



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University

INFORMING POLICY AND PRACTICE IV

2017/18 Student Equity in Higher Education
Research Grants Program Projects

Make tomorrow better.

Informing Policy and Practice IV

2017/18 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program

Projects National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

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The full reports are available on the web at ncsehe.edu.au

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Foreword

Professor Sue Trinidad — NCSEHE Director

The objective of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) is to build the evidence base through research informing policy and practice. One of the ways we have achieved this is through the NCSEHE Research Grants Program which has funded 47 projects since 2014, with a total research expenditure of A\$1,945,733. A further 15 projects will be undertaken in 2019/20.

This *Informing Policy and Practice IV* publication reviews outcomes from the 2017/18 Research Grants Program funding round. The research priorities for this funding round were: analysis of the impact of changes in student financial support, graduate outcomes, equity implications of the increase in postgraduate education, and the impact of local communities on equity participation. The fourth in the *Informing Policy and Practice* series, the publication also incorporates Associate Professor Maria Raciti's 2018 NCSEHE Research Fellowship on the perceived risks of going to university for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds.

In building the evidence base to support equity in higher education, the NCSEHE seeks to promote a positive cycle of continuous quality improvement in research, policy and practice: identifying the issues, providing research data, and leading the policy debate on equity in higher education. This intention is supported by the NCSEHE's other activities in developing links with stakeholders, disseminating research and information, and conducting events to build better networks and strengthen advocacy.

The role of equity in education is increasingly recognised as a driver of future economic and social development in society. Australia's future depends on all people being enabled to successfully engage in beneficial lifelong learning. This requires an inclusively designed educational system, at all levels and for all ages, that proactively removes barriers and provides for the diverse learning and support needs of all people. Making this happen requires the right information to be collected, evaluated and acted upon, to align system and institutional performance with policy objectives.

Over the last few years, the focus, quality and complexity of equity research, and the policy implications flowing from it, have changed considerably.

The equity and education sectors are looking more closely at the composition and dynamics of equity groups and the nature of disadvantage and success; the practices of educational institutions are under closer scrutiny for the way in which they may contribute to the barriers and enablers of success; more creative thought is being directed to innovative solutions to how students from disadvantaged backgrounds can be supported most effectively; and relationships between stakeholders are changing as more cooperation and coordination between them takes place to facilitate equity as part of implementing wider public policy objectives.

These are complicated and evolving challenges. We need to resolve the paradox of working on two different levels and integrating them both: high-level issues requiring communication and collaboration between stakeholders to reduce or eliminate silo thinking, and more fundamental issues such as understanding the personal complexities of equity and what constitutes disadvantage or success from an individual student-centric perspective.

The research projects in the 2017/18 funding round reflect these trends. Four research themes from this round emerged:

- knowing our students much better
- insights into understanding the subtleties and variations of living in regional Australia

- new ideas on the role of institutions and the processes that drive them
- ensuring long-term success in equity by measuring post-graduation outcomes.

The research reports featured in this publication provide a welcome contribution to the evidence base on how equity in higher education is faring and how we can make the greatest positive impact in the future.

Insights from the reports will assist researchers, equity practitioners and policymakers to better shape a more holistic student-centred approach to student equity in ways that re-evaluate what constitutes success. The reports confirm that improving the accountability and transparency of reporting by all educational institutions will better enable them to respond and adapt to student needs that are consistent with public policy goals in education.

A more equity-focused higher education sector will better align the supply of educational skills with the changing demands of the economy and society.

Preface

Mr Paul Farnhill — Policy Analyst

Overview

Ongoing access to quality education and skills is vital to helping all Australians maximise their abilities and to Australia optimising its economic and social development. In a world of technology-driven disruption, students and knowledge seekers from all backgrounds and ages need to be better able to confidently navigate the education-to-employment continuum, while educational institutions need to be responsive to the personal needs and strategic trends shaping the educational drivers of learning and jobs.

As education is a key enabler in life, the higher education sector must seek to remove barriers and provide for the diverse learning and support needs of all people. Equity in higher education has become a key overarching driver and the characteristics of the sector need to be inclusive, responsive, flexible, adaptable, transparent and accountable.

The reports from the 2017/18 round of the NCSEHE Research Grants Program have illustrated the growing complexity of the challenges for equity in higher education and the consequent need for innovative responses to them.

Four common themes stand out within this research and each report is categorised here under the four headings of: Knowing students, Understanding regional issues, Responsive institutions, and Sustainable outcomes.

Knowing students

We need to have a much better understanding of what characterises "disadvantaged" and recognise that in times of rapid economic and cultural change equity groups are more fluid than fixed. We need to know our students as individuals and produce student-centric solutions to challenges. Five reports produced insights into the complexities of really knowing students in order to produce informed and engaged strategies to support them.

People seeking asylum: Access and support in higher education, led by Lisa Hartley from Curtin University, tackled an Australian perspective on people seeking asylum which has become a major issue for many countries. In the past six years, around 30,000 refugees have resettled in Australia but can't truly call it home when faced with cultural and bureaucratic challenges in accessing education and employment and achieving a sense of full acceptance and integration in society. The report highlighted how Australia has been unprepared for an emerging equity group, and examined the wide-ranging challenges faced by a very culturally and ethnically diverse collection of peoples. The research project produced the first Australia-wide data on numbers seeking asylum currently engaging in higher education, or interested in doing so, and provided an overview of the Australian Government policy context. The report produced numerous findings on the barriers and challenges that people seeking asylum faced in accessing higher education and how universities have responded to restrictions on their access to education. The report made 26 recommendations for government, universities and communities.

Success and failure in higher education on uneven playing fields, led by Bernadette Walker-Gibbs from Deakin University, explored the cultural and social capital acquired from schooling among first year university students to establish what really shapes the idea of "success" or "failure" in young students, and to what extent that is understood and accommodated in current policy by governments and universities. The answers were all personal and unique, demonstrating that students need to be treated as individuals not as part of a homogeneous group. Subjective perspectives on success and failure determine confidence and motivation in accessing higher education, as well as how first year students

make sense of their first experiences of success and failure at university which can impact attrition rates. An intimate knowledge of these issues is essential in developing effective support networks and structures to assist students at this transitional time between school and higher education. The report made recommendations for policymakers, proposed practical action for all stakeholders, and nominated areas for further research.

Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village...?, led by Jenny Gore from the University of Newcastle, examined how local communities shape the aspirations and imagined futures of young people. Communities, along with family and school, exert a considerable influence on students' sense of self and what is possible in life. The study examined different types of communities, including people with different kinds of backgrounds and characteristics. The research illustrated how communities act as a form of collective socialisation, reflecting the different cultural, economic and social characteristics and values of those communities. This fusion of influences often works in subtle ways to shape aspirations and beliefs and the capacity of young people to navigate education and career pathways. Recommendations for community organisations included increased collaboration among community leaders, families and teachers to provide exposure to higher education through formal and informal events in the community. Recommendations for community organisations included increased collaboration among community leaders, families and teachers to provide exposure to higher education through formal and informal events in the community. Recommendations to education providers included tailoring outreach initiatives to local contexts, not just to equity group targets.

Equity at and beyond the boundary of Australian universities, led by Matt Brett from Deakin University (formerly with La Trobe University), investigated the learning outcomes and experiences of two sets of under-researched students: those enrolled in university programs delivered through third-party arrangements, and those in higher education courses delivered by non-university higher education providers. The report examined information availability, transparency in reporting, and public interest associated with equity performance. The report concluded that the size of the sectors providing third-party arrangements were growing, reporting among institutions was inconsistent, and there was considerable variation in student outcomes and equity performance. The report's four principal recommendations centred on increasing the transparency of reporting and publication requirements, and improved data collection with an emphasis on developing a more nuanced and common language for third-party delivery and equity performance. By enlarging the scope of analysis to cover all students in higher education and providing a clearer picture of the compositions of student types in all institutions, the report provides a way forward for policymakers to better know all students in higher education.

Career construction, future work and the perceived risks of going to university for young people from low SES backgrounds, by Maria Raciti from USC, demonstrated the variety of students within an equity group and the limitations of lumping people into categories and not seeing the individuals within them. The research examined how students assessed the challenges of work and education and made trade-offs between options and risks. It examined the decision making processes the students followed and examined risk tolerance as a characteristic to explain differences in how low socioeconomic status (SES) high school students responded to the decision dilemma of going to university. The report explored different types of risk (for example, functional, social) and different attitudes to risk (for example, risk averse, risk seeker) and how these considerations fed into decision making and different equity outcomes. The research illustrated the different ways that students responded to the uncertainties of whether to follow a pathway into higher education and how they managed trade-offs between different kinds of risks. This fresh perspective produced numerous insights that may guide researchers, policymakers and equity practitioners.

Understanding regional issues

While the number of equity students in regional Australia participating in higher education has increased, their proportional representation in higher education relative to their share in national population lags behind that of their metropolitan counterparts. Regional Australia's complex and compounding challenges are frequently cited, if not always clearly understood or fully reflected in public policy. The issues centre on unique and diverse individual circumstances, across and within a great variety of regions, and all within a shifting national and international economic and cultural landscape. Three research reports from the 2017/18 round of NCSEHE research funding illustrate the more nuanced approach taken to clarify issues and provide targeted solutions to them.

Regional communities' influence on equity participation in higher education, led by Robin Katersky Barnes from the University of Tasmania, investigated why some regional communities were more successful than others in the access, retention and attainment of equity students. The challenges faced by regional students in accessing and completing higher education have long been recognised. This study looked at differences between regional communities as a factor in shaping success. Case studies identified community infrastructure relevant to educational aspirations, including proximity to a university campus, and connections between campus and community. Positive community attitudes towards education and employer support for higher education have a significant role in promoting higher education access and participation, retention and success. One important implication is that university partnerships that are people-rich and draw on regional and remote community social capital and other assets such as employers, local libraries, study centres and community organisations should be developed and expanded and include strategies to engage younger and mature age students.

Shifts in space and self: Moving from community to university, led by Sarah O'Shea from the University of Wollongong, examined the "lived experiences" of how young people from rural and remote areas contemplate post schooling options. The report examined how individual students actually thought and felt about their post-school futures as well as their concerns and uncertainties about moving to a university life and away from home. The research was based on digital storytelling, facilitated by digital workshops on telling stories through a range of media, and the scripting and production of digital stories, followed by analysis of scripts featuring themes and interpretivist frameworks. The findings clarified four principal barriers and challenges in the transitional shift from community to university: the locational shift is often seen in terms of hardship rather than a rite of passage; the transition was defined by changing relationships and identity formation; the perception among many young people was that university was not necessarily for "people like them" because the journey was exceptional rather than expected; and the ways in which the desire to "give back" to the community informed post-school decisions about attending university and also what to study.

Understanding completion rates of Indigenous higher education students from two regional universities: A cohort analysis, led by Fiona Shalley from Charles Darwin University, examined how Indigenous students enrolled at two regional universities compared with national Indigenous student results regarding completions, length of time to complete and relative attrition rates across time. It is known that Indigenous students are likely to belong to multiple equity groups and have significant educational disadvantage. There are also many factors that shape the length of time it takes for some Indigenous students to complete a degree, as well as relative success and completion rates. In exploring these issues, the report produced four sets of recommendations: on long-term cohort tracking; on data and information management systems; on specific research gaps; and on Indigenous students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Responsive institutions

In a world characterised by rapid economic, social and technological change, the responsiveness and adaptability of institutions to those changes is a critical determinant of success for higher education institutions and all students. Systemic reform in the higher education sector, driven by transparency of operations, and accountability for public expenditure and equity performance, are the drivers of progress. Three of the research reports in the 2017/18 round of NCSEHE equity research funding examined how institutions can better position themselves to be responsive to strategic trends and the needs of the students they serve.

Structural inequality in higher education: Creating institutional cultures that enable all students, led by Ryan Naylor from La Trobe University, explored “structural inequality” in institutions to examine what they did to either block or facilitate a sense of belonging to, and ease of navigation within, the institutions. This approach reverses the traditional “deficit discourses” of asking how students can acquire missing skills, instead, adopting an institutional perspective asking what institutions can do to make themselves more inclusive and navigable. The approach was based on two considerations: “structurally enabling” which modifies institutional structures to minimise barriers and ensure a wider range of people are able to freely engage in education; and “capacity building” which provides services or supports that seek to that build cultural resources and capacity in students. Research pointed to enabling change through continuous modular transformation that focuses on small changes in specific areas rather than attempting sweeping organisational change. The report provided guidance on how institutions can manage the shift to a structurally enabling model of facilitating equitable participation in higher education.

Principles for equity in higher education performance funding, led by Andrew Harvey from La Trobe University, examined ways in which the public policy framework for universities—increasingly operating in a performance-based funding environment—could accommodate and reward institutions for their equity performance. The research argued that there are four fundamental principles required to ensure an effective and equitable performance funding model. These comprised: integrating student equity as an explicit objective of the performance funding model, rewarding the performance of progress made by individual institutions in advancing equity rather than relying on measures of outcomes that do not reflect true performance, establishing a student-centred performance funding model by including the student voice in its design, and ensuring consistency with broader principles of effective performance funding.

Access, quality and wellbeing in engineering Work Integrated Learning placements: Implications for equity and diversity, led by Natalie Lloyd from the University of Technology Sydney, investigated the current and potential contribution of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) to provide educational and transition-to-work benefits for both student participants and host employer organisations. The project focused on the engineering sector. WIL describes a range of educational experiences in which students are temporarily employed in companies or non-profit organisations. The research found that engineering WIL placements were frequently unpaid and subject to access inequities; students faced challenges in accessing quality placements and experienced detracting and discriminatory workplace cultures; and recruitment and employability were driven by practices that privilege students from high social capital backgrounds. The report produced a range of recommendations for industry, students and universities. For industry, the report proposed that businesses address the frequency of unpaid and underpaid placements and wellness issues. Students should be empowered as co-designers of WIL experiences and policy. Universities should consider other models and practices for WIL.

Sustainable outcomes

While we know that equity support measures work, there is less evidence on the longer-term outcomes for equity students — whether their experiences in jobs and incomes, and bachelor degree completion rates and post-graduate study outcomes are comparable with non-equity students. To know whether equity support measures truly roll back disadvantage for individuals and the disadvantaged groups they represent, we need to evaluate longer-term trends and issues. Four research reports from the latest round of NCSEHE research funding examined this area.

Beyond graduation: Long-term socioeconomic outcomes amongst equity students, led by Wojtek Tomaszewski from the University of Queensland, examined how equity group students fare in post-graduation employment outcomes. Do equity graduates reap the benefits of university education to the same extent as non-equity graduates? Overall, the analyses suggested that, for most of the outcomes investigated, the trajectories of equity and non-equity graduates moved in similar directions. However, there was a lower likelihood for employment and lower average salaries among low graduates from low socioeconomic backgrounds; people with disability were less likely to be employed; and Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students were less likely to be in employment and more likely to have lower average earnings. On a positive note, new graduates from regional and remote areas and Indigenous graduates did not appear to be disadvantaged in the short- to mid-term after graduation, though both groups were significantly less likely to work in the private sector than non-equity graduates. The findings suggest that entrenched disadvantage is a social challenge; while access to more and better education will help redress that disadvantage it will not eliminate it and other broader forms of social intervention and support may be required to create a truly equitable society.

Employment and study outcomes after graduation: An Australian higher education equity perspective, led by Ian Li from The University of Western Australia, examined whether equity students who participated in postgraduate study had equitable outcomes after the completion of their degree. The study found that graduates from low SES backgrounds, those with disability and those from a non-English speaking background were less likely to be in employment post-degree compared to non-equity students. There were some positive findings on equity students in the report. Equity students as a whole who engaged in postgraduate studies were between two and five per cent more likely to participate in further study compared to non-equity students (with the exception of regional and remote students). In contrast to equity students who didn't fare as well as their non-equity counterparts in the jobs market after university, good access to post-graduate studies among equity students provides encouraging signs for future employment outcomes.

Equity in postgraduate education in Australia: Widening participation or widening the gap?, led by Deanna Grant-Smith from Queensland University of Technology, is the first national report to access widening participation outcomes in postgraduate education in Australia. The project examined trends in access, participation and outcomes in postgraduate education by equity group students, types of universities attended, and higher degrees studied. Key findings were made for five equity groups, highlighting achievements as well as sub-optimal areas of performance. The report notes that progress in outcomes for equity students has not been consistent for all equity groups. It also highlights the stratification efforts in higher education, with some university groupings performing better than others in equity performance. Another key observation is that post-graduate education is more important for employability and post graduate participation should be an objective of equity policy. Future directions for proposed research included more attention on the postgraduate cohort; an examination of equity group heterogeneity and intersectionality; more rigorous qualitative research; better analysis at the institutional and university group level; and a focus on representation and achievement across the degree life cycle.

Access, quality and wellbeing in engineering Work Integrated Learning placements: Implications for equity and diversity

Natalie Lloyd, Megan Paull, Teena Clerke and Sally Male

University of Technology Sydney
Murdoch University
The University of Western Australia
Curtin University

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) includes internships, work placements, industry-based learning and practicums. They vary widely in timing, duration and remuneration. Benefits include improved self-efficacy and practical learning, while negative impacts include access limitations arising from low or no pay, workforce discrimination, and stress for many students. The report examined trends and issues and made recommendations for industry, students and universities that will make for improved outcomes for all three stakeholder groups.

Background

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is the umbrella term most often used in Australia to describe the range of educational experiences that engage students in workplaces, contributing to degree qualification. WIL placements vary widely. They may be full-time or part-time; of short-or long-term duration and can be paid, poorly paid or unpaid. Placements may be accessed through application processes or informal social networks. Such heterogeneity makes it difficult for stakeholders to hold clear or consensus views on WIL.

There is evidence suggesting WIL placements contextualise student learning and increase their employability on graduation, which higher education institutions and employers overwhelmingly support. Benefits of WIL are said to include improved self-efficacy and opportunities to gain a head start in a career. Negative impacts are often attributed to students, host organisations and universities.

Objectives and methodology

The research project examined student engineers' experiences in WIL placements, providing insights in how to guide improvements, particularly in relation to access, quality and wellbeing for students in equity groups.

The project employed a mixed methods approach comprising: the collection of institutional WIL placement data on paid/unpaid status, placement timing, institutional support, and placement requirements; a systematic literature review of published research; an online survey that included self-reported demographic data to allow researchers to identify participants from equity groups; a resilience scale and free response questions; and interviews with students about their internship experiences, supplemented by interviews with university staff.

The project sought to establish features of quality placement practices and identify if engineering students' wellbeing was eroded by stresses, including those that might arise from unpaid or poor-quality placements. The research objective was to establish students' experiences in engineering placements and determine how equity group students' experiences may differ to non-equity group students.

Key findings and recommendations

The report produced three key findings:

1. Engineering WIL placements were frequently unpaid and underpaid. There were a range of negative impacts on student wellbeing, which need to be better understood and acknowledged.
2. There were challenges in accessing quality WIL placements, especially for Women in Non-Traditional Areas (WINTA) and Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students. These challenges included systemic prejudices and detracting workplace cultures, including those which were discriminatory.
3. Recruitment and employability was driven by practices privileging high social capital that disproportionately benefitted students from high socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds were not as well equipped to manage the transition to WIL placements and their vulnerability was exacerbated by the self-sourced nature of WIL placements, compounded by WIL requirements mandated by universities.

Recommendations for industry, students and universities:

1. Industry and universities should acknowledge and address the frequency of unpaid, underpaid and paid-for WIL placements and seek to redress associated equity and wellbeing issues. Recommendations included:
 - Define, implement and advocate minimum "living wage" remuneration and equity targets for WIL placements.
 - Increase transparency, systematic collection and reporting of WIL placement data.
 - Propose and provide alternative, less intense, innovative WIL models if unpaid placements are unavoidable.
2. Students should be empowered as co-designers of WIL experiences and policy to support a cultural shift from compliance-driven engagement in WIL to a career curation mindset. To minimise poor-quality placements that pose a risk to students' wellbeing and perpetuate prejudices, the report recommended:
 - Engage students and graduates to inform the development of university and industry WIL placement policy and curriculum design.
 - Foster a culture of quality, outcomes-driven WIL placements across the triple helix of university-industry-student.
 - Increase university staffing and resourcing to strengthen preparedness, integration and support.
3. Universities should consider other disciplinary models and practices, such as those in health and education, to provide equitable access to quality engineering WIL placements. To minimise the burden on students to source, apply for, accept or persevere with poor quality, exploitative or otherwise unsatisfactory placements that may be detrimental to their wellbeing, the report made the following recommendations:
 - Allocate students to university and industry-partnered WIL.
 - Broaden in-curriculum industry-student engagement.
 - Remove or reduce the "hours"-dependent completion hurdle.

Expert commentary: Dr Grant Cooper

**School of Education
RMIT**

Increasingly, universities in Australia are setting strategic targets for student workplace participation as a component of their undergraduate and post-graduate studies. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is an umbrella term that includes a range of student experiences such as internships, practicums and clinical placements that take place in a work-place setting (or similar) as part of a student's course.

WIL is viewed by various stakeholders as an effective way to prepare students for the future workplaces they are likely to participate in. While universities (and others) are typically eager to spruik the benefits of WIL experiences, there is a growing body of evidence to indicate that students' wellbeing during WIL placements may be adversely affected by multiple and connected stresses, including those associated with unpaid WIL, such as practicums.

This report importantly examines students' experiences in WIL placements and how equity group students' experiences may differ to non-equity student groups. The report states that engineering WIL placements are frequently unpaid and underpaid and are subject to access inequities. It is reported that there are additional challenges in engineering WIL placements, notably for women in non-traditional areas (WINTA) and those from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB), who face systemic prejudices. Lloyd argues that recruitment and employability associated with WIL experiences privileges students who have access to high levels of valued social capital.

While mentioned briefly in the report, a potentially fruitful area of future research might be to explore students' access to valued cultural capital in their WIL experiences and the implications of such access in more depth. In sum, the report makes important recommendations for industry and universities, as these stakeholders have an opportunity to progress toward the goal of empowering students to be co-designers of their WIL experiences and facilitate learning environments that better reflects social justice principles of access, equity and quality.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/engineering-work-integrated-learning-placements/>

Beyond graduation: Long-term socioeconomic outcomes amongst equity students

Wojtek Tomaszewski, Francisco Perales, Ning Xiang and Matthias Kubler

The University of Queensland

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

This report revealed 15-year trends in equity students' post-university outcomes, including measures of health and wellbeing, as well as employment and financial status. The research found that most post-graduation trajectories converged over time, irrespective of equity group membership. Census data provided short- to medium-term evidence, complemented by innovative analysis of the HILDA survey, which enabled documentation of long-term trajectories.

Background

The benefits of attaining tertiary-level educational qualifications are well documented and include higher employment rates, higher earnings and working in more prestigious occupations. Other positive outcomes are likely to include a range of non-market outcomes such as better mental and general health, and better subjective wellbeing.

However, there is a lack of research in Australia that specifically considers differences in long-term outcomes of graduates from a variety of disadvantaged backgrounds.

This report expanded the focus of employment outcomes in Australia to broader measures of health and wellbeing. It also examined post-graduation trajectories in outcomes over time using longitudinal data and methods. The findings provide better insights into the short- and long-term outcomes of different groups of graduates.

Objectives and methodology

The report set three research questions:

1. Do equity graduates reap the benefits of university education to the same extent as non-equity graduates over the short- and long-run?
2. What are the differences in outcomes between graduates from different equity groups?
3. What are the specific outcomes—labour market, social capital, wellbeing—where equity group graduates perform particularly well or particularly poorly?

The report used robust statistical methodologies to analyse high-quality, nationally representative longitudinal data from two sources: the ABS Census of Population and Housing; and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey.

Both sets of analyses cover five populated-based equity groups: Low socioeconomic status (SES), Non-English Speaking Background (NESB), regional and remote, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) and students with disability.

The Census data focused on labour market outcomes and provided robust evidence over a short to medium time period. The HILDA survey enabled documentation of long-term trajectories across a broader set of socioeconomic outcomes (health, wellbeing and social capital).

Education survey data has different time horizons, with the two sources used above being far longer than other sources. The Census analyses cover up to five years post-graduation. The HILDA analyses extend the analyses to up to 15 years (this compares to the Graduate Outcomes Survey which is based on outcomes after four to six months).

Key findings and recommendations

The Census data suggested small but significant differences between graduates from some equity groups and their non-equity group counterparts in some labour market outcomes:

- a lower likelihood of employment and lower average salaries of low SES graduates
- a lower likelihood of graduates with disability to be employed
- a lower likelihood of NESB graduates to be in employment, and lower average earnings for those NESB graduates who are in employment.

These findings are consistent with previous evidence from the limited body of other Australian studies in this area, while arguably offering more robust evidence being based on a high-quality and authoritative data source.

On a positive note, new graduates from regional and remote areas and Indigenous graduates did not appear to be disadvantaged short- to mid-term post-graduation. A feature of these two graduate groups was that both were significantly less likely to work in the private sector. Public sector employment, including policies promoting equal access played a significant role for graduates from these groups in facilitating employment outcomes comparable to those of non-equity graduates at this stage of post-graduation.

Overall, the HILDA analyses suggested that for most of the outcomes investigated in this report, the trajectories of equity and non-equity graduates moved in similar directions.

However, while rarely statistically significant, there appeared to be some evidence that equity graduates, compared to non-equity student graduates, generally reported inferior outcomes in the first few years after graduation. This pattern appears to be most pronounced for indicators related to subjective assessment of financial prosperity, job security and social support.

While differences between equity and non-equity graduates were often not statistically significant or converged over time, there were two exceptions: students from an Indigenous background and students with disability. Both groups reported significantly inferior outcomes compared with their non-equity counterparts, particularly in terms of physical and mental health and subjective wellbeing. These results need to be interpreted carefully as they are based on small samples which may not be representative of the relevant populations. Furthermore, these patterns are not necessarily constrained to university graduates from these backgrounds but likely reflect broader disadvantage among Indigenous people and people with disability.

These findings suggest that this kind of disadvantage is not easily alleviated through the completion of a university degree alone, but also requires a concerted policy efforts within and beyond the education sector.

Expert commentary: Mr Andrew Norton

**Higher Education Program Director
Gratten Institute**

For decades, public policy has tried to increase the number of equity students in Australian universities, but only occasionally has anyone checked that higher education delivers them better life outcomes. This paper from Wojtek Tomaszewski and his University of Queensland colleagues looks at the evidence, using data from the Census and the HILDA survey.

The Census analysis period, from 2011 to 2016, was unusually tough for new graduates. The students completing their degrees in 2013 had the worst short-term employment outcomes yet recorded. Low socioeconomic status (SES) and NESB graduates did worse than other equity and non-equity students on high-skill work and income indicators, but small majorities of each found professional or managerial jobs. Higher education opened otherwise closed opportunities to equity group members, but the risk of no transformative employment change was high.

Higher education has non-financial benefits as well, and HILDA data is used to explore these. Equity and non-equity group members mostly reported better mental health after completing their degree than before. But general health and life satisfaction hardly changed for either group. The concerning exception was Indigenous students, who reported worse mental health and lower life satisfaction after getting their degree. This might be a small statistical sample issue, but possibly moving to study and work creates personal and social costs for some Indigenous people.

HILDA tracks the same people over time, which reveals that non-equity graduates start out ahead of equity graduates on some indicators, but the two groups converge over time. This probably partly reflects slower labour market starts for equity groups. But as for Indigenous students, higher education may change daily life more for equity than non-equity background people. Even if these changes are positive over the longer run, it takes time to adjust.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/long-term-socioeconomic-outcomes-equity-students/>

Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village...?

Jenny Gore, Leanne Fray, Sally Patfield and Jess Harris

The University of Newcastle Australia

**Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote**

While aspirations are an important factor in widening participation in higher education, research has generally focused on individual, family and school-related influences. This report examined how post-school aspirations were formed within, and shaped by, the communities in which young people lived. It found that aspirations were formed in very different contexts in which "community" could be seen as a form of collective socialisation, as an amalgam of time and place, and as a symbolic boundary shaping students' views of the world. The fusion of geographic, structural and relational elements in a community worked in overt and subtle ways to shape the aspirations of young people towards navigating imagined future lives. The report produced recommendations for communities, schools and education providers to facilitate improved access and participation in higher education in the context of community influences.

Background

While aspirations have become a key feature of Australian higher education policy and practice in an effort to widen the participation of underrepresented groups, research attention has often been directed to individual, family and school-related influences. Comparatively little is known about the role of local communities in shaping what students imagine for their post-school futures and how they propose to navigate them.

Objectives and methodology

The project had two research questions:

1. What impact does community have on student aspirations for higher education?
2. What community factors are important for increasing equity participation?

The research project investigated the structural characteristics of communities in which young people live as they form aspirations, as well as the subjective experiences and perceptions of young people and adults in these communities.

Data was drawn from two existing studies on post-school aspirations of school students enrolled in Years 3–12 across a diverse range of communities in New South Wales. Additional information was collected from community members. A mixed methods approach was taken to analyse the effect of community-level variables on university aspirations.

Eight case study communities were selected for further analysis with varying characteristics: high, low and mid socioeconomic status (SES); city and regional locations; and different cultural and language backgrounds.

Key findings and recommendations

Some of the key findings from the research included:

- Across all case study communities, higher education was the most popular educational pathway aspiration, although the proportion of students aspiring to this pathway differed between communities.
- Aspirations for university were high in many disadvantaged communities, challenging the simplistic view that young people from equity groups have low aspirations.
- Across all case study communities, aspirations for university were higher than existing levels of educational attainment; the proportion of young people who aspired to professional careers also far exceeded the proportion of local residents working in these careers, even in urban, high SES communities.
- On average, females were more likely than males to aspire to university across the case study communities, while males were more likely than females to aspire to technical and further education.
- The careers to which young people aspired were highly gendered, regardless of the community in which they lived.
- Students in high SES urban communities aspired to more prestigious occupations on average, compared to students living in regional and remote communities characterised by disadvantage.
- Aspirations were formed within very different contexts in which community acted as an important site of socialisation, in combination with home and school.
- The fusion of geographic, structural and relational elements within a community worked in both overt and more subtle ways to shape aspirations and the capacity for young people to navigate the pathway towards their imagined lives.
- Aspirations were not only linked to the future, but also to time and place.
- The territorial and relational elements of "community" coalesced in some communities to form a symbolic boundary impacting aspirations.

The report produced recommendations for communities and higher education providers, including:

Recommendations for communities (including schools and community organisations):

- Increase collaboration among community leaders, families and teachers to provide exposure to higher education through events within the community.
- Establish community-level scholarships to aid in the transition to university.
- Identify and create work opportunities that facilitate access to university role models and the opportunity to learn about different kinds of occupational futures.
- Recognise the importance of providing part-time and casual work to young people during their formal schooling.
- Consider how schools can function as community hubs to increase training opportunities for both young people and adults.

Recommendations for education providers:

- Tailor outreach initiatives to local contexts, not just to equity target groups.
- Utilise untapped resources in communities to bolster and support outreach initiatives.
- Promote scholarships to young people while they are still in school, as well to their families and communities.
- Identify current university students to become community role models, creating opportunities as part of their degree to return home to their community and share their experiences of university life.
- Implement Work Integrated Learning programs that can help supplement the essential services required in communities.
- Attention must be paid to alleviating some of the geographical and structural factors that coalesce to diminish aspirations for university.

Expert commentary: Dr Lyn Vernon

**Research Fellow
NCSEHE**

The career challenges facing young people today—whether they are living in cities, regional or remote communities—require intensive, long-term, people-centred interventions that build on existing understandings (local knowledge), networks and local government priorities and strategies. One-off short-term interventions or "quick fix" responses to complex and protracted educational and social problems are typically unsuccessful in supporting the career aspirations of young people, especially if the heterogeneity of communities is not recognised.

Understanding the influence of community on how young people imagine and construct their futures is greatly enhanced by this publication. This report affirms that young people from disadvantaged communities aspire to higher education and highlights how an individual's archive of experiences can impact on their future goals. The findings illustrate the nuanced relationships between key community attributes and individuals' expectations for the future.

This research highlights the need for regular and guided interactions in the form of provision of local work experience, access to local role models, scholarship help and tailored outreach for all students to develop and support their aspirations. This research changes the terms of recognition for policy advisors and practitioners, challenging them to include community influence on the university aspirations of young people alongside the influence of schools, teachers, parents and other students.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/community-influence-university-aspirations/>

Employment and study outcomes after graduation: An Australian higher education equity perspective

Ian W. Li and David R. Carroll

The University of Western Australia

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

This report found university graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds accessed further study at levels equivalent to their relatively privileged peers. However, graduates from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, with disability, or from non-English speaking backgrounds experienced disadvantage in employment outcomes. Policy action may be required to improve employment outcomes for some equity group students.

Background

Higher education policy in Australia has contributed to positive outcomes for equity groups in facilitating access, participation and completion of university. In addition, labour market outcomes for graduates are comparable between equity and non-equity students. However, it's not known whether students from disadvantaged backgrounds have equitable outcomes in participation in further study after the completion of their undergraduate degree.

As research indicates higher earnings and positive labour market outcomes for postgraduates, it is of public interest to examine post-study pathways for disadvantaged individuals.

Objectives and methodology

The study:

- linked robust data from the 2016 Graduate Outcomes Survey and administrative records from 19 universities to create an information-rich source for the purposes of analysis
- examined two post-degree completion outcomes—employment and further study—in keeping with the related goals of overcoming disadvantage and facilitating social mobility
- employed analytic techniques to investigate the correlation between employment and further study.

There were also limitations in this study:

- The post-degree completion outcomes considered in this study, while important, were non-exhaustive. While the study considered important labour market outcomes such as full-time employment, labour market mismatch and earnings, it did not consider other outcomes such as job satisfaction, mainly owing to the unavailability of such data.
- While the study considered employment and further study outcomes in tandem, this is a potentially complex pair of outcomes, and exact interactions or future impacts are unknown. For example, the impact of a combination of study and workload, and how

that might affect labour market outcomes such as mismatch and earnings, was not specifically examined in this study. Such analyses would need to be comprehensive to provide definitive findings and, as such, were beyond the scope of this study.

- The analyses here were static, and examined outcomes at only one point in the short-term. Future research could consider extending the timeframe and examining outcomes further in the future. Research looking at labour market outcomes of equity groups after postgraduate study could particularly complement the literature in this area.

Key findings and recommendations

The results from the multivariate analyses indicated that graduates from a low socioeconomic status (SES) background, with disability, or from a non-English speaking background were less likely to be in employment post-degree, relative to their respective counterparts. The estimated reduced propensity of employment for these groups was sizable — up to 16 per cent less for Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) graduates. However, in terms of further study post-degree, graduates from all equity groups, with the exception of graduates from regional and remote areas, were around two to five per cent more likely to be in further study after their undergraduate degrees were completed, relative to graduates from non-disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, academic ability, as proxied by Weighted Average Marks, and undergraduate degree field of study areas were found to be influential on the graduates' propensity to be in further study or employment.

Furthermore, graduates from the equity groups of low SES background, disability and NESB were found to be disadvantaged in labour market outcomes. For example, they were less likely to be in full-time employment, more likely to be mismatched in their jobs if there were employed, and earned less. In particular, graduates from NESB backgrounds were the most disadvantaged in these labour market outcomes.

Despite poor labour market outcomes for the stated equity groups, the findings from this study are encouraging for postgraduate study for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. From the perspective of higher education participation, engagement in further study, including postgraduate courses, appear to be accessible for individuals from equity backgrounds. Therefore, more needs to be done from the perspective of ensuring equitable employment outcomes, especially for students from equity backgrounds as they enter employment after postgraduate study.

Expert commentary: Professor Dawn Bennett

**John Curtin Distinguished Professor of Higher Education
School of Education, Curtin University**

Almost half of all Australians engage in higher education and nearly 50 per cent of students belong to one or more equity group. As such, approximately 380,000 students with disadvantage graduate each year with the degree-level skills and knowledge needed by the Australian economy. Ian Li and David Carroll find, however, that disadvantage is not ameliorated for these students. Rather, disadvantaged students are less likely to find full-time work or work which utilises their degree expertise, and they earn less than their peers.

There is no doubt that Australian policy enables more people to access higher education and that access and transition support programs have a positive impact. This report paves the way for existing programs to be enhanced and it has immediate implications including the need for transition programs to begin prior to entry and to continue well into careers.

Ameliorating disadvantage across both student life and the career lifespan requires a longitudinal and mixed-method approach. Linking academic records with student and graduate QILT data, as Li and Carroll have done, would enable the longitudinal research

needed to achieve this aim. As a shared concern across the higher education sector, I would hope that future calls for participation in research such as this would be answered by all Australian universities.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/postgraduate-study-graduate-employment-equity-groups/>

Equity at and beyond the boundary of Australian universities

Matt Brett, Naomi Tootell, Andrew Harvey, Buly A. Cardak and Peter Noonan

La Trobe University
Victoria University

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

Increasing numbers of equity students are participating in non-university higher education courses delivered through third-party providers and non-university higher education institutions (NUHEIs). Success rates were found to be variable and the report recommended better regulation through improved transparency and accountability with respect to arrangements in general, as well as how they relate to student equity.

Background

Higher education providers that deliver “at and beyond the boundaries of Australian universities” comprise two modes of delivery: university programs delivered through third-party arrangements; and higher education courses delivered by non-university higher education institutions (NUHEIs). The former category involves sub-contracting of program delivery, while the latter is beyond the boundary of Australian public universities.

Little research has been conducted on these forms of delivery. The number of students enrolled in university courses delivered by third-party providers is growing and current data is not disaggregated to facilitate understanding of equity group participation and performance within university third-party arrangements.

This report investigated the social demography, learning outcomes and educational experiences—as well as equity group participation, retention and success rates—to close a gap in understanding of the Australian higher education sector.

Objectives and methodology

The report progressed through five stages. A review was conducted of national and international literature on university third-party arrangements and non-university higher education providers. A mapping exercise was developed to determine the extent of university third-party delivery in Australia via a desktop review of university policy libraries, annual reports and financial statements. The authors then conducted analysis of domestic student equity participation, retention and success data for undergraduate courses identified as being delivered via third-party arrangements at five Australian universities. This was followed by analysis of student equity participation, retention and success data for all NUHEIs with domestic enrolments. Finally, interviews were held with leaders of five NUHEIs identified in stage four as having higher participation, retention and success rates for students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds.

The research examined four considerations:

1. Third-party transparency — what information about third-party delivery is publicly accessible?

2. Third-party public interest — what equity performance is associated with third-party delivery?
3. Equity beyond the university — what equity performance is associated with NUHEIs?
4. Learning from good practice — what can we learn from NUHEIs with good equity practice?

Key findings and recommendations

The report produced two sets of findings: student equity findings; and general findings.

Student equity findings included:

- Equity group participation is lower in third-party delivered courses than courses delivered in-house across the five universities examined. Those participation rates change as institutions recruited from beyond their traditional boundaries. Regionally headquartered universities enrolled proportionately fewer equity students in third-party delivered courses, which tended to be delivered in cities. Metropolitan headquartered universities enrolled proportionately more equity students in third-party delivered courses, which tended to be delivered in the regions or online.
- Equity group retention rates and equity group success rates are both lower in third-party delivered courses than courses delivered in-house across the five universities examined.
- Overall equity group participation, retention and success is lower for NUHEIs than public universities.
- For NUHEIs, low SES participation is growing and now exceeds that of public universities at undergraduate level; and there is far greater variation in low SES success and retention among NUHEIs than among public universities.

General findings included:

- Over half of Australia's public universities had a policy pertaining to third-party delivery, but universities employed a wide variety of nomenclature to describe third-party arrangements. There was also inconsistency in how university publications referred to third-party delivery.
- The increase in "approved educational facilities" revealed an expansion in delivery beyond university campuses, but it did not serve as a direct or proxy measure of third-party delivery.
- Seven universities for which third-party arrangements were identified included A\$280 million of expenditure on third-party arrangements in 2016, representing 10 per cent of total continuing operating expenses for the year.
- Domestic undergraduate enrolments in third-party delivered courses grew in both absolute and relative terms.
- The overall NUHEI Student Experience Survey results exceeded those of public universities in five out of six focus areas.
- There was far greater variation in Student Experience Survey results among NUHEIs than among public universities.

The report produced four principal recommendations for the Australian Government Department of Education:

1. Increase the transparency of third-party reporting and publication requirements, with particular emphasis on effective representation of sub-contracting and franchising arrangements to students.
2. Review data collection and reporting to better monitor third-party delivery arrangements, with particular emphasis on developing a more nuanced and common language for third-party delivery and equity performance.
3. Monitor and regularly report on the equity performance of NUHEIs.

4. Promote and capture good equity practice among NUHEIs and disseminate this practice throughout the broader higher education sector.

Expert commentary: Dr Paul Koshy

Research Fellow, Program Leader: Data Analysis NCSEHE

Equity policy in Australia has historically been framed around direct undergraduate enrolment in public universities. This report, *Equity at and beyond the boundary of Australian universities*, discusses an analysis of equity issues in two other important areas of undergraduate provision — that are taking place at the boundary of Australian universities, through third-party providers; and beyond, via non-university higher education institutions (NUHEIs). The report highlights some interesting findings in relation to each sphere of provision and commonalities between the two.

Third-party providers deliver learning and teaching services for universities, generally in contexts outside their main or secondary campus. Overall, the rates of equity student enrolment in third-party provided courses are lower. Geography seems to play an important role here, with regional-based universities having lower equity enrolment rates in third-party courses which tended to be delivered in cities, and city-based universities seeing increased equity enrolment rates in third-party courses which tended to be delivered in regional areas. Research across five universities shows that retention and success rates are lower for equity students in third-party courses when compared with equity students enrolled in in-house courses.

The analysis of NUHEIs highlights similar issues. The NUHEIs generally have lower levels of equity student participation, although low SES student participation in NUHEIs now exceeds that of the public universities. The performance of the NUHEIs is mixed, with retention and success rates among their equity group students being lower than in public universities but an analysis of the Student Experience Survey (SES) showing that they outperform the public universities in five out of six focus areas. However, there is a greater level of variation in retention, success and SES outcomes across the NUHEIs than the public universities.

From this report, it would seem that future research should further investigate third-party course delivery and NUHEI equity student enrolments, and specifically, the extent to which factors such as the remote operating context, scale of course provision and student self-selection are driving outcomes, and how policy can address these.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/equity-at-beyond-the-boundary-of-australian-universities/>

Equity in postgraduate education in Australia: Widening participation or widening the gap?

Deanna Grant-Smith, Robyn Mayes and Renee Chapman

Queensland University of Technology

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

Widening participation towards proportional representation of a number of equity groups against parity targets, while relatively successful, has focused on the undergraduate student cohort. But, as postgraduate education becomes more important in securing appropriate employment, there is a need to address how postgraduate study intersects with broader equity goals and student outcomes. The research examined postgraduate participation in relation to university groupings to better understand stratification or clustering effects and uneven opportunities for each equity group. The project made national findings and recommendations for all equity groups.

Background

The Australian higher education sector has had an agenda to widen participation since the 1990s, with policy aimed at achieving proportional representation of a number of equity groups against parity targets. This effort has been focused on widening participation in undergraduate education. There has been less research and practice focus on postgraduate access and participation. This is becoming a more important issue as postgraduate education is now more important as an employability enhancing asset.

Between 2006 and 2016, postgraduate enrolments increased by 48 per cent, outstripping the 41 per cent rate of growth for undergraduate enrolments, while a 10 per cent increase was evident in postgraduate research enrolments. The distribution of postgraduate students is uneven across university groups. The Group of Eight (Go8) universities account for more than one-third of all postgraduate students.

This was the first national report to address widening participation outcomes in postgraduate education in Australia. Findings were made for students from five equity groups — low socioeconomic status (SES), regional and remote, students with disability, Non-English Speaking Background (NESB), and Indigenous. Future directions were proposed for researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

Objectives and methodology

The project used unpublished student data from selected higher education statistics and published student data to explore equity trends in domestic student participation in postgraduate study across the enrolment life cycle in five equity groups.

The project had two research questions: What are the key trends in access to, participation in and completion of postgraduate study by students from different equity groups? How do these trends differ by university type and type of higher degree?

For each of the five chosen equity groups, the report identified national trends, identified trends within and between university types, and disaggregated the research and coursework cohorts.

Key findings and recommendations

Key national findings included:

- While there had been steady growth in overall undergraduate and postgraduate coursework and research enrolments and completions in the decade 2006–16, this growth was not consistent for all equity groups or institutions.
- Postgraduate proportional representation of Indigenous students and students from low SES backgrounds was smaller than their respective proportions of the undergraduate cohort.
- Conversely, the proportional representation in postgraduate enrolments of regional and remote students, those with disability, and those from a Non-English speaking background was higher than their proportional representation in undergraduate enrolments.

Key findings by university grouping included:

- The Go8 had a large share of the postgraduate cohort which was not matched in terms of its equity performance.
- Regional universities outperformed in terms of equity shares relative to market share.
- The performance of private universities was particularly poor in relation to equity group representation as a whole.

Numerous findings were made for equity groups, a selection of which included:

- All university groups had held ground or increased their proportion of Indigenous students; however, no university met the 3.3 per cent parity target.
- There was an overall downward trend in commencing enrolments of postgraduate students from regional and remote Australia, except for in Go8 universities which experienced a small, but steady, rise.
- The proportion of commencing undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds had remained steady at around 11 per cent, which remained significantly lower than the 25 per cent parity target.
- Over the decade there was a small, but steady, rise in the ongoing postgraduate participation of students living with disability for each of the university groups.
- The total number of commencing domestic postgraduate students from NESB backgrounds in 2016 constituted 4.9 per cent of the total cohort, exceeding the group target of 4.7 per cent.

The report proposed future directions for researchers, policymakers and practitioners:

- More research and policy attention are needed on the postgraduate cohort.
- An examination of equity group heterogeneity and intersectionality to understand the way in which wider participation can be achieved.
- More rigorous qualitative research to understand the issues facing specific cohorts of postgraduate students and institutions.
- Better analysis at the institutional and university group level — wide disparities between the wealth and resources of universities are not aligned with their relative contribution to supporting equity students.
- A focus on representation and achievement across the degree life cycle is required.

Expert commentary: Professor John Phillimore

**NCSEHE Research Grants Program Leader
Executive Director, John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (JCIPP)**

At least since the release of *A Fair Chance for All*, the focus of student equity policy in Australian higher education has been on domestic undergraduate students. Statistical collection and academic research on student equity have followed suit. The significance of higher degree by research (HDR) students to the national innovation effort and to the academic workforce has meant that they have attracted some attention. But discussion and analysis of postgraduate coursework (PGCW) students generally, let alone from an equity perspective, has been lacking.

This report demonstrates that PGCW numbers are now too big to ignore. Domestic PGCW students comprise around a quarter of all domestic student enrolments, and over one third of completions. In some professions, postgraduate qualifications are becoming almost mandatory. Given postgraduate coursework is one of the few areas in which university fees are relatively unregulated, there is the potential for stratification and inequity between students and institutions to shift upwards from the undergraduate to the postgraduate level. Indeed, there is a danger that the system could be “moving the goalposts”, with access to the professions and better paid jobs out of reach (relatively speaking) for equity students.

The report provides useful baseline data from which further equity analysis of the domestic postgraduate student population can be undertaken. It shows low SES students make up only 11 per cent of all PGCW enrolments; this percentage has not shifted over the past decade, despite undergraduate low SES participation shares increasing over the same period from 15.9 per cent in 2011 to 17.9 per cent in 2016. Low SES completions are just half that, at 5.8 per cent of the total. Most other equity groups are similarly underrepresented at postgraduate level. There may be some methodological issues over the definition of low SES status for postgraduate students, given that many are older and their SEIFA characteristics may no longer adequately describe their situation. But this is unlikely to tell the full story.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/widening-participation-or-widening-the-gap-equity-in-postgraduate-study/>

People seeking asylum: Access and support in higher education

Lisa Hartley, Caroline Fleay, Sally Baker, Rachel Burke and Rebecca Field

The University of Newcastle
Curtin University

Non-English Speaking Background Low SES

Over 30,000 people seeking asylum have temporarily resided in Australian communities over the past six years. Improved access to higher education for this group is important for their individual wellbeing and potential to contribute to society. While some universities are effectively responding to the complex barriers faced by people seeking asylum, these measures need to be better supported by government policy.

Background

In the past six years, over 30,000 people seeking asylum in Australia have resided in community detention or lived in the community on temporary bridging visas while they await processing of their refugee claim. These people, if deemed eligible for protection in Australia, are issued with one of two temporary visas: a three-year Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or a five-year Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV).

Accessing higher education is critical for many people seeking asylum, both to acquire qualifications and to live a meaningful life, as well as develop their capacities to contribute to their communities and society. However, there are enormous barriers for people seeking asylum in pursuing higher education, largely due to the restrictive Australian government policies.

Objectives and methodology

The research project provided a national map of the policies and practices affecting people seeking asylum and was the first of its kind to evaluate university and community supports for these students.

The project had three objectives:

1. to gather the first Australia-wide data on numbers of people seeking asylum currently engaging in higher education, and those interested in doing so, and provide an overview of the Australian Government policy context with regard to people seeking asylum and their right to education
2. to provide an overview of the current institutional context with regard to policies and mechanisms to support people seeking asylum and community sector support
3. to identify the barriers to accessing higher education for people seeking asylum and evaluate the effectiveness of university and community sector support initiatives.

The key components of the research included:

- findings from a national symposium that included 25 people seeking asylum, either currently or prospectively enrolled in higher education programs, and 40 representatives from universities and community organisations
- a national online survey of 67 representatives from 25 Australian universities and 21 Australian community organisations

- individual interviews with 11 students with lived experience of seeking asylum, 11 university representatives from nine universities in five Australian states, and six representatives from community organisations in New South Wales and Victoria.

Key findings and recommendations

People seeking asylum were found to face major challenges and barriers prohibitive to accessing higher education.

The only pathway to accessing higher education was being granted admission as an international student, given the temporary nature of the visa they were issued. This meant students were ineligible for financial support programs to assist tertiary study, including the Higher Education Loans Program (HELP), Commonwealth Supported Places, and concession rates.

Other barriers included: difficulty in accessing enabling courses, a lack of access to affordable English language courses, and inadequate access to student or other income supports.

A number of Australian universities had responded to these restrictions. Some universities offered "fee waiver" scholarships covering full tuition fees coupled with community sector advocacy and support.

Further measures are needed to ensure that these students receive supports necessary for their retention, participation and success in their studies. Australian Government policies underpinning the most significant barriers need to be addressed including the need for permanent protection visas to be issued to all who have been recognised as a refugee.

The report produced 26 recommendations: three for the Australian Government, 22 for the university sector and one for the community sector.

Recommendations for the Australian Government included:

- Grant permanent visas to all people currently on TPVs and SHEVs.
- Expedite the processing of refugee claims for those yet to be finalised.
- Ensure that all people seeking asylum and refugees have access to income and student supports on par with other Australians.

Twenty-two recommendations for the university sector were grouped into eight areas:

1. policy and practice development
2. full fee-paying/waiving scholarships
3. financial support
4. alternative entry pathways and transition supports
5. application process
6. academic and language support
7. support for people with disability, mental health issues, ongoing health challenges and family responsibilities
8. sector advocacy.

One community recommendation was produced:

- The sector should collaborate and coordinate with other community organisations and universities to advocate for Australian Government policy change to ensure that people seeking asylum recognised as refugees are given permanent protection visas and all people seeking asylum access appropriate income supports.

Expert commentary: Emeritus Professor Michael Hamel-Green

**College of Arts & Education
Victoria University**

Through well-designed qualitative research with refugees themselves, university support staff, and community-based groups, this important study presents the first detailed analysis of the major higher education barriers faced by refugees on temporary or bridging visas. It identified only 205 of the current 30,000 refugees on such visas as accessing higher education. Denied access to Commonwealth fee assistance, these refugees face the barrier of full course fees as “international” students.

Some universities, to their credit, offer a limited number of scholarships for this refugee group. The study argues cogently and persuasively for improving educational access and settlement hopes for such “in limbo” people seeking asylum living a daily nightmare of trying to survive while seeking the kind of qualifications that might lead to jobs.

The key recommendations, supported strongly by the findings, are that such asylum seekers be transferred to permanent visas that give them the same access to education and income as other Australians; and that universities need to offer, not only more scholarships, but also income support and more one-to-one support for such a marginalised group.

At the same time, the report argues strongly for urgent advocacy both by universities and community groups to achieve federal policy change to provide permanent protection visas and improved support for this group. There are also forms of state and local government support that could be seen as arising from the study’s findings, including low-fee state-based TAFE bridging and pathway programs, especially as offered by cross-sectoral institutions.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/people-seeking-asylum-in-australia-access-and-support-in-higher-education/>

Principles for equity in higher education performance funding

Andrew Harvey, Beni Cakitaki and Matthew Brett

La Trobe University

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

This research illustrated the need to consider student equity as central to any performance funding model, and to distinguish performance from outcomes. National data on retention, completion, satisfaction and employment, including for non-university providers was analysed, and performance funding models in the US and UK were examined. The report produced principles for performance funding, embedded into four key recommendations.

Background

Governments have long sought to assess and reward higher education institutions for their performance. Understanding the relative performance of institutions in teaching, retaining and graduating students would provide accountability for growing public funding, and would also be extremely helpful for prospective students. But what constitutes “performance” and how should it be measured?

The national objectives of higher education—enshrined in legislation—include quality, diversity, and the promotion of student equity. “Performance” would ideally be defined by institutional success against these interrelated objectives, whether assessing teaching quality or the ability to develop thoughtful, productive and employable graduates.

Objectives and methodology

The research focused on why, and how, any effective performance model would incorporate principles of student equity. Drawing on Australian higher education history, evidence from the US and the UK, and an analysis of contemporary Australian data, it argued that there are fundamental principles required to ensure an effective and equitable performance funding model.

Key findings and recommendations

The report produced principles for performance funding, embedded into four recommendations:

1. Integrate student equity as an explicit objective of the performance funding model.
 - Align performance funding objectives with national higher education objectives, which include an explicit commitment to student equity and diversity. This commitment could include adopting equity of access as a performance objective in its own right.
 - Analysis of Australian data reveals variable institutional commitment to the goal of widening participation, highlighting the potential value of including equity of access as a performance objective in its own right. The need to integrate student equity would also be inherent in the design of metrics for student success, retention, completion, satisfaction, and outcomes.

2. Reward performance rather than outcomes.
 - Control for student equity and/or correlated factors to distinguish institutional performance from outcomes, and to protect the objective of widening participation. Relatedly, develop measures of “learning gain” and other indicators that reflect the value added by institutions.
 - Such work has the potential to disrupt existing research-based rankings and to identify institutions that are high performing in teaching and supporting students, including those from equity groups. Analysis of current Australian data, however, suggests that many existing potential metrics are either negatively or not correlated with each other. In addition, the public universities report relatively homogeneous student outcomes on most measures. Significant further work is required to distinguish institutional performance in areas of teaching, success, student satisfaction, and graduate outcomes.

3. Establish a student-centred performance funding model.
 - Include students in the model design, include the student voice as a metric, and enable clear and transparent information that students can easily access and understand, including for non-university higher education institutions.
 - The analysis suggests that non-universities include both the highest and lowest performers on many potential measures, but prospective students currently lack much of this information. Unless models are explicitly student-centred, performance funding could exacerbate inequity, partly by providing information that is accessible only to the most privileged students.

4. Ensure consistency with broader principles of effective performance funding. An equitable performance funding model would also need to observe broader established principles of good practice. Though some of these principles are not explicitly related to equity, it is important to note the need for:
 - efficiency, with limited transaction and implementation costs
 - promotion of a developmental rather than punitive approach, which rewards institutions for improvement over time
 - strong accountability, consistency, and stability, to enable long-term planning and to avoid perverse incentives and “gaming” of the metrics
 - expansion of institutional capacity to assist universities to analyse and improve their performance
 - broad stakeholder engagement in design and implementation
 - support for the diversity of institutional missions
 - respect of provider autonomy, with prescribed uses
 - of funding in place only when justified by strong
 - policy reasons.

Expert commentary: Adjunct Professor Robyn Quin

Curtin University

Andrew Harvey, Beni Cakitaki and Matt Brett make a strong and evidence-based argument for including student equity as one measure of institutional performance and hence in the distribution of reward funding. They take the argument a step further and explain why institutions should not be rewarded for simply widening participation but for demonstrating they add value through effective teaching and support for students including those from equity groups. The institutions that make a difference should be the ones that get rewarded.

They position their argument in the broader context of a history of performance measures (and their value or non-value) in Australia, the United Kingdom and, unusually, the United States. The discussion is very readable and enlightening.

An original and compelling idea in the paper is that of including students in the development of a performance funding model. Students, they believe, should be included both in the design and assessment of any performance model and the student voice as a performance measure.

The paper makes an original and timely contribution to the national debate about performance funding by focusing on what should count as performance and what aspects of performance should be measured and rewarded.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/principles-for-equity-in-higher-education-performance-funding/>

Regional communities' influences on equity participation in higher education

Robin Katersky Barnes, Sue Kilpatrick, Jessica Woodroffe, Nicole Crawford, Sherridan Emery, Gemma Burns and Margaret Noble

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

Students from regional and remote Australia experience rates of access, retention and success in higher education below those of their city counterparts. It is well known that the reasons for this are many, varied and complex. To investigate the challenges and solutions, the project adopted a strengths-based perspective, identifying drivers of success including positive community attitudes and employer support towards education, and proximity to a university campus. There was also recognition of the need to better understand factors influencing higher education participation of mature age students; employers as enablers of access to higher education; and developing people-rich university partnerships.

Background

There has been a growing interest in challenges faced by students from regional and remote Australia as higher education access, participation, retention, success and attainment indicators remain persistently below those of their metropolitan counterparts.

The study adopted a strengths-based approach to identify and explore higher performing communities' characteristics, attitudes and expectations. It investigated programs, partnerships and interventions. Additionally, it examined social capital and infrastructure as sources of influence on decision making. These considerations were analysed to uncover key influencers supporting students to embark on higher education.

Objectives and methodology

The project used a mixed methods approach. Regional and remote communities, defined by postcode, were analysed for student access, participation, retention, success, and attainment indicators by equity group, using Department of Education data from 2011–16. Attainment was defined as award or degree completion. Regional and remote students attending five universities with more than 30 per cent of student load from regional and remote areas were surveyed to find community-related factors that influenced and enabled access, participation, retention and success.

Case studies identified community infrastructure relevant to educational aspiration. Key informants were interviewed to explore community factors contributing to higher education participation and success in five communities, selected to represent a diversity of communities which performed well on access, participation, retention and completion indicators from the national data and survey phases.

Key findings and recommendations

The study confirmed that there were differences among regional and remote communities in community assets and attitudes that affected higher education outcomes.

- Positive community attitudes towards education, employer support for higher education, proximity to a university campus and connections between campus and community each had a significant role in promoting higher education access, participation and success.
- Home community factors appeared to influence completion mainly through their impact on initial access to higher education.
- Communities with higher rates of their population accessing higher education tended to also have higher rates of participation and completion but did not have higher retention rates and success rates. This generally applied to each equity group.
- Communities with well above-average retention rates and success rates tended to have smaller populations.
- Communities proximate to a university campus performed well on multiple higher education indicators for regional and remote students overall, and also for disability, Indigenous and Non-English Speaking Background equity group students.

Community attitudes towards education revealed interesting observations, including:

- Students from all states agreed that their home community valued education.
- More Tasmanian students agreed that students tended to go to TAFE (rather than university) than students from any other state.
- Remote students were less likely to agree than regional students that people from their community with the ability to go to university were expected to go to university.

Findings from survey responses from regional and remote students revealed:

- Teachers and school staff, others who studied at university, and friends and family, were the home community factors most frequently reported as contributing to awareness of university and also the most commonly reported contributors of information and support that led to higher education participation and success.
- The presence of a university campus, visits from university staff and organised visits to a campus contributed to awareness and participation for almost half of the respondents.
- A quarter of survey respondents did not have affordable internet in their home community and less than two-thirds had reliable high-speed broadband, both essential infrastructure for higher education study.

Key implications for policy and practice included:

- Mature age students made up a larger proportion of the regional and remote cohort than the metropolitan student cohort but tended to be more invisible in policy and university outreach settings.
- Employers were enablers of higher education access, participation and success among community members of all ages within regional and remote communities.
- University partnerships that are people-rich and draw on regional and remote community social capital and other assets such as employers, local libraries, study centres and community organisations should be developed and expanded and include strategies to engage both younger and mature age students.

The report proposed further research into three areas:

- factors influencing regional mature age student higher education access, participation and success
- the relationship between home community skill profile, workforce needs and employer roles in encouraging and supporting higher education access, participation and success

- the extent to which state-specific educational and/or other sociocultural factors influence higher education participation and success rates and whether community size has some independent influence on higher education participation.

Expert commentary: Dr Tim Pitman

**Senior Research Fellow, School of Education
Curtin University**

In Australia, three out of every 10 people live outside a major city and one in 10 live in towns with populations less than 10,000. Access to higher education for these Australians is of critical importance, yet we know that generally, regional Australians lag behind the rest of the nation in terms of higher education participation and achievement. What we need to know more about—and what this study seeks to do—is understand what regional communities are or could be doing to effect change.

By analysing national-level quantitative data, this study gives us a greater insight into the "what": e.g., what types of people attend university in regional Australia, what attainment levels they gain, etc. But further, the case studies afforded the researchers the opportunity to speak to key change agents in these communities, to illuminate what both enables and inhibits regional higher education participation and success.

The findings from this study are detailed and in-depth and there is much to learn here. Yes, individuals at the community level can, and do make a positive difference, and this report describes how. Yes, community support is vital for the eventual success of many individuals and again, the report explores this issue in detail. But for me, the key finding is that proximal access to a higher education institution may be the most important factor in determining the higher education future of many regional Australians. To paraphrase a line from a movie — "If you build it they will come".

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/regional-communities-influences-on-equity-participation-higher-education/>

Shifts in space and self: Moving from community to university

Sarah O’Shea, Erica Southgate, Ann Jardine, Shamus Smith and Janine Delahunty

The University of Wollongong Australia

The University of Newcastle

The University of New South Wales

**Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote**

Digital storytelling platforms were used to gain fresh insights into the challenges facing regional and remote students as they move into higher education. The study gave students the opportunity to narrate and visually represent their individual perspectives, with workshops offered to commencing Year 11 students as part of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) ASPIRE outreach program.

Background

University enrolments have grown strongly over the last decade. However, rates of completion have remained relatively static, with non-completers consistently hovering between 15–18 per cent. Disproportionate numbers of early leavers are from regional and remote areas. Exploring how these students consider their post-schooling future can provide some insights into the issues behind this attrition. A better understanding of the “lived experiences” of learners is required.

Objectives and methodology

The research project employed a digital storytelling methodology to explore the cognitive, affective and embodied nature of the university experience in two areas: how young people from regional and remote areas contemplate post-schooling options; and the subjective experience of considering and actually moving into university.

Interviews and focus groups complemented digital stories, which enabled participants to narrate their own experiences incorporating a range of media including oral, written and pictorial representation.

The project was guided by three research questions:

1. How do young people articulate their movement into the university environment and the roles of their community/family in this process?
2. How do these young people understand themselves as university learners and how do these perceptions evolve throughout the first year of study?
3. How do the members of regional and remote communities articulate the influences or impacts brought by these young people back to their communities of origin?

The research questions were addressed by a three-staged study, with each question addressed through discrete activities:

1. Digital storytelling workshops were offered to commencing Year 11 students as part of the ASPIRE outreach program, with seven schools involved. Twenty-six digital stories were created by students who were asked to consider their post-Year 12 plans.
2. Current university students were engaged in the scripting and production of digital stories. These were completed by blog entries that explored three themes: arriving at

university and being a student; moving between university and community; and reflecting on the first year.

3. In-depth analysis of the data was conducted.

Key findings and recommendations

Four key findings were identified:

1. The embodied nature of the movement away from the community and the ways in which this was conceived by young people in terms of hardship or difficulty rather than being a positive rite of passage.
2. The complexity of transitions between the home and the world that exists beyond the confines of regional community settings — these transitions were not only defined by geography but also defined in terms of relationships and identity formation.
3. Perceptions among young regional people that university was not necessarily for “people like them” — a sense that attending higher education was an “exceptional” rather than an “expected” life course trajectory.
4. The ways in which the desire to “give back” to the community informed post-schooling decisions about attending university and also what to study.

Based on the findings, the report made five recommendations:

1. Universities need to develop dedicated and pre-enrolment, enrolment and transition support, timed to critical stages, delivered with the regional student cohort in mind. Strategies need to consider learners in a holistic sense, addressing academic knowledge and also addressing the emotional repercussions of moving away from the community to attend university.
2. The Australian Government Department of Education needs to explore approaches to better utilise existing online opportunities in high schools to enable regional and remote students to avail themselves of online university opportunities. This could include incorporating university subjects within the high school curriculum to introduce these learners to higher education expectations and to provide a structured introduction to studying online at a tertiary level.
3. Equity researchers should leverage the impactful nature of digital storytelling as a place-based methodology that is effective in understanding what is “inside students’ heads”. This methodology provides an opportunity for learners to both narrate and visually represent personal perspectives, such as “local narratives”, providing alternative or additional insight to quantitative or statistical evidence.
4. The university sector should strive to create productive collaborations/partnerships across regional and metropolitan universities that are characterised by united and cohesive outreach programs. These programs should provide multiple opportunities for regional and remote students and their families to engage with and experience a range of different institutions across the high school cycle.
5. Education policymakers need to appreciate regional and remote populations in terms of their multidimensionality. Acknowledging the rich diversity of communities avoids individuals only being defined by location and instead foregrounds the importance of relationships with the family, broader community and the land. This recognition would include understanding that this is not a group without aspirations or goals but rather a cohort that may simply require additional recognition and support in realising these ambitions.

Expert commentary: Associate Professor Cathy Stone

**NCSEHE Adjunct Fellow
The University of Newcastle**

Through the gathering and relating of students' own stories, this report shines a light on factors influencing post-school aspirations and university experiences of high school students in regional and remote areas of Australia. Given the significantly lower proportion of students entering university from these areas compared with metropolitan areas, this is both timely and relevant for government policy-makers and for higher education institutions.

The use of digital story-telling, woven into the report through active links, is highly engaging, with students talking directly to the reading audience. Some of these students are still at high school while others have begun university, and each has their own story to tell, in their own way. Their stories bring powerfully to life the report's recommendations; such as for universities to develop "students as partners" frameworks, to better engage, prepare and support these students via targeted outreach activities and other strategies; for government education departments to make online university study available within regional and remote high schools so that students can gain both university experience and credit; and, perhaps most importantly, for policies and interventions by all concerned to recognise the "multidimensionality" within this cohort and their diverse communities. These and other recommendations within the report are pertinent and valuable, while the inspirational student stories provide an even richer perspective on the issues raised and deserve to be seen and heard for themselves.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/moving-from-community-to-university/>

Structural inequality in higher education: Creating institutional cultures that enable all students

Ryan Naylor and Nathan Mifsud

La Trobe University

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

This report found an institution-wide approach, including staff and students, could reduce the structural barriers to higher education retention and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Universities and non-university higher education providers (NUHEPs) should prioritise a culture that actively identifies and overcomes barriers to equal participation, rather than relying on students to adapt to existing structures.

Background

With higher education funding likely to be increasingly linked to performance measurement, there is pressure on institutions to support and improve retention, success and completion rates for students without compromising the access and participation of students from equity group backgrounds.

The project examined how equity participation could be improved by modifying institutional structures to support and retain students.

Structural inequality is adopted as the theoretical framework, placing the focus on institutions and what they do to block or facilitate a sense of belonging and ease of navigation within the institution, rather than the characteristics of the students.

Barriers arise from the organisational and cultural make-up of an institution and are most amenable to change from within the sector.

Structural inequality is the converse of traditional deficit and “cultural resources” models of student support: rather than asking how students can acquire missing skills needed to leverage success. The research asked what institutions can do to make themselves more or less inclusive and navigable for all students.

Objectives and methodology

The project’s principal research questions were:

- How can institutions address systemic barriers that may contribute to student attrition, particularly in students from equity backgrounds?
- How can structural and cultural causes of attrition be reduced through institutional change?

Two sub-questions were investigated:

- What benefits might institutions achieve by using a structural inequality lens, in addition to the more common cultural capital lens?

- Using best practice case studies, what implications are there for formal and informal leaders within institutions to reduce structural inequalities?

The project adopted a multi-phase, qualitative methodology based on written and interview responses to develop case studies that articulate what higher education institutions are doing in the structural equality space and identify areas of good practice. Twelve universities and two non-university higher education providers (NUHEPs) participated in the study.

The case studies demonstrated that three main approaches had been adopted by the participating institutions: modifying the institutional structures to minimise barriers; providing services or supports that seek to build student cultural resources and capacity; blended approaches, which combine structurally enabling and capacity building approaches.

The report also identified six dimensions of university activity that may act as potential loci for internal structural inequalities: staff, students, curriculum, administration, campus life and the physical environment. An institution-level assessment of the overall approach was also included.

Key findings and recommendations

While institutions appeared more likely to have adopted capacity building approaches in some areas (notably administration) than others, structurally enabling responses were found in each area, and academic leaders acknowledged that institutions needed to grapple with structural inequalities.

The diversity in institutional responses suggests that the “problem” of enacting structurally enabling change can be accomplished by continuous, modular transformation rather than attempting sweeping organisational change.

The report provided some guidance on how institutions could move towards a structurally enabling model of practice. A fundamental principle is that student equity is “everyone’s business” within an institution. The report recommended that such a shift would be most effectively undertaken through distributed leadership, which holds that anyone may exert change within an institution; this includes all staff as well as students.

Based on the findings from this research, it was recommended that:

- all institutional staff should continue to focus on improving retention, success and completion rates for all students enrolled in their institutions, with a particular focus on improving the experiences and outcomes of students from equity backgrounds
- institutional leaders should audit their institutions to identify where structural barriers exist, and evaluate ways to minimise their impact on students
- students should be conceptualised as distributed leaders and involved in all discussions that seek to identify structural barriers and develop structurally enabling responses; a diverse range of students should provide input into this process
- the administration area is particularly likely to present opportunities for transitioning to structurally enabling approaches; institutional leaders and relevant staff should therefore focus attention there to reduce structural barriers
- funding bodies and academics should support and undertake further research into structural inequality in the Australian higher education sector and the responses institutions are making to reduce these barriers
- leaders should adopt continuous, modular change in local areas. Staff at all levels should identify ways to reduce the effort required to make that change, and to facilitate change through social influence in order to create sustainable change.

Expert commentary: Emeritus Professor Andrew Taggart

Murdoch University

High quality and validated research/evaluation projects should be the drivers of all policy. Policy once effectively translated should then be ready for implementation. The implementation necessary to bring about the change the policy intends remains the biggest challenge confronting Governments and indeed researchers. Equity policy is no different.

What we learn from Naylor and Mifsud's work is that equity students must be active participants in solving policy implementation challenges. Institutional-wide approaches show promise in better supporting equity students. Some guiding principles become apparent: meet students where they are at, don't see equity students with deficits; and higher education providers review their structures to enhance student belonging and ease navigation so that students are enabled to "fit in" not forced. Interestingly it appears that making continuous but small changes to administrative/student services practices can make a difference.

Modifying institutional structures for curriculum including practices such as plain language course materials both print and online; ensuring course mapping supports part-time study, particularly during placements (e.g. education and nursing), and offering flexible deadlines for assignments and exams that accommodate family and work commitments. From a staff perspective the clear message is support staff, academic and professional, to be pro-active with students to ensure awareness of administrative requirements without being on campus.

When we see policy impacting on real students in real-time then we need to learn from these successes and plan to review over time to see that the practices are resilient, like so many of our equity students.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/structural-inequality-retention-equity-students/>

Success and failure in higher education on uneven playing fields

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The University of Newcastle
The University of Wollongong Australia

Disability
Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote

With more people accessing higher education, it is important that more information on students’ aspiration, success and failure in their first experiences of university is made available to better support students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. This report explored forms of cultural and social capital that first year university students drew upon from their prior schooling to support their transitional journey into higher education.

Background

Public policy is inadequately informed about student experiences of “success” and “failure” and how students make sense of those terms. This is an issue of increasing concern at a time when places in some schools and universities are becoming segregated as some families are able to choose where they send their children to school, while others are not afforded the same privilege, creating social hierarchies.

Objectives and methodology

Three questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do Australian higher education reports informing current policy account for experiences of student success and/or failure?
2. How do first year equity students experience academic failure and success?
3. How do first year equity students mobilise and make sense of their first experiences of failure and success in higher education?

A literature review highlighted that students are entering university from increasingly diverse backgrounds which raises the issue whether the definition of equity should be extended beyond low socioeconomic status (SES).

The study included a secondary quantitative analysis of existing anonymised institutional data. Participants in this part of the study comprised 7,239 (2,744 males, 4,495 females) domestic students enrolled across four undergraduate courses (commerce, education, nursing and civil engineering) in one academic year (2016) from four different faculties at various campuses of a large metropolitan and regional university in Victoria.

This phase of the data collection investigated the effects of SES and Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) on student failure and dropout rates. More specifically, when controlling for other student characteristics and demographic factors, the unique contributions of SES and ATAR are of interest to the key findings of the study.

Focus groups and interviews were held with 24 students across two institutions — Deakin University in Victoria and the University of Wollongong in New South Wales.

Key findings and recommendations

Key findings from the qualitative data demonstrated that the connections between first year student experience of success and failure were related to outcomes of the first assessment in higher education. For students transitioning from secondary school into higher education, or coming into it after taking time off from formal education, receiving high marks/grades on their first assignments reaffirmed them as belonging in higher education. When they were not as successful on the first assignment they often did not know what was expected, both on the assignment and how it will be assessed. This could lead first year students to question if they belong in higher education.

Support networks and structures were important in the ways in which students experienced success. How and where they mobilised these networks from multiple entities both within and external to higher education institutions was also significant. This included support by family and friends, Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) initiatives, programs such as Peer Assisted Study Support (PASS), and support and feedback from lecturers and tutors.

Recommendations

Policy

- Australian education policy should include a widened definition of the parameters of equity groups to allow for more flexible funding models that enable students from more diverse backgrounds to be supported.

Practical action

- Practical action in higher education to strengthen the connections between the various key stakeholders in the students' journey of success may increase their access to support programs. There was considerable awareness of these programs but students were not always accessing them independently.
- Building feedback literacy into early assessment experiences. Students in the study were unsure about how to address some of the feedback information. More needs to be done to engage students with assessment expectations, standards and criteria beyond mere provision of a rubric.

Further research

- Further study should be directed into developing more interconnected support programs (including building assessment literacy, support and wellbeing into units of study) with students, academic and professional staff to encourage students to reflect on their definitions of success, and to normalise help-seeking if they fail to meet their expectations or if they fail a unit.
- Research on students over time beyond the first assignment is recommended to investigate how students changed and adapted their assessment habits and how this might increase their sense of belonging in higher education.
- Investigate more in-depth pathways to higher education than currently considered. Given many of the students from our study come from multiple equity categories, seeking tailored support strategies for equity students could ensure that uneven playing fields are addressed before they become even more segregated.

Expert commentary: Dr Nicole Crawford

**NCSEHE 2019/20 Equity Fellow
University of Tasmania**

Several of the key points in this report, such as broadening the definitions of equity groups and "success", and of knowing who our students are, resonate with recent NCSEHE reports, including *The Best Chance for All*. The quotations from students are salutary reminders of the assumptions easily made by academic staff about the academic literacies, and academic cultural and social capitals that first-year students may/may not arrive with when commencing university. The endeavour of creating a level playing field starts right at the beginning with the first assessment task.

In taking a strengths-based approach, it is not the students who are the "issue"; we are prompted to think about what we, as institutions and teaching staff, can do differently to make the requirements, expectations, and grading schemas explicit to *all* students from the outset. The finding that students in this study did not ask the staff, who were right in front of them, for assistance sends further powerful messages about the importance of teaching staff being approachable and welcoming questions from students — it's all about relationships! The qualitative findings also reveal how much the student participants took their performance in their assessment tasks to heart, thus impacting on them emotionally, on their confidence, and on their sense of whether or not they belong in their new academic culture. This report sparks us to question our assumptions and to think about how not to perpetuate the existing inequalities; many of the important issues highlighted could start to be addressed by implementing inclusive teaching practices, embedding academic literacies, and making the implicit/hidden curriculum explicit.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/success-failure-higher-education-uneven-playing-fields/>

Understanding completion rates of Indigenous higher education students from two regional universities: A cohort analysis

Fiona Shalley, James Smith, Denise Wood, Bronwyn Fredericks, Kim Robertson and Steven Larkin

Charles Darwin University
CQUniversity
The University of Queensland
The University of Newcastle

**Non-English Speaking Background
Indigenous
Low SES
Regional/Remote**

Indigenous students have lower higher education access, participation and completion rates compared with non-Indigenous students. While there are positive signs of improvement in these areas, there remain gaps in our knowledge as to the nature and magnitude of barriers and enablers in supporting Indigenous aspirations in higher education. This in-depth study of Indigenous students at two regionally-based universities aimed to strengthen the evidence base on Indigenous student completions and to review assumptions associated with policies targeting Indigenous higher education. The research report clarified issues on Indigenous access, participation and outcomes and provided four sets of recommendations for long-term cohort tracking; data and system changes; specific research gaps; and students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Background

Compared to the national Indigenous higher education student population, Indigenous students from regional and remote areas face additional challenges and barriers in accessing and participating in higher education. Significantly, they are likely to belong to multiple equity groups

There have been numerous calls for an improved evidence base to inform better policy and practice to support increased Indigenous participation and success in higher education. This is consistent with the Australian Government requiring greater performance transparency and institutional accountability around indicators of student success and student attrition, which also provides the impetus for more targeted research into Indigenous higher education.

Objectives and methodology

Student data can be complicated, reflecting the complex nature of student engagement with higher education. Students can discontinue and re-enter courses at any time; exit with a different degree type; change between full- and part-time; and change their study modality between internal and external. These factors influence the length of time it takes to complete a degree, as well as relative success and completion rates.

The project investigated the higher education outcomes of Indigenous students enrolled in two regionally-based universities: Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Central Queensland University (CQUniversity).

It tracked the progress of students enrolled in these universities starting with the 2005 cohort and finishing with the 2012 cohort.

A cohort analysis methodology allowed identification of relationships between characteristics of a population and that population's behaviours. Included in the analysis were student completions; length of time to complete; and student attrition.

Combining these results with student and staff interviews about the barriers and enablers to Indigenous student success allowed the cohort analysis to be grounded in the actual experiences of students from these universities. Additional qualitative research led by the two universities were also used to understand the complexities often faced by their students in balancing study and life responsibilities.

Key findings and recommendations

Compared to the national domestic student population, the Indigenous students from CDU/CQUniversity were: generally from regional and remote Australia and from low socioeconomic status (SES) areas, likely to be studying externally, likely to be female, likely to be mature age, more likely to have an identified disability but less likely to identify a non-English speaking background, likely to be admitted through pathways other than secondary school, highly likely to be the first in their family to enrol in university, and likely to be enrolled in a small number of study areas.

Some of the conclusions from the report included:

- Indigenous students from CDU and CQUniversity were gaining university awards, albeit at lower rates, when compared to the national Indigenous student population.
- Aspiration and motivation associated with “giving back” to their communities may play a significant role in why Indigenous students pursue higher education, with the predominance of studies in society, education and nursing.
- Additional support is likely to be needed for students with higher incidences of “regionality” and remoteness.
- CDU and CQUniversity Indigenous students took longer to complete their awards, which may support other research findings that Indigenous engagement with universities is not perceived as a time-limited activity in the way that other students see it.

In summary, recommendations proposed:

- Expand long-term cohort tracking to include separate analysis of the national Indigenous population.
- Improve data and information system changes to extend timeframe reporting of Indigenous student higher education award completion to a minimum of ten years; and develop a more sophisticated evaluation process, including targets and measures, for reporting participation and completions which are more appropriate to their circumstances.
- Provide support for Indigenous students from non- English speaking backgrounds to acknowledge the additional English Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) needs of some. Provide additional support structures, and work with Indigenous communities who speak languages other than English to increase aspiration and participation in higher education.

Expert commentary: Associate Professor Michael Dockery

Faculty of Business and Law
Curtin University

It is well known that, on average, Indigenous Australians do not achieve the same level of formal educational attainment as other Australians. The reasons are multifaceted and complex, with barriers commencing from early childhood and gaps in attainment widening over the life course. Nuanced and contextual analyses are required to unpack the causes of lower attainment and to generate sensible solutions for policy and practice. Fiona Shalley and colleagues have made an important and novel contribution along those lines.

Concentrating on students from two regional universities, the report presents quantitative analyses tracking cohorts of students through their studies and frames the results in the context of recent qualitative studies of students from the same two universities. The regional focus is significant — the relative exclusion from higher education of people in regional and remote Australia must be addressed to improve access for Indigenous students.

This report and its clear recommendations offer some much needed direction. For me, a telling—but unsurprising—finding that Indigenous students are concentrated in courses of direct relevance to their communities. That simple insight needs to drive reform in delivery of higher education and how data are collected to monitor Indigenous students' attraction, retention and success.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/completion-indigenous-higher-education-regional-universities/>

Research Fellowship report: Career construction, future work and the perceived risks of going to university for young people from low SES backgrounds

Maria Raciti

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Low SES
Regional/Remote

People from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds attend university based on their own assessment of perceived risks, rather than a lack of aspiration or ability. This proposition has not been thoroughly researched in a systematic way in equity in higher education in Australia. This Fellowship examined different kinds of perceived risks and the way they may play into work and careers. The findings introduced risk tolerance as a characteristic in explaining differences in how low SES high school students respond to the decision of whether to go to university.

Background

Making career decisions is increasingly complex and fraught with risk. Perceived risks are endemic in the decision to go to university. This Fellowship explored the role of perceived risks in the light of the contemporary career context where traditional ways of planning careers no longer work.

We live in uncertain times with the rise of the gig economy, job automation, career mini-cycles, and an erosion of the sense of security that going to university will "guarantee" access to a defined, stable occupation. With more occupations to choose from than ever before, young people may experience confusion or even decision paralysis. With predictions that jobs in the future are more likely to need a university education, there is a need to accelerate efforts to increase participation of people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds to prevent the further deepening of social inequalities.

Objectives and methodology

The aim of the Research Fellowship was to understand the interplay between career construction, future work and the perceived risks of going to university for young people from low SES backgrounds.

The project comprised three components: the role of perceived risks in the decision to go (or not to go) to university for high school students from low SES backgrounds, the decision-making processes of low SES high school students, and risk tolerance as a characteristic that can explain differences in how low SES high school students respond to the decision dilemma of whether to go (or not to go) to university.

The key research question was: How do the perceived risks of going to university influence the decision to participate in Australian higher education by people from low SES backgrounds? The research question produced two objectives: to identify the types of risks that people from low SES backgrounds associate with going to university, and to develop a

model of the influence of perceived risks on the decision to go to university by people from low SES backgrounds.

Three data studies were generated: a systematic content analysis of grey literature, a manual thematic analysis of secondary qualitative data collected in a recent National Priorities Pool (NPP) project, and a quantitative national survey that compared the perceptions of people from low SES backgrounds to those from other SES backgrounds to identify statistically significant differences in the project model.

Key findings and recommendations

Ten different types of risk were identified: functional risk, financial and resource risk, psychological risk, social risk, time-loss risk, physical and wellbeing risk, social class identity, opportunity cost, competency risk, and overall risk.

The study found low SES high school students responded in three different ways to the dilemma of whether or not to go to university: shortcut the decision-making process, postpone or avoid making a decision, or engage in "satisficing" where trade-offs are made to arrive at a "good enough" solution.

Risk tolerance was identified as a characteristic influencing students' responses to decision dilemmas. People varied in terms of how they approached risk. Some students were risk averse, others risk neutral and others are risk seekers.

A university participation decision-making model compared the influence of perceived risks on students from low SES backgrounds with those of other SES backgrounds and identified areas for widening participation.

Insights from the report included:

- Low SES high school students' perceptions of functional risk, social risk and overall risk could predict when they intended to go to university.
- Low SES high school students were more likely to be risk averse than their other SES counterparts.
- Low SES high school students who were risk seekers perceived that only good could come from going to university.
- Risk neutral low SES high school students were careful and more likely to be the first in their families to go to university.
- Compared to their other SES counterparts, low SES high school students were slower to progress to the exploration of occupations; were slower to progress to decisions short-cutting; and—for those who perceived going to university as risky—were less likely to postpone the decision.
- The parents of risk averse low SES high school students underestimated how much their child was concerned about going to university.

Expert commentary: Professor Sally Kift

Visiting Professorial Fellow NCSEHE

In this report, Maria Raciti addresses a significant knowledge gap for widening participation: the influence of perceived risk on decision-making by students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds about whether to go to university. This comes at a time when low SES enrolments are vulnerable: the reimposition of caps on student places has already delivered a massive decline in low SES enrolments—with growth enrolments down 83 per cent in the first six months from the past nine year average according to a recent report—while metrics proposed for performance-based funding present further risks to equity.

As jobs and careers shift, and as Industry 4.0 transformations mandate tertiary qualifications as foundational for lifelong learning and thriving, Maria's work offers us a nuanced model to navigate this career complexity for our most disadvantaged young people. She encapsulates the potential for decision-making to be short-cut, postponed/avoided or satisfied for a "good enough" solution and surfaces the reality of students' risk tolerance. This is socially just and nation building work. Social cohesion and national productivity demand that we accelerate our efforts to increase tertiary participation of low SES populations and bolster the prospects of successful completion by front-ending the quality of career advising.

For *The Best Chance for All*, (2018) and as Maria's Dr Suess quote encourages, we have a duty to help the young Low SES "mind-maker-upper to make up their mind" and equitably share in the full benefits that flow from active societal and workforce participation.

Full Report: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/perceived-risks-of-going-to-university/>

Biographies

Prof. Sue TRINIDAD

Sue Trinidad is the Director of the NCSEHE. An established scholar in the areas of higher education pedagogy and change management, the use of technology and student learning, Sue's research covers higher education and leadership including the use of technology for regional and remote areas to provide equitable access for all students regardless of their geographical location. Prior to becoming the NCSEHE's Director, Sue was Deputy PVC and Dean of Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin during 2007–12.

Prof. John PHILLIMORE

John Phillimore has been the Executive Director of the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (JCIPP) at Curtin University since 2007. John oversees the NCSEHE Research Grants Program. He is the leader of the Curtin Future of Work Institute's Public Policy in a Digital Age research program. For the past 30 years, he has worked either as an academic or as a senior adviser in the Western Australian Government. He has conducted research and written on public policy issues, including intergovernmental relations, higher education, public sector management, the Australian welfare state, regional policy, and Australian politics.

Paul FARNHILL

Paul Farnhill is an Economist and Policy Analyst with wide experience in policy issues in government and industry. Paul worked for the *Financial Times* newspaper in London before joining the Western Australian Government in a range of roles in economic development and policy analysis. He has also been a political speech writer and advisor to ministers and premiers.

A/Prof. Rola AJJAWI

Rola Ajjawi is Associate Professor in Educational Research at the Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning (CRADLE) at Deakin University. She has extensive experience in higher education research with an interest in workplace learning and feedback. Her aim is to promote success in higher education for all students. Rola co-edited a recent book on the impact of feedback in higher education: improving assessment outcomes for learners.

Peter ALSEN

Peter Alsen is a PhD candidate at the School of Education and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Deakin University. A former early childhood educator, his research focuses on the intersection of politics, law and education, entitled *Concepts of Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia and Germany*. Peter holds a masters degree in political science, law and psychology with a published monograph *Human Rights between Universalism and Particularism* (in German).

Dr Sally BAKER

Sally Baker is a Lecturer in the School of Education and the education "focal point" for the Forced Migration Research Network at the University of New South Wales. Sally's teaching and research interests centre on language, literacies, transition and equity in higher education, particularly with regard to culturally and linguistically diverse students, and refugee students in particular. Sally is also the Chair of the national Refugee Education Special Interest Group.

Prof. Dawn BENNETT

Dawn Bennett is The John Curtin Distinguished Professor of Higher Education and Director of the EmployABILITY and Creative Workforce Initiatives at Curtin University. She is acknowledged internationally as an expert on the development of graduate employability within higher education. Since 2002, she has led or contributed to research and interventions relating to women in STEM, learners with Autism, international student success, graduate success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, Indigenous cultural awareness, and learning supports for remote and regional students.

Prof. Sue BENNETT

Sue Bennett is Head of the School of Education at the University of Wollongong. Sue's research investigates how people engage with technology in their everyday lives and in educational settings. Her aim is to develop a more holistic understanding of people's technology practices, particularly to promote access and equity across educational experiences.

Matthew Brett

Matt Brett is Director of Academic Governance and Standards at Deakin University. He was a 2017 Equity Fellow and is now an Adjunct Fellow with the NCSEHE. Both Matt's parents were Deaf giving him lifelong experience of disability and catalysing over two decades of commitment to equity in higher education. Notable achievements include an Australian Learning and Teaching Citation for outstanding contributions to student learning and co-authorship of NCSEHE's *The Best Chance For All*.

Dr Rachel BURKE

Rachel Burke is an applied linguist in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle. Rachel's work focuses on linguistically and culturally diverse educational contexts, the critical examination of policyscape, and praxis-driven approaches to language and literacies education. Rachel has strong and established associations with community/not-for-profit providers of education and, through her research, seeks to highlight the value and significance of linguistic plurality, and advocate for equitable access to education.

Gemma BURNS

Gemma works at the University of Tasmania as a project manager and research assistant on projects with a focus on education, attainment and community engagement. Having started her career as a secondary teacher, she remains passionate about education and its power to transform and enrich lives. She is also a member of the Schools Engagement team where, as Coordinator of the School Higher Education Learning Hub at Newstead College, she supports and encourages Year 11 and 12 students to consider university pathways.

Beni CAKITAKI

Beni Cakitaki is a Research Officer at the Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research (CHEEDR) at La Trobe University, with a focus on quantitative methods. His research interests include Australian and international higher education policy, program evaluation, predictive analytics, student success and retention, and the political philosophy of education. Prior to his position at CHEEDR, Beni was a research assistant for Andrew Norton at the Grattan Institute.

A/Prof. Buly CARDAK

Buly Cardak is an Associate Professor of Economics at the La Trobe Business School and a member of the NCSEHE Advisory Board. His expertise is in the economics of education, publishing papers and grant funded research reports on the impact of disadvantage on university participation. Important research contributions include the impact of ability to pay on university participation and completion in Australia and the importance of first recorded

home address in understanding mobility and university participation of Australian regional students.

Dr David CARROLL

David Carroll is a Melbourne-based economist and researcher, currently employed as Manager, Strategic Analysis at Monash University. David has previously been employed as a Research Fellow at The University of Western Australia and Senior Research Associate at Graduate Careers Australia, and has collaborated with leading research and policy institutes, including the Grattan Institute and the National Institute for Labour Studies. David was awarded his PhD in economics in 2015.

Prof. Julia CLARKE

Julia Clarke is Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Business and Law at Manchester Metropolitan University, Chair of the Council of Chartered Association of Business Schools and Chair of the Business and Law Panel for the Subject TEF pilot. Julia has played a leading role in the development of Manchester Metropolitan's sector leading degree apprenticeship provision and in the launch of its online global programs. She is an active participant in the business education community, through her work with the international accrediting bodies.

Dr Teena CLERKE

Teena Clerke has participated in a range of educational, equity and health research projects with colleagues at the University of Technology Sydney. This includes equity scholarships in higher education, leadership education in transdisciplinary teams, learning in health partnerships, as well as visual communication design scholarship. Teena's expertise is grounded in education and visual communication design practices, and her research expertise in ethnography and visual research methodologies that are underpinned by feminist research principles.

Dr Grant COOPER

Grant Cooper is a lecturer in science and STEM education at RMIT University. He is an educator, researcher, learner and maker. At present, his research interests include the examination of emerging STEM education discourses, demographical predictors of science participation and associated capitals (e.g. science, cultural, social) and how digital technologies such as immersive VR have the potential to transform teaching and learning spaces.

Dr Nicole CRAWFORD

Nicole Crawford is a lecturer in Pre-degree Programs at the University of Tasmania (UTAS). She is the recipient of several national research grants. She leads UTAS's Social Inclusion CoP and is the facilitator of the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) Special Interest Group on Mental Health. Nicole's research interests include enabling education; student and staff mental wellbeing; and equity and inclusion in Higher Education.

Dr Janine DELAHUNTY

Janine Delahunty is an Academic Developer and Project Manager in the Academic Development & Recognition Team at the University of Wollongong. Janine's research interests are driven by the motivation to enhance educational practice and improve the learning experience, particularly for diverse learners and those from less-advantaged circumstances. Her research is innovative and spans all facets of the student learning experience, translating empirical data into practical end user resources.

A/Prof. Michael DOCKERY

Mike Dockery is Principal Research Fellow with the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre at Curtin University. As an applied labour economist, his research focuses on improving labour market, education and wellbeing outcomes for marginalised groups, with much of his work based on analysis of panel data. Mike has produced seminal works on the positive effects of cultural engagement and identity on wellbeing for Indigenous Australians. Other focus areas include the economics of education and training and the school-to-work transition and links between housing and socioeconomic outcomes. Mike has published over 50 papers, plus book chapters and monographs.

Dr Sherridan EMERY

Sherridan Emery (PhD) is a Research Assistant at the University of Tasmania, who researches across a range of university, school and community-based research collaborations. Her PhD project explored the concept of cultural wellbeing, through an investigation of teachers' perspectives of cultural wellbeing in classroom communities.

Rebecca FIELD

Rebecca Field is currently completing a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work and Social Policy at Curtin University. Her research compares the impacts of policy on social services for people seeking asylum in Germany and Australia. Rebecca is a tutor in the School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology at Curtin University. She also conducts research with the Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University.

A/Prof. Caroline FLEAY

Caroline Fleay is Associate Professor at the Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University, where she conducts research into the experiences of people seeking asylum. She has written extensively about the impacts on people seeking asylum of indefinite detention and being released into the community with minimal supports. Caroline is currently a Board Member of the Refugee Council of Australia and continues to campaign on the rights of people seeking asylum.

Dr Brandi FOX

Brandi Fox is a Research Fellow at Deakin University's Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning (CRADLE). She has undertaken multiple large educational research projects focusing on race, racism, culture, diversity and equity throughout Australia in primary, secondary and tertiary educational settings. Brandi's research interests are exploring young peoples' interculturality and subjectivities and the spaces where these are (in)formed.

Dr Leanne FRAY

Leanne Fray is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Newcastle in the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre. She has extensive experience in qualitative and mixed methods research and has previously worked on research projects across such disciplines as health, education, and social science. Her research interests include improving student access and participation in higher education.

Prof. Bronwyn FREDERICKS

Bronwyn Fredericks is the PVC (Indigenous Engagement) at the University of Queensland. She has a long research history and is a member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Research Committee (RAC), a member of the Beyond Blue National Research Committee and was a lead in the establishment of the ARC funded National Indigenous Researchers and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN). In 2016,

Professor Fredericks was appointed as a Commissioner with the Queensland Productivity Commission to lead the Inquiry into service delivery in Queensland's remote and discrete Indigenous communities.

Laureate Prof. Jenny GORE

Jenny Gore is Director, Teachers and Teaching Research Centre in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle and Visiting Professor at the University of Oxford, UK. Widely published, her research centres on quality and equity, teacher development, pedagogical reform, and enhancing student outcomes. Her current agenda focuses on the impact of Quality Teaching Rounds on teachers and students and the formation of educational aspirations during schooling.

A/Prof. Deanna GRANT-SMITH

Deanna Grant-Smith is an Associate Professor at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Business School. Her recent research has focused on the education-to-employment transitions of disadvantaged job seekers and early career professionals across a range of disciplines. In particular she has explored the challenges associated with unpaid work and internships, and student wellbeing in a work-integrated learning context. Deanna received the 2016 Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management Award for Early Career Researchers and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and member of the QUT Work/Industry Futures Research Program.

Emeritus Prof. Michael HAMEL-GREEN

Michael Hamel-Green is an Emeritus Professor in the College of Arts and Education at Victoria University, Melbourne. He was previously the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development at Victoria University. His areas of teaching and research interest are in peace studies, community development, regional disarmament and security issues. He has published widely on nuclear weapon-free-zones, nuclear non-proliferation, weapons of mass destruction, multilateral negotiations, disarmament and community development. He is Editorial Board Chair of the Routledge journal, *Global Change, Peace and Security*.

Dr Jess HARRIS

Jess Harris is Senior Lecturer at the University of Newcastle. Her research interests include the professional learning of school leaders, teachers and preservice teachers with a focus on improving equitable outcomes for all students. She has a specific interest in qualitative research methods, including case study research and the use of conversation analysis and membership categorisation analysis to analyse structures and patterns in social interactions in institutional settings.

Dr Lisa HARTLEY

Lisa Hartley is Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Human Rights Education at Curtin University. Her research is focused on questions of human rights and social change and cuts across the fields of refugee and migrant studies, sociology, and community and social psychology. Lisa's research interests include the experiences of refugees and people seeking asylum which is integrally connected with her community engagement work with community groups and people seeking asylum in Australia.

Dr Andrew HARVEY

Andrew Harvey is Director of CHEEDR at La Trobe University. He has a BA (Honours) and PhD in Politics from the University of Melbourne and has published widely in areas of higher education policy, including student equity, admissions, retention, and globalisation. Andrew's previous roles include Director of Regional Operations at La Trobe, Deputy Director

(Academic) of the Bendigo Campus of La Trobe, and Executive Officer of the Australian Council of Deans of Education.

Dr Ann JARDINE

Ann Jardine has a commitment to working to address social inequities and educational disadvantage. She has been instrumental in researching and developing the framework of widening participation best practice in Australia based on evidence-based models from England. In 2007, Ann initiated ASPIRE, UNSW's outreach program. In 2015, she became Director of UNSW's AimHigh unit, overseeing a portfolio of programs and initiatives to increase the participation in university of students from diverse backgrounds.

Dr Tiffany JONES

Tiffany Jones directs the higher education policy team at The Education Trust where she promotes legislation to improve access, affordability, and success for low-income students and students of colour. Central to this work is supporting equity- and student-centred accountability and affordability policies at the state and federal levels. Tiffany and her team design and promote policy to make higher education more affordable, hold colleges accountable, and invest in student success.

Dr Robin KATERSKY BARNES

Robin Katersky Barnes has more than 15 years' experience as a researcher in the STEM field. Robin's current research focuses on rural and regional areas and their access to higher education, skills development and community engagement in education. Robin is currently the Course Coordinator for the Associate Degree in Applied Science in the University College at the University of Tasmania. This current role combines both her science and education interests.

Prof. Sally KIFT

Sally Kift is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (PFHEA), a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Law (FAAL), and President of the Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows (ALTF). She has held several university leadership positions, most recently Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at James Cook University. Sally is a national Teaching Award winner, a national Program Award winner and a national Senior Teaching Fellow on the First Year Experience. In 2010, she was appointed an Australian Discipline Scholar in Law. In 2017, Sally received an Australian University Career Achievement Award for her contribution to Australian higher education.

Prof. Sue KILPATRICK

Sue Kilpatrick is Professor of Education, University of Tasmania and has held Pro Vice-Chancellor positions at the University of Tasmania and Deakin University. She has had university-wide responsibilities including social inclusion, pathway programs, Aboriginal outreach and support and rural and regional engagement. Sue combines research in rural and regional education, learning for work and community development with community-based regional development roles. She holds a PhD in the economics of education.

Dr Paul KOSHY

Paul Koshy is a Research Fellow at NCSEHE. He manages the Student Equity Data Program, including its annual briefing note and the Student Equity Data website. His current research focuses on higher education participation in Australia. This includes work on the school-to-university transition, comparative analyses of equity group participation, and the development of equity performance and outcomes measures in Australia.

Matthias KUBLER

Matthias Kubler is a Senior Research Officer at the Institute for Social Science Research where he works in the area of education and disadvantage. He coordinated the *2006 PhD Graduate Survey* and was recently the project manager of the *Review of Identified Equity Groups*. He previously researched in the area of the student experience and student retention as analyst for the University of Queensland Student Success and Strategies unit.

Prof. Steven LARKIN

Steven Larkin is a Kungarakany and Yanyula man from Darwin in the Northern Territory. Steven is PVC for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Newcastle and previously was the PVC for Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University (CDU) from 2009. He was also Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) at CDU. 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.

Dr Ian LI

Ian Li is an economist based at the School of Population and Global Health, UWA. He has research interests in health and labour economics, including research into higher education equity issues and graduate labour market outcomes. Ian's research has been supported by funding from the NHMRC and NCSEHE, and he has published in respected journals including *Education Economics*, the *Economic Record*, *World Development* and *Social Science and Medicine*.

Dr Adam LLOYD

Adam Lloyd is Senior Lecturer at the University of Newcastle. His PhD research primarily focused on identifying parenting practices to best prevent childhood obesity and better understand how parents (particularly fathers) influence children's lifestyle behaviours. More recently, Adam has worked on numerous projects in the areas of: quality teaching rounds; improving engagement in mathematics through physical activity; aspirations of students in the middle years of schooling; and evaluating in school numeracy programs.

A/Prof. Natalie LLOYD

Natalie Lloyd is Academic Director of Engineering and Information Technology Education at the University of Technology Sydney. Her research has explored issues of equity, such as the impact of creating critical mass classrooms for student engineers, the challenges for equitable discourse in globalisation of engineering education and accreditation, and gendered perceptions of English language development in engineering education. Natalie's research is informed by her lived experiences as a woman in a non-traditional area. She is a Fellow of Engineers Australia.

A/Prof. Sally MALE

Sally Male has the Chair in Engineering Education at The University of Western Australia, where she leads research on Work Integrated Learning, gender inclusion, and curriculum development; oversees the engineering professional practicum; and teaches electrical engineering. Sally is a Fellow of Engineers Australia, the Editor of the *Australasian Journal of Engineering Education*, an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Engineering Education*, and Governance Board Member of Engineering Institute of Technology.

A/Prof. Robyn MAYES

Robyn Mayes is an Associate Professor at the Queensland University of Technology Business School. She is Director of the QUT Work/Industry Futures Research Program and

Chair of the Business Faculty Equity Committee. A Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Robyn has a strong research interest in gender, equity and rural education.

Dr Nathan MIFSUD

Nathan Mifsud is a researcher at Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, and data scientist at Our Community. He has a PhD in cognitive neuroscience and Graduate Certificate in University Learning and Teaching from UNSW Sydney. Upon moving to Melbourne, he was a scholarly teaching fellow at La Trobe University for two years, during which time he conducted research on student equity and structural inequality.

Dr Ryan NAYLOR

Ryan Naylor is the Core First Year Coordinator for the Health Sciences at La Trobe University. His current research focuses primarily on student equity and the student experience. He has published widely on student experiences and expectations, issues of access to higher education, and equity interventions and their evaluation, as well as collaborating across many areas in higher education research.

Prof. Margaret NOBLE

Margaret Noble is CEO of the Australian Institute of Music, before which she was PVC (Academic Quality and Schools Engagement) at the University of Tasmania. Professor Noble has held senior executive roles across the higher education sector in the UK, New Zealand and Australia. Her academic roles have included CEO of Waiariki Institute of Technology, Principal and Chief Executive of the University College of Plymouth St Mark and St John, PVC (Learning and Quality) at the University of Greenwich and Director of Lifelong Learning at Teesside University.

Prof. Peter NOONAN

Peter Noonan is Professor of Tertiary Education Policy at the Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy at Victoria University. He has played a major role in shaping policy in Australia's education and training system and has experience working as a policy adviser, senior executive and consultant to federal and state governments, universities, higher education providers and TAFE institutes. He has been instrumental to several major policy changes and reviews.

Mr Andrew NORTON

Andrew Norton is an Honorary Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne. Mr Norton is the author/co-author of many articles, reports and publications on higher education issues. These include *Taking University Teaching Seriously*; *The Cash Nexus: How Teaching Funds Research in Australian Universities*; and the widely used reference report, *Mapping Australian Higher Education*. He has worked as the Higher Education Program Director at the Grattan Institute, as a Ministerial Adviser and served on two government-appointed policy reviews.

Prof. Sarah O'SHEA

2019 NCSEHE Research Fellow Sarah O'Shea has spent over two decades teaching and researching in the higher education field and is regarded as an expert in educational equity. Her research advances understanding about how underrepresented student cohorts enact success within university, manage competing identities and negotiate aspirations for self and others. She is currently leading an ARC Discovery Project exploring the persistence behaviours of First-in-Family students.

Dr Sally PATFIELD

Sally Patfield is a Postdoctoral Researcher with the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre at the University of Newcastle. Sally has over 15 years' experience working in various educational contexts, including as a primary teacher in NSW public schools. With an interest in equity research and practice, her PhD investigated the aspirations of school students who would be the first in their families to enter higher education. Sally is a first-generation high school graduate, university graduate, and doctoral graduate.

Dr Megan PAULL

Megan Paull, from Murdoch Business School at Murdoch University, brings an organisational behaviour perspective to the NCSEHE Research Grants Program study, having led research projects in the areas of business, management, organisational behaviour and non-profit management and leadership. She led the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) Volunteering to Learn project which examined university student volunteering. Megan is a qualitative researcher, usually taking an interpretivist approach which values the voices of participants.

Dr Francisco PERALES

Francisco Perales is a Senior Research Fellow at the Life Course Centre (ISSR, The University of Queensland). His research revolves around the issues of gender, work and families, with a particular interest in the production and reproduction of gender inequalities. His work often relies on principles of the life-course approach and his methodological expertise is on the analysis of longitudinal survey data. Recently, he was awarded an ARC DECRA to undertake a project which will provide new systematic Australian evidence of social stratification by sexual orientation across a diversity of life domains.

Dr Tim PITMAN

Tim Pitman is a researcher of higher education policy at Curtin University. His research has a focus on widening access and participation for groups of students historically underrepresented in higher education. This includes persons from low socioeconomic status backgrounds; Indigenous persons; people with disability; people from non-English speaking backgrounds; and people from regional and remote parts of Australia.

Adjunct Prof. Robyn QUINN

Robyn Quin is an Adjunct Professor at Curtin University, having previously held the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). Prior to her time at Curtin, Robyn was Pro Vice-Chancellor at Edith Cowan University. She has had a career-long commitment to student equity and currently works for the NCSEHE as a researcher, writer and consultant. She has been the project leader on some major NCSEHE studies in Victoria and New South Wales. Her research interests and publications are in the fields of educational reform, communications and cultural studies.

A/Prof. Maria RACITI

Maria Raciti's main research areas are social marketing and widening participation in higher education. Maria is an Adjunct Fellow with the NCSEHE and was part of a 2019 Departmental Taskforce with the Australian Government Department of Education. Dr Raciti is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK), was the 2018 Research Fellow with the NCSEHE, and is co-leader of two Indigenous research groups at USC.

Kim ROBERTSON MA

Kim Robertson is Senior Analyst, Indigenous Policies and Programs at Charles Darwin University. Kim is a descendant of Thanakwithi, Waanyi and Wik peoples of North Queensland and English ancestry. She has worked in Indigenous affairs across Northern Australia for 25 years, primarily in the public service and university sector. These roles span

grassroots engagement and applied social research through to management, strategy and evaluations. Kim's research focus is Australian Indigenous education, social policy, and evaluations and she is currently undertaking a PhD examining public policy and the resilience of senior Aboriginal women from Cape York.

Dr Emma ROWE

Emma Rowe is a senior lecturer in the School of Education at Deakin University. She researches on education policy and politics in education, and school choice. Her most recent book explores the de/construction of public schooling within OECD countries, activism and school choice. She is an associate editor for *Critical Studies in Education*. Emma's work is published in *Journal of Education Policy*, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, and others.

Fiona SHALLEY

With a previous career in the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Fiona Shalley is now a Research Associate with the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University. She is interested in challenges associated with data about population minorities, including identity statistics, and has worked on studies around Indigenous student access to higher education. Fiona supports empowering people with the knowledge and skills to use quantitative data to tell their stories and improve the strength of their advocacy.

Dr Andrew SKOURDOUMBIS

Andrew Skourdoumbis is a Senior Lecturer in Education at Deakin University. His research interests include critical policy analysis, teacher effectiveness research, teacher practice and educational performance, curriculum theory and research methodology. He investigates global reform efforts in education that impact teacher practice and the way that exacting methods of research govern teacher performance and effectiveness. He has successfully published in leading education journals within Australia and internationally.

Prof. James SMITH

James Smith is a Father Frank Flynn Fellow at Menzies School of Health Research. He was a 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellow and has remained with the Centre as 2019 Adjunct Professorial Fellow. James was Co-Lead of the Indigenous Leadership Research and Evaluation Network, and Program Manager for the Whole of Community Engagement Initiative at Charles Darwin University, receiving a SPERA Australian Rural Education Award for the program in 2018.

Dr Shamus SMITH

Shamus Smith is a software engineer and has significant research expertise in the design, development and evaluation of interactive software interfaces. His research interests include virtual environments, technology-enhanced learning and, more generally, human-computer interaction. His research is interdisciplinary and empirical in nature and focuses on the software engineering of advanced interfaces and the complex interactions that result when they are deployed with human users.

A/Prof. Erica SOUTHGATE

Erica Southgate is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of Newcastle, Australia and is recognised as "surfing the next wave" of technology-enhanced learning for social justice. Erica is a leader in the field of technology ethics (immersive technology, artificial intelligence), virtual reality for education, and has made a number of popular computer games for literacy learning. Erica was a 2016 Equity Fellow with the NCSEHE.

A/Prof. Cathy STONE

Cathy Stone is an independent consultant and researcher in post-secondary student equity, retention and success. She is a Conjoint Associate Professor in Social Work at the University of Newcastle, Australia and an Adjunct Fellow with the NCSEHE. In 2016, as an Inaugural NCSEHE Equity Fellow, Cathy completed a national research project into improving outcomes for those studying online. As an active researcher, Cathy's publications focus particularly on online, mature-age and regional student participation and success.

Emeritus Prof. Andrew TAGGART

Andrew Taggart was Acting Vice-Chancellor at Murdoch University (2014–2016) and Provost (2016–2018). He has an extensive research portfolio in teacher education, health, physical and sport education and led the recruitment of low SES/First-in-Family students to attend university. He holds Board positions at the Peel Development Commission, Australia Data Institute and Chairs the Educational Advisory Committee of the WA Cricket Association.

Dr Jason L. TAYLOR

Jason L. Taylor is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Utah. His research examines how higher education and community college policies influence social and educational inequities. He is currently the Vice-Chair for the Council on Public Policy in Higher Education for the Association for the Study of Higher Education in the US.

Dr Matthew KREHL EDWARD THOMAS

Matthew Krehl Edward Thomas PhD, University of Melbourne, is an academic at Deakin University. He is a former schoolteacher with a background in leadership, strategy and negotiation. Matthew's research is focused on time, social engineering surveillance and privacy.

Dr Wojtek TOMASZEWSKI

Wojtek Tomaszewski is a Research Group Leader at the ISSR at the University of Queensland (UQ), and a Senior Research Fellow at the ARC Centre for Excellence. Wojtek joined UQ from the National Centre for Social Research in London and has specialist expertise in quantitative research methods and advanced statistical analysis. He has conducted research for the British Government and the State and Commonwealth Governments of Australia, and has published in high-profile international journals.

Naomi TOOTELL

Naomi Tootell is a Senior Research Officer within CHEEDR at La Trobe University. She has more than 12 years' experience managing research projects with a social justice agenda. Recent projects Naomi has contributed to include *The adaptation of tertiary admissions practices to growth and diversity* (2016), *Equity at and beyond the boundary of Australian universities* (2019), and "Improving post-secondary education planning for children in, and transitioning from, out-of-home care" (forthcoming).

Dr Lynette VERNON

Prior to her current appointment, Lynette worked as Project Manager for a Murdoch program which aimed to widen access and improve participation in higher education. Her Doctor of Philosophy is in Psychology leading to research interests in the developmental implications of using technology at night. Lynette has a Bachelor of Science from UWA and Diploma in Education from Edith Cowan University. She has taught for the Department of Education for over 20 years, and while teaching completed her Graduate Diploma in Psychology at Charles Sturt University. In 2009 Lynette completed her Honours in Psychology at Murdoch University, and has also tutored at Murdoch in program evaluation.

A/Prof. Bernadette WALKER-GIBBS

Bernadette Walker-Gibbs is Professor in Education. She has led education initiatives in higher education, schools and with communities in Victoria and Queensland. She is recognised as an outstanding educator with commendations for teaching and research excellence as recently as 2018. Bernadette has an international reputation in research for her leadership of large scale, longitudinal studies in teacher education and for international comparative studies in rural education.

Prof. Denise WOOD AM

Professor Denise Wood AM is Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students) at USC. She also holds an Adjunct professorial research appointment at CQUniversity where she was formerly Engaged Research Chair and Director of the LEAP Research Centre. Her research focuses on strategies for improving educational access and participation, particularly for underrepresented groups including those in regional and remote locations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with disabilities. She received a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) award in 2017 for significant service to education as an academic, researcher and practitioner in the field of participation, inclusion and access.

Dr Jessica WOODROFFE

Jess Woodroffe is social and educational researcher at the University of Tasmania. Jess is passionate about engaging with young Tasmanians, schools and communities in the areas of informing aspirations and supporting transitions to higher education. Jess is currently collaborating with colleagues on a number of cross-disciplinary action research and evaluation projects in the areas of widening participation, community learning, educational program evaluation, social inclusion and youth health and wellbeing.

Dr Ning XIANG

Ning Xiang, Research Assistant at the ISSR at the University of Queensland, is an experienced researcher with a multi-disciplinary training background. She holds a PhD in social psychology and worked on the national evaluation of the Australian Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme and the follow-up ARC Linkage project, Millennium Mums Survey. Her current research involves student engagement, equity in higher education and maternal employment.

Acronyms

AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ALTF	Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows
A/Prof.	Associate Professor
ARC	Australian Research Council
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATEND	Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CEEHE	Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHEEDR	Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research CoP Community of Practice
CRADLE	Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning
FAAL	Fellow of the Australian Academy of Law
Go8	Group of Eight
HDR	Higher Degree by Research
HELP	Higher Education Loans Program
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program
HILDA	Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
ISSR	Institute for Social Science Research
JCIPP	John Curtin Institute of Public Policy
LLN	Language Literacy and Numeracy
NAEEA	National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NIRAKN	National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network
NPP	National Priorities Pool
NSW	New South Wales
NUHEIs	Non-University Higher Education Institutions
NUHEPs	Non-University Higher Education Providers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OLT	Office for Learning and Teaching
PASS	Peer Assisted Study Support
PFHEA	Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
PGCW	Postgraduate Coursework
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
Prof.	Professor
PVC	Pro Vice-Chancellor
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
SES	Socioeconomic status
SPERA	Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
UK	United Kingdom
UniSA	University of South Australia
UNSW	University of New South Wales
UQ	University of Queensland
USA	United States of America
UTAS	University of Tasmania
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
UWA	The University of Western Australia
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WA	Western Australia
WIL	Work Integrated Learning
WINTA	Women In Non-Traditional Areas

Note: For the purposes of this publication, "Indigenous" refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and/or Australian First Nations people, unless specified otherwise. This term is used for brevity. The NCSEHE acknowledges the diversity of views with regard to using these terms.

About the Centre

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) is a research and policy centre funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, and based at Curtin University.

The NCSEHE provides national leadership in student equity in higher education, connecting research, policy and practice to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people.

The diverse activities conducted by the Centre focus on strengthening Australia's research quality, capability and capacity to build a robust evidence base; and informing evidence-based policy design and implementation, and institutional best practice.

An emphasis on the "student voice" and evaluation and communication of best practice equity initiatives contextualises research and data analysis.

The NCSEHE conducts a broad scope of activities including:

- research-based projects both independently and in collaboration with other organisations, funded through external grants or through Centre resources
- the NCSEHE Research Grants Program
- equity policy and program evaluation
- Research Fellowships and Equity Fellowships
- student equity data analysis, online resources and briefing notes
- print and digital publications
- collaborative and independent events
- representation at national and international conferences
- an emphasis on effective communication through channels including: website, electronic newsletters, social media and general media exposure.

The Centre has established a strong national presence, engaging with key stakeholders and maintaining sector-wide partnerships to enhance outcomes and delivery of research and recommendations. The growing reputation and influence of the Centre has contributed to student equity becoming firmly incorporated into higher education policy.

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