



2017 NATIONAL EQUITY FELLOWS FORUM

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

#NEFF17

Make tomorrow better.

Welcome

Professor Sue Trinidad, NCSEHE Director

I would like to welcome you to the NCSEHE 2017 Equity Fellows Forum, and thank you for your valuable contribution to today's proceedings. Achieving an equitable higher education system is a complex challenge, and it is through collaboration and discussion that we can unpack these multifaceted issues and work toward innovative solutions.

This Forum presents an opportunity for us to share professional insights, experiences and ideas to establish strategic directions as we move toward our collective goal.

The NCSEHE has three primary objectives: to strengthen the evidence base by informing research directions; to collaborate with stakeholders to be at the centre of public policy dialogue; and to promote leadership and innovation in the equity sector. The NCSEHE Equity Fellows Program has been central to advancing these objectives, complementing the Centre's core activities in connecting research, policy and practice to improve access, participation and success for disadvantaged students.

Over the past two years, we have been privileged to support six emerging leaders through the Equity Fellows Program, each conducting targeted, high-profile projects focused on improving outcomes for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Today, we are pleased to present our 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellows, Mr Matt Brett, Ms Louise Pollard and Associate Professor James Smith, who will share an overview of their respective projects, taking the discussion forward into a broader context.

While their research addresses three discrete areas of focus, notable intersections reinforce the principle that a united, holistic approach is critical to achieving student equity in higher education.

Today's Forum would not be possible without the work of a dedicated group of people and the support of the Australian Government Department of Education and Training and Curtin University.

I would like to extend my gratitude to our speakers the 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellows, Associate Professor James Smith, Mr Matt Brett and Ms Louise Pollard; the NCSEHE Advisory Board; the NCSEHE Advisory Committee; and Equity Fellows Program Selection and Reference Committee, all of whom volunteer their time to assist us in achieving our goals.

On behalf of the NCSEHE, we are so pleased that you could attend this event and hope that you find this a productive and informative discussion. Thank you for your support and dedication in progressing the narrative around student equity in higher education.



Sue Trinidad
Director
National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



The Minister for Education and Training Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham, accompanied by NCSEHE Director Professor Sue Trinidad, Emeritus Professor Lesley Parker AM, and the six 2016 and 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellows at the 2016 National Equity Forum.

Agenda

9:00am – 9:10am	Welcome to Country
9:10am – 9:30am	Introduction and summary by Director, Sue Trinidad
9:30am – 10:30am	Equity Fellows Ms Louise Pollard, Associate Professor James A. Smith and Mr Matthew Brett present their Fellowship project overviews followed by questions from the audience.
10:30am – 11:00am	Morning tea
11:00am – 12:15pm	<p>Shaping the Future of Australian Higher Education Equity Policy</p> <p>Facilitated discussion with 2017 Fellows around the NCSEHE aim of bridging research, policy and practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research<ul style="list-style-type: none">> What research questions should we be prioritising for student equity?• Policy<ul style="list-style-type: none">> What is the relevance of student equity for tertiary education policy reform?• Practice<ul style="list-style-type: none">> How can we ensure the value and impact of student equity practice?
12:15pm – 12:30pm	Conclusion and close

Please note: The NCSEHE will be taking photographs and audio recordings of today's proceedings. Your image may be used by the NCSEHE in printed and/or electronic publications for promotional and educational purposes, and/or published on the internet. If you have concerns about your image being used for these purposes, please email ncsehe@curtin.edu.au.



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Equity Fellows Program

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

As part of their Fellowships, Fellows spend a period of time working in, and with, the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) in Canberra facilitating mutually beneficial engagement between the Department and the sector as a way of exchange and leadership opportunities. Bringing together Higher Education research practitioners with Higher Education policymakers and administrators is an innovative and creative feature of the Equity Fellowships, enabling us to learn from each other and to share our different perspectives on student equity.

The first cohort of Equity Fellows have had direct influence and impact on equity in the higher education sector through:

- identification of equity issues that affect the Australian higher education system, and the development and facilitation of approaches to address these issues
- sector-wide leadership in promoting, enhancing and developing good practice in improving access, participation and success in higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- the development of a collaborative arrangement for the ongoing exchange of knowledge between the sector and the Department to inform the delivery of government programs and policy concerned with equity in higher education.

Projects have also:

- raised the profile in higher education institutions of efforts to widen participation among students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- established and built on national and international partnerships and collaboration in widening participation.

Impacts and Outcomes

Since its inception just over a year ago, the Equity Fellows Program has already had a big impact on higher education in two major areas: through the dissemination and adoption of advice to researchers, policymakers and practitioners; and by developing capacity and leadership within the equity field. Because of their lasting impacts, the cumulative effects of the contributions of the Equity Fellows Program will continue to grow and shape the future of higher education.

The 2016 Equity Fellows have already made a major impact, conducting numerous presentations, workshops and seminars, and promoting their findings nationally and internationally through interviews, institutional visits and professional networking. The final reports and associated resources have been accessed widely, recording almost 8,000 downloads through the NCSEHE website:

- **Dr Cathy Stone** (5,365 downloads)
Opportunity Through Online Learning: Improving Student Access, Participation and Success in Online Higher Education.
- **Dr Nadine Zacharias** (1,003 downloads)
The Australian Student Equity Program and Institutional Change: Paradigm Shift or Business As Usual?
- **Dr Erica Southgate** (1,368 downloads)
Fair Connection to professional Careers: Understanding Social Difference and Disadvantage, Institutional Dynamics and Technological Opportunities.

The 2017 Equity Fellows, announced in November 2016, are now well into their Fellowships and have already presented their work so far on an international scale. Given the areas of critical importance to equity in which all three Fellows are working, we look forward to significant further outcomes from their work.

Downloads and Impact as of 31 October 2017

		Total	Oct	Sept	Aug	Jul	Jun	May	Apr	Mar
Dr Cathy Stone — <i>Opportunity Through Online Learning: Improving Student Access, Participation and Success in Online Higher Education</i>	Full report	2,639	321	215	249	203	298	389	574	390
	National Guidelines	2,726	263	334	323	260	295	389	519	343
Dr Nadine Zacharias — <i>The Australian Student Equity Program and Institutional Change: Paradigm Shift or Business as Usual?</i>	Full report	788	45	32	69	101	541			
	Equity Initiatives Map	215	21	13	26	59	96			
Dr Erica Southgate — <i>Fair Connection to Professional Careers: Understanding Social Difference and Disadvantage, Institutional Dynamics and Technological Opportunities</i>	Full report	836	184	652						
	<i>Immersed in the Future</i> DICE Report	532	90	442						

2017 Equity Fellows' Projects

Mr Matthew Brett

Equity, Performance and Accountability

Growth of public investment in Australian higher education has sharpened the focus of policymakers on issues of performance and accountability. This Fellowship explores the distribution of accountabilities for student equity objectives across the higher education system, and how these objectives are defined and progressed across policy instruments, policy processes, and institutional planning systems. The perspectives of system stakeholders have also been surfaced through surveys and interviews. The Fellowship has found that the Australian higher education system has a strong, broadly distributed, and deeply embedded commitment to student equity. There is no

crisis of accountability. There are, however, opportunities for strengthening equity performance and accountability systems. These opportunities are described in an *Equity Performance and Accountability Framework*, refined through application to specific policy and institutional settings. The framework will be stress tested by application within higher education policy reform processes and institutional settings. The Fellowship has provided an opportunity to explore issues of system importance, and through a secondment to the Department of Education and Training, Matt has developed a deeper understanding of the passion and commitment of those at the heart of policy design.

Ms Louise Pollard

Remote Student University Participation and Success: An Analysis of Policy and Practice

This 2017 Equity Fellowship focuses on remote students' participation in higher education, exploring issues relevant to these students and identifying ways in which they can be supported more effectively by the higher education sector and Australian Government.

Good practice examples from across the sector have been examined and the Fellowship was informed by a study tour to Canadian universities and a secondment to the Department of Education and Training. The Fellowship involves analysis of national datasets that have focused attention on the cohort of remote students in higher

education in a new and innovative way. This includes the development of a comprehensive summary of remote students engaged in university. The demographic profile may challenge assumptions made about the cohort previously and will help the sector, and governments, to refine and target strategies to support remote students in accessing and succeeding in higher education. The good practice case studies include interviews with students from remote Australia and staff engaged in the delivery of programs and curriculum. They will provide insights into the extent to which existing practice addresses the unique challenges and needs of the remote student cohort.

Associate Professor James A. Smith

Strengthening Evaluation within Indigenous Higher Education Contexts in Australia

Enhancing Indigenous pathways and transitions into higher education is a key equity priority in Australia. To do this effectively we need robust evidence assessing the process, impact and outcomes of Indigenous higher education policies and programs. This Fellowship investigates ways of strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. Key research questions address: the quality and utility of evaluation; the current challenges and opportunities associated with planning and undertaking evaluation; the enablers and barriers associated with using evaluation evidence to inform policy and program development and reform to support Indigenous participation and achievement; and strategies might be useful for strengthening evaluation. The multifaceted project has involved a scoping review of what is known about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia.

Additionally, primary research interviews have been conducted with 24 Indigenous scholars and thinkers working in Indigenous higher education contexts across all states and territories; and 15 policymakers working in Indigenous or equity-related higher education policy contexts within the Australian Government. This work has also involved consultation with key national stakeholders including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium and Universities Australia, resulting in the development of a conceptual model and accompanying evidence base to frame future strategies in this space. In particular, the Fellowship provides important baseline data to respond to multiple calls to Government and Australian universities to work towards the co-development of an Indigenous higher education performance, monitoring and/or evaluation framework.

Speakers



Mr Matthew Brett

Prior to his appointment as an Equity Fellow, Matt was Senior Manager of Higher Education Policy at La Trobe University where he provided policy advice to the University Executive and supported La Trobe's engagement with public policy processes. Matt has

extensive experience in higher education across a variety of roles including policy adviser, services manager, practitioner and researcher. Matt is also a PhD Candidate at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne.



Ms Louise Pollard

Prior to her appointment as an Equity Fellow, Ms Pollard was the Manager of Aspire UWA, a nationally recognised widening participation program. Preceding this, Louise was a teacher and Student Services coordinator at a WA Department of Education secondary school. She is a member of the Equity

Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia Executive Committee and was previously the peak body's representative on the NCSEHE Advisory Board. She has extensive community development and education program management experience, having worked and volunteered in a range of international contexts.



Associate Professor James A. Smith

Prior to commencing his Equity Fellowship, James was the Program Manager of the multi-award winning Whole of Community Engagement initiative led through Charles Darwin University (CDU). This built on over a decade of experience working in senior strategic roles in Indigenous health and education contexts in NT and SA. He is a Fellow of the

Australian Health Promotion Association, Co-Lead of the Indigenous Leadership Research and Evaluation Network at CDU, and holds multiple adjunct research positions. He has led numerous Indigenous higher education research projects and recently co-edited *Indigenous pathways, transitions and participation in higher education* published by Springer.



Professor Sue Trinidad

Professor Sue Trinidad is the Director of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. An established scholar in the areas of higher education pedagogy and change management, the use of technology and student learning, Sue's research covers higher education and leadership including the

use of technology for regional and remote areas to provide equity access to all students regardless of their geographical location. Prior to becoming the NCSEHE's Director, Sue was Deputy PVC and Dean of Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin during 2007-12.



The three 2017 Equity Fellows Associate Professor James A. Smith, Ms Louise Pollard and Mr Matthew Brett accompanied by the Minister for Education and Training Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham at the 2016 National Equity Forum.

About the Centre

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education began operation in 2008, hosted by the University of South Australia. In May 2013, Curtin University won the bid to take over the Centre and received funding to achieve its aim of informing public policy design and implementation and institutional practice, to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people.

The NCSEHE's objectives are:

- to be at the centre of public policy dialogue about equity in higher education
- to assist in closing the loop between equity policy, research and practice by:
 - supporting and informing evaluation of current equity practice, with a particular focus on identifying good practice
 - identifying innovative approaches to equity through existing research and the development of a forward research program to fill gaps in knowledge
 - translating these learnings into practical advice for decision-makers and practitioners alike.

Student Equity and Participation

The NCSEHE's key purpose is "to inform public policy design and implementation, and institutional practice, to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people."

In keeping with its purpose, the NCSEHE is connecting Commonwealth student equity policy with the activities of higher education institutions and national equity outcomes through its input into comparative assessment of institutional strategies, systemic assessments of policy achievements and assessments of national policy-making in view of this evidence. The Centre's focus is based on three programs of research activity.

1. Equity Policy and Program Evaluation

The Centre is providing leadership and support in developing a national approach and resources to evaluate the impact of initiatives to increase participation of people from low SES backgrounds and other equity groups in higher education.

2. Equity Policy and Planning Research

The Centre is furthering equity policy and planning in Australia, sharing knowledge and capabilities developed in Australia, and providing evidence on the impact of policy on equity outcomes in the system. By enabling national research and engagement on higher education policy and practice, the Centre ensures its research includes analysis of all student equity groups, including people from low SES, Indigenous, regional and remote communities, and people with disability.

3. Student Equity Data

The Centre conducts analysis of higher education datasets from a student equity perspective. This encompasses:

- compiling and analysing national equity data and survey data on student transition to higher education
- managing a website that presents data on student equity performance in higher education; in particular, the mapping of higher education participation data in Australia
- providing access to sources for data and data-driven research on equity policy and programs from around Australia and the world.

“Assisting in closing the loop between equity policy, research and practice.”

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