



**NCSEHE**  
National Centre for Student  
Equity in Higher Education



**Curtin University**

# STUDENT EQUITY NETWORK 2017 STARS CONFERENCE

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5 July 2017

# Aims and scope

## Student Equity Network

- Provide a forum to explore how universities have designed, implemented, evaluated and improved student equity programs since the introduction of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) in 2010.
- Participation rates have increased substantially and there are significantly more students from low SES backgrounds in the system now than ever before. However, these gains have been uneven across the sector and are difficult to attribute to institutional HEPPP programs.
- The question is: how we sustain and build on the gains made in a time of policy review and reform?

The aspiration for the SIG is that discussions will lead to:

- Improved sharing of existing and emerging evidence of what works to increase participation by students from equity groups, including evaluations of HEPPP funded initiatives
- More strategic approaches to institutional student equity programs which are based on an institution's equity performance, informed by evidence and aligned with wider institutional priorities
- Collaborations to conduct cross-institutional research, present innovations and disseminate findings from research and practice.

# Session structure

## Planning for the future in a changing policy context

- Introductions
- Share findings from Nadine's Equity Fellowship relevant to the design and implementation of institutional HEPPP programs
- Discuss the recommendations for the sector
- Explore the tools developed during the Fellowship and how they could be applied in your institutional context
- Discuss strategies for re-designing institutional HEPPP programs in light of Fellowship findings and/or proposed changes to the program and its evaluation
- Explore the interest of the group in an ongoing STARS Student Equity Network

# Introductions

Who are we?

Why are we interested in student equity?

What do we want to get out of this session?

Are you interested in keeping the Student Equity Network going between STARS conferences?

If so, what would be the preferred ways to do this?

And what are you prepared to contribute?





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# Design and implementation of institutional HEPPP programs

Insights from the Fellowship

# Fellowship research questions

The 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?

# Methodology

## A qualitative and collaborative approach

1. Analysis of HEPPP annual progress reports<sup>3</sup> (2010-2015) to produce a typology of institutional approaches to HEPPP implementation using the interpretive model and Equity Initiatives Map.
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.

# Key findings and outputs

## First national study on institutional HEPPP programs

- HEPPP has provided an opportunity for universities to develop bespoke equity programs which respond to their institutional profile and strategic priorities.
- Trend of stagnant participation by students from low SES backgrounds has been broken but outcomes at the institutional level were highly variable.
- Impact difficult to establish empirically but strategic intent an important variable.
- Volume of HEPPP funding mattered.
- Transformational change in one case study university.

### A set of diagnostic tools:

- An interpretive model building on Burke (2012)
- An Equity Initiatives Map 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.
- Case studies of three strategic approaches to HEPPP implementation and the success factors, outcomes and challenges associated with these.



# Equity Initiatives Map – top half



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infants and primary school students, teachers and parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primary and secondary school students, teachers and parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secondary school students and leavers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commencing/first year students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuing later year students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completing students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduates</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community members</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mature age students</li> </ul>				
MAJOR AIMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase <b>awareness</b> of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting, developing and/or maintaining <b>aspirations</b>, expectations and <b>attainment</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide opportunities for people to <b>access</b> and <b>achieve</b> at university, taking into account the degree of selectivity and distance to target communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement and belonging</li> <li>Academic literacies</li> <li>Competencies in discipline area/relevant knowledges developed through inclusive pedagogies</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employability</li> <li>Postgraduate study</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address issues of <b>affordability</b> of higher education study: provide information, strategies and financial support to fund student life</li> </ul>						
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)				



# Equity Initiatives Map – bottom half

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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outreach to early years of schooling (Years K–4)</li> <li>Community outreach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outreach to primary and middle years schooling (Years 5–9)</li> <li>Outreach to senior secondary schooling (Years 10–12)</li> <li>Pre-university experience programs</li> <li>School curriculum enhancement and support and foster skills and capabilities</li> <li>Professional development for careers advisors and teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pathways programs: a qualification that provides entry into university upon successful completion often from enabling, VET or private providers</li> <li>Foundation programs: programs that provide extra academic development to build skills; may be a separate qualification or part of a degree</li> <li>Alternative selection criteria and tools in entry requirements</li> <li>Outreach to VET/adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Orientation programs</li> <li>First year inclusive transition programs</li> <li>Academic service provision</li> <li>Non-academic service provision (childcare, financial aid, student counselling and health)</li> <li>Social activities</li> <li>Diversity of strategies, including extra-curricular learning development and other programs</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scholarships and prizes for potential students currently at school or in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging and inclusive curriculum/course design</li> <li>Inclusive pedagogies</li> <li>Reflexive practice</li> <li>Embedded literacies and skills development</li> <li>Contextual learning</li> <li>Continuing professional development for staff or students (to build capacity and awareness of changing needs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bridging programs</li> <li>Careers and employment support pre-course completion (including work integrated learning, part-time employment, leadership programs and professional mentoring).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative exit qualifications</li> <li>Careers and employment support post completion</li> </ul>
COMPETITIVE GRANTS IN Year/s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NPP in Year/s</li> </ul>			
CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$xxx (zz%)</li> <li>Including: Leadership role (e.g. Director, Coordinator), Evaluation Officer, Finance Officer, Admin Officer, Project Officer</li> <li>Also: General expenditure and reviews of business processes</li> </ul>			



# HEPPP expenditure and effort

## Equity Initiatives Map as a diagnostic tool

The sector's response to HEPPP in most cases built on equity strategies and infrastructure which pre-dated HEPPP as well as existing equity initiatives 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, Baik & 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.

# Interpretive model – Part 1

Criteria	National range (n=37)	Bottom third (n=12)	Middle third (n=13)	Top third (n=12)
<b>Equity performance</b>				
<b>2015 Participation, access, completion and retention rates of domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds (SA1 measure with PC 2011 fall-back) Retention ratio (2014)</b>	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)
<b>Change in the no. of domestic UG students (2010-15)</b>	Change: -10% – 141%	Low increase < 16% (n=14)	Medium increase 16-27% (n=12)	High increase > 27% (n=11)
<b>Change in low SES participation rates (2011-15 based on SA1)</b>	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
<b>Size and structure of HEPPP program</b>				
<b>HEPPP Participation \$\$\$ received (2015)</b>	\$374,000 - \$10,772,000	Small < \$3m	Medium \$3m-\$4.5m	Large > \$4.5m
<b>% rollover request in 2011</b>	0 – 139%	None	Medium 1-50%	Large > 50%
<b>Structure of 2015 HEPPP program: expenditure / initiatives as per Equity Initiatives Map (n=35)</b>	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)
<b>Number of HEPPP-funded initiatives (2012 and 2015)</b>	2012: 9 – 61 2015: 4 – 53 (n=35)	2012: Moderate < 20 initiatives 2015: Small < 10	2012: Large 20 – 32 initiatives 2015: Medium 10-20 initiatives	2012: V large > 33 initiatives 2015: Large > 20 initiatives

# Interpretive model – Part 1 cont'd

<i>Formal power structures: governance and administration of HEPPP</i>				
<b>Central administrative infrastructure (2015) (n=35)</b>	0% - 67% of institutional allocation	No institutional allocation (n=15)	Moderate 1 – 10% (n=10)	Large < 10% (n=10)
<b>Administration of HEPPP: responsibility for acquittal and reporting</b>	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)			

# Interpretive model – Part 2

Interpretive model – Part 2	
<b>Where is the University going with student equity/widening participation?</b>	University Mission as it relates to student equity/widening participation
	What was your jump-off point in 2010?
<b>Student equity/widening participation targets and strategic objectives</b>	Strategic objectives related to student equity/widening participation
	Targets cascaded through the university
	Institutional targeting strategies
<b>Formal power structures: HEPPP governance and organisational models</b>	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?	
<b>HEPPP administration</b>	
<b>Operations</b>	Clear processes for administering HEPPP moneys across university
	Continuous improvement
<b>Monitoring</b>	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
<b>Incentives</b>	Processes/opportunities for rewarding high performers
	Processes for removing poor performers
	Capacity building of current staff
<b>Other</b>	Challenges of the institution in supporting students from equity groups, esp. low SES
	Evaluation of HEPPP program or individual initiatives

# Attributes of effective and efficient 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.

# 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.



# Possible topics for discussion

1. Targeting of HEPPP initiatives to students from low SES backgrounds
2. The relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and student outcomes
3. Strategic intent as a variable to explain uneven outcomes
4. What is success in widening participation?
5. HEPPP as a driver of institutional change
6. HEPPP program reform proposals and evaluation framework



# The 'messy' business of targeting students from low SES backgrounds

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 but 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 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: people with money have a lot more choices than those without even if they belong to another equity group.

# Unpacking the relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and student outcomes

## HEPPP programs and equity performance

Complex relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and institutional equity performance as defined by the Martin indicators which cannot be fully explained with the methods chosen. 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.

# Unpacking the relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and student outcomes

## Demand-driven funding and HEPPP

Complex relationships between demand-driven funding and HEPPP: 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

One missing analytical ingredient to explain some of the variation in outcomes is strategic intent: individual universities seek to attract more students from low SES backgrounds to either grow or diversify their undergraduate student cohort (Peacock, Sellar & Lingard, 2014) . Was partially confirmed by this study:

1. Growth: Low SES cohort crucial for achieving the university's ambitious growth targets; strong increase in both numbers and participation rates of students from low SES backgrounds.
2. Diversification: Low SES not a traditional target group; achieved some diversification mainly through targeted and attainment-oriented access programs which effectively charted clear and accessible pathways into a selective institution.
3. Social justice: Collective target to increase applications to higher education providers across the state; success of the widening participation program 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

Need to conceive of success measures in much broader ways than low SES participation rate: 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:

- 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.

These could be used as the starting point for defining more comprehensive measures of success and form the basis for developing a national evaluation HEPPP framework.

# 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:

- Volume of HEPPP funding mattered in all cases, including the availability of substantial amounts of competitive 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.
- Influential equity directors and/or senior champions who drove the widening participation agenda across the institution and successfully initiated institutional change and/or leverage the energy generated by changes elsewhere to further the equity agenda.
- National participation target had only limited influence as a driver of change at the institutional level: no perceived consequences of (not) meeting institutional targets.

# HEPPP program changes

Current HEPPP	Reformed HEPPP (from 2018)
<b>Participation Component</b> (supports low SES students on campus) Funding is allocated by formula based on # of low SES students	<b>Access and Participation Fund</b> \$985 loading (indexed) per low SES student (~\$500 million over forwards) plus \$13.3 million (indexed) of performance component funding
<b>Partnerships Component</b> (supports outreach activities) Funding is allocated by formula based on # of low SES students	
<b>National Priorities Pool</b> (supports projects that inform more effective implementation of the HEPPP) \$6.5 million per year	<b>National Priorities Pool</b> (supports projects that inform more effective implementation of the HEPPP and collaboration between universities) \$9.5 million per year (indexed)



# Summing up and looking forward

Key insights and actions from the 2017 Student Equity Network session

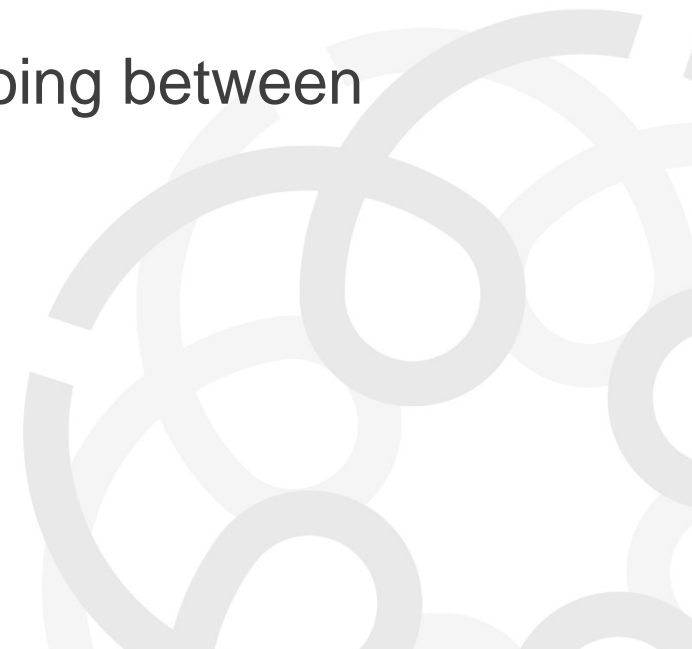
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