# Building Legacy and Capacity Webinar Four – Equity 2030: A Long-term Strategic Vision for Student Equity in Higher Education

Nadine Zacharias: Welcome, everybody. This is Nadine Zacharias representing the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. We are just before 1:00 so we'll give people another minute or so to come into the session before we kick it off.

It seems like we have fairly stable attendance so we might make a start. Welcome, everyone, to this webinar on the really exciting topic of equity 2030, a long-term strategic vision for student equity in higher education. I'm your host for today's webinar and I would like to introduce my co-presenters for today who are Matt Brett from La Trobe university who was a 2017 Equity Fellow with the National Centre and a co-facilitator for the workshop that we held in Melbourne. Daniel Edwards, who is research director, tertiary education at ACER and was a participant on the day and Sally Kift who is, among many other things, 2018 NCSEHE Visiting Fellow and who provided a context setting session on the day that many said should be mandatory viewing for everyone working in this space, so Sally is going to present an abbreviated version of that session to you today.

First of all, I would like to do an acknowledgment of country which is an interesting concept in a webinar situation because we are meeting all over the country. There are more than 40 of you in the session and counting but I'm acknowledging the traditional people in Melbourne so this is the country from which we are being broadcast to you today. This is the fourth and final webinar of the Building Legacy and Capacity series which is a strategic initiative the National Centre has implemented over the past 12 months. I'm going to introduce it quite briefly at the start of the session before handing over to our presenters to talk to you about the discussion and the insights from the final workshop that was held in Melbourne just on two weeks ago.

What you'll see is that we had some reasonably complex discussions on the day that we condensed into a 30-minute presentation for you to really serve as a discussion starter. We very much want to continue the conversation that started during that workshop because we can't exactly say that all the questions got resolved on the day and we shall show you what further opportunities there are to contribute to this conversation beyond the webinar. A little bit of housekeeping - you'll see that we have a captioner who is live captioning for us which is coming up on your screens. You can resize this, just have a bit of a play with that. There's also a question pod at the bottom of your control panel and I encourage you to learn to love that control panel. It's either on the right-hand side or left-hand side of your screen. There's various ways of resizing screens and making some things bigger than others, there's also an opportunity for you to ask questions of us during the session and at the end. There's a drop-down menu towards the bottom of the control panel where you can leave your questions and they will come through to us and then we can pick them up. We'll have a little conversation between presentations and then a longer session for discussion at the end.

There's also the opportunity, if the technology doesn't work for you at all, which I hope is not the case, to get in touch with Jane who's supporting us technically during the webinar so the email address there is admin@adcet.edu.au in case you have any technical glitches or questions. We are planning to present for about 20 minutes and then open up for a brief discussion in the middle of the session, continue to talk a bit about the outcomes from the workshop and then open it up for a more comprehensive Q and A in the second half of the session.

I'm going to launch into it now and start with a bit of an introduction of the Building Legacy and Capacity series. I hope that my presentation works. Here you are. OK, so the logic behind the concepts really came from the National Centre Board which was looking for an avenue to leverage nationally funded research and develop a format that enabled really productive conversations about complex issues because we felt there was good material that was held in lots of reports that sat on a website and we were looking for ways to extract this good information and the people who had conducted the research to really advance the national conversation.

The topics that we have looked at during the workshop series were quite diverse as you can see, so the first workshop looked at career education and low SES regional remote schools, we then looked at current students from regional and remote backgrounds, the last workshop was on evaluating Indigenous higher education and now this current one which was really forward-looking and very much in the spirit of legacy-building from the current work that many of us have been engaged in.

The objectives of the workshop are to define a collective knowledge base that can inform future research and practice; to collectively engage in strategic and action planning to inform institutional practice and future research and to develop evidence-formed policy advice.

The structure of the workshops are very consistent. There are six high-level questions which frame group discussions and they are there on the screen. We very much look at the nature of the problem. We are quite keen about success, what does success look like?  What do we already know?  What sort of principles can we articulate for good practice?  How does Government relate to the issue?  And are there any gaps in knowledge that will promote more positive changes if we had the answers to some questions?

Each of the conversations was informed by a set of reading materials and you have been provided with those as part of your registration email. There will be a follow-up publication from the workshop, in this case we are developing a discussion paper. These were the experts on the day and we were ably supported by the research team from the NCSEHE so you can see it was a really illustrious group of participants and I am handing over to Sally now to take you through her context-setting piece that she provided on the day with a bit more detail but I guess we had to fit it all in to this webinar format and Sally talks very fast so, Sally, over to you.

Sally Kift: Thanks very much, Nadine, and welcome to everybody. I'm delighted to be able to take part in this. So if you'll forgive the speed of this, but it was just to try and suggest to you that there's a lot going on at the moment and probably the take-away is that equity's quite vulnerable in this space and it is probably the Earnest and Young report at the bottom of that screen, April was a big month. A real pile of reports came out, captured there. The earnest and Young one I'll focus on for a minute because that's the one I think you'll find your institutional leadership are probably reading. There's only one mention of equity in that report and that was in the context of policies that created equity and diversity now, the quote is "constraining evolution" in the context of the need to assure competitive workforce so we all need to be always vigilant. Thanks, Nadine.

We're extremely fortunate in the sector to have the Mitchell Institute, if I could have the next slide, please, Nadine - the Mitchell institute has done fantastic work and you've got two of the reports there. I'm not seeing the slide change over, not sure whether that's working. I'll keep going. So this is the Mitchell Institute report looking at participation in higher education and, again, it is so disappointing that in 2018 when we should really have been reaching peak equity and peak participation because of years of patient outreach work, the cap's gone back on as the Mitchell Institute has said, even if the trends of the last two years were continuing in higher education and vocational education, there still wouldn't be enough growth in higher education to offset a steep fall in equity and we'd be going backwards.

I have given you there the higher education participation possibilities. The upwards trajectory would have been if we had kept going for 2018, the flat line is after the two years of cap. If we just do it on the basis of population growth. The decreasing line is in higher education so again it would be worse if that was also included but a - if debt was also included but a decreasing line if they don't relieve the caps in any way. If I can have the next slide, please.

We have been fortunate and long-served by the Grattan Institute which produced its usual rigorous analysis in the Dropping Out report that was released in April. Useful breakdown of the points of vulnerability as you can see there on the screen and I think we've all known this but good to have it set out. Very usefully, also, the Grattan Institute did identify the strong benefit of being at uni and doing some study even if you don't complete but, the next slide, please, Nadine, but the real problem potentially with what Grattan has suggested - and they recommended that QILT, quality indicators of learning and teaching sites should include personalised information on risk of non-completion. So students could go in and put in their variables and find out how likely it was that they would not complete and here's a picture of what that looked like from if you were a student, that was studying in a remote area, so you're not Indigenous, you're a male, you're speaking English at home and have no disability, if you're studying remotely - sorry from a remote area, you've already got a 36% chance of not completing. If you move to a metropolitan campus, that decreases by 7% but then if you make the bad decision to drop four subjects and go part-time your chances of not completing have been increased by 35% and if you go to study off campus it is another 2% so you end up with a grand total of a 66% total risk of non-completion.

The report generated headlines that many of you probably would have seen that drop out’s pretty easy to predict, you have to be part-time and online. Don't know that that's necessarily the message we want to be sending our cohorts. Next slide, please, Nadine.

You will have seen continually this focus on fixation and moral panic around ATAR and ATAR is a pretty blunt and inaccurate instrument, I think we'd agree. Again, the Mitchell Institute has come to our salvation by some rigorous work saying that less than - only about 26% of students are now being admitted on the basis of ATAR. You'll see that's decreased from when TEQSA and the Higher Education Standards Panel did its work in 2014 when there were 31% of students admitted on the basis of ATAR. The point is we have many other bases for admission and many of the vulnerable equity cohorts are coming in via very diverse pathways. It would be my suggestion that as part of the equity visioning for 2030, I think we need to take a position on ATAR and say what our preferred position around tertiary entrance might look like. The next slide, please, Nadine.

Then we come to a particularly happy place. For those of you who are not familiar, on 8 June the Higher Education Standards Panel produced its final report on improving retention, completion and success in higher education. There's a lot to like in this report and it's a lot of what we want just to deal with Grattan in the first instance, they made no recommendation as regards Grattan's recommendation that that quite rude measure of potential for non-completion should go up on the QILT website. They dealt with it far more empathetically and suggested that as part of a required mandated retention strategy that every institution should have, there should be an entry interview with every student and the student should be encouraged to think about what their completion prospects might be at that point and then enrolment be reviewed for those who have not engaged with their studies to the level that you might - that they might have been discussing by census date but apart from the requirement for retention strategy there's are also a recommendation and the Government has accepted all 18 recommendations in this regard. Again, a lot to celebrate. There's a recommendation that every institution have mental health strategy and implementation plan. The work done at La Trobe in particular around suggesting we have nested courses with appropriate exit points to demonstrate to students they've achieved and been successful, that's been recommended, that there be better careers advising for both school leavers and mature-age and there be a careers interview on entry. That's pretty exciting.

The panel identified and dealt sympathetically with the fact that external students are probably two and a half times more likely to withdraw and said that institutions should pay particular attention to that. Anyway, I'd recommend that report to you and my final slide, Nadine, is just to remind us, and everyone, that there's been a lot of work in this place. The NCSEHE Fellows have done fantastic work and a lot of that work you'll see picked up in the Higher Education Standards Panel report. When I spoke at the opening of the National Centre when it was at the University of SA in 2008, I talked about transition pedagogy so we know that we've got a lot to do to get students to come in but once they're in our institutions we need to work hard to support them and rise to the challenge of the great trust that they place in us. We need joined-up institutional approaches, academic and professional staff working together in a partnership that takes students' success seriously, as Vincent Tinto says students won't rise to low expectations and equity practitioners need to have a place at the curriculum design/redesign table to make sure we're holding everyone accountable to an inclusive education.

I'll hand over now to Daniel Edwards.

Daniel Edwards: Thanks, Sally. Thank you for having me and hello to everybody out there in webinar land. My role as Nadine said was as a workshop participant in the workshop a couple of weeks ago and I have been tasked with talking a bit about the threshold issues that were thrashed around early on in the workshop and really the focus of talking about the threshold issues were to begin to identify or talk about some of the key things that were impeding progress in the area or that we need to address in order to move forward so thinking of it as a threshold, we need to get over this to move forward. It was a very complex discussion and there was a range of issues and a lot of whiteboard space being used by Nadine in particular in that workshop. So what I have to say here is really not doing it justice but it's something that we've tried to work together to find some of the key things that came out of the day and out of that discussion and hopefully seeing how that leads into what the rest of the discussion is going to be about that follows me.

So the main points that we have up on the screen cover some of those issues. One of them is the prominence of equity fading in mainstream policy debates. There was a lot of talk about a shift in focus over recent years and we can track that over many decades but even in recent years a shift from participation and access being very monitored and key areas that have been talked about to more about value for money and certainly performance which is coming in as a big dialogue in the sector at the moment.

There was discussion about the discourse regarding access still being dominated by a focus on merit-based access for school leavers and that's at the detriment of talking about the other 50% of people who get into university, commence university each year, which is mature-aged students and people who are coming via pathways that are not ATAR-based pathways. Sally's already spoken about the ATAR issues already so I won't go on on that but I think it's important to note that there was discussion and recognition that the non-ATAR pathways groups are much more likely to be equity students than the high-performing school leavers with high ATAR. So that's why it's important to change the discourse around that group.

There was also lot of discussion about context and making sure that we again recognise that higher education doesn't operate inside a bubble. The system that spans - our system spans schools, VET and industry, all the pathways that we have into and out of the higher education sector rely on the workforce, rely on schools, rely on VET, rely on a whole lot of other aspects. Those aspects impact on who gets in, who gets out, what people - what it outcomes are for people who are leaving, the tertiary sector, etc.  It is just important - we often do think about context but it is an important thing to re-emphasise, that there is context to the higher ed. system.

Also in terms of this we were talking about it being global so there's a broad global perspective. In an equity-based context, there was also some discussion about international students, the fact that they make up 25% of our student population but when it comes to equity discussions they're not discussed all that much and that there are potentially equity dimensions relating to this group. I think there's been research around first in family, for example, we also know there are different metrics which might track each student's going not as well as some others so just the global perspective is not just about the world as an industry but also the way that Australian higher education is attracting students in.

The building of an innovation economy is not possible without strong accessible higher education - higher education sector is another issue discussed. The accessible word in there is important in the context we were discussing this and, again, this is context, recognising there's a balance and a key role for higher education - that higher education plays in Australia, in the Australian economy, but I think also it's important to note there's a balance between what higher education can do and what other parts of our economy can do, for example migration.

The second-last dot-point there is sort of self-explanatory, that institutions are responsible for supporting the students that they enrol. This is coming through in terms of some of the performance-based and standards-panel discussions of that but in more detail - sorry, simplistically it's about knowing who are students are and what their needs are and for institutions to be able to support

The last one is about principles of equitable access to higher education and we'd need to flow through from equity groups to individuals who experience other kinds of disadvantage. We know there's work going on in this space at the moment but outside of the groups we tend to focus on there's often a lack of recognition of other areas of disadvantage and groups or people who might have disadvantages - refugees, care levers, first in families, even the international student in some respect need to be thought about too and perhaps there's a need to think about the way that these issues are captured in the future.

So the next slide, we also talked about progressing beyond the threshold and really where Matt's going to take us in his presentation pushes down this way but I thought this was useful just to show where the discussion around threshold issues came to a head or had these thoughts about where are we going to go. I'm not going to go into detail except to broadly say there was a strong discussion about focussing on positive rather than deficit when it comes to talking about equity. There was a discussion about broadening our understanding of the student population and its diversity within higher education and recognition this is happening. Half of Sally's presentation before was about some great stuff that is happening in this area and talking about how communicating the impact - sorry, communicating this diversity can have an impact if it's done in the right way.

The last point was better articulating the context of higher education sector. In Australia and in the globe. Matt will talk in much more detail about this but there was a sense early on in the discussions about clarifying the role of higher education in skills development, in social wellbeing, in a whole range of other areas that fit within what is it that higher education is setting out to achieve. Also there was the caveat in terms of that kind of discussion about recognising that higher education shouldn't be tasked with solving all the world's problems or just because there are these dimensions to it, it fits within a wider context and can't solve everything all the way through.

That's a quick spiel and I apologise for the phone calls in between. I'll pass on to Nadine now who will talk a bit more about the A Fair Chance For All aspect of this.

Nadine Zacharias: Thank you, Dan. I'll just get my audio and video back and while I do, I've put up for discussion the objective of A Fair Chance For All which we had a good look at on the day and basically asked the question: Is the objective of A Fair Chance For All still valid? This is the question I'd like to throw to you. So while you have a think about it, I'll read it to you.

The overall objective for equity in higher education is to ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole.

I mean, all of us in this space know that Australia's aiming for proportionate representation so equity students as a share of the student population in order to achieve equity but also know that that is not universally the case so that other jurisdictions use quite different ways of coming at the issue. What I'd like to encourage you to do is you can ask questions or raise your hand on your panel and if you do that and want to say something and respond to this question of is the objective of a fair chance for all still valid, I can unmute your microphone and you can make a comment to the total group so if we have any brave participants who want to say something in response to this question or in response to Dan's and Sally's presentations about context I'm happy to throw it to you. No?

We have a few people who were there on the day, people who were participants in the workshop. Does anyone want to make a comment?  No?  I'm happy to hold this over to the next session. We'll have a bit more time for Q and A at the very end. I might just throw it over to Matt and talk to us about the outcomes from the session and some of the strategic objectives we identified on the day. Over to you, Matt.

Matt Brett: Thanks, Nadine. Thanks also to Sally and Dan. Also getting in to too much detail around the way forward that was discussed at the workshop, I think it's worthwhile just to pause a bit on the last slide to recognise it is actually quite a very big question so we've put you on the spot there asking is this legacy framework, is it still valid in a context where we've just thrown a whole lot of challenges at you in terms of what's going on in the sector and what some of the threshold issues are et cetera?  Hopefully, as we work through strategic priorities moving forward you can reflect a little bit more on the legacy and impact of A Fair Chance For All and your response to that question:  Is it still valid?

On that point, I think it's worthwhile even if we think about what we're doing here today. We're all dialling in and video conferencing in from all part of the country with a live stenocaptioner giving us live accessible content. In some ways, we've got to this point of having this accessible platform because the sector has changed but also because we've had a long-term focus on accessibility and access for all various equity groups. Our very presence here today is a legacy of that framework in some ways.

And along those lines, a key outcome of the workshop was a recognition that the frameworks that we have are actually pretty good. Australia's got a very good higher education sector. It's got good equity practices in lots of ways, we've got a higher educational loan program for example that is the envy of the world in many respects and that was very much a feature of the product of the time and the focus of equity around the Dawkins reforms of higher education and A Fair Chance For All is really part of that. So what was the message that came through loud and clear through the workshop was not that we need to throw out A Fair Chance For All or throw out some of those other frameworks but just to recognise that they have been really important and they continue to be important but we perhaps need to refine and tweak them to respond to some of the current challenges, to be able to address some of those threshold issues and to prepare the sector for a future that's still a little bit uncertain with the role of technology, the role of globalisation et cetera is in some ways potentially really challenging the foundations of the sector and our assumptions about it. It's about building and extending A Fair Chance For All rather than saying it doesn't matter anymore but it was a bad framework that no longer served its purpose. It really recognises and celebrates A Fair Chance For All and tweaking and refining a bit is the key message.

Might come to the next slide, please, Nadine. So the next priority from that - and it sort of came up through the early discussion from Sally and Dan - is that we need to hook in to the broader context. Any tweaks to the equity frameworks that we might have that connect to the overarching objectives for higher education and increasingly tertiary education and with that, most people would have had access to some pre-reading. Not everyone may have had time to go through all the details but a key element of that reading was just reminding people of the work of Martin Trow and the whole concept of mass and universal higher education. We're pretty much there in Australia right now. 50% of school leavers now move in to tertiary education in some form, that's about 40% for higher education and that is likely to grow, notwithstanding any challenges or issues that we have, that we face right now. So we need to think about what this long-term overarching objective is for higher education, recognising it's likely to have a universal participation dimension to it and really making clearer the connection between equity and that broader function of higher education. In some ways the cues for that are already there in existing policy and legislation which talks about if the knowledge function of higher education - the role it plays in economic wellbeing and development. It is reminding people equity is part of these fundamentals of higher education but doing it in a way that really addresses the needs of policymakers and decision-makers so it kind of speaks their language and that it picks up on some issues that again were called out by Sally and Dan and might include greater recognition of things like life-long learning, health and wellbeing, employment outcomes and diversity in Australian society and accountability issues and getting a return on public and private investment in higher education.

We also need to do that in a way that really moves away from the deficit approach to thinking about equity and trying to elevate and promote the status of equity as a key and important component of what we do rather than some marginalised or side issue that's only the preserve of some members of the higher education sector. That is particularly the case when it comes to appropriate benchmarking where in some cases the history that is associated with some groups can see benchmarks placed on their performance which could serve to exclude them rather than finding ways of really challenging the structures in the system that could support them equally over the longer term.

That gets us to the next strategic priority which is thinking about a multidimensional concept of success and on the day I would say that most of the discourse and conversation was really focused, we certainly engaged some sector thought leaders on some of these really vexing questions but it wasn't until we got to this concept of success that we moved away from a consensus view of what the challenges and issues were and what some of the responses might be to recognising the success for many which is a problematic term that can be misused in some way. We need to approach the notion of success in a way that's multidimensional, that can accommodate some of the perspectives that many people have around success in ways that are really connected to the overarching objectives of higher education.

We see in other systems, like the school education system, we've got nuanced measures of success and equity particularly with the framework used with the My School and NAPLAN. I think another thing that came out from the workshop discussions and some of the work that myself and Stan and Sally have done post-workshop in trying to extract meaning from this is really place the interest of students at the forefront of what we're trying to do here. Whatever we do needs to be in the best interests of students, not necessarily can respond to some kind of policy compromise that might be structured...we also need to do this in a way that really doesn't privilege the quantitative over the qualitative and recognises the strengths and influence of those so it's as much about the stories as the stats and numbers and we need to put that in context we understand a whole picture of what works for whom, in what context. And why. I think it is probably fair to say that notwithstanding the strength of the Australian higher education system, they've got a long way to go in terms of really having a nuanced appreciation of that very question, what intentions work, for whom, why, et cetera? That's partly why there's been so much emphasis on evaluation of equity policy in recent times.

The last strategic priority is about equity evaluation, having been clear about what our objective might be and how that hooks in to the broader social and economic narrative that is driving Australian policymaking over the long-term and having a clear sense of what success might mean. It is just making sure we've got both the capability and infrastructure in the system to be able to move forward with assessing the success of equity policy over the longer term. And in some ways an important recognition for this is that the critical mass of equity researchers - we could have more. We could have a little bit more research, a little bit more research funding, a stronger pipeline of equity researchers that help the system to be able to best fulfil the equity objectives that it's setting - equity objectives that it's setting with a better culture that sees equity valuation as part of what various institutions might be doing rather than something a small subset of practitioners might be actively concerned with and making sure we've got the best methodologies, best data and best research to make that happen.

In terms of next steps for how we might progress with that, it's worthwhile recognising that there is quite a lot of information and research that's been done out of equity but we haven't necessarily pulled it all together into a coherent form with a meta-analysis and synthesis that would help us best understand what we could do better as a system. There's also a lot of data in the system that's not being as well utilised as it could be so part of this infrastructure piece is to make sure that we have access to, and can best make use of, the data we already collect rather than making it an issue of having to collect orders of magnitude more data to support our evaluation processes.

Some of this has been picked up by the research and innovation panel and the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education has just loaded up all the reports that have come from National Priorities Pool projects over the last few years into a single repository which is a fantastic achievement in its own right. The task is to pull the threads and help inform what we're doing together over the long-term.

Moving on to the last slide which is a first attempt or a first draft of being able to pull all these things together. The context, the broader direction of higher education, the contemporary challenges and strategic priorities. What Nadine, myself, Sally and Dan have done is to get a vision statement which in some ways has a resonance and connection to A Fair Chance For All...but it tries to start to funnel all these things down into a single slide that names all the elements we're trying to grapple with which will allow us over the longer term to unpack those into more detailed policies and practices.

Top of the list is a statement of Australian tertiary education system objectives which pull together the relevance of tertiary education for social wellbeing and cultural intellectual life as well as economic productivity angle as well. That becomes the overarching context which we need to hook in to and it's already stated equity dimension saying all members and groups in society who have access to high quality learning experience and opportunities aligned with the aspirations which fulfil their learning potential. It is a slight tweak to the way A Fair Chance For All framed these things and puts emphasis on all people recognising that different people have different aspirations and start from different places but as part of a lifelong learning journey, that there's a consistent option to access high quality education at every step. We're hoping to get feedback on this statement from everyone participating in this webinar today but if those aspects of the vision are valid we need to integrate that vision within the system and that opens up a number of system-level considerations, particularly that the system is by designable to accommodate the diversity present in Australian society for groups and communities or individuals. And, despite our best efforts of designing a system that's accessible to all, recognising we might need additional interventions to help some people for whom we cannot accommodate broad systems and features.

Lastly, there's a commitment to evaluation of making sure that we embed within our system a capacity of constantly assessing and evaluating the objective, how we're tracking against it and whether we need to change anything as a cyclical dynamic process rather than a fixed point in time. It becomes more of a process solution than a specific policy dimension in its own right.

So having gone through the equity 2030 vision statement as a discussion draft, we're going to just communicate what some of the next steps might be and throw it open to a Q and A. The next steps - bigger picture considerations, really responding to the universal participation dimension where there's in some ways a greater focus on personalised learning and individual needs being met and how do we do that in an efficient way and in a way that recognises that we don't have a magic pudding that can throw infinite resources at this particular issue and also doing that without making too many assumptions about where students are coming from. Part of that will be how we utilise online and flexible learning technologies and again today is a great example of what technology can do but this is just the starting point of what will happen over the longer term. You also need to think about the level of differentiation in the system. Right now Australia's got a small number of very large institutions and we're asking whether or not the institutions can meet the needs of the diverse student population. Lastly, thinking about this question that Dan raised before about whether or not this is equity society or equity in higher education and how do they fit together, which is in itself a very big question and proposition.

Nadine and I and other members of the National Centre will be preparing a discussion paper that takes the information and discusses it in much more detail than we've been able to do in today's webinar. Right now it's over to you guys to give us a sense as to what you've made of the content we've provided to you today and that discussion is going to be led by Nadine so over to you, Nadine.

Nadine Zacharias: OK. Thanks a lot to Matt and to all of the presenters and, yes, it's over to you. And I think to ease us into it, I have three questions already so I'll start us off with those and while we are discussing those questions others can think of their own and send them through to generate just a bit more conversation. We have 15 minutes so keep those questions coming.

The first one was by Ian Cunninghame and, Sally, it's a question for you. It goes very much towards whose responsibility is it? Is there a responsibility by the students? What is the responsibility of the institution? Ian asks: Would a better use of the Grattan Institute's risk factor presentation be to show institutions where they need to focus support resource development? This is an example - analysis consistently shows part-time study is a significant risk factor for disengagement but are universities taking this feedback on board and taking steps to engage part-time students? Sally, do you want to take that?

Sally Kift: Yes, thank you. Thank you for the question. I don't think the suggestion is that we're going to argue with the fact. It's the question about how we mediate that information to our equity cohorts so I'm much more taken - so thank you to the Grattan Institute for pointing that out, it's not something we're unaware of, you only need to look at Louise Pollard's NCSEHE Fellowship on regional and remote students who are all of those things and more. I'm worried about the vulnerability of students being presented with such a rude outcome by feeding their data into a national website. As I was about to say, I'm much more taken with the Higher Education Standards Panel idea that we would have these conversations with our students on entry into higher education. It's already been put to me how do we do that with 11,000 students if that's the first-year cohort of some of the bigger institutions? Well, you know, that's a problem, isn't it?  So we'll need to think about how we scale it up but I think the fact that it's somewhat difficult and inconvenient for institutions doesn't abrogate the responsibility. Let's have those discussions, and they can be over a period of time, to make sure students understand there are - not sure what the language might be - risk factors potentially, but this is how we can plan and how we would make them successful. So I commend the Higher Education Standards Panel discussion around this too.

Nadine Zacharias: Thank you, Sally. We have another question by Anne Bowden who asked: Would any presenters like to comment on their knowledge of current academic staff backgrounds regarding their entry, that is did they come via ATAR or another pathway? I'm not sure we have this kind of information but other might jump in. What I would say in response to your question, Anne, we had a really interesting experience at Deakin where we had a project on first-in-family students as an attempt to change the narrative and find alternative ways to talk about the experiences of students coming in without the cultural capital that is often assumed in participating in higher education and we had any number of academics putting their hand up to say, "I am a first-in-family student. I had a first-in-family academic." And they wore it as a badge of honour over time. So we had this little email signature that identified people as a first-in-family student and it went all the way up to the Vice-Chancellor who's quite proud to say she's a first-in-family student and very much takes that perspective into her job. So I guess from that perspective we have some knowledge and understanding that there's quite a large cohort amongst staff from a first-in-family background but I am not aware we have any information about their entry pathways. Anyone else in the presenter group? I take silence as no. Matt?

Matt Brett: I might jump in there and say that staff collection around higher education is, compared to the student collection, quite inadequate. We don't really capture much information systematically around the diversity of staff coming in to higher education and their specifics of background, entry to higher education etc. In some States - NSW for example has for a long period of time reported on the number of staff receiving disability-related adjustment. That's the only State that's done that systematically but just underscores that we can collect more information, we can report on more information but we choose not to as a sector for various reasons and I think having a clearer view about equity in the system will help drive the kinds of things that we might report on and the kind of data we might collect.

Nadine Zacharias: Thanks, Matt. Sally?

Sally Kift: A quick comment from me. I mean, we know how agentic it is for students to see other students just like themselves who have been successful. I mean, wouldn't it be powerful if that was the conversation that academics had with their students on entry to institutions. So it's a fabulous idea. Let's do that.

Nadine Zacharias: Wonderful. Thanks. More questions coming in now. Thank you for that. There's one from Ryan Cornwell from Monash University and it goes to accountability so, Matt, you can get your camera and microphone ready, I guess. Should each university be individually accountable for equity presentation as well as the whole sector, he says, as in proportionate student populations, for example from Monash.

Matt Brett: My Fellowship last year was equity performance and accountability and that report will be coming out soon so I have grappled with these issues at length. I think what we should not be aiming for in my view is that every university be exactly the same. We should not be looking to have every university have exactly the same level of representation and part of the reason for that is because different universities serve different purposes, different communities and different communities have different characteristics but what I think we should not be aiming for is letting any institution off the hook to say that they do not have a role to play in equity. I think that's the conversation that Monash needs to have around what are its equity goals, how is it tracking against those and how is it making itself accountable for reaching the goals it does have?

Nadine Zacharias: Stay on the line, Matt. The next question is from Lilita McHenry and she's just wondering if the panel have reflected on the new Glyn Davis book and his predictions on what a future sector will look like, fewer institutions, micro-credentials and so on and what this means for student equity.

Matt Brett: I have read that book. It is on the book shelf behind me. I would disagree with some of Glen's propositions around the institutional composition of Australian higher education and I think the lessons for that are, in part, in the pre-reading that we sent through, particularly the Martin Trow article which speaks to what's necessary in a universal higher education context to meet the needs of a diverse group of students and I think it's very hard for a single institution or small number of institutions to be all things to all people. That's my starting assumption. But Glyn's smarter than me and has more knowledge than me and maybe he's right but I would disagree. I think what we have in Australia is an institutional model that has concentrated institutional scale at university level and proliferated, with very bad quality, at a VET level. I think one way or another we need to find a happy medium between the two so VET and our higher education system is much stronger with the right level of scale to provide a viable level of quality without having one institution serving everyone's needs.

Nadine Zacharias: Thank you. Again, stay here. Before we go, maybe Dan and Sally, do you have any comments on Glyn's version of the future of higher education in Australia?

Daniel Edwards: Not from me.

Sally Kift: Nor me.

Nadine Zacharias: Wonderful. The next question from Bronwyn Herbertson asks: The new equity vision links higher education to groups and members, aspirations rather than to have participated reflecting numbers in society so the drop off proportional representation, is it deliberate as a true societal reflection as aspirational? For example, people with disabilities will not be reflected in higher education and participation numbers as they are in society. Matt, that is you times two.

Matt Brett: I think one of the flaws with A Fair Chance For All as it currently stands is it that has pulled the focus of the system towards a couple of small groups and hasn't necessarily accommodated the diversity in Australian society. We don't, for example, in the same way that other countries or systems do, track issues of race. We don't track or consider issues of religion. We don't, for example, track issues of sexual preference, for example. There's few examples of things we don't track. Disability, as you'd know, is a very broad category that includes a whole range of body structures and functions and my view is that what we need to do is find a framework that allows us to be able to pick up on all these diverse threads in society without putting everyone into a low SES bucket or everyone into a regional bucket or disability bucket that doesn't necessarily pick up the sophistication and nuances of those individual group issues. In my report coming out soon, I provide a way of being able to maybe track and manage that across the system, across time, and hopefully that approach is something that has legitimacy and people pick up on but my immediate response to your feedback is that this is by no means an attempt to marginalise disability or to not recognise its importance but to find better ways of being able to integrate that within our equity vision.

Nadine Zacharias: Thank you. Time for one final question and it is from Larissa Yen from Canberra University: Is the number of higher education institutions in Australia impinging upon our ability to achieve equity? I'm not quite sure, Larissa, if you think we have too many or too few of them. Does somebody want to take that one? Maybe extrapolate what would happen if we had a lot more or a lot less.

Matt Brett: I want to give Sally and - maybe Sally go first and I might come in after Sally.

Sally Kift: I don't know that I have anything particularly clever to say other than that I think as we investigate a joined-up tertiary education system there will be more and put VET on an equal footing with higher education particularly in the circumstances where we were looking at the potential for further inequity exacerbated by the technological revolution. I'm constantly worried about that. So there are those aspect. One of the things I do also worry about - I'm going to use this as an opportunity to put this in there - is the opportunity for equity groups to access postgraduate education as the new normal becomes an undergraduate degree. That will be a new frontier for equity, I imagine. How we might enable clear pathways into that variety of systems is always a problem and I think there was a clear admission that admissions transparency, while going some way towards that, still didn't mediate and to help students to navigate complex pathways into higher education which is why the discussion about ATAR and those pathways is so important.

Nadine Zacharias: Thank you and stay on the line, Sally, and you too, Dan. Larissa has written in to clarify she thinks there may be too many universities to achieve equity. Dan, do you want to have a go?

Daniel Edwards: I was going to say something similar to what Sally was in terms of their changing possible linking-up of systems and the broader context of higher education as being, you know, the groups that come in to higher education are linked to what the school sectors are - what the school are able to produce but they're also linked to what's happening in the broader marketplace and what opportunities there are so I think - not sure about the overall numbers of institutions themselves but since December with the changing and recapping of the system, some of those questions change - I think it changes quite a lot in terms of whether there is that opportunity for opening up as widely as necessary or not and I think that frames a bit of what I was going to say about that.

Nadine Zacharias: Thank you. Matt, one final comment?

Matt Brett: Two things I'll draw people's attention to in terms of the size and scale in Australia, if you look at somewhere like the US, you're picking up on Sally's point around postgraduate and it's fantastic we've got someone like Sally doing a review of the AQF, it means we will have these kind of discussions in the heart of higher education moving forward. It's fantastic. Looking at a RAND Graduate School in the US, people may have heard of RAND Corporation as a consulting group, that runs PhD programs only in public policy, only PhDs in public policy, that's all they do, whereas in Australia we are all things to all people. At the other end of the spectrum, another university only teaches in ASL, American Sign Language. There are ways of being able to deliver higher education that do not require going massive scale of the size we see currently in some Australian universities. I think there's a lot to be said for that kind of approach, whether or not we would achieve something like that is another question but I would question whether or not the University of Melbourne, for example, can offer the same level of service to Mildura as Melbourne as Malvern and Warrnambool and Gippsland. I'm perhaps banging a drum here but I think there are real questions around how big institutions can be and still deliver quality and accessibility.

Nadine Zacharias: Thank you. We have run out of time. I want to thank the co-presenters, I want to thank the team at the National Centre and we have received a lovely thank you from one of our participants here acknowledging some of the good work the colleagues are doing often behind the scenes so thank you. Thank you to the visible ones and thank you to the invisible ones. I'd also like to acknowledge that we had several participants from the workshop in the webinar today so a shout out to Kate Flynn and Wojtek for tuning in. This is not the end of it, this is the start so watch out for opportunities to contribute to a longer-term vision for equity. Final shout out to World Access to Higher Education Day which is an international event that NCSEHE is part of so we will host the Australasian hub event for world access day which will take place on 28 November so look out for that. More information to come very soon. This is it for us. That was the Building Legacy and Capacity workshop series. I have seriously enjoyed working with all of you and I hope the same is true for you. I'm sure we'll see many of you maybe in Auckland at the STARS conference or around the traps. Thank you all for participating and see you soon. Bye for now.