in its mission statement. In both cases, institutional mission was seen as an important driver in achieving institutional change and outcomes for the University's internal and external community. The strong link to its mission statement protected the equity programs at *Targeted and Personalised*. At *Deliver at Scale*, equity and widening participation were regarded by a number of interviewees as being 'in the DNA' of the university.

- **Sophisticated understanding of the barriers to higher education for equity students and the specific issues in the University's communities:**

The ways in which universities conceptualised the nature of the problem they were trying to address and used the existing evidence base as well as practitioner experience to inform program planning, were key to the success of all three approaches. The sophisticated understanding of the issues in their communities, which in two cases included the entire state, were paramount in determining institutional targeting strategies and program design.

- **Equity director as a direct report to a member of the University's executive team:**

With regard to formal power structures, an important difference across the case studies was the status of the equity director and the associated institutional power of the equity leadership and team. Only at *Principles and Partnerships* was the Equity Director a direct report to an executive member and this contributed significantly to the success of the approach. The low visibility and relatively low status of equity directors in the other two case studies made the equity agenda vulnerable in a context of organisational change, especially when senior champions had left the institution.

Table 6

Interpretive Model Part 2 – Approaches to HEPPP Implementation

Criteria	Case Study 1: Deliver at Scale	Case Study 2: Principles and Partnerships	Case Study 3: Targeted and Personalised
The metaphor	A widening participation ecosystem	Pearls on a string	A widening participation orchestra
Where is the University Going with Student Equity/Widening Participation?			
University Mission as it relates to student equity/widening participation	Strong commitment to the region, equity, inclusion and partnership	Explicit commitment to community service, collaboration, widening participation and social justice	Strong commitment to the principles of equity and merit as well as to the region
What was your jump-off point in 2010?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional data, strategic plan and practitioner experience - Understanding of community needs - International research on good practice 	Strong conceptual framework and principles which translated into an institutional WP plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Census data, institutional data and practitioner experience - Understanding of geography and target communities - International research and experience on good practice
Student Equity/Widening Participation Targets and Strategic Objectives			
Strategic objectives related to student equity/widening participation	Strong strategic alignment	Strong strategic alignment	Strong strategic alignment
Targets cascaded through the university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targets detailed in WP plan (not part of official planning framework) - Executive KPI and reporting but not embedded systematically across hierarchy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targets included in Strategic Plan - Embedded in Executive performance agreements with quarterly performance reports to Executive Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reference to percentages in Strategic Plan - Inclusion of total numbers in Access and Participation Plan - No formal reporting process
Institutional targeting strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All 6 equity groups - Out-of-home care students - Students from refugee backgrounds - Maori and Pasifika students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low SES undergraduate participation - Indigenous participation - Attrition for all commencing bachelor degree students 	<p>2010: (i) regional/remote students and Indigenous people, regardless of SES; (ii) disadvantaged secondary schools; (iii) disadvantaged communities and second-chance mature-age students.</p> <p>2016: percentage of students from low SES, rural and isolated, and Indigenous backgrounds</p>
Formal Power Structures: HEPPP Governance and Organisational Models			
Governance arrangements: oversight of HEPPP	Line management; oversight by Executive	Line management; oversight by Executive	Line management; oversight by Executive
Key decision makers and processes for allocating HEPPP funding	Central: Decision making by positional authority	2010: Collaborative and based on a WP plan developed in 2009 by consensus discussion amongst the relevant work areas. Over time shift to central approach	Central: Decision making by positional authority
Collaborative leadership	No working group, network or dedicated Committee	University-wide Equity Committee, Widening Participation Network: community of practice and advisory body	University-wide Equity Committee, four divisional strategy teams which act as communities of practice
Status of student equity/widening participation team	Equity Director not reporting to Executive	Equity Director direct report to Executive	Equity Director not reporting to Executive
Structure of student equity/widening participation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dedicated WP team established in 2011 - Frequent reporting changes - Now in Student Experience portfolio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dedicated WP staff based in Equity Unit - Stable over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WP staff embedded in Student Support Services - Stable over time

Organisational model	HEPPP allocation split between WP Unit and central. WP has primary responsibility for school outreach and coordinating targeted WP initiatives	Equity Unit controls funds centrally and has coordinating function to achieve devolved service delivery through strong internal partnerships	Integration and co-location of outreach and support teams in the same organisational area (Student Services) which holds all funds centrally
Key partners	Comprehensive: internal, school, community	Comprehensive: internal and school; selective community	Selective: internal, school and community, incl. industry
Reforms: has there been major change over time?	No, focus was on expansion	Some: evolution and consolidation	Some: evolution and funding arrangements
HEPPP Administration			
<i>Operations</i>			
Clear processes for administering HEPPP moneys across university	No internal agreements. No clarity over who was ultimately responsible. WP initiatives tied to annual project plans. \$\$ confirmed early in the new year for most initiatives.	Internal MOU	All funds held centrally
Continuous improvement	Strong with focus on consultation and evidence	Strong with focus on renewal	Strong with focus on gaps and efficient service delivery
<i>Monitoring</i>			
Processes for performance tracking of progress against objectives and budget	Progress: bi-annually, using a prescribed project management methodology and reporting template. Budget: dedicated resource to do continuous financial monitoring and comprehensive mid-year review.	Progress: bi-annually, using a prescribed reporting template; expectation to evaluate projects with assistance from central Budget: central monitoring of budgets and expenditures at end of year; dedicated HEPPP account code.	Progress: annual progress updates. Budget: separate accounts within Student Support budget and support from Divisional Finance Officer.
Processes for performance review of project managers	As needed and consultative based on progress reports	Hands-on and consultative based on progress reports	Line management process
Clarity/comparability of performance measures across projects	Detailed process outlined in WP Plan 2015-2017	Objectives set out in MOU	Divisional plan and Access and Participation Plan
Consequence management	\$\$ recovered in case of underspend if lack of outcomes, scale, value for money; change of scope; or staff turnover	\$\$ recovered in case of underspend or project discontinued if lack of outcomes, scale, value for money or scope creep	Reallocation of funds within Division based on need and/or performance
<i>Incentives</i>			
Processes/opportunities for rewarding high performers	Would receive same or more \$\$	Would receive more \$\$	Limited in current institutional environment
Processes for removing poor performers	Funding reduction	Projects discontinued	Line management
Capacity building of current staff	Yes, for WP staff but not general staff population	Yes, under the banner of 'social justice awareness'	Yes, comprehensive for WP staff (esp. Strategy Teams) and academic partners involved in WP initiatives.
<i>Other</i>			
Challenges of the institution in supporting students from equity groups, esp. low SES	None stated in reports. HEPPP fully spent in 2010 and every year since.	Stimulating sufficient demand for tertiary study can only be achieved by seeking economies of scale and an organised approach which should be state-wide.	Geography (distance = cost) and needs of target group.
Evaluation of HEPPP program or individual initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, at initiative level and monitoring of applications - Dedicated Evaluation Officer (not continued in 2015) and Procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, at initiative and program level, monitoring of applications - Dedicated Evaluation Officer 	Yes, at initiative level (by Strategy Teams) and external evaluations of flagship outreach program in 2011 and 2013

- Embedded widening participation staff in existing equity or student support team:**
 The structure of the widening participation/equity team and the organisational model seemed to be more effective for those universities that embedded widening participation staff in existing equity or student support teams rather than create a new, stand-alone widening participation unit which seemed to be more prone to frequent reporting changes and in danger of marginalisation as illustrated by *Deliver at Scale*. By contrast, the larger equity and student support teams in the other two universities were seen as an established part of the university and linked into key decision-making structures, including relevant committees.
- Central control by equity team over the total HEPPP allocation and clear processes for administering HEPPP moneys across the University:**
 In this study, the established equity and student support teams at *Principles and Partnerships* and *Targeted and Personalised* centrally controlled HEPPP funding whereas the allocation was split between the widening participation team and central at *Deliver at Scale*. Together with the lack of clearly articulated processes for administering HEPPP moneys across the University, the *Deliver at Scale* operating model resulted in unclear authority over the institutional allocation and diminished power for the widening participation area. Coupled with the very large size of the HEPPP funded program and very high numbers of distinct initiatives, the program was labour intensive to implement and monitor, susceptible to overlapping activities and responsibilities and, ultimately, to conflict between different organisational areas. For the other two case studies, their control over the total HEPPP allocation and, in the case of *Principles and Partnerships*, clear processes for administering it across coordinated initiatives in different areas were key success factors and resulted in efficient and low-conflict models of implementing much smaller and more streamlined programs.
- Program-level community of practice which supports capacity building and learning across HEPPP program components and informs program development and continuous improvement:**
 Collaborative leadership emerged as a significant dimension of successful implementation approaches. *Targeted and Personalised* and *Principles and Partnerships* had created communities of practice around HEPPP implementation, either across the institution or within the organisational area that delivered HEPPP funded initiatives. These were regarded as essential in building collective capacity and understanding, surfacing and disseminating learnings across program components and assisting in program development and continuous improvement. By contrast, the lack of a coordinating function in the form of a working group, network or dedicated committee emerged as a weakness in the *Deliver at Scale* approach. Such a structure might have provided a forum to resolve internal tensions between different areas. Somewhat against expectations, key decision makers and governance arrangements did not emerge as an important differentiation between approaches. Instead, they were reasonably similar across the cases which suggests that decision-making processes and oversight of HEPPP had become managerial and routine.
- Partnerships based on mutual benefits and respect:**
 Choice of key partners and the adoption of a deliberate partnership strategy were regarded as a strength in each approach. Though there were notable differences in the partnering choices, number and kind (internal, school and community), and partnership approaches (more selective versus comprehensive) taken by the three case studies, each was assessed as having worked very effectively by the equity teams and external partners and with mutual benefits to both parties. The assessments were more varied for internal partners.
- Equity leaders and practitioners as the driving force behind successful widening participation programs:**
 The key success factor that is understated in the interpretive model is the importance of people, that is, the human factor in delivering successful widening participation programs. This finding has been frequently documented in previous studies (Burke, 2012) and was confirmed here. People were at the heart of the widening participation endeavour in all three case studies and equity practitioners had challenged common myths about the ability of (elite) universities to genuinely and productively engage with disadvantaged communities. All universities displayed an ethos and commitment to extending opportunities to young people in the most distant and disadvantaged places in their realm of influence. It seems to be an attitude and way of working which makes an equity practitioner,

regardless of their institutional affiliation. This study showed that equity leaders and practitioners were the driving force behind successful widening participation partnerships both external and internal to the University.

This last attribute of effective equity program design and implementation is probably the most difficult to capture in an interpretive model. The individual dimension included in Burke's (2012) model was omitted for this study due to the number of interviews at each institution. However, future work could include such analysis to more fully reflect the strong influence of individual equity practitioners, leaders and champions on the success of institutional HEPPP or other equity programs.

4.6 Chapter Summary: Key Findings and Recommendations

HEPPP Expenditure and Effort Across the Student Lifecycle

The sector's response to HEPPP in most cases built on existing equity infrastructure and programs which were re-worked, scaled up and/or significantly expanded by HEPPP funding. The *Equity Initiatives Map* is a powerful tool to produce a national picture of HEPPP expenditure and effort because it enables a lifecycle analysis and consistent terminology across very diverse institutions and HEPPP programs. The analysis showed that there were consistent trends as well as significant changes in HEPPP implementation between 2011 and 2015:

- In 2011 and 2015, most HEPPP funding was spent on initiatives in the participation and pre-access phases.
- Only a minority of universities invested substantial amounts into the access phase.
- There has been a significant shift of resources and attention into the attainment and transition out phase between 2011 and 2015.
- Universities had very different funding arrangements for central administrative structures to support HEPPP implementation; 15 institutions had no central infrastructure paid for by HEPPP, an increase from 10 universities in 2011.
- Responsibility for institutional acquittal and reporting on HEPPP funding spanned many levels of the organisational hierarchy, from equity practitioners to executive managers.

Investigations at the initiative level on the basis of HEPPP annual progress reports generate useful insights into the design and implementation of HEPPP programs. However, this approach also has an important limitation: the focus is placed on the smallest unit of analysis, often artificially separating components of larger projects, which creates an impression of a collection of many small and unrelated activities. Understanding the internal workings and how institutional HEPPP programs 'hang together' and make sense in the wider institutional context are limited by this itemised approach to progress reporting.

Context Matters in HEPPP Implementation

The case study analysis shifted the analysis from the initiative to the program level and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the greater whole rather than its component parts. With this approach, the structural analysis enabled by the *Equity Initiatives Map* and the equity performance data produced by the Department are contextualised and the full range of outcomes produced by HEPPP funding becomes visible.

The case studies illustrated the diversity of HEPPP implementation and the importance of institutional context in designing and analysing HEPPP programs:

- The institutional context of each university was different and demanded solutions which were responsive to local factors both internal and external to the university.
- Success of institutional HEPPP programs depended significantly on institutional context and the wider organisational values, norms and ways of operating which shaped both the approach taken to HEPPP implementation and the assessment of its success or otherwise.
- HEPPP has provided universities with the flexibility to develop and implement bespoke programs which best fit their institutional profile and priorities.

- It is impossible to aim for a one-size-fits-all blueprint of 'best practice' or 'what works' in HEPPP implementation across the sector because of the existing institutional diversity.
- This diversity calls for evaluation approaches which are context-specific and can assess what kind of institutional program works best for a specific university.

Attributes of Effective and Efficient HEPPP Programs

The *Equity Initiatives Map* can be used as a diagnostic tool by universities to:

- Analyse the level of strategic alignment of their HEPPP funded program of work with its equity performance by integrating both sets of information in the same framework.
- Prompt strategic discussions at the institutional level about the challenges for students from low SES backgrounds in accessing a university's course offers and succeeding in their study.
- Serve as a guide in program design or a checklist to assess whether current programs meet the core dimensions of effective equity initiatives.
- Reflect on current outcomes and help prioritise the level of investment and effort across the student lifecycle going forward.

Finally, the Fellowship found that good management practice and organisational approaches adopted by universities mattered in the implementation of institutional HEPPP programs. Bearing in mind the limitations of the small sample, the following attributes can be regarded as positively contributing to the effectiveness and/or efficiency of institutional HEPPP programs:

- strong commitment to equity and the region articulated in the University's mission statement
- sophisticated understanding of the barriers to higher education for equity students and the specific issues in the University's communities
- equity director as a direct report to a member of the University's executive team
- embedded widening participation staff in existing equity or student support team
- central control by equity team over the total HEPPP allocation and clear processes for administering HEPPP moneys across the University
- program-level community of practice which supports capacity building and learning across HEPPP program components and informs program development and continuous improvement
- partnerships based on mutual benefits and respect
- equity leaders and practitioners as the driving force behind successful widening participation programs.

The interpretive model developed for the Fellowship can be used by universities to analyse their organisational and management approaches to HEPPP implementation and serve as a framework for identifying factors which may further improve program effectiveness and efficiency.

The recommendations emerging from the findings presented in this chapter address policy makers, university leaders and practitioners as well as researchers:

Recommendation 1: Completion and Publication of Institutional Equity Initiatives Maps

The Department should request universities to complete the *Equity Initiatives Map* based on their annual progress reports and publish them on the Department's website. This would provide regular updates on HEPPP implementation to the sector, increase accountability for HEPPP expenditure and effort and provide an efficient mechanism to share good practice and innovations across the sector.

Recommendation 2: Institutions to Provide Overarching HEPPP Narrative

The HEPPP reporting process should invite program-level analysis and reflections over time by asking universities to provide an overarching narrative of its program's intent, structure, achievements and challenges to more fully capture outcomes and persistent issues associated with HEPPP funded work.

Recommendation 3: Review and Reform Institutional HEPPP Programs

Universities should use the *Equity Initiatives Map* as a diagnostic tool to review their HEPPP programs and optimally align expenditure and effort with institutional priorities and needs.

Recommendation 4: Improvements to HEPPP Program Effectiveness and Efficiency

Universities should use the interpretive model to review their organisational and management approaches to HEPPP implementation and identify any factors which may further improve program effectiveness and efficiency.

Recommendation 5: Analyse Individual Dimension of Program Success

Future research could include the analysis of the individual dimension, building on Burke's (2012) work, to more fully capture the relationships between individual equity practitioners, leaders or champions and institutional structures and discourses to assess how these relationships influence the success of institutional HEPPP or other equity programs.

5. A More Equitable Higher Education Sector?

The aspiration which underpinned the introduction of HEPPP was that the sector would bring about a transformation of access to higher education and radically improve the participation of students from low SES backgrounds with the assistance of significant equity funding by the Commonwealth (Australian Government, 2009). The previous chapter has demonstrated that universities developed diverse approaches to HEPPP implementation depending on their institutional context.

This chapter will focus on the outcomes achieved by the sector in terms of increases in the number and share of students from low SES backgrounds in undergraduate courses. I will also report how the case study universities managed the focus on students from low SES backgrounds as the target group and to what extent the national 20 per cent participation target influenced institutional equity strategies and practice.

5.1 Manifestations of a National Aspiration: A New Trend in Higher Education Participation

The reform agenda to widen participation in Australian higher education over the past seven years has been a demonstrable success. The introduction of demand-driven funding and HEPPP from 2010 broke the trend of stagnant participation of people from low SES backgrounds in higher education (Kemp & Norton, 2014; Naylor et al., 2013). From 2010, Australia has recorded the first substantial increase in participation rates since the 1990s, up from 16.3 per cent in 2009 to 18.2 per cent in 2015 (Koshy, 2016), that is, an increase of 1.9 percentage points. There are significantly more students from low SES backgrounds in the system now than ever before, 130,246 students in 2015 compared to 90,447 in 2009. This represents an increase of 44 per cent while the undergraduate cohort overall expanded by 30 per cent. Going on these figures, the sector has achieved the targets identified in the budget papers for 2015-16, that is, 127,000 domestic undergraduates in low SES based on the SA1 measure and 18.1 per cent participation rate (Commonwealth Government, 2016). When the 1.9 percentage point increase in low SES participation rates is judged in historical perspective and against the significant expansion of the higher education system at the same time, it is indeed looking like a transformation.

It is beyond question that the higher education reforms implemented from 2010 have made a major contribution to the increased participation rates by students from low SES backgrounds at sector level. The Kemp-Norton review of the demand-driven funding system (2014) found that the policy was responsible for increased enrolments in higher education by students from low SES backgrounds as well as students from regional and remote areas and Indigenous backgrounds. The authors as well as Naylor et al. (2013) argued that while the outcomes of HEPPP funded partnership work in particular would only become evident over time, HEPPP was a plausible program to increase attainment levels of school students in disadvantaged areas and their aspirations for higher education. While neither of those studies proved causal relationships between the introduction of the policy package and increases in participation by equity students, there is no credible alternative explanation for the substantial increases in the participation rates and total numbers of students from low SES backgrounds entering, and succeeding in, higher education.

Notwithstanding strong increases in the numbers and participation rate of students from low SES backgrounds, student outcomes were more varied across the student lifecycle:

- Access rates for undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds, using the SA1 measure, increased by one percentage point between 2011 and 2015, to 17.2 per cent.
- Retention and success rates for the cohort both fell, by 1.8 and 1.1 percentage points respectively, but only slightly more than for the total undergraduate cohort. Put differently, retention ratios were reasonably high (between 0.93 and 1.01) and only 10 institutions had a retention ratio of less than 0.98. This means that most universities retained students from low SES backgrounds (almost) as well as those from mid and high SES backgrounds. While parity with the total cohort has not yet been achieved, there is also no evidence of a crisis in the retention of students from the target group.
- Completion rates of students from low SES backgrounds also improved slightly, by 0.6 percentage points, and stood at 14 per cent in 2015.

Demonstrably, the bulk of additional places created by demand-driven funding went to students from mid and high SES backgrounds which supports Marginson's (2015) pessimistic assessment that the higher education sector tends to reinforce the societal status quo rather than change it. However, it is significant that in the lead-up to the 2017 academic year, the number of offers to students from low SES backgrounds continued to increase while offers overall stagnated (Ross, 2016). This comes at the same time as inequality in wealth distribution in Australia is on the rise (Sheil & Stilwell, 2016). On the face of it, the aspiration of the reform agenda is being realised. Has it been a transformation of access? Stable policy settings and budgets would certainly reveal the answer.

5.2 The Policy Package: HEPPP and Demand-Driven Funding

This study explored the complex relationships between demand-driven funding and HEPPP and aimed to clarify their different contributions. Several interviewees in partner schools as well as equity practitioners used metaphors relating to open doors and keys provided to high school students through HEPPP funded initiatives and the uncapping of university places. Taken together, they proposed that demand-driven funding opened a door to a world of opportunity that was invisible to many people from low SES backgrounds. HEPPP funded work made the open door visible and positioned the opportunity to get a university education as desirable, attainable and affordable.

One of the executive interviewees argued that HEPPP was “not a case of: build it and they will come”. Kemp and Norton (2014) argued convincingly that the demand-driven system was a necessary but not sufficient condition of continued increases in low SES enrolments:

- Demand-driven funding solves access issues at sector level but not necessarily at the institutional level as it has not flung open the doors to all institutions and all courses as illustrated by the *Principles and Partnerships* and *Targeted and Personalised* case studies.
- Demand-driven funding does not overcome the barriers to access associated with awareness, aspirations, attainment and affordability. But these dimensions are addressed by HEPPP funded work. However, the affordability of higher education has got worse under recent policy changes relating to the Start-up grant and Indigenous support provisions.
- Neither policy is able to address the most important barrier to access comprehensively: attainment at school level (Kemp & Norton, 2014). This was a particular challenge for the selective universities in this study.

Another executive interviewee suggested that the triad of Gonski needs-based school funding, demand-driven funding and HEPPP was a coherent and far-sighted policy package. As the achievements of the higher education policies are emerging, one cannot help but wonder what contributions the original Gonski funding model would have made to increasing access and success of equity students in higher education. While there was evidence that attainment-oriented (pre-)access initiatives improve outcomes for prospective students and the institutions that enrol them, HEPPP will not enable universities to overcome the increasing attainment gaps created by an inequitable schooling system (Goss, Sonnemann, Chisholm & Nelson, 2016). Further investment in secondary schooling seems to be necessary.

This study adds to the argument that, as a policy package, HEPPP and demand-driven funding have achieved demonstrable success in widening participation to higher education. The conceptual distinctions are clear. The volume of funding involved in sustaining demand-driven funding is much greater than that for HEPPP. The upward trend of enrolments for students from low SES and Indigenous backgrounds is continuing while the undergraduate cohort overall is plateauing. If we want to empirically assess the impact of one policy over the other, we need different tools than those employed in the Fellowship research project and earlier studies.

5.3 The Role of the National Target as a Driver for Institutional Action

In light of the successful performance of the sector, it is worth asking whether the 20 per cent participation target drove institutional responses to HEPPP and the demand-driven system. The case study analysis suggests that the national target had only limited influence as a driver of change at the institutional level. The existence of a national target was seen as ‘useful’ in the early phases of HEPPP, especially at

Targeted and Personalised, because it raised awareness of the issues and prompted strategic discussions and research about how to attract and support students from the target group. However, the existence of a national equity target was not considered as essential for progress into the future by any stakeholder group interviewed for the Fellowship project.

The case study analysis showed that the national target did not have significant impact in universities because it was seen as unrelated to the institutional context by executives and equity directors alike. There was no effective translation of the national to institutional targets and from institutional targets to institutional HEPPP programs. The Compact agreements may have served this purpose but were last updated in 2013 and did not determine equity performance targets for the period of 2014-16.

Institutional targets set by executive management mattered in only one of the three case study universities:

- *Deliver at Scale* had articulated an ambitious low SES participation target in the context of overall institutional growth; and achieved it.
- *Targeted and Personalised* had never committed to a firm target for access and participation rates of students from low SES backgrounds beyond those included in its Compact agreement.
- At *Principles and Partnerships*, the University had articulated an institutional target for low SES participation in its strategic plan, which was an executive KPI and got reported on quarterly at executive meetings and to Council, but executives did not seem worried about the fact that the participation figures had barely moved since 2010. This was because the University had committed to an approach that measured the success of the collective effort, that is, being an active participant in the state-wide outreach plan and shifts in post-school destination data by school and in the regions; and not just on individual institutional enrolment figures. The rationale for this approach was that there was an inherent tension between acting collaboratively for a broad state, sector and/or national outcome, and being measured and rewarded as an individual institution.

From the sector's perspective, the key issue appeared to be that there were no perceived consequences of (not) meeting the targets:

- performance funding initially made available to reward universities that had met their Compact equity targets had been quickly abolished
- the Compacts themselves were seen as an 'irrelevance'
- executives were not held accountable internally or externally despite having relevant KPIs in their performance documents.

One equity director put the issue bluntly: "I think the real question is: what happens to people who fail their target – nothing!" As noted earlier, HEPPP had not been connected to equity performance in a meaningful way through formal reporting processes. Based on these findings, there does not seem to be a strong argument for continuing with a participation target for students from low SES backgrounds. If such a strategy were to be pursued in the future, the mechanisms for meaningfully connecting a national target to institutional sub-targets and desired program outcomes would need to be carefully considered and consistently enforced.

5.4 The 'Messy' Business of Targeting Students from Low SES Backgrounds

HEPPP focused collective attention on a target group defined by a geographic unit of analysis to identify the level of disadvantage experienced by an individual, family and community. This focus has created challenges for equity practitioners in the implementation of the program. While this is not the first time the problems with the definition have been pointed out (compare for example Gale, 2012; Harvey et al., 2016; Naylor et al., 2016), this study explored systematically how universities made the policy focus on people from low SES backgrounds work in their context, that is, how they activated and appropriated the national equity program in their local context (Peacock et al., 2014).

The case study analysis demonstrates that each university had a tremendous understanding of the needs and challenges of their target communities and had worked with them over time to develop customised solutions. A literal interpretation of low SES as SA1 was usually unworkable in practice,

especially for retention activities. Instead of singling out individual students based on their postcode/SA1 and an assumption that they need support, all universities used principles of universal design to create inclusive support offers for the target cohort which was thought to benefit all students. In the pre-access phase, all of the case study universities used the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA, specifically developed for the *MySchool* website) as a guide to identifying partner schools.

Each of the three universities had developed proxies, sub-groups or alternative mechanisms for identifying students which would benefit from HEPPP funded interventions:

- *Deliver at Scale* regarded its entire current student population and all communities within its catchment area as 'low SES' and had developed sub-groups within the total cohort to target for intensive support.
- *Principles and Partnerships* had developed alternative, evidence-based mechanisms to target the most disadvantaged schools, communities and students for pre-access initiatives and individualised support. It funded a low SES 'component' of mainstream support regarded as particularly beneficial for the target group, and piloted new initiatives not provided by mainstream services.
- *Targeted and Personalised* mainly worked in regional and remote communities and inner-city locations not necessarily classified as low SES but structurally disadvantaged by distance and/or lack of educational resources and/or role models.

In practice, 'students from low SES backgrounds' often became the shorthand way for addressing educational disadvantage experienced by all three groups identified in the Bradley Review, students from regional and remote as well as Indigenous backgrounds in addition to low SES, but could include further equity groups as was demonstrated in the *Deliver at Scale* case study. In light of the HEPPP Guidelines, this seems a legitimate way to work with a flawed definition to get to the right people. One of the Equity Directors summed up the approach succinctly:

A lot of universities – and we've probably done this as well – have used funding embedded into programs rather than create deficit models of singling out students particularly if it's poverty. I don't know that that's been severely policed and the focus is just on low SES. If a reasonable rationale for how the programs have been developed has been used in the outreach space, [it hasn't] stopped that focus on other groups. Financial disadvantage is the one thing that has an impact on every other group. You can look at almost every other group and say "Well, if you're not financially disadvantaged, you have a lot more choices".
(Equity Director)

The focus on low SES as the main target group for the national equity program was universally confirmed by interviewees. The consensus among stakeholders was that people with money have a lot more choices than those without even if they belong to another equity group. At the same time, the heterogeneity of the low SES community was recognised and an argument made to legitimise other equity groups to address multiple disadvantage while the focus remained on poverty and the socio-cultural disadvantage it creates.

There was also a view expressed by interviewees and participants in the equity workshops that the next quartile up (26-50 per cent of the population) were not all that different in terms of educational attainment and material wealth and that there was substantial movement between the lowest and second lowest SES quartile. Thus, the second quartile was seen as 'missing out' under current arrangements while the ability for universities to target that cohort in addition to low SES communities seemed obvious.

There are two key insights from the analysis of current practice:

- A narrow focus on low SES as SA1 misses the broader point that HEPPP funded curriculum and student support initiatives in particular have supported the retention and success of a much greater share of the increasingly diverse undergraduate cohort in Australian universities, including students from the other five equity groups and international students.

- Equity practitioners have demonstrated their ability to deal with the complexity in their target communities and developed interventions which address and often overcome the structural barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education.

For the time being, the challenges associated with the low SES definition persist but each of the studied universities had identified effective workarounds. With the review of the equity groups underway, there is the prospect of developing a target group definition, or a blended model of group and individualised indicators, which is more accurate and user-friendly in targeting equity interventions at groups and individuals.

5.5 Chapter Summary: Key Findings and Recommendations

A More Equitable Higher Education Sector

The reform agenda to widen participation in Australian higher education over the past seven years, that is, the introduction of HEPPP and demand-driven funding, has been a demonstrable success and broke the trend of stagnant participation of people from low SES backgrounds in higher education. The sector has achieved the targets identified in the budget papers for 2015-16, that is, 127,000 domestic undergraduates in low SES based on the SA1 measure and a participation rate of 18.1 per cent.

Moreover, on the lead-up to the 2017 academic year, the number of offers to students from low SES backgrounds continued to increase while offers overall stagnated. These increases in participation by the target group are recorded at the same time as inequality in wealth distribution in Australia is on the rise, suggesting that the aspiration of the reform agenda for a more equitable higher education sector is being realised.

This study confirmed that relationships between demand-driven funding and HEPPP are complex but found that their different contributions can be conceptually delineated:

- Demand-driven funding opened a door to a world of opportunity that was invisible to many people from low SES backgrounds.
- HEPPP funded work made the open door visible and positioned the opportunity to get a university education as desirable, attainable and affordable.
- Demand-driven funding solves access issues at sector level but not necessarily at the institutional level as it has not flung open the doors to all institutions and all courses.
- Demand-driven funding does not overcome the barriers to participation associated with awareness, aspirations, attainment and affordability. These dimensions are addressed by HEPPP funded work.
- Neither policy is able to address the most important barrier to access comprehensively: attainment at school level. This was a particular challenge for the selective universities in this study.

This research adds to the argument that, as a policy package, HEPPP and demand-driven funding have achieved demonstrable success in widening participation to higher education.

The National Target as a Driver of Institutional Change

At the same time, the case study analysis suggests that the national participation target had only limited influence as a driver of change at the institutional level:

- The national target was seen as 'useful' in the early phases of HEPPP because it raised awareness of the issues and prompted strategic discussions and research about how to attract and support students from the target group.
- There was no effective translation of the national target to institutional targets and from institutional targets to institutional HEPPP programs. The Mission-Based Compacts may have served this purpose but were last updated in 2013 and did not determine equity performance targets for the period of 2014-16.
- From the sector's perspective, the key issue appeared to be that there were no perceived consequences of (not) meeting institutional targets.

- The existence of a national equity target was not considered as essential for progress into the future by any stakeholder group interviewed for the Fellowship project.

The Appropriation of National Policy to Institutional Context

This study found that universities needed to actively translate the policy focus on people from low SES backgrounds into their context which resulted in different approaches to what constitutes 'low SES' depending on the institution's context:

- Each university had a tremendous understanding of the needs and challenges of their target communities and had worked with them over time to develop customised solutions.
- A literal interpretation of low SES as SA1 was usually unworkable in practice, especially for retention activities for which all case study universities used principles of universal design.
- In the pre-access phase, all of the case study universities used the ICSEA as a guide to identifying partner schools.
- In practice, 'students from low SES backgrounds' often became the shorthand way for addressing educational disadvantage experienced by all three groups identified in the Bradley Review, students from regional and remote as well as Indigenous backgrounds in addition to low SES, but could include further equity groups.
- In light of the Guidelines, this seems a legitimate way to work with a flawed definition to get to the right people.

There are two key insights from the analysis of current practice:

- A narrow focus on low SES as SA1 misses the broader point that HEPPP funded curriculum and student support initiatives as well as inclusive teaching and alternative forms of assessment have supported the retention and success of a much greater share of the increasingly diverse undergraduate cohort in Australian higher education.
- Equity practitioners have demonstrated their ability to deal with the complexity in their target communities and developed interventions which address and often overcome the structural barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education.

The focus on low SES as the main target group for the national equity program was universally confirmed by interviewees. The consensus among stakeholders interviewed for the Fellowship was that people with money have a lot more choices than those without even if they belong to another equity group.

The recommendations emerging from the findings presented in this chapter address government policy and future research.

Recommendation 6: Stability of Policy Settings

The government should maintain stable policy settings with regard to demand-driven funding and HEPPP to continue the unprecedented improvements in equity group participation.

Recommendation 7: Participation Target

There does not seem to be a strong argument for continuing with a participation target for students from low SES backgrounds. If such a strategy were to be pursued in the future, the mechanisms for meaningfully connecting a national target to institutional sub-targets and desired program outcomes would need to be carefully considered and consistently enforced.

Recommendation 8: Compound Disadvantage

The HEPPP Guidelines should legitimise other equity groups to address compound disadvantage while the focus remains on poverty and the socio-cultural disadvantage it creates. The definition of socioeconomic disadvantage should be extended to include the next quartile up (26-50 per cent of the population) which experiences similar disadvantage in terms of educational attainment and material wealth.

Recommendation 9: Definition of the Target Group

The current review of the equity groups should develop a target group definition, or a blended model of group and individualised indicators, which is more accurate and user-friendly in targeting equity interventions at groups and individuals.

6. The Relationships Between Institutional HEPPP Programs and Student Outcomes

The previous chapters showed that universities had developed distinctly different models of HEPPP implementation and that improvements in the outcomes of students from the target group had been achieved at sector level. I demonstrated that student outcomes of HEPPP funded initiatives are currently defined by the Martin indicators, that is, improvements in access, participation, retention and completion rates for people from low SES backgrounds in undergraduate courses, and measured longitudinally in the HEIMS data collated and published annually by the Department of Education and Training.

This chapter explores whether institutional approaches to HEPPP implementation can be linked to different student outcomes noting the limitations identified by Naylor et al. (2013) that the factors which underpinned increases in the higher education participation rates by students from equity groups are tightly interwoven. I will then make an argument for broadening the collective view on what constitutes 'success' in widening participation initiatives drawing on the range of outcomes of HEPPP funded work reported in the case studies.

6.1 Linking Institutional HEPPP Programs to Institutional Equity Performance

The relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and institutional equity performance as defined by the Martin indicators are complex and cannot be fully explained with the methods chosen for the Fellowship study. The analysis presented here is largely descriptive and based on existing information which is publicly available as well as the interview data generated from the case studies. This study illustrates the complexity associated with linking HEPPP programs and institutional equity performance by shifting the analytical focus from the national to the institutional level.

The increase in low SES participation rates recorded at sector level was not at all evenly distributed across the 37 public universities which received HEPPP funding in 2015 and is summarised in Part 1 of the interpretive model, included as Table 4 in Chapter 4:

- There were great variations in institutional equity performance with regard to access, participation and completion rates of low SES students in 2015 ranging from three to 33 per cent across the sector.
- Retention rates spanned from 62 to 89 per cent.
- Universities recorded very different changes in low SES participation rates over the period 2011 to 2015 (-5.42 to 5.61 percentage points) with a third of the sector experiencing declines. At the other end, one third of institutions achieved increases in participation rates between 1.3 and 5.6 percentage points over the same period. The average increase across the sector was 0.8 percentage points.

Thus, some universities contributed disproportionately to the national increase in low SES participation rates. The obvious question is, what factors drove those differential outcomes?

The demand-driven funding system enabled universities to pursue widely different growth strategies and outcomes (-10 per cent to 141 per cent growth between 2010 and 2015) which has resulted in tremendous increases in the undergraduate cohorts of some institutions while others chose not to, or were not able to, grow much at all. This exacerbated existing institutional diversity across the sector but also reshaped the previous sector hierarchy. The data considered for the Fellowship analysis suggest that a strong second tier has emerged just outside the Group of Eight of large, comprehensive institutions, some of them highly selective in all or some of their courses and in direct competition with the Eight for undergraduate students, as illustrated by the *Principles and Partnerships* case study.

This growth and diversification has not always gone hand-in-hand with increases in low SES participation rate. Analyses of HEIMS data in the context of universities' HEPPP allocations (Department of Education and Training, 2016a, 2016b and 2016c) did not reveal any clear correlations between the changes in low SES

participation rates over the period 2011-2015, institutional growth, the amount of HEPPP funding received, and the size and diversity of the undergraduate student cohort. Put differently, more HEPPP funding did not necessarily result in larger increases of participation rates. Also, high or low growth did not always result in greater or lesser changes in participation rates, that is, there is no empirical evidence that large increases in low SES participation rates were mainly achieved by strong growth in the total cohort.

6.2 Strategic Intent as a Variable to Explain Uneven Outcomes

The complex relationships between these different variables are illustrated by the case study universities. I argue that one missing analytical ingredient to explain some of the variation in outcomes is strategic intent. The three universities pursued distinctly different growth strategies under the demand-driven funding system, had different approaches to HEPPP program design and achieved very different outcomes in terms of access and participation rates. Notably, all case study universities had retention rates of over 80 per cent so that differential outcomes were mainly related to strategic differences in the access and pre-access phases:

- *Principles and Partnerships* achieved a low increase in low SES participation rate within a low-growth strategy.
- *Targeted and Personalised* achieved substantial growth of the target cohort within a low-growth strategy, a rare feat.
- *Deliver at Scale* achieved major increases in low SES participation rates in the context of a high-growth strategy.

Among the case studies, *Principles and Partnerships* was unique in its approach to measuring success in that program outcomes and institutional performance for access of students from low SES backgrounds were only loosely coupled. The focus was placed instead on increasing applications to tertiary education providers from partner schools across the state. Thus, the collective effort and outcomes were seen as more important than institutional increases in access and participation rates.

The University interpreted the HEPPP Guidelines in quite a pure way and emphasised increasing awareness of and aspiration for higher education options at the cohort level and dispelling myths about affordability. It had a bonus scheme and funded an enabling program for mature age students delivered by a TAFE partner but they did not result in large numbers to the University. In this case, the size or quality of the institution's HEPPP program were not the key drivers behind the lack of changes in participation rates. Instead, the alternative success measure adopted internally meant that institutional equity performance was less of a priority.

Arguably, *Principles and Partnerships* benefited less from this collective approach than if it had focused more explicitly on generating applications of students from low SES backgrounds to the University. The strategic decision to limit growth of the undergraduate cohort and other structural constraints, such as the city location of the main campuses and the very selective nature of most courses, created barriers to access for students from low SES backgrounds which were not explicitly addressed in its HEPPP program. The University did not focus on lifting the attainment levels of individual students in its pre-access work so as to put them in a position to compete for a place in one of its highly selective courses.

By contrast, the flagship pre-access initiatives of the other two case study universities placed a deliberate focus on raising attainment levels of individuals with potential for higher education study and charted clear pathways into their institution:

- *Targeted and Personalised* invested the greatest share of HEPPP funding of any Australian university into the access phase and was one of the few selective universities to have substantially increased its low SES access rate since 2010. The consistent focus on attainment was critical to translating outreach efforts into increased participation rates at an elite university and in enabling students to access selective courses in other universities.

- *Deliver at Scale* did not face access issues at the same level as the other two universities in that it had a multi-campus presence within its diverse community and few courses that were highly selective. The relative absence of structural barriers was reflected in a very high access rate for students from low SES backgrounds (more than 22 per cent). Thus, the investment in pre-access and participation initiatives supported its equity performance and seemed a good strategic fit going forward.

This analysis suggests that one missing dimension in the existing meso-level data to explain at least some of the variation in outcomes is strategic intent: what did a University set out to achieve with regard to its equity performance in the context of strategic growth objectives for its total undergraduate cohort? And how well did it deliver on these objectives? Peacock et al. (2014) argued that individual universities sought to attract more students from low SES backgrounds to either grow or diversify their student cohort. Their thesis is only partially supported by the case study findings.

In one case study, *Deliver at Scale*, the low SES cohort was crucial for achieving the university's ambitious growth targets and it recorded a strong increase in both numbers and participation rate of students from low SES backgrounds. The other two universities aimed for diversification of their undergraduate cohort rather than growth albeit with very different zeal. *Targeted and Personalised* achieved some diversification mainly through targeted and attainment-oriented access programs which effectively charted clear and accessible pathways into this selective institution. *Principles and Partnerships* had developed a collective target to increase applications to higher education providers across the state and the success of its widening participation program was only loosely coupled with institutional equity performance. Thus, *Principles and Partnerships* circumvented the instrumental, binary logic proposed by Peacock et al. (2014) and pursued social justice rather than institutional benefits.

A few interviewees raised whether the sector and policy makers were too worried about attributing success to individual institutions, especially in terms of access and attrition rates, and argued that measures beyond the Martin indicators were needed to conceptualise and track success at systems level. These could include state-level measures of success in the pre-access phase for all states and territories in the form of application rates from disadvantaged and underrepresented schools, as were adopted by *Principles and Partnerships*, to work around the practice-based tensions observed by Peacock et al. (2014).

The questions that arise from this finding are: are our measures and conceptions of equity performance comprehensive enough? Can the Martin indicators capture the breadth of outcomes and the complexity of drivers behind changes in low SES participation rate? The Fellowship does not provide definitive answers to these questions but the findings from stakeholder interviews in particular can serve as a conversation starter and feed into the current review of equity groups.

6.3 What is Success in Widening Participation?

The Fellowship has enabled numerous conversations about what different stakeholders thought constitutes 'success' of equity initiatives to widen participation to higher education. The case studies illustrate that an increase in low SES participation rate was only one outcome of HEPfPP funded work and often not the most important. Other outcomes for universities included reputational benefits in the community, especially at *Deliver at Scale*, as well as institutional learning and change, including transformational change at *Targeted and Personalised*.

Most of the positive outcomes to students who enrol at university are captured by HEIMS or institutional data, such as increased access rates and improved study outcomes. The question is whether these data can be used not only to show progress over time but also to address emerging and persistent issues. Naylor et al. (2016) argue that group-level analyses provide inadequate insights into disadvantage mainly because they are static and not sufficiently granular. Their proposed solution is to focus on individual students to more deeply unpack the extent and nuances of disadvantage. A more individualised approach would have advantages for implementing retention initiatives at the institutional level. Work to identify at-risk students was underway to different degrees in each of the case study universities.

Current levels of attrition were not seen as an indicator of 'failure' by the sector or individual students. Discussions about alternative exit qualifications, the social benefits of outreach work or participation in any form of university study challenged accepted notions of degree completions and social mobility as the only valid interpretations of success. These conversations mirrored themes explored in recent conceptual work (for

example, Naylor et al (2016) on alternative conceptions of success), and empirical studies (for example, Harvey, Szalkowicz and Luckman (2017) on re-recruitment of non-completing students). They also connect with critiques by Burke (2012) and Bennett and Southgate (2014). Taken together, they challenge policy makers, university leaders and equity practitioners to conceive of success measures in much broader ways than low SES participation rate.

Moreover, HEPPP programs generated unprecedented levels of on-campus employment for students from equity groups which resulted in payment as well as the more intangible benefits of enhancing graduate attributes and employability. They also provided an opportunity for students to 'give back' to their school communities and promote the benefits of higher education to the next generation of students as previously reported by Cupitt, Costello and Mitchell (2015) using data from the Queensland Widening Participation Consortium. Between the three case study institutions, there were close to 1,000 students employed in HEPPP funded projects, mainly as Student Ambassadors, mentors and peer leaders. This element of success is not currently captured and shared in systematic ways.

At the partner school level, there were examples of HEPPP funded interventions being identified as catalysts for whole-of-school transformations:

- The school-university partnerships reportedly changed student and teacher attitudes, student behaviour and school cultures.
- Deeply embedded pre-access programs were credited with lifting attainment levels, provided access to opportunities that were beyond the financial capacity of schools and enabled them to draw on the extensive resources of a university.
- Practitioners in the Equity Workshops described the achievements of the partnership work funded by HEPPP as a "triumph".

However, these successes are currently invisible to decision makers in universities and government departments:

- The far-reaching outcomes of HEPPP funded work are not fully captured in the existing equity performance measures and are not extracted from HEPPP reports and shared with the sector in systematic ways.
- There are currently no agreed instruments that enable universities to consistently capture improvements in participating students' understanding and awareness of higher education options or pathways, any impact of HEPPP funded work on students' pre-tertiary attainment or the influence of initiatives on students' decisions to apply for a university course.

The development of an evaluation framework for HEPPP seems to be the only solution to develop such instruments and enable the sector to systematically evaluate the influence of HEPPP funded initiatives on broadly defined student outcomes, especially in the (pre-)access phases.

The building blocks and principles for an evaluation framework already exist. Bennett and colleagues (2015, p. 6) argued that the best impact evaluations of equity programs were "stakeholder centred, context specific and iterative". They proposed that a mixed methods approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods, usually works best to understand the impact of an initiative or a program of initiatives.

Moreover, broadly-defined student outcomes are articulated as the 'Major Aims' in the *Equity Initiatives Map*. They capture the known factors that present structural, cultural and financial barriers to access and successful completion of a higher education qualification to people from equity groups across the student lifecycle. The 'Major Aims' posit that institutional HEPPP programs should aim to:

- Increase awareness of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting, developing and/or maintaining aspirations, expectations and attainment.
- Provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at university, taking into account the degree of selectivity and distance to target communities.
- Address issues of affordability of higher education study: provide information, strategies and financial support to fund student life.

- Enable successful transition, engagement and progression by strengthening engagement and belonging, academic literacies and competencies in discipline area/relevant knowledges developed through inclusive pedagogies.
- Enhance the employability of graduates and facilitate their transition to postgraduate study.

The 'Major Aims' capture the known factors which present structural, cultural and financial barriers to access and successful completion of a higher education qualification to people from equity groups across the student lifecycle and should be developed further for effective evaluation and targeting of HEPPP activities.

6.4 Chapter Summary: Key Findings and Recommendations

Unpacking the Complex Relationships Between Institutional HEPPP Programs and Student Outcomes

The relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and institutional equity performance as defined by the Martin indicators are complex and cannot be fully explained with the methods chosen for the Fellowship study. The analysis found that the increase recorded at sector level was not at all evenly distributed across the 37 public universities which received HEPPP funding in 2015 and that some universities contributed disproportionately to the national increase in low SES participation rates:

- Equity performance with regard to access, participation and completion rates of low SES students ranged from three to 33 per cent across the sector. Retention rates extended from 62 to 89 per cent.
- Universities recorded very different changes in low SES participation rates over the period 2011 to 2015 (-5.42 to 5.61 percentage points) with a third of the sector experiencing declines. The average increase across the sector was 0.8 percentage points.
- The demand-driven system enabled universities to pursue widely different growth strategies and outcomes (-10 per cent to 141 per cent growth between 2010 and 2015) which has resulted in tremendous increases in the undergraduate cohorts of some institutions while others chose not to, or were not able to, grow much at all.
- This growth and diversification has not always gone hand-in-hand with increases in low SES participation rate: there were no clear correlations between the changes in low SES participation rate over the period 2011-2015, institutional growth, the amount of HEPPP funding received, and the size and diversity of the undergraduate student cohort.
- Put differently, more HEPPP funding did not necessarily result in larger increases of participation rates. There was no empirical evidence that large increases in low SES participation rate were mainly achieved by strong growth in the total cohort.

Strategic Intent as a Variable to Explain Uneven Outcomes

The case study analysis suggests that one missing analytical ingredient to explain some of the variation in outcomes is strategic intent. The three universities pursued distinctly different growth strategies under the demand-driven funding system, had different approaches to HEPPP program design and achieved very different outcomes in terms of access and participation rates. For one case study, the low SES cohort was crucial for achieving the university's ambitious growth targets and it recorded a strong increase in both numbers and participation rates of students from low SES backgrounds. The other two universities aimed for diversification of their undergraduate cohort rather than growth. One case study university achieved some diversification mainly through targeted and attainment-oriented access programs. The third university had developed a collective target to increase applications to higher education providers across the state and the success of its widening participation program was only loosely coupled with institutional equity performance.

Towards a Broader Notion of Success and a National Framework to Measure Progress

The Fellowship enabled conversations about the outcomes and successes of HEPPP initiatives which collectively challenge policy makers, university leaders and equity practitioners to conceive of success measures in much broader ways than low SES participation rate. There are a number of important outcomes of HEPPP funded work which are currently invisible to decision makers in universities and government departments, especially those associated with successful school-university partnerships. These outcomes

are, however, articulated as the 'Major Aims' in the *Equity Initiatives Map*. The 'Major Aims' capture the known factors that present structural, cultural and financial barriers to access and successful completion of a higher education qualification to people from equity groups across the student lifecycle. They posit that institutional HEPPP programs should aim to:

- Increase awareness of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting, developing and/or maintaining aspirations, expectations and attainment.
- Provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at university, taking into account the degree of selectivity and distance to target communities.
- Address issues of affordability of higher education study: provide information, strategies and financial support to fund student life.
- Enable successful transition, engagement and progression by strengthening engagement and belonging, academic literacies and competencies in discipline area/relevant knowledges developed through inclusive pedagogies.
- Enhance the employability of graduates and facilitate their transition to postgraduate study.

The recommendation emerging from the findings presented in this chapter addresses the need for a HEPPP Evaluation Framework:

Recommendation 10: National HEPPP Evaluation Framework

The Department of Education and Training should develop an evaluation framework for HEPPP to enable the sector to systematically evaluate the influence of HEPPP funded initiatives on broadly defined student outcomes across the four main phases of the student life cycle. The framework should encourage evaluation approaches which are stakeholder centred, context specific and iterative and combine qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The 'Major Aims' articulated in the Equity Initiatives Map could form the basis for developing a comprehensive suite of evaluation tools.

7. HEPPP and Institutional Change: Paradigm Shift or Business as Usual?

Previous chapters have established that there was a diversity of approaches to HEPPP implementation that led to different outcomes. The national 20 per cent participation target did not act as a strong driver behind institutional action. Instead, strategic intent emerged as an important variable in understanding the uneven outcomes in terms of changes in low SES participation rates recorded across the sector.

This chapter further unpacks the drivers behind institutional changes during the period of HEPPP implementation and assesses the extent to which transformational change has been achieved in the case study institutions.

7.1 Drivers of Change: Dollars, Institutional Mission and Individuals

In the case study institutions, the drivers of change were seen in a combination of factors that played out with different emphases across the three universities. At *Deliver at Scale*, the main driver for the widening participation agenda was seen in the University's vision, mission and values which tie its aspirations and success to the future of the region in which it operates. At the same time, there was a recognition that the volume of HEPPP funding forced decision makers to ask strategic questions at the institutional level about equity work and move beyond a patchwork approach:

So if I look at the influence of HEPPP, the scale of the funding meant that the organisation had to ask the questions: what has worked? What has not worked? How do we want to make it work? How do you do the balance between at-university and pre-university and also how are we going to evaluate it? (Equity Director)

[The introduction of HEPPP] crystallised the need for doing what we were doing. In a coordinated sense, it made it something the University was taking seriously, wanted to make a difference and establish these programs and run them for the greater good and also to meet a national need. In terms of setting up at the University, I think it just put a lot of structure around some of the stuff that had been ongoing for a while but had been done in an *ad hoc* nature. (Equity Director)

The results of the discussions included a more 'deliberate' approach to widening participation, a change in language and the creation of a dedicated leadership role and associated team of expert practitioners. With the additional money and formal positions came power and status which were consciously deployed by the equity directors to advance the strategic agenda and ensure adherence to funding conditions.

At *Principles and Partnerships*, there was a strongly articulated belief into the transformative power of education which was intimately tied to widening participation work and the purpose of a university. For the University, this translated into a dual commitment to excellence and social justice:

We don't need more middle-class kids doing university; we need kids who are from disadvantaged backgrounds for whom education will make a profound difference. [...] Our philosophical position is that excellence and social justice must run together and that's how we play it. (Executive)

Most interviewees did not think that the University's approach to equity and widening participation had changed fundamentally with the introduction of HEPPP. The fact that the money went to the equity unit which already drove the agenda across the University meant that agreed principles were confirmed but the capacity to act on them majorly expanded with the receipt of substantial funding and the associated increase in institutional attention. This was particularly so with regard to external partnerships to stimulate demand in higher education. The amount of money mattered as it finally allowed the University to fund initiatives properly and deliver everything at scale. The key enabler of strategic changes at *Targeted and Personalised* was seen in the availability of external competitive funding for equity initiatives:

We always had a reputation as being a university that had a focus on equity and our previous VC was seen as an equity champion. But the funding wasn't there to run these kinds of programs. The funding gave us the opportunity to show that this was something that the University could do well and should have been doing well beforehand. (Equity Director)

Since 2009, when competitive equity funding first became available, the University had expanded its equity and access activities considerably, recognising its 'patchy' performance against national equity indicators. The new initiatives were evidence-based, including by learnings from selective institutions in the UK. They included pre-access programs, new alternative entry pathways, extension of the institutional equity scholarships program and augmented specialist support services. When HEPPP was introduced, the University was able to build on existing programs and expertise generated by earlier competitive funding. These initiatives were significantly expanded again with institutional and competitive HEPPP funding, the latter in 2011 and every year since.

Beyond institutional mission and the volume of funding provided by HEPPP, influential equity directors and/or senior champions also emerged as important drivers for change. The presence of an influential champion at *Deliver at Scale* who could drive the equity agenda at the top was seen as crucial in the setting-up phase of the institutional HEPPP program:

The fact that we had somebody who was passionate about it, who actually was in a position that reported directly to the Vice-Chancellor I think also made a difference in terms of how it was actually 'language'd', identified and the meaning that was placed on that by the Vice-Chancellor to the University. (Equity Director)

At *Principles and Partnerships*, there was no question that the Equity Director drove the widening participation agenda in collaboration with a supportive executive group and reinforced by a large equity team. The Equity Director was a direct report to an executive member and exerted great influence on most matters related to the student experience.

At *Targeted and Personalised*, the institutional commitment to the dual goals of equity and merit was operationalised by a committed group of senior individuals who had lived experience of the transformative power of education. This group turned the commitment to equitable outcomes into a strategic priority and 'university ambition' and, thus, ascribed it value. One of the equity directors reflected on the approach:

So we had this group and we all liked working with each other and we were given licence to dream large, to get on with it, to make it really happen and it was liberating and it was empowering to actually be able to go to people and say "This is what the university wants to do. How can you participate?" [...] It was "This is a university ambition. It's in the strategic plan" and as soon as people realised that it was valued and that they could make a contribution that wasn't going to bust their budget and was actually going to give back an enormous amount to them that they would find personally satisfying, they were in. (Equity Director)

Thus, despite their differences, it is possible to identify clear and consistent drivers of change in all three case study institutions: institutional mission and values, influential individuals and the volume of HEPPP funding:

- A university's mission and values which positioned equity and merit, social justice and excellence, equity and partnership as dual goals and core commitments were seen as key drivers.
- The volume of HEPPP funding mattered in all cases, including the availability of substantial amounts of competitive funding, which enabled a significant scaling up of equity initiatives and gave strategic importance and visibility to the institutional widening participation endeavour.
- Beyond institutional mission and the volume of funding provided by HEPPP, influential equity directors and/or senior champions who drove the widening participation agenda across the institution were critical in all of the cases as were the skills of those individuals to either initiate institutional change and/or leverage the energy generated elsewhere to further the equity agenda.

There was a shared view that if the money were to reduce substantially, it would have significant ramifications across individual universities and the sector and that the scale and reach of the programs would not be maintained.

7.2 Barriers to Change: Funding Cycles and Amounts Not Aligned with the Nature of the Challenge

The key challenge associated with the design of HEPPP by equity directors and practitioners which prevented more systemic changes was that the program was trying to address a long-term challenge with short-term funding. Currently, HEPPP funding is allocated on an annual basis, funding amounts are communicated late in the year and have to be fully spent within the calendar year. Interviewees reported that the annual funding cycle created inefficiencies and unnecessary anxiety at the coal face which impeded program effectiveness.

The worst outcome of annual funding allocations and late announcements of funding amounts was seen in perpetual staff turnover which was acutely felt by practitioners. One senior project manager described the inefficiencies and impact on performance due to having to spend a third of their time on recruitment, training and exit processes as well as having to manage lengthy periods with an under-staffed team. At *Deliver at Scale*, it was seen as very difficult to commit to ongoing staff contracts and guarantee the long-term viability of initiatives due to the fact that funding was spread across different teams and divisions in the University. Interviewees in all case study universities commented that the allocation of three-yearly budgets, as was done for the competitive partnership funding and suggested in an unsuccessful reform proposal in 2014, would be a much better approach. This was due to increased commitment and expertise of staff employed in HEPPP funded projects and the reduction of inefficiencies described above. At the same time, practitioners and the equity directors shared a view that their university would not want to, and not be able to, walk away from core outreach and retention activities which added to the argument that these should be funded out of operating funding or at least be staffed by ongoing employees.

Especially in a program as large and complex as *Deliver at Scale*, the current funding arrangement necessitated the continual monitoring and active management of HEPPP funds across a large number of projects throughout the year and required the employment of a dedicated finance officer as well as monthly management attention and time. The task of financial monitoring was less onerous in the other two universities, largely due to their decision to keep the money in one organisational area or to allocate it out with strict conditions. The existence of 'different HEPPP buckets' – that is, the institutional participation allocation versus partnership funding by formula, competitive partnership funding and National Priorities Pool funding – with different rules and funding periods was experienced as unnecessarily complicated.

The effectiveness of HEPPP implementation was also hampered by the prevalent perception across the sector that HEPPP funding was continually at risk. The loss of significant funding at the end of 2012, when 2011 rollover was not granted, and the successive 'hair cuts' of HEPPP funding in federal budgets had only added to the impression that HEPPP was not here to stay as a substantive equity program. Finally, the current formula does not account for a university's geographic location and the disproportionate cost of delivering outreach activities in large states. At *Targeted and Personalised*, the most obvious and discussed challenge of HEPPP implementation was the small institutional HEPPP allocation in the context of a university that was trying to reach out in deep, sustained and innovative ways to a large state which was very expensive. As a consequence, the University needed to continually apply for significant amounts of competitive funding to increase capacity, especially in the pre-access phase. This created an extra workload and employment insecurity for staff as well as challenges for program sustainability. Thus, it is worth revisiting the HEPPP formula and consider building in loadings for universities in Queensland and Western Australia, in particular, with outreach programs to regional and remote schools and communities.

7.3 The Importance of Cross-Institutional Partnerships in Widening Participation Strategies

Widening participation to higher education is a systems issue; the nature and scale of the task require long-term funding and collaboration. In Australia, its root causes can be found in the complex

interrelationships between poverty, racism, the lack of cultural capital and distance. Disadvantage accumulates through primary and secondary schooling and manifests in the strong correlation between SES and school attainment (Kemp & Norton, 2014). Executive interviewees noted that the problem resides largely outside of the higher education system but this and other studies (Queensland Widening Participation Consortium, 2016 and KPMG, 2015) have shown that universities have the capability and resources to work into the earlier parts of the education system to prevent or ameliorate educational disadvantage.

The imperative for collaboration is increasing rather than reducing. Yet, universities have always been competitive and this seems to only have increased in the era of rankings and an increasingly saturated marketplace. As unmet demand is drying up, there was evidence in the case studies of attempts to co-opt widening participation programs and practitioners for marketing purposes. This ignores the fact that equity and marketing are trying to fix different problems: the impact of systemic disadvantage on individuals and communities versus institutional load and income. There are also inherent conflicts between the principles of practice and the ethos of practitioners. One of the equity directors argued that the sector had moved beyond these divisions. It was true for *Principles and Partnerships* but not the other two universities. This study illustrates the importance of HEPPP being a national program which allocates dedicated equity funding to all Australian universities and of a renewed focus on cross-institutional partnerships.

The HEPPP competitive partnership projects overcame or at least undermined the competitive urge and provided a process for constructively working through the intersection between marketing and widening participation as can be demonstrated by successful state-wide partnerships in Queensland and Victoria as well as the largest of all collaborative endeavours, *Bridges to Higher Education*, in the Sydney basin. None of those partnerships have stayed fully intact beyond their funding period. The competitive partnership process should be re-instated to re-energise the existing links and incentivise collaboration of tertiary institutions within and across state boundaries.

Moreover, the focus at the federal level is shifting to student choice and the importance of increasing, or at least maintaining, access to elite institutions and degrees. The UK serves as a cautionary tale, having created a highly stratified higher education system with negative outcomes for social mobility (Marginson, 2017). Targeted and tied equity funding is essential to keep the most selective universities in the game as illustrated by the *Targeted and Personalised* case study, where HEPPP gave equity leaders the opportunity to show that widening participation was something that the university could do well and should have been doing well beforehand. In addition, the HEPPP Guidelines were used as a 'protection' of equity funds.

7.4 Transformational Change?

The Fellowship analysis of the case studies and HEPPP reports has shown that it is without question that HEPPP has fundamentally changed the scale and scope of student equity practice in universities and the power and influence of equity directors and practitioners as institutional change agents. At its peak, HEPPP was about 12 times larger than its predecessor program. The sheer volume of funding in some cases dictated a strategic re-think of approaches to widening participation, as illustrated by *Deliver at Scale*. There was evidence from the case studies that HEPPP increased the institutional focus on student equity, significantly lifted the level of understanding about the barriers to participation across institutions and created an expert workforce with specialist skills not previously found in universities. While all of the case study universities pointed to processes of strategic integration of their widening participation initiatives, only one unequivocally called it a fundamental change in approach.

In Eckel and Kezar's (2003) terminology, there was evidence of deep changes in pre-access work and student support in two of the case study universities, *Principles and Partnerships* and *Deliver at Scale*, which could be classified as 'isolated change' in their typology. However, the changes did not seem to be pervasive. HEPPP funded work touched most areas of the universities while not necessarily altering them in fundamental ways. Most of the integration and innovation was concentrated in service areas of the universities. They did not impact the work of faculties and academic staff in structural ways. At *Principles and Partnerships*, the central equity team had made a concerted effort to get all faculties on board with learning-based pre-access work. However, both equity practitioners in the faculties interviewed for the study often felt excluded from mainstream business and had received no financial contributions from their faculty, despite

repeated requests. *Deliver at Scale* had one major initiative run by an academic out of a faculty which illustrated how deep embedding of widening participation work in faculties could be achieved should the University decide to pursue it on a greater scale.

By contrast, at *Targeted and Personalised* two senior interviewees who had sufficient organisational memory (pre-2010) stated that HEPPP had turned the equity agenda into a strategic priority and that operational strategies and the culture of the institution had changed substantially. I argue that transformational change did occur in that university driven by equity leaders who leveraged the energy and opportunities created by the introduction of a new course model and centralised admissions processes to advance a widening participation agenda. Because the equity strategy was driven out of one organisational area by a well-connected group of senior change agents, 'savvy leaders' in Eckel and Kezar (2003, p. xi) terminology, it could take full advantage of changes brought about by the new course model which was introduced in the context of demand-driven funding at the same time as HEPPP and fully implemented from 2012.

The significant policy changes at the institutional level provided the vehicle to carry the equity agenda across the University and integrated it in the new strategic priorities, operational structures and institutional culture which emerged. In the interviews, there was sufficient evidence of both structural and cultural changes, resulting in deep and pervasive alterations to the institutional status quo which can be classified as 'transformative' as defined by Eckel and Kezar's (2003) framework adopted for this study:

You've got to remember that for us, this [bonus point scheme] came in at the same time as our new [course structure]; we were going through that whole process of reviewing our course structure and our pedagogy. That gave us the opportunity to implement [the bonus point scheme] and then provide the support for those students coming in through the HEPPP participation funding. (Equity Director)

The University used those funds [HEPPP Participation] to really drive its diversity and equity programs. I think a key aspect of [the University's] approach, and how this came about, not because of the demand-driven system but because of the curriculum change. Undergraduate admission is completely centralised. [...] It has made it very easy to have the entire equity program driven centrally. (Executive)

[The University] would have struggled if an equity student displaced an otherwise qualified student. From that aspect, we needed the demand-driven system as well as HEPPP, although [we] had a very modest growth trajectory. [...] We had to have demand-driven funding or we had to have capacity to take advantage of HEPPP. Similarly, if we'd not had HEPPP, would the demand-driven system have resulted in the same outcome? Quite clearly not [in a selective university; we] would have just looked around and said "Oh well, there's a few more people in that school we can have. We'll have them". It would not have happened. (Equity Director)

Oh, we fundamentally changed our operational strategies and the culture of the institution moved with us and became much more accepting, much more welcoming and much more open to contributing. (Equity Director)

The data also show that 'institutional sensemaking' (Eckel & Kezar, 2003, p. xii) happened at the University which is regarded as an essential activity of transformational change. HEPPP funded initiatives repositioned the equity agenda and turned it into a collective endeavour that people could readily buy into:

HEPPP funding has paid for [the access programs]. I've seen them being birthed in the time I've been at the University and that is fundamentally different – fundamentally different and they're well-known in the University. They're high profile and we're very, very proud of them. (Executive)

They [academic colleagues involved in equity initiatives] enjoyed it. They saw it as being true to their responsibility as an academic; to enthuse the next generation and they would work with anybody who wanted to be there and showed interest and capacity. It didn't take long for them to understand that they'd only been looking at part of the community in the past and there was a whole bunch of other people who could bring totally different things to bear on what they were thinking and they were delighted. (Equity Director)

So, the disadvantages are phenomenal and we learned so much... yeah, we read all the reports, we thought we knew but we learned so much by going there and visiting the schools and seeing what the situation was and getting to know the teachers and then realising how quickly the teachers turned over and realising that some kids were having three teachers for a single subject in one year and that wasn't unusual. Now, how do you stand a chance when that's your circumstance? When that was realised broadly within the University – and there were some key people in the University – it started a change within the whole institution where there was suddenly an awakening of (1) I understand what the problem is and (2) what, you mean I can actually contribute to the solution? I didn't know that was possible. (Equity Director)

On the other hand, there were reports that the commitment to sustained pre-access work in disadvantaged communities, which was the foundation of the *Targeted and Personalised* approach, did not penetrate the entire organisation equally, especially the faculties. While the engagement of academic staff to deliver pre-access initiatives in communities, especially teacher professional development, had been very successful, and transformative for the individuals involved, equity programs did not seem to penetrate the mainstream priorities of faculties. However, because the equity agenda had been embedded in changes to admissions and course systems, every faculties was by default impacted and had to respond to the increasing diversity of the student cohort as part of normal business.

The assessment period of transformational change chosen for this study was 2010-2016, that is, the duration of HEPPP implementation. However, this could be seen as reasonably arbitrary from the perspective of the participating universities. Because the period of HEPPP implementation coincided with the introduction of major organisational changes at *Targeted and Personalised*, equity leaders were able to take advantage and embed widening participation programs in mainstream processes. The collective action across the University amounted to transformational change as defined for this study. However, had the period of investigation been extended to the early 2000s, *Principles and Partnerships* might have fulfilled the conditions of deep and pervasive change. There, the equity director had actively initiated changes in other areas and reshaped fundamental elements of the academic endeavour at the University, including the design of curriculum and student support structures, embedding of Indigenous knowledge and alternative admissions schemes. Similarly at *Deliver at Scale*, there had been waves of major change prior to 2010 and again from the middle of 2016 which were impacting equity strategy and practice.

Thus, I argue that the absence of transformational change does not constitute failure. Instead, my assessment of change can be seen as an indicator of the diverse starting points of Australian universities towards the collective goal of raising the participation of students from low SES backgrounds, in terms of the diversity of their student cohort, their equity infrastructure and structural barriers impacting on the accessibility of undergraduate courses, and the distance travelled since the launch of HEPPP.

In addition to investigating the depth and pervasiveness of change, it would have been useful to analyse HEPPP programs through the lens of lifecycle models of change. All three institutional programs can be considered as mature and were at different stages of 'rejuvenation' or 'repositioning'. As with any mature program, this is a difficult phase fraught with risks where strategic decisions might lead to reinvigoration or slow decline (Kezar, 2001). The same can be said about HEPPP as Australia's flagship equity program: it is a mature program and, following the recent evaluation by ACIL Allen Consulting, the next few months will be critical to the program's long-term future and success.

7.5 Chapter Summary: Key Findings and Recommendations

HEPPP as a Catalyst of Organisational Change

The Fellowship explored to what extent HEPPP had acted as a catalyst for organisational change in equity strategy and practice between 2010 and 2016. The case studies and equity workshops suggest that HEPPP has fundamentally changed the scale and scope of student equity practice in universities and the power and influence of widening participation practitioners as institutional change agents:

- At its peak, HEPPP was about 12 times larger than its predecessor program. The sheer volume of funding in some cases dictated a strategic re-think of approaches to widening participation.
- HEPPP increased the institutional focus on student equity, significantly lifted the level of understanding about the barriers to participation across institutions and created an expert workforce with specialist skills not previously found in universities.
- All of the case study universities pointed to processes of strategic integration of their widening participation initiatives but only one unequivocally called it a fundamental change in approach.
- In two universities, there was evidence of deep changes and processes of integration and innovation in pre-access work and student support. HEPPP funded work touched most areas of universities while not necessarily altering them in fundamental ways.

Transformational Change

One of the case study universities realised transformational change as defined for the purpose of this study, that is, it achieved deep and pervasive alternations to the status quo. The equity strategy became deeply embedded in the academic enterprise as well as the new strategic priorities, operational structures and institutional culture which emerged from the change process. Transformational change was enabled by a number of interrelated factors:

- Change was driven out of one organisational area by a well-connected group of senior change agents.
- These change agents leveraged the energy and opportunities created by the introduction of a new course model and centralised admissions processes to systematically advance a widening participation agenda.
- HEPPP funded initiatives repositioned the equity agenda within the university and turned it into a collective endeavour that people could readily buy into.

While the commitment to equity work did not penetrate the entire organisation equally, every faculty was by default impacted and had to respond to the increasing diversity of the student cohort as part of normal business because the equity agenda had been embedded in changes to admissions and course systems.

Drivers of Change

It is possible to identify clear and consistent drivers of change in all of the case study institutions, although they played out with different emphases across the three universities:

- A university's mission and values which positioned equity and merit, social justice and excellence, equity and partnership as dual goals and core commitments were seen as key drivers.
- The volume of HEPPP funding mattered in all cases, including the availability of substantial amounts of competitive funding, which enabled a significant scaling up of equity initiatives and gave strategic importance and visibility to the institutional widening participation endeavour.
- Influential equity directors and/or senior champions who drove the widening participation agenda across the institution were critical, as were the skills of those individuals to either initiate institutional change and/or leverage the energy generated elsewhere to further the equity agenda.

Barriers to Change

The key challenge associated with the design of HEPPP by equity directors and practitioners which prevented more systemic changes was that the program was trying to address a long-term challenge with short-term funding. Currently, HEPPP funding:

- is allocated on an annual basis
- funding amounts are communicated late in the year
- have to be fully spent within the calendar year.

Interviewees reported that the current funding arrangements created inefficiencies and unnecessary anxiety at the coal face which impeded program effectiveness:

- The worst outcome of annual funding allocations and late announcements of funding amounts was seen in perpetual staff turnover which resulted in inefficiencies and reduced performance.
- At the same time, practitioners and the equity directors shared a view that their university would not want to, and not be able to, walk away from core outreach and retention activities: these should be funded out of operating funding or at least be staffed by ongoing employees.
- Current funding arrangements necessitated the continual monitoring and active management of HEPPP funds, especially in large programs, requiring dedicated finance staff and management attention and time.
- There was a prevalent perception across the sector that HEPPP funding was continually at risk.
- Finally, the current formula does not account for a university's geographic location and the disproportionate cost of delivering outreach activities in large states.

Interviewees in all case study universities commented that the allocation of three-yearly budgets, as was done for the competitive partnership funding and suggested in an unsuccessful reform proposal in 2014, would be a much better approach, especially due to increased commitment and expertise of staff employed in HEPPP funded projects and the reduction of inefficiencies described above.

The Importance of Cross-Institutional Partnerships

Widening participation to higher education is a systems issue. The nature and scale of the task requires long-term funding and collaboration which should be enabled by Australia's national equity program:

- Universities have demonstrated their capability to work into the earlier parts of the education system to prevent or ameliorate educational disadvantage.
- The imperative for collaboration is increasing rather than reducing: there was evidence in the case studies of attempts to co-opt widening participation programs and practitioners for marketing purposes in the context of increasing inter-institutional competition.
- The HEPPP competitive partnership projects overcame, or at least undermined, the competitive urge and provided a process for constructively working through the intersection between marketing and widening participation. This was demonstrated by successful state-wide partnerships in Queensland and Victoria as well as the largest of all collaborative endeavours, *Bridges to Higher Education*, in the Sydney basin. None of these partnerships have stayed fully intact beyond their funding period.
- Providing all universities with HEPPP funding is crucial for preserving student choice and access to elite institutions and degrees for students from equity backgrounds.

The recommendations emerging from the findings presented in this chapter address policy makers and university leaders:

Recommendation 11: Maintain Funding Levels

The Government should continue HEPPP funding at current levels to ensure that the scale and reach of institutional programs are maintained. Funding should be allocated for three years to improve the efficiency of HEPPP implementation. HEPPP must remain as a national program, with dedicated equity funding to all Australian universities and an explicit incentive to engage in cross-institutional partnerships.

Recommendation 12: Ongoing Employment of Core Staff

Staff delivering core outreach or retention activities should be paid out of operating funding or at least be employed as ongoing staff.

8. Conclusion

This Fellowship was the first national study analysing how different Australian universities designed and implemented institutional HEPPP programs since 2010 and how these meso-structures had contributed to student outcomes and organisational change. The key finding is that HEPPP has provided an opportunity for universities to develop bespoke equity programs which respond to their institutional profile and strategic priorities. At sector level, the trend of stagnant participation by students from low SES backgrounds has been broken, but outcomes at the institutional level were highly uneven. While the impact of institutional HEPPP programs on student outcomes is difficult to establish empirically, strategic intent emerged as an important variable. The volume of HEPPP funding had substantial influence on equity strategy and practice and, in one of the case study universities, was leveraged for transformational organisation change.

The Fellowship has produced a set of diagnostic tools, an interpretive model (Tables 1, 4, 5 and 6) and an *Equity Initiatives Map* (Table 3), to enable analyses of HEPPP program design and implementation in the context of institutional equity strategy and performance. The three case studies illustrated the application of the tools to identify universities' strategic approaches to HEPPP implementation and the success factors, outcomes and challenges associated with these.

Context Matters in HEPPP Implementation

The case studies illustrated the diversity of HEPPP implementation, which mirrors the (pre-)existing institutional differences in a stratified higher education sector (James et al., 2008), and the importance of institutional context in designing and analysing HEPPP programs:

- Wider organisational values, norms and ways of operating shape both the approach taken to HEPPP implementation and the assessment of its success.
- It is impossible to aim for a one-size-fits-all blueprint of 'best practice' or 'what works' in HEPPP implementation across the sector.
- This diversity calls for evaluation approaches which are context-specific and can assess what kind of institutional program works best for a specific university.

The Appropriation of National Policy to Institutional Context

This study found that universities needed to actively translate the policy focus on people from low SES backgrounds into their context which resulted in different approaches to what constitutes 'low SES':

- In practice, 'students from low SES backgrounds' often became the shorthand way for addressing educational disadvantage experienced by all three groups identified in the Bradley Review, students from regional and remote as well as Indigenous backgrounds in addition to low SES, but could include further equity groups.
- A narrow focus on low SES as SA1 misses the broader point that HEPPP funded curriculum and student support initiatives in particular have enabled the retention and success of a much greater share of the increasingly diverse undergraduate cohort in Australian higher education.
- Equity practitioners are able to deal with the complexity in their target communities and developed interventions which address, and often overcome, the structural barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education.

The focus on students from low SES backgrounds as the main target group for the national equity program was universally confirmed by interviewees. The consensus was that people with money have a lot more choices than those without, even if they belong to another equity group.

Program Design: HEPPP Expenditure and Effort Across the Student Lifecycle

The sector's response to HEPPP in most cases built on equity strategies and infrastructure which pre-dated HEPPP as well as existing equity programs which were re-worked, scaled up and/or significantly

expanded by HEPPP funding. The analysis showed that there were consistent trends as well as significant changes in HEPPP implementation between 2011 (Naylor et al., 2013) and 2015:

- In 2011 and 2015, most HEPPP funding was spent on initiatives in the participation and pre-access phases.
- There has been a significant shift of resources and attention into the attainment and transition out phase between 2011 and 2015.
- Universities seem to be under-investing in the access phase, especially in light of the excellent results achieved by the case study university that allocated significant expenditure and effort to tailored access initiatives.

The *Equity Initiatives Map* can be used as a diagnostic tool by universities to review their HEPPP programs and optimally align expenditure and effort with institutional priorities and needs.

Implementation: Attributes of Effective and Efficient HEPPP Programs

Universities had very different operational arrangements for central administrative structures to support HEPPP implementation as well as the responsibility for institutional acquittal and reporting on HEPPP funding. The case study analysis found that good management practice and organisational approaches adopted by universities mattered in the implementation of institutional HEPPP programs. It identified attributes that can be regarded as positively contributing to the effectiveness and/or efficiency of programs. The interpretive model developed for the Fellowship can be used by universities to analyse their organisational and management approaches to HEPPP implementation and serve as a framework for identifying factors which may further improve program effectiveness and efficiency.

A More Equitable Higher Education Sector

The reform agenda to widen participation in Australian higher education over the past seven years, that is, the introduction of HEPPP and demand-driven funding, has been a demonstrable success and broke the trend of stagnant participation of people from low SES backgrounds in higher education:

- The sector has achieved the targets identified in the budget papers for 2015-16 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016, pp.54-56).
- In the lead-up to the 2017 academic year, the number of offers to students from low SES backgrounds continued to increase while offers overall stagnated. These increases in participation by the target group are recorded at the same time as inequality in wealth distribution in Australia is on the rise, suggesting that the aspiration of the reform agenda for a more equitable higher education sector is being realised.

However, at the institutional level, outcomes for students from low SES backgrounds are very uneven and it is difficult to establish any influence of HEPPP funded work on those outcomes.

Unpacking the Complex Relationships Between Institutional HEPPP Programs and Student Outcomes

The relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and institutional equity performance as defined by the Martin indicators are complex and cannot be fully explained with the methods chosen for the Fellowship study. What can be observed is that:

- The increase recorded at sector level was not at all evenly distributed across the 37 public universities which received HEPPP funding in 2015: some universities contributed disproportionately to the national increase in low SES participation rate.
- The growth and diversification enabled by demand-driven funding has not always gone hand-in-hand with increases in the low SES participation rate: there were no clear correlations between the changes in low SES participation rate over the period 2011-2015, institutional growth, the amount of HEPPP funding received, and the size and diversity of the undergraduate student cohort.

- Put differently, more HEPPP funding did not necessarily result in larger increases of participation rate. There was no empirical evidence that large increases in low SES participation rates were mainly achieved by strong growth in the total cohort.

This study confirmed the complex relationships between demand-driven funding and HEPPP and it is difficult to untangle the relative impact of each policy empirically. However, their different contributions can be clearly delineated conceptually:

- Demand-driven funding solves access issues at sector level but not necessarily at the institutional level as some institutions and courses remain highly selective.
- Demand-driven funding does not overcome the barriers to participation associated with awareness, aspirations, attainment and affordability. These dimensions are addressed by HEPPP funded work.
- Neither policy is able to address the most important barrier to access comprehensively: attainment at school level. This was a particular challenge for the selective universities in this study.

This research adds to the evidence that, as a policy package, HEPPP and demand-driven funding have achieved demonstrable success in widening participation to higher education.

Strategic Intent as a Variable to Explain Uneven Outcomes

This study suggests that one missing analytical ingredient to explain some of the variation in outcomes is strategic intent. It confirms and simultaneously extends existing findings (Peacock et al., 2014) that individual universities sought to attract more students from low SES backgrounds to either grow or diversify their student cohort. The three case study universities pursued distinctly different growth strategies under the demand-driven funding system, had different approaches to HEPPP program design and achieved very different outcomes in terms of access and participation rates.

In one case study, the low SES cohort was crucial for achieving the university's ambitious growth targets and it recorded a strong increase in both numbers and participation rates of students from low SES backgrounds. The other two universities aimed for diversification of their undergraduate cohort rather than growth albeit with very different zeal. One of those achieved some diversification mainly through targeted and attainment-oriented access programs which effectively charted clear and accessible pathways into this selective institution. The third university had developed a collective target to increase applications to higher education providers across the state and the success of its widening participation program was only loosely coupled to institutional equity performance. Thus, it circumvented the instrumental, binary logic proposed by Peacock et al. (2014) and pursued social justice rather than institutional benefits.

Towards a Broader Notion of Success and a National Framework to Measure Progress

The Fellowship enabled conversations about the outcomes and successes of HEPPP initiatives which collectively challenge policy makers and practitioners to conceive of success measures in much broader ways than low SES participation rate. There are a number of important outcomes of HEPPP funded work which are currently invisible to decision makers in universities and government departments. These outcomes are, however, articulated as the 'Major Aims' in the *Equity Initiatives Map*. The 'Major Aims' capture the known factors that present structural, cultural and financial barriers to access and successful completion of a higher education qualification to people from equity groups across the student lifecycle. They posit that institutional HEPPP programs should aim to:

- Increase awareness of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting, developing and/or maintaining aspirations, expectations and attainment.
- Provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at university, taking into account the degree of selectivity and distance to target communities.
- Address issues of affordability of higher education study: provide information, strategies and financial support to fund student life.
- Enable successful transition, engagement and progression by strengthening engagement and belonging, academic literacies and competencies in discipline area/relevant knowledges developed through inclusive pedagogies.
- Enhance the employability of graduates and facilitate their transition to postgraduate study.

The *Equity Initiatives Map* is a powerful tool to produce a national picture of HEPPP expenditure and effort because it enables a lifecycle analysis and consistent terminology across very diverse institutions and HEPPP programs. Investigations at the initiative level on the basis of HEPPP annual progress reports generate useful insights into the design and implementation of HEPPP programs. However, this approach has an important limitation: the focus is placed on the smallest unit of analysis, often artificially separating components of larger projects, which creates an impression of a collection of many small and unrelated activities. Understanding the internal workings and how institutional HEPPP programs ‘hang together’ and make sense in the wider institutional context are limited by this itemised approach to progress reporting.

The case studies shifted the analysis from the initiative to the program level and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the greater whole rather than its component parts. With this approach, the structural analysis enabled by the *Equity Initiatives Map* and the equity performance data produced by the Department are contextualised and the full range of outcomes produced by HEPPP funding becomes visible. It also enables longitudinal analysis which tracks progress over time.

HEPPP as a Catalyst of Organisational Change

The Fellowship explored to what extent HEPPP had acted as a catalyst for organisational change in equity strategy and practice. HEPPP has fundamentally changed the scale and scope of student equity practice in universities and the power and influence of equity directors and practitioners as institutional change agents:

- HEPPP increased the institutional focus on student equity, significantly lifted the level of understanding about the barriers to participation across institutions and created an expert workforce with specialist skills not previously found in universities.
- All of the case study universities pointed to processes of strategic integration of their widening participation initiatives but only one unequivocally called it a fundamental change in approach.
- In two universities, there was evidence of deep changes and processes of integration and innovation in pre-access work and student support. HEPPP funded work touched most areas of the universities while not necessarily altering them in fundamental ways.

Transformational Change

One of the case study universities realised transformational change as defined for the purposes of this study, that is, it achieved deep and pervasive alterations to the status quo (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). This change resulted in an equity strategy that became deeply embedded in the academic enterprise as well as the new strategic priorities, operational structures and institutional culture which emerged from the change process. Transformational change was enabled by a number of interrelated factors:

- Change was driven out of one organisational area by a well-connected group of senior change agents.
- These change agents leveraged the energy and opportunities created by the introduction of a new course model and centralised admissions processes to systematically advance a widening participation agenda.
- HEPPP funded initiatives repositioned the equity agenda within the university and turned it into a collective endeavour that people could readily buy into.

While the commitment to equity work did not penetrate the entire organisation equally, every faculty was by default impacted and had to respond to the increasing diversity of the student cohort as part of normal business because the equity agenda had been embedded in changes to admissions and course systems.

Drivers of Change

It is possible to identify clear and consistent drivers of change in all case study institutions, although they played out with different emphases across the three universities:

- The volume of HEPPP funding mattered in all cases, including the availability of substantial amounts of competitive funding, which enabled a significant scaling up of equity initiatives and gave strategic importance and visibility to the institutional widening participation endeavour.
- A university's mission and values which positioned equity and merit, social justice and excellence, equity and partnership as dual goals and core commitments were seen as key drivers.
- Influential equity directors and/or senior champions who drove the widening participation agenda across the institution were critical, as were the skills of those individuals to either initiate institutional change and/or leverage the energy generated by changes elsewhere to further the equity agenda.

At the same time, the case study analysis suggests that the national participation target had only limited influence as a driver of change at the institutional level. From the sector's perspective, the key issue appeared to be that there were no perceived consequences of (not) meeting institutional targets. The existence of a national equity target was not considered as essential for progress into the future by any stakeholder group interviewed for the Fellowship project.

Barriers to Change

The key challenge associated with the design of HEPPP by equity directors and practitioners which prevented more systemic changes was that the program was trying to address a long-term challenge with short-term funding. Currently, HEPPP funding:

- is allocated on an annual basis
- funding amounts are communicated late in the year
- have to be fully spent within the calendar year.

Interviewees reported that the current funding arrangements created inefficiencies and unnecessary anxiety at the coal face which impeded program effectiveness:

- The worst outcome of annual funding allocations and late announcements of funding amounts was seen in perpetual staff turnover which resulted in inefficiencies and reduced performance.
- At the same time, practitioners and the equity directors shared a view that their university would not want to, and not be able to, walk away from core outreach and retention activities: these should be funded out of operating funding or at least be staffed by ongoing employees.
- Current funding arrangement necessitated the continual monitoring and active management of HEPPP funds, especially in large programs, requiring dedicated finance staff and management attention and time.
- There was a prevalent perception across the sector that HEPPP funding was continually at risk.
- Finally, the current formula does not account for a university's geographic location and the disproportionate cost of delivering outreach activities in large states.

Interviewees in all case study universities commented that the allocation of three-yearly budgets, as was done for the competitive partnership funding and suggested in an unsuccessful reform proposal in 2014, would be a much better approach, especially due to increased commitment and expertise of staff employed in HEPPP funded projects and the reduction of inefficiencies described above.

The Importance of Cross-Institutional Partnerships

Widening participation to higher education is a systems issue. The nature and scale of the task require long-term funding and collaboration which should be enabled by Australia's national equity program:

- Universities have demonstrated their capability to work into the earlier parts of the education system to prevent or ameliorate educational disadvantage.

- The imperative for collaboration is increasing rather than reducing: there was evidence in the case studies of attempts to co-opt widening participation programs and practitioners for marketing purposes in the context of increasing inter-institutional competition.
- The HEPPP competitive partnership projects overcame, or at least undermined, the competitive urge and provided a process for constructively working through the intersection between marketing and widening participation. This was demonstrated by successful state-wide partnerships in Queensland and Victoria as well as the largest of all collaborative endeavours, *Bridges to Higher Education*, in the Sydney basin. None of these partnerships have stayed fully intact beyond their funding period.
- Providing all universities with HEPPP funding is crucial for preserving student choice and access to elite institutions and degrees for students from equity backgrounds.

The Fellowship has explicitly considered the diversity of the Australian higher education sector in analysing the successes brought about and challenges associated with HEPPP implementation. Universities had very different starting points on the road to improving low SES participation in terms of the diversity of their student cohort, their equity infrastructure and structural barriers impacting on the accessibility of undergraduate courses, including geographic location, their level of selectivity and flexibility of delivery methods. The absence of transformational change does not constitute failure. Instead, my assessment of change can be seen as an indicator of the distance travelled since the launch of HEPPP.

9. Recommendations

A number of recommendations are made throughout this report and are grouped here by audience: recommendations for policy makers, recommendations for the sector, and recommendations for research.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Recommendation 1: Completion and Publication of Institutional Equity Initiatives Maps

The Department should request universities to complete the *Equity Initiatives Map* based on their annual progress reports and publish them on the Department's website. This would provide regular updates on HEPPP implementation to the sector, increase accountability for HEPPP expenditure and effort and provide an efficient mechanism to share good practice and innovations across the sector.

Recommendation 2: Institutions to Provide Overarching HEPPP Narrative

The HEPPP reporting process should invite program-level analysis and reflections over time by asking universities to provide an overarching narrative of its program's intent, structure, achievements and challenges to more fully capture outcomes and persistent issues associated with HEPPP funded work.

Recommendation 6: Stability of Policy Settings

The government should maintain stable policy settings with regard to demand-driven funding and HEPPP to continue the unprecedented improvements in equity group participation.

Recommendation 7: Participation Target

There does not seem to be a strong argument for continuing with a participation target for students from low SES backgrounds. If such a strategy were to be pursued in the future, the mechanisms for meaningfully connecting a national target to institutional sub-targets and desired program outcomes would need to be carefully considered and consistently enforced.

Recommendation 8: Compound Disadvantage

The HEPPP Guidelines should legitimise other equity groups to address compound disadvantage while the focus remains on poverty and the socio-cultural disadvantage it creates. The definition of socioeconomic disadvantage should be extended to include the next quartile up (26-50 per cent of the population) which experiences similar disadvantage in terms of educational attainment and material wealth.

Recommendation 10: National HEPPP Evaluation Framework

The Department of Education and Training should develop an evaluation framework for HEPPP to enable the sector to systematically evaluate the influence of HEPPP funded initiatives on broadly defined student outcomes across the four main phases of the student life cycle. The framework should encourage evaluation approaches which are stakeholder centred, context specific and iterative and combine qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The 'Major Aims' articulated in the *Equity Initiatives Map* could form the basis for developing a comprehensive suite of evaluation tools.

Recommendation 11: Maintain Funding Levels

The government should continue HEPPP funding at current levels to ensure that the scale and reach of institutional programs are maintained. Funding should be allocated for three years to improve the efficiency of HEPPP implementation. HEPPP must remain as a national program, with dedicated equity funding to all Australian universities and an explicit incentive to engage in cross-institutional partnerships.

Recommendations for the Sector

Recommendation 3: Review and Reform of Institutional HEPPP Programs

Universities should use the *Equity Initiatives Map* as a diagnostic tool to review their HEPPP programs and optimally align expenditure and effort with institutional priorities and needs.

Recommendation 4: Improvements to HEPPP Program Effectiveness and Efficiency

Universities should use the interpretive model to review their organisational and management approaches to HEPPP implementation and identify any factors which may further improve program effectiveness and efficiency.

Recommendation 12: Ongoing Employment of Core Staff

Staff delivering core outreach or retention activities should be paid out of operating funding or at least be employed as ongoing staff.

Recommendations for Research

Recommendation 5: Analyse Individual Dimension of Program Success

Future research could include the analysis of the individual dimension, building on Burke's (2012) work, to more fully capture the relationships between individual equity practitioners, leaders or champions and institutional structures and discourses to assess how these relationships influence the success of institutional HEPPP or other equity programs.

Recommendation 9: Definition of the Target Group

The current review of the equity groups should develop a target group definition, or a blended model of group and individualised indicators, which is more accurate and user-friendly in targeting equity interventions at groups and individuals.

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Appendix

Expert Advisory Panel

Expert Advisor (and Affiliation)	Area of Expertise	Meeting Dates in 2016
Penny Jane Burke (Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education, Newcastle)	Equity Program evaluation and methodologies Key experts in UK	14 March 26 April
Brenda Cherednichenko (Deakin University)	Tactical support of the Fellowship Key experts in HE sector	21 July 18 October
Richard James (Melbourne University)	Education policy and program analysis Strategic contribution of the Fellowship	
Sally Kift (James Cook University)	Higher Education policy and advocacy Fellowship process and engagement strategies	
Gabrielle O'Brien (QUT), EPHEA President	Equity practice Key equity practitioners/universities	
Vicki Ratliff/Julie Birmingham (Department of Education and Training)	HEPPP design and administration Key contacts in the Department	
Sue Trinidad (NCSEHE)	Alignment with program and project objectives and deliverables	
Denise Wood (Central Queensland University)	Intersection with evaluation project Equity Program evaluation and methodologies	

Department of Education and Training

Interviews in March/April 2016	Current and Past
Deputy Secretary Higher Education	1
Group Managers of Higher Education and other relevant senior public servants	4
Managers of Equity Branch	2
Other conversations during the placement	
HEPPP Manager	2
Subject matter experts	3
Coffee catch ups with equity team	3
'Frank and fearless' catch ups with Equity team	3
Discussions about HEPPP evaluation	2
OLT	1
HERI seminar: equity scholarships	28 July

UK Study Tour: 13-14 June

UK practitioners/ researchers/ policy makers	University of Bath 3 interviews	Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) & Office for Fair Access (OFFA) 1 interview each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SRHE Seminar London, Tuesday, 14 June - Professor Jacqueline Stevenson – Sheffield Hallam University - Professor Ann-Marie Bathmaker – University of Birmingham
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Special Interest Group/Student Equity Workshops

STARS Perth	Brisbane	Perth	Sydney	Melbourne
29 June	17 August	31 August	15 September	6 October
10 attendees	16 attendees	17 attendees	11 attendees	21 attendees

University Case Studies – Interviewees

Universities	1. Deliver at Scale (13)	2. Principles and Partnerships (14)	3. Targeted and Personalised (13)	[Pilot (3)]
Vice-Chancellor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Executive member with responsibility for HEPPP	Yes	Yes, current and previous	No	Yes
Equity Director	Yes, current and previous	Yes	Yes, current and previous	
HEPPP Program Manager	Yes	Yes, previous	Yes	
Project Managers of HEPPP-funded initiatives (up to 3)	Yes, 5	Yes, 5	Yes, 4	
Academics involved in HEPPP-funded initiatives (up to 2)	No	No	Yes, 2	
Partners: principals, key contacts in schools/TAFE (up to 3)	Yes, 3	Yes, 3	Yes, 2	
Senior Exec with Portfolio responsibility for T&L or load planning	No	No	Yes	
Senior Managers not directly involved in HEPPP	No	Yes	No	Yes

List of Presentations

Number	Title	Event/Location	Date
1	Moving beyond 'acts of faith': effective scholarships for equity students	UTS Scholarships Symposium, Sydney	29 February
2		HERI Seminar, Department of Education and Training, Canberra	28 July
3		Scholarships Seminar, Monash University	7 October
4		CSHE Research Seminar, University of Melbourne	29 November
5	The Australian student equity program and institutional change: taking the perspective of the funding body	EAN Silver Jubilee Conference, Dublin	30 May
6	Student Equity: Special Interest Group	STARS conference, Perth	29 June
7	Student Equity Workshops	Brisbane	17 August
8		Perth	31 August
9		Sydney	15 September
10		Melbourne	6 October
11	Fellowship: high-level findings	NCSEHE 2016 National Research Forum, Canberra	28 November
12		AARE Symposium	1 December
13	Case study universities: report back on findings	Sydney	18 January 2017
14		Brisbane	25 January 2017
15		Perth	10 February 2017
16	Fellowship findings and implications for the sector	UA Higher Education Conference, Canberra	2 March 201