BUILDING LEGACY AND CAPACITY WORKSHOP TWO

Higher education participation and completion of regional and remote students

Make tomorrow better.

Contents

1. Setting the Scene for the Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series

About the Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series

The Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series is a strategic initiative by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) to explore in depth four topics chosen from the '10 Conversations' conducted during the NCSEHE Forum in November 2016. This new strategy aims to further extend the NCSEHE's capacity in synthesising, codifying and disseminating learnings from research and practice and use them to inform future initiatives, studies and policy.

The objectives of the workshops are to:

- define a collective knowledge base informed by research and practice
- engage in strategic and action planning to guide institutional practice and future research
- develop evidence-informed policy advice.

Each workshop consists of a small group of 10-12 participants, including researchers, practitioners, policymakers and community partners, who contribute their insights as subject matter experts. The workshops are structured around high-level questions which frame the group discussion. Instead of reviewing the details of individual research reports and case studies included in this publication, workshop participants are encouraged to draw on these insights and experiences to advance a national conversation at the intersection of equity research, practice and policy. The outcomes of the discussions will be shared widely across the sector, including via webinars, written materials and professional illustrations.

Workshop Two:

Higher education participation and completion of regional and remote students

The second workshop in the series put a spotlight on the higher education participation and completion outcomes of regional and remote students. While strategic efforts to address the lower participation and completion rates of regional and remote students are hardly a greenfield site for Australian universities, there has been renewed interest by the Australian Government, namely an Interdepartmental Committee on Access to Higher Education for Regional and Remote Students, budget announcements of targeted scholarships and eight regional study hubs as well as the Government commissioned *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* led by Emeritus Professor John Halsey.

It is clear that regional and remote students, as well as regional higher education institutions, face structural challenges that impact participation and completion outcomes. The 2017 Higher Education Standards Panel discussion paper found that institutional and student characteristics associated with higher attrition rates reflect those of regional universities and their students. At the same time, regional institutions still do the heavy lifting in attracting students from regional and remote backgrounds to higher education and graduating them, notwithstanding an increasing flow of regional and remote students to metropolitan universities.

For equity practitioners, researchers and policymakers, there remain questions about the nature of the problem and the best ways to support people in regional and remote locations to access and succeed in higher education:

- How can universities successfully mitigate the structural challenges faced by their (potential) student cohort, especially regional institutions which themselves suffer from systemic disadvantage?
- How do universities create both flexibility and consistency in the student experience for an increasingly diverse cohort?
- Do these strategies work for Indigenous students who make up a significantly larger share of regional and remote cohorts than metropolitan ones?
- How do institutions manage critical first encounters, clarify expectations, address the diverse and often complex needs of students and create a sense of belonging in a massified system looking for further efficiencies?

- Should policy approaches focus on creating scale and critical mass or on delivering local support to smaller and more remote communities?
- Is it possible to move beyond geographical limitations to create supportive, technology-enabled third spaces?

In trying to resolve these questions and work towards evidence-based advice to policymakers and practitioners, this workshop brought together a group of subject matter experts to consider the topic from different and various perspectives. These included researchers who have explored migration and completion patterns of regional and remote students, provided a more finely grained picture of the cohort and highlighted the importance of effective online delivery to any successful strategy.

At the same time, we learned from equity practitioners, and senior managers, who have designed and implemented university-wide strategies or initiatives to support students from regional and remote backgrounds in accessing and succeeding in higher education. The featured case studies provided insights into both strategic approaches and tailored interventions to improve participation and completion outcomes for students from regional and remote backgrounds.

The workshop also included the voices and insights of policymakers who have the opportunity to set the framework and provide incentives for addressing the structural barriers to equitable outcomes for individuals in regional and remote locations and the universities they choose to attend.

The workshop was structured around high-level questions which framed the group discussion:

1. What are we trying to achieve? What does effective institutional support of regional and remote students look like?
2. What do we know about the nature of the problem? Why is it difficult to deliver effective support for these students, especially if they study online?
3. What do we know from current practice and research: What worked? What didn't work? And why?
4. What are the must have elements of successful approaches? What are the common challenges and potential pitfalls?
5. How could the Australian Government, and State Governments, better support effective institutional support for regional and remote students?
6. Is there a gap in knowledge which impacts on the quality of policy and practice? If so, what kind of research is required to fill it?

The insights generated during the workshop are summarised in the following section.

2. Summary of Workshop Two Outcomes

The outcomes of the workshop have informed this good practice guide for the sector which includes a set of recommendations for practitioners, policymakers and future research, captured in this visual illustration.

Note: This visual is accessible in high resolution on the NCSEHE website: https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/workshop2-illo-FINAL.jpg
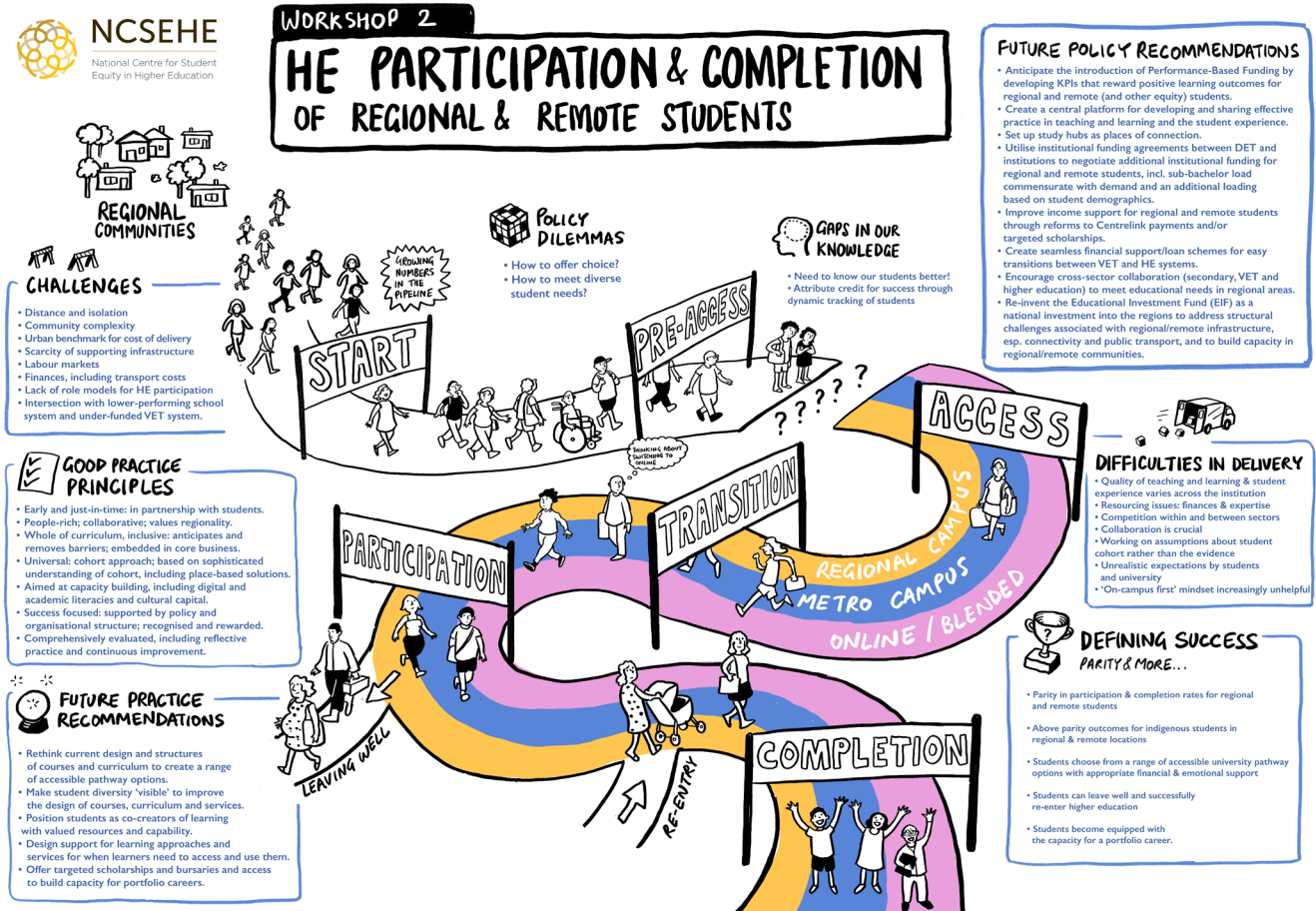
Defining Success: Parity and More

The workshop sought to articulate a definition of success with regard to higher education participation and completion of regional and remote students.

The complexity of the issues explored during the session, required multi-faceted concepts of success.

The group proposed that we will have achieved success when:

- there is parity in participation and completion rates for regional and remote students in higher education
- above parity is achieved for Indigenous students ('closing the gap' agenda) with higher representation of this cohort in regional and remote areas
- students can choose from a range of accessible university pathway options: in the community, including on-campus, online, or hybrid model of both; or moving away from home to university, with appropriate financial and emotional support
- students become equipped with the capacity for a portfolio career; i.e. equipped for a multitude of jobs—often simultaneously—over their working life.

Success also looks different across the various stages of the student lifecycle which, in an era of lifelong learning, are not necessarily linear:

Pre-Access
- Prospective students perceive higher education as an option to which they can aspire, and in which they can succeed.

Access
- Students are able to make informed course choices and can gain access to their course of choice.

Transition
- School-leavers successfully make the transition to independent learning and life.
- Mature age students achieve career and personal transformations.

Participation
- Students progress in their courses.
- If study is no longer the best path for them, students leave well and are supported to re-engage with higher education if and when they choose to return.

Completion
- Graduation, realising vocational destinations, continuing to further study as desired.
- These definitions of success drove the development of Good Practice Principles and Recommendations for Future Practice and Policy.

2.1. Good Practice Principles

These Good Practice Principles for effective institutional support of regional and remote students emerged from the discussion of existing leading practice examples:

- Early and just-in-time; in partnership with students.
- People-rich; collaborative; values regionality.
- Whole of curriculum; inclusive: anticipates and removes barriers; embedded in core business.
- Universal: cohort approach; based on sophisticated understanding of cohort; including place-based solutions.
- Aimed at capacity building, including digital and academic literacies and cultural capital.
- Success focused: supported by policy and organisational structure; recognised and rewarded.
- Comprehensively evaluated, including reflective practice and continuous improvement.

2.2. Recommendations for Future Practice and Policy

To achieve effective institutional support of regional and remote students, a set of recommendations was developed to inform future practice and policy.

Recommendations for Future Practice

1. Rethink curriculum design, academic calendars, duration of courses, possibility of hybrid approaches to studying locally (regional campuses delivering mix of online/on-campus programs) to create a range of accessible pathway options.
2. Make student diversity 'visible' to improve the design of courses, curriculum and services.
3. Position students as co-creators of learning with valued resources and capability.
4. Design support for learning approaches and services for when learners need to access and use them. Examples include:
   a. online peer mentoring, including PASS
   b. out of hours or extended support provision, especially IT and academic skills.
5. Offer targeted scholarships and bursaries, including for Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placements, intensives and international mobility, and access to co-curricular opportunities in students' local communities to build capacity for portfolio careers.

Recommendations for Institutional and Government Policy

1. Anticipate the introduction of Performance-Based Funding by developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that reward positive learning outcomes for regional and remote (and other equity) students.
   a. These might consist of existing metrics, for example, success rates and ratios for equity students, as well as new metrics.
   b. New metrics should account for institutional characteristics and improvements across a range of measures at the institutional level. They could include the adjusted and 'modified for student distribution' institutional attrition rates which were calculated by the Higher Education Standards Panel as well as similar approaches in relation to performance against the Higher Education Standards Framework and QILT.
   c. Furthermore, new indicators of admission transparency and/or a new measure of value add/distance travelled could be developed by the sector in partnership with the Department of Education and Training.
2. Create a central platform for developing and sharing effective practice in teaching and learning and the student experience.
3. Set up study hubs as places of connection:
   - Use existing spaces, for example, small regional campuses, libraries, schools
   - Provide great connectivity: fast internet, no quota limits.
   - Deliver student services on site, for example, orientation, peer support.
   - Generate engagement opportunities with parents, adult prospective students and the wider community.
4. Utilise institutional funding agreements between the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) and institutions to negotiate additional institutional funding for regional and remote students, including sub-bachelor load commensurate with demand and an additional loading based on student demographics.
5. Improve income support for regional and remote students through reforms to Centrelink payments and/or targeted scholarships.
6. Create seamless financial support/loan schemes for easy transitions between Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher education systems.
7. Encourage cross-sector collaboration (secondary, VET and higher education) to meet educational needs in regional areas.
8. Re-invent the Educational Investment Fund (EIF) as a national investment into the regions to address structural challenges associated with regional/remote infrastructure, especially connectivity and public transport, and to build capacity in regional/remote communities.

2.3. Gaps in Knowledge

The workshop also identified gaps in knowledge which should be addressed by future research to enable evidence-informed practice and policy:

1. Need to know our students better!
   - Illustrate the diversity of student sub-groups following the lead of Louise Pollard for the regional and remote cohorts.
   - Explore the production of student personas as a tool to visualise the diversity of the student cohort.
   - Link HEIMS data to relevant Centrelink data to enable the better tracking and support of students who experience financial and personal hardship.
2. Attribute credit for success:
   - Develop processes and systems to enable the dynamic tracking of students at course level, over time and across sectors and institutions to make visible all the actors contributing to student completion.

3. Pre-Reading Materials for Workshop Two

3.1. Workshop Agenda

Date: Tuesday, 17 October 2017
Location: The University of Western Australia, Perth
Venue: St Catherine's College
Facilitator: Nadine Zacharias

TIME	ACTIVITY	
08:30	**Arrival, registration, tea and coffee**	All
08:55	**Welcome experts to the workshop**	Sue Trinidad
09:00	**Session One:** • *Defining success: What does effective institutional support of regional and remote students look like?* • *Defining the nature of the problem: Why is it difficult to deliver effective support for these students, especially if they study online?*	All
10:30	**Morning tea**	All
11:00	**Session Two:** • *Sharing successes, insights and lessons learned from current practice and research: What worked? What didn't work? And why?* • *Towards a good practice guide for designing and implementing effective institutional support to regional and remote students: What are the must-have elements of successful approaches? What are the common challenges and potential pitfalls?*	All
12:30	**Lunch**	All
13:15	**Session Three:** • *Towards supportive public policy: How could the Australian Government, and State Governments, better support effective institutional support for regional and remote students?* • *Is there a gap in knowledge which impacts on the quality of policy and practice? If so, what kind of research is required to fill it?*	All
14:45	**Conclusion and closing**	Nadine Zacharias

3.2. Current Research

Regional Student Participation and Migration: Analysis of factors influencing regional student participation and internal migration in Australian higher education (2017)

Buly Cardak, Matthew Brett, Paul Barry and Richard McAllister, La Trobe University; Mark Bowden and John Bahtsevanoglou, Swinburne University of Technology; and Joseph Vecci, University of Gothenburg (Sweden)

Research outline

This research examined regional student participation and migration by use of novel data sources and analytic techniques which provide relevant insights for contemporary higher education policy challenges and reform processes. This study builds our knowledge of regional student participation and mobility through quantitative analysis of:
- factors associated with regional youth progression through school and into higher education, using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY)
- factors associated with the migration of students with a commencing regional home address to major cities and other regional areas, using customised administrative data obtained from the Department of Education and Training, with particular emphasis on the impact of demand-driven funding on patterns of student migration.

Key findings

The research found strong apparent growth of regional students migrating to metropolitan locations to study. There was a substantial increase in the number and proportion of students with a regional commencing home address and current metropolitan term address. More research on the ways students utilise and update their permanent home and term addresses is necessary to fully understand patterns of regional student migration.

Further analysis of mobility within regional Australia finds regional delivery continues to be an important feature of Australian higher education (around 70 per cent of regional students had a regional term address in 2014). However, only a handful of regions have campuses operating at sufficient scale and reputation to act as net recruiters of students from more distant regional locations. This may be related to the size of regional centres and consequent economic opportunities.

The authors anticipate that this study will be of interest to many stakeholders in regional higher education. We have deliberately avoided normative positions around whether the patterns of regional student participation and mobility are inherently positive or negative. This study is perhaps the first of its kind in using a new indicator for student geographic origins, with potential applicability to regional and socioeconomic status related policy questions. The authors understand an indicator of this type will be routinely included in the higher education statistics collection.

Implications for policy, practice and research

The policy implications of our findings based on LSAY data suggest investments in regional families, regional schools, partnerships between regional schools and higher education providers, and in regional school outreach programs, remain key interventions for improving regional student participation rates. Policymakers may wish to consider the identified patterns of mobility, and the extent to which regional campuses are serving a broader geography when investing in regional higher education delivery.

This research sheds new light on a longstanding policy challenge and raises additional questions. For example:
- What forms of school interventions will lead to improved regional school outcomes and higher education participation and success?
- Beyond the information on commencement and participation analysed here, how do patterns of geographical mobility vary across the student life cycle and post-graduation?
- Do student success and employment outcomes vary by patterns of geographic mobility and participation?
- How responsive are regional students to policy reforms such as scholarships and relocation grants that incentivise geographic mobility?

Read the full report here.

Understanding the Completion Patterns of Equity Students in Regional Universities (2017)

Karen Nelson, Catherine Picton and Kerry Martin, University of the Sunshine Coast; Julie McMillan and Daniel Edwards, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER); and Marcia Devlin, Federation University

Research outline

Completion patterns of cohorts enrolled in Regional University Network (RUN) universities are influenced by the sociocultural, structural and economic implications of equity group membership.

This research analysed a specific data set from the Department of Education and Training used for its cohort-tracking analysis to compare the profiles and completion patterns of students attending RUN universities with the profiles and completion patterns of students attending metropolitan universities. Building on that foundation, the study synthesised prior research on the sociocultural and financial context that students at RUN universities encounter, extending a comparative analysis of completion patterns and informing mitigation strategies to enhance the retention of equity group students in RUN universities.

Key findings

Across all equity cohorts, RUN universities have a higher percentage of enrolments compared to metropolitan universities. Students from equity groups face a number of structural challenges in accessing, participating and completing higher education, including geographical location, financial constraints, emotional factors and sociocultural incongruity. These structural and other compounding factors present a significant challenge to the success and completion of RUN cohorts and, in particular, RUN equity group students.

RUN universities have been highly successful in mitigating multiple disadvantage at policy and practice levels. The majority of RUN students successfully graduate from bachelor degrees and achieve comparable completion patterns of equity group students and non-equity RUN students, who face some of the same structural challenges. Notably, high levels of student satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning and student support are achieved by RUN universities.

Implications for policy, practice and research

Recommendations for institutions:
- Continue community and family outreach programs to further develop responsive student support networks. Offer flexible access to learning resources and diversify curriculum structures, delivery modes and schedules.
- Provide financial subsidies to reduce stress and remove barriers for individual students.
- Create a sense of belonging through partnerships with students.
- Engage families and communities to broaden the understanding and experience of going to university.
- Respond to students' challenges by enabling constructive cycles of learning.
- Offer greater flexibility in learning and assessment design and strategies.

Recommendations for the sector:
- Increase investment in regional schools and widening participation programs.
- Continue to build partnerships to enhance regional infrastructure and communities.
- Focus on building economic stability in regional communities.
- Promote emotional wellbeing through compensating disadvantage.
- Invest in managing critical first encounters.
- Mitigate intergenerational disadvantage.
- Establish and maintain constructive engagement with regional communities.
- Continue to support relevant research.
- Recognise flexible progression pathways and nested qualifications.

Read the full report here.

Research outline

This 2017 Equity Fellowship is focused 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 the Australian Government. Analyses of national data sets and good practice examples from across the sector form the core elements of this research. In addition, the Fellowship is being informed by a study tour to Canadian universities and a secondment to the Department of Education and Training.

Key findings

The analysis of national data reveals a unique profile of the remote student cohort in 2015. As Table 1 shows, half of the cohort studied online or part-time. Almost 10 per cent of the cohort were students who identified as Indigenous Australians. Two-thirds of all students were women and 40 per cent were from low SES backgrounds. These factors intersect to create distinctive challenges.

Table 1: Remote student cohort summary

	Students by geographical region (2015)			
	Metro	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote & Very remote
Total number of students enrolled (domestic students)	823,855	141,172	57,854	9,007
Enrolled part-time	32.9%	36.2%	38.2%	49.4%
Enrolled externally/online	15.9%	30.2%	35.7%	51.5%
Indigenous Australians	1.1%	2.47%	4.47%	9.47%
Student from low SES backgrounds	12.0%	32.3%	38.9%	40.7%
Gender: **Female** **Male**	56.6% 43.4%	62.7% 37.3%	64.5% 35.5%	67.8% 32.2%

Source: University Statistics Team and the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS), Australian Government Department of Education and Training

Implications for policy, practice and research

This 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.

Opportunity through online learning: Improving student access, participation and success in higher education (2017)

Cathy Stone, University of Newcastle and National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)

Research outline

This Equity Fellowship research project published in March 2017 aimed to improve outcomes for online students, primarily in undergraduate education. There tends to be considerable diversity of the Australian undergraduate student cohort; this includes students from backgrounds historically underrepresented at university, as well as those with little prior experience of academic and/or online study. During 2016, qualitative interviews were conducted with 151 members of academic and professional staff across 16 higher education institutions—15 in Australia plus the Open University (OU) UK—to seek the combined wisdom of practitioners in online learning. From analysis of the interview data and other related published research, seven key findings emerged.

Key findings

1. Online education requires a strategic institution-wide approach towards:
   a. understanding the nature and diversity of the online student cohort
   b. institutional funding and resourcing
   c. developing, implementing and regularly reviewing quality standards for online teaching, learning design and student support, including engagement and retention strategies.
2. Early intervention with students to connect, prepare and engage is essential.
3. The role of teacher-presence is key to building student engagement within the online class.
4. Content, curriculum and delivery needs to be designed specifically for online learning, through:
   a. designing for online
   b. being engaging, interactive and supportive
   c. strengthening interaction amongst students.
5. Regular and structured contact points between the institution and the student provide connection and direction along the student journey.
6. Learning analytics have an important place in informing appropriate and effective student interventions.
7. Collaboration across the institution is required to integrate and embed support; delivering it to students at point of need.

Implications for policy, practice and research

These seven findings informed the development of 10 *National Guidelines for Improving Student Outcomes in Online Learning*, primarily for institutions offering online undergraduate education, but also for other online education, particularly where there is a similar diversity of the student cohort.
1. Know who the students are.
2. Develop, implement and regularly review institution-wide quality standards for delivery of online education.
3. Intervene early to address student expectations, and build skills and engagement.
4. Explicitly value and support the vital role of teacher-presence.
5. Design for online.
6. Engage and support through content and delivery.
7. Build collaboration across campus to offer holistic, integrated and embedded student support.
8. Contact and communicate throughout the student journey.
9. Use learning analytics to target and personalise student interventions.
10. Invest in online education to ensure access and opportunity.

Read the full report here.

3.3. Good Practice Case Studies

The University of Wollongong – Strategic approach to supporting regional and remote students

University profile

At the University of Wollongong (UOW) the proportion of students from regional and remote communities made up 23.1 per cent (3,474 students) and 0.2 per cent (30 students) respectively of the overall undergraduate student cohort in 2015. In the same year, the undergraduate student cohort at UOW consisted of 21,866 students. UOW has a diversified cohort of undergraduate students with representation from the following equity groups in 2015:

- 1.8 per cent of the total cohort identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 25.1 per cent of the total cohort were from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- 11.3 per cent of the total cohort had a disability

Strategic approach

There are two strategic approaches that UOW utilises to attract and retain regional and remote students. These include:

- a multi-campus strategy to foster students staying connected to their communities
- a university-wide student life cycle approach to attracting, transitioning, retaining and ensuring the success of regional and remote students.

UOW has seven campuses located in the Illawarra South East, South-West Sydney and Southern Sydney Regions (see Figure 1). Through the pre-access and access phases of the student life cycle, UOW strategically targets programs and university offers to ensure students have the best opportunity for success at University. As these campuses generally attract students from low socioeconomic (SES), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and regional and remote backgrounds, offering the students the opportunity to remain connected to their communities in a small and supportive campus environment is important to their retention and success at university, especially in their first year. As the students progress through university at UOW's regional and metropolitan campuses, there is a strong focus on contextualised co-curricular, transition and support, peer learning and academic development activities, with dedicated staff from these areas physically present at the campuses. In addition to this, each of the campuses has a Regional or Metropolitan Careers Consultant and employability programs to increase employment outcomes for these students.

Figure 1: UOW's multi-campus strategy
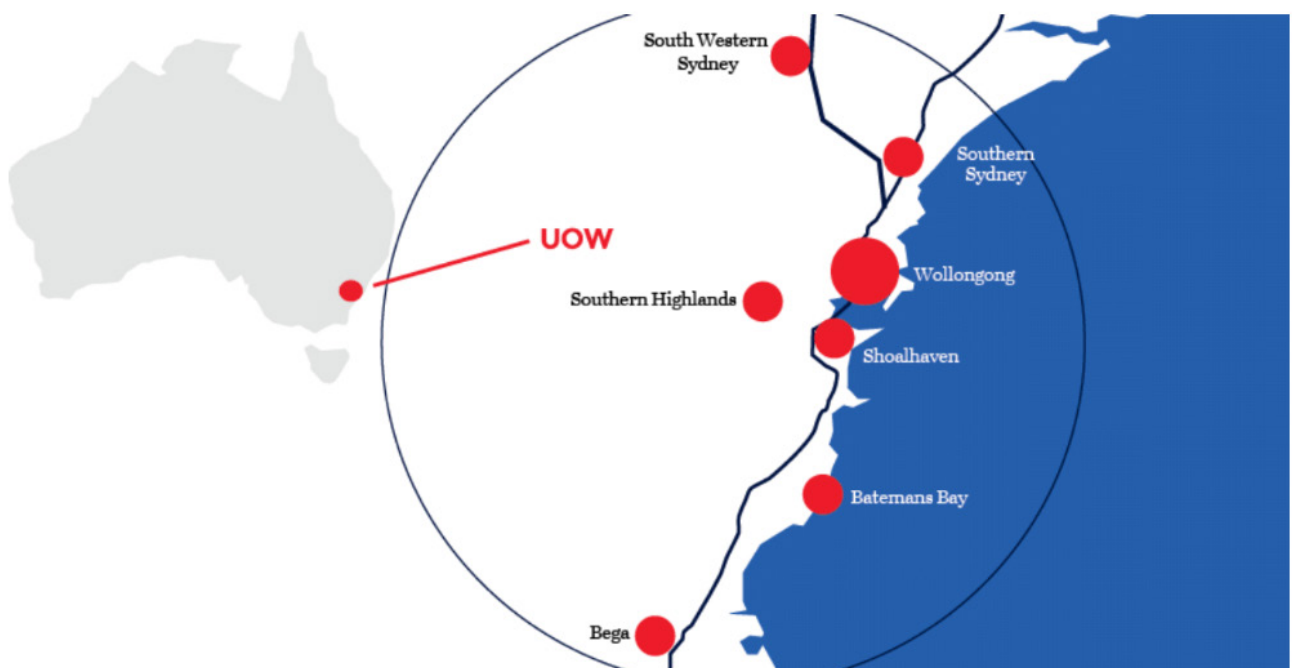
This university-wide student life cycle approach is mirrored across all UOW campuses, including the Wollongong campus where students have moved away from their local communities. In addition to the co-curricular, transition and support, peer learning and academic development activities that occur at all UOW campuses, there is a strong focus on Learning, Teaching and Curriculum. The Designing for Diversity Project was launched in 2013 and has resulted in the development of resources and professional development of university teaching staff to support them in designing pedagogy for diverse groups of students. The strategy has included creating socially inclusive online learning environments. This is underpinned by a sophisticated approach to learning analytics that aims to maximise success of all students by understanding the learner and their learning context in large first year subjects. In addition to this, a strong focus on accommodation scholarships and embedding transition and support activities, including peer learning, in residential campus environments has strengthened the retention and success of regional and remote students across UOW.

Outcomes

The HEIMS data indicate that representation of individuals from regional and remote communities at UOW has increased by 3.5 per cent over the last 10 years, to 28 per cent in 2015. Table 1 shows that the University had a very good retention ratio (1.04) for regional students, meaning that regional students had a higher retention rate (86 per cent) than the total cohort (83.5 per cent). Remote students were retained slightly less well than the total cohort. Success rates and ratios were also high and mirrored the different patterns for regional and remote students observed for retention outcomes. UOW's overall completion rate based on the 2009 cohort was 76.7 per cent.

Table 1: Equity performance for students from regional and remote backgrounds

| UOW (2015) | Retention | | Participation | Success | |
	Rate	Ratio	Rate	Rate	Ratio
Regional (ASGS)	86.0%	1.04	28.0%	89.8%	1.01
Remote (ASGS)	78.2%	0.94		86.6%	0.97

Source: HEIMS data: 2015 Appendix 5 – Equity Performance Data; https://docs.education.gov.au/node/41766

James Cook University — Strategic approach to supporting regional and remote students

University profile

James Cook University (JCU) is a multi-campus university with over 20,000 students. Courses are offered in Townsville, Cairns, Singapore and Brisbane, with study centres at Thursday Island, Mount Isa and Mackay. Of the 22,784 domestic students at JCU in 2015, 22.8 per cent were from low SES backgrounds, 21.9 per cent of students came from regional or remote areas, over 50 per cent were the first in their families to attend university, 4.5 per cent were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 4.5 per cent had a disability. National and state data indicate that people in JCU's catchment area experience social and economic disadvantage, including in terms of secondary school completion rates, participation rates in higher education and internet access.

Strategic approach

JCU is committed to enhancing students' access, participation and success through a whole-of-institution approach to widening participation, learning, teaching and the student experience, including appropriate facilities and access to technologies. To provide strategic guidance and leverage in relation to the realisation of this agenda, JCU has authored the _Access, Participation and Success Plan 2015 –2017_ which is underpinned by the institution's values and the belief that place is powerful.

The _JCU Access, Participation and Success Plan 2015-2017_ established a four-domain framework across the student life cycle with indicators (outcomes) for each area. The framework draws on work by Naylor et al. (2013) and is informed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfares (2014) articulation of equity performance indicators. The focus on prioritising expenditure is on sustainable, collaborative, and evidence informed actions.

Since 2014, there has been a focus on 20 courses with over 100 EFTSL and high levels of diverse students to target interventions in a whole-of-institution approach, including outreach and partnership, transition activities, academic skills and initiatives to support successful participation of a diverse student cohort. In addition, HEPPP programs provide employment opportunities for students which in itself has a retention effect.

Outcomes

Robust evaluation of core programs demonstrates their influence on student retention:
*   Equity scholarships: In 2015, a total of 222 students from low SES backgrounds received a scholarship, award or bursary with retention rates of 79 per cent compared with 69 per cent of those who did not receive scholarship support.
*   Student mentors: with retention for participants at 82 per cent, compared to 62 per cent for non-participants in 2015
*   Unistart — university preparatory program: 78 per cent retention for participants, compared to 70 per cent for non-participants in 2015
*   Peer Assisted Study Sessions — PASS: 82 per cent retention for participants, compared to 66 per cent for non-participants in 2015.

HEIMS data indicate that JCU has always had a very high representation of individuals from regional and remote communities (87.6 per cent in 2015). Table 1 shows that the University achieved parity in terms of retention ratio for regional students, and that remote students had a higher retention rate (77.5 per cent) than the total cohort (76.4 per cent). Success rates and ratios for regional and remote students, on the other hand, were below those of the total cohort.

Table 1: Equity performance for students from regional and remote backgrounds

JCU (2015)	Retention		Participation	Success	
	Rate	Ratio	Rate	Rate	Ratio
Regional (ASGS)	76.3%	1.00	87.6%	85.2%	0.95
Remote (ASGS)	77.5%	1.02		81.8%	0.95

University of Tasmania — The University Preparation Program (UPP): an open-access enabling program to widen participation and enhance preparation for higher education

Program outline

The University Preparation Program (UPP) at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) is a fee-free, open-access enabling program. UPP is an alternative pathway for students who would otherwise not qualify for, or even contemplate, university studies. It is a strategy to widen participation in higher education in Tasmania where university participation is lower than national averages. UPP was developed on the small regional campus in Burnie, north-west Tasmania, 21 years ago to improve access to higher education for mature age students, in response to industry downturns.

UPP aims to familiarise students with the university academic culture, and develop students' academic literacies and skills to prepare them for undergraduate studies. Typically, the UPP cohort is diverse in age, prior educational experiences, and cultural background. Most UPP students are from inner regional or outer regional areas, and they tend to belong to one or more of the following categories: low socioeconomic backgrounds; mature age; first-in-family; students from refugee backgrounds; and students with disabilities, including mental health conditions.

The course delivery mirrors the undergraduate structure at UTAS of students studying units, attending lectures and tutorials, and/or learning online (via the UTAS Learning Management System). Students can study UPP full-time or part-time, during the two standard university 13-week semesters. UPP is part of the UTAS formal institutional enrolment processes, which helps students become familiar with the university administrative systems. Support has been intentionally built into UPP, and has evolved, in response to the needs and challenges of the diverse student cohort. Support is personalised, holistic, integrated, and occurs throughout the whole of the student life cycle. Unique to UPP are the weekly Supported Studies sessions that offer an opportunity for assistance with coursework, and the development of peer support groups. Flexibility in studying on-campus or online, or a combination of the two, enables students to choose the mode that best suits them.

Outcomes

Major expansion since 2011 has resulted in UPP being delivered on-campus (state-wide in Burnie, Hobart, and Launceston) and online. In 2017, 435 students are enrolled in UPP, and 921 former UPP students are enrolled in an undergraduate course. In gaining academic skills, students, in turn, develop confidence, a sense of belonging to the institution, and an identity as a university student.[1] Longitudinal research in north-west Tasmania found that in gaining the foundations for change (i.e. academic skills and an awareness of the academic culture) students had the confidence to embark on an undergraduate degree. Confidence and support are paramount in environments where higher education is not part of the family tradition or community culture. Participation in UPP was found to have a transformative effect on many of the participants — personally, educationally, and professionally.[2] Furthermore, the ripple effect of attitudinal changes in students has the potential to influence their families and communities.

Future development of the program

Many UPP students live in regional areas, away from the three campuses, and study online out of necessity. Retention is more challenging for this group, and the provision of face-to-face support in the students' local communities is desirable. A strategy to achieve this goal is to expand the UPP collaboration with the local libraries (LINCs) and community online access centres.

---

[1] Crawford, N. (2014). Practical and profound: Multi-layered benefits of a university enabling program and implications for higher education. *International Studies in Widening Participation*, 1(2), 15-30.

[2] Crawford, N., Johns, S., Jarvis, L., Hawkins, C., Harris, M., & McCormack, D. (2015). *Foundations for change, confidence, and new opportunities: impacts of a university enabling program in north-west Tasmania*. Paper presented at the Inaugural Students Transitions Achievement Retention and Success (STARS) Conference.

Southern Cross University — A regional university's approach to connect and prepare online education students' transition to study

Program outline

Southern Cross University (SCU) is a regional university playing a major role in widening the participation of people from underrepresented groups in higher education, with 25 per cent of its students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, 57 per cent from regional and remote areas, and 4.2 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Students who study via online education account for over 40 per cent of the University's student cohort. Consistent with the sector, retention rates of online students at Southern Cross University are consistently below those of on-campus students.

In an effort to both improve the transition experience and the retention rates of online students, the Prepare and Connect engagement initiative was developed to respond to the early transition needs of online students, prior to and during orientation, focusing on academic expectations and the use of learning technology. The opportunity for students to meet other online students, hear tips from students in the UniMentor program and connect with staff in their discipline were also critical features of the program. UniMentors are experienced students who have overcome the same challenges and offer support and assistance to students in their first semester (or session) of study.

The Prepare and Connect initiative aimed to connect in particular with students from low SES, regional and remote, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and those who were first in their family to study at university. From Session 1 2016, face-to-face Prepare and Connect events were held at the Gold Coast, Lismore and Coffs Harbour campuses as well as the Grafton Learning Centre. In 2017, Connect and Prepare events to specifically target the needs of SCU's remotely located distance students were successfully trialled at Kempsey, Port Macquarie and Taree.

Outcomes

The Prepare and Connect initiative aligns closely with best practice as articulated in Stone's recent study which recommended that institutions intervene early to address student expectations, build skills and engagement[1] . Evidence to date has shown that the initiative successfully engages with students in the very early transition stage. The project has enabled local online students to meet each other and staff face-to-face in a welcoming and supportive environment, providing the opportunity to become familiar with the online learning space and try out online tools. Students reported leaving more confident, feeling supported and knowing where to go for ongoing assistance.

Results so far indicate that those who attended the Prepare and Connect event were more likely to be enrolled in at least one unit post-Census date when compared with students who were invited but did not attend. The difference was between 12 and 23 percentage points for the first three sessions of program implementation. It is worth noting that attendance rates have varied substantially across sessions with between 18 and 34 per cent of invited students actually attending the event.

Future development of the program

Currently, options are being explored to embed the on-campus Prepare and Connect events for online students at the Gold Coast, Lismore and Coffs Harbour campuses in the schedule of events during orientation week. A proposal is currently underway to further develop and implement a model for extending outreach style events which Connect and Prepare clusters of students residing in remote areas.

[1] Stone, C. (2017) *Opportunity through Online Learning: Improving student access, participation and success in higher education*. Perth: National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE).

University of New England — Early Alert: a student-centric approach to enhancing student engagement regardless of geographic location

Program outline

Almost half of enrolled students (40 per cent) at the University of New England (UNE) reside in regional locations and four per cent are considered to be living in a remote area, while 80 per cent of the total student cohort choose to study online. The challenge for UNE, in supporting online students who reside and study in regional and remote Australia, is to provide appropriate intervention and support at a distance.

Early Alert is an important element of a comprehensive university strategy that is led by the PVC Academic Innovation portfolio and aims to connect, prepare and engage UNE students in their university experience regardless of geographic location. The program provides a suite of wraparound services to students identified as at risk of disengagement from their studies. This is achieved through the use of contemporary technology, including engagement analytics, and support through a case-by-case management process implemented by specialist case managers within the Early Alert Team. The Early Alert Program allows case managers to identify and respond to distinct student needs in real time, building social capital, and acknowledging differences in the student experience and unique needs within discrete cohorts.

A sequence of interventions aims to demystify online learning and create an increased sense of belonging for commencing students. These include:
- structured contact prior to the start of teaching, often over several months, informs each commencing student of what to expect
- a personal call and follow-up from a peer advisor at the point of enrolment
- a hard copy *Commencement Pack* and *Online Orientation Program*.

During teaching periods, timed weekly emails, milestone communications—including pre-Census Check-up Week—underpin systematised identification of students at risk of disengagement through the Early Alert program. This data-driven approach allows students to be identified, contacted and case managed through tools which target student wellness (fitness for purpose), happiness (self-stated satisfaction), shared sentiment and discontinuation reasons (Automated Wellness Engine, Emoticon System, the Vibe and Unit Discontinuation data).

As broad support trends are identified through individual case-by-case management, feedback loops are closed in real time on a just-in-time, just-in-case basis across the major social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and a blog known as the Insiders' Guide. This provides a 360-degree view of the student experience which supports students to navigate policy and procedures to encourage individual success.

Early Alert does not seek to replicate or duplicate the support services being delivered through the schools or other directorates; rather it provides a frontline triage service for students. Students are referred to programs delivered by Institutional Support Units, extra-curricular activities available to students in their local community or local support and regional outreach services for students living in remote areas.

Outcomes

Since 2010, more than 53,000 incidents of support have been carried out for more than 20,170 individual students. The support and regular communications are well received by students, with enthusiastic comments indicating the approach influenced their sense of belonging and student identity and demonstrated the University's commitment to the success of its students. When compared to their non-case managed peers, students are between two per cent and nine per cent more likely to continue their studies into the next teaching period (varies depending on teaching period enrolled).

Future development of the program

To improve the tracking of students across their university journey, including periods of intermission and discontinuation, systematic evaluation of the program will be further strengthened. Moreover, there are continued efforts underway to ensure a consistent student experience in terms of the quality and timeliness of support provided by Early Alert and partners across, and external to, the University.

3.4. National Priorities Pool (NPP) Projects Focusing on Regional and Remote Students

UNIVERSITY	PROJECT	2014
University of Wollongong	***Supported pathways to education & employment***	**$299,721**
	This project aims to improve the participation of low SES, rural and remote and Indigenous people in higher education and employment by providing 250-350 individuals with opportunities to enhance their academic capacity and options post-schooling to access higher education and employment through a supported pathways program.	

UNIVERSITY	PROJECT	2015
Federation University Australia	***Facilitating success for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds at regional universities***	**$149,500**
	This project will identify successful approaches to increasing the success of low socioeconomic status domestic students studying at regional universities, provide guidance about how to begin addressing gaps in current approaches to supporting these students, and provide policy advice on potential new approaches to fostering success for students in this target group.	

UNIVERSITY	PROJECT	2016
University of Southern Queensland	***Australian universities and public libraries working together to facilitate success for low socio-economic students living in regional and remote communities***	**$139,824**
	The project will develop a 'Framework for Australian Universities and Public Libraries Supporting Regional and Remote Students', providing recommendations, strategies and resources to guide the development of accessible, relevant and sustainable study and learning support to meet the needs of low SES higher education students living in regional/remote communities.	
CQUniversity	***Improving the transition and retention of regional students from low socio-economic backgrounds: A '5 Ps' approach***	**$179,094**
	This project will identify strategies to support regional students from low SES backgrounds during their transition into university to address persistently high levels of attrition, especially at regional universities. The project will trial a pre-commencement intervention strategy aimed at supporting the transition, participation, retention and success of commencing regional low SES students across six disciplines (nursing & midwifery, health sciences, social sciences, education, business and engineering) and five regional universities.	

4.Workshop Attendees

Kylie Austin

Kylie Austin is the Outreach, Pathways and Co-Curricular Manager at the University of Wollongong. Kylie has worked on HEPPP funded projects over the last eight years, and has led a team of 12 staff who are dedicated to designing, implementing and evaluating outreach activities for underrepresented students in higher education. Kylie has also completed her PhD, which is focused on the development of mutually beneficial partnerships to increase the outcomes for individuals who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Rachel Callahan

Rachel has been successfully leading the equity and diversity agenda at Southern Cross University since 2006. Rachel has been pivotal in introducing new initiatives aimed at bridging the disadvantage many students and communities face across SCU's footprint including: The Stellar Program in the Clarence Valley, The UniMentor Program and The UNI-BOUND School outreach programs. Rachel holds a Bachelor of Business from Griffith University and a Graduate Diploma (Law) from Southern Cross University.

Edward Campbell

Ed is Manager — Student Engagement and Retention at the University of New England and Chairs UNE's Orientation Committee, supporting the transition of more than 10,000 commencing students (online and on campus) each year. He leads UNE's Early Alert Program which won an ALTC Program Award and Citation in 2011 and has been involved in student engagement for the past 18 years. He is passionate about Engagement Analytics and is responsible for the development of UNE's peer-based Personalised Retention & Engagement Program (PREP) which supports commencing students from enrolment through the first weeks of studies. He has a background in rural journalism, public relations and marketing, is a reformed musician, and a very amateur gardener.

Buly Cardak

Buly Cardak is an Associate Professor of Economics in the Department of Economics and Finance, La Trobe University. His research focus is on the Economics of Education. He has worked on the equity and access implications of credit constraints on university participation and completion in Australia, the equity implications of Australian tertiary admissions processes and the differences between regional and metropolitan educational outcomes. He has also studied differences in outcomes between students from public and private schools. His research has been funded by $700,000 of competitive grants, published in leading international and Australian journals, is widely cited and has contributed to the policy debate on higher education in Australia.

Paul Corcoran

Dr Paul Corcoran has more than four decades' experience in tertiary education, including senior administrative roles and academic roles in higher education institutions in Australia and internationally. Paul holds a Master of Educational Administration (Hons) from the University of New England and a Doctor of Philosophy (Business) from the University of the Sunshine Coast. He is a Fellow of the Association for Tertiary Education Management. Paul joined the Australian Government's Higher Education Division in 2011, before moving to the Office for Learning and Teaching in 2014. He has recently become Director, Equity Policy in the Department of Education and Training.

Nicole Crawford

Nicole Crawford has more than 10 years' experience teaching and researching in higher education. She has worked in pre-degree programs at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) since 2011. She was a co-chief investigator in a research project that explored the longer-term benefits of UTAS's University Preparation Program (UPP) in northwest Tasmania. She is a recipient of a 2016 OLT Seed Grant, Lighting the path(way): articulating curriculum design principles for open access enabling programs, and a 2017 HEPPP NPP grant, Improving the beaten track. In pre-degree programs, she is involved in unit coordination, teaching and support. She initiated and leads UTAS's Social Inclusion Community of Practice, and is the facilitator of the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) Special Interest Group on Mental Health.

Sally Kift

Sally Kift is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (PFHEA) and President of the Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows (ALTF). From 2012–17, she was Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at James Cook University. Prior to commencing at JCU in 2012, Sally was a Professor of Law at Queensland University of Technology, where she also served as Law Faculty Assistant Dean, Teaching & Learning (2001–06) and QUT's foundational Director, First Year Experience (2006–07). Sally is a national Teaching Award winner (2003) and national Program Award winner (2007). She was awarded a Senior Fellowship by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) in 2006 to investigate the first year experience and is currently a Discipline Scholar in Law. Sally is an Adjunct Professor at JCU, La Trobe University and QUT.

Steven Larkin

Professor Steven Larkin is a Kungarakany and Yanyula man from Darwin in the Northern Territory, Australia. Steven is Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Newcastle and previously was the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University from 2009. He was also Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) at Charles Darwin University. Steven continues to provide invaluable input as a management level member of several well-respected professional affiliations, which include: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC); National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN); The Healing Foundation; and Beyond Blue.

Karen Nelson

Karen Nelson is the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students) at the University of Sunshine Coast. Karen is responsible for developing the USC student experience and leading a range of innovative curricular and co-curricular initiatives to enhance the student experience, retention and success. Karen has previously led a series of large national projects, which have produced transferable resources for the sector. In 2016, she led an eight-institution national project shaping the 21st century student experience in regional universities and in 2017 produced a research report for the NCSEHE, *Understanding the completion patterns of equity students in regional universities*. Karen is the Editor of the *Student Success* Journal and Co-Chair of the annual STARS Conference.

Louise Pollard

Prior to her appointment as 2017 Equity Fellow, Ms Pollard was the Manager of Aspire UWA, The University of Western Australia's nationally recognised widening participation program that works with 65 schools in Perth and regional Western Australia to raise aspirations for higher education. Ms Pollard is also a member of the Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia National Executive Committee and was previously the peak body's representative on the NCSEHE Advisory Board. Prior to joining UWA, Louise was a teacher and Student Services Coordinator based at a WA Department of Education secondary school. She also has extensive experience in community development and education program implementation, having worked and volunteered in a range of international contexts, predominantly in Timor Leste.

Cathy Stone

Cathy Stone is a 2016 Equity Fellow and 2017 Visiting Research Fellow with the NCSEHE. She is also a Conjoint Associate Professor in Social Work with the University of Newcastle, Australia. Cathy has a longstanding interest in and commitment to student equity, widening participation and improving the student experience for increasingly diverse university student cohorts. She has worked for many years in developing and managing student support and success programs in both on-campus and online university environments, as well as researching ways these can be improved. Cathy's key research interests and publications focus particularly on improving the experiences of mature age, First-in-Family and online students. Further details about Cathy's work can be found at: http:// www.newcastle.edu.au/profile/cathy-stone.

Nadine Zacharias

Dr Nadine Zacharias is Senior Research Fellow at the NCSEHE and was an inaugural Equity Fellow in 2016. Nadine's research interests and expertise are at the intersection of equity research, practice and policy at institutional and national levels. She has led applied research projects in the fields of equity policy and program management, inclusive teaching and learning and gender equity in employment. Nadine was Director, Equity and Diversity at Deakin University from 2011–16 where she led one of the most integrated and effective Equity teams in Australian higher education.

DISCLAIMER