Andrew Harvey · Catherine Burnheim
Matthew Brett *Editors*

Student Equity in Australian Higher Education

Twenty-five years of A Fair Chance for All

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Preface

In 1990, the Australian Government developed a student equity framework for higher education. Within the Framework, known as *A Fair Chance for All*, the Government declared that all Australians should have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education, and that this objective could be met by 'changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole' (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 1990, p. 2). Central to this vision was the establishment of six identified student equity groups: people from low socioeconomic backgrounds; Indigenous Australians; people from regional and remote areas; people with disabilities; people from non-English speaking backgrounds; and women in non-traditional areas. Participation targets, funding allocations and policy decisions soon followed the designation of these groups.

Twenty-five years later, *A Fair Chance for All* has endured despite dramatic change across the Australian higher education sector. In 2015, around a quarter of the higher education cohort comprise international students, and a quarter of students are studying at postgraduate level. Non-university higher education providers are growing in prevalence, women comprise a majority of higher education students, and the student cohort includes unprecedented diversity. The focus of this book is on how and why the Framework has endured through such tumultuous times, and on how it might be recast to meet future challenges.

The first section of the book examines the origins and conceptual features of *A Fair Chance for All*. We consider the contextual factors associated with its introduction, the significance of the transition from elite to mass higher education, comparisons with student equity policies of other countries, and the performance of students in each of the identified equity groups. The second section considers the future of equity in Australian higher education within the context of rising participation, globalisation and institutional stratification. What futures can be imagined, and how will student equity be conceptualised within them?

Chapter Overviews

Andrew Harvey, Catherine Burnheim and Matthew Brett argue the need for comprehensive reform of student equity policy. A revised Framework could include a focus on academic achievement and graduate outcomes, international and postgraduate students, non-university providers, and missing and marginalised cohorts.

Lin Martin provides a first-hand account of the origins, development and significance of *A Fair Chance for All* and related policy instruments such as the equity performance indicator framework. Martin highlights the achievements and longevity of the Framework, and outlines challenges for future policy-makers.

Sam Sellar and Trevor Gale trace the political genealogy of *A Fair Chance for All* and consider how it helped to frame the problem of student equity. They argue that the Framework exemplifies broad trends toward governance by numbers and neo-social modes of governance. National and international developments in higher education policy following the introduction of AFCFA are explored, with a specific focus on student equity policy in England.

Celeste Liddle highlights the impact of Government and institutional strategies for increasing the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in higher education. She argues that achieving full engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people requires a whole of institution approach to culture and governance.

Andrew Harvey, Lisa Andrewartha and Catherine Burnheim argue that reform is required to increase representation and outcomes, particularly of students from the lowest socio-economic status backgrounds. They canvass potential strategies to achieve this reform, including refocussing on school achievement through need-based funding, curriculum reform, and university outreach; expanding enabling programs and alternative entry pathways; and increasing the understanding of diverse student backgrounds.

Matthew Brett explores issues of disability, highlighting that higher education equity frameworks are a subset of broad policy reforms that have enabled improved participation. Brett also highlights the challenges that face graduates with disabilities in effective participation in the labour market, and affirms the need for equity policy that includes graduate outcome measures.

One of the success stories of the past quarter century has been the increasing representation of women in Australian universities. Yet Sharon Bell notes that women remain underrepresented in many fields of education and at the higher levels of the academic workforce. Bell argues that change requires revisiting the original *A Fair Chance for All* focus on women in non-traditional disciplines, improving university employment opportunities for recent PhD graduates, and generating equity of access to the pathways to these opportunities.

Kemran Mestan highlights that access and participation for people from non-English speaking background (NESB) have improved since *A Fair Chance For All*, but there remain differences across specific ethnic cohorts. Beyond access, NESB students as a general group remain disadvantaged in measures of achievement and graduate outcomes. Mestan encourages future equity policies to consider the whole higher education lifecycle.

The university participation rate of regional and remote students has shown no improvement since 1990. Catherine Burnheim and Andrew Harvey argue that higher education policy has mistakenly focussed on provision at regional campuses as the primary solution to increasing participation, rather than addressing deeper causal factors such as school achievement.

Simon Marginson highlights the extent to which equity in higher education is tied to broader societal equity. To achieve a 'fair chance for all', the preconditions lie in changes in the distribution of economic rewards, a reduced tolerance for social hierarchy, and the re-democratisation of politics and policy.

Andrew Norton's chapter considers what markets mean for equity groups, and argues that the supply of student places is vital to academically disadvantaged cohorts. He outlines how most equity groups experienced their largest enrolment surges after market policies, such as the lifting of controls on undergraduate student numbers in public universities, were introduced.

International students lie outside the scope of the existing student equity framework. Christopher Ziguras questions this omission by exploring the shifting conceptualisations of internationalisation over time. He argues that a renewed student equity framework could address a range of international student cohorts who face disadvantage, as well as broader issues within the hierarchy of global mobility.

Ian Anderson considers the experience of Indigenous higher education students, and argues that equity policy must broaden its scope. In particular, degree completions, ensuring access to professional courses including engineering and medicine, and supporting Indigenous graduates' transition to employment are important elements of linking Indigenous higher education policy to economic and social impact.

Sharon Bell and Robyn May highlight the importance of student equity at postgraduate and higher degree levels. The authors note the centrality of these levels to the future academic workforce, which evidences a resilient tendency to reproduce itself and struggles to achieve diversity. Tracking the transition of equity group undergraduate participation to postgraduate courses, and better mapping graduate career outcomes, are advocated.

A revised equity framework is proposed by Ryan Naylor, Hamish Coates and Paula Kelly. The authors argue the need to focus on student success and outcomes, and also to move beyond preoccupation with the prospects of a small number of tightly defined groups. Increasing the focus on disadvantaged individuals rather than groups relies on robust and accessible evidence.

Finally, Emmaline Bexley describes the historical policy shifts that have shaped the sector into its present form, and examines the implications for student equity of a higher education market in which providers are numerous, funded to different extents by different sources, and driven by different institutional missions.

Reference

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Services
AGS	Australian Graduate Survey
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographical Classification
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank
ATAS	Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AUSSE	Australasian Survey of Student Engagement
AVCC	Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee
CAE	Colleges of Advanced Education
CALD	Culturally and Linguistic Diverse
CSHE	Centre for the Study of Higher Education
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	Department of Education and Training
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DPIE	Department of Primary Industry and Energy
DPM&C	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
EGPI	Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education
ERA	Excellence in Research in Australia
FASTS	Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies
GCA	Graduate Careers Australia
GDS	Graduate Destination Survey
Go8	Group of Eight Universities
HDR	Higher degree by research
HEC	Higher Education Council
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme

HEIMS	Higher Education Information Management System
HEPP	Higher Education Participation Programme
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme
HILDA	Household Income and Labour Dynamics Australia
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IHEAC	Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council
ISP	Indigenous Support Program
ITAS	Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme
LSAY	Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NESB	Non-English speaking background
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NRSS	National Research Student Survey
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
NUHEP	Non-University providers of higher education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PELS	Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
RRMA	Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas
SEAS	Special Entry Admissions Scheme
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SES	Socio-Economic status
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
UA	Universities Australia
UAC	University Admissions Centre
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency

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Part I

Chapter 1
Towards a Fairer Chance for All: Revising the Australian Student Equity Framework

Andrew Harvey, Catherine Burnheim, and Matthew Brett

Introduction

This volume has been inspired by the 25th anniversary of *A Fair Chance for All* (also referred to hereafter as the Framework) in 2015. The contributions of some of Australia's foremost thinkers on higher education have been curated by the editors to acknowledge the durability of the equity Framework, but also to critically consider its efficacy in a new and evolving landscape. Within this introductory chapter, we argue the need for broad reform in light of major sectoral changes. *A Fair Chance for All* has provided a historically effective mechanism for allocating scarce resources, set the broad domains for strategic intervention, and delivered valuable longitudinal data and evidence on which to base policy. The longevity of these legacies is particularly notable. For more than two decades, Government policies have been informed by robust, commensurable data and high level, national categories of disadvantage that have held bipartisan support. Few higher education policy frameworks can boast such durability and versatility.

Nevertheless, the limitations of existing policy are increasingly clear. An emphasis on access and participation constrains the extent to which equity policy can effectively address student achievement and outcomes. A continuing focus on domestic students within public universities means the exclusion both of international

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students, who now comprise more than a quarter of the student cohort (Australian Government 2014a), and of non-university higher education providers (NUHEPs), whose relevance within the system is growing (Group of Eight Australia 2014). The specific focus of the Framework on undergraduate education has enabled little consideration of rising postgraduate inequity, and little ability to monitor the effectiveness of sub-degree pathways into higher education. Establishment of the equity categories themselves has enabled effort to be focussed, but has also created missing and marginalised cohorts. The calibration of multiple and compound disadvantage remains problematic. Moreover, the static participation rates of many student groups reflect a focus on ensuring equality of opportunity rather than progress towards greater equity in outcomes. In some ways, *A Fair Chance for All* has also inadvertently reified the bifurcation of quality and equity, rather than promoting equity and diversity as inherent components of quality, particularly in the context of teaching and learning. It is therefore time to expand the scope of the national framework and begin a new conversation about student equity in Australian higher education.

Historical Context

A Fair Chance for All was conceived within the broader 'Dawkins reforms', which created a unified national system of higher education, established the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and led to a transformative expansion of student enrolments. Within these reforms, the role of universities as drivers of economic growth was paired with an explicitly stated belief in the need for higher education to promote fairness and social inclusion, interpreted as proportional representation at the level of class, gender and race. The effects of the Dawkins reforms have been well documented (Croucher et al. 2013), and include institutional integration and consolidation, and enrolment growth among domestic and international students. The reforms linked increased participation to economic imperatives and outcomes, but also recognised higher education's social role. *A Fair Chance for All* was itself a product of a specific social, economic and political context (see Chap. 2, Martin 2015; and Chap. 3, Sellar and Gale 2015), and also of a dominant meritocratic ideology (see Chap. 10, Marginson 2015).

A major challenge facing policy makers in the late 1980s was the means by which higher education expansion could be financed. With universities overwhelmingly funded by public financing, system growth faced significant constraints. These constraints were eased by the introduction of HECS, an income-contingent student loans scheme. Australia led the world in the introduction of a comprehensive income-contingent loans scheme, and the policy innovation has subsequently been emulated in other higher education systems such as the United Kingdom. HECS was itself a core equity measure which ensured that the shift in costs towards students was achieved without up-front costs for participation. HECS was also emblematic of a shift towards the marketization of higher education, a topic that is covered by Andrew Norton in Chap. 11 of this volume (Norton 2015b).

The student equity agenda was informed by several reports, including the Green and White Papers (Dawkins 1987, 1988), which both highlighted the importance of raising access for under-represented student groups. In a statement that could easily have been made before the demand-driven system was introduced more than two decades later, the White Paper noted that 'while growth will facilitate the achievement of greater equity in higher education, growth alone will not be sufficient' (Dawkins 1988, p. 21) and that specific strategies were needed at institutional, state and national levels. This process culminated in *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Education Employment and Training (DEET) 1990) and the subsequent elucidation of the six equity categories (Martin 1994).

Defining core equity groups enabled the collection of rich longitudinal data on access, participation, success, and retention, at both institutional and national levels. Moreover, the categorical framework provided clear parameters for research into student equity, and facilitated targeted national funding to support the groups (Bradley et al. 2008). For example, guidelines added to the Higher Education Support Act (2003) outlined that 'Programs in this chapter aim to assist with overcoming barriers to access and participation by domestic undergraduate students in higher education, in particular, those students who are Indigenous, who come from a low socio-economic status (SES) background, or who have a disability' (Australian Government 2012b, p. 9). The Indigenous Support Program, the Higher Education Disability Support Programme, and the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) were all subsequently established to support students within these longstanding equity groups, and funding is distributed to institutions according to enrolment data. A separate regional loading fund ($67 million in 2014–2015) supports regional campuses, thus indirectly supporting students from rural and isolated areas (see Australian Government 2012a). In total, at least $250 million per year is currently allocated to support the identified equity groups. These funds are distinct from student income support measures for which many equity students are eligible, and the cost of supporting HECS, which alone is estimated at $1.4 billion in 2014–2015.

Twenty-five years after publication of *A Fair Chance for All*, Australian higher education is poised for another wave of transformation, with rising expansion, competition, and potential deregulation. The demand-driven system introduced in 2010 removed caps on student numbers for most university courses, leading to a surge in university enrolments across all states and demographics (Kemp and Norton 2014). Expansion included a significant increase in under-represented student numbers, leading some commentators to laud the demand-driven system as a triumph of equity (Norton 2013a). However, these increases are less impressive when considered in the proportional terms of the Framework. By this interpretation, little progress has been made, with the identified target groups still under-represented at university compared to their population share (Pitman 2014; Koshy 2014).

Governments now appear determined to reduce their relative financial contribution to the growing sector (Norton 2014a), so the prospect of higher student fees seems likely. Similarly, government grants as a proportion of university income have steadily declined since 1981 (Norton 2014a, p. 54) and the Australian

Government remains committed to financing reforms (Commonwealth of Australia 2015, p.160) that make the prospect of higher student fees likely. Supporters of fee deregulation argue that previous fee increases – deferred through HECS – did not deter under-represented students from attending university, so future fee increases are unlikely to impede access and participation (see Hare 2014). By contrast, others claim that fee increases will affect the types of institutions and courses that students can access, and their subsequent success and graduate outcomes (Hoving 2015). A Commonwealth Scholarships Scheme has been proposed, along with a large regional structural adjustment fund (Australian Government 2014b). Equity remains at the forefront of reform discussions. Yet while the philosophical questions may have changed little since *A Fair Chance for All* was conceived, the landscape has.

Expanding the Framework to Include Achievement and Outcomes

A Fair Chance for All focused explicitly on access and representation, advocating the need for composition of the student population to reflect the broader population (DEET 1990, p. 8). This principle was central to the subsequent confirmation of equity indicators in 1994 when baseline data first compared the university participation rates of the six identified equity groups with their share of the total population (Martin 1994). Although success and retention data were collected, the original inclusion of equity groups was based primarily on access, and most subsequent reviewers have maintained the need for such a focus. In a context of expanding participation, however, we argue that equity in access must be supplemented by attention to equity in success and outcomes.

As an example, the proportionate representation of the non-English speaking background cohort at university has led some researchers to conclude that the category should be removed from the national equity framework (James et al. 2004; Norton 2014b; Watson and Pope 2000). However, students from a non-English speaking background still face disadvantage at different points of the higher education continuum, most notably at the level of graduate outcomes (Mestan and Harvey 2014; see Chap. 8, Mestan 2015). Similarly, despite some increase in participation, Indigenous retention rates are extremely low and students with a disability face relatively poor graduate outcomes (see Chap. 6, Brett 2015).

Indigenous students also face challenges in accessing the highest status professional courses, such as Medicine and Dentistry (See Chap. 13, Anderson 2015). Access is important, but the value of that access varies substantially between groups. As early as 1996, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) review noted that a future equity framework 'must encompass means of monitoring achievements in terms of graduation rates, participation at higher levels of study and employment outcomes' (NBEET 1996, p. 59).

The need to monitor completions and outcomes has become starkly apparent under the demand-driven system. Commentators have noted the relatively high attrition rates, for example, of students who enter Bachelor programs with an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) below 50 (Norton 2015a), and of students from low SES background who are also of mature age (Tones et al. 2009). Draft Government papers have discussed tying institutional funding to completions, and publishing more transparent data around graduate outcomes. Similar trends exist in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), where proposals exist to limit federal funding to institutions who record low completion rates. Evidence suggests that some private providers, in particular, may be providing access to disadvantaged students but not supporting them effectively through to completion (Mettler 2014). As Tinto (2012) notes, what is important is not only commencing but completing a degree, as the value of higher education for non-completers is not high. Graduate destination data lies outside the ambit of the Framework but could be explicitly included in a revised formulation.

A greater focus on outcomes would also influence patterns of access. The demand-driven system is predicated on student choice, and the Australian Government desires that choice to be informed by accurate data on graduate destinations and outcomes. However, existing published data (from sources such as the commercially published Good Universities Guide and the Commonwealth's MyUniversity site) reflect only aggregate student outcomes, without reference to student geo-demographic characteristics. Similarly, the new Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), have been developed to position students as informed consumers. Through aggregating survey data on the student experience and graduate outcomes, students will be encouraged to shift their choices accordingly. However, equity performance does not currently feature prominently within QILTs design specifications. Existing measures of outcomes are thus inchoate, but they indicate how the equity framework could be broadened beyond a focus on access and representation.

Broadening the Framework Beyond Domestic Students and Public Universities

International full fee paying students were considered in draft indicators that preceded *A Fair Chance for All*. The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC)/ Australian Council of Directors and Principals (ACDP) Working Party on Performance Indicators identified international students as well as gender; age group; Aboriginality; and language spoken at home (AVCC/ACDP 1988). While these elements were not explicitly identified as equity indicators, they highlight important omissions in the final student equity indicators around both age group and international students. The omission of international students has grown in importance as student numbers have risen rapidly (see Chap. 12, Ziguras 2015).

Despite representing a quarter of the total student cohort (Australian Government 2014a), international students lie outside the student equity framework and receive little targeted support. Indeed, travel concessions and other benefits available to domestic students are still denied to international students in many states. Implicit in their exclusion from the Framework is a notion that international students are relatively wealthy, given their capacity to pay tuition fees well in excess of domestic students. Evidence suggests that wealth is unevenly spread, however, and that many international students are living in poor conditions, working excessive hours, and financially struggling to afford education and cost of living expenses (Bexley et al. 2012). The 1996 NBEET review noted that fee-paying international students were excluded from their analysis because the funding source lay outside the Commonwealth. However, that review also acknowledged that, 'increasingly, the boundaries about provision of support services for these students and for some designated equity groups are becoming blurred' (NBEET 1996, p. 3). As Ziguras notes in Chap. 12 of this volume, there are now sound reasons for broadening the national equity framework to include international students (Ziguras 2015).

The rise of non-university higher education providers (NUHEPs) is also threatening the relevance and stability of the student equity framework. There are currently no financial incentives for NUHEPs to consider student equity in admissions, and proposed Commonwealth support assumes an absence of both research and community engagement responsibilities. Proposed reforms to higher education financing have advocated funding NUHEPs at 70 % of the Commonwealth contribution rate, primarily on the basis that non-universities do not have the same research obligations held by public universities (Norton 2014a, b). However, the experience of the US is cautionary here, with many private providers and community colleges accepting large numbers of equity students but returning poor completion and graduation rates (Mettler 2014). Beyond general regulation and quality assurance, there is a need to ensure that equity is confined neither to public universities, nor to admissions. *A Fair Chance for All* outlined that, 'Underpinning the Government's equity strategy is the understanding that higher education institutions are publicly funded, so they have a clear responsibility to provide opportunities for all sections of the Australian community' (DEET 1990, p. 8). If public funding extends to NUHEPs we would expect similar responsibilities to be maintained, but lack of coordination across Australia's tertiary sector hampers consistent adoption of equity principles (see Chap. 16, Bexley 2015).

Expanding the Framework Beyond Undergraduate Students

A Fair Chance for All focused, understandably, on undergraduate students. The only major reference to postgraduate study can be found in the target 'to increase the numbers of women in postgraduate study, particularly in research, relative to the proportion of undergraduates in each field by 1995' (DEET 1990, p. 27). In Australia, the proportion of university students enrolled in a postgraduate degree was just 7 % in 1990. However, postgraduates had risen to 27 % of the student

cohort by 2010 (Department of Education and Training (DET) 2015). An increase in the proportion of the population acquiring undergraduate degrees has resulted in credential inflation and a rise in the number of students continuing to postgraduate education (Wakeling 2009). This trend exists across the developed world, and is likely to continue in Australia as undergraduate education has expanded dramatically under the demand-driven system (Kemp and Norton 2014).

Postgraduates are more likely to be employed after graduation compared with undergraduates (Smith et al. 2010) and are more likely to enter professional and higher managerial occupations (Edwards 2010). They are likely to earn more money than those with undergraduate degrees, and postgraduates are also more likely to report satisfaction with their job and a belief in its utility to society (Harvey and Andrewartha 2013; Norton 2012). Moreover, the academic workforce is derived primarily from postgraduate and higher degree students, so a cycle of inequity can easily be created (see Chap. 14, Bell and May 2015). The benefits of postgraduate education underline the need to ensure equality of access. However, participation at postgraduate level remains much less representative than at undergraduate level.

A very small number of low socio-economic students, for example, currently continue to postgraduate level study. Heagney (2010) notes that low socio-economic students constitute only 10.5 % of the total Australian postgraduate cohort. The under-representation of some students is most evident at doctorate level where the cohort is predominantly metropolitan and from medium to high socio-economic backgrounds. In Australia in 2008, just 8 % of continuing PhD students came from low socio-economic backgrounds, despite this group constituting 15 % of the overall university cohort and 25 % of the population. Students from rural and regional backgrounds are also under-represented at postgraduate and higher degree levels. In Australia in 2008, only 11 % of continuing PhD students were from rural and regional backgrounds, despite this group constituting 17 % of the overall university cohort and 27 % of the population (Heagney 2010).

The indicator of low socio-economic and regional status for postgraduate students is problematic, as it is based on the permanent home address of students. Considering socio-economic status at the point of initial enrolment in higher education, in addition to the point of postgraduate enrolment, may be one way to maintain the utility of the current indicator whilst providing additional insights into equity for postgraduate cohorts. Either way, it is important that more robust measurement of socio-economic status is developed to understand both undergraduate and postgraduate patterns (see Chap. 9, Burnheim and Harvey 2015; see Chap. 14, Bell and May 2015; see Chap. 15, Naylor et al. 2015). Unequal representation at postgraduate level is apparent, but its extent cannot be fully understood within current data constraints.

Numerous reasons exist for the postgraduate under-representation of disadvantaged groups, including the pipeline effect of institutional stratification (Harvey and Andrewartha 2013). Within the UK context, Wakeling (2009, p. 292) highlights 'the symbolic capital which attaches to a first-degree from particular universities or types of university', and notes that 'the first-degree institution attended was a clear indicator of the likelihood of progressing to postgraduate study'. Australian data is likely to be similar given the elite 'Group of Eight' universities enrol the majority of

PhD students and large numbers of postgraduate students. These institutions also typically enrol relatively low proportions of low SES students at undergraduate level.

A Fair Chance for All was not established in an environment of credential inflation, and the rise of postgraduate study has been one of the notable trends in higher education over the past 25 years. Including postgraduate study in a revised student equity framework is necessary given these compositional changes, but also in light of new models of provision. In many fields, particularly health and education, there is an overall trend to requiring a postgraduate qualification for professional entry. Some universities, most notably the University of Melbourne, have reconstructed their curriculum to move all professional degrees to Masters level. In establishing the model, both the University of Melbourne and the University of Western Australia advocated its equity by highlighting that entry to the professions will be based on undergraduate performance rather than the socio-economically distorted ATAR (see Harvey 2014). Measuring the veracity of this claim, and understanding the nature of student equity within each institution, clearly requires consideration of data at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Within the existing Framework, it is difficult to test the claims of either institution as there remains a paucity of publicly available data on postgraduate student equity.

Categorical Imperatives: The Creation of the Equity Groups

The student equity framework has been reviewed on several occasions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014; Bradley et al. 2008; James et al. 2004). Remarkably, there has been little change to the equity groups in the 25 years since they were first canvassed. The framers of *A Fair Chance for All* themselves acknowledged that other groups might be worthy of inclusion. There was specific reference to long-term unemployed people, for example, as one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in the community (DEET 1990, p. 19). In the subsequent paper on equity and general performance indicators in higher education (Martin 1994, p. 7), the project management team considered the possibility of including South Sea Islanders, either within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander category or separately. Interestingly, one of the challenges flagged was the difficulty in applying quantitative data methods to a small group of only several thousand people. This challenge was later visible in discussion about care leavers, i.e. people who have transitioned out of foster, residential or kinship care (Harvey et al. 2015b; Harvey et al. 2015c) and other potential groups. For example, some researchers have highlighted the need to focus on students from refugee backgrounds (Ben-Moshe et al. 2008).

However, despite many potential contenders, no new categories have been added since 1990. The Research Group suggested that equity indicators should be seen in institutional as well as sectoral context (Linke 1991, p. 126). The Project Team agreed that institutions should not necessarily focus on every category (for example

the Sydney-based University of Technology (UTS) excluded regional and rural targets) and that institutional targets should be different tailored to their historical context and catchments. The University of South Australia, for example, set a high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander target, reflecting the broader South Australian population (Martin 1994, p.18). The NBEET review recommended that, within these broad categories, institutions identify and develop responses to particular subgroups that are appropriate to their catchments (NBEET 1996, p. xvi). Subsequently, revisions to the framework have been largely hermeneutic, with a focus on categorical definitions. This focus has been sharpest in the case of low socio-economic students, where Australian Bureau of Statistics data has recently been harnessed to consider disadvantage within a smaller statistical area level than the previous postcode measure allowed (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014). Opportunities for universities to specify their own equity priorities were established through Mission Based Compacts, with performance funding allocated for a time to institutions that met participation targets for students from low socio-economic status backgrounds and an institution-specified group. Institutions focussed on discrete established equity groups, with a small number of exceptions. The University of South Australia opted for a composite indicator encompassing all equity groups, and Curtin University and the University of Melbourne negotiated to focus on postgraduate students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The only substantive change to the Framework has been the prioritisation of particular equity groups. There was a reduced focus on the category of 'women in non-traditional fields' after initial national targets – 40 % for most non-traditional fields and 15 % for Engineering – had been achieved. While women in non-traditional fields still constitute an equity category, there are no national policies in this area (Norton 2013b) and equity performance data for this target group has not been published since 2005 (Gale and Parker 2013).

The rise of female participation in higher education remains the most notable student equity success of the last two decades. However, this dramatic compositional change arguably owes little to the identification of an equity category, but much to broader structural and societal reforms (see Chap. 7, Bell 2015). The success of women highlights the importance of systemic cultural change that was underlined in the NBEET review. As that review noted, 'the focus on equity now needs to be moved from the individual to the system, and from the deficit model to an understanding of the way in which the sector itself under-serves and perpetuates the under-representation of some sections of society' (NBEET 1996, p. 75). Within this context, it could be argued that the student equity framework contributed little to the steep rise of female student numbers, but broader changes to staffing policies and equal opportunity legislation probably contributed substantially.

Indeed, the example of women highlights the importance of staffing policy to student equity, and the limitations of viewing 'success' in terms of proportional student representation (see Chap. 4, Liddle 2015; see Chap. 7, Bell 2015). The 1996 NBEET review of the Framework advocated 'the development of staffing policies and practices which address those aspects of institutional culture which pose barriers to women's appointment, promotion, access to continuing employment, and

positions of leadership'(NBEET 1996, p. xvii). Ongoing under-representation within senior university management and the highest academic levels (Fitzgerald 2014; Fitzgerald and Wilkinson 2010) highlights the need to broaden focus from university access to the quality and outcomes of that access. Despite the review, and the close relationship between student and staff equity, staffing issues also remain outside the scope of the Framework.

In reviewing the equity groups, care is also required not to maintain assumptions of the past. Any addition of smaller disadvantaged groups, for example, would not necessarily involve data collection to the same extent as the six large groups. Including groups such as students from refugee background or care leavers in a revised framework might not involve the generation of large new institutional data sets and an accompanying administrative burden (Harvey et al. 2015b). A more calibrated framework is possible, aided by technology that did not exist when the original founders wrote *A Fair Chance for All*. Moreover, academic analytics provide new possibilities to address disadvantage at individual level (see Chap. 15, Naylor et al. 2015), enabling both individual and categorical disadvantage to be addressed. The rise of academic analytics does not, however, negate the need for an overarching framework that addresses structural barriers such as class and race. Evidence suggests that these barriers remain powerful and enduring (Gonski 2011; Teese and Polesel 2003).

To this end, it could be argued that Indigenous Australians do not receive sufficient priority within *A Fair Chance for All*. Though listed as one of the six equity groups, Indigenous Australians clearly face a unique form of historic disadvantage. As Liddle (see Chap. 4) and Anderson (see Chap. 13) both argue, the outcomes for Indigenous students in higher education remain unacceptable, and access to the professions remains limited (Anderson 2015; Liddle 2015). Any revised Framework requires specific attention to improving university participation as well as achievement and outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Moreover, both Anderson and Liddle also note that it is difficult to consider the plight of Indigenous students without also addressing the under-representation of Indigenous staff within the academic profession (Anderson 2015; Liddle 2015). A whole-of-university approach is required (Behrendt et al. 2012), along with cultural change that moves beyond attempts to integrate or mainstream Indigenous students and knowledge.

Compound and Multiple Disadvantage

Within the 1993 consultation process that informed the final adoption of the six equity categories, two institutions highlighted the issue of multiple disadvantage, and the Project team noted briefly that 'this may be an important issue worth examining more fully' (Martin 1994, p.157). A subsequent review of the indicators by James et al. (2004) also noted the importance of multiple disadvantage. However, the James review argued that the two primary overlapping indicators were low SES and regionality, and that until low SES could be defined beyond a geographic basis,

it was too difficult to qualify this multiple disadvantage effectively (James et al. 2004).

The question of compound disadvantage relates closely to the groups who are missing or marginalised from the current Framework. Some groups are technically subsumed within the broader groups – for example, many care leavers and refugee background students are from low SES backgrounds. However, the broad groups alone do not reflect the extent of disadvantage faced by refugees and other marginalised people, and do not enable redress for that level of disadvantage. Similarly, compound disadvantage is not simply a reflection of people falling into multiple categories, but a state in which disadvantage is seriously compounded by each new factor. In both cases, there is a level of disadvantage that lies beyond the scope of the current Framework and its broad categories. Addressing extreme levels of inequity requires a more calibrated approach to equity, and a Framework that explicitly acknowledges the extent to which some groups and individuals are marginalised. While the Framework has enabled tracking of participation at the system level – as it aimed to do – aggregate measures mask important institutional and community differences. Addressing compound and multiple disadvantage remains challenging, but a revised Framework could investigate how the evidence base might be strengthened to meet this challenge.

Equality or Equity?

The extent of disadvantage faced by some individuals trying to access higher education also calls into question the Framework's focus on formal equality rather than equity, and on representation as the key outcome. *A Fair Chance for All*, and policy instruments established within the same reformist era such as State Equal Opportunity Acts, take a formal approach to equality, under which equality of treatment is paramount. Formal equality guarantees no outcome, and in some jurisdictions this has been found to hamper progress towards fairness (Gardiner 2008). The concept and failings of formal equality can be juxtaposed with the concept of substantive equality by Barnard and Hepple (2000). Formal equality embodies a notion of procedural justice, and allows persons to be treated equally poorly or equally well, irrespective of differences in individual starting position or individual outcomes. The concept of substantive equality, however, is explicitly concerned with the outcomes and places emphasis on differential treatment to achieve this equality.

Care leavers (people who have transitioned from out-of home care) provide a useful example of the limitations of formal equality within higher education. Out-of-home care refers to those in relative/kinship care, foster care, residential care, family group homes, and independent living. Young people in out-of-home care often confront specific educational challenges from an early age, including placement instability and disrupted schooling (Bromfield et al. 2005; CREATE Foundation 2006; Fernandez 2008; Townsend 2012). Despite typically poor school

outcomes, a high risk of homelessness and unemployment, and extremely low participation rates in higher education (Johnson et al. 2010; Thoresen and Liddiard 2011), few universities offer specific policies or support for care leavers (Harvey et al. 2015c). Often these students form a subset of low SES students, but the incentives provided under the Framework are patently insufficient to encourage greater participation and success in higher education. Admission bonus points and pathway programs are useful, but improving the participation rate of care leavers requires deep structural inequity to be addressed. One strength of the Framework – longitudinal participation data provided across six broadly agreed categories – can thus at the same time be viewed as a weakness. Institutions need to move outside and beyond the high level focus of the Framework in order to support particular groups, whether they be care leavers, students from refugee backgrounds, prisoners, or other under-represented people. A similar argument could be made within the low SES category itself, with students in the lowest socio-economic decile typically facing severe under-representation that is masked by the broader quartile-level data reported (See Chap. 5, Harvey et al. 2015a).

These philosophical and terminological debates were raised during the inception of the Framework. For example, tension was encapsulated in discussions about whether the objective was to address disadvantage or under-representation (Martin 1994, p. 6). Both the original framework (DEET 1990, p. 28) and subsequent work by the project team (Martin 1994) argued that under-representation typically implied disadvantage, suggesting a need for active equity measures. Issues of identity were also raised, for example the labelling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as disadvantaged, since 'the Indigenous peoples of Australia do not consider themselves to be disadvantaged by virtue of their Aboriginality'(Martin 1994, p. 6).

However, the NBEET (1996, p. 75) review also highlighted the limitations of the Framework, and argued the need for systemic cultural change. In advocating a transition from considering disadvantage at the level of the individual to the level of the system, the Higher Education Council raised the significance of 'building equity considerations into criteria for appointment and appraisal of staff, and into course development and review, as well as various staff development initiatives related to the development of inclusive curriculum and teaching methodologies' (NBEET 1996, p.75). U.S. research also focusses on the need to move beyond compositional diversity, to consider areas such as campus climate and diversity within the formal and informal curriculum (Bensimon and Malcom 2012; Williams et al. 2005).

Revision of the Framework could situate the document within this broader context, and advocate the need for deep institutional change to support student equity objectives. While the six categories have proven remarkably durable and enabled equity policy to remain prominent at national level, institutions still receive little support for tackling participation rates of small, highly disadvantaged groups, or for adopting broader cultural change across their organisations. A comprehensive approach is required to break the cycle of disadvantage that remains 25 years after the Framework was founded.

Inclusive Excellence: Moving Beyond the Bifurcation of Equity and Quality

A Fair Chance for All was largely limited to whether students from different groups were accessing higher education at rates proportional to their population. As we have argued in this chapter, the Framework's focus on compositional diversity was important but incomplete. Recent proposed revisions have tried to create a more comprehensive set of indicators. For example, the Australian Government's commissioned review by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014) focused on the development of a performance measurement framework for equity in higher education. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare identified 61 potential indicators for monitoring educational attainment and outcomes, precursors of higher education and education system performance. However, while advocating an expanded range of performance measures for the equity categories, the scope of the review excluded interrogation of the overall architecture and constituent categories of the framework. Similarly, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) released a draft equity framework in 2015, but that draft also excluded any changes to the categories themselves.

Apart from excluding various groups, stages and levels of education, a much broader critique of the Framework could be made. As we have argued, *A Fair Chance for All* is focussed on measures of proportional student representation and compositional diversity, rather than addressing more systemic issues such as campus climate, staffing and inclusive curriculum. However, the Framework also arguably reifies the division of quality and equity. In so doing, there is little space to consider the ways in which equity and diversity can themselves strengthen the notion of quality, particularly within teaching and learning. US research on inclusive education highlights that raising the compositional diversity of a campus 'increases the probability of exposing a student, irrespective of his or her race and opinion, to a wider range of perspectives on a particular issue' (Milem et al. 2005, p. 7). Further, minority influence theory shows that when groups include minority opinions, cognitive complexity is stimulated among majority opinion members (Gruenfeld et al. 1998; Milem et al. 2005).

In many ways, equity and diversity are required in order to provide students with the highest quality learning experience. Despite the complexity of these relationships though, traditional measures of institutional quality are typically very narrow and focussed on research metrics (Harvey cited in Hare 2015). In revising the student equity framework, we should seek also to revise our notions and measures of institutional quality, in particular by exploring the concept of inclusive excellence (Williams et al. 2005). Equity objectives could be framed not in isolation, nor as complementary to a separate set of objectives for quality, but rather as an inherent aspect of institutional quality. Re-conceptualising equity in this way would help to reduce its long-standing marginalisation within institutional and sectoral policy.

Conclusion

The national student equity framework has generated robust data and provided a sound basis for the development of many related policies over 25 years. Focussing attention on a small number of high level groups risked criticism of which the founders were well aware, but enabled stability and longevity, and kept equity prominent within higher education policy. The Labor Government's drive to raise low SES participation, in particular, is unimaginable without the evidence generated by measures within and around *A Fair Chance for All*. Nevertheless, substantial change is now needed. Consideration of student achievement and outcomes beyond participation rates is increasingly important. International students, postgraduate students, sub-degree offerings and non-university higher education providers must all be brought into a revised conception of student equity. A commitment to driving equity beyond formal equality, and a more calibrated approach to defining disadvantage are integral to this goal. Moreover, moving beyond the quest for proportional representation towards advocating broader systemic and institutional change is required. Particularly, we need to consider equity as an inherent component of quality, rather than an isolated policy objective.

Some of these changes are relatively easy; others are more challenging; and many will be controversial. In highlighting the limitations of the current Framework, we seek not to provide an alternative blueprint but simply to commence a conversation both difficult and important. In order to move student equity from the margins to the mainstream, reform is required. The 25 years since *A Fair Chance for All* have provided a wealth of evidence on what measures can improve access for under-represented students. We are now well-positioned to develop a broader framework that harnesses this evidence, acknowledges student equity as both structural and individual, and promotes access, achievement and outcomes. The next national equity framework could refocus from fairness to equity, from some students to all, and from representation to systemic and cultural change.

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Chapter 2
Framing the Framework: The Origins of *A Fair Chance for All*

Lin Martin

Introduction

I was asked to provide a first-hand account of the origins, development and significance of *A Fair Chance for All* and related policy instruments such as the equity performance indicator framework. I am indebted to Professor Denise Bradley, who in the late 1980s led the project which culminated in the publication of *A Fair Chance for All*, for her advice and recollections from those times.

The Precursors to *A Fair Chance for All*

While the concept of fairness and increasing participation became much more central to Government higher education policy in the late 1980s, improving student equity was an issue internationally and in Australia long before *A Fair Chance for All*. Various scholarships schemes introduced by Governments of both colours, Indigenous support programs, and the abolition of university fees in 1974 by the Whitlam Government were all significant equity initiatives (Gale and McNamee 1994) but they were based on an imprecise concept of disadvantage and on an assumption that the way to address inequalities in access to higher education was to remove financial barriers to study. The Whitlam Government policies demonstrate why more focused initiatives were required. With the abolition of fees in 1974, it was believed that the mix of students in universities would be broadened to include a higher proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged students. Unfortunately

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this did not happen, mainly because there were few accompanying changes to admission criteria by universities to allow for a less academically prepared clientele.

Anderson and Vervoon (1983) discussed these issues and published an early general study of participation in Australian post-secondary education entitled *Access to Privilege*: *Patterns of participation in Australian post-secondary education*. They commented that institutions which had the most selective access policies had the lowest percentage of students from lower socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. In the meantime the equity policy agenda was also advancing. The national Social and Economic Summit of the Hawke Government held in 1983 first discussed the link between the social and economic agendas and expressed concerns over participation rates at tertiary institutions of 'disadvantaged' groups. Increasing the education levels of the workforce was seen to be a major pillar in a set of macro-economic reforms for Australia planned by the Government.

Linke et al. monitored participation by low socio-economic status background and rural students in a series of studies in South Australia (1985; Linke, with Oertel (Martin), and Kelsey 1988) in the mid-1980s. Their work explored how to measure the socio-economic and rural profile of higher education students and to investigate whether any of the equity initiatives introduced from 1974 to 1984 had any real impact on changing this profile. Linke's study was an early attempt to use regional analysis of census social and economic data by postcode to construct a measure of relative socio-economic disadvantage which could be used to classify higher education enrolments by socio-economic status. He spelt out in detail the limitations of such measures and calibrated the results obtained through this approach with the results of surveys conducted in South Australia at the time. The study had several important policy-related conclusions: that provision of more places over the 10 year period had done nothing to change the socio-economic profile of enrolled students as the bias was equally present in the application profile as in the enrolment profile. If all applicants had been offered places the socio-economic profile of the sector would not have changed. This was a discouraging finding and underlined the tendency to social replication of the higher education sector. Since the provision of more places and removing financial barriers were the main strategies used at that time, these results represented important conclusions in terms of advancing the social equity goals of the Labor Government into the future.

In fact, Linke's approach was an important precursor of most of the work that followed in defining equity groups in the sector in a consistent way, and demonstrated a robust approach to monitoring access and participation over time. It showed that changing the equity profile of the higher education sector in Australia would prove to be a considerable challenge.

Equity and the Dawkins Green and White Papers

The Green and White papers circulated by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in 1987 and 1988 (Dawkins 1987, 1988) represented a step function change in the policy framework for the provision and funding of higher education in Australia and the importance of higher education participation to the future economic sustainability of the nation. The policy papers heralded significant growth in the sector, established the Unified National System, foreshadowed bringing together the traditional universities with the newer colleges of advanced education and teachers' colleges in a series of mergers, and removed disparities in funding between the two groups (Ed. Croucher, Marginson, Norton, & Wells, 2014). Expanding on the issues identified in the National Social and Economic Summit of 1983, social justice was a major plank of the new policy framework. The Green Paper stated that, in spite of considerable effort in recent years, 'substantial inequities in access to higher education remain[ed] for some groups in the population' (Dawkins 1987, p. 21). The phrase *A Fair Chance for All* was coined for the new equity framework in the spirit of the Australian belief that its citizens should all get 'a fair go' at accessing higher education opportunities. In spite of a lack of hard participation data in 1987, the groups in society that were identified as under-represented in higher education were:

People from financially disadvantaged backgrounds;
People from rural and isolated areas;
Aboriginal people;
Women in some disciplinary areas; and
Some migrant groups.

The argument was repeated that increasing participation generally would assist in improving equity in spite of earlier evidence to the contrary but this time the need for more 'direct measures' (Dawkins 1987, p. 21) was identified, as well as a desire to coordinate equity strategies to achieve a set of national objectives and targets. It was foreshadowed that the proposed National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) would be given responsibility for advising on particular equity issues. The involvement of the new advisory body proved to be a lasting change in the policy arrangements for equity in the sector until its abolition in 1997.

When the White Paper was released in July 1988, the Government reiterated the policy directions of the Green Paper and equity remained as a key plank of the policy. The need for diversity of both institutional mission and the student population was stressed and proposals were made to transfer greater responsibility to the Unified National System institutions for planning and development of courses and services which best served their catchment areas and missions. Most importantly, equity was mainstreamed into national and institutional planning, monitoring and review through the Educational Profiles process and treated as an essential component of a quality higher education system (Dawkins 1988, p. 26). The Government also foreshadowed its intention to implement a national coordinated approach to

achieving its equity objectives. This was a significant change in approach which required initiatives to address participation gaps and build equity into the core activities of institutions. At this time there were no international models for such an approach and the policy initiatives were based entirely on Australian work. This was a significant achievement at the time and the Australian equity framework developed has proved to be influential in development of policies internationally. However, the longevity of the framework is viewed by some as a policy stasis which has acted against equity policy innovation and refinement.

The under-represented groups were also extended by the additional of a sixth group, 'the disabled', who were identified as drawing less on the benefits of higher education than others. A further emphasis in the White Paper was a strengthening of a statement of intent to develop a set of performance indicators for the sector which could be used as the basis of funding on output and performance. Equity was included in the list of performance indicators which were to be developed, again placing equity performance alongside core teaching and learning business indicators such as student demand, retention and completion rates (Dawkins 1988, p. 86).

The emphasis on the proposed national approach to equity and the need for a set of performance indicators were critical to the further promotion of the equity agenda in higher education and set in train the formulation of *A Fair Chance for All.* On re-reading the Green and White Papers one is struck by the breadth of vision of the reform agenda, the apparently strong commitment to equity by the Government and also by how little the productivity argument and policy landscape have changed in relation to these issues over the last 25 years in spite of all that has been done.

Advancing Equity Policy in the 1990s

The discussion paper, *A Fair Chance for All*, was released in 1990 as a joint publication of the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and NBEET (1990). Minister Dawkins had referred the task of leading the development of the policy to the Higher Education Council of NBEET and had sought advice on guidelines for institutions to apply to their equity planning as part of the Educational Profiles process. The paper was developed under the guidance of an Equity Working Group with membership from NBEET, DEET and the sector which was chaired by Professor Denise Bradley, who was at that time Deputy Chair of the Higher Education Council. In order to get a first-hand account of the development of *A Fair Chance for All*, I contacted Denise Bradley to discuss the genesis of the policy paper. Denise reports that the origins of the equity agenda as it appeared in the policy papers arose from action taken before 1985 by the then Minister, Susan Ryan, who had appointed a group of women as commissioners on the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission. This group and Minister Ryan were strongly influenced by Affirmative Action work occurring in the United States at the time and were interested in questions of what was a fair percentage of people from various groups in society having access to the benefits of education and paid work, and the

role that a critical mass of students from these groups had on raising participation. The focus at first was on women, but the same arguments applied to under-representation of other groups which eventually led to their listing in the Green and White Papers, and the development of *A Fair Chance for All*.

Following the release of the draft equity discussion paper in 1990, there was a period of consultation with the sector and input on strategies which had worked in particular institutions was taken into account in the final version. *A Fair Chance for All* aimed to provide a national overview of equity issues for the sector; to advise the Minister on guidelines for institutions for the development of their equity plans to be included in Educational Profiles; and to define a national equity objective for the sector. In particular the document was to set national equity objectives and targets for each of the six disadvantaged groups identified in the White Paper. As best could be done in an environment where precise definitions and comprehensive baseline data on participation had not been established, population shares of 15–64 year olds of the equity groups in the general population were calculated using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and compared where possible with under-graduate participation rates from the available student data.

It should be emphasised that the Government's policy settings were focussed on the student population in these groups. That is, the approach was one of measuring participation at the group level to enable judgements to be made by government not only about national progress but also the relative performance at this level between institutions. Thus, the subsequent work on tighter definitions of the groups and the development of performance indicators was not focussed on identifying the equity status of individuals to enable targeting or evaluation of specific initiatives or to provide information about possible access to benefits. The view of the Working Party, too, was that the task was to develop broad national objectives for what appeared from contemporary evidence to be educationally disadvantaged groups. It felt that institutions were best placed to identify the particular nuances of need in their communities within and between these groups and to monitor the needs and performance of individuals in local settings. Institutional autonomy was a fraught issue at this time of major policy change and to move any further down the path of monitoring institutional performance in detail was considered counterproductive to the policy intent. Institutions needed to 'own' the fine detail of their own locally produced Equity Plans. Times have changed with the introduction of mission-based compacts in place of the post-1988 Educational Profile documents but the arguments about autonomy of the universities persist. While there was and remains an imperative to be able to measure equity group participation there is now consider-able flexibility in the unit record student collection for institutions to do their own monitoring of other groups in line with their own descriptions of disadvantage.

Within this broad framework, a national objective, targets mainly relating to access and participation, and a possible set of strategies to achieve equity were described for each of the six groups. Even at this early stage, the Equity Working Group was concerned about areas of multiple disadvantage and commented that the siloed approach to describing the groups and strategies 'did not mean to imply that these groups are mutually exclusive' (p. 10). This issue still remains a concern of

equity practitioners. Annual analyses done using comprehensive data 25 years on still rarely explore the concept of multiple disadvantage quantitatively even though it is known that many strategies put in place to redress disadvantage are applicable across several groups. The broader availability of unit record data to institutions in recent years through the national data collection now allows institutions more easily to undertake this analysis themselves and to share that data. In fact there was always capability for institutional analysis of the impact of their equity strategies after agreement was obtained on the definitions.

The national objectives and targets for the disadvantaged groups covered various aspects of access, participation and completion in higher education as shown in Table 2.1. Targets were mostly qualitative as baselines could not be established or realistic future values be set due to lack of data. This meant that the framework established in *A Fair Chance for All* was still a long way from the goal stated in the White Paper for a suite of meaningful performance indicators to be developed.

Against these objectives and targets, suggestions for appropriate strategies were made for each group. Similar strategies were listed for a number of the groups but they were always targeted at remedying under-participation or access, taking into account knowledge of the characteristics of each group. For example, awareness programs were listed as a strategy for non-English speaking background (NESB) students and those with disabilities but the type of programs suggested varied. Similarly, flexible study options were thought helpful in improving participation for ATSI students, women, students with disabilities and rural and isolated students but for quite different reasons related to their type of disadvantage. The types of strategies were based on examples of good practice volunteered by the sector members involved in the *A Fair Chance for All* consultations at that time and compiled and synthesised by the Higher Education Council (HEC) Working Party.

Table 2.1 Type of objectives in A Fair Chance for All by disadvantaged groups

Disadvantaged group	Access	Participation	Completion	Postgrad study	Quantitative targets
Socio-economically disadvantaged	X	–		–	No
ATSI	–	X	X	X	Yes
Women	–	X In non-traditional fields	–	X	Yes
NESB	–	X By sex and discipline	–	–	No
People with disabilities	X	X And in professional disciplines	–	–	Yes
Rural/Isolated people	–	X	–	X	No

There was no requirement for institutions to identify strategies in their Equity Plans for every disadvantaged group and they were encouraged to analyse their catchment areas for their student population and address those groups most under-represented in their current student profile. In fact, few did this and most addressed all categories. Summary reports of these institutional equity plans were later prepared annually by DEET drawing out qualitative information about success of various strategies and allowing sharing of information about the equity agenda across the sector.

A Fair Chance for All represented a landmark report internationally – no country had attempted to aim for a higher education profile which was representative of the population profile; to set national participation targets or objectives; to identify groups where there was some evidence of disadvantage; or to mainstream student equity as a core component of institutional planning and performance monitoring. Awareness of the issues behind under-representation of groups in the higher education population was raised by the publication of the discussion paper, and the need for positive action to address these issues was recognised. But the measurement of actual progress towards the targets set was still not possible because of the lack of common definitions and metrics for the disadvantaged groups.

1989–1991: The Research Group on Performance Indicators

In 1989 the Commonwealth Government commissioned a Performance Indicators Research Group 'to develop and trial a broad range of quantitative indicators suitable for evaluating relative performance in higher education at both system and institution levels and to report on their practicability, data requirements and appropriate conditions of use' (Linke et al. 1991). The Research Group was led by Russell Linke and comprised a number of senior university staff who had previously been involved in similar work undertaken by the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee and the Australian Committee of Directors and Principals in Advanced Education before the establishment of the Unified National System. I was also appointed to that research group. Equity indicators were included in the Research Group's brief, but the primary purpose was to establish a minimal set of general performance indicators which would allow evaluation of how well the sector was achieving teaching and research targets established through the Educational Profiles process.

The project was a very practical one which tested each proposed indicator using real data from a selection of institutions to ascertain whether it reliably differentiated levels of performance adequately between the trial institutions. But the Research Group also developed some of the metrics commonly used today by commissioning new work on teaching and staff quality. In particular, Paul Ramsden was commissioned to develop a student survey which was the first version of the Course Experience Questionnaire. New indicators were also developed on student progress rates, attrition and completion times for students.

Unfortunately, less attention was paid to the indicators of participation and social equity by the Research Group, although the importance of their development was emphasised. The only two indicators relevant to *A Fair Chance for All* that were tested related to access to courses by women and the female academic staffing profile of institutions. This was in spite of the Research Group stating that 'it is one of the fundamental aims of higher education in any free society to promote the full development of individual potential beyond the circumstantial constraints imposed by social or cultural background, language, distance, age, sex or physical disability' (Linke et al. 1991, p 116), a view which aligned with the philosophy of *A Fair Chance for All*. I was disappointed with the progress made in this area by the Research Group given its brief but took heart from the statement in the report (Linke et al. 1991, p. 116) that the indicators which had been developed were not comprehensive and that, following the release of *A Fair Chance for All*, a more appropriate indicator set might be addressed by a number of research and evaluation projects in the future.

Performance Measurement in Equity: The Conceptual Framework

Following the release of the Performance Indicators Research Group's report in 1991, the Government identified a priority for further research into performance measurement through the Evaluations and Investigations program. At the time I was working for Denise Bradley at the newly formed University of South Australia and I suggested we should submit a proposal to do what the Research Group had not achieved and try to develop and test a set of equity performance indicators which were aligned with the national objectives and targets specified in *A Fair Chance for All*.

We submitted a proposal to DEET with Denise Bradley as Chair of the Project Management Team and me as the investigator. The aim of our project was to define and evaluate a set of equity indicators to augment the Research Group's set of general performance indicators and to develop a computer package for institutions to extract the necessary data from their statistical files reported to the Government and calculate the full set of general and equity indicators. The project bid was successful and funds were granted at the end of 1991. As well as Denise Bradley, the Project Management Team comprised two members from DEET, a representative of the Higher Education Council, and four members of the previous Performance Indicators Research Group (Linke, West, Mackay, & Martin). Gavin Moodie was secretary to the Project Management Team.

The methodology for the part of the project that related to the equity indicators was to:

• Review the DEET data collections and determine a set of operational definitions for the six designated equity groups;

- Canvass views of institutions on these definitions;
- Define a prototype set of equity performance indicators and test the feasibility of these indicators on a subset of institutional data; and
- Analyse the indicator values for the trial data and ensure the validity of the indicators in discriminating performance differences.

The underpinning philosophy for the project was to keep the number of indicators small while enabling measurement of progress against the national objectives and targets for the groups enunciated in *A Fair Chance for All*, and to use as far as possible the existing student and staff data collections for the sector.

Until then, institutions had been asked to describe their own categorisations of equity groups which led to a plethora of definitions. The pressure not to extend the range of data in the national collections meant that it was necessary to consider surrogates for some of the areas of disadvantage and to build on the work done by Linke a decade earlier on regional measures in the definitions of the equity groups.

The conceptual framework I developed for equity measurement under the guidance of the Project Management Team consisted of:

- Precise operational definitions for the six designated groups from *A Fair Chance for All*;
- A set of performance indicators which could be applied across each of the groups so defined, aligned with the objectives set down in *A Fair Chance for All*;
- The set of national targets from *A Fair Chance for All*;
- A set of reference values linked to the objective or standard for each group indicating what an unbiased profile might be; and
- Institutional targets to be set by each provider.

An examination of the national targets and objectives from *A Fair Chance for All* as summarised in Table 2.1 revealed that performance measures would need to cover the following concepts, and analysis would need to be undertaken by level of course and field of study.

- Access (related to commencing students who were in the equity group);
- Overall participation (related to total students in the equity group);
- Completion (successful completion of awards); and
- Staff participation.

The Performance Indicator Research Group had already proven that completion rates and times were very difficult to calculate accurately because of the impact of different types of enrolment on the outcome. Instead, they had derived measures based on the last 1 or 2 years' data collection and found that these were more stable and effective at differentiating performance between institutions. The two base indicators recommended by the Research Group which could be combined to provide an estimate of completion were Initial (or first year) Retention Rate and annual Student Progress Rate. As these had been well tested for feasibility by the Research Group in the previous study, the Equity Indicators Project Management Team agreed to use them instead of the single measure of completion. The two indicators

were Success, which was the ratio of student progress rate for students in the equity group to that of other students, and the Apparent Retention Rate which was the ratio of the between years retention rate for all students in the equity group to the rate for all other students. Several indicators relating to staff incidence in the institutional profile for some under-represented groups were also proposed in the report, but these never received the same prominence as the student measures.

It appeared that these four indicators – Access, Participation, Success, and Apparent Retention – could be applied to each equity group once it was systematically defined and progress against all of the national objectives and targets set in *A Fair Chance for All* could be covered off. This had potential to provide a simple and consistent way to monitor progress in improving representation of the groups within and between institutions as well as nationally. Because the equity groups were identified due to their suspected under-representation in student enrolment profiles compared with their incidence in the higher education age group of the population, the access and participation indicators were related to these population percentages. The exception to this was the low SES indicator which was based on the concept of bias in the student population used by Linke in his South Australian study in 1983 and so compared the total enrolment of low versus high SES students in the relevant student population. The construction of the indicators made it easy to develop the set of benchmarks for equality against which the indicator values were to be compared. An unbiased indicator result was usually 1 or a population share and progress towards these benchmarks was easy to interpret.

The challenge remained to identify the best possible operational definitions for each of the six groups to which the indicators could be applied. My proposal to the Project Management Team was for a set of definitions which were based on self-identification by students at enrolment in terms of existing elements in the national student data collections. Those definitions are described in detail for each group in the report of the equity indicators project (Martin 1994). Only one group, students with disabilities, required additional data to be captured.

A consultation paper was prepared on the proposed definitions and indicators and DEET circulated it to all Unified National System institutions. It is an indication of the level of interest in the project that 33 of the 38 universities provided a response to the paper. A detailed summary of the responses was compiled by DEET and the Project Management Team's views on them is included in the final report of the project (Martin 1994, pp. 155–180). Some minor changes were made to the definitions as a result.

Once the definitions were settled, the indicators were trialled for feasibility and reliability using semi-aggregated data files provided by six selected universities. This involved extensive manual calculations because the software package had not yet been developed but proved that the indicators differentiated institutional performance well and enabled the calculation of a consistent time series of data for monitoring. The report was finalised and published by the Department in 1994 and at their request I conducted workshops in most States to explain the project and its outcomes and how institutions could use the software package included in Volume 2 of the report to calculate the equity indicators. Subsequently in 1995 the Department implemented the indicators nationally and required institutions to com-

ment on their outcomes as part of their equity documentation in their Educational Profiles submissions.

Issues Arising During the Consultations and Finalisation of the Report

The general issues which received the most attention from the sector included the use of the concept of under-representation as an indication of disadvantage; the implied uniformity of the equity groups; and multiple disadvantage. The Project Management Team argued that under-representation reflected unequal opportunity of access and support to succeed in higher education and therefore was an indication of disadvantage. It recognised that there was variation between individuals' circumstances within an equity group but reiterated the argument made earlier about the government and policy focus being on the groups rather than the individuals for this project.

The more specific issues that emerged, which were hotly debated within the Project Management Team, were as follows.

Non-English Speaking Background Students

While the issue of low participation by people from non-English speaking backgrounds as a group was identified in *A Fair Chance for All*, under-representation was specific to some cultural groups. The issues of whether only first generation migrants should be considered and the impact of language difficulties or cultural differences on success for these students were discussed. Some cultural groups were over-represented in particular fields of study and generally women were under-represented in all cultural groups. In the end the Project Management Group supported the definition which pragmatically represented NESB in terms of *educational* disadvantage arising from their immigration circumstances, recognising that this was a change in philosophy from that used for other demographically determined groups. To be included in the group the student had to be born overseas and speak a language other than English at home, but also to have arrived in Australia a relatively short time before their higher education studies. The period was set as 10 years because potential higher education students arriving earlier than that were likely to have undertaken part of their primary or secondary education in Australia and were therefore less educationally disadvantaged. This concept was based at the time on a model of first and second phase learners, but it did reduce the number of students in the NESB group. Classifying outcomes for the indicators by broad country of origin (European, Asian etc.) was also considered but rejected because some language groups were not large in number and when combined with field of study

sometimes produced stereotypical participation patterns (e.g. some European groups with high participation in law and medicine and Asian students being over-represented in science and technology studies while being under-represented generally in higher education) which reinforced prejudices about the levels of disadvantage really suffered by this group.

Students with Disabilities

The Project Team recognised the significant barriers to higher education suffered by students who had profound disabilities, but this area was a sensitive one for which no data at all existed until the mid-1990s. There were also difficulties in determining the size of the population to be used as a reference value for the group.

Once the report was finalised with the rather weak definition documented earlier, DEET proposed to augment the national student data collection by including the required questions. The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee strongly resisted this. I attended the meetings where the changes were discussed as a representative of the Higher Education Council, where I was working by that time. The decision to include the new data elements on disability in the national collection was won by a close vote with DEET and the Higher Education Council members supporting the change. While far from perfect, it seemed to be better to have some information on this group than nothing at all, and DEET agreed to trial the definition of this group for a period of 3 years. It still remains.

Rural and Isolated Students

The postcode classification scheme devised by the then Department of Primary Industry and Energy (DPIE) had been used by DEET in analyses of enrolments in urban, rural and remote regions and was under review when the equity indicators were being developed. The classification was known to produce some spurious results for students living in rural or regional areas which had a university presence. I was keen to try a different scheme based on travel time or cost of travel to a university campus. Relevant work had been done by Dennis Griffith from the Northern Territory who had devised a composite access score for each ABS Collectors District using data on the size of the population centre being accessed, the time/cost/distance to a range of services and the economic resources of the geographic area (Griffith 1992). This seemed to have potential for applicability to the definition of the rural and isolated equity group although Griffith warned that his approach might produce perverse results for isolated areas. The Project Management Team planned to trial the Griffith approach in two South Australian universities and compare the results with those obtained for the indicators using the DPIE classification scheme

but in the end this was not done and the definition remained as described above. The use of Collectors District data was not readily available at the time so this trial would have been a significant piece of additional work for the project team.

Low Socio-Economic Status Students

The most contentious definition related to socio-economic status and the use of postcode analysis although this had been the subject of several pieces of research commissioned by DEET since the Linke regional analysis from 1983. The key issues were the assumed homogeneity of the postcode areas and the use of averaged data as the basis of the index of socio-economic disadvantage. A further matter was how to classify mature aged students whose SES was not any longer based on the characteristics of their parents.

But the decision to use the postcode methodology was not taken lightly and relied heavily on a study done in 1993 by Roger Jones of the ANU (Jones 1993) which compared distributions of the populations of students recorded in the 1986 census based on the components of the ABS EdOcc index with the value of SES assigned under the postcode methodology. Jones concluded (1993, p. 63) that subject to some limitations 'at the national level, state and capital city level,… the postcode methodology can usefully be applied using the ABS Index of Education and Occupation to develop profiles for the following subgroups:

- Students aged 17–24, with no restriction on region; and
- Students aged 25–64 in major urban areas'.

This finding was similar to comments made by Linke et al. back in 1988. The other limitation placed on use of postcode data as a surrogate for SES was related to the size of the postcode areas and the incidence of rural/isolated postcode areas in the low and high socio-economic status groups defined as a proportion of the whole population. Jones found that SES groups defined in terms of postcode areas could only be used reliably at the State or national level rather than for smaller population groups.

The use of postcodes in the SES methodology in the study has remained a running sore of criticism over the years and many attempts have been made to improve on it. There have also been changes made to the approach to measurement of participation both in terms of the indicator, which lost the concept of bias, and also introduced the use of Collectors Districts rather than postcodes to address the issue of homogeneity of the area of analysis. I had always taken the view, when asked, that I did not expect the differences in trends for the indicators at the national level to vary significantly from those derived under the postcode methodology, and this has been largely proven. However, relativities between different institutions do change, which matters when individual university performance is being considered.

Epilogue

The definitions and indicators for measuring higher education equity performance published in 1994 have been used in two major reviews: the first in 1995 related to progress in the equity of the designated groups against *A Fair Chance for All* objectives and targets by the Higher Education Council; and secondly in the Bradley Review of Higher Education in 2008. The former review is an example of masterly misjudgement in timing as the report was presented to the Labor Minister just prior to the 1996 election being called. While recommendations about relative performance of the groups and the need to focus in future on Indigenous, rural/isolated and low SES students were used in subsequent Government initiatives, the broad recommendations in that Higher Education Council report were not really acted upon by the Coalition Government.

The Bradley et al. review (2008) contained detailed recommendations about equity based on the analysis of the participation and success data from the indicators and led to the setting of a national target of participation for low SES undergraduate students of at least 20 % by 2020 in parallel with a removal of the volume caps on the sector as a whole. Figure 2.1 shows the impact on access of the changes resulting since 2009 for the sector, and the fine-tuned low SES definitions – the first sustained inroads to reducing disadvantage for low SES students in over 20 years.

In my view it is fitting that *A Fair Chance for All* and the Bradley report top and tail this analysis of equity policy and the recent improvements demonstrate the vision and commitment of Denise Bradley in this long quest of a fair chance of participation in higher education for all Australians.
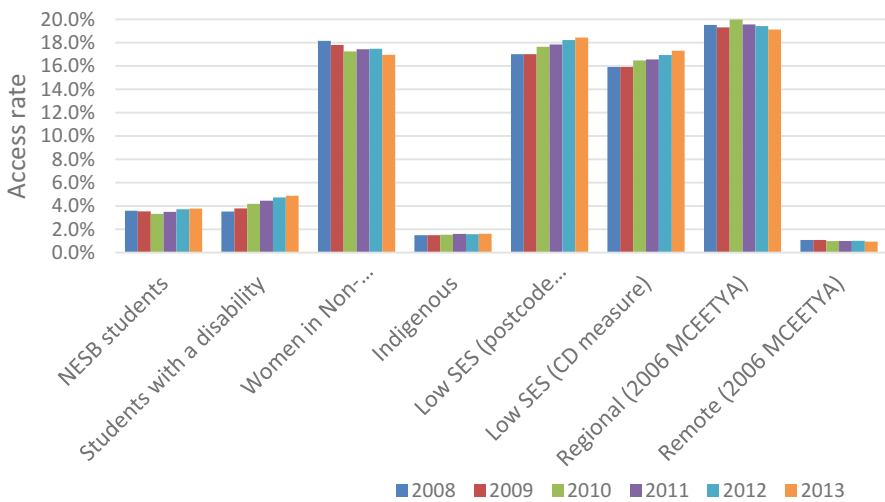
Fig. 2.1 Undergraduate domestic access rates by equity group 2008–2013 (Source: Department of Education Higher Education Statistics, 2013, Appendix 2 Equity groups)

What Were the Achievements?

The longevity of the policy framework for equity which commenced in 1990 with the publication of *A Fair Chance for All* is remarkable. There is little doubt that being able to quantify access, participation, success and retention led to more targeted equity initiatives and provided feedback to Government that funds committed were contributing to greater social justice and opportunities for disadvantaged groups. In my view it was the simplicity of the model and its alignment with *A Fair Chance for All* which contributed to its easy use and the ongoing interest in its outcomes. Its survival over more than two decades has meant that we are able to see where the national effort has succeeded and where it has faltered. It has provided evidence about where we need to try harder and where we are having success at national and institutional level.

I believe that what gets measured gets addressed and acted upon. The development of the equity framework and its national implementation as a core element of the planning and monitoring structures for the sector led to it being taken seriously by senior management in the universities, and the mainstreaming of the data collection and reporting allowed a degree of analysis and identification of gaps in provision of support at a broad level which would not have been possible without either component.

Since 1990, overall participation improvements have been made in most categories and the total number of students in the equity groups at least kept pace with their non-equity group peers, so that some groups identified in *A Fair Chance for All* are no longer regarded as under-represented.

What Worked Well?

Approaches that worked well included:

- The methodology used in the development of *A Fair Chance for All* of setting national targets and using a mixture of good planning and involvement of practice leaders in institutions who were committed to the advancement of disadvantaged students and who already had some good initiatives in place;
- Enunciation of a clear Government vision and a combination of funding carrots and legislative sticks to bring the sector along with that vision;
- An easily understandable conceptual framework which allowed alignment of programs to the particular aspect of equity being addressed;
- The pragmatism of the equity indicators Project Management Team on some measures combined with quantitative rigour of definitions and indicator calculation; and
- A truly cooperative venture between DEET, the Higher Education Council and the sector and the commitment of the Department to the facilitation of data collection in the development and trialling of the definitions and indicators.

What Could Have Been Done Better?

Some aspects might also have been dealt with better. In spite of the extensive work done on the use of postcodes, the sector remained unconvinced and the focus on monitoring of results for low SES students was diminished. It may have been better to use the actual surrogates of low SES in a different way and to push to get agreement to additional data elements related to individual student characteristics, but this would also have required some comparative index of socio-economic to be developed. This was 'a bridge too far' for the Government grappling with a much more comprehensive student data collection and for the bigger picture.

The issue of multiple disadvantage might also have been addressed more fully in the report at the risk of making the conceptual framework more complex.

Looking Back and Forward

The methodology developed and applied in the indicators project was fit for purpose at the time given that the use of the concept of under-representation of groups by the Government then was a cornerstone of the *A Fair Chance for All* policy statements. But in my view effective policy making always should have regard for feasibility of implementation and should apply a principle of economy of effort for institutions and for bureaucrats. This was an over-riding factor for the equity indicators project and is also the basis of its ultimate success. There is little point in having a wonderful policy solution that is so complex that the administrative overheads mean it cannot be effectively implemented or the outcomes from it interpreted.

With the current sophistication in equity units and the collaborative ventures funded through the additional equity and participation resources which flowed to universities after the adoption of the Bradley Review recommendations, there is a much greater need for a focus on evaluating the success of particular initiatives. Nevertheless, there is still a place for group indicators in identifying broad areas of disadvantage and the extent of them in the sector and to point the way to broad areas where action is required. The development of more numerous and complex indicators must balance the benefits of possibly greater precision of measurement against the cost of their development and maintenance. That said, there is a stronger imperative to measure outcomes of specially funded equity projects in a way that demonstrates to government that the investment was worth it in terms of changing the higher education profile. The equity landscape is also changing with the current Government's emphasis on individual benefits such as scholarships, which will require development of new approaches.

However, any new conceptual framework for equity should not lose sight of the lessons learned in the projects undertaken 20 years ago. These are that any new system should:

- be sufficiently simple that it can be easily understood;
- be practical and cost effective to implement;

- use a small number of indicators which when combined allow a coherent analysis of the factors which impact on participation to be understood; and
- be a catalyst for action.

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Chapter 3
Framing Student Equity in Higher Education: National and Global Policy Contexts of *A Fair Chance for All*

Sam Sellar and Trevor Gale

Introduction

From the 1960s, education systems around the world began to grow rapidly, with many making the shift from elite to mass or near universal higher education systems (Trow 2006). The focus on increasing opportunity for equity groups is more politically feasible in such conditions, where increases in the proportion of disadvantaged students do not need to come at the expense of students from more privileged backgrounds. Indeed, as Gale and Tranter (2011, p. 42) have argued, historically:

> [e]qualising opportunities for social groups to participate in higher education by redistributing existing opportunities (from the advantaged to the less advantaged) has not been a palatable option. Whereas, expanding the system has enabled the creation and distribution of new opportunities without old ones being lost, even though the evidence to date is that this has not led to greater representation in university of people from disadvantaged groups.

It is important to see *A Fair Chance for All* in the context of a set of related changes to Australian higher education at the time of its introduction in 1990 and more than fifty per cent growth in numbers of students enrolled in higher education over the preceding 15 years. *A Fair Chance for All* is both a product of a particular moment in Australia's economic, political and social history, and a reflection of new social and economic policy trends toward 'neo-social' modes of governance (Lessenich 2010; Rose 1991; Savage 2011, 2013).

The party name changed from Labour to Labor in 1912, during Fisher's second term as Prime Minister

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A Fair Chance for All was introduced after a decade of neoliberal political economy, which emerged from a series of concurrent global developments, from Deng Xiaoping's opening up of China to the Chicago School experiments in Pinochet's Chile and the economic policies of Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK (Harvey 2005). The economic crises of the 1970s marked an economic and political turning point, bringing to an end the social welfare politics of the post-war years and opening the way for a more conservative politics that sought to individualise responsibility for economic and social welfare. Coupled with the shift from industrial to information economies in many Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, these changes brought education into sharper focus as both a lever for economic policy and as a rationalisation for the withdrawal of the welfare state and its replacement with what Raco (2009) has dubbed the 'politics of aspiration': a politics that rationalises the need to increase peoples' autonomy and responsibility to pursue education as a key strategy for investment in individual and collective wellbeing. *A Fair Chance for All* is a significant precursor to the reworking of social justice commitments according to the politics of aspiration during the 1990 and 2000s.

During the 1980s, the Hawke-Keating Labor government had pursued economic rationalist policies (Pusey 1992), while maintaining certain social welfare ideals promoted by earlier Labor governments. For example, the effects of the Whitlam government's abolition of university fees in 1974 continued to be felt during this period and *A Fair Chance for All* can be considered as part of Whitlam's legacy in this regard. It is thus necessary to situate *A Fair Chance for All* at the conjunction of two policy trends: on the one hand, it can be seen as inheriting from longer-term Labor commitments to a 'fair go' and to increasing social equality through educational opportunity, while on the other hand it can be seen as part of a global policy trend, which emerged in the late 1970s, toward shifting responsibility from the state to individuals, with education presented as the primary means for social mobility and economic security. In this chapter we examine *A Fair Chance for All* as both a point of convergence between these policy trends and a pivot point between earlier and later developments in higher education policy, both nationally and globally.

This chapter is divided into three main sections and a brief conclusion. In the first section we reflect on the emergence of *A Fair Chance for All*, tracing developments in Australian higher education policy from the mid-1970s to 1990. In the second section we consider how *A Fair Chance for All* helped to frame the problem of student equity and how it exemplifies the trends toward governance by numbers and neo-social modes of governance. In the third section we consider national and international developments in higher education policy following the introduction of *A Fair Chance for All*, with a specific focus on student equity policy in England. To conclude, we turn our attention to the future and ask where the policy conversation about equity in higher education needs to go now. We acknowledge that the conditions in which we pose this question, in Australia and beyond, have been shaped in important ways by *A Fair Chance for All*.

While primarily providing a survey of changing higher education policy contexts over the past three decades, the chapter does draw on empirical research projects examining student equity policy in Australian higher education (Sellar et al. 2011) and a comparative study of student equity policy in Australia and England from the mid-1990s.[1] The latter project involved document analysis of major equity policies in England and Australia, as well as a review of relevant OECD publications. Nine interviews were also conducted with equity practitioners, bureaucrats and policy analysts in England, Australia and at the OECD in Paris. These interviews focused on the changing rationales for and nature of equity policies and programs in OECD nations over the past 15 years. The data generated from this project are not explicitly analysed here, but do provide an important empirical backdrop to our argument. The purpose of the chapter is not to evaluate the impact of *A Fair Chance for All* on equity, but rather to understand the contexts that influenced its development and to locate its intervention within the recent history of equity policy in education.

Equity and the Expansion of Higher Education: The Development of *A Fair Chance for All*

An important shift occurred in Australian education during the 1960 and 1970s as the higher education system began to expand. As a result, questions of availability and access took on a new importance (James and McInnis 2005). The number of students in tertiary institutions grew steadily, trebling from 1975 to the mid-2000s. In 1974, the Whitlam government abolished university fees and introduced means-tested living allowances in response to this growth in Australia's higher education system and associated pressures for working and middle class students to have greater access to newly limited places. The development and introduction of *A Fair Chance for All* must be set against these earlier developments in Australian higher education policy.

During the Fraser Government years (1975–1983), there was a shift of focus toward the vocational training side of tertiary education as an option for students from working and middle class families, although the provision of free tuition and means-tested living allowances continued. While substantial increases in participation occurred during the 1970s, the composition of the student population did not change significantly during this period and remained skewed towards more elite students. Moreover, there was a split between greater numbers of elite students enrolled in university places and greater numbers of working and middle class students taking up places in lower status Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE), which were later amalgamated with existing universities or given university status in their own right under Dawkins' Unified National System of higher

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[1] This project was titled 'Raising aspiration for higher education in an era of 'motivational deficit' and was funded by The University of Queensland through an Early Career Researcher grant. The project Chief Investigator was Sam Sellar.

education. The objective spelt out in *A Fair Chance for All* was precisely to address this imbalance in access to university places, thus 'changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole' (DEET 1990, p. 2).

Two influential reports were authored by Don Anderson and colleagues in the early 1980s (Anderson et al. 1980; Anderson and Vervoorn 1983) and these were an important antecedent to *A Fair Chance for All*, helping to formulate the problem of student equity in ways that shaped the discussion paper. Anderson et al. (1980) and Anderson and Vervoon (1983) sought to theorise relations between four conditions affecting university participation: the availability of places, aspiration to study, levels of academic achievement, and financial and geographical accessibility. The strategies set out in *A Fair Chance for All* to achieve objectives and targets for improving participation among equity groups can be framed by these four conditions; for example, special entry arrangements designed to overcome unmet academic achievement requirements or awareness programs designed to increase aspiration for higher education. The latter of the two Anderson reports was launched and championed by the new education minister in the Hawke government, the Hon. Susan Ryan, who provided the impetus for the development of a national equity policy approach in higher education.

As Gale and Tranter (2011) have argued, the policy challenge at the time of the Anderson reports was unmet demand for university places. However, at the time that *A Fair Chance for All* was published a new policy moment was beginning, during which the fourth condition—aspiration—would come to the fore as nations sought to increase their investments in human capital.

> While earlier expansions to Australian higher education were undertaken in response to high levels of 'unmet student demand' (greater numbers of eligible applicants to university than places available), the current expansion to the system is being contemplated for very different reasons: the perceived need for more knowledge workers in order to increase the nation's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy (Gale and Tranter 2011, p. 42).

This is a development that we examine in the following section. However, it is important to note here that *A Fair Chance for All*, which outlines strategies to raise awareness of university among socio-economically disadvantaged communities, can be seen to mark an important point of transition from the emphases of the Anderson reports to the 'politics of aspiration' that would come to shape debates about student equity in Australia, the UK and other OECD nations in the years following its publication.

Free tuition came to an end in 1989 with the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) by the Hawke-Keating government. This development reflected the emphasis on both equality of opportunity and human capital investment during Dawkins' period as the Federal Minister of Education, Employment and Training, as well as the market reforms that were proposed in a 1987 Green Paper, *Higher Education: A policy discussion paper* and the White Paper published in 1988, *Higher Education: A policy statement* (Ramsay et al. 1998). A number of other policies that were published around this time shaped the 'context of policy influence' (Bowe et al. 1992) of *A Fair Chance for All*. These

included *Towards a Fairer Australia: Social Justice Under Labor* (1988); *A Fair Go: the Federal Government's Strategy for Rural Education and Training* (1989); and the *National Aboriginal Education Policy* (1989). The identification of various equity groups in *A Fair Chance for All* reflects the particular foci of these antecedent policy statements. Following the publication of the White Paper, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) was tasked with preparing a response, *A Fair Chance for All*, in conjunction with the higher education division of the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET).

Given the history of *A Fair Chance for All*'s development, we argue that the policy revisits Whitlam's emphasis on educational equality of opportunity, but widens the purview of this concern in relation to groups beyond those defined in terms of socioeconomic status: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities and people from rural areas. As Gale and Tranter (2011) argue, at this time 'Australian policy in higher education equity had reached a level of considerable sophistication'. Moreover, *A Fair Chance for All* was 'recognised as a landmark in the development of equity policy in Australia' (James and McInnis 2005, p. 230) and 'continues to provide the foundation for the policy framework for student equity in Australian higher education' (Gale and Tranter 2011, p. 37). In the following section we draw out key innovations introduced by *A Fair Chance for All*, particularly with regard to the governance of higher education and education more broadly, before considering how the *A Fair Chance for All* framework continues to shape thinking about student equity in higher education.

The Economisation of Morality and Neo-Social Modes of Governance

As a policy document, the *A Fair Chance for All* discussion paper exemplifies two developments in the governance of advanced liberal democracies that have had significant impact on education policy in the decades following its publication: governing by numbers and neo-social governance. These two developments are intimately related. Governing by numbers, a term coined by Nikolas Rose, describes how numbers have become 'intrinsic to the forms of justification that give legitimacy to political power in democracies' (Rose 1991, p. 675). Neo-social governance refers to '*the subjectivation of the social*': handing over social responsibility from public (collective) institutions to private (individual) actors' (p. 315). As Lessenich (2010) explains, neo-social governance requires 'activating the self for the sake of society' (p. 306) and this activation is central to the policy logic of investing in human capital. Together, these developments have come to dominate contemporary conceptions of equity in education (Lingard et al. 2014), which depend on a variety of calculations to determine whether educational participation and performance are fairly distributed across different population groups and whether different

population groups are enabled to realise their potential as human capital. *A Fair Chance for All* can be seen as an important early example of these related developments.

The phenomenon of governing by numbers has been well-documented in education (Grek 2009; Ozga 2009; Lingard 2011) and with the rise of national and international large-scale assessments, education is increasingly understood through the lens of quantitative data and various data visualisations (Sellar and Lingard 2014). Exemplifying the emergence of this mode of governance, *A Fair Chance for All* is premised on dividing populations into categories, setting targets in relation to various measures and instituting a program of performance monitoring. *A Fair Chance for All* was influential in conceptualising the problem of student equity such that it became subject to commensuration; that is, 'the expression or measurement of characteristics normally represented by different units according to a common metric' (Espeland and Stevens 1998, p. 315).

The policy text itself spells out the imperative to generate numbers that enable student equity in higher education to be made governable: 'Objectives should be quantified wherever possible' (DEET 1990, p. 52) and '[t]he Government has signalled its intention to develop funding arrangements for all higher education programs that take into account a range of output, quality and performance measures' (DEET 1990, p. 54). This enables disparate equity groups and issues to become rendered in terms of easily monitored and compared measures relating to enrolment, participation and graduation rates. In particular, *A Fair Chance for All*, in conjunction with the equity indicators for higher education developed a few years later (Martin 1994), consolidated a conception of equity in higher education based on proportional representation. As James and McInnis (2005) argue, '[s]oon after the creation of the framework in the early 1990s, universities established administrative infrastructures to respond to the policy's expectations' (p. 232). This can be seen as one vector of the emergence of data infrastructures in education that are now playing an increasingly important role.

The Preface to *A Fair Chance for All* (DEET 1990, p. v) recognises the tensions inherent in categorisations that enable social groups to be made commensurable, but the discussion paper 'does not accept that a lack of precision is sufficient reason to delay action to overcome the very real disadvantages apparent in our society, or to fail to develop measures to assess progress towards overcoming such disadvantage'. Here we see an interesting balance between what Rose (1991) describes as a 'politics of *accuracy*', a 'politics of *adequacy*' and a 'politics of *ethics*' that 'questions the morality of making certain political decisions in terms of numbers' (p. 674). The balance between these three aspects of policy by numbers provides an insightful indication of the values driving the formulation of policy as numbers. In the case of *A Fair Chance for All*, we can see a concern for social justice driving an appeal to adequacy over accuracy. This is suggestive of the *social* emphasis of *A Fair Chance for All*, although in the context of the broader economization of the social that is captured in the notion of the 'neo-social' as compared to the 'neo-liberal'.

Lessenisch (2010) argues that the ongoing transformation of neo-liberal political economy driven by the 'reformed welfare state is not sufficiently captured when it is conceptualized as a process of the subordination of the social to an overwhelming economic rationality' (p. 314). The issue is more complex and involves a 'neo-social' approach—or what Lessenich describes as the active society—which is 'not only about conducting the conduct of an (under-socialized) *homo oecenomicus*, but also—and equally importantly—about the political construction of the subjectivity of an (over-)socialized *homo societalis*' (p. 315). The dual rationales of this neo-social approach to governance informs *A Fair Chance for All* and is clearly expressed in the policy document itself: 'A fairer society is both a primary objective of social policy and an indispensable element in achieving economic policy objectives' (DEET 1990, p. 6).

The 'neo-social' can be understood as a development of early phases of neo-liberalism that sought to deny or bracket society in preference for a stringent individualism. However, as Rose (1999) argues, the third way renewal of social democracy brought the social back in and 'rests upon its simultaneous "socialization of capital", or "capitalization of the social"'. In *A Fair Chance for All*, we can see this socialisation of capital in the prioritisation of the objective to overcome disadvantage, coupled with the capitalisation of social evident in the linking of this objective to economic objectives. This is a double-movement in which the social is prioritised from within an economic rationality. As Shamir (2008) argues:

> the moralization of markets … entails the economization of morality; a process which is compatible with the general neo-liberal drive to ground social relations in the economic rationality of markets. In this respect the moralization process which is of concern here entails a set of practices that contribute to a constantly evolving and adapting neo-liberal imagination, in fact practices that amount to an epistemological breakthrough in that they ground and reframe socio-moral concerns from *within* the instrumental rationality of capitalist markets. (p. 3)

The commitment to social justice that shaped the context of influence of *A Fair Chance for All*, and the social justice commitment that is made explicit in the text itself, must be set against this broader development that conditioned the evolution from the individualist neo-liberalism of Reagan and Thatcher to the neo-social politics of the Hawke-Keating governments in Australia, Blair's New Labour in the UK and, more recently, to David Cameron's notion of the 'big society', which clearly describes the political invention of handing over responsibility for the social to individuals.

To reiterate, the social justice commitment at the heart of *A Fair Chance for All* must be understood in relation to the expansion of the higher education system. Gale and Tranter (2011) argue that 'periods of expansion to the Australian higher education system have always been accompanied by distributive notions of social justice: in this case, equal opportunity to access and participate in higher education' (p. 41), while during 'periods … of "consolidation" in higher education provision … the inclusion of more people from disadvantaged backgrounds may be seen to undermine the talent and hard work of 'deserving individuals' and traditional notions of merit and standards' (p. 42).

From the perspective of neo-social governance, Gale and Tranter's (2011) conclusions regarding the varying relationships between social justice commitments and expansionary dynamics appear quite complementary. We can see here what Rose characterises as a 'partnership between an enabling state and responsible citizens' (p. 479) that passes through different yet complementary phases. While *A Fair Chance for All* was developed and introduced by a Labor government with an avowed social justice commitment, the framework of *A Fair Chance for All* was continued – albeit with less financial and moral commitment – under the subsequent conservative Howard governments (1996–2007), which instead emphasised individual talent, hard work and responsibility. Rather than two contradictory movements, *A Fair Chance for All* established a policy logic in higher education that provides a pivot between the complementary socialising and individualising aspects of neo-social governance, driven by calculative technologies that enable continual evaluations of individual and collective investments in human capital.

Framing Student Equity in Education: National and Global Developments Post- *A Fair Chance for All*

In this section we survey two general developments in education policy that can trace their genealogy back through the policy moment of *A Fair Chance for All*: the rise of aspiration as an issue for student equity in higher education and the evolution of conceptions and measures of equity in education more broadly. While other aspects of the Dawkins reforms to tertiary education in Australia, such as the HECS model of income-contingent loans, have inspired reforms to tuition fees in other systems, *A Fair Chance for All* has had less explicit impacts on policy developments elsewhere. Therefore, we do not argue that *A Fair Chance for All* directly influenced these developments. Rather, we consider *A Fair Chance for All* as an important early moment in a set of conversations about equity in education, which have been mediated through the work of the OECD and have developed through multiple iterations of policy borrowing between Australia and the UK.

First, we consider the emergence of aspiration as a policy problem for governments in OECD nations. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the transition from industrial to information economies led to governments introducing policy strategies for increasing investment in human capital. The knowledge economy discourse that flourished at this time indexed the economisation of education that had begun with the popularisation of human capital by the Chicago School economists in the 1950s and 1960s, and which reached a new level of intensity at the end of the Cold War when a new phase of global economic integration and competition began. At this time the OECD published *The knowledge-based economy* (OECD 1996a) and *Lifelong learning for all* (OECD 1996b) and also introduced its Indicators of Education Systems (INES) project and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Economic globalisation and the rise of policy as numbers in

education fed global competition in relation to human capital investment and efforts by nations to attract new kinds of high-skill, high-wage jobs (Rizvi and Lingard 2010).

As a strategy for investing in human capital, governments in OECD countries embarked on expansions of their higher education systems. In many cases, the new places created by expansion have exceeded the demand for higher education from elite fractions of the population and governments have increasingly felt the need to become active in relation to stimulating demand among groups that had not traditionally seen post-compulsory education as a desirable option. This brought the fourth condition identified in the Anderson reports—aspiration, or desire for education—into sharper relief as a policy problem for governments (Sellar et al. 2011). This is also an example of what Lessenich (2010) describes as the active society: 'Activating social policies are meant to guide people not merely toward (more) activity, but also toward the adoption of "pro-active" behaviour, understood as planned, purposive and prudential action' (p. 312).

In the two decades since *A Fair Chance for All* was published, aspiration thus emerged as a prominent issue for HE in Australia, England and other OECD nations. During the 1990s and 2000s, governments in Australia and England began courting a demographic group described as 'aspirational': a particular fraction of the lower middle class (*petite bourgeoisie*) who were experiencing social mobility and saw socially redistributive welfare policies as a limitation on this mobility. This appeal to the 'aspirationals' was an important element in reforging the identity of the Australian Labor Party in relation to the conjunction of neo-liberal political economy and social democratic commitments. As Johnson and Tonkiss (2002) have shown, policy at this time had a significant effect on the development of third way politics in the UK and can be seen as background to the new emphasis on student equity that emerged in England in the late 1990s.

Approaches to widening participation in English higher education did not have a substantive national dimension prior to the release of the Dearing Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in 1997. At this time, student equity was seen to be a matter largely for institutions and approaches to widening participation varied depending on institution-specific missions and contexts. However, following the Dearing Report and the election of Blair's New Labour in 1997, national targets were set for increasing participation. In 2004, the Aimhigher program was established and consolidated a suite of antecedent programs designed to stimulate awareness of, and aspiration for, higher education among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. Policy and program innovations in English higher education at this time had subsequent impacts on the new wave of Australian higher education policy reform that was initiated by the election of the Rudd Labor government in 2007 and the release of the 'Bradley' Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008 (Commonwealth of Australia 2008).

In two respects, *A Fair Chance for All* can be seen as an important precursor to student equity policy reforms and programs in Australia and the UK during the 1990 and 2000s. First, social policy formation in England during this time borrowed from the policy work of the Hawke-Keating governments. Moreover, England can

be seen as following Australia's lead in establishing a national framework for student equity in higher education. However, it is important to note, following James and McInnis (2005), that *A Fair Chance for All* 'located responsibility for monitoring system performance with government while devolving the responsibility for programmes to reduce imbalances to individual institutions … the net national result would be the accumulation of universities' individual achievements in reducing local participation imbalances' (p. 230). *A Fair Chance for All* can thus be seen as helping to constitute student equity as a national policy problem in Australia, albeit one to be managed through a 'steering at a distance' approach to devolved responsibility, which thus contributed to national framings of this problem and strategic policy responses in other contexts such as the UK.

Second, *A Fair Chance for All* can be seen as an important precursor to the education policies and programs that emerged in response to the politics of aspiration in both Australia and England. In contrast to earlier observations that government policies were unable to have significant effects on students' aspirations, in comparison to the influence of families, peers and communities (Anderson et al. 1980), *A Fair Chance for All* explicitly promoted awareness-raising programs, such as career events and information sessions, as an important strategy for increasing the participation of people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. While greater attention was directed to special-entry arrangements and support programs for this group, *A Fair Chance for All* (1990, p. 17) did advocate for '[h]igher education awareness programs in areas where there are consistently low levels of higher education participation' and promoted strategies including '[d]eveloping promotional and information material for schools, TAFE colleges, community groups and government agencies' and introducing '[p]rograms to familiarise students with the higher education environment' (p. 18). In its promotion of awareness raising programs as a means to encourage new social groups to become pro-active in relation to educational participation, *A Fair Chance for All* thus foreshadowed the Aimhigher program in England and the focus on raising aspiration in the Australian Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP).

With regard to education policy more broadly, *A Fair Chance for All* embodied conceptions of equality as opportunity and fairness that have had substantial influence in the education work of the OECD and in education policy globally over the past decade. The OECD employs a dual definition of equity in education: equity as *inclusion* and equity as *fairness*. The inclusion definition 'implies ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all' (OECD 2007, p. 11). The fairness definition 'implies ensuring that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential' (OECD 2007, p. 11). These definitions can be traced back to an influential report commissioned by the OECD (Levin 2003), which had its antecedents in the organisation's focus on lifelong learning in the late 1990s. This report took a neo-social approach to conceptualising equity and argued that '[e]quity is important not only out of a duty of fairness to all members of a society, but also because countries as a whole are better off when the benefits of learning are widely shared and the gaps are minimized between the most and least advantaged' (p. 3).

In the OECD's work on educational equity in the 2000s, clear links can be seen back to the conceptualisations and discourses of fairness and equity that informed the development of *A Fair Chance for All* over a decade earlier. Indeed, the *A Fair Chance for All* discussion paper explicitly outlines its equity as opportunity or fairness rationale: 'The overall objective for equity in higher education is to ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education' (DEET 1990, p. 2).

This approach to student equity in higher education continues to shape policy in Australia. In 2008, the Review of Australian Higher Education explicitly acknowledged its debt to the conceptualisation of equity in *A Fair Chance for All*, stating that '[p]olicy relating to access and equity had its genesis in *Higher Education: a policy statement* (the White Paper) of 1988 (Dawkins) and *A Fair Chance for All*' (Department of Education, Employment and Training DEET 1990, p. 36). The government's response to the Review affirmed a conception of equity as fairness at the heart of the most recent set of reforms to Australian higher education, promoting the ideal of: 'A fairer Australia—all Australians will benefit from widespread equitable access to a diverse tertiary education sector that allows each individual to develop and reach their potential' (DEET 1990, p. 7). Moreover, other innovations of *A Fair Chance for All*, such as the development of performance measures relating to equity, continued as a prominent policy focus in this wave of policy reform: 'In 2010 the Government will work with the higher education sector to develop a robust set of performance indicators. The indicators will include measures of success for equity groups ...' (DEET 1990, p. 33).

We can see that *A Fair Chance for All* not only enshrined conceptions of equity that have shaped education policy globally in the past two decades. *A Fair Chance for All* also prefigured developments in other contexts such as England, and central aspects of the Framework continue explicitly to shape thinking about equity policies and programs in Australian higher education. In particular, the conjunction of an ideal of fairness with an emphasis on performance measurement and producing active subject-citizens who embrace their responsibility to invest in human capital through education were particularly prescient dimensions of *A Fair Chance for All*.

Conclusion: The Coming Decade of Student Equity in Higher Education

In this chapter we have sought to provide a survey of changing national and global higher education policy contexts over the past three decades, specifically from the perspective of the publication of the *A Fair Chance for All* discussion paper in 1990. We have argued that *A Fair Chance for All* emerged from a specifically Australian conjunction of a social justice commitment to 'a fair go' and neo-liberal political economy as it gained ascendency during the 1980s. In this respect, *A Fair Chance for All* constitutes an early Australian exemplar of neo-social governance, and its emphasis on the introduction of targets and performance measures foreshadowed

the rise of policy as numbers in education during the 1990s. *A Fair Chance for All* also prefigured the shift in student equity policy to focus on aspirations, through policies and programs that sought to activate people in relation to their educational potential, and enshrined a conception of equity as fairness or equality of opportunity that would come to shape education policies in the decades that followed its publication.

But how will conversations about student equity in Australia and beyond develop in coming years? We argue that it needs to take account of three broad global developments: growing inequality, the geopolitical and economic shift to Asia and the exponential growth of digital technologies that is ushering in a second machine age. First, as Piketty (2014) and others have shown, there is a growing gap between the very wealthy and the rest of the population leading to a concentration, globally, of capital in the hands of a very few. This growing economic inequality will not be redressed through education and raises questions about the effectiveness of educational opportunity as a means of producing fairer societies. Second, the economic and geopolitical shift to Asia has challenged the narrative that OECD nations will become magnet economies for high-skill, high wage jobs, with Asian nations now leading on global measures of educational quality and new modes of production enabling high quality goods to be produced in Asia at a relatively low cost (Brown et al. 2011; Jacques 2012). This development has raised serious questions about the beliefs that have underpinned knowledge economy discourses and strategies of human capital investment that shaped education policy over the past three decades. Third, and finally, Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) have shown how the exponential development of digital technologies is refashioning modes of production such that 'there has never been a worse time to be a worker with only "ordinary" skills and abilities to offer, because computers, robots and other digital technologies are acquiring these skills and abilities at an extraordinary rate' (p. 11). This places new and increased pressure on educational institutions to keep pace with the rate of educational change.

One crucial outcome of these developments, coupled with the continuing expansion of higher education systems, is that the promise of 'more learning equals more earning' will almost certainly not be kept for many of the next generation. Access to and participation in higher education will not necessarily contribute to fairer societies. Rather, the nature or kind of higher education that large proportions of the population now receive will be the crucial factor. As a result, the emphasis on participation promoted by *A Fair Chance for All* and subsequent equity policy will need to be complemented by at least two other strategies that involve a fundamental rethinking of who higher education serves and, more fundamentally, what ought to constitute higher education. (For an expansion of these arguments see Gale 2012, 2015). If *A Fair Chance for All* can now be seen as an important precursor to policies and programs focused on educational equity over the past two decades, the decade to come will require innovative student equity policy that is integrated with policies in other areas and with broader institutional reforms which recognise that higher education is no longer an institution for an elite few and that its curricula and pedagogies must keep pace with dramatic sociocultural, technological and economic changes if it is going to serve fairly the many who now participate.

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Chapter 4
First Peoples: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation in Higher Education

Celeste Liddle

Introduction

Since the then Labor Government tabled the *A Fair Chance for All* policy paper in 1990, the landscape for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in tertiary education has changed dramatically. This document put forward a number of recommendations for the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in higher education, with a view of increasing participation rates 60 % by 1995 (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990). It also outlined Indigenous student support centres, study support, alternative entry and other items as priorities for achieving equity. Most of these have been installed at universities, to varying success. Participation rates have increased and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are accessing higher education than ever before. Yet 25 years after the tabling of *A Fair Chance for All*, participation rates are still a long way from reaching population parity levels, attrition rates are still high and universities are yet to fully cater for the unique needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort.

There were many reasons *A Fair Chance for All* identified these initiatives as methods to increase Indigenous participation at universities. Indigenous students were, and still are, less likely to complete secondary schooling and therefore alternative education programs which enabled participants to increase their skills prior to undertaking a full tertiary education were desirable. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are still statistically more likely to be mature-aged students as opposed to school leavers. They are more likely to be women and consequently are more likely to be balance studies with family and community commitments. Statistically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are also more likely to be

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from low socio-economic backgrounds. That Indigenous students found universities to be exclusive environments in the educational content provided is of little surprise. Other groups such as feminists had built Women's Studies departments to deal with similar omissions in knowledge but in the late 1980s, there were very few Aboriginal Studies areas on campuses. In short, at the time it was clear that the sector was sorely lacking when it came to the inclusion of Indigenous people and changes were desperately needed.

In 1987, the Dawkins White Paper on Higher Education stated that the current Indigenous student load was 2,000 students or 0.5 % of the total student cohort (Dawkins 1988). This equates to about a third of what the then population parity rates (1.6 % in 1991) were according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In 1990, *A Fair Chance for All* drilled down into this figure further, highlighted that only 2 % of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were participating in Higher Education, and there was a heavy skewing toward vocational educational level courses such as certificates and diplomas, as opposed to degrees. In 2014, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students made up 1.1 % of the total student cohort. While this clearly indicates an increase in Indigenous student load over time, it still only represents about a third of what the current population parity rates are (3 % in 2011). Additionally, it was actually a drop from the 1.2 % load reached in 2008. The raw government data for 1998 states that the Indigenous student load was 1.3 %.

Over the past few years, thanks to the uncapping of student places, the number of university students has grown substantially, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student numbers (though not proportion) have followed this trend. In 2008, the number of Indigenous students participating in Higher Education was 9,490, and by 2013, this number had increased to 13,781 – nearly seven times the rates of engagement outlined in 1987. Considering the majority youth population when it comes to the Indigenous age distribution, there is a great capacity to grow these numbers further, striving eventually to at least population parity rates. Yet without significant change to the sector and the way it interacts, not just with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but with staff and the broader community, reaching these rates seems unlikely.

This section will talk about attempts to achieve that cultural shift since the Dawkins review, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and staff experience at universities and the current issues in the sector. From abandoned initiatives, to reinventing the wheel time and time again, the Indigenous experience has been fraught and if the sector truly wishes to engage more Indigenous people, it needs to do more.

Analysis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Participation 1990–2015

In the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training in 2004, concerns were raised that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments had remained static at 1.2 % of the total student population since 2000

(Bishop 2004). The youthful age distribution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was highlighted as a reason why this issue of access urgently needed revisiting. Many trends that were identified in 2004 exist to this day. The engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is still roughly at twice the rate of men. Indigenous students are still more likely to be mature-aged when entering the system and financial hardship is still of concern.

These issues were reiterated in a 2008 Universities Australia paper entitled *Participation and equity*: *A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*. In recommendation four of this paper, it states that the following are imperative for achieving Indigenous equity and equality on campus:

- improving the academic preparedness of prospective Indigenous students;
- developing alternative pathways into higher education;
- improving the academic and personal support for Indigenous people once enrolled; and
- improving financial support (Universities Australia 2008).

The mirroring of the suggestions of *A Fair Chance for All* is quite noticeable. Indeed, over the period of two decades, most reviews and reports seemed circular in their recommendations; returning to the same place.

In 2011, a quantitative report entitled *On Stony Ground*: *Governance and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation in Australian Universities* was published. This report, investigated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student (and staff) participation over 5 years, as a consequence of university governance and policy. The student numbers were additionally compared against their state population parity numbers to see how they were tracking in comparison with the various policies they had in place (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011).

The results were striking. To begin with, most universities lacked targets, both for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student access and attainment (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011, pp. 31–38). A strong, yet unsurprising, correlation existed between universities which lacked Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student policy, objectives, targets, key performance indicators and formal evaluations with low Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student numbers (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011, p. 32). Additionally, while some universities did have clear policies in place with regards to student access, very few backed this up with policies on student attainment. In other words, the focus of many universities appeared to be how to get Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the door, but showed a distinct lack of understanding of how to ensure those students are adequately supported and retained. Most telling though was adherence to the eligibility guidelines for the Indigenous Support Program (ISP). Most universities were not complying to the stipulated funding guidelines as they had not implemented 'strategies for improving access, participation, retention and success of Indigenous Australian students' (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011, p. 33).

Perhaps *On Stony Ground* gives us some insight into why recommendations have been circular: the policy and support to create more equitable environments where not always there in the governance levels of the institutions and therefore implemented

from the higher levels (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011). For the most part, rather than seeing universities embrace Indigenous students, employees, knowledges and experiences on campus, it has instead mainly been the responsibility of the Indigenous support centres, which become increasingly siloed. For proper change to occur, a much broader approach has long been required, and this opportunity presented itself particularly following the release of the Behrendt review in 2012.

The Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, July 2012

The *Behrendt Review*, chaired by Law Professor Larissa Behrendt, sought to investigate ways in which more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could access and participate in higher education (Behrendt et al. 2012). In the introductory letter contained within the report, Professor Behrendt stated that she felt the report had the potential to 'dramatically improve the Australian higher education sector' and additionally highlighted the imperative for this to occur to ensure that Indigenous people had greater capacity to overcome multiple social disadvantages such as low socio-economic status and high rates of isolation (Behrendt et al. 2012, p. 8).

This review contained 35 recommendations covering all aspects of university life, from student access and experience, to staffing, to the funding and the building of research capacity, to the changing of the broader culture on campus. It attempted to clarify and pull together what had been a series of disparate reports and reviews into a comprehensive document. The population parity target was recommended to be reset to 2.2 % nationally – taken as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people between the ages of 18 and 64 – for both student and staff engagement in the sector. Most importantly though, the review called for the accountability of these measures to not only sit with senior management and faculty leaders, but also for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be represented in the highest levels of governance within universities so that the structures which oversee these directions would, in themselves, become inclusive spaces.

Perhaps the most crucial aspects of the review were recommendations 10 and 11. Together they state:

Recommendation 10 (Behrendt et al. 2012, p. 19):

> That universities adopt a whole-of-university approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success so that faculties and mainstream support services have primary responsibility for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, backed up by Indigenous Education Units.

Recommendation 11 (Behrendt et al. 2012, p. 20):

> That universities:
>
> - continue to support Indigenous Education Units to provide a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including postgraduate and higher degree by research students.

> • review whether their Indigenous Education Units have appropriate objectives, funding, structures and accountability measures to ensure quality student outcomes with a focus on:

– outreach work with schools and other sectors
– improvements in retention and completion rates
– access to quality tutoring services
– collaborate with each other and government to build an evidence base and share good practice.

Recommendation 11 notes the crucial role that Indigenous Education Units play when it comes to engagement of Indigenous students and staff, and calls for these units to be strengthened. In the Behrendt review, the Indigenous Education Units are seen as a fundamental part of maintaining forward momentum when it comes to achieving equality.

How universities have enacted the Behrendt recommendations has been variable. Some of the Indigenous Education Units which had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific educational programs have found those programs either being absorbed by mainstream faculties or have had the programs discontinued altogether. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who were teaching into those programmes have, at times, found themselves to be in unsupportive environments where western ways of knowing were still very much the accepted normal and engagement with students was minimised. Likewise, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students engaged in these specialised programs lost the self-supporting community of Indigenous students. Additionally, where the ISP were moved into mainstream areas, students sometimes became reluctant to access them because environments which were free-flowing and community-supporting became more sterile and seeking support was more like conducting a business transaction. That sense of "place" on a university campus can be very quickly diminished and it is erroneous to assume that faculties and schools have the capacity to offer that same sense of belonging as an Indigenous student centre.

The specific calling for Indigenous Education Units to be strengthened while the universities themselves diversify and take greater responsibility has, in some instances, gone unheeded. Indeed, what is appearing to be most strongly affected at this point is the capacity for alternate modes of learning such as the block release models and bridging programs as well as the more basic task of growing student numbers. This is a very concerning development. To move forward, universities must revisit their ideas of 'cultural embedding' and the 'whole-of-university approach' to ensure that these are not paternalistic nor "mainstreaming" in their approaches, but are rather about turning the entire university into a collaborative and supportive environment. These should be about growing cohorts of Indigenous students into future potential university staff by providing them with space all over the university to assert knowledge and identity as well as grow their capacity. It should also be about taking pride in the unique environments Indigenous centres provide on campus and encouraging them to grow in strength and reach as well as see their value as a cultural hub. Universities need to value their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centres and the key roles they play on campus.

The History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Centres as Hubs on Campus

When *A Fair Chance for All* was released, the lack of visual Indigenous presence on campus was notable and the establishment of them was considered a priority. Prior to this point Indigenous student populations on most campuses were generally disparate and brought together by student union activities or simply by actively searching out other 'black faces' in the crowd. Indigenous centres on campus came to be in a variety of ways over time: through the goodwill of the university itself, through student protest and staking a claim to dedicated space and through institutional competition for Indigenous student numbers. Potential Indigenous students actively sought out Universities which offered specific support areas on campus and therefore, universities which were yet to develop such mechanisms were left behind when it came to the recruitment of students. It was in their interest, educationally and financially, to provide spaces for Indigenous students.

As well as providing support for students, the student centres have also been integral at building Indigenous staff numbers on campus. This has had the added benefit of providing employment opportunities for current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on campus as well as building current staff capacity via ready access to study. Until the existence of many of these student centres, there had been very few identified spaces on campuses where Indigenous expertise would be called upon.

A variety of programs have been offered out of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centres over the years. These programs include, but are not limited to: specific student support; the administration and implementation of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme; scholarship administration; student recruitment activities; mentoring of future students; community outreach. In addition to this, some student centres also offered academic programs geared around creating greater access opportunities. Following the nation-wide implementation of Voluntary Student Unionism, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centres also tended to become the sole entertainment space for Indigenous students with gatherings and activities.

In the main, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centres on university campuses have been funded almost entirely by direct government funding through the ISP allocations based on Indigenous student enrolment numbers, with some universities providing top-up funds on an ad hoc basis. Others have been funded partially, or even fully, by philanthropic donations. This funding autonomy has historically, provided a certain amount of independence to these centres. They have, to a degree, been able to maintain levels of staffing in reasonably stable roles and therefore have continued to provide specific programs, despite any internal reviews that they may undertake. They have additionally, until recent years, not suffered from the same levels of casualisation of staff as other areas in the universities. However, according to the government data releases in recent years, this trend is changing and there appears to be a widening gap between actual numbers of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and the full-time equivalent appointments. There is a valid concern, therefore, that with the move by some universities to mainstream Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and academic programs, the ISP funds will be redirected across various areas of the university leaving the centres under-resourced or even forced to shut. Considering the important role that they have played, and continue to play, with regards to providing an integral community conduit on campus, the impact of such moves is likely to be devastating when it comes to the growing of student numbers.

Both the Behrendt review and *On Stony Ground* called for a greater accountability in the distribution of the ISP funds to universities (Behrendt et al. 2012; Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011). In an environment where funds are distributed broadly across the university with the dissipation of the core area which provides much of the structural support and analysis for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience on campus, how will this accountability be monitored? Will the answer instead lie in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students having to fit the system rather than the system changing to be more inclusive? If growth of Indigenous capacity is indeed important then these governmental guidelines need to be enforced and monitored to ensure that there is ongoing success.

The Relationship Between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staffing Levels and Student Levels

There has long appeared to be some correlation between the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff on campus and the number of students. In 2014, these numbers where virtually identical with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students making up 1.1 % of the national student body, full time equivalent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff making up 1.1 % of all staff nationally and actual number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff making up 1 %. Anderson and Pechenkina (2011, p.4) state that 'the situation of Indigenous students is intertwined with that of Indigenous staff (academic and non-academic) at Universities'. It is additionally recognised in the *Behrendt review* and the *On Stony Ground paper* (Behrendt et al. 2012; Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011), as well as the various governmental reports over the years, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are integral to the success of the students. This is because not only do they provide visible role models within the sector, but often Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic staff also act as an additional support person for students on campus, mentoring them through their coursework and providing opportunities for further study within a supportive environment. Therefore, the growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing numbers has a direct impact on the potential to grow the student numbers. Increasing the staffing levels is in the best interest of any university which wishes to increase its student load.

One of the key criteria for eligibility for the ISP funding, is the existence of an Indigenous Employment Strategy. Yet where these strategies exist, their content can differ substantially. Since 2002, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has included a mandatory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander claim as part of the bargaining rounds, and since 2004, this claim has included an employment target to be included in the collective agreements and a committee with the responsibility to monitor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment on campus. One of the key reasons why the NTEU has pursued this is because while most of the universities had some kind of Indigenous Employment Strategy in place, very few contained any real targets and goals, and being policy documents, none of them were legally enforceable. Containing these items within a collective agreement, on the other hand, makes them a binding agreement between the NTEU and the university in question and therefore, if the university fails to make some ground with regards to the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and the NTEU fails to hold the university to this agreement, then a dispute can be raised. Under this model, there is the ability for some true accountability when it comes to employment.

In addition to this, the NTEU has pursued other items such as cultural leave, language allowances and high level employment opportunities (for example: pro-vice chancellor and deputy vice chancellor positions). These types of clauses are designed, like the outlining of the whole-of-university approach in the Behrendt report – to assist in the diversification of the workplace by making it more conducive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life experience (Behrendt et al. 2012). Yet universities remain a difficult environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to work in.

In 2011, the NTEU released the *I'm not a racist, but…* report on cultural respect, racial discrimination, lateral violence (bullying between peers, rather than from the top-down power structure, as a way of trying to survive oppressive situations) and related policy at Australia's universities. Based on a poll of the NTEU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership, the results were alarming. For example:

- 71.5 % of the survey respondents stated that they had experience racial discrimination in the workplace;
- 79.5 % stated that they had been treated less respectfully in the workplace due to their culture and/or cultural obligations;
- 67.9 % stated that this lack of cultural respect had come from their colleagues;
- 60.6 % stated that they had experienced lateral violence on campus (NTEU 2011, p. 4).

Additionally, in the greater majority of cases, respondents stated that they had received little satisfaction from reporting these instances of discrimination to their employer.

The question that needs to be asked is therefore this: if these are the issues confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working within the sector, do students experience these same issues on campus? Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and their experiences on campus are a key indicator as to how accepting and supportive a university environment is for Indigenous community members. This data suggests that, if universities wish to increase their student numbers and be

successful in retaining students, they need to examine their structures and how these actively exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from campus. They need to implement full cultural competency training, ensure that they actively recruit and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across the entire institution in a variety of roles and ensure that their learning environments are supportive of Indigenous knowledges. And they need to ensure that the unique space on campus – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support centre – which announces to Indigenous people that they belong in university, is strong and supported.

The Ongoing Financial Stress for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

The provision of a specific student allowance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has made an impact in to attracting Indigenous people to undertake study. While there have been the financial benefits of such a program to many students who would not otherwise have the means to attend university, the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (ABSTUDY) has also provided opportunities for diversified educational experiences. Additionally, knowing that there is a specific government allowance program that has been designed to address the specific circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people provides esteem and a note of security for students and their families.

Income support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has existed in some form since 1969, and since that time has undergone many changes in what it covers and how it is administered. According to the 2014 ABSTUDY Policy Manual, ABSTUDY in its current form was formed in 1988 by the amalgamation of two existing Indigenous educational payments: the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme and the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (Australian Government Department of Social Services (ABSEG) 2014). The original form of ABSTUDY was available to fulltime Indigenous tertiary students and paid a living allowance, course fees, and an incidentals allowance for books and other course materials and equipment. The ABSEG, on the other hand, was for eligible Indigenous secondary students as a way of trying to close the education gap by encouraging students to finish school and go on to tertiary education.

There were two major changes that occurred to the ABSTUDY payment which had probably the biggest impact for student eligibility. The first was the introduction of income testing in 1993. Students under the "age of independence" (then 23, raised to 25 and is now at 22) who did not qualify for one of the available independence criteria could be deemed ineligible on the basis of the income of their parents even if they were not living at home while studying, though many would still be able to access supplementary benefits such as the incidentals and excursions allowances. Simply put, with support no longer universal for Indigenous students at university, the prospect of studying became less attractive to many. Further changes to ABSTUDY were then announced by the government in 1998 and implemented in

2000. These changes brought the payment more in line with the provisions contained within Youth Allowance and Austudy but also retained some allowances specific to ABSTUDY (for example, as previously mentioned, the incidentals allowance and block release payments). The rates of payment between the two allowances had long been comparable, but they were brought into line with regards to how they were administered and students accessing ABSTUDY were also able to gain rent assistance. Yet the income testing was extended and now included assets tests and the Family Actual Means Test, again impacting eligibility rates.

It is interesting that these changes in 2000 coincide with the plateauing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student numbers. Certainly, while more students found themselves ineligible, more found their studies untenable. In 2006, a report and strategic plan for the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (2006) to the Minister for Science, Education and Training highlighted that there had been a drop in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments at university, as well as a drop in ABSTUDY eligibility. Additionally, they argued that the means testing and the payment rates had most likely contributed to this negative outcome and called upon the government to revisit these provisions. The calls for scholarship provisions and emergency funds provided from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centres were constant at this time. The rates of payment for the Living Allowances barely increased over the years and it wasn't until the recommendations of the Bradley Report in 2008 (Bradley et al. 2008) were received that there were some reasonable changes to the rates of payment, allowable individual income, and the age of Independence was reduced again.

It has always been tough being a student, but in the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there have long been additional hurdles which need to be properly addressed. As stated in the 2012 Student Finances Survey by Universities Australia (2013), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are older than their non-Indigenous counterparts more likely to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and they are more likely to have dependants or be supporting more people on their payments. There was some positive data with regards to the levels of funding Indigenous students are accessing ($5,827 higher per year than non-Indigenous undergraduate students) though with more responsibility for extended family and the like, it is easy to see why increased funding alone is unlikely to make a dent on student retention (Universities Australia 2013, p. 68). Additionally, if students are ineligible for study payments in the first place, yet are on their own, in many cases (for example, the "Start-up Scholarships" currently available) these students also found themselves ineligible for other forms of support as there has been a tendency to link financial support to eligibility for government allowances.

In short, the financial provisions currently available are not stretching to the full spectrum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience. In order to stop this being a factor in why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may not access or stay in higher education, there is a need to reassess the current financial provisions and ensure that they are adequate and supportive.

Alternate Pathways and Modes of Delivery

The Closing the Gap Report 2015 reported that there had been few gains in achieving more equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2015). Of the goals for Indigenous people in education, the only one listed as being on track in the report was the goal to halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rate by 2020. In 2008, there was a 45.4 % year 12 attainment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and this had grown to 58.5 % in 2012–13. This should be welcome news as there is a definite potential for more students to move into tertiary education following their secondary studies, yet when juxtaposed against the other educational goals listed in the Closing the Gap report, a very different picture is painted.

More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are attaining year 12, yet the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not improving. Does this mean that more students with potential but who are not necessarily "university ready" are going through the secondary education system? If so, what mechanisms exist currently to support these students once they complete year 12 and create educational pathways for them into higher education?

In the 2006 Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council report, it was noted that by 2001, enabling programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had decreased in importance as methods of university access with more students undertaking similar pathways into higher education as non-Indigenous students did. It additionally notes that during the late 1990s, 70 % of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students gained entry to higher education through special entry programs which includes the enabling programs. It therefore makes some sense that the proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have plateaued since alternate entry uptake declined. In addition to this, it was noted in the 2004 National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Higher Education and training that between 2000 and 2004, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments in certain Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and vocational programs increased; mainly in certificate level courses as opposed to diplomas and advanced diplomas (Bishop 2004). Interestingly though, according to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2014) data between 2009 and 2013, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments in the VET sector stayed relatively stable during this time, at around 4.6 % of the total student body. This is clearly above national population parity rates, and therefore some questions need to be asked as to whether TAFEs and universities can work together to create better pathways between them for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The Behrendt report also called for the strengthening of pathways between TAFE and universities was precisely an item called for. It also noted that more encouragement and incentives to undertake higher level TAFE courses were needed, and the ability to articulate into tertiary education is a crucial educational pathway which

has not been investigated to its fullest potential. Additionally highlighted was that by 2010, over half of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were still utilising enabling programs and special entry schemes to enter university. So while the drop from the late 1990s has been roughly 20 percentage points, special entry and enabling programs are still crucial. Yet funding and resourcing continue to be a big issue and indeed, there have been downsizing and redundancies across the sector within some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centres offering enabling and alternate degree courses. This has additionally affected the capacity to offer block release degree programmes – an important alternate mode of delivery encouraged by the *A Fair Chance for All* report. Block release programmes offer a way of tailoring higher education to make it more accessible to the 40 % of Indigenous people who live in remote and regional areas where university access is a challenge. With many of these centred in the Indigenous Education Units, in an environment of mainstreaming we are seeing these programmes diminished as academic staff are absorbed into faculties.

Rather than growing, it appears that a number of these specific programs tailored around Indigenous experience and need are currently shrinking with a definite impact on student capacity. In a Group of Eight submission to the panel of the Behrendt report, it was highlighted that funding for enabling programs had not been revised to fit in with the demand-driven system of funding Commonwealth-supported. Funding for alternative modes should be revisited as a means of keeping opportunities alive.

ITAS, and Other Such Programs, as a "Deficit System" Support, Rather Than a Capacity-Building Tool

The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) is available following a student application process requesting individual tutorial support and is administered mainly via the Indigenous Education Units. ITAS has long provided support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on campus looking to increase their success in their academic courses. In addition to this, some postgraduate students have taken advantage of the employment opportunity ITAS provides, not just to earn some money whilst studying but to also gain experience in tutoring and academic assistance for their own careers. While mainly geared towards assisting undergraduate students, it has also, at times, provided postgraduate students with academic support, though usually a special case has to be made in order for these postgraduate students to be allocated a tutor. While uptake of the program across the country is not consistent, the 2014–2015 budgetary allocations to the various universities for the ITAS program – which were allocated on the basis of institutions bidding for funding so therefore can be considered reasonably reflective of student demand – highlight that universities which have strong student centres and a variety of course delivery modes available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

to access, also have strong demand for tutorial assistance, providing an environment where students feel confident accessing academic support programs.

Yet for almost as long as the program has been around, ITAS appears to have been understood as a support or "deficit model" program rather than it being considered a key opportunity to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in attaining excellence, and this has been fuelled in many ways, by universities and students themselves. Most recently, this misconception was enhanced by the change of the funding method for ITAS meaning that Indigenous Education Units were required to bid for funding rather than being given an allocation based on student numbers as it had been in previous years, so there became an imperative to "show cause". Additionally, the fact that postgraduates only can access this program via pleading a special case despite the fact that postgraduate qualification levels in the community are nowhere near parity levels, highlights this issue. There is a key opportunity to not only support students and provide employment for students, but also to keep alumni engaged with centres in the hope that they consider further study.

The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme is one example of a number of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific programs on campus that are limited in scope. There is more of a need to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement on campus. While some universities celebrate the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by creating hoods in Indigenous colours for their graduation robes, or naming scholarships or places on campus after prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates, there are a number of other opportunities to do this. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enter the tertiary system knowing all too well that they will not have an easy ride ahead of them. When they see the success of those who went before them actively celebrated by a university, it not only creates role models everywhere they look and reinforces the knowledge that their university is proud of these achievements, but it also gives students more of a sense that they belong there.

Conclusion

It has been 25 years since the *A Fair Chance for All* paper called for more inclusion and innovation in the field of Aboriginal education on campus. Since that time, there have been many attempts to create more supportive environments on campus. Among the many successes have been a growth in student numbers, a growth in staff numbers in a variety of capacities, the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centres nation-wide, the implementation of a range of community-inclusive course delivery modes that see many students who would never have considered university an option for them access tertiary studies, and the graduation of a wide range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across a number of disciplines. Yet, if these subsequent reports and reviews show us anything at all, it is that we are still fighting many of the same battles on campus that we were back

when the Dawkins report was tabled and we keep coming back to the same ideas in order to change these issues. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still not enrolling in university courses at a rate reflecting the population parity rate. We're still having to fight for space on campus. We're still having to prove the worth of our knowledges and experiences. We are still seen, in many cases, as a problem rather than a solution. Universities still remain bastions of white western masculine supremacy and it is tough trying to break through all those layers in order to prove one's worth.

There are a lot of opportunities universities can take up. They can to revisit the ideas of "Whole-of-University approach" and collaboration in order to ensure that every department, every faculty, every library and so forth is an environment which includes and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They can recognise that rather than reinforcing the traditional means of entry to their courses, there is a chance to engage the Indigenous life-experience more prominently in their policies so that TAFEs are engaged, high school students see that there is the potential for them to go on to bigger and better things, and Aboriginal people in the workforce see that there is an benefit for their careers in engaging in study. Universities can preserve the very things which made them attractive to Aboriginal students (and staff) in the first place, such as the strong on-campus presence of Indigenous people and culture, the alternate modes of delivery of courses which strong culturally-inclusive content, and the meaningful engagement of community in their governance and everyday activities. Financial assistance can be stronger and more easily available so that students have the opportunity to focus on their studies and be supported, as time and time again, financial issues factor into the decision of an Aboriginal student not to continue in their course of choice. Above all else though, Universities must understand that structural racism needs to be broken down and that success lies not in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people blending into the mainstream, but rather the oldest living cultures and knowledge systems in the world are embraced and celebrated on campus. For these are truly unique attributes which no other university in the world can celebrate.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people deserve a place on campus, and universities need Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on campus. The answer lies in true collaboration.

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Chapter 5
Out of Reach? University for People from Low Socio-Economic Status Backgrounds

Andrew Harvey, Lisa Andrewartha, and Catherine Burnheim

Introduction

Socio-economic status was the first equity category considered within *A Fair Chance for All* (the Framework) (Department of Education Employment and Training (DEET) 1990). Philosophically, class was central to the then Labor Government's vision of social justice. Practically, a focus on class made sense – socio-economic status is an overarching category and most disadvantaged groups are disproportionately likely to be from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds as well. The Framework ensured that class would be at the forefront of student equity considerations, and proposed systematic measurement of SES in higher education for the first time. The decision to prioritise, measure and track socio-economic status helped to define the next 25 years of equity policy. Changes to HECS were evaluated by their impact on low SES students, universities introduced a wide range of measures to boost low SES participation, the Rudd Labor Government was ultimately able to create targets and a policy agenda based on the data gathered under *A Fair Chance for All*, and researchers developed an extensive body of evidence around cultural capital and the effects of socio-economic status on university participation. Despite these positive impacts, there is a need to update and revise the Framework in light of changes to data collection, market environments, conceptual understandings and ongoing structural inequity.

In this chapter we explore the national and international context of *A Fair Chance for All*, noting the dominant language around meritocracy and the emphasis of the

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then Labor Government on addressing structural inequities such as class barriers. We also identify the major elements and insights of the Framework. Many of the strategies proposed have subsequently been adopted and have assisted low SES students to participate in higher education. The Framework advocated more enabling and bridging programs, acknowledging the need for an expansion of sub-degree level offerings to assist academically under-prepared students. These programs are already widely adopted and creating positive and lasting impacts (Hodges et al. 2013). Some improvements in Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) articulations and joint degrees have been made, and the alternative entry programs recommended are now operating in over half of public universities, opening the doors of university to new, previously under-represented cohorts (Harvey 2014).

Nevertheless, limitations of the Framework continue to be reflected in policy settings. First, both the definition and measurement of socio-economic status were problematic at the time, and remain contested. Some imprecision sprang from the restrictions of readily available data. More refined measures of socio-economic status by smaller geographic areas (Census Collection District and Statistical Area 1) rather than postcode now provide greater accuracy, as the following sections highlight. A broader issue of measurement, however, has arguably created more lasting issues. By measuring SES categories in quartiles, the Framework created a very broad cohort of disadvantage. We argue that adopting such a large group led to an underestimation of the extent of class inequality, and to policies that were not always closely targeted to those most in need. The Framework authors maintained that limited additional resources would suffice to redress under-representation, provided universities integrated equity into their mainstream processes (DEET 1990). This determination may have been more difficult to justify had the socio-economic focus been on deciles rather than quartiles. While the development of specific strategies for the long-term unemployed was canvassed, there was a broader reluctance to acknowledge the need for intensive reforms to raise participation of the most disadvantaged.

Indeed, whether by political exigency or limitations of scope, the Framework arguably underestimated the intractability of class. As longitudinal data reveal, little progress has been made against the original low SES target since its creation. Partly, this is the result of insufficient resource allocation to address the root causes of unequal participation. Raising student awareness and aspiration are both relevant to increasing university participation but the primary cause of under-representation of low SES students remains low school achievement. Reforms such as university outreach to schools were recommended within *A Fair Chance for All*. However, it is only since the more recent introduction of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) that serious resources have been allocated to enact such programs. The Government arguably underestimated the work involved to increase low SES demand, and the Framework itself reflects a language of 'opportunity' rather than structural inequity (see Chap. 1 of this volume, Harvey et al. 2015).

At the other extreme, the Framework reflected the central and limited allocation of student places. The later introduction of the demand-driven system led to the greatest single increase in low SES participation and has even been correlated with

a slight increase in proportional participation (Kemp and Norton 2014). However, this increase demonstrates that a rising tide still lifts some boats more than others, with the majority of new places under the demand-driven system taken by higher-SES students. Moreover, the demand-driven system coincided with an explicit national target to raise low SES representation to 20 % of the student population, a target that was itself supported by funding incentives and allocations. Just as *A Fair Chance for All* accompanied the Dawkins reforms, so the Bradley Review coupled its 20 % low SES participation target with the recommendation for the creation of the demand-driven system. The Bradley recommendations depended on the earlier definitional work of the Framework, and the commitment to both equity and growth was continuous with earlier policy.

Advocates of further market expansion have argued that expansion of places to sub-degree level, as proposed by the current Government, would serve low SES students and prevent students at risk of attrition entering Bachelor degrees directly. This advocacy must be tempered by appreciation of international experience (Mettler 2014). Low SES (and other) students remain at risk of exploitation, and expansion of non-university providers must include strong quality assurance to ensure reasonable completion rates and graduate outcomes. Moreover, neither the opening of markets to date nor the interventionist Framework strategies have addressed disparities by course, institution and level of study. The Framework focussed specifically on undergraduate composition at a sectoral level. A broader consideration of equity would address institutional stratification and inequities at postgraduate level and beyond. While higher education remains of benefit to most graduates, those benefits are not shared equally by discipline and institution.

Finally, we examine potential stigmatisation of low socio-economic background students within existing policy settings, and consider how the conversation about cultural capital might be reframed. There is a need to separate academic under-preparedness from low socio-economic status itself when identifying the causes of under-representation. Low SES students are disproportionately likely to receive low Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranks (ATARs), but it is the ranking rather than their status that is most likely to affect university access and achievement. Indeed, low SES students with similar ATARs typically outperform high SES students once enrolled at university (Harvey and Burnheim 2013). Despite comparable retention rates and relative over-performance by ATAR level, the very terminology of low SES implies a deficit, and the construction of theories of cultural capital have frequently emphasised what low SES students lack (Mills and Gale 2007). Without abnegating the effects of class, it is necessary to develop new language to acknowledge different types of capital and to promote a university curriculum and environment that welcomes diversity of experience and culture. This project must be aligned to a sophisticated equity framework that acknowledges the strengths as well as limitations of different groups.

Many existing limitations of measurement and scope could be addressed with relative ease, while a conceptual and linguistic shift requires education and cultural change, but modest financial resources. Addressing the deeper causes of structural inequity would, however, require a different philosophical approach and financial

commitment from that offered by governments of both persuasions to this point. The inequities of Australian schooling, and their subsequent impact on higher education participation, were well documented by respondents to the Gonski Review (Nous Group 2011). Despite initial enthusiasm from the then Labor Government, however, funding for a more needs-based school model has proven difficult to find. Without such commitments to addressing the root causes rather than symptoms of under-representation, socio-economic differences in higher education participation will remain prevalent.

Context

The inclusion of 'people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds' as the central category in the *A Fair Chance for All* framework is continuous with the overall policy priorities of the Labor government, and with the Dawkins higher education reforms in particular. The aim of the Dawkins reforms was to modernise and expand the higher education system to achieve both economic and social goals (see Chap. 10 in the volume, Marginson 2015). The expansion of the system was predicated on the creation of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), an income-contingent loans scheme for students. The introduction of HECS brought an end to the era of free education, instituted by the Whitlam Labor government in 1972. The abolition of tuition fees by Whitlam was seen as an icon of his government's commitment to social justice, and retreat from that policy was politically fraught for its Labor successors. However, for Dawkins, the creation and growth of the Unified National System was intended to increase participation for all groups in Australian society, as well as to meet economic needs for skilled workers. Dawkins was correct in that the expansion of undergraduate places was responsible for a substantial increase in low SES student enrolments, even if proportional representation remained largely unchanged.

A Fair Chance for All, then, was a corrective and safeguard against concerns that the introduction of HECS would affect participation. This concern is evident in the Framework's focus on social class as a factor in access, and its aim to measure participation nationally and compel institutions to address participation. The Government was aware of the primacy of class, and of the considerable degree of overlap in the membership of the equity groups. James et al. (2004) looked at patterns of multiple group membership and, using 2000 data, found that nearly half of the students from low SES backgrounds also belonged to a second equity group. The main areas of overlap were with students from rural and isolated areas, which was confounded by the use of postcode to define these groups, and with Indigenous students.

Importantly, socio-economic status of higher education students had never previously been measured systematically in Australia. The Framework relied heavily on several key studies of participation and equity conducted in the late 1980s by Power et al. (1986), Linke et al. (1988) and Williams et al. (Williams et al. 1987).

The Power et al. (1986) study was commissioned by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission with the particular aim to 'examine the effects on participation by disadvantaged groups of changes in the number of places available' (p. i). The study concluded that increasing places would increase equity participation overall (primarily by lowering entry scores) but that alternative entry schemes, information campaigns and some form of access quotas would also be required (p. ii–iii). Since the introduction of the Framework, almost all major policy reviews have considered the impact of their proposals on students from low SES backgrounds, including the review of HECS increases by Chapman and Ryan (2003), the higher education review by Bradley et al. (2008), and even the market-oriented review by Kemp and Norton (2014). A *Fair Chance for All* gave socio-economic status a central place in higher education policy. The objective to increase low SES university participation has proven remarkably stable over time, and has been embraced by Australian governments of all political persuasions.

Objectives and Measurement

A *Fair Chance for All* declared that all Australians should have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education, and that this objective could be met by 'changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole' (DEET 1990, p. 2). The impact of exclusion from higher education was seen to have both individual and societal impacts:

> large sections of the Australian population do not have access to the social and economic benefits of higher education. This also means that their potential to contribute to the community's social and economic progress is not being fully taken up. (p. 14).

Increasing participation would have multiple benefits. The next challenge was to construct robust and feasible ways to measure socio-economic status. As Martin reiterates in this volume, the aim of measuring student socio-economic status was to monitor and address the progress of the higher education system as a whole in meeting these national goals (see Chap. 2, Martin 2015). The selected measure of socio-economic status was based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), measured by the postcode of students' home addresses. This measure was selected on the basis of its ready availability in institutional data collections, and its effectiveness in representing socio-economic distributions at the national level. The postcode measure reflects the geographic distribution of disadvantage in Australia, which is well documented and persistent (Vinson et al. 2015).

Against these benefits of simplicity and national representativeness, the postcode measure had a number of shortcomings. The primary criticism is that residential address does not accurately reflect individuals' circumstances. All low SES postcodes include households at a range of income levels; similarly, many low income households are present in high SES postcodes. The institution of measures at smaller

geographic areas (Census Collection Districts, then Statistical Area 1) led to an overall reduction in the number of students counted as 'low SES', reflecting the tendency of individuals from higher income households to participate in higher education.

Strategies Proposed in the Framework

A Fair Chance for All described six strategies for increasing the participation of students from low SES backgrounds (Department of Education Employment and Training DEET 1990). Strategies included:

- Further development of special entry arrangements;
- Bridging and supplementary support programs;
- School and community higher education awareness programs in disadvantaged areas;
- Subsidised child care;
- Improving links with TAFE;
- Developing information directed at long-term unemployed people (p.14).

Limited new resources were proposed but a focus on integrating equity within higher education institutions was outlined (DEET 1990). The success of the strategies was mixed. Overall, the years following *A Fair Chance for All* saw an increase in low SES numbers, although proportional representation remained largely unchanged until the demand-driven system was introduced in 2008. Analysis of increases to HECS revealed no major impact on low SES background students, allowing successive governments to increase the amount of student debt and raise the levels of student repayment without fear of a decline (Chapman and Ryan 2003). Such policy developments were only possible because of the measurement of socio-economic status provided by the Framework. Income-contingent loans schemes spread to the UK and elsewhere partly based on the Australian evidence that revealed the participation of under-represented groups would not be negatively affected by such schemes.

Many of the strategies proposed within the Framework have also been adopted and have assisted low SES background students to participate in higher education. In particular, there has been extensive uptake of school awareness programs; special entry arrangements; and enabling and bridging programs. *A Fair Chance for All* advocated school awareness programs for low SES background students. University-run school outreach activities have increased substantially since the introduction of HEPPP in 2009. In their review of outreach activities, Gale et al. (2010) found that the most prominent target group of these programs was low SES background students, followed by Indigenous students and then students from rural and remote locations. Common outreach activities included: visits to schools by university staff and students; visits to university campus by school students; mentoring and tutoring of school students by university students; university staff working with school

teachers or parents; and university staff and students engaging in school or community projects.

A Fair Chance for All also advocated the use of special entry arrangements for low SES students. Most universities now offer special entry access schemes to compensate for different types of disadvantage that may have negatively affected educational progress and academic results, including coming from a disadvantaged financial background (Harvey 2014). Students can also be given 'bonus points' on a sliding scale to compensate for the disadvantage experienced. Selection officers may then take into account this disadvantage when ranking applicants for entry into a university course (Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre 2014; Universities Admissions Centre 2014; Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre 2014).

The Framework recommended more enabling and bridging programs, acknowledging the need for an expansion of sub-degree level offerings to assist academically under-prepared students. There are two types of enabling programs that are popular with students from low SES backgrounds: pathway enabling programs which provide a distinct pathway to university; and remedial enabling programs which are undertaken concurrently with university study. Students from equity groups comprise approximately 50 % of students in enabling programs, compared with 30 % of all domestic undergraduate students (Lomax-Smith et al. 2011). Despite their attractiveness, enabling programs typically record relatively high attrition rates. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of students who complete pathway enabling programs transition to university. Of the 12,411 students who undertook a pathway enabling program in 2009, 4061 had progressed into a Bachelor degree level course in 2010 (Lomax-Smith et al. 2011).

Finally, it is worth noting that the very measurement of socio-economic status led to substantial and enduring policy initiatives. The HEPPP program focussed national attention around the lowest SES quartile, and delivered substantial amounts of funding to that end, while the Labor Government's low SES participation target was reflected in institutional mission compacts and arguably drove widespread reform across the sector. As outlined previously, various reforms of HECS were also predicated on evidence gathered through the measurement of socio-economic status. In creating a relatively simple and consistent measure of socio-economic status, the Framework laid the foundations for policy reform, even if insufficient resources were ultimately allocated to achieve that reform. The longitudinal data created also provided a platform for research that has informed policy-makers and practitioners for over two decades.

Limitations of *A Fair Chance for All*

In this section we consider five major limitations of the Framework in addressing the under-representation of students from low SES backgrounds in higher education: definitional and measurement limitations; misunderstanding of the causes and

intractability of class; changes to market environments; a problematic focus on aggregated access; and a model of implied deficit.

Definitional and Measurement Limitations

Definitional problems are evident in the multiple measures of socio-economic status adopted by the Department of Education and Training. More refined measures of status by Census Collection District rather than postcode now provide greater accuracy, though improving the measurement of socio-economic status for postgraduate students remains a challenge (Burnheim and Harvey 2013).

Equally problematic, though rarely questioned, is the near-universal adoption of quartiles to compare socio-economic groups. By definition, people from low SES backgrounds comprise 25 % of the population in Australia. There is no inherent logic to this classification by quartile other than its relative simplicity – the UK, for example, typically adopts a slightly more nuanced quintile approach. The arbitrariness of adopting quartiles has been noted by some commentators, but few have highlighted the 'long tail' of disadvantage, and the need to focus on the lowest socio-economic decile in particular.

Andrew Norton (2010) argues that the focus on the lowest quartile is 'fundamentally flawed' and that a focus on the lowest socio-economic half might be more rational. Norton (2009) found the academic results of the lowest SES quartile (by occupation and postcode) were little different from the second quartile. Norton's analyses of the 2008 Victorian Year 12 results found that students living in the lowest 10 % of postcodes had the poorest academic results, but those in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th deciles also had poor results. Later, Coelli (2010) examined higher education participation data from the census and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey and confirmed that access to higher education is no better for the second quartile than the first quartile. More recently, however, Norton (2013) examined university attendance rates for 20–24 year olds by SES deciles and found the data 'less lumpy' than anticipated. He concluded that 'attendance rates do slowly but steadily increase as people move up the SES spectrum, without the large and weakly-differentiated lowest 50 % I expected from other sources'.

While some view the quartile measure as too narrow, we argue that the focus could be narrowed further in some cases to consider the most disadvantaged subgroup – the lowest socio-economic 10 %. Students from low SES backgrounds are not a homogeneous entity; instead there exists a gradient of disadvantage within the group (Willems 2010). Data suggests that the gradient is relatively steep, and differs across states and territories. In 2008, the Australian Government set a target for 40 % of 25–34 year olds to hold a Bachelor's degree or above by 2025 (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2009). In 2011, nearly 32 % of that population held a degree, but there were vast differences in attainment. Within the lowest socio-economic decile, fewer than 10 % of people held a degree,

compared with 58 % of those in the highest decile. Similarly, only 9 % of 18–19 year olds in the lowest socio-economic decile were participating in higher education in 2011, compared with an average of 28 % across all deciles, and a rate of 55 % within the highest decile (ABS 2011). A person from the highest socio-economic decile is more than five times as likely to hold a degree as someone from the lowest decile.

Deciles also provide more insight into differences across states and territories. The ABS captures data on relative socio-economic disadvantage through the SEIFA. The ABS use Census Collection District (CD) data that capture small spatial measurements and therefore represent the most accurate geographic data. ABS data highlight that the 'discriminatory power of SEIFA is greatest at the extremes of the distributions' (ABS 2006, p. 44). Within the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), 28 % of collection districts are within the top decile of socio-economic advantage. By contrast, Northern Territory (NT) and Tasmania have a high proportion of relatively disadvantaged districts. More than a quarter of collection districts in the NT, and more than a fifth of those in Tasmania, lie within the bottom socio-economic decile for Australia (ABS 2006, p. 45). The general socio-economic data, and the specific educational data, both reveal a nation of broad socio-economic diversity whose extremities are concealed by a tendency to focus on the broad middle. Reducing the socio-economic gap thus requires significant resources, but also a better understanding of the extent of the gap. With an exclusive focus on quartiles, the full extent of class inequity is masked.

Misunderstanding the Causes and Intractability of Class

The Framework arguably misread the causes of the under-representation of students from low SES backgrounds in higher education. Strong emphasis was placed on the need to raise aspirations, and this has since been a strong focus of higher education equity policy and practice. For example, the Partnerships component of the HEPPP was provided to universities to establish partnerships that 'raise the aspirations and build the capacity of people from low SES backgrounds to participate in higher education' (Australian Government 2014). The majority of university outreach programs targeting school students are designed to increase aspiration levels of students from low SES backgrounds. In their survey of 26 universities covering 59 outreach programs, Gale et al. (2010) found that approximately 70 % of programs included elements of aspiration building, including programs designed to familiarise students with university, provide guidance on career planning, and promote interest in specific fields of study. By contrast, only 11 % of outreach programs were designed to improve school achievement levels, and 14 % focused on improving school retention and completion.

The weight of research evidence suggests that many students from low socio-economic do have high aspirations for the future and a clear understanding that higher education is required to enter their desired careers (Homel and Ryan 2014;

Prosser et al. 2008; Reid and McCallum 2014; Wilks and Wilson 2012). The larger problem often is that these aspirations cannot be realised with the lower school achievement levels and completion rates recorded for these students. Aspiration is also mediated by achievement and the two can be mutually reinforcing. Socio-economic differences in university participation are largely explained by the under-achievement of low socio-economic students in secondary school. The correlation between low SES and low school achievement levels is well established (Birrell et al. 2000; Martin and Karmel 2002; Palmer et al. 2011). The ATAR is the centrepiece of university selection for school-leavers, and ATAR is long known to contain a socio-economic bias (Dobson and Skuja 2005).

The causes of socio-economic differences in school achievement levels are multifaceted. Differences can be partially attributed to differential access to, and participation in, rigorous academic curriculum in upper secondary school. Students from low SES backgrounds tend to be concentrated in government schools, which tend to have fewer resources, narrower curriculum offerings, and a greater focus on vocational studies (Teese 2006). By contrast, students from high SES backgrounds tend to be concentrated in non-government or selective high schools which are able to offer a wide academic curriculum, especially at the advanced level (Watson and Ryan 2010). Within schools, factors such as ability grouping and subject choice also contribute to socio-economic differences in achievement levels. While the issue is complex, it is clear that greater emphasis needs to be placed on increasing the achievement levels of students from low SES backgrounds. As Norton notes, 'It is the poorer school performance of low SES students that narrows or eliminates higher education opportunities. Until academic results are improved, only modest increases in low SES higher education enrolment and attainment are possible' (2012, p.33).

There remain a range of broader arguments that education is designed to reproduce class privilege (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), that a focus on employment factors rather than education is more likely to reduce class differences, and that portraying education as a 'passport out of poverty' shifts responsibility (and therefore blame) onto individuals rather than the structural class barriers to education achievement (Marsh 2011). For example, the extent to which higher education can reduce class inequality is itself debatable. According to Bourdieu, the education system is biased towards the higher socio-economic class and serves only to reproduce social hierarchies (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). A distinction can also be made between the objectives of inclusion and fairness (Marginson et al. 2013). Inclusion relates to the absolute number of people from low socio-economic groups accessing higher education, while fairness relates to the proportional distribution of student places between socio-economic groups. Fairness is the more difficult objective as it requires a degree of displacement of persons from the higher socio-economic ranks. Norton has argued that the success of low SES students within the demand-driven system should be viewed not by their enrolment share, but by their outcomes relative to their own quartile (Kemp and Norton 2014). These arguments have been covered in depth elsewhere (see Chap. 10, Marginson 2015; Mills and Gale 2007) and limitations of space prevent us from addressing them individually.

However, it is important to note that the origins of socio-economic inequity remain highly contested, and designers of any subsequent student equity framework must be cognisant of these debates and able to situate the framework within a broader social and economic context.

Changes to Market Environments

A Fair Chance for All recommended the formation of links between TAFE and university as a strategy for increasing participation of students from low SES backgrounds. These links have grown over the past two decades, particularly since the introduction of the demand-driven system. Based on the available evidence, however, it appears that vocational education and training pathways have not been a particularly successful mechanism for increasing access to higher education for low SES students. In a comprehensive review of the literature, Griffin (2014) found that 'transition from VET to higher education is a viable pathway for some disadvantaged learners, although it is not used as widely as it could be' (p.3). One reason for the limited success of these pathways is that low SES students are under-represented in high level vocational educational and training programs, and it is these high level programs that most likely to lead to higher education. Wheelahan (2009) noted that pathways between the sectors do not widen participation of under-represented groups but rather deepen participation of already well-represented groups.

More influential has been the demand-driven system itself, which has led to an expansion of places and a small rise in the proportion of low SES background students at university. Since 2008, their share of enrolments has risen from 15.0 to 16.3 % in 2014. For some authors, the market has achieved what *A Fair Chance for All* and other central, bureaucratic initiatives could not. In Chap. 11 of this volume, Andrew Norton (2015) argues that:

> While the total number of places was not ignored in *A Fair Chance for All* or in later policy, it has received too little attention relative to its significance. It is no coincidence that most equity groups experienced their largest enrolment surges after controls on student numbers were lifted.

Uncapping places has increased low SES enrolments, but at a rate far short of that required to meet population parity targets. Advocates of further market expansion have argued that expansion of places to sub-degree level, as proposed by the current Government, would serve low SES students and prevent students at risk of attrition entering Bachelor degrees directly (Kemp and Norton 2014). Places in sub-degree programs are currently allocated and limited by Government, and the demand-driven system has focussed almost exclusively on undergraduate places. Advocacy for uncapping sub-degree places and simultaneously opening the market to non-university providers must be tempered, however, by appreciation of international experience (Mettler 2014). Low SES (and many other) students remain at risk of exploitation, and expansion of non-university providers must include strong quality assurance to ensure reasonable completion rates and graduate outcomes.

Problematic Focus on Aggregated Access

The Framework is also constrained by a focus on access and participation at the sectoral level, which conceals disparities by course and institution. While higher education remains of benefit to most graduates, those benefits are not shared equally by discipline and institution. Students from low SES backgrounds are highly concentrated in particular fields of study, such as Education and Nursing, and particularly under-represented in top-tier courses such as medical studies (Gale and Parker 2013). Students from low SES backgrounds are also over-represented within the Regional Universities Network, which is not surprising given the very high rates of regional student participation at these universities (see Chap. 9 in this volume, Burnheim and Harvey 2015). Along with students from the other equity groups, students from low SES backgrounds are under-represented at the most elite higher education institutions, the Group of Eight universities (Gale and Parker 2013). One of the next challenges is to increase participation in high status courses and institutions, a goal that is likely to require more active interventions at school and societal levels.

The Framework has promoted a primary focus on access and participation rather than other key performance indicators such as retention, success, completion and graduate outcomes. However, as Engstrom and Tinto (2008) note, 'access without support is not opportunity' (p.46). There is a relatively high attrition rate of students entering Bachelor programs with ATARs below 50, a group disproportionately likely to come from low SES backgrounds. In the short term, an expansion of enabling and other sub-degree programs could improve the preparation of these students, but in the longer term there is a more fundamental need to raise school achievement.

Students from low SES backgrounds are also under-represented at postgraduate level. In 2009, only 10.5 % of postgraduate students were from low SES backgrounds, well below their 16 % representation within all commencing university students (Gale and Parker 2013). Under-representation at postgraduate level is becoming increasingly problematic as the expansion of higher education means higher levels of qualification are needed to distinguish employment candidates (see Chap. 14, Bell and May 2015). While students from low SES backgrounds are under-represented at all levels of postgraduate study, they are especially under-represented in higher degrees by research (Heagney 2010). This under-representation is largely as a result of institutional stratification and low levels of institutional mobility (Harvey and Andrewartha 2013). The Group of Eight universities are the leading generators of PhD scholars in Australia, accounting for 52 % of all PhD student load (Harman 2002). With small numbers of students from low SES backgrounds entering the Group of Eight Universities at the undergraduate level, a pipeline of privilege is created. This pipeline is exacerbated by relatively low mobility among Australian postgraduate students (Kiley and Austin 2008). Increasing postgraduate participation will require interventions at undergraduate level (Harvey and Andrewartha 2013).

Capital Ideas and the Language of Stigma

Historically, the experiences of low SES background students at university have been conceptualised in a way that implies deficit. The emphasis has often been placed on what low SES students lack, namely the cultural capital needed to succeed at university. Cultural capital can be defined as 'proficiency in and familiarity with dominant cultural codes and practices for example, linguistic styles, aesthetic preferences, styles of interaction' (Aschaffenburg and Mass 1997, p. 573). Some have argued that students from low SES backgrounds may arrive at university without an understanding of the norms and expectations of higher education. Disjunction is manifest, but caution is also required when examining this phenomenon. For example, Bletsas and Michell (2014) discuss 'classism' as a feature of Australian higher education. The authors defined classism in this context as 'pervasive cultural and institutional norms which construct individuals who are of a low SES as inherently deficient in a variety of ways' (p.93). The authors also highlight the need to challenge the incorrect assumption that students from low SES backgrounds are 'needy'. While low SES students are under-represented at university, those who do attend perform as well as their peers (Bradley et al. 2008).

Despite their achievement levels at university, the different needs, experiences and strengths of students from low SES backgrounds are often overlooked and undervalued. Yosso (2005) identified six forms of capital possessed by socially marginalised groups that often go unrecognised: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital. These types of capital could be acknowledged and integrated into teaching and learning to elicit the diverse skills, strengths and experiences of students from low SES backgrounds.

The terminology around low SES students is also problematic. Terms such as 'low socio-economic background' and 'non-traditional' suggest a deficiency on behalf of the student, and terms such as 'poverty', 'disadvantage', 'deprivation' and 'exclusion' have also been criticised for their negative framing (Gidley et al. 2010). Instead, terms and concepts such as 'social inclusion' and 'human potential' are seen to be more positive, constructive and empowering (Gidley et al. 2010). Universities need to develop broader understandings of the diversity of their student cohorts, and the strengths that different students bring to the learning environment.

Conclusion

Improving the participation of low SES background students is central to improving the participation of all under-represented students. In providing a consistent measurement of socio-economic status for the first time, *A Fair Chance for All* laid the groundwork for decades of research and policy interventions. An extensive body of evidence has since been built around university aspiration, awareness, access and achievement. The Framework also drove institutional reform through university

outreach, alternative entry pathways and TAFE collaboration. Uncapping places drove further expansion from 2008, but this marketisation was itself informed and framed by socio-economic data and targets.

Despite these achievements, *A Fair Chance for All* was unable to drive an increase in proportional representation of low SES background students. The extent of inequality was, and continues to be, masked by the reporting of socio-economic status in quartiles rather than deciles; limited funding was allocated to schools and tertiary providers to reduce this (understated) inequality; and the Framework reflected a broader commitment to providing opportunity rather than addressing deep structural inequity. Stubbornly low educational achievement, particularly within schools, remains the primary cause of under-representation. Further progress for low SES background students relies on policies that explicitly address educational achievement and its broader causes.

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Chapter 6
Disability and Australian Higher Education: Policy Drivers for Increasing Participation

Matthew Brett

Introduction

Increasing participation of students with disability in higher education can be considered a success of a multi-dimensional public policy agenda that sought to reduce the disadvantage associated with disability. *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990) and the associated *Equity and General Performance Indicators for Higher Education* (Martin 1994) were higher education elements of this policy context. Higher education was itself going through major reforms with the establishment of the Unified National System, commonly known as the Dawkins reforms, after the Minister responsible for higher education at the time, John Dawkins. The Dawkins reforms radically transformed Australian higher education, triggering a proliferation of universities and an expansion in enrolments. Growth and equity were core considerations of the reform process, allowing higher education to accommodate increased numbers of qualified people who were previously unable to access a capacity-constrained system. Increasing year 12 retention rates and the retraining needs of adults affected by economic structural adjustments heightened the pressure for higher education reform and system expansion.

A rising tide is said to lift all boats, and system expansion opened opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in higher education. The continued year on year increase in the number and proportion of students with disabilities (Fig. 6.1) points to a public policy success that is not well documented in the literature. There is significant complexity associated with the intersection of disability and higher education that warrants nuanced analysis of the underlying policy drivers that have contributed to this outcome.

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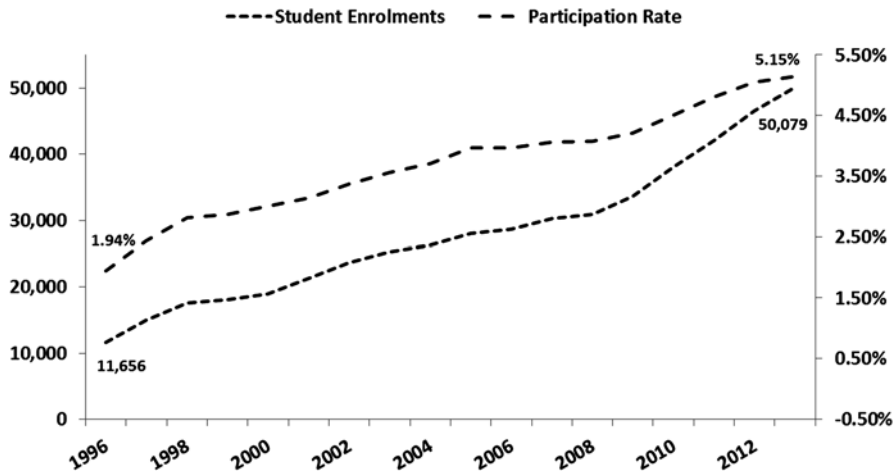
Fig. 6.1 Enrolments and participation rate of domestic students with disability 1996–2013 (Source: Department of Education and Training 2012)

Making disability a designated equity group within the Australian higher education reform process is a causal factor in the increasing participation of students with disabilities. *A Fair Chance for All* played an important role in affirming the significance of disability within higher education equity policy, and in being able to quantify changes in the participation of students with disabilities. However, the significance of *A Fair Chance for All*, and higher education equity policy in broad terms, can be overstated. This chapter explores key factors influencing increased participation of students with disability in higher education, including specific developments in higher education policy. While the increase in the participation of students with disabilities is to be applauded, there remains a need to consider the quality and outcomes of participation. There is also a need to recognize where participation remains severely restricted. The chapter concludes with an analysis of directions for future research and policy innovation.

Background and Context

While *A Fair Chance for All* affirmed disability as an equity category in higher education policy, it is by no means the first policy relating to disability in Australian higher education. For example, the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme operated between 1944 and 1951 and facilitated access to vocational and academic training for returned armed services personnel. Eligibility criteria for the Scheme included support for those unable to return to a pre-War occupation due to disability (National Archives Australia 2015a, b). As early as 1922, the registration of masseurs (a pre-cursor of the physiotherapy profession) included reference to the

prescribed training and assessment processes for blind persons (Masseurs Registration Act Vic 1922). Barriers to participation for students with disabilities have been dismantled but also assembled over time. In the case of physiotherapy, there was a time where physiotherapy was considered a fitting profession for the blind (Mottershaw 1955). In contemporary Australia however, visual acuity is now considered an inherent requirement of physiotherapy that can preclude participation of blind students (e.g., University of Western Sydney 2015).

A Fair Chance for All emerged from a context where there was heightened recognition of the disadvantage associated with disability. The Hawke Labor government was elected in 1983 with a policy agenda that included social justice and equity (Gallagher 1993). The Government commissioned the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission to identify:

> …ways of achieving rapid, substantial and sustained reductions in the mismatch between the composition of society and the social composition of tertiary institutions, individual faculties and the tertiary sector as a whole (Gallagher 1993, p. 194).

The 1984 Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission process identified several groups as disadvantaged in access to higher education, including people with disabilities. The equity die was cast, and 'Aboriginal people, people from low income groups, migrants and people from some ethnic groups, women, people with disabilities, and people from outer metropolitan and rural areas' (Gallagher 1993, p. 194) have been the key equity groups targeted in Australian higher education policy ever since.

Higher education policy reform was established through a Green and White paper process. *The Challenge For Australian Higher Education in Australia* (Dawkins 1987), and *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (Dawkins 1988) placed growth and equity as key considerations in higher education policy reform. Cabinet papers relating to the Dawkins higher education reforms were released in 2015 providing additional insights into these historic reform processes. The Cabinet submission committed the Government to:

> …develop national equity objectives as a guide to institutions and future funding allocations will have direct regard to the progress made by institutions towards the achievement of agreed goals (National Archives Australia 2015a, b, p. 13).

A Fair Chance for All embodied the commitment to develop national equity objectives. Other chapters in this volume will provide a richer account of the context and detail of *A Fair Chance for All*, but it is worth restating the goal:

> The overall objective for equity in higher education is to ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990, p. 2).

A Fair Chance for All also provided a more detailed account of the objective, targets and strategies for each equity group, including People with Disabilities. The disability targets set were a doubling of commencing enrolments by 1995, and increasing participation in professional and vocational oriented courses by 30 % by

1995. An important part of attaining this objective was establishing a mechanism for quantifying the participation of students with disabilities in higher education.

The Department of Employment, Education and Training commissioned, through the Evaluations and Investigations Programme, a project to develop and trial equity performance indicators and produce a computer package for institutions that could generate equity and other indicators (now known as the Martin Indicators after the project lead, Lin Martin). At the time of this project, data on the participation of students with disabilities was not required as part of the standard Department of Employment, Education and Training student data collection. Most institutions did collect some data on disability, but approaches were varied. The project grappled with how best to phrase a question that could, through student self-identification, quantify participation of students with disability. Tensions implicit in how the question was phrased related to whether responses would be too narrow (excluding potentially valid responses), or too broad (including circumstances of minor or temporary nature), and yet still generating useful information for institutions around the services and resource implications of accommodating increased participation by students with disabilities. The project settled for the following questions to be included within enrolment declaration forms:

> Do you have a disability, impairment or long term medical condition which may affect your studies?
>
>   If yes, please indicate the area of impairment:
>
> - Hearing
> - Learning
> - Mobility
> - Vision
> - Medical
> - Other

Would you like to receive advice on support services, equipment and facilities which may assist you? (Martin 1994, p. 87).

Institutional perspectives on these questions were varied. As Lin Martin writes in this volume, Vice-Chancellors strongly resisted including disability within the data collection, and the inclusion of disability was passed narrowly after a vote. Institutional feedback included responses that revealed an aversion to the term disability, preferring instead that emphasis be placed on 'impairment' or 'functional limitations' (Martin 1994, p. 171). Others were concerned about the potential for under-reporting, believing students would not disclose for fear of stigma and discrimination. Conversely, others suggested that false positives were likely, and evident in student responses to existing data collection instruments. Concerns were also raised about the level of detail included as areas of possible impairment. Alternative categorization schema were put forward that increased the number of indicative impairments or functional limitations. The disability indicators were introduced to the standard student data collection for a trial period of 3 years, and despite these concerns, have been retained without change to this day (Higher Education Information Management System 2015).

The points of contention evident in consultation around indicator development remain relevant, particularly if one wishes to assess the efficacy of higher education policy on the participation of students with disabilities. The prevalence rates of mental health conditions or autism, for example, or the relationships between severity of impairment and outcomes measures such as success and retention cannot be ascertained from enrolment declaration data. Various policy review and advocacy processes have sought to refine the disability indicator, including James et al. (2004); Pagnini et al. (2014); Norton and Brett (2011). Some two decades later, the trial question within the indicator framework remains a seemingly permanent fixture. It would however, be unfair to pass critical judgment on what was anticipated to be a temporary indicator on the basis of limitations in generating insights into the policy and institutional performance questions of today. The absence of baseline data of any reliable form at the time of *A Fair Chance for All* means that the disability data that has been collected has been useful, despite clear limitations.

What Is Measured Matters: Quantifying Disability

One cannot explore the nuances of disability and higher education without exploring the term 'disability' and its use in the Australian policy context. *A Fair Chance or All* acknowledged that little was known about the participation of students with disabilities in higher education. It juxtaposed a national reference value for the 'physically disabled' (7 % based on a 1985 survey) with a 1981 study that estimated the proportion of students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions at 0.17 %. Over the quarter century since the release of *A Fair Chance for All*, our understanding of disability has shifted, and the language used within disability discourse has evolved.

The proportion of the population now considered to experience disability is 18.5 % (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014a). These changes are not the result of a tripling in the proportion of society that is disabled using a 1985 conceptual reference point. Population aging partially accounts for increasing prevalence of disability, but much of the increase relates to a change in scope of circumstances associated with the term disability. This logic is relevant to assessing changes in the participation of students with disabilities. The proportion of students with disabilities in higher education is now 5.2 % (Department of Education and Training 2014), a marked increase from the 0.17 % estimated in 1981. This increase reflects both participation by students with disability and a shift in definitional scope that sees more students identifying with the term disability. The precise contribution of each of these factors is difficult to quantify.

The barriers leading to the exclusion of people with disabilities from higher education have been steadily dismantled, but not eliminated, contributing to improved participation. Continued growth in both absolute enrolments and the proportion of students with disabilities in higher education can be anticipated. There may be a time when the number and proportion of students with disabilities demonstrates a

decline, as is evident in a decrease in prevalence across Australia between 2003 and 2012 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014b). Increasing rates of disability disclosure warrant more sophisticated institutional and policy responses grounded in improved data collection and a robust theoretical framework.

The dominant perspective on disability is described as the medical model (Grönvik 2007; World Health Organization 2002). Disability from this perspective is understood as a departure from normalcy in bodily form and function. These deviations are in need of correction and treatment by the medical sciences. The medical model positions the participation of people with disability as a problem at the level of the individual. Successful participation necessitates individual adjustment, rather than adjustment of the environment to accommodate individual characteristics.

Auditory disabilities provide an example of different approaches. Cochlear implants restore hearing and are lauded as a triumph of medical science, but the resulting population of Australian sign language speakers is reduced to levels that raise concerns about the minimum number of speakers required to maintain viability of the language (Johnston 2004). From a medical model perspective, this form of treatment is a success, but from a cultural perspective, the outcome erodes the culture associated with the Australian Deaf community.

The medicalised perspective of disability is associated with negative perspectives of disability. Bioethicist John Harris (2000) positioned disability as a 'harmed condition', and one that many in society have a strong rational preference to avoid. This perspective may be unpalatable to many, but perhaps explains why objections were raised about using the term disability in the development of the equity indicator framework. Resistance to the use of the term disability within higher education policy is not a quirk of an unenlightened past. A 2010 survey of Australian tertiary education disability practitioners ranked disability as 15th out of 19 options as the preferred term for informing students about the presence of services that facilitate the provision of reasonable adjustments under disability discrimination legislation (Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability (ATEND) 2010). Disability was perceived in positive terms by 44 % of respondents, while the most preferred term, Universal Design, was perceived in positive terms by 77 % of respondents. Significant stigma is associated with disability, and pragmatically recognized by those who work to support the participation of students with disability in tertiary education.

Stigma is associated with discrimination, and less favorable treatment of people with disability. Less favorable treatment has been recognized as an area of policy intervention through the establishment of anti-discrimination legislation. Legislative protections for people with disabilities were evident in State anti-discrimination legislation predating *A Fair Chance for All*. The Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (1984) for example, made it unlawful to treat someone less favorably (including through unlawful exclusion from an educational program) on the basis of 'impairment' or 'malfunction'. Inconsistent legal protections for people with disability across States contributed to an extension and standardization of legal protections by the introduction of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act in 1992. The

definition of disability used within the Disability Discrimination Act was broad, including for example, imputed disability and presence of viruses capable of causing disease. There were calls to utilize the Disability Discrimination Act definition of disability within the equity performance indicators, but they were rejected by the project team for their legal tone and length. The Disability Discrimination Act made discrimination on the basis of disability within education unlawful, and has been a powerful driver of greater inclusion of people with disabilities across Australian education systems.

The State based Equal Opportunity Acts and Disability Discrimination Acts highlight that the medical model of disability may be dominant but has never been absolute. These Acts have imposed requirements on society and institutions to adjust their practice to accommodate, where reasonable, the participation of persons with disabilities in a range of activities, including employment and education. The inclusion of disability within *A Fair Chance for All* and Martin indicators is representative of the political will to facilitate a deliberate change to the nature of higher education, making it more inclusive of people with disabilities. This change was not a spontaneous outpouring of political and institutional interest in disability. Disability activists were instrumental in elevating an awareness of the discrimination faced by people with disabilities and translating this awareness into political action. Policy change was hard fought, at times of precarious status, and ultimately of long-term benefit to society at large. This disability activism was not a localized issue, and aligns with similar movements across the world, exemplified by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006.

Emerging from the disability activism movement of the United Kingdom in the early 1970s was the origins of what is known as the social model of disability. The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and Disability Alliance (DA) described disability as:

> the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by contemporary organization which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities (UPIAS and DA 1975, p. 20).

The social model of disability shifts emphasis from individual impairments to social structures and places policy as the site of intervention to mitigate disadvantage. Reforms such as State and Federal anti-discrimination legislation, building code revisions that mandate accessibility, and increased funding for disability programs across education systems are consistent with social model policy interventions.

The social model of disability, while described as now hegemonic in influencing policy internationally (Lang 2001), is not without competition as a driver of policy. The World Health Organization International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health (ICF) was ratified by all 191 World Health Organization member states in 2001 and was designed as the international standard to describe and measure health and disbility (World Health Organisation 2016). The ICF draws upon both the social and medical models, and positions disability as a problem at the level of a person's body, and a complex social phenomenon. It uses terminology

of participation restriction to describe disability in dynamic rather than absolute terms. If the six illustrative categories of disability utilized by the Martin indicators were seen as close to the limits of tolerance for an enrolment declaration, the ICF typology would have almost certainly be deemed too complex. The classification is designed to be universal in quantifying health and disability across all body structures and functions, all activities, and all contextual factors. The ABS Survey of Disability and Carers generates the primary reference data for disability in Australia and uses a survey instrument aligned with the ICF that spans 534 pages (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014c).

Disability is complex, and opens questions around whether the participation of students with disability in higher education can be adequately understood from a yes/no binary self-disclosure instrument. The answer to this question is self-evidently that there is much more to disability than that which can be ascertained from the current equity indicator framework. However, while the indicator framework was not designed to form definitive knowledge base on disability in higher education, the data which has been generated by the *A Fair Chance for All* policy framework has been of significant influence in progress towards a more inclusive environment. Policy design, implementation and impact is rarely linear, and imperfect policy can have both positive results and unintended consequences.

In addition to the ICF there is increasing interest in ecological models of disability that see people and their environments as interconnected. OECD comparative analysis of how higher education systems accommodate disability concludes that ecological models of disability should be the conceptual driver of policy and service delivery (Ebersold and Evans 2003; Ebersold 2008). The ICF is not inconsistent with an ecological model, but remains primarily a diagnostic and classification tool rather than a conceptual driver of policy and service delivery.

If one were to position *A Fair Chance for All* and the Martin indicators within various models of disability, the underlying policy intent is consistent with social and ecological approaches to disability. Through recognizing the underrepresentation of people with disabilities, the policy framework sought to reorganize structures within higher education to facilitate the participation of students with disabilities. *A Fair Chance for All* outlined a range of strategies and interventions that could be employed by institutions to assist the participation of students with disabilities. Irrespective of flaws in indicator design, through including disability as a target group, and standardizing data collection on their participation, a positive feedback loop was established that facilitated an evolution in the character of higher education that has accommodated many more students with disabilities. This feedback loop has operated alongside a range of changes to the higher education operating context, including an overall expansion in higher education participation, the strengthening of legislative protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, and shifting social expectations and attitudes towards disability. Though imprecise and conceptually flawed, the disability indicator has been of significant benefit, but it is perhaps time to consider a change.

Outcome Indicators for Students with Disabilities

Notwithstanding earlier critique of the disability indicator, it remains useful in providing a high level indicator of sector performance. The total number of students disclosing disability can be disaggregated by students who identify with indicator sub-categories, and who indicate the need for services. Table 6.1 highlights the relative distribution and performance of disability sub-categories. Of note, a significant proportion of students identify with more than one sub-category providing a proxy for rates of multiple impairments. Success and retention rates are slightly below that of all students, leading to retention and success ratios that are around 95 % of that for all students. This ratio has been stable over the last decade. Increasing the participation of students with disabilities has not come at the expense of outcomes. When considering the broad range of barriers to participation for students with disabilities, stable success and retention ratios of around 95 % suggest that the policy interventions put in place at a system and institutional level are remarkably effective.

There is, however, variation in the retention and success rates of students by impairment category. Students identifying with the vision sub-category have success and retention rates that are closer to the rates reported for all students. Success rates are consistently lower for students identifying with the 'other' sub-categories. There is little evidence to draw upon that might clarify the characteristics of students that select the 'other' category and whether this is related to particular body structures or functions. The retention and success rates for students highlighting the need for services are within the range of retention and success rates of students by specific indicator category. This would suggest that disclosure of the need for services is not a good proxy of severity of disadvantage or disability (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Equity performance by impairment category 2010

Impairment categories	Equivalent full time student load	Proportion of students (%)	Proportion of those declaring disability (%)	Retention rate (%)	Success rate (%)
Students disclosing disability	29,323	4.9	100	76.3	83.2
Hearing	2,575	0.4	8.8	76.4	83.8
Learning	4,195	0.7	14.3	76.9	82.7
Mobility	3,010	0.5	10.3	74.2	82.9
Vision	4,305	0.7	14.7	79.8	86.1
Medical	11,929	2.0	40.7	74.7	82.4
Other	8,306	1.4	28.3	74.6	79.8
Sub-total	34,320		117.0		
Students disclosing need for services	14,415	2.4	49.2	75.7	81.9
All domestic students				79.3	88.2

Source: Department of Education and Training (2012)

The higher education system has been successful in increasing participation while maintaining quality of participation. This is evident in success and participation rates that are comparable to that for all students.

A key question emerging from the participation of students with disabilities in higher education is whether graduates with disabilities can succeed in the labour market. Census data captures information only on respondents who report a need for assistance with core activities but captures no information about the time of onset of disability. This distinction is relevant to understand whether graduates with disabilities who are not in the labour force have been unable to find work post-graduation, or have acquired a disability through their working life that has led to this labour market status. Census data suggests that graduates with disabilities are far less likely to be actively engaged in the labour market (Table 6.2). Younger persons (20–29) with a bachelor degree reporting a core need for assistance are more likely to be employed (47 %) than older age groups (40–49) (33 %) suggesting that younger graduates with disability are faring better in the labour market (Table 6.2).

Another data source that provides insights into the outcomes of graduates with disabilities is the Australian Graduate Survey, which seeks information about the labour market outcomes of graduates 3 months after graduation. The Australian Graduate Survey uses a binary yes/no question for disability status, invoking similar data interpretation challenges to that of the equity performance indicator. Graduates reporting disability are less likely to be earning a salary close to median graduate starting salaries (Figure 6.2) and more likely to be out of the labour market and unavailable for full time work or study (Fig. 6.3).

The range of outcomes for higher education students with a disability is a mixed bag. Success and retention rates are near equivalent to those for all students, but graduate employment statistics are far from equivalent. Younger persons with disability have improved outcomes when compared with older persons with disability providing a glimmer of hope that future graduates, who may be considered beneficiaries of a more inclusive education system, will experience a more equitable labour market.

Table 6.2 Employment of people with bachelor degrees with and without

Persons with bachelor degree		Employed, worked full-time or part-time (%)	Employed, away from work (%)	Not in labour force (%)
No need for assistance with core activities	20–29 years	80	4	12
	30–39 years	80	6	12
	40–49 years	84	4	10
Has need for assistance with core activities	20–29 years	47	6	40
	30–39 years	39	8	49
	40–49 years	33	5	59

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011)
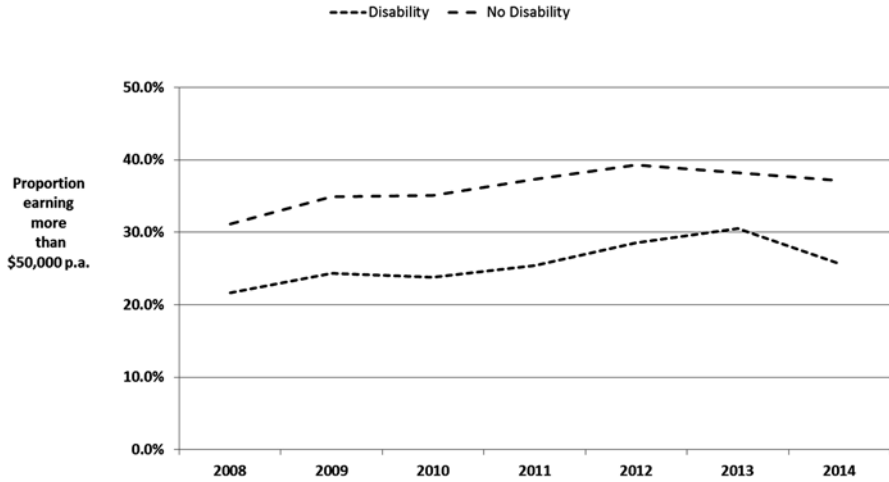
Fig. 6.2 Graduate salaries 2008–2014 (Source: Graduate Careers Australia 2015)
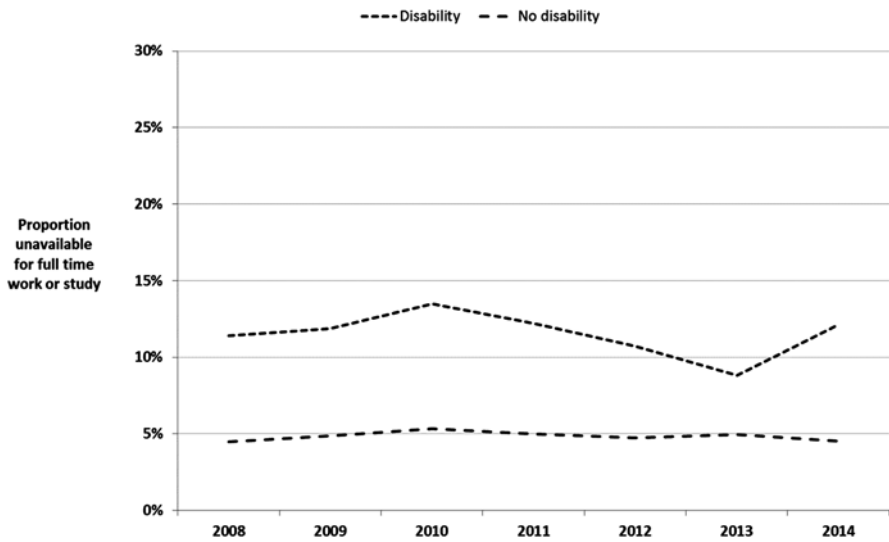
Fig. 6.3 Post graduation work and study availability (Source: Graduate Careers Australia 2015)

Policy Drivers of Improved Higher Education Participation

Emphasizing the low rates of participation of students with disability in higher education around the time of *A Fair Chance for All* can diminish an appreciation of the achievements of persons with disability and the measures in place to facilitate their inclusion, which occurred before the presence of this policy framework. Pierre

Gorman, for example, was admitted to the University of Melbourne in 1942, graduating in 1949 with multiple degrees, and went on to become the first profoundly deaf person to obtain a PhD from the University of Cambridge in 1960. Scholarships, awards and art collections at the University of Melbourne and State Library of Victoria now bear his name.

It is difficult, however, to provide anything more than anecdotal evidence of participation pre-*A Fair Chance for All* due to the absence of systematic data collection, and the broad exclusion of people with disability from mainstream society. What is clear is that the policy context mediating the participation of students with disabilities has become more sophisticated and comprehensive over time. Table 6.3 highlights the development of significant policy instruments that have directly and indirectly supported the participation of students with disabilities. Together these changes have underpinned increases in the participation of students with disabilities (Table 6.3).

The high level policy frameworks listed in Table 6.3 are only a subset of a long list of policy and institutional innovation and interventions relating to disability in higher education. To make sense of these interventions and their relationship to *A Fair Chance for All*, it is worth considering the strategies that *A Fair Chance for All* articulated for supporting the participation of students with disabilities. These strategies were developed in consultation with higher education equity and disability practitioners, and included:

- Special equipment and facilities
- Advisers/contact people to help students with disabilities
- Promoting distance education opportunities
- Modifying materials and curriculum
- Flexible timetabling and course requirements
- Information to students with disabilities about services available

Table 6.3 Policy frameworks

Policy domain	1990	2000	2010	Policy exemplar
Legislative protection for rights of students with disability	Varied	Yes	Yes	Disability Discrimination Act 1992
National policy framework incorporating students with disability	Yes	Yes	Yes	*A Fair Chance for All* 1990
National funding for disability services in higher education	No	No	Yes	Disability Support Programme 2002
National data collection on students with disability	No	Yes	Yes	Martin Indictors 1994
National standards on access to premises	No	No	Yes	Disability Access to Premises Standards 2010
National standards on access to education	No	No	Yes	Disability Standards for Education 2004
National standards on access to public transport	No	No	Yes	Public Transport Standards 2002

The type of equipment and facilities necessary to support the participation of students with disabilities is largely a function of underlying functional impairment, but the activities associated with higher education and nature of the social and built environment. The relationship between these factors is dynamic. The accessibility of buildings constructed prior to modern building standards meant that much of the building stock of universities in 1990 was inaccessible to people with physical disabilities. The special equipment and facilities of 1990, which might include mechanical devices like stair climbers, has largely been made redundant as the building stock has been refurbished or replaced by more modern and accessible design as a legislated standard. There remain some heritage buildings where accessibility is poor, but mass higher education in Australia has brought with it larger modern buildings where dignified unassisted front door access is a core design feature.

Design standards for education facilities (specifically Australian Standard 1428.2) are prescriptive, detailed and cater for a broad range of disability related requirements. Standards on the location and availability of sanitation facilities include signage requirements around use of braille signage and information on whether the facilities favour those who require right or left handed access. Audio loops that enable those with hearing aids to access amplified speech free from distracting background noise are also standard.

Accommodating the participation of students with disabilities through special equipment and facilities is not always achieved through standards-based accessible design. Institutions continue to grapple with questions that include how laboratory facilities can be made accessible and safe, and how duty of care manifests itself in clinical placements and practicum activities. In many ways, these issues are dealt with by subtle imposition of constraints and encouragements that see students pragmatically self-select into areas where participation restriction is less likely to arise. Where students do push the boundaries of what is considered acceptable, there arise complex negotiations between students and institutions around how participation can be achieved. The negotiation process is mandated within the legislative frameworks by requiring institutions to consult with students with disabilities on reasonable adjustments. A student's right to participate free from discrimination is juxtaposed with institutional rights to uphold academic standards. The effectiveness of this process is evidenced both by increasing levels of participation by students with disabilities and a paucity of case law emerging from disability discrimination legislation. Issues are generally resolved through mediation well before court judgement is required, and students generally have more pressing priorities than winning on points of principle through the legal system.

The rise of the internet demonstrates the dynamic nature of disability and its intersection with services and facilities. In 1990, almost all study materials were available in print. For students with a print disability, accessing these materials required their conversion into an accessible format; narration into audio, conversion to braille, or more cutting edge conversion into electronic formats processed by costly text-to-speech or text-to-braille systems. Today, many of these materials are available online, and can be processed by higher quality natural speech software embedded within operating systems of near ubiquitous smart phones. However,

effective access to online materials requires web information to be structured accessibly. Studies into the accessibility of Australian university websites found that 100 % of sites and 92 % of pages failed to meet the basic standards (Alexander 2007). Further, the more frequently used online video resources like YouTube are generally inaccessible to people with hearing impairments as captions on these resources are rare.

Central to mediating the provision of services, equipment and facilities for students with disabilities are the advisers and contact people employed to help students with disabilities. The nomenclature of employment titles and the dates at which these positions were established will vary from institution to institution, but disability practitioners are now ubiquitous, and play an important role in helping universities meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (Cth) 1992 and Disability Standards for Education (Cth) 2005. The way these roles are framed has matured significantly since their depiction in *A Fair Chance for All* as 'help with photocopying, library assistance, appropriate accommodation and social support' (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1990, p. 42). The work of disability advisors is more complex, regulated, professional and organized than ever before. The types of services recognized within the role of disability practitioner for membership with the Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability include for example:

- Assessment of student needs (including documentation of disability and health conditions);
- Identification, implementation and evaluation of support plans and reasonable adjustments required by the student;
- Induction/management of disability support workers;
- Disability education, training and awareness for academic and general staff;
- Provision of advice regarding assistive technology and learning strategies;
- Liaison with teaching and other support staff in order to assess the implications of disability for learning;
- Assistance in the development and implementation of institutional Disability Action Plans, policies and procedures to ensure disability services and supports comply with relevant disability legislation and standards; and
- Mediation between rights of the individual student and the interests of the institution (Australian Tertiary Education Disability Network on Disability 2013)

The Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability has its origins in a 1991 conference, Pathways, conducted by Deakin University. The Pathways conference is now held biennially and serves as the primary professional development and professional networking event for disability practitioners across Australia.

The maturation of the role of disability practitioner is aligned with a maturation of institutional commitment to disability. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) first released guidelines relating to students with disabilities in 1996 (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee AVCC 1996). These guidelines affirmed a sector wide commitment to the inclusion of students with disabilities and the role of the disability practitioner in both enabling access for students with

disabilities and upholding academic standards. In addition to overarching AVCC policy commitments to disability, almost all Australian universities have prepared disability action plans consistent with Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act. Action Plans are required to outline the policies and programs to achieve the objects of the Discrimination Act; which include the elimination of discrimination against persons on the ground of disability areas of work and education.

Since 1991 the Australian Government has provided funding to advance the quality of services and participation of students with disabilities. Disability practitioners were involved in *Co-operative Projects for Higher Education Students with Disabilities* (CPHESD) where State based disability practitioner networks focused on immediate challenges of facilitating participation and improving their skills and knowledge base. Some publications, such as the *Towards Success* series of publications (Al-Mahmood et al. 1998) produced by CPHESD remain the cornerstone of institutional information around disability for some institutions. The Evaluations and Investigations Programme also allocated funding for disability practitioner projects, including those that examined the role of technology (Leung et al. 1999), flexible delivery models (Edwards 2002) and career outcomes (Boardman 2003).

An evaluation of CPHESD (Department of Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1997) ultimately found that for all the positives associated with CPHESD, the State-based approach led to duplication of effort and a more national coordinated approach was warranted. Emerging from this finding has been the development of the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training and the National Disability Coordination Officer Program that respectively seek to enhance knowledge of disability in education and improve linkages between schools, vocational education, higher education and employment.

As participation has increased, the responsibility for what might be considered 'help for students with disability' has broadened. For example, groups not specifically included within the Martin indicator questions include mental health conditions and autism. While consideration of mental health issues was evident at the time the indicators were adopted, the prominence of this group has increased. A National Summit on the Mental Health of Tertiary Students was held in 2011 (Centre for the Study of Higher Education 2011). The role of counsellors and counselling services in mediating the participation of students with mental health issues has become more significant. There is growing recognition that the structure of curriculum and assessment can be a significant stressor associated with poor mental health. Students in some universities are being screened for levels of mental distress and illness, formally acknowledging the relationships between the nature and design of the curriculum and student mental health (Larcombe and Fethers 2013). The resulting policy and institutional responses are bringing the responsibility for mediating student participation to the heart of the academy. Even in traditional disability groups such as vision impairment, the Web Accessibility Network for Australian Universities has been established and is comprised mainly of information technology staff involved in web design and content management rather than direct 'help' of students.

Distance education was positioned as an important mechanism for enabling the participation of students with disabilities. Barriers relating to mobility and access

for students with disabilities, such as inaccessible public transport, would be resolved through a bolstered distance education program. Notwithstanding accessibility improvements to public transport associated with Public Transport Standards (2002), a multi-decade implementation period means that it will be many years before people with disabilities can experience equivalent access to public transportation. Promoting the participation of students with disabilities through distance education is a policy intervention that makes good sense in theory, but students with disabilities would appear to be much like other students and no more or less likely to undertake distance education. There is close to zero correlation between an institution's distance education program and enrolments of students with disabilities, even in institutions that were once specifically funded as Distance Education Centres. Distance education services of the past and today have played an important role in facilitating access for some students with disabilities, and at some institutions, but the utility of distance education would appear to have been over-stated for the disability cohort as a whole.

A Fair Chance for All recommendations around modifications to course materials and curriculum are best understood within anti-discrimination frameworks and models of disability. A strict adherence to a medical model of disability would imply that students would need to adapt and adjust to the curriculum. Expectations of consultation with students with disabilities to identify reasonable adjustments under disability discrimination legislation invoke social and ecological models of disability. The reasonable adjustment process legitimizes a need to modify curriculum, while upholding academic standards. An emerging focus of policy development related to curriculum modification is the practice of making inherent academic requirements explicit, which acts as a reference point for consultation around reasonable adjustments. From the time of the introduction of reasonable adjustment provisions in anti-discrimination legislation, there has been debate around what might be considered reasonable. Interpretations of curriculum and assessment can vary enormously across students, advocates, disability practitioners and academics. Through articulating inherent academic requirements, relevant stakeholders can embark on negotiations to identify reasonable adjustments with a clear reference point around what may or may not be feasible to support the participation of a student with a disability.

Early work on the concept of reasonable adjustments emerged from disability practitioner networks and CPHESD grants (Watts et al. 2000). Some universities are systematically articulating inherent academic requirements for all their programs of study (Bialocerkowski et al. 2013). A challenge in this area is the extent to which inherent requirements reflect exclusionary academic conventions developed over time; arising from limited interactions with people with disabilities, which itself is a function of the long-term exclusion of people with disabilities from mainstream society and academic disciplines (Brett 2014). Even with the best of intentions, statements of inherent academic requirements may serve to entrench what Ebersold (2008), p. 224 describes as a 'defectological' approach, that questions the 'educability' of persons with disability and emphasises what people cannot do. An alternative approach would be to consider the participation of students with disabilities as a

creative and innovative process, partnering with students and mobilizing stakeholders to create learning experiences and assessment tasks that are aligned with personal, developmental and career aspirations (Ebersold 2008, p. 228).

The fixed standards reference point aligned with efficient identification of reasonable adjustments under disability discrimination legislation is in some ways consistent with the mass higher education system evident in Australia today. If Australia is to achieve universal access to higher education, there is likely to be greater need to offer a personalised and customised higher education experience (Trow 1973). Already discourse around the digital disruption that higher education is about to experience places some premium on personalised and customised learning models (Tierney 2014). For now however, standards prevail, and it is much easier for a reasonable adjustment to involve a minor change to an existing requirement than change the requirement altogether (Shaw and Waterfield 2008). Additional time for exams for students with disabilities is a standard feature of examination periods, but substituting one assessment task for another is a much rarer form of adjustment.

Policy Innovations to Improve Participation and Outcomes

An important legacy of *A Fair Chance for All* has been the integration of disability questions into higher education data collection. This data availability has augmented sector and institutional policy and decision-making in ways that have supported the inclusion of students with disability. However, policy evaluation and research has engaged with disability in higher education only to a limited degree. Reports and publications on disability tend to draw upon higher education data with simplistic binary descriptions that have little to offer about the nature and impact of disability. Unsophisticated understandings of disability and the disability indicator can lead to sub-optimal policy decisions. The Bradley Review of Higher Education for example, while recommending a major boost to disability funding, utilized a participation ratio reference value that excluded persons with a profound and severe core participation restriction (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 28), leading to an over-estimation of the participation ratio for students with disability, and thereby diminishing the degree to which disability issues required greater policy attention and resources. There is scope for the higher education data collection to adopt a more sophisticated definition of disability that transcends a yes/no binary. There is also scope for the sector to reduce its reliance on the enrolment indicator, aligning institutional data collection and institutional research with tools such as the International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health.

The policy response to the Bradley Review of Higher Education did not lead to significantly increased disability funding. One can speculate as to whether the policy response may have been stronger had the degree of underrepresentation been made more clear within the Bradley Review. The question of funding for students with disabilities was an important one at the time of *A Fair Chance for All*, with a survey of institutions on the services and costs of providing support for students

with disabilities (Andrews and Smith 1992). Universities were clearly expending resources from within their operating grants to support the participation of students with disabilities in 1991, with some universities facing disproportionate costs if they enrolled higher numbers of students with more costly support requirements. It took over a decade for the Government to establish a specific funding program for students with disabilities that partially reimbursed universities for their disability related expenditure, with the Additional Support for Students with Disabilities Programme first operating in 2002.

Implicit in the design of the Additional Support for Students with Disabilities Programme are restrictions on the types of services eligible for funding, and the disability characteristics associated with these services. Claims cannot be made for infrastructure, general running costs of disability support services or personal care. Universities can be legitimately expected to ensure that core infrastructure and services are accessible and meet the requirements of relevant standards, so one cannot expect disability funding to cover all disability related costs. However, current frameworks and performance indicators do not sufficiently encourage investment in innovative service delivery that might facilitate better outcomes in both higher education and the labour market. The design of policy instruments that might achieve these outcomes is far from clear. Existing policy frameworks are highly successful on many levels, and one can expect continued incremental improvements in participation and service delivery. However, as long as the disability indicators remains superficial and poorly aligned with robust theoretical frameworks, an evidence base that might trigger more innovative approaches is absent.

The most pressing priority for research and policy innovation is around employment. It is concerning that the labour market participation statistics for graduates with disabilities are so different from those evident with those without disability. It would seem logical that if one can withstand the demands of higher education, one should not be excluded from employment. This issue was addressed explicitly in a thesis by Peter Gibilisco, questioning whether higher education for people with disabilities will 'ever be seen as more than an end in itself, and rather, as a means to an end?' (Gibilisco 2005, p. 225). For those with profound disability the answer to this question must in future be that higher education offers a normalised and routine progression to successful participation in the labour market. If this is to be achieved, policy settings that trigger creativity and innovation in higher education and the labour market will be required. Gibiliso again offers insights into what this might look like:

> My assertion is that society's responsibility increases in specific ways oriented to professional commitment and involvement once the student with a severe disability graduates (Gibilisco 2008).

There is considerable activity that explores ways to improve graduate employment for people with disabilities. Glascodine (2011) undertook a Churchill Fellowship that sought to identify and import the best of support practices for graduates with disabilities from the United Kingdom to Australia. Murfitt's (2006) exploration of graduate employment made the critical insight that direct experience

of disability is more likely to influence employers than constructed scenarios around graduate employment. Mentoring programs for students with disabilities are now common, a direct result of Murfitt's work.

Existing frameworks within higher education and anti-discrimination legislation remain grounded in principles of equal opportunity and equality of treatment that are somewhat ambivalent to the starting position and end point of individuals across the life course. An alternative approach is the prioritization of substantive equality, and being more prepared to treat people differently to achieve greater equity in social outcomes. While there are moves within some jurisdictions towards substantive equality (e.g., Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010), and greater consideration of equality of outcomes, progress is slow, and innovative approaches are rare. A new wave of interconnected and multidimensional policy responses, similar to those that contributed to increasing participation for students with disabilities (including *A Fair Chance for All*) is required. If this is to be achieved, better evidence and more sophisticated research will be key. At this point, both remain elusive.

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Chapter 7
Ivory Towers and Glass Ceilings: Women in Non-traditional Fields

Sharon Bell

Introduction

Globally we have seen unprecedented growth in women's participation in higher education over the past four decades. The report on Women in Higher Education under United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's *Global Education Digest* (United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO 2012) notes that the number of female students in tertiary education has grown almost twice as fast as men, largely reflecting 'changing values and attitudes related to the role and aspirations of women in society that are the legacy of social change and the feminist movements which emerged globally in the 1960s and 70s'.

In Australia these changes were reflected in improved retention rates of young females to Year 12 of schooling and increased rates of transition from Year 12 to higher education, documented from 1980 through the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (Long et al. 1999, p. 1).

It is also well documented that these global social changes were reflected in and enhanced by the policy and legislative environment. In 1984 Australia passed the Sex Discrimination Act and in 1986 the Australian Government passed the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act. At the individual state level legalisation covering equality and diversity was introduced at different times following the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act of 1977. Three states introduced Equal Opportunity Acts in 1984 (Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia). Data on the gender composition of university staff were first published in 1985 (Carrington and Pratt 2003, p. 4).

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Together with the government's national agenda for women *A Say, A Choice, a Fair Go* (1988) these were important precursors to *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Education, Employment & Training (DEET), 1990), which explicitly recognised the importance of the productivity as well as the equity agenda for women:

> Women are under-represented in most of the Government's key priority areas for economic development. In terms of national goals, women represent a pool of untapped potential. In addition, although women are equally represented in the current student population, their under-representation in the past has meant that there are still many older women in the community who have not had the opportunity to undertake (sic) in higher education.
>
> A more equal balance between the sexes in higher education will also help redress inequality in employment for women. Women's participation in the workforce will be directed away from areas of shrinking employment and into areas of skills shortage. This will help break down the present sex-segregation of the labour force and enable women to achieve the social and economic benefits of equality of employment opportunity (1990, p. 29).

The current Australian Government legislation to address gender discrimination in employment is the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012, which established the new Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), responsible for administering the Act and charged with promoting and improving gender equality in Australian workplaces. This Act has five principal objectives: to promote and improve gender equality; to support employers to remove barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the workforce; to promote the elimination of discrimination on the basis of gender in relation to employment matters; to foster workplace consultation; and to improve the productivity and competitiveness of Australian business through the advancement of gender equality (Winchester and Browning 2015, pp. 269–270).

Australian universities operate not only within the context of this legislation, but also within a system of regulatory frameworks specific to higher education. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), established in 2000, regulates and assures the quality of Australia's higher education sector against the Higher Education Standards Framework. The Standards Framework includes reference to student diversity stating that institutional policies, practices, and approaches to teaching and learning must be designed to accommodate student diversity, and specifying that staff must be equipped for their roles (Winchester and Browning 2015, p. 270).

Consistent with this legislative and regulatory framework and a global pattern of feminisation of the academy (Morley 2013, p. 3), in Australia women now outnumber men in many universities; over 50 % of the domestic student population in Australia is female, change graphically illustrated in the Grattan Institute Report *Mapping Australian Higher Education 2014–2015* (Fig. 7.1).

It is important to note however that the above schematic presents discontinuous data, as the Dawkins reforms of the late 1980s brought the previous Colleges of Advanced Education, and the non-university training colleges of teacher education, hospital nursing programs, schools of art and conservatoria into the university sector. These previously independent institutions were characterised by large proportions of female students and staff (Castleman et al. 1995) concentrated in certain disciplines – most notably education, nursing and the creative arts.
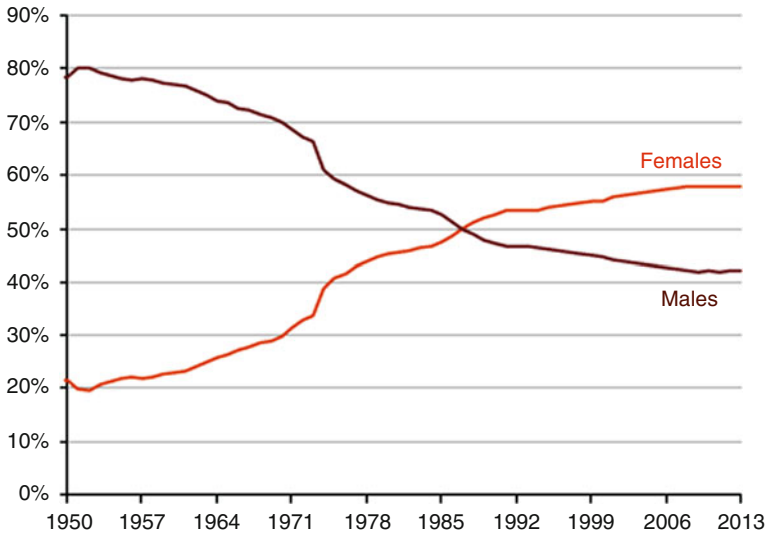
Fig. 7.1 Proportion of higher education enrolments by gender, 1950–2013 (Source: Norton and Cherastidtham 2014. Reproduced with permission from the Grattan Institute)

A Fair Chance for All

The impact of these structural changes in the sector on women's participation was explicitly recognised in *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1990) which, rather than merely accepting a population parity participation rate as appropriate, set out the following framework to address gender equity in higher education (p. 27):

The Objectives
To improve the balance of participation of women in higher education with particular emphasis on:

- non-traditional courses, including engineering, business studies, economics and science.
- research higher degrees.

The Targets

- To increase the proportion of women in non-traditional courses other than engineering from the current level to at least 40 % by 1995.
- To increase the proportion of women in engineering courses from 7 to 15 % by 1995.
- To increase the number of women in postgraduate study, particularly in research, relative to the proportion of female undergraduates in each field by 1995.

Strategies to Achieve the Objectives and the Targets

- Promoting non-traditional courses and careers for women and girls.
- Bridging courses, especially in mathematics and science.
- Supplementary support concurrent with award course enrolment.
- Curriculum review and development, and teaching processes that focus on non-traditional courses.
- Provision of adequate child-care.
- Special initiatives to encourage women to undertake postgraduate courses, particularly research.
- Flexible course arrangements.

At the undergraduate level this equity category was formalised in the Martin Review (Martin 1994) as 'Women in non-traditional areas of study: Female students who are enrolled in the Natural and Physical Sciences; Information Technology; Engineering and Related Technologies; Architecture and Building; Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies; Management and Commerce; and the narrow field of Education (Economics and Econometrics)'.

Unfortunately the specific *A Fair Chance for All* and subsequent Martin Review targets have been rendered invisible in our current policy environment, even though not all been met. Increasingly departmental commissioned reports have focused on the broad objective 'to improve the balance of participation of women in higher education' (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1990, p. 27) and by default for women the broad equity objective is taken to be 50 % (of both commencing students, and of total student enrolments) and this overshadows the targets set for women in non-traditional fields of study and the target to achieve parity of participation in research degrees with participation of women at the undergraduate level.

Definition of Equitable Outcomes

The equity framework treats an equitable outcome as 'one in which there is parity between percentage group representation in education and in the general population. Distance from parity is measured by reference to Equity Indicators, or target values, which are based on percentage equity group membership in the 15–64 year old Australian population' (James et al. 2008, p. 14). The equity target group 'women in non-traditional courses' is an exception to this, with the targets set at 40 % participation for business, economics and science and 15 % participation in engineering and IT.

It can be assumed that the decisions re targets in *A Fair Chance for All* were framed to identify 'achievable' targets to be reached within a very short time frame (5 years), but when outcomes are then measured against other equity groups these significantly different targets skew understanding of outcomes, enabling Universities
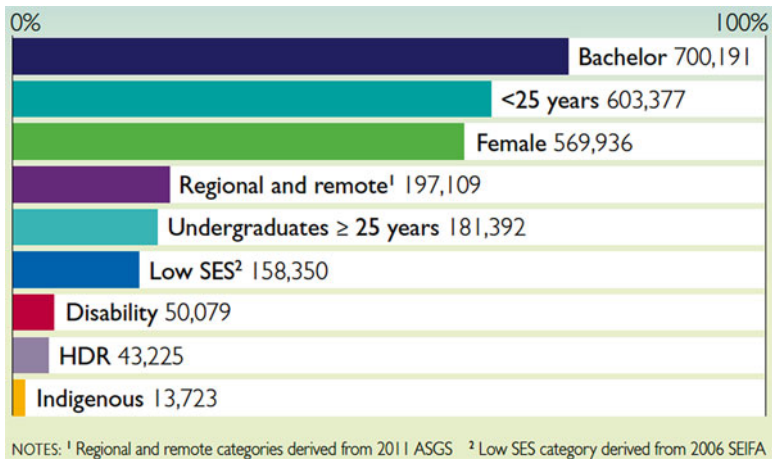
Fig. 7.2 Domestic student proportions by category 2013 (Source: *Universities Australia Data Snapshot 2015, Domestic Student Proportions by category 2013 table*. Data sources: Department of Education and Training and Australian Bureau of Statistics Data as at February 2015. Reproduced with permission from Universities Australia)

Australia (UA) for example, to produce the following set of key statistics which conflates identified equity groups (with no reference to targets) with broad student categories based on level of study and age (Universities Australia 2015, p. 6). This type of representation generates an overly positive impression of achievement in relation to female participation vis à vis other equity categories (Fig. 7.2).

Policy Drift: Women in Non-traditional Disciplines

Over the past decade, since the James et al. 2004 review report *An Analysis of Equity Groups in Higher Education 1991–2002* (DEST), there has been a refocusing of interest on the groupings:

- people from low socio-economic backgrounds;
- people from rural or isolated areas; and
- Indigenous people.

One recommendation of the 2004 review was that targets be set for men in Nursing (20 %), Society and Culture (40 %) and Education (40 %). This is reflective of heightened public interest in the participation and success of 'boys' in education, and increasing 'concern' expressed re the high levels of participation of women in undergraduate education. In fact in their 2008 report James et al. state, without supporting evidence, that 'women are now over-represented in most fields' coupled

with the rider 'although not in all and certainly not at higher degree level' (James et al. 2008, p. 15).

From a policy perspective what is interesting is that analysis of equity outcomes has not been adequately configured in the context of the original *Fair Chance for All* or subsequent Martin Report targets. Moreover, reporting and review processes tend to focus on Broad Field of Education, therefore disguising significant and enduring disciplinary differences. This is particularly relevant when the research shows that women constitute the majority of participants in higher education from Low SES (57 %), Rural (60 %) and Isolated (63 %) equity groups (James et al. 2008, 11) which in turn contributes to patterns of participation in fields of study, level of course and university type (p. 19).

This process of policy drift does not appear to have been a purposeful and definitive change in policy but rather an understated change of priorities with the high priority of Low SES participation dominating the policy space. The outcome is that 'women' have been rendered invisible in key higher education policy reports such as the Bradley Review of 2008 (Bradley et al. 2008).

Subsequently, reporting on women's participation was not a performance indicator in Mission Based Compact agreements (2011–2013) in terms of either undergraduate participation or in relation to research training or the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). The HEPPP aims to encourage and assist HE providers to meet the Commonwealth Government's ambition that, by 2020, 20 % of domestic undergraduate students be from low SES backgrounds. Projects funded under HEPPP (2015–2018) include the Widening Participation Longitudinal Study –Scoping Study that aims to explore the success of interventions to support people from disadvantaged backgrounds access and participate at university by tracing the progress of a cohort of prospective and actual students over a period of time.

Currently, the Commonwealth tracks enrolment performance for major equity groups in comparison with equity group reference values but the equity group women in non-traditional disciplines is not included. This means that although the overall participation of women has been consistently mapped and Departmental data includes data on this equity group there are few sources of comprehensive analysis against the *Fair Chance for All* targets for women in non-traditional disciplines and this equity group is no longer included the Departments Equity Performance data or higher education reports.

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) reported on domestic undergraduate student enrolment and equity outcomes from 2007 to 2012 in the context of the broadening of higher education participation since 2007 (Koshy 2014). This report did not include women in non-traditional disciplines, but a subsequent Briefing Note on Student Equity Performance in Higher Education 2007–2013 (Koshy and Seymour 2014) provides a brief report on the seven equity groups originally designated by the Martin report (1994) including women in non-traditional areas (Koshy and Seymour 2014, p. 4).

It is interesting to note from this report that since 2007 while Table A higher education providers have expanded equity enrolments the category women in

non-traditional areas was the second slowest area of growth in participation. Over this period the number of reported students with disability increased by 57.6 % while Indigenous student numbers increased by 45.6 %. Growth in low SES student numbers was 37.4 %, while growth in NESB numbers increased by 36.9 %. By contrast slower growth was evidenced in the equity categories regional (26 %) and remote students (11.8 %) and women in non-traditional areas (15.5 %). In fact women in non- traditional areas declined as a proportion of total enrolments from 19.4 % in 2008 to 18.8 % in 2013 (Koshy and Seymour 2014, p. 10).

Knowledge of these differential patterns of women's participation, particularly at the level of Narrow Field of Education, is limited. There are exceptions to this. One is the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS) report on women in science (Bell et al. 2009) a report commissioned in part in response to growing awareness of the looming personnel shortages thought to be facing the academic and research sectors.

Women in Science

In the FASTS report time series student data from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is summarized. This data shows that in 2007 women made up 55 % of all undergraduate students and 52 % of post-graduate students (DEEWR 2007). However, the number of female students is not evenly distributed between the different fields of education. The Health and Education fields had the highest numbers of female students at 73 and 74 % respectively. This is in marked contrast to the fields of Engineering and Information Technology where the numbers of female students make up only 15.5 and 19 % respectively, only just above the 1995 target set by *A Fair Chance for All*. Other fields such as Natural and Physical Sciences (52 %), and Management and Commerce (48.5 %) hover around 50 % but do exceed the 1990 40 % target.

The FASTS report found that women were represented at more than the 1990 equity target of 40 % in only 7 of the 29 'narrow fields' of SET education: agriculture, forestry studies, environmental studies, chemical sciences, earth sciences, biological sciences and other natural and physical sciences (Bell et al. 2009, 35). The uneven representation of women in the different fields of education is a manifestation of horizontal segregation, well documented in the literature (Carrington and Pratt 2003, p. 7).

Moreover, the period of significant growth in the participation of women in all fields of education was in the decade 1983–1993. Since 1993 participation has continued to grow but at a slower rate with the exception of the broad field Agriculture, Environment and Related Studies.

Snapshot data clearly indicates that even when relatively high levels of participation at undergraduate and post-graduate levels have been achieved there is a post-doctoral 'tipping-point' (Bell and Bentley 2005) and persistently low levels of representation of women at senior levels of the academy – evidence of vertical

segregation (Carrington and Pratt 2003, p. 7). The research of Castleman et al. (1995) on the payroll data of a sample of universities suggests that women are distributed unevenly amongst high and low demand disciplines and that where they form a sizeable minority of academics in high demand disciplines they remain concentrated in the lower levels of the classification structure (1995, pp. 46–48).

Data on participation in higher education graphically illustrates established patterns of low levels of participation in engineering and information technology and low rates of retention and success in and beyond the postdoctoral phase for all other broad fields of science. In 2007 women constituted more than 50 % of natural and physical sciences bachelor degree completions but less than 15 % of level D & E academic staff (DEEWR 2008; 2009, p. 18).

By 2011, in the natural and physical sciences, women made up 56 % of completing students at the bachelor level, 50 % of honours completions and 51 % of doctorate completions (Fig. 7.3).

Between 2001 and 2011, the proportion of women at the bachelor level remained relatively constant, at the honours level a slight decline in representation is discernible, while at the doctorate level representation increased (Fig. 7.4). There continues to be a marked difference in the proportions of female and male staff members in senior academic positions.

Figure 7.4 shows that over 2001–2011 there were increases in the proportions of female staff at higher levels of employment in the sciences, especially at levels C (rising from 18 to 32.5 %) and D (12 to 20 %), but the rate of change is little more than 1 % per annum. At Level E the rate of change is less than 1 % per annum and from a low base (from 7 % in 2001 to 14 % in 2011). There were more marked increases in other fields over this time, as Fig. 7.5 shows.

Fig. 7.3 Female representation by student completions and academic level, 2011 (Source: ACER DIISRTE Higher Education Statistics Collection, customised data, 2011)

Fig. 7.4 Female representation by student completions and academic level, sciences, 2001–2011 (Source: ACER DIISRTE Higher Education Statistics Collection, customised data, 2001–2011)

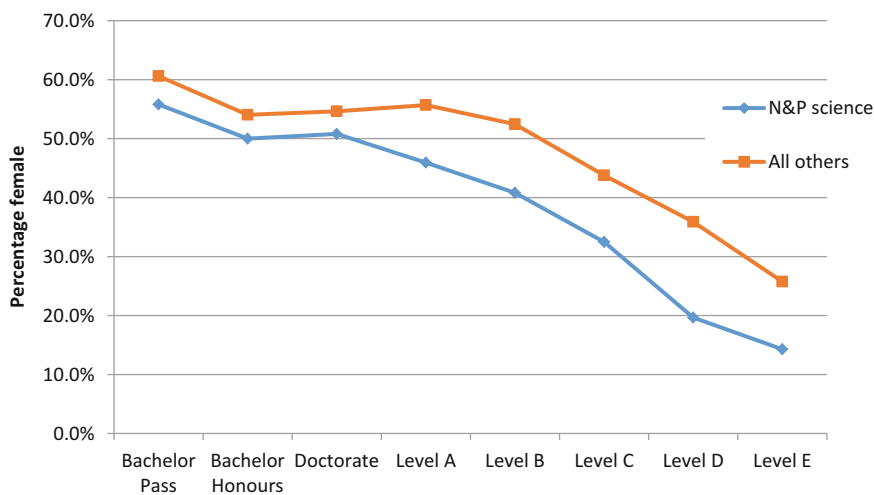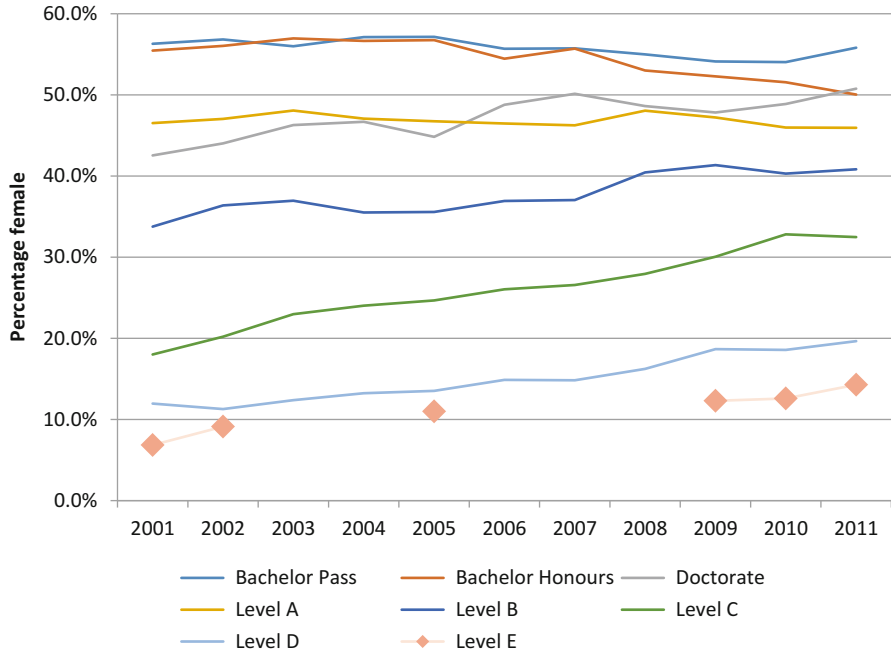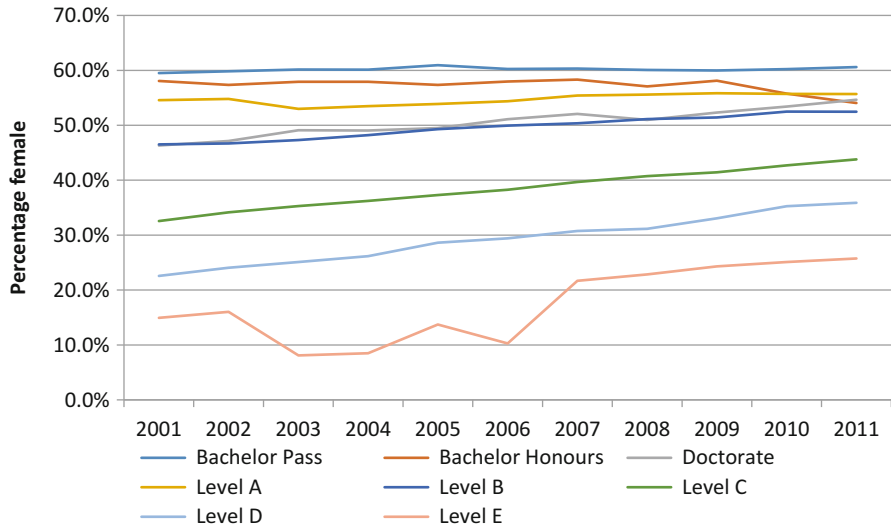
Fig. 7.5 Female representation by student completions and academic level, non-sciences, 2001–2011 (Source: DIISRTE Higher Education Statistics Collection, customised data, 2001–2011)

The overall sustained pattern of gender inequality in universities in Australia is consistent with the international evidence base (National Science Foundation NSF 2009; National Academy of Sciences, Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science, Engineering Committee on Science Public Policy 2007; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD 2006). It is also increasingly recognised that the attrition of women from the scientific professions impacts negatively on productivity and, through the consequent failure to achieve diversity, limits innovation (Bell et al. 2009; Hewlett et al. 2008; National Academy of Sciences, Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science, Engineering Committee on Science Public Policy 2007).

Does Discipline Matter?

As outlined above we know that women are now participating in significant numbers in undergraduate programs and increasingly in postgraduate programs. But we also know they are clustered in traditional disciplinary groupings, particularly Health and Education with some notable recent 'break-throughs': law, medical science, veterinary science, and environmental sciences. The pattern of disciplinary change at the broad level of education is summarized in Table 7.1.

In terms of overall patterns of equity as measured by participation in higher education the question arises 'Does discipline matter?' or is it a question of *vive la différence?*

In terms of research quality, volume and measures of esteem we know that all disciplines are not equal. Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA 2011, 2012) provides detailed data by discipline on research income, staffing profiles, national competitive grants and measures of esteem. In the 2012 evaluation at the two digit Field of Research level the outstanding fields are: Medical and Health Science (11) with Clinical Science and Public Health and Health Services being the outstanding

Table 7.1 Differences by broad field of education

Female dominated	*Increasing female participation*	Male dominated
Creative arts	*Agriculture & environment*	Architecture[a] and building
Education	*Management & commerce*	Engineering & related technologies
Health	*Natural and physical sciences*[a]	Information technology
Society and culture (including Law)		

Note: [a]These broad fields disguise significant disciplinary differences. For instance in the field of Natural and Physical Sciences women's participation is relatively low in disciplines (Narrow Fields of Education) such as Mathematical Sciences, Physics and Astronomy and Earth and Chemical Sciences. In fields such as Biological Sciences there is significant participation of women (Bell et al. 2009, 17). Similarly the field Architecture and Building disguises the increasing participation of women in Architecture (Whitman 2005, p. 7)

narrow fields of research within this broad field; Engineering (09) with Electrical and Electronic Engineering being the outstanding narrow field of research within this broad field; and Biological Sciences with Biochemistry and Cell Biology being the outstanding narrow field of research within this broad field. These broad fields of research account for 42 % (22 %, 12 % and 8 % respectively) of the research outputs assessed for ERA 2012 with the next most significant fields being Information and Computer Science (6 %) with the narrow field of Artificial Intelligence and Image Processing outstanding, and Commerce, Management and Tourism Services (6 %) with the narrow field Business and Management outstanding. At the level of broad field of research Medical and Health Science (82), Engineering (27) and Biological Sciences (25) record the highest number of outputs of any broad fields rated at level five 'outstanding performance well above world standard' (2012, pp. 18–20).

The Australian Research Council does not yet publish data on gender distribution in ERA so it is not possible to draw conclusions regarding the gendered nature of these fields of research except to note that Engineering, Business Studies and Science were each 'non-traditional fields' targeted for the increased participation of women in *A Fair Chance for All.* Analysis of data on participation in higher education graphically illustrates established patterns of low levels of participation in engineering and IT and low rates of retention and success in and beyond the post-doctoral phase for all other broad fields of science (Bell et al. 2009, p. 35).

Equity for Women in Higher Education

To articulate what equity might look like beyond numerical targets (ratio to reference target values) it is a reasonable assumption that women who enter the tertiary sector should be able to aspire to levels of achievement comparable to males in the sector. That given similar levels of capability (evidenced by undergraduate, honours and post-graduate completions) their life circumstances and the organisational culture of the sector should not be an impediment to reaching the highest levels of success. Including:

- participation and success in a range of disciplines including 'high demand' (Castleman et al. 1995) and 'non-traditional' (including research intensive) disciplines
- participation and success in all types and all levels of research from institutional based programs to national competitive programs
- participation and success in those programs targeting the highest levels of research excellence, and
- representation in leadership comparable to participation in the sector across a range of institutional types from comprehensive to research-intensive.

We have already seen that the first condition, participation and success in a range of disciplines including 'non-traditional' and 'research intensive' disciplines has not been uniformly met. Of domestic students the total number of women in non-
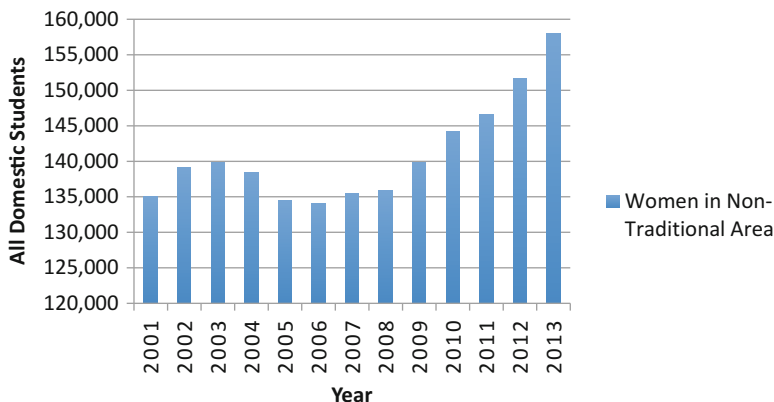
Fig. 7.6 Women in non-traditional areas 2001–2013 (Source: DET Higher Education Statistics All Domestic Students by Equity Group)

traditional disciplines has increased by only 22,927 from 134,999 in 2001 to 157,926 in 2013 (Fig. 7.6).

The need to recognise 'the important role for women in the growth and regeneration of the HDR workforce' (Edwards et al. 2009, p. 53) is obviously intimately tied to future research performance, as is clarity around academic career paths and opportunities. There is a pressing need to identify and eliminate the drivers of the post-doctoral 'tipping point' through organizational change and employment practices as these are arguably critical factors, not just in attracting and retaining female students, but also in encouraging them to join the academic and research workforces. Dever et al.'s research on post PhD employment suggests gendered experiences. Female graduates report significantly less encouragement than males from supervisors in gaining employment and building academic careers (2008, p. ii). These researchers conclude that social relationships and academic and professional connections are critical to good employment outcomes (2008, p. iii). This finding is reinforced by the recent research by Bell and Yates (2015) on women qualified at the postgraduate in biological and chemical sciences.

May (2011) reports that since the mid-1980s the majority of new academic staff appointed in the sector have been casual staff, and following Percy (2008), it is estimated that casuals now perform the majority of undergraduate teaching. From Unisuper data May has been able to ascertain that there are 67,000 individual casual staff in the sector and that of these 57 % are women. Are these casual staff the role models, promoting the advantages of an academic research career that will motivate students to aspire to 'roles like theirs'?

It is fair to say that a great deal of research has described gendered patterns of participation in the sector whilst far less has addressed strategies for change. Increasingly the need to move beyond compliance with the equal opportunity legislative environment (taken as a given in higher education and government) to focus

on equality of outcomes is being recognized. It is arguable that in the case of women access does not yet equal equity.

In this context it is instructive to consider the university experience through the eyes of the student. Many of our students undoubtedly experience gendered institutions but institutions that are, through their eyes, dominated by women: from the administrative staff who handle recruitment and enquiries, the casual teachers in the highly feminised disciplines in which many study, the professional support staff in libraries, counseling services and equity offices. They are unlikely, until postgraduate studies, to gain entrée to the world of university research, and if they happen to be one of the few in a 'non-traditional' discipline they may find the competitive, even ruthless research environment unattractive. Perhaps at graduation ceremonies they are surprised to find there are so many senior males who also inhabit their scholarly universe.

Change to this experience inevitably demands systematic organizational cultural change, ensuring that 'women have no doors closed to them that are open to men' (Cockburn 1991, p. 31). This is a move from 'accommodation' of women to 'reframing' the professional environment – a move that also calls into question conventional masculinities (Williams 2000, p. 271). This change is critical, not just for women, but also for many of the disadvantaged students who now enter higher education as we have moved to a much more open and less selective system.

Carole Leathwood argues that 'notions of academic 'ability' are central to higher education, with a university education generally regarded as a mark of significant intellectual capacity. Traditionally, access to HE was reserved for a relatively small and elite strata of society, and moves to expand and widen participation in the 1960s resulted in claims that academic standards would inevitably decline. This moral panic about 'dumbing down' has accompanied both increasing levels of achievement and the participation of new groups of students in the academy. Classed, racialised and gendered assumptions impact on the kinds of higher education deemed appropriate for different students, the valuing of different courses/disciplines, the denigration of 'needy' students, and what constitutes a 'good' university' (Leathwood and Read 2009).

Policy settings that lack nuance and focus only on one dimension of the academic enterprise – undergraduate participation – can blind us to entrenched patterns of inequality that, despite the banner headlines, remain firmly in place. Change is partly dependent on revisiting the original *Fair Chance for All* focus on women in non-traditional disciplines and significantly on improving university employment opportunities for recent PhD graduates and generating equity of access to the pathways to these opportunities. Change is also dependent on leadership and the type of nuanced understanding of differential equity outcomes for identified equity groups evidenced in *A Fair Chance for All.*

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Chapter 8
Access, Achievement and Outcomes Among Students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds

Kemran Mestan

Introduction

Although Government reports recognised that NESB people as a whole were well represented in higher education by the 1980s, the same reports also noted that a number of ethnic groups were under-represented (Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission 1986; DEET 1987). At the same time that equity in higher education was being taken seriously, increasing attention was given to the social inclusion of ethnic minorities. In 1989, the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia established a government strategy to improve access to services and promote equitable outcomes, with reference to overcoming language and cultural barriers. A specific objective was to ensure that access to higher education was equally available to all ethnic groups (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989). The equity categories used in *A Fair Chance for All* were identified in the 1970s for the purposes of promoting social justice in schooling (James and McInnis 2005), but it was in the context of the heightened emphasis on multicultural policy as a means to promote 'social justice' in the 1980s, that NESB continued to be considered an equity category for the case of higher education (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989).

The objectives relating to NESB people in *A Fair Chance for All* were:

- To increase participation of people from non-English speaking background groups that are under-represented in higher education.
- To improve the balance of participation of non-English speaking background students by sex and discipline.

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The first NESB objective acknowledged that not all lingual minorities were under-represented in higher education. Furthermore, *A Fair Chance for All* recognised that there was uneven participation across disciplines and between sexes by various lingual minorities. Despite this recognition, when it came to defining the NESB category in Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education (EGPI), a homogenous category was delineated. It was explained that distinguishing lingual groups makes the categories too small to derive meaningful statistical conclusions (Martin 1994, p. 70). Using geographic regions was considered (e.g. European and Asian) but there was wide diversity within such groups (Martin 1994, p. 85).

In comparison, the equivalent measure in the United Kingdom (UK) (black and ethnic minorities [BEM]) distinguishes between five groups: blacks, Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis and Chinese. In the United States (US), African-Americans and Latino participation is measured. Measuring the engagement of specific ethnic and marginalised groups is appropriate when there are large numbers of people from a small number of ethnic groups. However, NESB people in Australia come from a large number of diverse ethnic groups. Each jurisdiction needs to tailor its measurement of minority engagement with higher education to its demographics. Thus, the approaches of the UK and the US are not transferable to Australia.

In accordance with the difficulty and inappropriateness of distinguishing ethnic groups in Australia, Martin defined NESB as having three components: domestic students who were born overseas, have been in Australia for less than 10 years and who speak a language other than English at home (1994). This definition relied on data that was already collected by institutions. Although *A Fair Chance for All* affirms that 'distinction needs to be drawn … between first and second generations' (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990, p. 36), a narrower definition was provided in EGPI via the aforementioned 10 year proviso.

The 10 year proviso used in the official definition is particularly contested. Recently arrived migrants are often more advantaged than migrants who have been in Australia for considerably longer (Birrell and Healy 2008). The 10 year proviso was included on the presumption that that those who have been in Australia for more than 10 years have generally had sufficient time to become enculturated and have likely undertaking secondary schooling in Australia, thus are therefore relatively less disadvantaged (Australian Education Council 1996, p. 71). First generation NESB people have had proportionately lower participation in higher education than new arrivals since at least the early 1990s (Dobson et al. 1996, p. 54). The link between length of time in the country and language fluency is tenuous, many factors influence language acquisition and ability, such as socioeconomic background (Mincham 1995; Windle 2004). Not all people from NESBs have English language difficulties (Grebennikov and Skaines 2009).

The report acknowledged that the definition provided for the NESB category was the 'least satisfactory', amongst the equity categories outlined in *A Fair Chance for All* (Martin 1994, p. 85) Accordingly, 're-thinking' the issues related to the NESB category in 'subsequent work' was recommended (Martin 1994). Despite this recommendation, the definition of the NESB category officially used for higher

education reporting remains unchanged. Most Australian government bodies, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department responsible for immigration and settlement, have ceased using the term 'NESB', instead switching to Culturally and Linguistic Diverse (CALD). This followed from a decision in 1996 by the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, which accepted that 'NESB is seen as an oversimplified indicator of disadvantage, which may result in inappropriate service provision and neglect the positive aspects of cultural and linguistic diversity'(Commonwealth Interdepartmental Committee on Multicultural Affairs 2001). Researchers apply broader definitions of NESB and utilise related terms such as 'ethnic minority'. Examples of such divergent definitions include not restricting the period of time in the country to 10 years, or including students with a parent born in a non-English speaking country (Equity and Diversity Unit 2012; Marks and Fleming 1998).

Definitional tensions are also evident in the way that higher education institutions apply the category. For example, there is variance between universities in Victoria in setting the length of time in Australia when considering applications through the Special Entry Admissions Scheme (SEAS). Consideration given to English language difficulties also differs between state tertiary admissions centres. Thus, while all universities adopt the Australian Government definition for data collection purposes, institutions differ in their definition of NESB for supporting access. The relationship between NESB and educational disadvantage is therefore both complex and contested. The NESB cohort is heterogeneous, with different ethnic groups suffering from varying degrees of disadvantage, whilst some ethnic minorities outperform people from English speaking backgrounds. These tensions underline the need for a nuanced approach. In addition to appreciating the sub-trends of access to university, NESB disadvantage materialises at later stages of the higher education lifecycle, that is, with achievement, and then extends even further with regard to employment outcomes (Mestan and Harvey 2014).

As with other equity targets in *A Fair Chance for All* (except women and indigenous people) the NESB targets were not quantified. The target was for:

> All institutions with significant proportions of non-English speaking background groups in their catchment area to provide higher education awareness programs and adequate support programs by 1992 (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990, p. 35).

Given that the objectives focussed on participation, it can only be assumed that the target related to 'support programs' aimed to improve retention, and thereby maintain participation amongst those who access higher education. Quantified targets were later provided in EGPI (Martin 1994, p. 71), which included retention and success as well as access and participation. The access rates were measured in comparison to a reference value, derived from the number of NESB people in the population aged 15–64, which was 8.3 %. The other indicators were based on ratios of the NESB and the non-NESB population and therefore have a reference value of 1.

Despite the inclusion of retention and success indicators, government incentives to improve equity have concentrated on access and participation. The Australian Government Higher Education Participation Programme (HEPP) is the latest

manifestation of the focus on access. HEPP provides financial incentives to universities for enrolling individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as grants for university outreach. (Peacock et al. 2013). Government support for NESB students has arguably been de-emphasised. Initiatives that were introduced in 1987 as part of the National Policy on Languages, such as the 'Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Supplementation Program', which aimed to 'boost multicultural and intercultural studies in tertiary education institutions' (Young and Holding 1987) have been discontinued. Conversely, special initiatives remain for low socioeconomic, regional and indigenous people.

A focus on participation is necessary but insufficient to redress inequity in higher education. The inadequacy of an equity policy centred on participation is evident in considering higher education as part of a lifecycle. Attracting students to university is seen as beneficial largely because those students will graduate with sought-after skills and qualifications, thereby gaining better employment outcomes than non-graduates (Norton 2012). Accessing university is rarely considered to be an end in itself. Given the advantages of higher education to the individual, it is important that no groups are excluded from the opportunity to participate, but achievement and outcomes cannot be assumed. Access is an insufficient indicator of disadvantage, as disadvantage does not wash out over the course of study (Mestan and Harvey 2014). Inequity manifests itself at different points of the higher education lifecycle for different groups. The comparative outcomes associated with each of the equity categories differ between access, achievement and graduate outcomes. Each stage of this higher education lifecycle will now be examined with regards to NESB people.

Access

The rate of NESB participation at university in Australia has oscillated. In 1991, the ratio of the proportion of NESB people in higher education across all levels of courses compared to the general population was 0.88 (Australian Education Council 1996, p. 33). By 1995, NESB people went from being under-represented to over-represented, with the ratio climbing to 1.13 (Australian Education Council 1996, p. 33). This over-representation was consistent with international trends in similarly ethnically diverse countries. In the UK, for example, most ethnic minorities are over-represented at university, albeit less so at elite universities and courses (Modood 2012).

The 2008 government-commissioned Bradley Review of higher education in Australia found that NESB people continued to be well represented in higher education, but their rate of participation declined from the mid-1990s. In 2007, NESB people comprised 3.7 % of the general population and comprised 3.8 % of the higher education cohort, which constitutes a ratio of 1.02 (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 29). In 2011, NESB people appeared under-represented in higher education. People from a NESB comprised 5.3 % of the general population, but only 3.6 % of
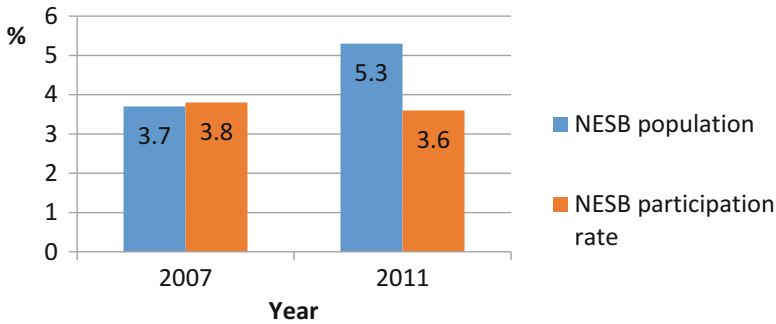
Fig. 8.1 Comparing change in NESB participation

higher education students (DIICCSRTE 2011), meaning that their ratio of participation had fallen to 0.66 (Fig. 8.1).[1]

The continual decline in NESB representation since the 1990s largely reflects changes to Australia's migration program. As the Bradley review recognised:

> While students from non-English-speaking backgrounds appear to have experienced a decline in participation over the period, this is largely due to changes in immigration policy. The current higher education profile for these students is now broadly representative of the general population (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 28)

The proportion of people accepted in the Australian Migration Programme under the 'skilled' stream grew from 51 % in 1997–1998 to 68 % in 2012–2013 (Australian Government 2014, p. 20). Since socio-economic status and parents' level of education is correlated with one's participation in higher education (Cobb-Clark and Nguyen 2010; Marks et al. 2000), it is to be expected that the children of migrants who arrive on skilled visas will not be as disadvantaged as the children of unskilled migrants. Furthermore, many of the skilled migrants are former international students, with the department responsible for immigration stating – 'Onshore migration is driven by graduating international student' (Australian Government 2014, p. 20). When former international students gain permanent residence status they are counted in the domestic NESB population, but having completed an Australian degree they are not likely to begin another degree. Furthermore, Australia has improved the recognition of foreign qualifications, again mitigating the need for migrants to embark on higher education in Australia. Consequently, although the NESB population has grown, they are less likely enrolled in university, making it appear as though NESB people are under-represented.

About 27 % of permanent migrants are part of the family stream, more than three quarters of whom are partners of Australian residents (Australian Government

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[1] This figure was calculated by dividing the number of NESB enrolments by the total number of NESB people in the Australian population. This was the method used in the Bradley Review, whereas the figures from the 1996 Australia Education Council report used the population aged 15–64.
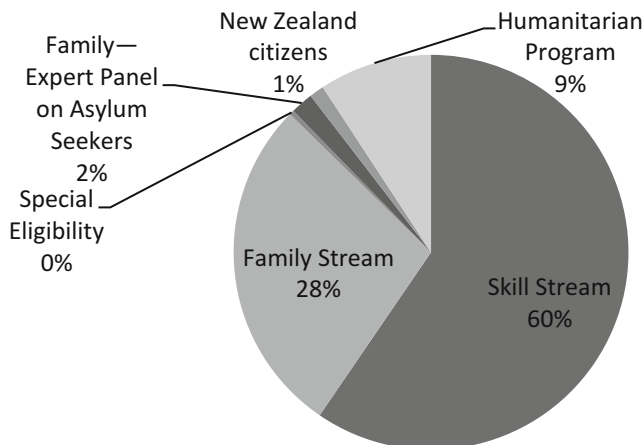
Fig. 8.2 Australian permanent migrants by category 2012/13 (Source: Australian Government 2014)

2014, pp. 7, 33). Only 4 % of the family stream visas in 2012/2013 were provided to children, who would be most likely to benefit from policies supporting access to higher education (Australian Government 2014, p. 35). Figure 8.2 presents the breakdown by program category of Australian permanent migrants in 2012/2013. According to the 2011 census, amongst all people who migrated to Australia before 2007, 295,000 (about 9 % of all migrants) marked the category describing their English proficiency as poor (Australian Government 2014, p. 119). Although people might underreport the extent that their English language skills are poor, considering that most of the people in question will be of an age that makes their participation in higher education unlikely, a relatively small proportion of migrants need special consideration in accessing higher education.

The healthy representation of NESB students at university has led some researchers to conclude that the NESB category should not be an equity target group (James et al. 2004, p. 42; Watson and Pope 2000, p. 6). Nevertheless, many universities are still guided by the official equity policy framework and continue to offer preferential access to NESB students. In the state of Victoria for example, all eight universities recognise NESB in their access schemes, and many provide bonus selection points, which enables the Australian tertiary admissions rank (ATAR) of students to be recalibrated.

Higher rates of NESB participation can be substantially explained by their comparatively greater aspirations to attend university (Marjoribanks 2005). Bowden and Doughney (2010, p. 28) found that Australian students who do not speak English at home aspire to attend university at 30 % higher rates than average. Reported rates of access thus conceal the extent of unmet expectations.

Furthermore, the overall strong NESB representation masks sub-trends. The cohort is heterogeneous in terms of other demographic qualities, such as socio-

economic status, parental level of education, and cultural characteristics. There is substantial variation in access rates amongst NESB demographic groups. There is evidence that certain lingual-ethnic groups (such as Chinese and Vietnamese) on average perform well in secondary school, with their representation at university reflecting this strength; conversely, some lingual-ethnic groups (such as Turks, Arabs, Pacific Islanders and Africans) perform less well (Considine and Zappalà 2002; James et al. 2004; Windle 2004). Consequently, high performance of some lingual-ethnic groups conceals the relative disadvantage of others. Public schools with high concentrations of NESB students have witnessed a relative decline in university offers, along with public schools in general (Edwards et al. 2005, p. 27). However, positive discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is not a practical option, as the number of people in many ethnic groups will be too small to make statistical generalisations. Categories containing few people are prone to volatility in statistical outcomes, which does not necessarily reflect social disadvantage.

This heterogeneity was recognised in *A Fair Chance for All*, which suggested that universities develop specific equity plans that reflect the nature of disadvantage amongst ethnic minorities within their catchment. However, with the creation of a unified NESB equity category, and data collected for the category as a whole, policy settings have not encouraged universities to develop sophisticated strategies. When the equity and performance indicators were defined it was recommended that universities examine how NESB intersects with other factors, such as sex and socio-economic status in their catchments (Martin 1994, p. 85). However, without specific targets, little action appears to have been taken by universities in this regard.

In regards to NESB female participation, considerable progress has been made. In 1992, only 45 % of the NESB population was female, compared to 55 % of the ESB population (James et al. 2004). By the year 2000, however, female students had become the majority of the NESB population, at 52 % (James et al. 2004). In 2013, 54 % of all domestic students who were born outside of Australia were female (Department of Education and Training (DET) 2013). This was less than the Australian born population, where 59 % of students were female. Since female participation amongst both NESB and English-speaking background (ESB) people is strong, the gap between the two categories might seem unproblematic. However, the participation rate of females averaged across all non-Australian countries of origin is reduced due to females from particular countries being under-represented. In two of nine regions females were under-represented: 'Southern and Central Asia', as well as the 'Middle East and North Africa'. In both regions females make up 48 % of domestic students in Australia. Hence, it appears that universities with significant populations of people from those two regions need to implement practices to improve the representation of females from those groups, and incentives for universities to act need to be considered.

The sub-category of NESB people who are particularly disadvantaged are people from a refugee background (Ben-Moshe et al. 2008; Hannah 1999). During 2012–13, about 9 % of permanent migrants settled in Australia as part of the Humanitarian Program (Australian Government 2014, p. 7). Almost all people who enter the country on the refugee or humanitarian visas are from non-English speaking countries

(Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DiAC) 2011). A large scale survey for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship found that only about 4.9 % of Humanitarian entrants obtained a university degree 5 years after arriving in Australia (Australian Survey Research Group 2011, p. 18). The majority of Australian universities do not provide specific and systematic support for people from refugee backgrounds to access their institutions, although in most states applications can be made to entry access schemes on grounds such as enduring 'difficult circumstances', from which refugees can benefit. The University Admissions Centre (UAC), which processes applications for New South Wales and Canberra universities, recently added 'refugees' as a category entitling applicants to bonus points.

The objective of the NESB equity category needs to reflect the particular disadvantage of NESB people (Mestan and Harvey 2014). Access and participation appears not to be an extensive problem for NESB people, except for people from refugee backgrounds. Hence, access and participation objectives should be amended to concentrate on people from refugee backgrounds. Currently, universities collect and report on the citizenship and visa status of their students, so refugee students can be identified However, people (or their parents) who arrived in Australia on a humanitarian visa who have since become citizens will not be identified in university records as refugees. Thus, the number of people from refugee backgrounds will be underestimated. Although the number of people from refugee backgrounds in higher education cannot currently be accurately identified, the number of people who enter universities through a refugee provision of tertiary admission centres (especially if all centres adopt the UAC process of a specific refugee stream) in conjunction with those on a humanitarian visa can be used as a proxy indicator. The number of people in Australia from a refugee background can be used as an aspirational indicator, that is, rather than a target that universities should be achieving, a benchmark that universities can strive toward. Despite some provision made for refugees through admission centres, without national targets, accompanied by incentives, universities may not adequately reach out to people from refugee backgrounds.

Furthermore, the proportion of students from refugee backgrounds can be compared between institutions. A loading could be provided for each student that institutions have from a refugee background. This would incentivise institutions to both reach out to refugee communities, as well as request students from refugee backgrounds who have become citizens to self-disclose, verified by evidence of their refugee background status. Educational institutions partnering with community organisations is one avenue to improve educational engagement of people from refugees backgrounds (Sidhu and Taylor 2009).

Addressing the under-representation of specific ethnic minorities within the NESB category is better left to institutions, which can develop strategies related to the demographics of their surrounding region. Ethnic minorities who are under-represented are likely to suffer from compound disadvantage, such as also coming from a low socioeconomic background. In the case of some ethnic minorities, females are underrepresented. Governments could require institutions to develop 'equity plans', such as those that followed *A Fair Chance for All* (DEET 1993),

identifying under-represented ethnic minorities, mindful of gender, in their region, and a plan to engage those minorities. In the case of people from refugee backgrounds, national targets and incentives can be institutionalised.

Achievement

Whilst NESB students *in general* are well represented at university, the cohort underperforms academically (Mestan and Harvey 2014). Unit failure rates are higher for NESB students than for ESB students, as measured by the success ratio.[2] In addition, there is evidence that the NESB cohort generally attains lower marks (Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER) 2010). Further research based on the business faculties of two Australian universities found that domestic 'NESB students experience significantly lower marks than students who speak English in the home' (Foster 2011, p. 10). However, the retention rate of NESB students is higher than ESB students, suggesting that many NESB students persist despite failing units. The comparatively high retention rates and low success rates for NESB students can be observed in Fig. 8.3.

Other researchers have also noted this paradox (Grebennikov and Skaines 2009; Marks 2007), but it remains unclear why NESB retention rates are high. The presence of cultural norms that emphasise perseverance could be a factor. Evidence in support of this comes from the 2010 Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) at La Trobe University. Boredom was the most common reason for ESB students leaving their course, with almost 28 % citing it. In comparison, only 3 % of
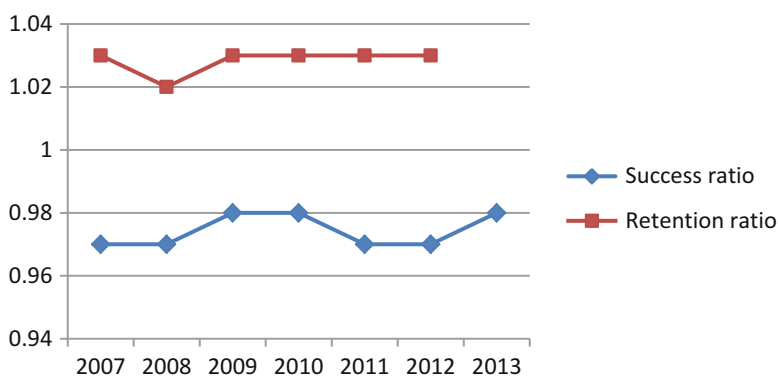
Fig. 8.3 NESB success and retention ratios (Source: Australian Government 2013)

[2] The 'success ratio', sometimes referred to as the progression ratio, compares the success/ progression rates of a group in question (such as NESB) with another group (such as ESB). A ratio of 1 represents equality between the two groups, more than 1 means that the group succeeds at higher rates, and less than 1 means the group succeeds at lower rates.

NESB students cited boredom as a reason for leaving their course (Planning and Institutional Performance Unit (PIPU) 2009–2010). This data suggests that NESB students are either not as easily bored, or more likely, boredom is not seen as a sufficient reason to discontinue study.

However, since the NESB cohort is constituted by diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, the cultural importance of persistence is probably only a partial explanation. Another hypothesis is that NESB students have fewer options in the labour market, thus are compelled to remain in education to improve their employment opportunities. This theory is supported by evidence that young NESB men are generally more likely to experience unemployment than ESB men (Marks and Fleming 1998).

Although the reason for the higher retention rates of NESB students remains uncertain, it is clearer why NESB students are more likely to fail units. NESB students can 'take time to adjust to the Australian accent, style and fluency of lecturers' speech, terminology, idioms and abbreviations used in lectures and tutorials' (Grebennikov and Skaines 2009, p. 67). This argument is supported by research showing that NESB students are more likely than ESB students to report that tutorials are not an effective source of learning (Lovejoy 2001). Largely because of these language issues, NESB students may also be relatively less 'active learners.' For example, the AUSSE data at La Trobe University indicated that NESB students are less likely to report asking questions and contributing to class discussion, working with students outside of class, as well as discussing ideas from class with others (Planning and Institutional Performance Unit PIPU 2009). However, the same survey showed that NESB students reported a relatively high level of interaction with staff (Australian Centre for Educational Research ACER 2010; PIPU 2009–2010). This suggests that NESB students seek further assistance from teachers but are less inclined to engage in participatory group learning, which is likely due to a lack of confidence in oral communication.

Universities can and should implement practices to close the NESB-ESB achievement gap. In *A Fair Chance for All*, the Australian Government set a target for 'all institutions with significant proportions of non-English-speaking background groups in their catchment area to provide … adequate support programs' (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990, p. 35). The report outlined potential strategies, which included supplementary support and curriculum review. However, the 1996 review assessing progress in meeting the equity targets found that most universities had failed to implement strategies to support NESB people (Australian Education Council 1996, p. 35), and it appears little has changed since.

Currently most Australian universities assist those experiencing language difficulties through support provided by an independent language skills unit. Such language skill units can certainly help students, but they may be insufficient. Some students find generic external language support unhelpful because they already understand basic linguistic rules, but have trouble applying them to subject specific content (Ramburuth 2002). Discipline specific language support is often required (Good Practice Principles Steering Committee 2010).

In addition to specialised and supplementary support, improving the outcomes of NESB students requires changing teaching methods more broadly. Such change can

be achieved through embedding inclusive pedagogy in the curriculum (Pantelides 1999). *A Fair Chance for All* identified the need to develop multi-cultural tertiary higher education curriculum, noting that 'institutions should review and revise curriculum and teaching methods to identify elements of both linguistic and cultural bias which disadvantage non-English-speaking background students' (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990, p. 39). The aim of the curriculum review followed from The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia and was to involve the promotion of multicultural development and cross-cultural awareness. One reason for the need to modify general pedagogical practices is that disadvantaged populations, including NESB students and especially people from refugee backgrounds, under-utilise remedial services (Silburn et al. 2008). To meet learning needs through mainstream programs, all lecturers and tutors (especially those in disciplines with high numbers of NESB students) could receive training to enhance cultural awareness. Furthermore, teachers may need to alter their communication habits which might include: speaking slower and more clearly, avoiding colloquialisms and long sentences, incorporating more visual aids and providing preliminary lecture outlines with definitions (Grebennikov and Skaines 2009). Many people from refugee backgrounds in particular have originated from oral cultures, and therefore will benefit from pedagogy that accommodates this, such as orally explaining figures and checking comprehension through discussion of texts (Burgoyne and Hull 2007). Improving the achievement of NESB students requires both broad and deep responses, including pedagogical and curricular reform.

Graduate Outcomes

When NESB students graduate, they are less likely to gain employment than ESB students (Mestan and Harvey 2014). Unlike participation and retention rates, there are no direct extrinsic or intrinsic financial incentives to improve graduate outcomes. Consistent with international findings, the responsibility to find employment is largely left with the individual graduate (Dreijmanis 2004). Lower emphasis on outcomes helps to conceal the extent to which some cohorts, such as NESB students, fare poorly in the final stage of the higher education lifecycle. In fact, according to the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS), which is conducted approximately 4 months after course completion, NESB employment outcomes were more than twice as poor as ESB students. Between 2009 and 2013, NESB students were about 83% more likely than ESB students to be seeking full-time employment; Fig. 8.4 shows employment outcomes for the years between 2009 and 2013.

These rates are substantially higher than the figures presented in the Graduate Careers Australia reports. The Graduate Careers Australia reports include NESB students who have been in Australia for more than 10 years after graduation and these reports use the whole student population as the comparison group. Our figures exclude NESB students who have been Australian for more than 10 years or more and we use ESB students as the comparison group.
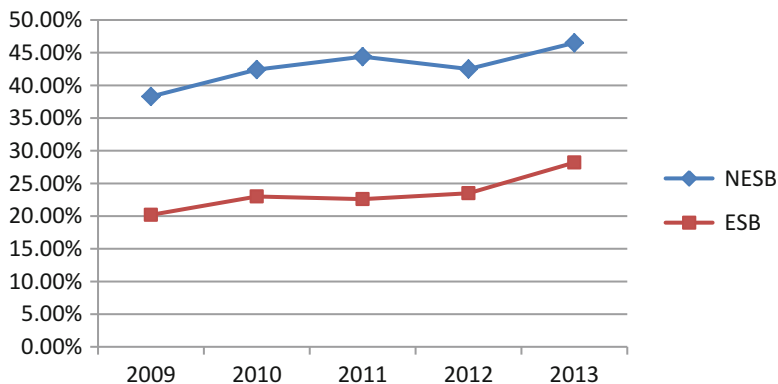
Fig. 8.4 Proportion of NESB & ESB graduates seeking full time employment (Source: Graduate Careers Australia Master File)

The rate at which graduates seek employment is influenced by the broader economy, thus most pertinent is the size of the gap between NESB and ESB students, rather than mere changes in NESB rates over time.

While the statistics presented in Fig. 8.4 include those who are working part-time, there is an even greater gap between NESB and ESB gradates not working at all and seeking full-time employment (Graduate Careers Australia 2014b). Furthermore, among the official equity categories, NESB graduates, along with people with a disability, have by far the worst employment outcomes; much worse than rural and Indigenous students (Graduate Careers Australia 2011, p. 4). Interestingly, in the Beyond Graduation Survey (which is conducted 3 years after graduation) the NESB-ESB employment gap narrows, which suggests that NESB graduates are employable, but have difficulty making the transition into employment (Graduate Careers Australia 2014c).[3]

However, substantially fewer NESB than ESB graduates reported that their qualification was a formal requirement of their job, with there being a 12 % gap in the 2013 AGS (Graduate Careers Australia 2014a). Furthermore, the salaries of NESB graduates are lower than ESB graduates. In 2013, for example, NESB graduates earned about 9 % less than ESB graduates (Graduate Careers Australia 2014a). Hence, NESB graduates seem to take longer to find work, and when they do, their work is less likely to be closely related to their qualification. Probably reflecting this reality, they are paid less than ESB graduates.

Between 2009 and 2013, NESB people consistently experienced worse graduate outcomes than ESB people across all fields of study. In the field of Engineering and related technology, NESB people were about three times more likely to be seeking full time employment than ESB people. In the fields of Management and Commerce and Medicine and related fields, NESB people were about twice as worse off. In the

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[3] The Beyond Graduation Survey (BGS) survey was a much smaller sample than the AGS. Consequently, the differences between NESB and ESB students are not statistically significant, unlike the AGS, which is purportedly a census.

fields of IT, Society and Culture and the Natural and Physical Sciences, NESB people were almost one and half times more likely to be seeking full time employment (Graduate Careers Australia 2014a).

The poor employment outcomes of NESB people cannot be explained by higher rates of further study, such as postgraduate degrees, at least not in full-time study. NESB and ESB graduates were studying full-time at similar rates between 2009 and 2013 (Graduate Careers Australia 2014a).

The relatively poor graduate outcomes of NESB students gives reason to reflect on the 'value-add' that universities provide. The privileged status of universities to confer qualifications, as well as the public support they receive, depends in part on ensuring that graduates from their career-orientated courses are indeed employable. In regard to NESB students, this responsibility at times appears to be unfulfilled.

The poorer graduate outcomes for NESB students do not seem to result from a lack of endeavour on behalf of those students. To the contrary, the AUSSE survey results for La Trobe University show that NESB students are putatively more 'career ready' than ESB students. For example, NESB students are more likely to: set career development goals and plans; keep their resume up-to-date; and know 'where to look for jobs' (PIPU 2009–2010).

In Australia and internationally, there appears to be an 'ethnic penalty', where 'ethnic minorities fail… to convert their high educational attainments into comparable occupational outcomes' (Hasmath 2012, p. 67). Some research suggests that a reason for the relatively poor employment outcomes of migrants who have tertiary qualifications is their limited English language proficiency (Birrell and Healy 2008). However, other research has found that English language proficiency was *not* the 'principal' impediment to gaining employment, at least in the case of international students, with 'profession-specific skills', individual 'well-roundedness' and 'cultural-fit into a workplace', being the most important employment factors (Arkoudis et al. 2009). This latter conclusion is corroborated by Hasmath (2012), who found that one of the two major reasons for the ethnic employment penalty was that migrants have difficulty operating within a firm's working culture. The other main reason for the ethnic penalty was that migrant groups often have less developed social networks (Hasmath 2012).

Research also shows that discrimination toward recently arrived communities, and those with stronger foreign accents, impedes migrant employment outcomes (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006, 2007; Hasmath 2012). People with foreign accents are often interpreted as less credible (Lev-Ari and Keysar 2010). For many NESB graduates, it may be the delivery rather than the proficiency of language that impedes their employment prospects.

Universities can enact practices to improve NESB graduate outcomes. The language support could emphasis to a greater extent functional English language, in addition to academic language skills. In most workplaces, oral communication is more valuable than the ability to write at an academic standard, and spoken English is central to recruitment processes such as job interviews. Universities can also offer 'work ready' programs, covering topics such as workplace culture and practical skills related to employability. Courses can also aim to offset the weaker social

networks of some NESB students by supporting them to gain work experience and peer and industry mentoring. Universities can also actively counter employer prejudices by affirming the aptitude of NESB students through their relations with employers. Hence, there are various initiatives that universities can implement to advance acceptance of cultural diversity in the workplace and generally improve the employment outcomes of NESB graduates. However, universities are unlikely to invest significant resources in promoting equitable outcomes for their graduates unless there are government targets and incentives. Equitable graduate outcomes could be a factor governments consider in awarding various equity funds, such as HEPP grants.

Conclusion

Universities are successful at attracting NESB students as a whole, though further effort is required to ensure adequate representation of sub-cohorts such as students from a refugee background. The outcomes for NESB people are consistent with the equity policy framework stemming from A Fair Chance for All; whereby increasing access was emphasised and the NESB category was not divided into smaller ethnic cohorts. However, beyond access, there are areas in which NESB students as a general group remain disadvantaged. These areas are achievement and graduate outcomes, which A Fair Chance for All neglected. NESB students have lower success rates than ESB students and gain employment at much lower rates. When considering the status of NESB people throughout the higher education lifecycle, it becomes evident that NESB should be preserved as an equity category. The relatively high participation rate of the NESB people could be evinced to demonstrate the efficacy of A Fair Chance for All. However, closer analysis of the NESB cohort underlines the need to build on A Fair Chance for All to broaden the equity debate. Policies need to move beyond considerations of aggregated access, to consider the full lifecycle of higher education, including success rates, retention, post-graduate participation and achievement, as well as employment outcomes. Finally, the disjunction between the reality of NESB disadvantage and actual university practices highlights broader issues around the current national higher education equity agenda, which concentrates on participation. Funding and policies need to focus on achievement and outcomes as well as representation.

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Chapter 9
Far from the Studying Crowd? Regional and Remote Students in Higher Education

Catherine Burnheim and Andrew Harvey

Introduction

The university participation rate of regional and remote students has shown no improvement since 1990. Of all the equity challenges identified within *A Fair Chance for All*, regionality has proved the hardest to confront. The lack of progress is not the fault of those who designed the national equity framework. Indeed, *A Fair Chance for All* was remarkably prescient about the causes of under-representation and the solutions required. The Framework identified the need to raise school achievement, increase university outreach, expand offerings through online delivery, deliver bridging and enabling programs, create alternative entry pathways, and improve credit transfer between institutions (Department of Education Employment and Training (DEET) 1990). Unfortunately, only limited public funding has flowed to support these initiatives.

Instead, successive governments have focussed on physically expanding the provision of regional higher education, addressing barriers to geographic mobility, and uncapping places at undergraduate level. These strategies have typically failed either to address the root causes of low demand or to address the fundamental dislocation of three education sectors: schools; vocational education and training; and higher education. In this chapter we argue the need for a renewed focus on increasing regional demand, from sub-degree level to higher degrees by research. We argue that the primary reason for regional under-representation at university remains relatively low school achievement. Low achievement affects both the likelihood of

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attending university, including the propensity to relocate to study, and the likelihood of completing university once enrolled. A spectrum of initiatives across school education, access schemes, modes of provision and qualification structures are required to address regional students' participation and success.

Regional Demographics and Measurement Challenges

The distribution of the Australian population outside the cities is highly diverse, and encompasses substantial towns as well as some of the most isolated habited areas in the world.

'Regional' in the Australian context is used to mean 'non-metropolitan', and generally excludes the capital cities. Classifications of rurality and remoteness have used different combinations of population size, population density and distance from major centres. The question of access to campuses in particular was considered in the Martin Indicators process, and the team was interested in considering distance to a campus in constructing remoteness indices, but this was not pursued (see Chap. 2 of this volume, Martin 2015).

Australia has a highly urbanised population – in 2013, over three-quarters of the Australian population were classified as metropolitan. The proportion of Australians residing in cities has remained stable for several decades (Hugo 2012). The remaining quarter of Australian residents are spread over very different geographic areas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2004). The great differences across regional and remote Australia contribute to the complication of measuring remoteness in Australia. The 'regional' category encompasses circumstances from substantial rural centres with good transport links and a range of industries to small communities of declining population and limited employment opportunities. Where regional growth has occurred, it has been largely in the coastal zones, with inland regions struggling to retain population.

The Martin Indicators paper used the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA) classification devised by the Department of Primary Industry and Energy (DPIE). This classification included as 'rural' those living in small and large rural centres (10,000–99,999 population) and other rural areas (population below 10,000). 'Isolated' areas were defined as populations of fewer than 5000 people, located with a higher degree of remoteness from any major population centre than those areas classified as rural.

This classification was replaced in 2001 by the Regional and Remote Index developed by the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) classification. This classification change replaced the 'rural/isolated' classification with the terms 'regional' and 'remote'. From 2011, the 'regional' and 'remote' categories have been derived from the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), which is based on the ARIA+ methodology, an enhanced version of the ARIA methodology.

Overall, the three classifications – RRMA, MCEETYA and ASGC – reflect very similar proportional divisions of the population into metropolitan, regional or rural and remote categories. However, small changes in methodology can create significant impacts on how particular areas are classified. The chart below compares the 2013 reference values for regional and remote participation using both the MCEETYA and ASGC classifications. Under both measures, the populations of New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory are all classified as highly urbanised, and the proportion of their populations classified as regional and remote are largely stable. In the Northern Territory, the measures yield the same population proportions, and also illustrate the high proportion of the Territory's residents who live in remote areas – at 43.3 %, by far the largest proportion of any jurisdiction. In the cases of Queensland and Tasmania, however, the changes in measurement produce very different results. For Queensland, the ASGC methodology classifies 41.97 % of the State's population as regional, compared with 28.54 % for the MCEETYA methodology. In Tasmania, the reclassification is very significant, with the reclassification of Hobart leading to the entire state as being designated either regional or remote. These changes have an impact at the local community and institutional level. For example, James Cook University in Townsville, Queensland, leads the country in 2013 as the university enrolling the most regional students under the ASGC methodology, at 82.38 % regional students, compared with only 19.72 % under the MCEETYA methodology. Similarly, the University of Tasmania doubles its proportion of regional students from 39.32 % (MCEETYA) to 78.67 % (AGSC) (Fig. 9.1).

While at a national level the different classification systems yield broadly similar results, it is important to note that changes in measurement can make significant, even transformational, changes at the local and institutional level. These changes

	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland	Western Australia	South Australia	Tasmania	Northern Territory	Australian Capital Territory	Multi State
Regional (McEETYA)(b)	22.33	23.66	28.54	21.78	23.53	57.34	56.70	0.14	22.33
Regional (ASGS)(c)	25.20	23.66	41.97	21.78	23.53	97.87	56.70	0.14	25.2
Remote (McEETYA)(b)	0.57	0.09	3.43	7.44	3.48	2.13	43.30	0.00	0.57
Remote (ASGS)(c)	0.57	0.09	3.43	7.44	3.48	2.13	43.30	0.00	0.57

Fig. 9.1 Regional and remote reference values 2013

affect the development of policy to address diverse regional needs, and are particularly important in relation to the profile of regional campuses and to the different funding schemes attached to campus location, students' home address and their study location.

The Problem of Regional Participation

Participation Overall

'People from rural and isolated areas' are listed last of the six priority groups in *A Fair Chance for All*. The needs of regional students were not an afterthought, however, and had been addressed prominently in the Dawkins White Paper (Dawkins 1988, p. 21) in regard to both increasing access overall and to meeting skill needs in the rural sector and in non-metropolitan areas. Despite ongoing priority to regional students in policy initiatives, student income support and other access schemes, regional participation has been declining across the period from 1990 to 2015. Regional students comprised 20 % of domestic undergraduate enrolments in 1989 and 18.6 % in 2011. Even after the uncapping of undergraduate places in the demand-driven system, regional participation rates showed no sign of increasing.

As with low SES students, the overall number of regional students participating in higher education has increased, with 22,000 students added between 2001 and 2010, and the same number again between 2010 and 2013 following the introduction of the demand-driven system. These increases have only just kept pace with growth in metropolitan enrolments, however, leaving the overall student profile static.

Participation and Relocation

Tables 9.1 and 9.2 highlight regional student participation rates and ratios. These data classify students as regional where the post code of their permanent home address recorded at enrolment falls within a regional area. The classification

Table 9.1 Regional student participation rate 2009–2013

Regional student participation rate	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
MCEETYA definition	17.83	18.06	18.15	18.09	18.07
ASGS definition			20.08	19.97	19.85

Table 9.2 Regional student participation ratio 2009–2013

Regional student participation ratio	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
MCEETYA definition	0.72	0.72	0.73	0.74	0.74
ASGS definition				0.70	0.69
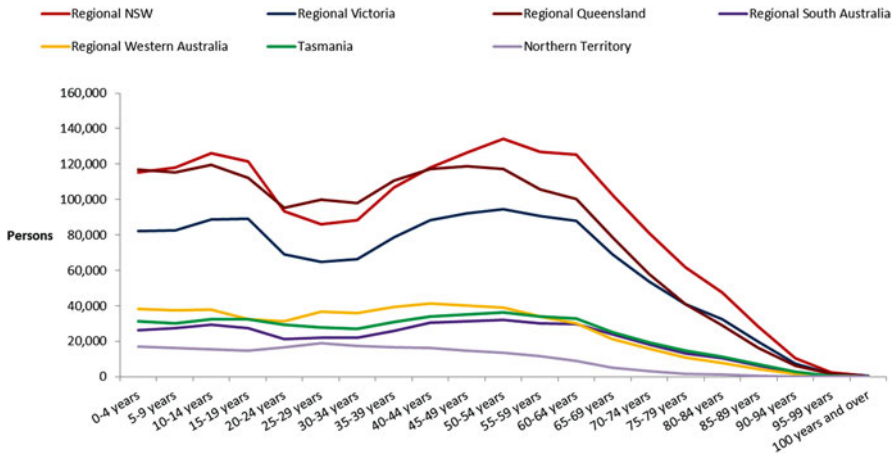
Fig. 9.2 State and territory regional and remote population in 5 year age groups (Source: ABS Census Table Builder, 2011 Census, Usual Place of Residence, 5 Year Ago Group, Remoteness Area. Note: NO major cities classified in Tasmania and Northern Territory)

generates useful insights into the participation of students from regional origin, but has limitations. The data do not identify the proportion of students who relocate to another regional or major city location, nor those who pursue on-campus or online study modes. These distinctions are important, as regional students who relocate to major cities tend to remain within major cities, and contribute to a major change in the population distribution of regional communities (Fig. 9.2). The exodus of young adults from regional locations is well known but rarely quantified.

The effect of student relocation on the age and skill profiles of regional communities has preoccupied policy-makers and regional leaders for many years. The net migration of prime age people to metropolitan areas has a number of causes – most importantly employment – but study is also a major driver. We will argue that concern with retaining students locally for their undergraduate study has led to a focus on regional campuses, rather than some of the underlying causes of regional under-representation in higher education, and some of the specific dimensions of under-representation by discipline, institution and level of education.

Participation by Discipline

A concern of *A Fair Chance for All* was to ensure participation by regional students in studies relevant to regional industries and economies, as well as to the broader range of disciplines and professions. Higher education was seen as a contributor to making rural industries 'prosperous and efficient' (Department of Education Employment and Training DEET 1990, p. 44), but the importance of regional students' involvement in 'the whole range of careers, not just those related to rural

industries' (Department of Education Employment and Training DEET 1990, p. 44) was also affirmed.

In 1996, the performance of *A Fair Chance for All* was reviewed in *Equality*, *diversity and excellence*: *Advancing the national higher education equity framework* (National Board of Employment Education and Training 1996). For rural students, overall access across all levels of higher education had declined from 19.6 % in 1991 to 18.44 % in 1995. The report noted that:

> Rural students are over-represented in only one field – Agriculture. They tend to enrol in Education and Veterinary Science and not in the other professional courses such as Business, Law and Architecture.
>
> In 1995, rural students comprised 39.89% of Agriculture enrolments, 22.65% in Education, 22.31% in Veterinary Science but less than 15% in each of Business, Law and Architecture (p. 39).

Rural students were also over-represented in diploma and associate diploma courses, comprising 31.2 % of sub-degree enrolments:

> This may reflect the predominance of associate diploma and diploma courses in the field of Agriculture, or may reflect the degree of preparation and the scope of subjects available to them in rural schools, leading them to be less well-prepared for university study. (p. 39).

These trends were consistent through the 1990s and early 2000s. James, Baldwin, Coates, Krause and McInnis (2004) reported that:

> Across the period 1991–2002, rural and isolated students were more highly represented in the fields of Agriculture, Education, Health, and Veterinary Science than other fields (though still under-represented in all but Agriculture). They were the least well represented in the fields of Architecture, Business, Engineering, Law (pre 2001) and Society and Culture (from 2001) (p. 23).

The authors went on to note that within aggregate fields like Health, rural and isolated students were well represented in Nursing but significantly underrepresented in Medicine, Dentistry and Optical Sciences (p. 24). Rural and isolated students were similarly underrepresented in Law and Economics.

The representation of regional students by field of study also has a gendered dimension. Regional campus students are more likely to be female, older than the average undergraduate, and have carer responsibilities (Richardson and Friedman 2010). In 2011, fewer than four in ten regional campus enrolments were men (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2011). At some regional campuses, including Central Queensland University Bundaberg, La Trobe Mildura and Charles Sturt Albury-Wodonga, the proportion was barely above one in four (Harvey 2011). Higher-achieving students, and particularly those seeking enrolments in specific courses, were more motivated to relocate to study (Hillman and Rothman 2007, p. 27). In many cases, those students seeking enrolment in Architecture and Building, Engineering, and sciences relocate to metropolitan areas to access these courses which are not offered regionally (Phillips 2009, p. 51). These fields also attract higher proportions of male students (Harvey 2011).

Course enrolment trends reflect gendered perceptions and expectations by families and young people about career paths and further study. A 2011 national study

of primary aged children found that only 40 % of parents in outer regional areas expected their son to obtain a university degree, compared with 78 % of metropolitan parents of girls (Baxter, Gray, and Hayes 2011). Boys themselves are more likely to hold negative views about the nature and value of university study. In a study on regional students, (Alloway and Gilbert 2004) that:

> This perception of university study as an extension of 'school' clearly dominated students' views. A 'university' was considered almost synonymous with a 'school': regimented, institutionalized, hard work, dull. We had not anticipated the strength of this perception, but it seems to us to be an indicator of the experiences that rural students may have of university life and university credentials (p. 105).

While female-dominated graduate professions like teaching and nursing are 'visible' in regional areas, fewer 'traditional' male graduate professions have a regional profile. With evidence that young men's post-school choices are driven by the importance of work and earning an income, additional focus could be placed on career advice, industry partnerships and work-integrated learning (Alloway and Gilbert 2004; Rothman and Hillman 2008, 2008, p. vi). Although there have been a number of proposals for rural cadetship schemes (e.g. Lee Dow et al. 2010, p. 56–57), initiatives to support transition to employment in regional industries have been limited.

Specific policy initiatives have targeted the interface between higher education participation and particular disciplines. Agriculture and Medicine provide two contrasting examples. Agricultural Science and related fields are clearly enabling disciplines for rural industries. Through the mid-twentieth century, agricultural education was provided by specialist institutes, as well as by faculties within comprehensive universities. The Dawkins reforms saw the amalgamation of some of these specialist campuses (Gatton in Queensland, Roseworthy in South Australia and Orange in NSW) into university structures. The 1991 McColl Review of Agricultural and Related Education recommended policies for reforming agricultural education that exploited opportunities for economies of scale, improved teaching efficiency and greater focus on institutional strategic planning. The Review's recommendations aligned with the creation of the Unified National System and led to consolidation of agricultural education and a continuing funding commitment to supporting places in Agriculture. Despite these changes, however, Agriculture has continued to decline. In 2008 the combined enrolments in Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies were 16,516, but by 2013 enrolments had declined to 12,202, despite the overall growth in the system ushered in by the demand-driven system.

The provision of medical practitioners in regional and remote areas of Australia has also been the focus of policy attention, with a number of schemes developed specifically to support the enrolment of people from rural areas in Medicine, and to retain graduate doctors in regional areas. These include the HECS reimbursement scheme, which was introduced in the 2000–2001 Federal budget, and offered graduates a reimbursement of 20 % of HECS debt per year of service in designated regional areas. The scheme was deemed a failure due to lacklustre take-up rates (Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) 2014; Gorton 2012). There are

also several Bonded Rural Scholarship schemes, the largest of which supports 100 students per year through a $20,000 annual scholarship, with graduates bonded to work for 6 years post-graduation in rural practice (Department of Health 2015). The Rural Clinical Training and Support Program commenced in 2011 and provides recurrent funding for clinical training schools in regional areas. A requirement of the program is that 25 % of CSP medical students are recruited from a regional background. A 2013 review of the program found that the target was effective, with 23.6 % of students enrolled from a regional background in 2011 (Department of Health 2013). These programs are supplemented by a range of programs in Medicine and Dentistry to support rural clinical placements. The number and extent of programs to support regional participation in Medicine reflect the high national priority on providing health services and regional areas, and are examples of initiatives beyond core elements of higher education policy that affect the participation of regional students in selected fields.

Participation by Institution and Campus Type

The Bradley Review discussed the patterns of enrolment by regional and remote students across institutional type. The Review noted the significantly higher rates of regional enrolment for universities with regional campuses, and their relatively low rates of enrolment in the Group of Eight institutions (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, and Scales 2008, p. 34) Fig. 9.3.

Richardson and Friedman (2010) found that 'Students at higher education institutions (HEIs) in regional parts of Australia are predominantly from surrounding regional areas', and were more likely to be female and older than their metropolitan peers.

Enrolments at regional campuses have been affected by the demand-driven system. Between 2009 and 2013, enrolments at major city campuses grew by over 150,000 or 17 %, compared with around 22,000 or 14 % for regional and remote campuses (Table 9.3). Over the same timeframe, enrolments of regional students grew by over 22 %, highlighting that regional students are increasingly pursuing major cities to pursue higher education. The number of campuses at which higher education was delivered increased significantly within major cities, but actually decreased in regional areas, particularly on smaller campuses of fewer than 500 students (Table 9.4).

Participation by Level of Study

Regional students are also underrepresented at postgraduate coursework and higher degree levels. In 2008, only 11 % of continuing PhD students were from regional backgrounds, compared with 17 % of the student cohort overall (Heagney 2010). Harvey and Andrewartha (2013) have argued that this underrepresentation
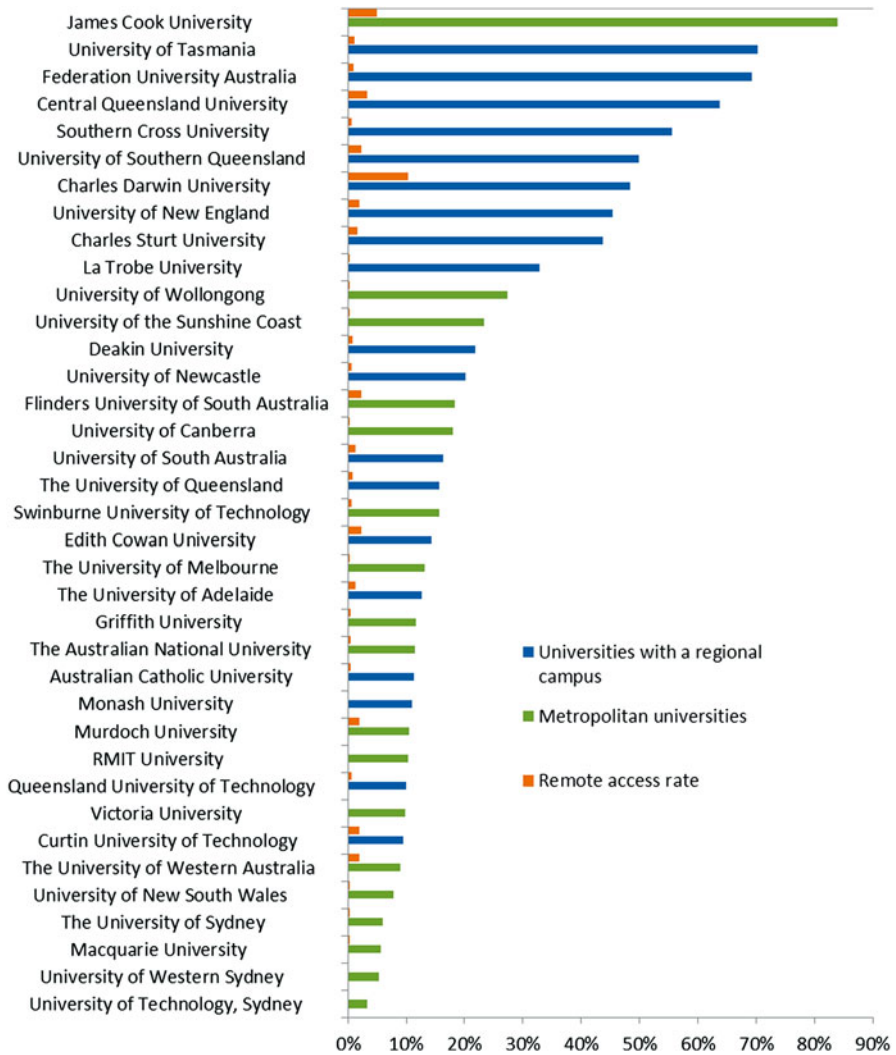
Fig. 9.3 Access rates for regional and remote students by location and university campus 2014 (Source: Department of Education and Training (2015). Note: Access rates are based on ABS ASGS geographic classifications. The coding of metropolitan universities and universities with a regional campus is based on those included within Bradley et al. (2008))

intersects with both institutional and disciplinary factors. Research higher degree students are concentrated in the Group of Eight universities, and in the sciences (Harman 2002). Australian students in general have much lower rates of mobility than is the case in other countries, and usually remain within the same city or state for postgraduate study, and often at the same institution (Kiley and Austin 2008). In 2009, over 50 % of postgraduate students were enrolled in the same university at

Table 9.3 Campus enrolments by location

	Enrolments		Campus locations	
	2009	2013	2009	2013
Major city	892,124	1,044,861	323	363
Inner regional	135,520	151,475	68	64
Outer regional	23,822	29,783	28	31
Remote	949	926	14	12
Very remote	44	43	3	4
Total	1,052,459	1,227,088	436	474

Source: Department of Education and Training (2015)

Table 9.4 Regional and remote campuses by scale of operation

Regional and remote campus locations	2009	2013
0–100 enrolments	65	67
101–500	19	14
500+	29	30
	113	111

Source: Department of Education and Training (2015)

which they had studied their undergraduate degree (Graduate Careers Australia 2009). This tendency amplifies the lower rates of regional enrolments in the Group of Eight universities, which are all metropolitan-based.

Regional Patterns of Educational Attainment

Underlying the underrepresentation of regional students in higher education are patterns of school retention and achievement. School outcomes are linked to broader social and economic factors, in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Regional employment and income levels, for example, are lower than metropolitan levels (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2013).

The education attainment profile of regional populations is much lower than that of major cities, across all levels of education (Table 9.5). Most notable though are Year 12 completion and attainment rates. The Year 12 attainment rate for persons 20–39 years of age (the age range where the demographic differences are most striking) is also much lower for regional communities, and for some jurisdictions (Fig. 9.4). Factors influencing disparities between urban and rural communities are cyclical and intergenerational. Poorer school outcomes result in fewer people from regional communities with a preparedness or disposition to participate in higher education. Regional students who complete and succeed in school are more likely to relocate to major cities on a permanent basis. Fewer people with a higher educa-

Table 9.5 Educational achievement

	Major cities (%)	Regional (%)
Year 12 completion rate	81.0	67.0
Higher education bachelors attainment	19.1	9.9
Higher education postgraduate attainment	7.5	2.9
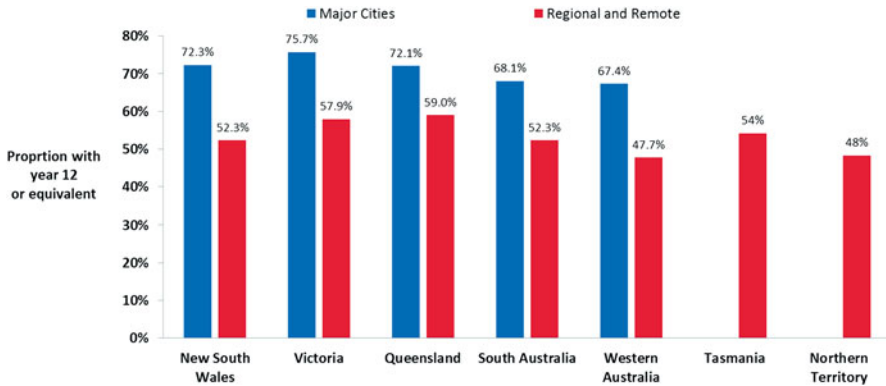
Fig. 9.4 State and territory Year 12 attainment (Proportion of 20–39 year olds to have completed high school, by state and remoteness area. Source: ABS Census Table Builder, 2011 Census, Usual Place of Residence, Remoteness Area. Note: Tasmania and Northern Territory population have no major cities)

tion qualification in regional communities translates into reduced access to skills and professionals across agriculture, business, education, engineering, finance, health, science and welfare, contributing to comparatively poor performance on indicators of social and economic development. This lower level of social and economic capital in turn influences poor performance in schools.

Regional school students are often under-served in key curriculum areas, particularly science and mathematics. Australian results from the 2006 PISA survey of mathematical and scientific literacy showed gaps in mathematical skills between students in metropolitan schools and regional schools, with remote schools performing at a significantly lower level (Thomson and De Bortoli 2008). The difficulties in securing skilled teachers in regional areas is a contributing factor to these weaker outcomes (Lyons et al. 2006, p. 24). Resources affect school performance at a number of levels, contributing to lower student outcomes. Evidence also suggests that some combinations of school subjects, such as science and mathematics, are strongly linked to higher education participation (Teese and Polesel 2003). There is a clear hierarchy of the school curriculum and regional students are often left with limited access to this hierarchy (Teese and Polesel 2003).

Approaches Following *A Fair Chance for All*

A Fair Chance for All proposed that 'people from rural and isolated areas' be a priority group for equity programs. The major factors affecting lower rates of access for rural students, drawn from the 'A Fair Go' statement, were 'lower school retention rates, lack of proximity to tertiary institutions, limited curriculum choice and lack of information about the availability of higher education and its benefits' (Department of Education Employment and Training DEET 1990, p. 45). Geographic isolation was seen as amplifying issues around the adequacy of secondary education (school retention and curriculum choice), and the availability of information is also limited by lack of access to local resources, and to campuses in particular.

The Framework gestures to the connection between socio-economic status and rurality by recommending that outreach should be focussed on 'schools with low transition rates to higher education, especially outer metropolitan and regional schools' (Department of Education Employment and Training DEET 1990, p. 15). However, there is no further reference to the problems of regional and outer metropolitan schools accessing educational resources either in terms of school quality or in 'cultural capital' available in the school community. Similarly, the needs of Aboriginal people in remote areas for distance and alternative access provision is identified (p. 22) but not elaborated upon in connection with the goals for rural students. As with many other equity groups, the intersection of different aspects of disadvantage is noted in *A Fair Chance for All* but the implications for policy responses are not addressed in detail.

In proposing strategies to address the under-participation of rural students, *A Fair Chance for All* set goals for outreach to rural schools, and for increasing support for rural students through distance education. Significantly, accountability for these targets was vested in regional universities and the Distance Education Centres:

> 'All *institutions in rural and regional areas* to establish information programs on opportunities in higher education directed at rural schools and communities by 1992.'
> '*Institutions with designated Distance Education Centres* to improve student support for isolated and rural students by 1992 to increase graduation rates' (p. 44).

This specific accountability could be seen to signal that regional participation was the particular responsibility of some providers, rather than a sector-wide responsibility. Regional campuses were encouraged both to engage locally with their communities and to provide generally for non-metropolitan students through the Distance Education Centres, including to areas well beyond their local catchments. Thus regional participation was framed as a problem involving both local and generic solutions.

Further strategies to increase rural participation beyond awareness-raising and distance education included alternative entry arrangements, bridging and supplementary courses, credit transfer arrangements and assistance with accommodation (p. 44). Alternative entry was seen as important as rural students were more likely

to be 'disadvantaged in meeting entry requirements for higher education' due to 'isolation, inadequate schooling and lack of access to study resources' (p. 46). The mobility of country regions due to 'their work or circumstances' was noted as a contributing problem, with the risk of being 'adversely affected' by differences in state education systems (p. 46). Similarly, bridging and supplementary courses and credit transfer arrangements were identified as strategies to assist students affected by 'limited subject choice and lack of access to study resources such as libraries' (p. 47). Accommodation on campus was also identified as a factor affecting participation.

The Dawkins reforms aimed to strengthen regional provision to provide a range of higher education options locally and to retain students in regional areas (Burnheim and Harvey 2013). This vision included partnerships between higher education and TAFE, as well as distance education. *A Fair Chance for All* balanced this priority through a number of strategies aimed at supporting access through means other than physical access to a local campus including distance education, alternative entry, bridging courses, credit transfer and accommodation assistance. Across this range of strategies, however, most direct investment has been made in supporting regional campuses.

Distance Education

Distance education was expanding in the pre-Dawkins, with about 12 % of students studying externally through Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) and universities (Dawkins 1987, p. 37). Following Dawkins, distance education was integrated into the amalgamated universities, and centralised in six Commonwealth-supported Distance Education Centres (DECs).[1] The DECs were to provide focus and scale to the development of external education, with the aim of improving quality and accessibility (Dawkins 1988, p. 51). However, a centralised approach was too limited to accommodate burgeoning innovation across the sector in multi-mode and online delivery, and the DECs were decommissioned before the end of the 1990s. Part of the DEC legacy is Open Universities Australia (OUA), the largest consortium delivering open and distance education. Regional participation in OUA is strong at around 28 % in 2010, though distance education has not proved a 'game changer' for regional access.

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[1] The eight original Distance Education Centres (DECs) designated in 1989 were: Charles Sturt University; University of New England; Deakin University; Monash University Gippsland; University College of Central Queensland (University of Central Queensland); University College of Southern Queensland (University of Southern Queensland); South Australian College of Advanced Education and Western Australian Distance Education Centre (a joint operation involving Murdoch University, Curtin University of Technology and the Western Australian College of Advanced Education) (Umehara 1990).

Alternative Entry and Credit Transfer

Alternative entry programs, including enabling courses and other pathway programs are available at most regional campuses, providing a route in to higher education for students who have had interrupted study or not completed Year 12. These programs play an important role in regional access. In some institutions these programs are very large, for example the University of Newcastle's Open Foundation and NewStep programs enroll around 2000 students annually (Hodges et al. 2013).

All Australian universities offer some form of special consideration in admissions for students that address a range of circumstances including regional location. Students can apply for these schemes through state-based Tertiary Admissions Centres or directly to institutions.

Pathways from vocational education and training (VET) to higher education are also important in regional admissions, with most universities offering credit recognition for previous studies. The broader potential of structured VET to higher education pathways to facilitate access remains unrealized, however. University partnerships with Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes have been identified as priorities for further development since the Dawkins Green and White papers (Burnheim and Harvey 2013). Twenty-five years later, the Bradley Review made similar recommendations for integration of vocational and higher education to open access to regional students, particularly in smaller regional communities thin markets (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 112). Development of viable models has been constrained by governance and funding models. Vocational education remains primarily within State jurisdiction, while higher education is funded by the Commonwealth government. Many TAFEs and private VET providers offer higher education courses, however these programs are not eligible for Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) funding, which means that their fees are higher than university programs (Moodie and Wheelahan 2009). The expansion of the demand-driven system to non-university higher education providers, including TAFEs, has been identified as a priority by both Labor and Coalition governments, but is unlikely to be legislated without broader changes including fee deregulation due to the cost of expanding Commonwealth funding. The current growth in non-university higher education provision, driven largely by private providers, is concentrated in metropolitan areas providing access to larger student catchments (see Chap. 11 in this volume, Norton 2015).

Income Support

Meeting the costs of study, particularly for relocating students, is a continuing challenge for students from regional and remote areas. Richardson and Friedman (2010) found that regional students were more likely than other students to be deterred from enrolling by the costs of study, and were more likely to defer their university offer for financial reasons (Richardson and Friedman 2010). Although James' (2001) survey of regional students found that their knowledge of higher education

costs was 'sketchy', they were often concerned about the financial impact on their families, and this had an impact on their cost-benefit analysis of attending university (James 2001). Regional students' lower confidence in the personal return on investment in higher education makes the immediate costs loom larger.

Income support policies have attempted to address the higher up-front costs of participation for regional students, and to recognise the circumstances of relocating students. Relocation Scholarships were introduced in 2011, replacing the Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship. Relocation Scholarships provide annual assistance to students receiving Youth Allowance or Abstudy, at a rate of $4124 for the first year of study, and $1031 in subsequent years. From 2010 to 2013, over 36,000 regional students received Relocation Scholarships, and from 2014 the eligibility was revised to target the payment more directly toward rural and regional students (Parliament of Australia 2014). Young people living in areas classified as 'Outer Regional', 'Remote', or 'Very Remote' were also exempted from the work requirements to qualify for Independent status (Parliament of Australia 2010). This eligibility was extended to students from 'Inner Regional' areas from 2011 (Parliament of Australia 2011).

Financial constraints also affect regional students' choices to defer their offer of a university place. For example, regional student deferral rates spiked to 21 % in 2009, possibly connected to the global economic downturn. Students defer for a number of reasons, but Polesel found that regional young people were significantly more likely than others to identify financial and practical barriers such as 'The course was not offered locally', 'Difficult to support yourself' or 'It would have meant leaving home' (Polesel et al. 2012, pp. 19–20). Metropolitan students were more likely to defer study to travel or because they were 'not ready for more study at the moment'. Polesel's study found that a healthy majority of students who deferred their offer proceeded to enrol at university, but approximately three in ten students who deferred did not take up their place, or enrolled but then discontinued.

Regional Campuses and Supply-Side Initiatives

Sustaining viable and diverse cohorts at regional campuses has been the object of significant Commonwealth investment. Particularly from the early 2000s, regional institutions and campuses have benefited from multiple schemes to support capital development and develop new programs. Some of these schemes have been explicitly directed at re-balancing funding anomalies and consequences of increasingly competitive funding policies. For example, the Regional Protection Scheme (2002–2008) was designed to buffer regional providers[2] from losses incurred in Research Training Schemes and Institutional Grants Scheme. Regional Loading was intro-

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[2] The designated HEPs are: Charles Sturt University; Southern Cross University; University of New England; University of Newcastle; University of Wollongong; Deakin University; La Trobe University; University of Ballarat; CQU; James Cook University; USQ; University of Tasmania; Charles Darwin University.

duced in 2004 as part of the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to provide an ongoing subsidy to meet the costs of regional provision. The policy intent and rate of regional loading was discussed at length in the Bradley Review, which noted that the costs of providing higher education in regional areas was 'close to unsustainable' in some locations (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 111). Regional loading was reviewed following Bradley, and a new formula introduced in 2012, increasing the loading to almost double its previous rate. This increase saw regional loading become a $64 million scheme, providing annual funding of over $13 million to James Cook and $8 million to University of Tasmania. The size of these grants reflects not only the increased value of the scheme but also the revised measurement of remoteness.

Despite this substantial investment, the demand-driven system has driven a further divergence in enrolments between metropolitan and regional campuses, as shown in Table 9.3. A detailed analysis of applications, offers and acceptances in Victoria from 2007 to 2011 found that student preferences to metropolitan campuses were ten times greater than for regional campuses, and that over the 4 year period offers grew by 43.1 % for metropolitan campuses compared with 24.3 % for regional campuses (Newnham and Anderson 2012, p. 5). While regional students preferred a local course option where it was available, a majority of regional applicants in selected Victorian regions from 2009 to 2011 still preferred to relocate to study, most often to a metropolitan campus (Harvey et al. 2012). With a wider range of courses, metropolitan campuses have been able to tap into unmet demand, particularly from students in lower ATAR ranges to expand rapidly under the demand-driven system.

The impact of greater student choice on the geographic distribution of enrolments has led some commentators to call for an end to subsidization of regional providers. Daley and Lancey argue that regional subsidies are an attempt 'make economic water flow uphill', and that public monies would be better spent in supporting regional students to relocate (Daley and Lancy 2011, p. 3). Crase et al. (2011) have critiqued Daley and Lancey's analysis, arguing that their construction of the problem, understanding of regional higher education and use of data is flawed. They argue for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between public investment and outcomes from regional higher education. Even accepting elements of this critique, the contradictions inherent in the competing policy goals of increasing student choice and supporting regional infrastructure remain.

Ways Forward

Funding regional campus provision of higher education is only one aspect of supporting increased participation by students from regional and remote communities. *A Fair Chance for All* proposed a range of strategies, including awareness programs, distance education, alternative entry, credit transfer and assistance with accommodation. Over the past 25 years, investment in the recommended strategies has been uneven. Although most universities market their courses to regional students, it was not until the establishment of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships

Program that substantial funding was available for universities to pursue schools outreach. Alternative entry and credit transfer arrangements are extensively available for students enrolling in both city and regional universities, however the systematic reform that would facilitate a greater role for vocational education and training in providing pathways has not occurred. Student income support for regional students has been increased, and become better targeted; however the costs of education remain a barrier for regional students.

The fundamental limit to growth in regional higher education attainment remains school achievement. Too few young people in regional and remote Australia complete secondary school, and fewer still achieve at high levels across the full range of disciplines. Students with low ATARs or incomplete secondary studies are less likely to apply to university, and if they do are less likely to be offered a place. Higher achieving regional students do seek to relocate to study, and enroll in a greater range of courses, but often these students are the more advantaged individuals within their cohorts (Harvey et al. 2012). The concentration of regional students in selected fields of study and in lower tier institutions in turn affects their access to postgraduate study and professional careers.

Investment in regional schools, particularly public schools, is arguably the most important policy measure to increase regional higher education participation. This investment could be directed to improving student learning experiences, ensuring access to a full range of curriculum, and enhancing careers advice. Reform of school funding must also be accompanied by measures to support mature age students to re-engage with education, and stronger pathways from vocational to higher education. Better access to technology and use of increasingly sophisticated modes of blended learning can also provide opportunities for students in the regions to study a wider range of courses and to improve the quality of their outcomes. These strategies could lead to a reconceptualization of regional campuses as hubs of learning in a range of modes, and overcome some of the problems of 'thin markets'.

A Fair Chance for All affirmed the importance of access to higher education for people regardless of their geographic location. Realising this goal will remain challenging in the face of broader economic and demographic patterns. Strategies that focus on students' learning, and on increasing well-designed educational pathways, have the potential to enable more people from regional and remote communities to access and succeed in higher education.

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Part II

Chapter 10
Higher Education and Inequality in Anglo-American Societies

Simon Marginson

Introduction

This chapter reflects on a longer time span than the 25 years of equality of opportunity since *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990). Its time horizon is the 50 years since the founding moment of the modern approach to equality of opportunity in higher education, in the mid 1960s. The chapter also considers equality and inequality in higher education not just in the context of government policies and higher educational practices, but in the context of the larger society and economy. It does so not in relation to Australia alone but to the larger set of Anglo-American societies, particularly Australia's 'parent' polities in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). The modern histories of higher education in the US and the UK have been influential across the world, most of all in Anglo-American societies such as Australia. English-speaking societies share certain features, including a distinctive approach to merit, fairness and entitlement. With the partial exception of Canada, they also seem chronically unwilling to tackle educational privilege, they are manifestly becoming more unequal in terms of income distribution, and there is less upward social mobility through education than in parts of Europe.

There are close similarities in both policy and institutional organization, between Australia and the UK. At times they almost seem to be a common higher education

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system. Australia lacks an equivalent of Oxford and Cambridge; national policy in Australia places less emphasis on stellar research performance; and some of the 'new' universities in Australia, the former colleges of advanced education (Croucher et al. 2013), have done better than their equivalents in the UK, the post 1992 universities such as the former polytechnics. Nevertheless UK higher education often marches lock-step with Australian thinking, sometimes with a lag of a few years one way or the other. The UK invented Thatcherism in 1980s economic and social policy before it was applied in Australian education (Marginson 1997a, b). Australia developed income-contingent tuition loans and demand-driven funding before they were taken up by the UK. In relation to participation and equity, language, intentions and structures of practice are similar (Gale and Parker 2013). At the same time both the UK and Australia are often affected by American ideas and models, without necessarily embracing the extremes of American experience.

American ideas and policies about equality of opportunity in the 1960s, and a concurrent though less developed set of practices in the UK, still determine society's expectations about higher education in Australia and many other countries. The key idea from the 1960s is the utopian idea of society ordered as an *educational meritocracy*. This chapter discusses the two facesof the 1960s meritocratic ideal: higher education as human capital, as economic progress; and higher education as equality of opportunity, as social justice. These are the founding myths of modern higher education systems. They are resilient myths—if a week is a long time in politics, 50 years is an age—and they have travelled all over the world. There are tensions between human capital theory and the idea of universal equality of opportunity, yet each is essential to the meritocratic ideal. Each of these founding norms imagines that higher education has a great role in making society, in which merit conquers all, though in reality higher education has little control over the economic and social settings that constitute its possibilities and limits.

The Heyday of Equality of Opportunity

Our historical understanding of social selection, merit and equality in Anglo-American society has been advanced by Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-first Century* (2014). Social competition is always partly zero-sum. But Piketty shows that special circumstances after 1945 opened the way to greater social mobility and a larger role for social allocation in higher education in the US, UK and Australia, among other countries.

Before World War I, inherited wealth and capital incomes retarded the potential for upward social mobility through work and education, especially in Europe and the UK but also in the US. At that time the relatively new capitalist societies in Australia and New Zealand were more economically equal and socially open than the UK (Piketty 2014, p. 322). However, in the UK and US the World Wars and Great Depression evacuated many of the great fortunes. The partial emptying out of the upper echelon of society provided more space for upward movement after 1945.

The politics also changed. There was a widespread determination to create a more democratic and humanist order, alongside continuing faith in the efficacy of state intervention. America was shaped by the 1930s New Deal; Australia had Post-War Reconstruction (Macintyre 2015). For a while there was continued support for the wartime instruments of state planning. Finance was nationalized in many countries, and progressive income tax and inheritance taxes, used to mobilise resources for the war effort, continued into the postwar era, reducing inter-generational transfer (Piketty 2014, p. 374). Until the 1970s savings from labour were the main source of wealth. The top tax rate was high and managers' salaries were restrained. High and stable economic growth and the expanding functions of the state facilitated the spread of home-ownership by what Piketty calls the 'patrimonial middle class', including teachers, public servants and academics. There was more room at the top and (partly because of that) more room in the middle of society.

In the 1950s to 1970s the Anglo-American countries came closer to becoming meritocratic than before or since. 'During the decades that followed World War II, inherited wealth lost much of its importance, and for the first time in history, perhaps, work and study became the surest routes to the top' (Piketty 2014, p. 241). It was widely though not universally agreed that the best means of sorting the competition for social position was higher education and the education/work nexus. Aspirations for education boomed. Credentials multiplied. Governments financed the growing social demand for education, even in the US, providing infrastructure and tuition costs.

Equality of Opportunity and Human Capital Theory

Governments built bigger education systems to provide for expanding opportunity. The 1960 Californian Master Plan, the Robbins Report in the UK and the Martin Report in Australia codified the meritocratic role of higher education (Kerr 2001a; Robbins 1963; Martin 1964). The planners wanted to combine excellence and equality, consistent with the existing social and institutional hierarchies, while providing broader pathways for movement into those hierarchies. Here Robbins and the Master Plan did not create social mobility, they facilitated it. Arguably, the 1960s and 1970s saw the peak of higher education's role in social allocation in the English-speaking countries. Secondary schooling and higher education were both more open in themselves, and more able to facilitate social mobility (much as the allocation role is peaking in China today, with its fast growing middle class). It is no coincidence the most progressive education policy, and the greatest willingness of states and taxpayers to finance opportunity, combines with maximum openness in the social structure. The mistake educationists often make is to assume that education policy and practice alone can prise open society to enable more upward mobility. Upward mobility has a larger spread of roots.

The UK Robbins report declared it axiomatic that 'higher education should be open to all those who are qualified by ability and attainment' and 'who wish to' enroll (Robbins 1963, p. 8), though the expansion of opportunity should not compromise academic excellence (Robbins 1966, p. 107). The pool of ability was much larger than often thought, it stated. It was impossible to identify a limit (Robbins 1963, p. 49). The number of places should be regulated by social demand for them. This policy was finally implemented in Australia only in 2010 and UK only in 2015. It was not the UK but California that led the way in progressing universal access.

The 1960 Californian Master Plan adopted the principle of access to all qualified to enter, with the bulk of expansion to take place in 2-year community colleges. Above them were the state universities, and then the top tier, the multi-site University of California, the world's strongest system of science universities. Californian thinking, epitomized in Clark Kerr's (2001b) synthetic analysis of the 'multiversity', and Martin Trow's (1973) argument about the transition from elite to mass to universal higher education, became the main theory of higher education.

However, the democracy of the Master Plan, its reconciliation of institutional hierarchy with universal opportunity, rested on the promise of broad pathways for upward transfer between lower and upper tiers (Parry 2011). Likewise the Robbins Report (1963, p. 9) stated: 'We attach great importance' to the transfer function. In the outcome transfer was largely forgotten. In the UK there was little interface between Further and Higher Education. In Australia, in most fields, transfer from vocational education and training (VET) to higher education was fragmented and retarded by the universities. In California, upward transfer routes became centred on a few community colleges captured by the middle class.

Meanwhile, human capital theory was also being born, not in California but in Chicago (Mincer 1958; Schultz 1959, 1960, 1961; Becker 1964). Human capital theory is pure 1960s. While it conflicts with liberal self-determined learning, it is as meritocratic and optimistic as equality of opportunity. Piketty (2014, p. 385) notes that Gary Becker's mathematisation of human capital theory is permeated by the belief that capital other than human capital has lost its determining importance. In the human capital universe, when students acquired the right educated attributes— the embodied productivity required by graduate employers—salary and success would follow. Providing graduates were 'employable', there was no end to the social wealth that higher education system could generate by this mechanism, until saturation participation was reached. This notion of open potential for growth and enrichment is a long way removed from the Bourdieu's (1984, 1993) zero-sum competition for social position, where the prospects of each person are limited by the positions and trajectories of others. But as long as there were broad opportunities for upward mobility human capital theory seemed to fit.

Human capital theory created impossible expectations. Higher education became responsible not just for personal development and social justice, but universal career success, private enrichment and collective economic growth. Nevertheless, the vision was saleable both in government—rates of return analysis promised to measure the efficiency of higher education and enable targeted investment—and in the public space. Merit as learned and portable ability also had a legitimating power.

Human capital theory, floating free of other forms of capital, implied that those with social advantages had succeeded not because of their birth and connections, but their abilities and powers of application (Hennessy 2014, pp. 1, 34).[1] In this curious backhand way, human capital theory modernised (meritified) privilege, and made social scientists complicit in privilege, though their own normative commitment was to equality of opportunity.

Since the 1960s these two meritocratic paradigms have dominated policy language and research on higher education. Social scientists focus on widening equal opportunity to more of the population, on the barriers to equality, and on issues affecting sub-populations. Other research has focused on the fragmented and disjointed passage between the heterogeneous zones of education and work, including tens of thousands of studies of private rates of return. Yet despite the multiplication of participation and graduate labour by three or four times, distributional equality of opportunity seems further off than ever, the transition to work still harbours mysteries, and it is unclear to what extent graduate returns derive from education or from something else.

There are two overlapping reasons for the failure of research to nail these problems and underpin a more informed and enlightened policy. First, intrinsic weaknesses in the founding utopian notions, the legacy of the 1960s. Second, the conditions governing society, policy and higher education since the 1980s, which have been especially detrimental to equality of opportunity, with the partial exception of gender equality.

Problems of Human Capital Theory

First, consider the problems that have arisen in relation to human capital theory. The theory assumes that education determines marginal productivity, and marginal productivity determines earnings. With some caveats, the value of investment in education is a function of lifetime earnings. These are heroic assumptions. First, and fundamentally, as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) puts it in *Education at a Glance*, 'a host of education-related and context-related factors … affect the returns to education' (OECD 2014a, p. 151). After the other factors are taken out, the residual education/earnings relationship is often weak rather than strong; unsurprising, because as Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa note, 'colleges have little control over wage outcomes' (Arum and Roksa 2014, p. 125). Earnings are affected by social background, by family income (e.g. Wolniak et al. 2008, p. 131), and by type of secondary school attended; by social and family networks at the point of entry to higher education, by networks in the transition to work (Borgen 2015), and networks through the career (Arum and Roksa 2014, p. 14); by field of study, by level of qualification, and by the status and resources of higher education institution, though the effects of 'institutional quality' is subject to

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[1] I thank Glyn Davis for drawing attention to this essay.

much variance in research findings. Earnings are also affected by custom and hierarchy in professions and workplaces, by the system of wage determination, by the industrial balance of power, and by the configurations and fluctuations of national and regional economies.

Second, some quantitative studies find the relationship between graduation and earnings is non linear. The apparent income effects of higher education are magnified at the top end of incomes—though here also the effects of family background on job and income are also magnified (Bingley et al. 2011); the income effects of attending an elite institution tend to inflate (Hussain et al. 2009, p. 12); and field of study differences in earnings fade (Kelly et al. 2010). Together, these findings suggest that other factors such as family connections and super-manager salaries may be driving returns at the top end. This not only underlines the point that factors other than the education itself are at play, it also suggests the ratio between the different causal elements is itself variable: higher education has less effect on high-income earners than on people in the middle.

Third, it is often difficult to accurately attribute enhanced value to individuals who work in a combined workplace, as do most employees (Dorling 2014, p. 57).

Fourth, students often fail to follow a human capital logic in real life. The private benefits associated with education include social status as well as incomes. Some studies find that status effects, status signals, and variations in status by field of study or type of institution, appear stronger than income effects (e.g. Arum and Roksa 2014, pp. 80–81 in relation to business studies; Triventi 2013, pp. 55–57; Zhao 2012; Hu and Vargas 2015. See also Hennessy 2014, p. 47). Prospects of assuming a managerial role seem especially important, relative to earnings, for graduates from prestige institutions, and those with generic degrees working in the public and non-government organisation (NGO) sectors, which includes many women (Roksa 2005, p. 207). Moreover, at point of enrolment students rarely take forgone earnings into account (Thomsen et al. 2013, p. 471); and Robst (2007, p. 399) finds that they mostly know earnings only in the chosen occupation, not in related fields.

Finally, the fit between higher education programmes and occupations is only partly coherent, especially for graduates holding generic degrees (Roksa and Levey 2010, p. 391), and for the many working outside fields of specific training, which often but not always generates income penalties (Melguizo and Wolniak 2012, p. 383).

Problems of Equality of Opportunity

Equality of opportunity carries a parallel set of problems. The principal intrinsic limit is the persistence of irreducible differences between families in economic, social and cultural resources. Policy can partly compensate for economic differences, but can scarcely eliminate the potency of the family in cultural capital and social networks (Corak 2006; Mountford-Zimdars and Sabbagh 2013). As competition

intensifies these effects are heightened. They could be weakened only by shifting social selection away from higher education and channeling family effort into the new domain of competition.

A second intrinsic limit is the socially differentiated capacity to realise student aspirations. In mid secondary school, aspirations to enter higher education are broadly spread. However, students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, and in remote locations, tend to underestimate their own academic potential, are less willing to take risks, and are less familiar with performance and application strategies (e.g. Thomsen et al. 2013, pp. 457, 471, 474). These difficulties could be partly overcome by extensive identification and tailored assistance. Instead actual Anglo-American systems tend to magnify the intrinsic inequality, as apparent in two studies published in 2013.

In the US Caroline Hoxby and Christopher Avery (2013) provide a census-level study of all applicants to higher education in the United States. They found that the vast majority of low-income high achievers do not apply to any selective American college, despite the lower prices of tuition in selective colleges due to financial aid. Low-income high achievers opt for more uniformly safe choices than do their high-income colleagues. Typically the former are from districts too small for selective high schools or a mass of high achievers, and are unlikely to encounter a teacher who attended a selective college. They make application decisions without fully knowing their own capabilities.

In another large-scale study, in the UK, Vikki Boliver (2013, 2011) finds continued and dramatic class differences in access to the elite universities: 'Applicants from lower class backgrounds and from state schools remained much less likely to apply to Russell Group universities than their comparably qualified counterparts from higher class backgrounds and private schools, while Russell Group applicants from state schools and from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds remained much less likely to receive offers of admission from Russell Group universities, in comparison with their equivalently qualified peers from private schools and the White ethnic group'. Those 'schooled in the state sector remain just half as likely to apply to a Russell Group university as those from private schools' (Boliver 2013, pp. 344–345). UK students must file applications before their final school results are known, increasing what Hoxby and Avery call 'undermatching' (Hoxby and Avery 2013, p. 4; Borgen 2015, p. 34; see also parallel findings by Chankseliani 2013, p. 440, for Georgia). Worse, however, Boliver shows that inequality of opportunity is also built into the university admissions process. In the case of students with equivalent qualifications, 'applying to a Russell Group university from a private school rather than a state school, or from a White ethnic background rather than a Black Caribbean/African or Pakistani/Bangladeshi one, increases the odds of admission to a Russell Group university by at least as much as having an additional B-grade A-level' (Boliver 2013, p. 358).

A third intrinsic limit to equality of opportunity is systemic and structural—the tendency of expanding higher education systems to differentiate between or within sub-sectors, on the basis of unequal value (Shavit et al. 2007). With a structured hierarchy of value, for example between state and private schools, or between

different tiers or types of institutions, families with prior social advantages are best placed to compete for the places conferring high positional advantages (e.g. of many Lucas 2001, 2009). The social hierarchy becomes matched to the hierarchy of educational sectors, institutions and programmes, varied on the basis of selectivity. Financial barriers can accentuate prior social differences, though income-contingent tuition loans soften these effects.

The post 1990 turn to quasi-market competition in system organisation (Marginson 1997b) is associated with the accentuation of stratification between institutions. Research by Scott Davies and David Zarifa (2012), using Gini coefficients and other measures of the stratification of higher education in the US and Canada, and focused on institutional resources, shows that the vertical 'stretch' in both countries has increased, the US system is considerably 'steeper' than Canada, and the Ivy League is peeling away from the rest. Davies and Zarifa note that in competitive systems a process of cumulative advantage operates, whereby top institutions leverage their resources and status to further lift their relative position. These trends are not an inevitable outcome of growth per se. Nordic education shows that policy, regulation and funding together can limit to modest levels the resource and status differences between schools and between universities, so that formal education tends to reduce rather than reproduce or increase overall social and economic inequality. But a certain threshold level of trust and equality of respect is needed to establish and maintain such systems (Gärtner and Prado 2012).

Inequality of opportunity becomes especially concentrated when the above factors intersect, for example cultural capital and social networking within elite structures. In a qualitative study of students at the University of Oxford and at Sciences Po in Paris, Gerbrand Tholen and colleagues (2013) show how these students use networked connections to secure entry to the upper echelons of the graduate labour market. One student distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' networks: good networks are grounded in smarts and academic merit; bad networks solely in family and ambition (p. 148). The merit principle is still normative but here it plays out within restricted circles, legitimating elite trajectories, rather than underpinning whole-of-system organisation.

This is more obvious in Laura Rivera's (2011, 2012) research on the hiring practices of leading Northeastern banks, consulting and law firms in the US. These firms recruit not simply from selective schools, but solely from Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Stanford, and Wharton at MBA level. It is not the content of Ivy League education they value but its prestige. They attribute superior qualities to these graduates because they had been selected into top universities, regardless of academic performance once there. Further, following a process also used in Ivy League admissions, at point of hire the elite firms perform a strong secondary screen on candidates' extracurricular accomplishments. They favour high status, resource-intensive activities typical of white upper-middle class culture, to achieve cultural fit between graduates and the other employees of the firm.

These studies, quantitative and qualitative, indicate the extent to which higher education falls short of the 1960s meritocratic ideal. There is an unmistakable class-based and location-based patterning of outcomes. The extreme case is the US,

where 64 % of the students of Tier 1 institutions are from the top 10 % American families in terms of income (Soares 2007, p. 167). Some leading public universities do better. University of California Berkeley's intake is as academically strong as that of the Tier 1 private universities, yet it enrols as many low-income students, and students from under-represented minorities, as the whole Ivy League. Only 28 % of its intake is from the top income decile.[2] But this is an egalitarian drop in the sea of inequality. Equality of opportunity is further reduced by informal quotas that limit the number of Asian-Americans entering prestige universities, despite superior academic performance (Unz 2012).[3] Further, taking both elite and non-elite institutions into account, early degree completion rates are heavily skewed towards the top income quartile (Fig. 10.1).

In 2013, 77 % of persons in the top US family income quartile had completed a degree by age 24 years. The graduation rate had almost doubled from 40 % in 1970. In the bottom quartile the graduation rate also rose, but from 6 % in 1970 to 9 % in 2013. In the second bottom quartile the graduation rate was 17 % in 2013 (The
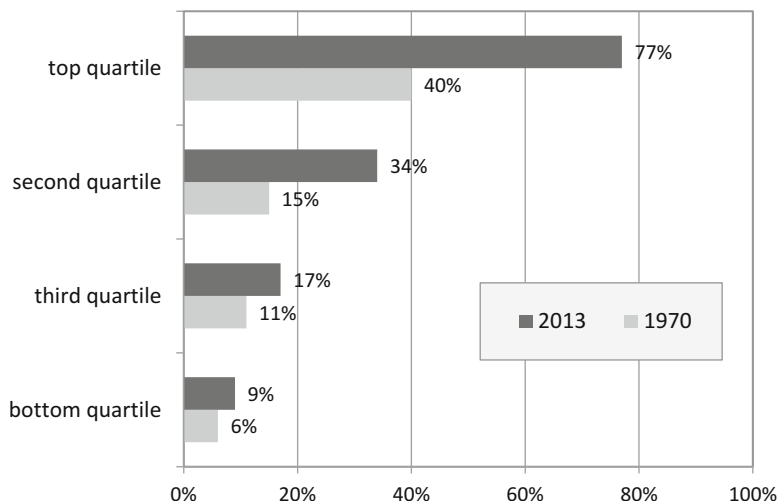
Fig. 10.1 Social inequality in college degree attainment in the United States, 1970/ 2013. Graduated with Bachelor degree by age 24 years, by family income quartile (Source: Adapted from data in The PELL Institute and Penn Ahead (2015), p. 31)

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[2] Under UC Berkeley's progressive tuition policy, 40 % of undergraduates are subsidized by other students and pay no tuition, and two thirds receive at least some financial aid. Half Berkeley's students graduate with no debt. The average graduate debt of $19,000 is just over two thirds of the national average of $27,000 (Douglass 2013, pp. 4–5; Soares 2007, pp. 166–167).

[3] The violation of the merit principle in relation to Asian-Americans is the subject of a legal challenge to Harvard (Associated Press 2015). Longstanding use of non-academic criteria by the Ivy League enables them to discriminate, but the problem may also extend to the University of California (Samson 2013).

PELL Institute 2015, p. 31). Reflecting on this, in *Degrees of Inequality* (2014), Suzanne Mettler argues that: 'Over the past 30 years … our system of higher education has gone from facilitating upward mobility to exacerbating social inequality.' Higher education fosters a society that 'increasingly resembles a caste system: it takes Americans who grew up in different social strata and it widens the divisions between them and makes them more rigid'. It 'stratifies Americans by income group rather than providing them with ladders of opportunity (Mettler 2014, pp. 4–5, 8).

Mettler's statement about lack of mobility is supported by OECD data comparing the odds of getting to tertiary education for two groups of students—those with one or more parents who attended tertiary education, and those whose parents did not. In the US, students from tertiary educated families were 6.8 times as likely to access tertiary education, than students from non-tertiary families. In England in the UK (6.3) intergenerational mobility was almost as low. Only Poland and Italy (9.5) had lower mobility than the US and UK. Australia (4.3) was in the middle of the table. Scandinavia ranged from Finland (1.4) to Denmark (3.0). South Korea was 1.1. These data again suggest there is an Anglo-American problem, and that it is worse in the US and probably the UK than Australia—Canada at 2.6 in the OECD data is the exceptional case—and also emphasise that it is possible to have higher mobility than in the US and UK (OECD 2014a, p. 93). However, low social mobility as evidenced by stratified educational participation does not mean higher education *itself* is the driver of low social mobility and high inequality.

The Larger Patterning of Social Inequality

So far the failure of the 1960s meritocratic ideal has been explained in terms of flaws in the ideal, flaws also articulated through its weak and partial implementation, dogged by policies and practices (private schools, stratification and low transfer between tertiary institutions, financial barriers, admissions) that retard it. However, what of the larger historical setting, in which merit has retained a legitimating function, yet the dream of open social mobility and egalitarian education is fading? Why is it that Anglo-American societies failed to press forward towards Nordic educational achievement and equality? Since the 1970s merit in higher education has played out in a setting in which Anglo-American societies—though not all societies—have become significantly more unequal; and this inequality has extended from the economy and society to the polity.

Trends in inequality are readily quantified only in relation to incomes and wealth. Income inequality is the aggregation of inequality of income from labour and inequality of income from capital in form of financial holdings and property. More than 99 % of people earn the majority of their incomes from labour. Both labour and capital incomes are affected by taxation policy, which can either decrease and increase inequality. In general, societies that are relatively equal in their distribution of income and wealth are also societies in which inter-generational social mobility is maximized (Piketty 2014), which as noted, provides the greatest scope for the allocative role of higher education.

Table 10.1 Income shares of top 1 % and bottom 50 %

	Europe 1910 High inequality (%)	Scandinavia 1970s/1980s Low inequality (%)	Europe 2010 Medium-high inequality (%)	USA 2010 High inequality (%)
Top 1 %				
Share of labour income	6	5	7	12
Share of capital income	50	20	25	35
Share of total income	20	7	10	20
Bottom 50 %				
Share of labour income	n.a.	35	30	20
Share of capital income	5	10	5	5
Share of total income	20	30	25	20

Source: Adapted from data in Piketty (2014), pp. 247–249

Piketty and others show that in the Anglo-American countries, the concentration of wealth and income in hands of the top 10 %, top 1 %, and top 0.01 % have increased sharply since 1980 (Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2013; Dorling 2014; OECD 2014b). There is no debate about the continuing empirical trend to greater inequality in the US and UK, and in Australia (Piketty 2014, pp. 315–316). It is clear and dramatic.

In 1970s Scandinavia, the most equal of the modern societies, the top 1 % received 7 % of all income. In Europe in 2010, the top 1 % received 10 % of income. In the US in 2010 the top 1 % received 20 %, the same level as in the aristocrat-led societies of late nineteenth century Europe (Table 10.1). However, in 2010 the top 1 % in the US achieved 20 % of income more through labour income and less through inherited capital than was the case in old Europe. Modernised inequality is legitimated by an element of merit, though as elite graduate recruitment shows, competition for top labour incomes is scarcely a level playing field.

At present economic inequality is increasing in about two thirds of countries. There has been an explosive growth of managerial salaries in the US and UK, and to a lesser degree Australia, Japan and European countries, much of it in the finance sector. Finance, which received 40 % of US profits prior to 2008 (Stiglitz 2013, p. 120), has double the proportion of very high salaries that its share of the economy suggests (Piketty 2014, p. 303). Managers often set their own remuneration, including bonuses, or negotiate that remuneration with boards of like-minded folk on which they themselves sit (Stiglitz 2013). Again we find that inequality takes a more modern quasi-meritocratic form, centered on control over work rather than inheritance,

and normatively grounded in the 'shareholder value conception of the firm' in which managers are seen to contribute disproportionately to value (Hanley 2011, p. 904).

Between 1980 and 2010 in the US the income share held by the top 0.1 % rose from 2 % to nearly 10 %. Income in the US is now 'about as unequally distributed as has ever been observed anywhere' (Piketty 2014, pp. 319, 256). Piketty (2014) expects that by 2030, the top 1 % in the US will receive 25 % of all income, compared to 20 % in 2010, and the bottom 50 %'s share will have fallen from 20 % to 15 % (p. 249). In the UK between 1980 and 2010, the income share of the top 1 % moved from 6 to 15 %, reaching the highest level since the 1930s. In Canada it was 12 % in 2010. In Australia it was 10 %, the highest level since the Korean War wool boom of the early 1950s (Piketty 2014, p. 316).

Salary inequality is partly balanced by the patrimonial middle class, though in the US the decline in the market value of many homes, and the slippage in the middle class share of wages, indicates the position of the 'middle middle' and lower middle class is declining (Stiglitz 2013). In the next generation, when today's super manager salary is tomorrow's inheritance, the more traditional form of inequality will return. Society will become more closed at the top, reducing meritocratic mobility into and within the elite, while income shares continue to decline at the middle and bottom of the pyramid.

Piketty's argument is that the trend to inequality and the attenuation of social mobility are endogenous to the capitalist economy, unless corrected by policy. The endogenous trend has been the starting point for the political developments of the last three decades, in the neo-liberal era. Societies relatively static in terms of social mobility, in which social elites are rapidly concentrating their economic power, are vulnerable to the plutocratic capture of politics, and the implementation of political ideologies and fiscal and monetary policies crafted to advance the interests of the elite. This has happened in the US and UK, and arguably also in Australia. The problem of plutocratic capture is much discussed in the inequality literature, including that of the global policy agencies and global NGOs (e.g. Cingano 2014 for OECD, Oxfam 2014). Plutocratic capture has been linked to financial deregulation and the 'financialization' of the economy (e.g. Piketty 2014, pp. 193–194, 303, 376; Stiglitz 2013, pp. xxiii, 43, 120, 308; Dorling 2014, pp. 55, 83–90; OECD 2014b, p. 9; Tridico 2012; Wisman 2013, p. 939; Bentele 2013, p. 29; Hanley 2011, p. 908); and political symbiosis between central government regulation—particularly in Treasury-dominated polities such as the UK and Australia—and the private finance sector (Stiglitz 2013, pp. xxiii, 311). Neo-liberalism is a set of regulatory technologies grounded in the finance-sector worldview.

Plutocratic capture of the polity is illustrated by tax policy. There is a close relationship between the growth of the income shares of the top 1 % and 0.1 %, and reductions in the rate of tax on capital and labour incomes (Stiglitz 2013, p. xxxi; Dorling 2014, p. 77). The anti-tax posture now mandatory in Anglo-American politics acts to protect the rich. Piketty remarks: 'Taxation is perhaps the most important of all political issues. Without taxes, society has no common destiny, and collective action is impossible' (2014, p. 493). However, it is now highly unlikely that any

political party could take government without conforming to the finance sector policy templates, including deregulation and tax minimisation.

In the context of elite capture of the polity, the regulation of schooling and higher education in the interests of elite stakeholders is easy to understand. The neglect of state schools; the fostering and funding of private schools, which encourages some families to invest in privileged treatment for their own children at the expense of others; the policy failure to secure social equality in access to elite universities, the nurturing of positional hierarchies through competition and league tables; and in the US the lucrative federal subsidisation of the for-profit colleges despite low quality and poor student completion rates (Mettler 2014, pp. 87–110)—these are minor aspects of the larger political project of the plutocracy. Yet this political project not only violates equality of opportunity in higher education, it also tears the meritocratic mask away from human capital theory.

Higher Education and Anglo-American Inequality

In the English-speaking world the rapid growth of inequality is taking place in societies in which formal participation in higher education is at an historic high. If education produces human capital, which determines marginal productivity, and that determines rates of return, then education-determined inequality of skills and productivity is responsible for the growing income inequality. Yet higher education is largely decoupled from the surge in top incomes (Piketty 2014, pp. 315, 330).[4] The theory of marginal productivity, human capital theory, cannot explain large variations in graduate incomes over time. Nor does it explain differences between earnings, and patterns of income distribution, in countries whose higher education is relatively similar (Piketty 2014, p. 308).

It is clear that the social allocation function of higher education is not a constant but is conditioned by the larger social, economic and political setting. Nor is this function necessarily constant across a single population. It is segmented. Elite institutions, along with family and social networks, provide one of the principal pathways into high salaried professional positions, funneling innovative talent into finance and managerial roles where the chief rewards lie (Stiglitz 2013, p. 120). This not only underlines the role of higher education in positional allocation, it also identifies a function of higher education that only some students experience. William Deresiewicz (2014) and Roger Geiger (2015) suggest that in the US, elite higher

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[4] It is ironic that while current international agency literature on inequality pins the blame for growing inequality on super-salaries rather than education, it gives education policy principal credit for cases of reduced inequality, e.g. Brazil; and high growth without growing inequality, e.g. South Korea, and treats education policy as key to reducing inequality (OECD 2010, 2014b; Lee et al. 2012; Cingano 2014; Oxfam 2014, p. 18). However, it is plausible that reduced inequality, and better access to good quality education, both have origins in third factors such as changing economic values, growing trust and/or political reform; and clearly each is facilitated by, as well as facilitating, increased social mobility.

education plays a primary role in distinguishing the upper middle class—those nest-ling in the top 1–5%—from the more beleaguered American 'middle middle' class. Here something like 1950s/1970s social allocation plays out. However, above and below the middle layer it is different.

Figure 10.1 showed that for Americans in the bottom two income quartiles, higher education's role in social allocation is limited. Above the level of the upper middle class, higher education as such again becomes less important. Though the apparent returns to higher education are maximized, more than higher education is at work; and as private fortunes grow, especially as inheritance returns to a primary role, university becomes less essential—notwithstanding its meritocratic legitima-tion function, and the prestige consumption of Ivy League and Oxford/Cambridge degrees. In the US Joseph Soares finds that 22 % of the children of high income professional families enroll in Tier 1 institutions, and 14 % of children from high-income non-professional families. In fact 19 % of the children of all high-income professional families, and 36 % from other high-income families, attend no college at all (Soares 2007, pp. 173–179).

The paradox is that higher education is potent in creating new prospects for indi-viduals from low SES backgrounds lacking family capital, even while it fails to redistribute opportunities, especially in elite institutions, on a social scale. Brand and Xie (2010) and Dale and Krueger (2011) finds that students from under-represented social groups gain the largest benefits from higher education, relative to their compatriots who do not participate. Conversely, socially advantaged students depend on higher education the least for access to social status, income and profes-sional work, but participate at the highest rate. What higher education cannot do on its own, despite the supply-side promise of human capital theory, is expand the number of high value positions in society, so as to enable expanded mobility into the middle and upper echelons of society. In the absence of absolute growth in opportu-nities—or what was always more unlikely, a redistribution which would reduce the opportunities to some families from the middle and/or upper layers of the SES dis-tribution—competition into and within higher education can only become more intense, as middle class families jostle for position and bring every possible asset to bear on the competition to secure advantage. Until the political economy changes, that is the future for Anglo-American higher education.

Conclusions

One third of the world's school leavers now participate in tertiary education, com-pared to 10 % in 1970. There is majority participation in the Anglo-American coun-tries (UNESCO 2015). From 1990 to 2010 the female to male ratio of total years of education lifted from 82 to 91 % (UNDP 2013). Education helps to reproduce soci-eties with relatively low inequality, as in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, or is associated with mobility amid growth as in South Korea. Yet in the English-speaking countries, hopes that more democratic education could weaken class-based stratifi-cation have failed.

Higher education can facilitate more meritocratic social allocation and higher intergenerational mobility when a relatively egalitarian social order is in place, but it cannot and will not trigger the development of more egalitarian society on its own. The lesson of the last 50 years is that while we can do much to create a fairer system for individuals and for particular localities, the victories are limited. The social averages do not shift very much. Later the system springs back to type—unless the social and political climate favours greater social equality, as in the 1950s/1970s in the English-speaking world. This is not the case at present, though the limits of the time are concealed by the legitimating myth of human capital, the official rhetoric and token programmes for equal opportunity, and the continuing illusions educationists and others create about the meritocratic potential of education. Nor can higher education restore the 1950s/1970s setting solely by its own efforts. Informed and enlightened governments and publics can and should do all that they can to open up elite universities along Berkeley lines; and especially to shore up the resourcing, status and quality of mass higher education; but beyond a certain point all efforts will be blocked unless there is a change in the social settings outside education.

We should set aside the self-fulfilling hubris that higher education is the principal maker of society. In aggregate, incomes, wealth, labour markets, taxation, government spending, social programmes, and urban development, are overwhelmingly more important. Christening the social realm a 'knowledge economy' or 'innovation society' will not change this. If there is to be a new opening and equalising of educational opportunity, the preconditions lie in changes in the distribution of economic rewards, a reduced tolerance for social hierarchy, and the re-democratisation of politics and policy. If we are truly to achieve a 'fair chance for all', that is where we must look.

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Chapter 11
Equity and Markets

Andrew Norton

Introduction

In the years before *A Fair Chance for All* was published, higher education markets had started at the edges of an otherwise bureaucratic system. Yet the report itself makes no mention of this, and reflects the era's dominant policy culture. It sets out the equity strategies that universities, as highly dependent clients of the Australian government, would be expected to follow. The report assumes rather than responds to the wishes and interests of students.

Although market alternatives to this top-down approach were suggested at the time and subsequently, no comprehensive market-driven policy reform has ever made it through the political process. Yet through several steps over 25 years most student places have come to be distributed by markets or quasi-markets. In markets, the number of places and their prices are principally set through the decisions of higher education providers and students. In Australia, international students, domestic postgraduate coursework students, and students outside the public university system are mostly in markets. Domestic undergraduates in public universities are largely in a quasi-market, with few controls on student numbers but fees that are capped.

This chapter looks at what these markets mean for equity groups discussed in *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1990). It discusses them in chronological order of the government's decision to become involved in market-based policies.

The basic thesis advanced is that the supply of student places is vital to the academically disadvantaged equity groups. While the total number of places was not ignored in *A Fair Chance for All* or in later policy, it has received too little attention

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relative to its significance. It is no coincidence that most equity groups experienced their largest enrolment surges after controls on student numbers were lifted.

This Chapter's Equity Group Focus

As this chapter is about funding mechanisms, it will focus on equity groups most likely to be affected by the number of student places and their price. These are people identifying as Indigenous, living in a regional or remote location or classified as low socio-economic status. The latter group gets the most emphasis, reflecting the research literature. Academic disadvantages common in these groups reduce options when student places are limited, and low income could restrict opportunity when study costs are high.

By contrast, neither women nor people from non-English speaking backgrounds, two other *A Fair Chance for All* equity groups, are generally academically disadvantaged or under-represented at university. Some particular issues with these groups are considered in other chapters. More than the other equity categories, students with disabilities need specific support or adaptation by the university. Improvements in these areas, and possibly better identification of students with a disability, may be more significant access factors than places or prices.

Equity group trends are officially measured by reference to the university population. This is a convenient method, as enrolment data gives us an annual census to work with, but it is not ideal for tracking overall equity progress. Where data is available, it is better to track equity groups against their own population. For example, low socio-economic status student numbers can be calculated as a percentage of low socio-economic status persons. This tells us to what extent opportunities for higher education are increasing or decreasing for that group. Using the university population as the equity denominator implicitly assumes that the issue is distributing a fixed pool of student places, when as this chapter argues the size of the pool is a key obstacle to equity group progress.

The Funding System for Government-Supported Students in the Early 1990s

When *A Fair Chance for All* was published in early 1990, Australia was in the second year of an experiment with income-contingent loans, through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). This ended a period of free higher education that began in 1974, with all government-supported students being charged a flat $1,800 a year, equivalent to around $3,700 in 2015. Students could pay this directly or defer payment until their income reached a threshold, which was equivalent to

around 90 % of average weekly full-time earnings (Highfield and Warren 2015, p. 252). This income-contingent aspect meant that there were no upfront tuition charges, and that education remained free for people with long-term earnings below the threshold for repayment.

Both sides of the HECS debate made equity arguments. The Wran report that recommended HECS argued that the free higher education system was 'inequitable', because its benefits went mostly to people who are or would become privileged and affluent (Wran 1988, p. ix). The additional revenue from HECS would help fund additional student places, with the then education minister John Dawkins arguing that 'improvements in access and equity are heavily dependent on growth in the system' (Dawkins 1988, p. 21). Opponents of HECS argued that it would reduce access for less privileged groups and women (Chapman and Nicholls 2013, pp. 113–119).

At least impliedly, different models of equity group thinking lie behind these competing arguments. Demand-side arguments for free education assume high levels of price sensitivity and risk aversion, especially among groups that are historically under-represented in higher education. The argument for HECS, by contrast, assumes that people across the socio-economic spectrum make broadly rational decisions about higher education. As the HECS charge was low relative to the benefits of higher education, and as the government took much of the financial risk, it would have no significant effect on student demand. Its impact will be discussed later.

Although HECS is an example of user pays, it was not the introduction of markets into undergraduate education. Market prices are set by suppliers of goods and services responding to consumer demand. With HECS, neither the universities nor their students had any direct influence on the student charge. The 1974 policy that government would set the price for student places remained; it was just no longer going to be zero. The money went to the government, with universities acting as collection agencies for students paying upfront. HECS had no effect on net university income, which principally came from a separately determined operating grant for their teaching and research activities.

Similarly, HECS gave students no market influence on the number of places any university offered. This was determined by government, with the specific preferences of students for particular courses or institutions not a major factor in the decision. Although HECS financed more student places, significant unmet demand for higher education remained, as seen in Fig. 11.1. Calculating real unmet demand is not straightforward for reasons described in the notes to Fig. 11.1. Around the time that *A Fair Chance for All* was published, about 50,000 applications for university did not result in any offers, with underlying unmet demand estimated at around 20,000. To put this in context, about 129,000 domestic students started a bachelor degree in 1991 (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), 2001, p. 15), suggesting that around 13 % of the potential commencing cohort was not admitted.
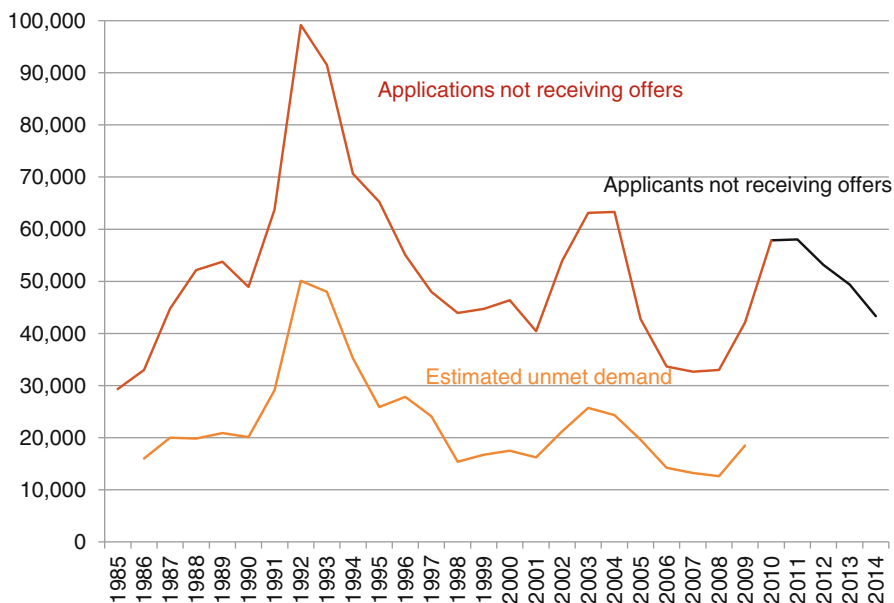
Fig. 11.1 Unmet demand for undergraduate higher education, 1985–2014. Note: Only applications to public universities are included. 1985–2009 'applications not receiving offers' is from tertiary admissions centres only and removes low ATAR applicants from the count. The ATAR cut-off varied over time, but was 54.55 in 2009. 'Estimated unmet demand' removes double counting of applicants who applied in more than one state, and includes a discount for applicants predicted to reject their offer, had they received one. The chart reports the upper estimate of annual unmet demand, which was presented as a range. 2010–2014 counts all applicants, including direct applicants to universities as well as through tertiary admissions centres (Sources: Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) (2004), Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2009b), Department of Education and Training (2015b))

Student Places and Equity Groups

Shortages of student places create a need for rationing. For young people, there is usually a threshold requirement of completing the final year of school. Once this threshold is reached, typically applicants are ranked by their prior academic performance. The higher an applicant's rank, the higher their chance of an offer. Conversely, lower-ranked applicants have a reduced chance of receiving an offer, both for particular courses and overall. This system disadvantages any group that tends to have weaker prior academic performance.

For children whose parents have lower educational attainment levels and occupational status, as well as children who are Indigenous or living in non-metropolitan areas, academic disadvantage is evident early in the school years (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2014). This flows through into school completion. By the late 1980s around half of low socio-economic status students were finishing school, compared to approximately 70 % of

high socio-economic status teenagers (West et al. 1998, p. 93). By 2013 a little over two-thirds of low socio-economic status students finished school, so a larger share now reach higher education's threshold requirement. The gap between high and low socio-economic status school completion rates has narrowed to 11 percentage points (Productivity Commission 2015, Table 4A.191). Indigenous students have increased their Year 12 completion rates significantly since 2000, but in 2014 they were still 25 percentage points below the result of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2015, Table 64a). Regional students are less likely than students in metropolitan areas to complete school (ABS 2008, pp. 93–97).

Oddly, given the importance of Year 12 results classified by equity group for assessing how many prospective university students could be enrolled, this data is not routinely collected or reported. Ad hoc studies suggest, unsurprisingly, that low socio-economic status students get significantly lower Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranks (ATARs) than their high socio-economic status peers. Figure 11.2 shows that in 2008, Victorian students living in low socio-economic status areas had ATARs that were significantly skewed to the lower end. Only 16 % had results in the 80-plus ATAR range that provides a good range of course choices, compared to 44 % of school completers in high socio-economic status areas. Various other studies using a mix of geographical and parental measures of socio-economic status arrive at the same general conclusion (Cobb-Clark and Nguyen 2012; Edwards et al. 2005; Huong and Justman 2014; Redmond et al. 2014; Teese and Polesel
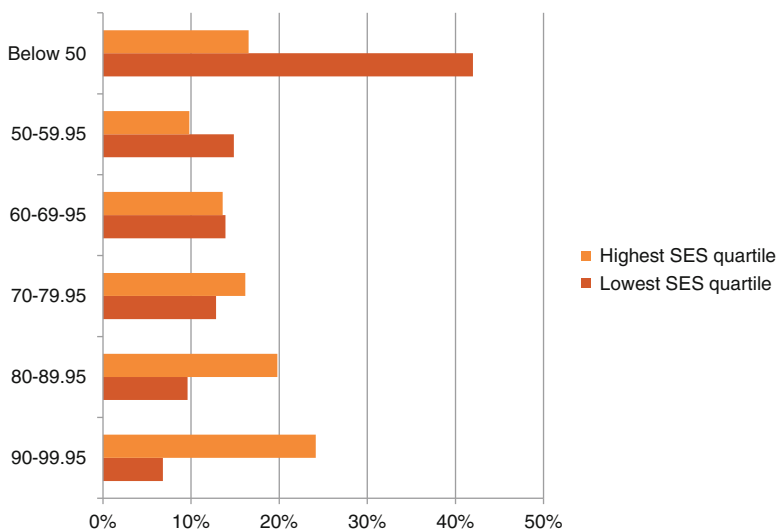
Fig. 11.2 Distribution of ATAR results, 2008 Victorian school leavers by geographic classification of socio-economic status. Note: The allocation of student postcodes was based on the ABS census Index of Education and Occupation. However, it used the simple ABS ranking of postcodes, while Department of Education and Training SES indicators use a population weighted ranking. This has led to an understatement of low SES numbers by the population measure (Source: Author's own calculations based on Victorian Tertiary Admission Centre data)

2003). This is also reflected in low socio-economic status students who do apply to university having relatively low ATARs (Kemp and Norton 2014, p. 38).

Lower school completion rates and weaker Year 12 results make it near-impossible for equity groups to have a university enrolment share that matches their share of the population. However, at the margins there are Year 12 completers at the lower-ATAR levels who would have gone to university, if there had been more places (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2009b, table A15). The system of constraining the number of student places, therefore, disproportionately affected academically disadvantaged equity groups. The implications of this will be explored further when the demand driven system is discussed.

Restricted admission to undergraduate places has flow-through consequences for postgraduate study. Successful completion of a bachelor degree is typically required for admission to postgraduate courses, although professional experience is sometimes an acceptable substitute.

Markets in Higher Education

At the time of *A Fair Chance for All* the vast majority of students were in places allocated by the government, with prices set by the government. The following sections describe the impact of market or quasi-market policies on the academically disadvantaged equity groups, particularly those of low socio-economic status (a category which overlaps with Indigenous and regional students).

Because Australia's equity framework focuses on domestic students, this chapter omits any detailed discussion of international students. They were the first major exception to government control of student places and prices, with deregulation beginning in 1986 (Meadows 2011). This market has been very successful. By 2013, there were nearly 330,000 international students enrolled in Australian universities, including 85,000 studying offshore (for more detail see (Norton and Cherastidtham 2014, pp. 24–25)). These students earned universities at least $4.3 billion, which was 16 % of all university income (Department of Education 2014b).[1] International students are still the purest market public universities have: there are no controls on numbers, there is no maximum fee, there are no tuition subsidies, and there are no student loans.[2]

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[1] The number is likely under-stated, as some international student revenue comes through subsidiaries and partnership arrangements.

[2] For onshore international students, a student visa is required. However, there is no maximum number of visas that can be issued. Some international students have their fees paid for them as part of Australia's international aid program.

Domestic Postgraduate Coursework Students

In the free education era, postgraduate places for domestic students were, like their undergraduate equivalents, fully publicly funded and distributed. As with under-graduates, this put constraints on student numbers. From 1988, the government cautiously lifted regulations preventing full-fee postgraduate coursework places. Initially, full-fee courses could only be offered to employed people who were upgrading their skills (DEET 1993, p. 93). This reflected similar equity considerations to those used in support of HECS. Such people were not likely to need public support, as both their current and future incomes were likely to be above average. There were many policy changes over the following years, but by 1994 the domestic postgraduate coursework market was largely deregulated, except for initial professional entry qualifications in teaching and nursing (Anderson et al. 1998, pp. 111–112). This meant that universities could decide how many places to offer and what fees to charge.

With full-fee postgraduate students adding to HECS students, enrolments grew rapidly, as seen in Fig. 11.3. In the 1996 Budget, however, higher education funding cuts were particularly focused on postgraduate coursework places (Vanstone 1996, p. 7). This contributed to a decline in numbers after 1997. Prior to that point, at least, the mixed economy model of funding postgraduate coursework places had probably helped the equity groups. While upfront full-fee places would be too expensive for some students, the scale of the capacity increase outweighed any deterrent effects on total enrolments. Between 1993 and 1997 there was a 15 % increase in rural enrolments, a 20 % increase in low socio-economic status enrolments, a 27 %
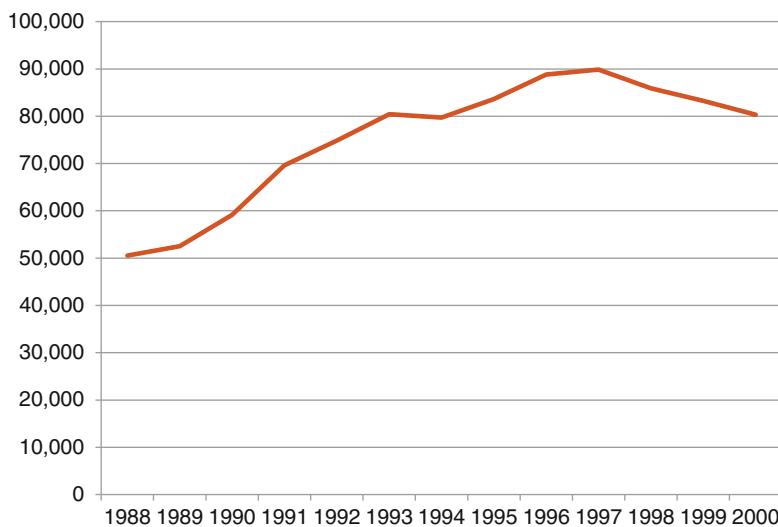

Fig. 11.3 Domestic postgraduate coursework students, 1988–2000 (Source: DEEWR (2000))

increase in female enrolments, and a 76 % increase in Indigenous enrolments (Anderson et al. 1998).

The absence of income-contingent loans for full-fee postgraduate coursework places was a constraint on the market, and one that was likely to particularly affect equity groups. In response, the Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme (PELS) began in 2002. PELS debt was added to any outstanding HECS debt, and repaid according to the same criteria. As can be seen in Fig. 11.4, it probably contributed to a spike in full-fee enrolments, clearing financial obstacles to further study previously faced by some students. In 2005, PELS was merged into FEE-HELP, which covered full-fee students regardless of enrolment level.

Commonwealth-supported postgraduate places were limited in number for some years, but after 2005 they began growing again, as can also be seen in Fig. 11.4. They had the same public funding rates as undergraduate places, with student charges also the same regardless of course level. Places were allocated through funding agreements between the Commonwealth government and each university. For a few years, growth in total postgraduate enrolments was driven by these places. The new places were spread widely across institutions and disciplines, and include special deals to transfer initial professional entry courses to postgraduate level (such as at the University of Melbourne). While the absolute number of fee-paying places grew again from 2009, their share of the total has been under 60 % for several years, after peaking at 77 % in 2005.

Some postgraduate courses are expensive. As Fig. 11.5 shows, the median annual fee for a Juris Doctor (JD), an initial professional entry qualification for legal practice, is $30,000. The median Master of Business Administration (MBA) course
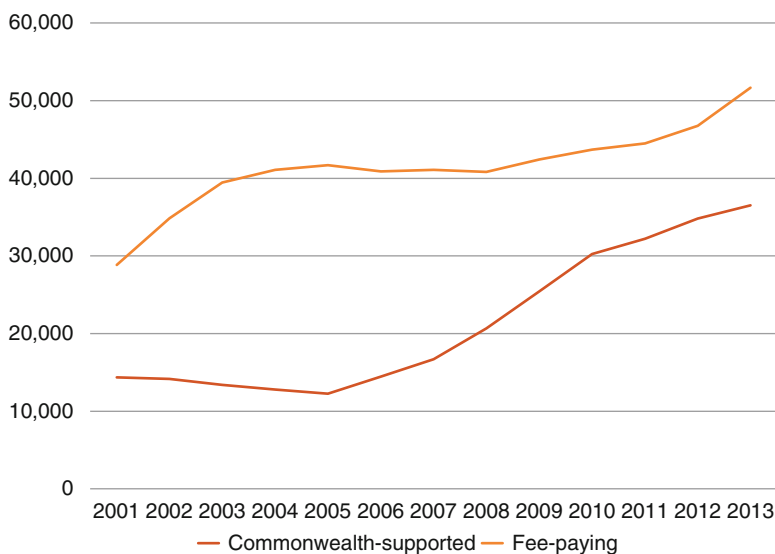

Fig. 11.4 Full-time equivalent postgraduate coursework enrolments, by fee-paying status, 2001–2013 (Source: Department of Education and Training (2015a))
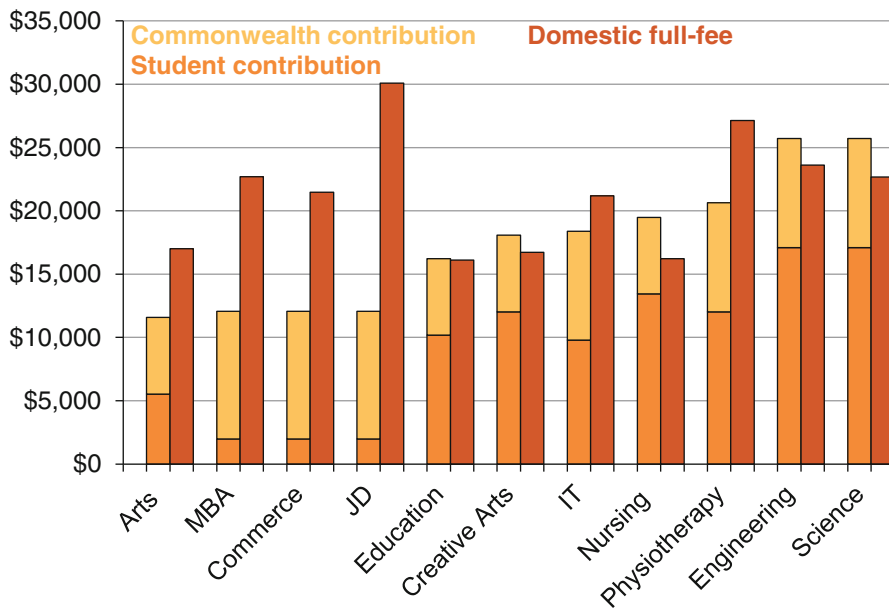
Fig. 11.5 Income for a Commonwealth-supported place compared to median domestic postgraduate fees, 2014 (Source: Fee data is sourced from university websites)

costs about $23,000 a year. In both cases, the revenue per place received by a university is well in excess of what it would receive for a Commonwealth-supported place in the same discipline. In all disciplines, the median fee exceeds the student contribution for that discipline. However, in several disciplines the median fee is less than the total income the university would receive for a Commonwealth-supported student. University equity missions may be a factor in this pricing.

Researchers have suggested various reasons why people at least originally from a low socio-economic background may be under-represented in postgraduate education. These include general theories about attitudes to cost and debt among lower socio-economic status groups. There are also more specific concerns around postgraduate education, including limited eligibility for social security benefits and whether the first university attended may limit options (Harvey and Andrewartha 2013).

Equity group participation in postgraduate coursework is not routinely reported. The geographic socio-economic measures used for undergraduates aim to capture the families they come from by using a home address (rather than a teaching period address, which would over-represent high socio-economic status locations around universities). Postgraduate students are much less likely to be living with their parents than undergraduates.[3] The census indicators used to rate addresses by

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[3] According to the 2011 census, 45 % of people enrolled at university without any post-school qualification give their household relationship status as a 'dependent student'. By contrast, only
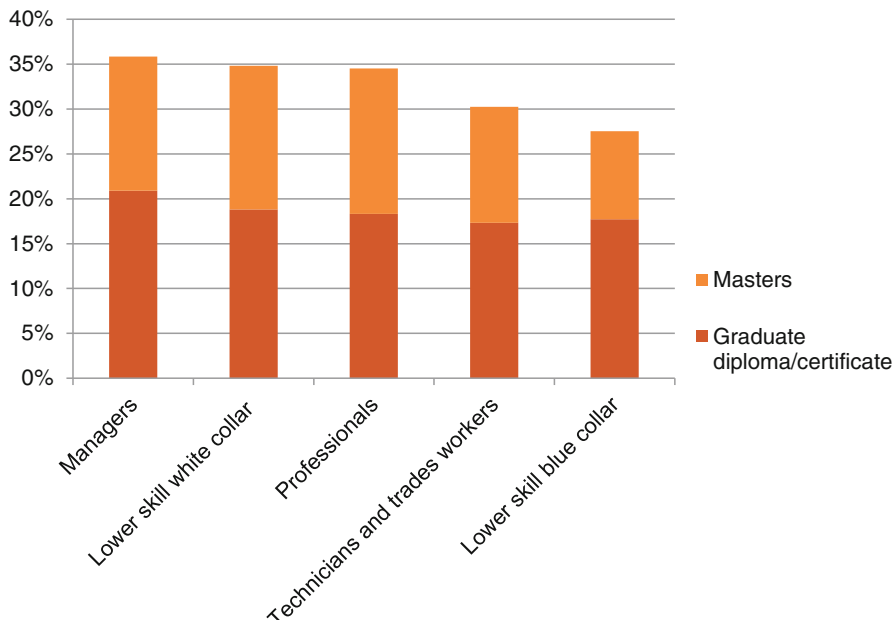
Fig. 11.6 Proportion of bachelor degree graduates with postgraduate qualifications, by occupation of father at age 14. Notes: Lower skill blue collar includes machinery operators and drivers, and labourers. Lower skill white collar workers include community and personal service workers, clerical and administrative workers, and sales workers. The qualification shown is the highest. Some graduates have both graduate diplomas or certificates and a masters degree. HILDA does not distinguish between vocational and higher education graduate diplomas and certificates, but enrolments in vocational education were relatively small (the vocational qualification has been removed from the Australian Qualifications Framework). PhDs are generally not delivered on a market basis and have been excluded from the analysis (Source: Household Income and Labour Dynamics Australia survey, 2013)

socio-economic status mean that, by definition, any area with a large number of postgraduate students is unlikely to be low socio-economic status (ABS 2013b, p. 37). Within these constraints, in 2008 10.5 % of postgraduates met the geographic low socio-economic status definition (Heagney 2010). This is little changed from the 10.2 % reported in 1993 (Anderson et al. 1998, p. 23).

While it is not trend data, the Household Income and Labour Dynamics Australia (HILDA) survey has family background information of people with postgraduate qualifications. Most people have acquired their postgraduate degrees since fees were introduced, so the numbers capture their effects (ABS 2013a). Figure 11.6 shows postgraduate qualification rates among bachelor degree graduates by the occupation of their father. Among the graduates whose fathers were in white collar work when they were 14, rates of achieving a postgraduate qualification are essentially the same.

8% of people enrolled at university who have a bachelor degree gave this response. These figures do not include people dependent on their parents but living outside the family home: (ABS 2012)

However, people whose fathers held blue collar jobs are less likely to hold a postgraduate qualification.

It is not clear whether price or other factors explain this difference. Whatever the cause, without the deregulation of postgraduate places, the total supply of places is likely to have been less than half of what it has been over the last 20 years. For overall postgraduate degree attainment across the socio-economic groups, full-fee places have been critical to escaping Commonwealth budget-driven constraints on total enrolments.

Non-university Higher Education Providers and Private Universities

Private higher education is not new in Australia. By the late 1980s there were two private universities, Bond and Notre Dame, and by the late 1990s there were 78 private non-university higher education providers (Norton and Cherastidtham 2014, pp. 11–12). The private higher education sector is a mix of for-profit and not-for-profit institutions. With a few minor exceptions, in the 1990s private higher education institutions were almost entirely reliant on private money. Their students received neither tuition subsidies nor loans, although usually they were entitled to student income support.

The funding distinctions between higher education providers have been repeatedly criticised by government-commissioned reviews as lacking a clear policy rationale, as unfair to students who miss out on government assistance, and for distorting the market (Bradley 2008; Kemp and Norton 2014; West et al. 1998).

The main funding policy change affecting private higher education was the introduction of the FEE-HELP student loan scheme in 2005. FEE-HELP offers income-contingent loans to all full-fee students in approved higher education providers. While eligibility for public subsidy is largely based on historical precedent, FEE-HELP eligibility is based on objective criteria. The main difference with HECS-HELP (for students in Commonwealth-supported places) is that with FEE-HELP there is no discount for paying upfront, and in the case of undergraduates a loan fee of 25 % of the loan's value applies. The repayment system is the same for all HELP schemes.

FEE-HELP is generally credited with encouraging new entrants to the higher education market. In 2014, there were 109 private higher education institutions. There are also another 22 non-university providers including Technical and Further Education institutions (TAFEs), other government-owned providers, and subsidiaries of public universities. They are sometimes grouped with private providers, as many face the same issues of limited public support for their students. Most non-public university higher education providers now offer FEE-HELP loans to their students, although there is still a significant minority that do not (see the lists at Norton and Cherastidtham 2014, pp. 94–96).

Although Bond University and some non-university higher education providers charge premium prices, except in business courses the more typical fees provide less revenue per student place than universities receive for a Commonwealth-supported place in the same discipline (Fig. 11.7). The higher charges paid by students in these providers principally reflect the lack of tuition subsidies and the FEE-HELP loan fee, rather than underlying costs of provision.

Figure 11.8 shows that enrolments outside the public universities are growing. Although most students are in full-fee places, some Commonwealth-supported places are allocated outside the public university system. The University of Notre Dame is by far the largest recipient of these places.

The non-public university sector is diverse, which makes equity generalisations difficult. Unlike public universities, which have many objectives, most other higher education providers have fewer and more focused aims. These aims do not necessarily include equity although some, including the 10 TAFEs now offering higher education qualifications, have equity missions. Pathway colleges are largely in the for-profit sector, but they are expressly aimed at improving the study skills of low-ATAR students, a group in which low socio-economic status students are over-represented. This is one reason why a review I conducted with David Kemp for the government recommended their inclusion in the public funding system (Kemp and
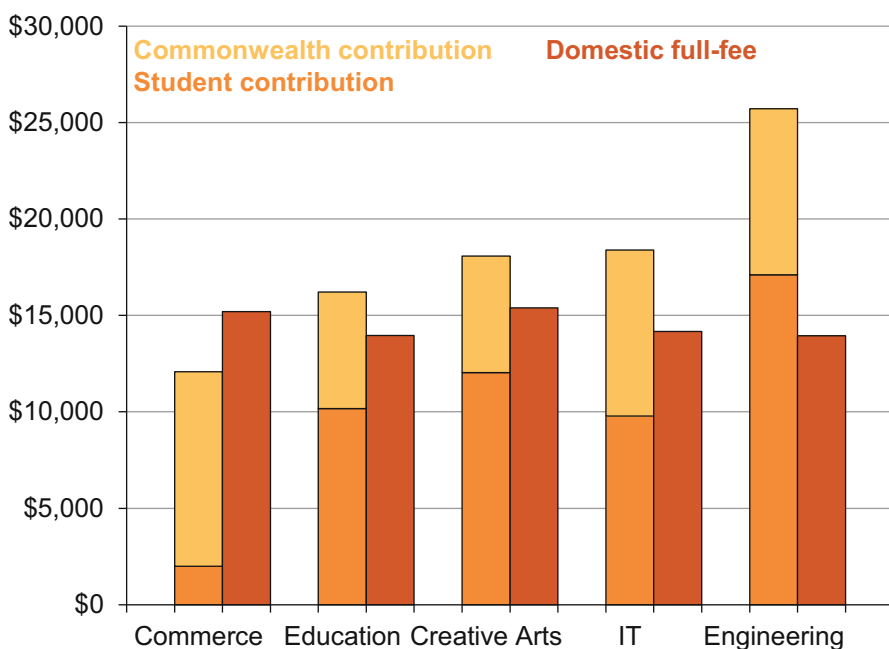
Fig. 11.7 Median bachelor degree fees for students in non-university higher education providers compared to Commonwealth-supported place rates, 2014. Note: A limited range of disciplines shown reflecting the more common courses offered by non-university higher education providers (Source: Non-university higher education provider websites)
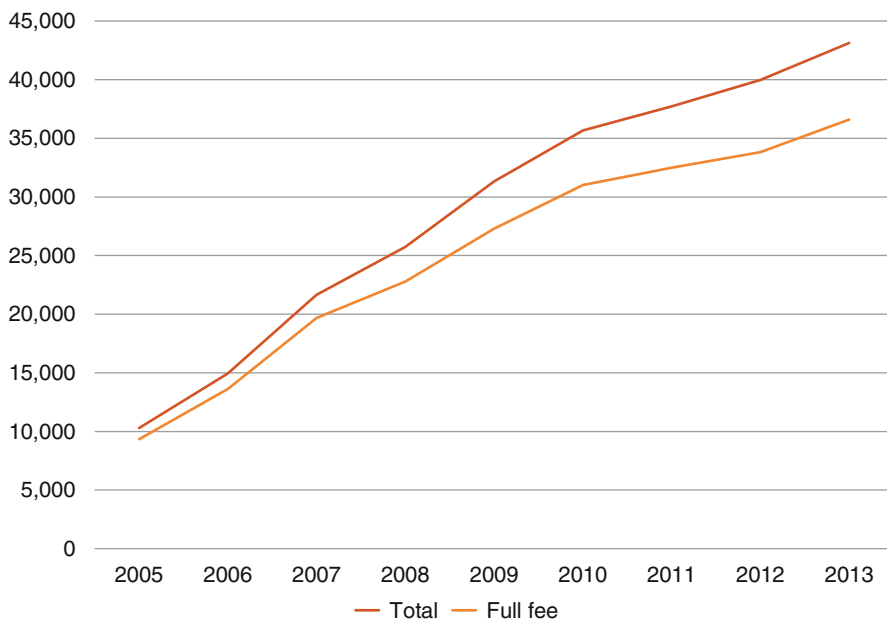
Fig. 11.8 Domestic full-time equivalent enrolments in non-university higher education providers and private universities. Notes: This includes all non-university higher education providers, including those directly owned by a government or by a public university. The numbers are influenced by the inclusion of increasing numbers of higher education providers coming into the statistical collection, as well as by increased enrolments (Source: Department of Education and Training (2015a))

Norton 2014). This recommendation was accepted by the government, (Department of Education 2014c), but the necessary legislation was rejected by the Senate.

There is only limited information on equity group enrolments outside the public university system. Overall in 2013, 13 % of their students were from low socio-economic areas. This compares to 16 % of students in public universities. However, the difference is at least partly due to the concentration of non-public university higher education in the major capital cities, especially Sydney. If non-university higher education providers with their main campus in Sydney are compared to universities with their main campus in Sydney, the non-university providers have a slightly higher low socio-economic status enrolment share, 13–11.5 %. Similarly, Victorian non-university higher education providers have a higher low socio-economic status share than the metropolitan universities (Department of Education 2014d, pp., equity appendix 2.5).

Given the weaknesses of geographic measures of socio-economic status, which can misclassify individuals, these results should be interpreted cautiously (Dockery et al. 2015). They are however consistent with many non-university higher education providers targeting academically disadvantaged students.

The Demand Driven System for Commonwealth-Supported Students

The full-fee postgraduate coursework market and the non-public university higher education providers added enrolment capacity, with likely positive effects for equity groups. However, until recently by far the largest category of student places – undergraduates in public universities – was still centrally-controlled, as it had been at the time *A Fair Chance for All* was published.

The system of centralised allocation of government-supported places had been criticised at least since the 1980s. The main alternative was to distribute public funding according to user choices, sometimes called voucher schemes. Vouchers for public money can be combined with private payments, which can be set by government or unregulated.

Not all voucher proposals have a strong access element. The schemes proposed by the Liberal Party in the late 1980s and early 1990s would still have capped the total number of places. But the schemes proposed in the West review of 1998 and the Bradley review a decade later both recommended removing restrictions on student numbers (Norton 2013a). The Bradley recommendation was accepted by the government in 2009, and phased in between 2010 and 2012 (DEEWR 2009a).

From 2012, all previous restrictions on the number of Commonwealth-supported bachelor degree places in public universities were lifted, with the exception of medical courses. This aspect of the policy is called 'demand driven', although strictly speaking it provides an option rather than an obligation to respond to demand. Diplomas and associate degrees were kept within the central allocation framework, as were postgraduate coursework places. A Bradley report recommendation to extend Commonwealth-supported places outside the public universities was not accepted.

Enrolment Growth and Low Socio-economic Status Participation

The Bradley report did not make strong claims that uncapping supply would of itself lead to reduced inequalities in higher education participation. In its analysis of the then system, it listed growth in student places as something that had not worked (Bradley 2008, p. 38). It argued that more needed to be done by universities in outreach and support, backed by government-imposed targets and performance measures. In this, it followed the intellectual framework of *A Fair Chance for All*.

While direct equity measures and growth are complementary strategies, the Bradley report's analysis underestimated the significance of growth. This is an example of how the convenience measure of low socio-economic status as a percentage of the university population, which had long been flat at around 15 %, obscures real change. The little-varying percentage of the university population

indicated that low socio-economic status enrolments were growing at much the same rate as the other socio-economic groups. But provided total enrolments grow more quickly than Australia's population as a whole, participation rates *within* each group increase.

As the low socio-economic status population is not routinely calculated there is no readily available time series, but the census provides a guide as to what was happening. Figures 11.9 and 11.10 show university participation rates for 18 and 19 year olds living at home – a necessary constraint as otherwise the census cannot identify parental occupations. Using these jobs as a measure of socio-economic status, university participation rates of late teenage children have increased across all occupational categories.

The 2011 census recorded the effects of a very strong growth phase in Commonwealth-supported places, triggered by the easing of caps on student numbers (Fig. 11.11). Between 1993 and 2008 annual growth rates exceeded 3 % only once, and were negative several times. But from 2009 to 2013 growth rates exceeded 3 % every year, peaking at more than 6 % in 2009 and 2010. By 2010, low socio-economic status student enrolments were growing more quickly than those from other socio-economic backgrounds. This is shown in Fig. 11.12, which puts the numbers into an index to make growth rates clear.

A factor improving low socio-economic status student numbers is the easing of ATAR requirements. Figure 11.13 shows the ATARs of students admitted at the
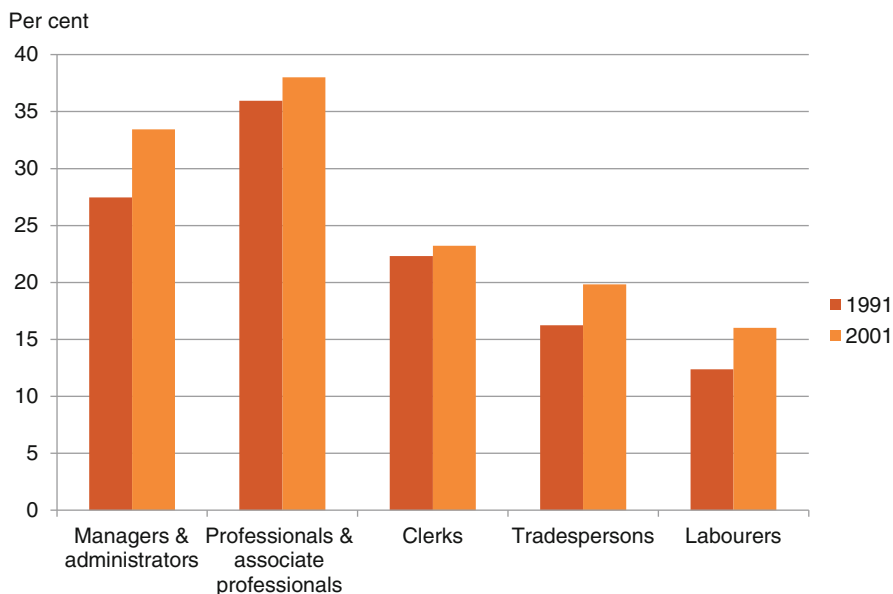
Fig. 11.9 University participation rates for 18 & 19 year olds living at home, by occupation of parent, 1991 & 2001. Note: Parent based on who was the census reference person in the household, which is usually the father when he is present (Source: Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 1991 and 2001)

Per cent
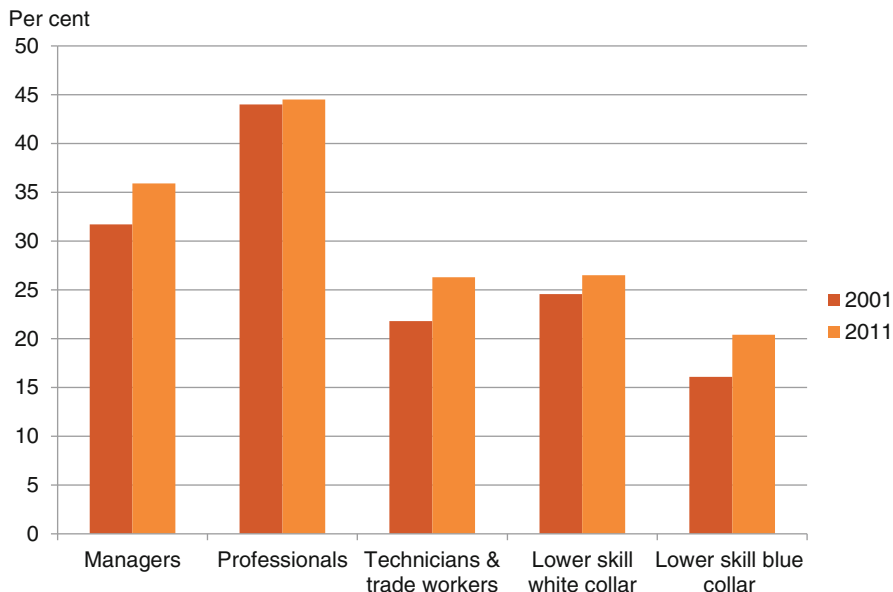
Fig. 11.10 University participation rates for 18 & 19 year olds living at home, by occupation of parent, 2001 & 2011. Notes: Parent based on who was the census reference person in the house-hold, which is usually the father when he is present. Occupational categories changed in 2006, but the old categories were available for comparative purposes for 2001. Lower skill blue collar includes machinery operators and drivers, and labourers. Lower skill white collar workers include community and personal service workers, clerical and administrative workers, and sales workers (Source: Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2001 and 2011. Data supplied by the Group of Eight)

10th percentile. As an example of what this means, in 2004 10 % of people admitted based on ATAR had a rank of 68 or below. By 2012 this rank had declined to 60. As low socio-economic status students are over-represented among those with ATARs below 60, they disproportionately benefited from this change. The spike in ATAR requirements from 2002 to 2004 corresponds with the relatively large deterioration in low socio-economic status commencing students that can be seen in Fig. 11.12 around the same time.

Could the Same Results Have Been Achieved Under the Previous System?

Student places could have been increased within the old centrally-controlled sys-tem, and on occasion this happened – notably in the years around *A Fair Chance for All*, and then again in the lead up to the demand driven system. But the quasi-market elements of the demand driven system led to greater supply than would have been
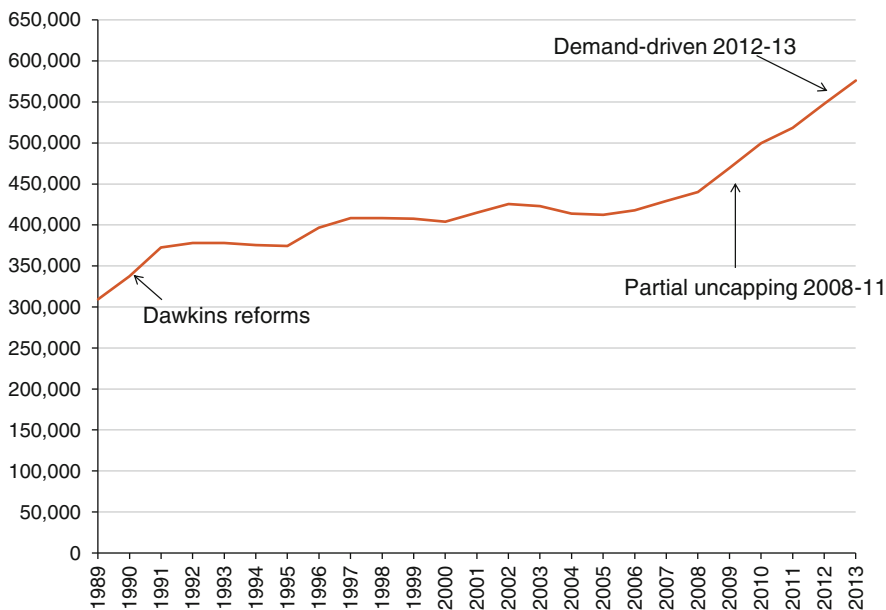
Fig. 11.11 Number of full-time equivalent Commonwealth-supported student places, 1989–2013 (Source: Data supplied by the Department of Education and Training)
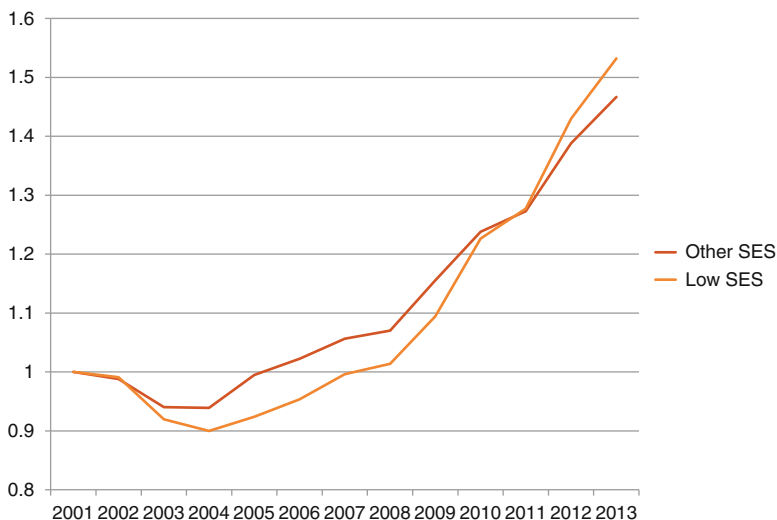
Fig. 11.12 Index of commencing domestic undergraduates, low socio-economic status and other socio-economic status. Note: The 2006 postcode measure of socio-economic status is used to allow a time series. The 2011 measure gives a total that is 1 % less in absolute numbers for 2011 (Source: Department of Education (2014d))
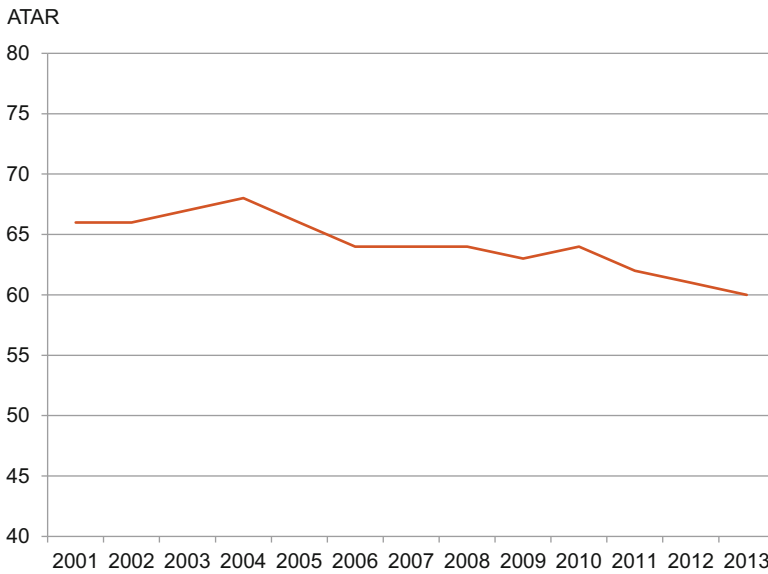
Fig. 11.13 ATAR of students admitted at the 10th percentile, 2001–2013 (Source: Data supplied by the Department of Education and Training)

likely previously. Under the old system, the number of student places would remain roughly the same without deliberate government action. Under the demand driven system, the default arrangements were reversed. Curbing the number of places required deliberate government action, with legal and parliamentary obstacles restricting any quick response (Norton 2013b, ch7). This meant that the number of student places kept growing even as the Commonwealth's fiscal position worsened from 2008, in marked contrast to the 1990s experience of places being frozen or cut in response to Commonwealth budget deficits.

This growth provided a favourable context for *A Fair Chance for All*'s policy descendant, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP). Policies aimed at increasing demand for higher education historically faced the problem that demand already exceeded supply (Fig. 11.1). To the extent that equity policy increased demand, it put equity applicants into an often zero-sum competition with other prospective students. When student places are growing slowly and even declining in some years some applicants have to miss out (Fig. 11.11). It was only when the demand driven system lifted supply constraints that we saw academically disadvantaged groups increase their share of the university population (Koshy 2014, p. 5), as well as their own rates of higher education participation.

Even without HEPPP, the funding available under the demand driven system created strong incentives to pursue additional enrolments. University marketing targeted prospective students who might have previously thought themselves ineligible for higher education. Sometimes this was done directly ('your strengths cannot be

ranked' a Victoria University campaign told prospective students in early 2015), sometimes through the pathway colleges that take lower-ATAR students and articulate them into the second year of a public university course.

The effects can be seen in applications by ATAR. The number of 60 and below ATAR applications increased by 50 % between 2010 and 2014, in an overall market that increased by 7 %. Application trends based on vocational or higher education diploma-level qualifications, other significant entry routes for 'non-traditional' students, are harder to interpret because students can apply directly to a university and through a tertiary admissions centre. For direct applications, those based on sub-bachelor degrees are up 63 % in a market up 48 % between 2010 and 2014. With the opening up of more university entry options, it is unlikely to be coincidence that low socio-economic status applications and enrolments are now increasing more quickly than those of the other socio-economic groups (Statistics from (Department of Education and Training 2015b) and predecessor reports).

The Price of Education

Quasi-market policies on the supply of student places are undoubtedly good for equity. But the effect of market policies on prices is much less clearly pro-equity. Basic economic theory suggests that, other things being equal, when prices go up demand goes down for most goods and services. At least in the absence of a loan scheme, it is also plausible that prospective students from low socio-economic status backgrounds would be more affected by prices than other students. They are less likely to have the personal or family resources needed to pay upfront fees.

With Australia's income-contingent loan scheme there is little evidence that the price of tuition in subsidised undergraduate programs explains undergraduate socio-economic differences in university participation (Chapman 2006, pp. 69–80). For a given ATAR, participation rates are similar across the socio-economic scale, as seen in Fig. 11.14. Whatever their family background, school leavers seem to make broadly rational decisions given their realistic alternatives. At the higher ATAR levels, where prospects of course completion are good, the vast majority of Year 12 students go to university. As the risks of non-completion increase (Department of Education 2014a), participation rates decline across all socio-economic groups. Other studies in the Australian and international literature have similarly found that once prior academic performance is taken into account, socio-economic status has little influence on higher education participation (Cardak and Ryan 2006), (Marks 2014, pp. 116–118). Socio-economic status has its principal effects prior to school completion.

In the largely full-fee markets, the evidence is more ambiguous. People with bachelor degrees whose fathers were blue collar workers are less likely to have a postgraduate qualification than people whose fathers were white collar workers. Possibly the reasons for some are financial, but it could also be a flow-through effect of academic performance. Less academically inclined people may be content with
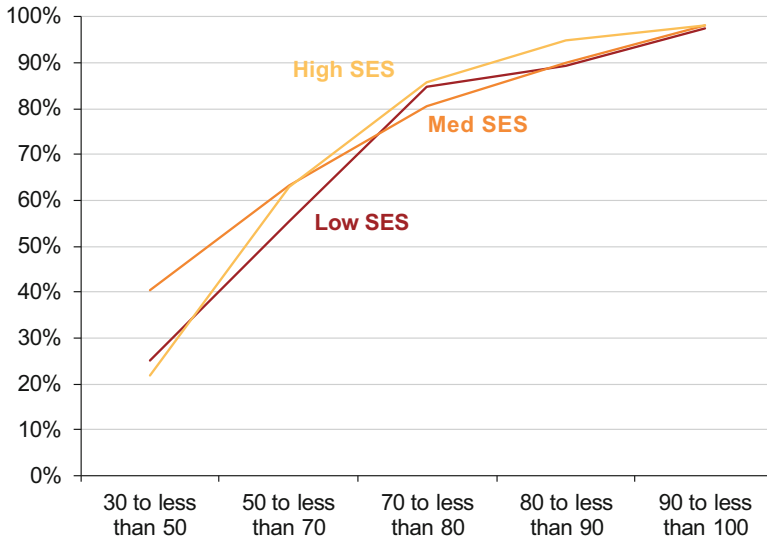
Fig. 11.14 Higher education participation rates by ATAR and socio-economic status, 2012. Note: The chart shows university participation rates by 2012 for young people who were in Year 9 in 2006. Socio-economic status (SES) level is defined by the father's occupation when the child was 15 years old. The occupation is converted into an AUSEI06 score, with 25 or below defined as low SES and 75 or above as high SES (Source: Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth)

their bachelor degree, and not want to study further. Most graduates of any socio-economic background do not proceed to postgraduate study. We are also left with a puzzle: neither academic nor price theories explain postgraduate attainment by the children of lower-skill white collar workers.

In the non-university market, a slightly lower share of students come from low socio-economic status areas than is the case for public universities overall. This is influenced by the concentration of these providers in the central areas of Sydney and other capital cities, where there are relatively few locations classified as low socio-economic status within easy proximity. While non-university providers would realise that their often niche course require large populations to attract enough students, with their relatively high fees they may also have decided that low socio-economic status areas in the regions or outer suburbs would not be financially viable.

If sensitivity to fees differs by socio-economic status, we need to be clear about the trade-offs. Fees that may deter some low socio-economic status prospective students could still be justified on access grounds, if they finance a greater supply of places. The total number of low socio-economic status students can increase even if some are deterred (as is the case across the socio-economic scale). The Dawkins-era decision to introduce HECS and use the revenue to expand student places made the right trade-off, as did the decision to deregulate the domestic postgraduate market. Low fees that just add to unmet demand statistics are not an effective policy

instrument. It is the availability of places, more than anything else, that drives improvements in low socio-economic status people attaining a higher education qualification.

Markets and Higher Education: The Future

Since 1985 markets have come to play a much bigger role in Australian higher education. In 2013, only 8 % of student places were distributed by primarily bureaucratic mechanisms. More than a third of student places were occupied by full-fee paying students. The effects of markets show in university finances too, giving them substantial revenue streams that are independent of government. International and domestic full-fee paying students contribute 22 % of university income, and charges for Commonwealth-supported students add another 16 % of all university revenues. However, universities still rely heavily on the Commonwealth government, which provides 41 % of university revenue in direct grants, and another 17 % via HELP loans (Department of Education 2013).

The market sector of higher education is likely to be resilient. International student numbers are growing strongly again, and domestic postgraduate coursework enrolments have increased steadily in recent years. Despite added competition from public universities due to the demand driven system, other higher education providers have lifted their student numbers.

While full-fee student numbers should keep rising, the introduction of market mechanisms into higher education may have reached its policy peak. Fully market driven fees for Commonwealth-supported domestic undergraduates are unlikely to eventuate. This was proposed by Liberal education minister Christopher Pyne in May 2014, but has been rejected by the Senate. If it does pass on a later attempt, a future Labor government is likely to repeal it.

The demand driven system is facing fiscal and ideological challenges. Its expense has already led to attempts, so far unsuccessful, to reduce per student government spending. It is criticised for admitting too many lower-ATAR students and producing more graduates than there are jobs for them (Carr 2015).

Re-capping of undergraduate places poses more risks to low socio-economic status groups than any other policy currently contemplated. But even if it is repealed or moderated the demand driven system will have had lasting benefits. It produced a surge in student places that would not have occurred under the old system. These places are unlikely to be abolished even if further growth is slowed. Increased equity group participation rates are a result of demand driven funding. It may not be a fair chance for all, but it is a fair chance for many more than in the past.

reported in this paper, however, are those of the authors and should not be attributed to either DSS or the Melbourne Institute.

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Chapter 12
And Fairness for All? Equity and the International Student Cohort

Christopher Ziguras

Introduction

When *A Fair Chance for All* was developed, the international student cohort in Australia was small and its original exclusion from the Framework's consideration is unsurprising in this context. However, while the authors themselves iterated the need for an ongoing process around defining and identifying groups, an equity framework for international students has remained absent despite burgeoning student numbers, such that international students now comprise nearly a quarter of university enrolments. Equity has not been a prominent feature of Australian international education policy since the 1980s when government subsidies for international students were ended and full fees introduced. The government's objective in *A Fair Chance for All* was 'to improve participation in higher education of people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds so that the mix of commencing students more closely resembles the mix of the general population' (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990, p. 14). While governments have been concerned to ensure that meritocratic principles guide domestic students' access to higher education, they feel little obligation to extend such principles to citizens of other nations. Clearly, when Australian policy aspires to ensure that higher education is within "everyone's reach", the term 'everyone' refers only to Australian citizens and permanent residents.

Discussion about our obligations towards international students has been almost purely couched in terms of consumer protection within a broader consensus that the public good that international education policy should serve is Australian national interest. So within that political environment, is it possible to make a case for

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broadening access to Australian higher education to currently excluded international students? This chapter examines the ways in which questions of equity have been considered in relation to international students, and argues that the shift from purely market-based internationalisation to broader forms of global engagement in Australian higher education create the possibility for a renewed focus on broadening access to international education. A renewed student equity framework could address a range of international student cohorts who face disadvantage, as well as broader issues within the hierarchy of global mobility. There is a need to review the relevance of Australia's equity frameworks to the composition of both inbound and outbound international student cohorts.

The Disappearance of Equity with the Rise of the Education Market

A Fair Chance for All was launched 5 years after the biggest change in international education policy in Australia's history, with the introduction of full fees for international students in 1985. This remains significant today, since the end of subsidies signalled the beginning of a largely market-based era in which international students were seen primarily as consumers, with rights to consumer protection. Australian education came to be seen as a luxury good available to affluent students from across the region. In such a context, any considerations of equity of access for international students were rendered nonsensical.

From the 1950s to the 1980s Australia sponsored a large number of students, estimated at around 40,000, on a range of scholarship schemes, the largest of which was the Colombo Plan. However, alongside the government-sponsored students were growing numbers of self-funded or 'private' students, whose tuition fees were subsidized by the Australian government. Between 1950 and 1975 the Australian government sponsored around 18,000 students, with the largest numbers of students coming from Indonesia, Malaysia, South Vietnam, and Thailand. During the same period, however, Australia hosted an additional 45,000 'private' international students, with the largest numbers from Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Singapore. By 1975 less than a quarter of the 12,500 international students in Australia were in government-sponsored programs (Cleverley and Jones 1976, pp. 26–29). Nevertheless, the international student program was colloquially referred to as the Colombo Plan, after the largest scholarship scheme, even though, as Auletta (2000) has shown, most international students as far back as the 1950s had been private rather than sponsored students.

Until the 1970s, these private international students paid the same tuition fees as domestic students. By the 1960s international students represented 5 % of the university student population. The Whitlam government abolished fees for both domestic and international students and for the first time imposed a cap of 10,000 on the number of private international student numbers. The Fraser government introduced

an Overseas Student Charge of between \$1500 and \$2500 for private students, depending on the program, and removed the cap on numbers. Universities were free to enroll international students as long as they did not displace domestic students. Despite the reintroduction of fees the number of international tertiary students more than doubled between 1979 and 1984, from 6745 to 13,047, in part due to the introduction of full fees for international students in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1979 by the Thatcher government. The difference between the Overseas Student Charge and the full cost of the students' education, i.e. the government's subsidy, included in Australia's foreign aid expenditure figures (Meadows 2011).

The Hawke-Keating government decided in 1985 that subsidizing the tuition of private international students should not be a priority of Australia's international development assistance, since private international students were very likely to from the most affluent and well-connected social strata within their home countries and were hardly the most-needy recipients for development assistance. Successive governments were also under pressure to expand the number of places for domestic students, and the expenditure taxpayer funds on international students was politically difficult to support while places for Australian students were being rationed (Meadows 2011). From 1986 universities were allowed to set their own tuition fees (above a legislated minimum) and enroll as many international students as they chose, and government subsidized places were phased out by 1990, the year that *A Fair Chance for All* was launched. And if there were any doubts about the viability of the full fee regime, they soon evaporated. Fears that the introduction of full fees would lead to sharp reductions in the number of international students proved unfounded. In fact, the opposite happened; the number of international students completing degrees in Australia in the 1990s exceeded the number of completions in the previous four decades combined (Banks and Olsen 2011, p. 94).

Equity Groups Within the International Student Population

So let us consider what transpired with regard to equity groups in the international student population after the shift 'from aid to trade', as the policy shift described above has come to be known. *A Fair Chance for All* identified six equity groups whose participation in higher education in Australia was to be encouraged through a range of measures: people from low socioeconomic backgrounds; Indigenous Australians; people from regional and remote areas; women in non-traditional areas; people with disabilities; and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. In this chapter we will be most focused on people from low socio-economic status backgrounds, but first let's consider how the other five groups might relate to international education.

Successive governments have been concerned to increase participation of people from regional and remote areas, and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While there is no data available to assess what proportion of the international student population are from rural communities in their home country or are

Indigenous people, the participation rates of both these groups are likely to be very low indeed, for similar reasons. First, in the middle-income countries from which most international students come, economic development in cities has rapidly outpaced development in the countryside, producing serious inequalities that are reflected in participation in national education systems and even more so in international education. Language also plays a part. While English is becoming an essential skill for middle-class city-dwellers the world over, this is rarely the case for rural and Indigenous communities which usually have lower rates of literacy in the national language and proficiency in English is of little value (Rassool 2013). There has been no effort to increase access to Australian higher education of indigenous or rural international students.

The proportion of international students in Australia who are female has increased in recent decades but the overall numbers have not yet equalised. Currently, 47 % of the international students in Australia are female, but there are significant differences based on country of origin, with more female students from East Asian countries and more male students from South Asia. The percentage of females in the student populations of each of the top ten sources countries in 2014 was: Thailand (64 %), Vietnam (53 %), China (52 %), South Korea (51 %), Malaysia (49 %), Indonesia (48 %), Brazil (48 %), Nepal (37 %), India (29 %), Pakistan (9 %) (Department of Education and Training (DET) 2015). As Boey (2014) has noted, the motivations and impediments of prospective male and female international students differ significantly between countries, influenced by such factors as broader disparities in access to education, parental preferences in relation to overseas study and perceived prospects in the labour market at home and abroad. Apart from insisting on a gender balance in relation to the small proportion of students who are sponsored by the Australian government, there does not seem to be much scope for institutions or governments in Australia to influence the gender balance of students coming from each country.

If achieving gender parity in the international student population overall were ever to become a concern of government, which so far it has not ever been, it is conceivable that visa policies could be tweaked to facilitate growth in student numbers from source countries with higher proportions of females and restrict access from countries with higher proportions of males. Or theoretically a government could introduce gender-balance requirements for visas issued from each country by restricting the number of females from Thailand and the number of males from Pakistan. But as with other equity categories, there does not seem to have been any public interest in the gendered participation rates of international students in particular fields of study, and what research into gender and international education has been conducted has tended to be qualitative and concerned with cultural and educational experiences in Australian education (Boey 2014).

While the Australian Department of Education goes to considerable efforts to increase access to higher education for Australians with disabilities, consistent with the ambitions set out in *A Fair Chance for All*, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection actively prevents foreigners with disabilities from studying in Australia. Many international students need to meet a health requirement in order to

obtain a student visa, a measure intended to protect the Australian population from infectious diseases and to contain public expenditure by screening out temporary and permanent entrants to Australia who are 'likely to result in significant health care and community service costs to the Australian community' (Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) 2015). Prospective students may require a medical assessment if they come from or have travelled in particular countries or are applying for particular courses of study. There is very little public information about how the health requirement is administered, and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection does not publish any advice about the types of conditions that are considered undesirable but reserves the right to deny a student a visa if it judges that person's condition may cause them to incur higher than normal care costs.

Australian residents from non-English speaking backgrounds were identified as an equity group. The presence of large numbers of international students, the vast majority of whom are from non-English speaking backgrounds, has required universities to invest considerable resources in support services and has required teaching staff to take into account the needs a highly culturally and linguistically diverse student population. There is broad acceptance now that universities must put in place both rigorous selection measures to ensure that applicants have sufficient English proficiency, but must also provide concurrent language and learning support to students from diverse backgrounds (International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) 2013).

Lastly, let us consider socioeconomic status. Because Australia is one of the most expensive countries in the world in which to study as an international student, self-funded students are overwhelmingly drawn from the wealthier social strata in their home countries. This financial barrier is by far the most significant impediment to merit-based access for international students. Research on the social class of students in the UK found that the international student population was more heavily skewed to higher income occupational groups than the domestic student population (Marginson et al. 2010). From the perspective of students' home countries, the ability for affluent students to buy a place in a university in another country can undermine states' abilities to ensure meritocratic access to higher education. This can cause resentment if high-performing students with local degrees from competitive national universities are beaten out in the labour market by students who have not performed as well but have been able to afford a place in an overseas university.

However, while international students may be from higher socioeconomic groups in their home country, their families typically have low incomes by Australian standards. A 2014 survey of 18,393 international students who had applied to a UK or Australian university by educational marketing and recruitment company Hobsons, found that 59 % had a family income of US$25,000 or less per annum, and a further 26 % had a family income between US$25,000 and US$50,000 less per annum (Hobsons 2014). While there is wide variation in incomes between countries, it is clear that for the families of the majority of international students, the investment in their children's international education poses a very significant financial burden. When we consider the socioeconomic status of international students we need to

bear in mind this very different position in relation to the home country, in which they are typically among the most affluent, and the host country, in which they are typically among the least affluent.

A financial means test is one of the core features of the student visa screening process, the purpose of which is to ensure that the students' families are affluent enough to be able to support their study and living costs in Australia. Students must have sufficient funds to travel to Australia, pay their tuition fees and to support themselves during their studies. The type of evidence students need to provide varies according to their home country and the level of study they will be undertaking; while students from high-income countries can vouch that they have sufficient funds, students from middle- and low-income countries must provide evidence such as bank records or proof of sponsorship.

The government sets a minimum fee that universities can charge international students, to ensure that no public subsidy exists. By allowing universities to set international fees and at the same time constraining the income that universities receive for domestic students governments have ensured that international students will contribute more per capita to the university and will therefore cross-subsidize domestic students. Marginson et al. (2010) argue that international education growth has been primarily driven by "scarcity induced by deliberately underfunding teaching and research" rather than by the quality of Australian education or rising demand in Asia (p. 47). It is true that public funding is less than the universities would like, but to call this 'underfunding' is clearly rhetorical device to argue for higher levels of funding rather than a statement of fact. In any case, regardless of the level at which the teaching of domestic undergraduate students and research is funded, universities have sought to attract international students because they are able to charge higher fees to international students, and because domestic undergraduate enrolment numbers were capped until recently. We can see this in practice at postgraduate coursework level where both international and domestic fees are deregulated. Universities all charge international students more for the same masters coursework programs.

As Marginson and Considine (2000) showed, the income derived from universities' involvement with the global education market was a major driver of a culture of entrepreneurial managerialism since the 1990s. And rather than displacing domestic students, international students who are paying more than the full cost of their studies generate surplus income for the institutions that has far fewer strings attached than public money. Thus fee income from international students has in effect cross-subsidized domestic students in Australia for the past three decades.

The financial tests including in visa screening processes appear to be effective to the extent that the majority of international students in Australia do not experience any financial hardship, according to research on students' finances undertaken by Marginson et al. (2010). However, some students do experience hardship, and the safety nets available to domestic students are often not available to these temporary residents. The challenge to policy makers endeavouring to broaden access is that the less stringent the student visa finance test becomes, the more students are likely to experience financial hardship in Australia. Marginson et al. (2010) argue for the finance test to be made much restrictive by raising the amount of money students

must have available for each year in Australia and making the application of the test more rigorous. This they feel will ensure that all students coming into Australia are more financial secure during their studies. However, such measures would most seriously restrict access to those from lower socioeconomic status families and low income countries.

Should We Care About Widening Access for Low Socio-Economic Status International Students?

Before considering how Australian education could be made more accessible, let us consider why this is a worthwhile endeavor. There are of course arguments that can be made on the basis of internationalist solidarity, and this is the major justification for spending on sponsored students. The number of Australian government and university scholarships for international students is higher now than it was during the Colombo Plan period, at an estimated cost of around AUD$720 million per year, around half of the spending coming from government and half from universities (Department of Education 2014). Around 85 % of international research students are supported by scholarships from the Australian government, their home government or their universities. However, these students represent a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands of international students in Australia, and nearly all of the students in bachelor and masters coursework programs are self-funded.

Given the self-interested nationalist tone that has dominated the framing on international education policy since the 1980s, is there any way we can mount an argument that broadening access to less affluent students and other excluded groups is in Australia's national interest? There are three considerations: scale, quality and diplomacy.

Through Austrade's discussion paper, *Australian International Education 2025* the Abbott government expressed a desire to continue to grow the scale of onshore international student numbers in Australia, aiming to double the number of international students by 2025, which will require maintaining a growth rate of 7 % per annum which has been achieved over the 12 years to 2015 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) 2015). While the number of affluent young people in source countries will likely continue to grow, continued expansion will require broadening access to new groups of students. Austrade puts this in geographical terms, extending to less affluent regions of major sources countries, such as "'going west in China' and 'going south in India'" (DFAT 2015, p. 2).

A second motivation for broadening access is to allow institutions to select more on merit rather than capacity to pay. The quality of the student experience, for both international and domestic students, is influenced by the ability of universities to select the best applicants. In light of the significant competition between destination countries, Australia has an interest in seeking the most talented students from amongst a broader socioeconomic group. Universities are very aware of this competition at the level of doctoral training, as Universities Australia's (2015) calls

for the expansion of scholarships testifies. However, as yet there is little recognition that broadening access and shifting to more merit-based selection of undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students would also improve Australia's ability to attract international talent.

A third reason for broadening access is that international education has always been a hugely significant form of social interaction at various levels between Australia and the region, and has never been purely motivated by the generation of export income. In 1992, then education minister Kim Beazley elaborated a public diplomacy rationale for internationalization of higher education in Australia and variations of this approach have been espoused by Australian government ever since:

> The Government recognizes that international education is an increasingly important part of Australia's international relations. It uniquely spans the cultural, economic, and interpersonal dimensions of international relations. It assists cultural understanding of all parties involved. It enriches Australia's education and training systems and the wider Australian society with a more international outlook (quoted in Harman 2005, p. 126).

Beazley was responding to criticism from Asian countries of Australia's overly commercial approach, and to this day the social relations of international nearly always take a backseat to the commercial relations in explications of policy (see also Meadows 2011, pp. 78–80). Over time as the international education sector has matured, universities have sought to integrate international student recruitment within a broader international strategy that also focuses on internationalization of the curriculum, mobility of domestic students, and international research engagement. Since the late 2000s this has been referred to as a 'third phase' of international education in Australia, after aid and trade (Buffinton 2008) and the most commonly cited elaboration of this broader internationalization approach is Hudzik's (2011) guide, *Comprehensive Internationalization*.

To achieve the deeper international engagement to which Australian universities now almost universally aspire requires the development of reciprocal and respectful relationships with partner universities and governments overseas. While Australia may not be concerned with access and equity abroad, these partners most certainly are. We have reached the point where our disregard for equity is becoming the major impediment to the building meaningful relationship in the countries from which we recruit our students. When universities were simply recruiting fee-paying students this did not matter so much, but now that we are striving for a broader and deeper educational and social engagement, we need to care more about social inequality beyond our shores.

How to Widen Access?

So how could access for international students be widened? Clearly the expansion of foreign aid scholarships is a priority but these will only ever support a small proportion of international students. Since the 1980s no political parties have expressed

interest in reintroducing public subsidies for the bulk of international students. But even if public subsidies for tuition fees are off the table, there are several ways in which receiving countries like Australia can make education more affordable to a wider cross-section of the world's students, the first two focused on reducing students' expenditure, the latter two focused on increasing their income.

The first is to reduce the cost of obtaining a qualification by encouraging short and low-cost programs. The types of study options attractive to less affluent students are short vocational diploma programs, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS), and articulation arrangements which offer advanced standing into Australian degrees based on affordable pathway programs in their home country. Significantly, such low-cost study options are often provided by private providers rather than public universities, and the universities have been the most vocal critics expanding access to such options, arguing that doing so damages Australia's brand as a high quality destination. Such programs are often used as a stepping stone towards a higher qualification, and we should support such pathways. However, currently students who are already in Australia on a temporary visa, either as a student, tourist or on a working holiday visa, face a Subsequent Temporary Application Charge of $700 if they apply for a student visa, on top of the normal visa fee which itself is considerable. Such measures disadvantage lower socioeconomic status students who enter the country on short-term visas and then apply to stay on if they find that they can manage.

Australia does have well-established systems to enable students to move between levels of education; in 2013 48 % of international students commencing higher education had previously studied in Australia. Most of those students had undertaken ELICOS (28 %), vocational education and training (9 %) or foundation programs (7 %) (DET 2014). Students from low-income countries such as Myanmar are overwhelmingly enrolled in sub-degree and undergraduate programs, with few progressing on to masters level (Ziguras 2015). Structuring visa conditions to enabling more students to pursue lower-level studies and pathways into higher education will significant improve access to less affluent students.

The second means of reducing the cost of international education is through the provision of low-cost purpose-built student accommodation, and here Australia fares poorly compared with other destination countries. A recent study by Burke (2015) found that Australian universities provide less residential college accommodation than comparator countries, forcing students to be more reliant on the private rental market, which is both expensive and comparatively unregulated. Burke advocates the expansion of university-provided accommodation but it seems more likely that the growth will be generated by private sector investment in facilities managed by student-focused accommodation providers such as Urban Nest and Scape. In order to facilitate low-cost student accommodation, local governments will need to change planning codes to encourage buildings with smaller rooms than is typical in Australian dwellings, with more shared living spaces, and less car parking. In the meantime international students crowd into houses and apartments, using bunk beds to share bedrooms as university students throughout Asia are accustomed to. There is certainly unconscionable exploitation of students by landlords taking place,

which should not be tolerated, but we must also recognize that low socioeconomic status international students are seeking low-cost forms of accommodation that are currently in very short supply.

On the income side of the ledger, providing international students with the ability to work in Australia reduces students' dependence upon family savings and is especially significant for less affluent students. International students in Australia are allowed to be employed for 40 h per fortnight during term time and unlimited hours during breaks, which is in line with other English speaking destination countries (although students in the United States can only work on campus and sub-degree students in the UK have no work rights), and more generous than most other destination countries (see Ziguras and McBurnie 2015). Allowing students to work significantly expands accessibility since part-time work can contribute to covering the cost of studies and living expenses. Work experience in Australia might also enhance students' employability through providing an opportunity to engage socially and professional with locals in ways that may not be possible on campus. Baas (2006, 2014) has documented the ways in which for many students, including those from South Asia in particular, education and employment in Australia are mutually dependent.

The fourth way in which we can broaden access for low socioeconomic status international students is to allow them to remain in Australia to work after the completion of their studies. This enables students to recoup the cost of their studies sooner after graduation, which is an especially appealing prospect for students from low-income countries. During the 2000s a sizeable proportion (most likely around one-third) of completing international students in Australia obtained permanent residency. As Birrell (2006) showed, the education-migration pathway was particularly attractive to students from low-income countries including those in South Asia, and enrolments in particular fields and levels of study were heavily influenced by their likely migration outcomes (Ziguras 2012). In recent years the pathway to permanent residency has become more uncertain for international graduates, and sponsorship by an employer is often required, but post-study work rights of between 2 and 5 years are now available to most university graduates. For less affluent students, the ability to work in Australia after graduation is an important means of reducing the riskiness of their family's investment in education.

The Vulnerability of Low Socioeconomic Status International Students

The ability of students to apply for permanent residence after having completed a short vocational diploma led to a huge expansion in the number of international students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds enrolled in Australia (Baas 2006). These programs were more accessible since the English language requirement for vocational programs is lower and the financial test to obtain a visa was less demanding due to the short duration of the program and the lower fees charged by private

colleges compared with universities. In addition students were able to work part-time during their studies and then full-time once they had completed and had lodged a permanent residency application.

One unforeseen consequence was the vulnerability of these students to exploitation in the labor market and violence. Poorer students are more dependent on income from shift work, such as driving taxis, stacking supermarket shelves, working in convenience stores, and as security guards. Because students are legally permitted to work only 20 h per week, many work in undocumented jobs with substandard wages and conditions. They are more likely to be living in outer suburbs with cheaper housing, and using public transport late at night in areas where street violence is more common. Several much publicized violent attacks against Indian students in Australia are attributable to their vulnerability and exposure to entrenched pockets of violence in Australia's large cities, although some cases were clearly racially motivated assaults by groups of teenagers of various ethnic backgrounds.

These students were vulnerable to a lack of safety and quality of life that neither the Indian nor Australian communities could accept. Youth violence had been a persistent problem in some Australian cities for a long time, and could not be fixed easily, but one lasting change has been that policing around public transport has been improved in the aftermath of these attacks. As Markus (2012) has noted, violence and robbery had been a longstanding issue in many of the locations in which Indian students were assaulted, and the media attention that developed in India led to responses that local residents had long been calling for.

Australian immigration authorities responded to the attacks on Indian students in a very different manner, tightening the financial means tests for students from less affluent countries, significantly increasing the amount of available funds for living expenses that prospective students were required to show in order to obtain a student visa. This served to again restrict access to education in Australia to more affluent students who are less likely to be exposed to the violent fringes of Australian society (Ziguras 2012).

This episode illustrates the potential risks for international students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, which need to be managed. It must be noted the nearly all of the Indian students who befell serious misfortune in Australia during that period were studying in private colleges rather than universities, but the lessons still hold: when broadening access to students from less affluent backgrounds we must ensure that adequate support services are in place, whether these are provided by educational institutions, governments or other agencies. Marginson, et al.'s (2010) study of international university students found that those with the highest rates of financial stress were older postgraduate students, a higher proportion of whom had accompanying children, and who were less likely to be supported by parents. Their call for a more developed network of support services for students experiencing financial stress remains pertinent today. Relevant too is University's Australia's (2015) call for more low-cost student accommodation near campuses so that students will be less exposed to exploitative landlords and the dangers of travelling long distances on public transport to suburbs far from universities where rents are cheap but where their safety is compromised.

Offshore Provision and Equity

So far we have only considered international students studying onshore in Australia, but around 80,000 of the 330,000 international students in Australian universities are enrolled in offshore programs and campuses (Universities Australia 2015). Transnational education, the delivery of an Australian qualification outside Australia, is much more accessible to low socioeconomic status students. If the student is studying in their home city then the cost of travel and accommodation is close to nil, and for those student who do travel to study in a transnational program (for example from Myanmar to Kuala Lumpur), the cost of travel and accommodation is considerably lower than for the same program offered in Australia. The tuition fees charged for offshore programs are much lower also. The exclusionary processes embedded in the Australian student visa regime which keep out students with limited financial resources and disabilities do not apply. This greater accessibility is a mixed blessing, however, in a world in which exclusivity too often equated with quality. In Singapore, which has one of the world's highest concentrations of transnational programs, they are considered by many to be second or third best options, for students unable to attend either a quality university in Singapore or an overseas university. Hoare (2012) found that the outcomes for transnational students in Singapore, who had had to work hard to take advantage of their 'second chance' education, actually far surpassed their expectations, despite their fears that their transnational qualifications would be judged negatively based on their low status.

Conclusion

The development of *A Fair Chance for All* in 1990s coincided with the ending of subsidies for international students and the beginning of an era in which the only rights that international students were entitled to were those of the consumer. Australia has not been concerned in the intervening 25 years about the composition of the international student population in Australia. Extensive research has been undertaken on their decision-making processes in choosing a country, institutions and field of study, and on their experiences as students in Australia, but surprisingly little is known about the degree to which they represent a cross-section of their home country's population. It is usually assumed that international students are predominantly drawn from the most affluent urban families in each country, and this is likely to be the case, but it is surely not the whole story. As Robertson and Runganaikaloo's (2013) detailed research on students who choose to stay in Australia has shown, students are motivated to leave home, and then some of them to stay away from home, for a wide range of reasons to do with their cultural identity, employment prospects, intimate relationships and thirst for adventure. As with other forms of migration, it may the case that the most affluent students easily do well at home, and it predominantly the members of next tier of the middle class who have both the

means and the aspirational striving to invest in education abroad. We also know very little about the impact that highly exclusive access to Australian education has on the many countries in Asia and the Pacific where we are the largest destination for mobile students. These are important questions if we are serious about understanding the impact of Australian international education on inequality.

Despite the lack of interest in equity during the era of educational trade, the broad-based desire for broadening and deepening of our educational relations may serve to heighten Australian education providers' and governments' interest in merit-based entry of international students. While our visa requirements do not help to broaden access, many other features of Australian's international education system do, most important of which are the ability of students to undertake a broad range of programs at various levels and to transition between them, the ability of students to work in Australia during their studies and after graduation, and the ability of students to undertake degrees abroad at much lower cost. We should celebrate the ways in which these measures support less affluent students, and work on providing better low-cost student accommodation and support services for those students who are not coping. Much has changed in the international education landscape in Australia in the past 25 years, both due to the size of Australia's international student population and the depth of our universities' international engagements and we should no longer pretend that the lack of equitable access to our institutions is somebody else's problem.

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Chapter 13
Indigenous Australians and Higher Education: The Contemporary Policy Agenda

Ian Anderson

Universities and Indigenous Development

Over the past decade there has been a significant shift in how Australian Indigenous[1] leaders have articulated their vision for cultural, economic and political development. This has, in part, reconfigured the place of higher education in the broader Indigenous policy agenda – but not without tensions and debate.

All elements of the current Indigenous higher education strategy were evident in a very embryonic way in *A Fair Chance for All – National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education* (Department of Employment Education and Training 1990), a discussion paper released 25 years ago by the Australian Government Department of Employment, Education and Training. It pointed out the need to focus on participation and completion rates, and also flagged high level priorities, such as increasing the enrolments in Law, Medicine and Health Studies (Department of Employment Education and Training 1990, p. 20). *A Fair Chance for All* framed equity in higher education within a social justice framework.

In the current environment, Indigenous politics continues to be focused on issues pertaining to Indigenous rights including the development of political institutions that enable forms of political and cultural authority. Political contestation around these issues has a clear continuity with the Indigenous politics that emerged in the period following the 1967 Constitutional referendum (Chesterman and Galligan 1997). This is evident in the work of national institutions such as the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (National Congress of Australia's First Peoples 2013) and internationally through the engagement of Indigenous Australians

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[1] In this chapter the term 'Indigenous' is used to identify the First Peoples of Australia. The term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is used to refer to and recognise the two unique Indigenous populations in Australia.

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in the work of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2015). There has also been a resurgent interest in the development of regional Indigenous structures, of which the Empowered Communities Program is one example. This innovative model is building regional structures to strengthen Indigenous decision making and cultural authority at a regional community level with eight regions opting into the initial pilot program (Langton 2015a).

However, layered on top of this older rights-focused agenda, there is also a growing aspiration among many Indigenous communities to participate in the global economy. This is being expressed through a desire for jobs, freedom from a reliance on government welfare or program funding, and the creation of greater opportunities for business. Indigenous leaders Marcia Langton and Noel Pearson have been influential advocates for this reform agenda and it has also found a voice across the national Indigenous leadership (Langton 2012; Pearson 2009). This new political agenda, which requires the development of Indigenous economic, intellectual and political capital, is now influencing government policy. This thinking is evident, for example, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, in the propositions for the reform of the training sector put forward by Andrew Forrest in *The Forrest Review: Creating parity* (Forrest 2014) and in the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt Review) (Behrendt et al. 2012).

Indigenous higher education potentially plays a critical role in realising this vision for economic and social development. However, for this to be fulfilled a new policy regime is required – marking a break with an older policy paradigm of Indigenous higher education focused on growing participation. This new framework does not abandon the growth agenda for Indigenous participation in higher education, nor the equity model on which it was based. However, it does provide a much sharper focus on the quality of educational outcomes and the graduate opportunities that this provides.

This new policy agenda has, at least partially, positioned higher education more centrally within a broader Indigenous policy agenda. Up until now, higher education has not been a strategic priority for Indigenous policy makers. For example, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014* (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2011), while noting the importance of higher education, makes no specific recommendations, deferring these until after some more specific policy work had been undertaken. However, as I suggest later in this chapter this issue remains unresolved.

This policy gap in relation to higher education was addressed in 2012 with the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al. 2012), the first comprehensive review of its kind. The scope of this review covered the secondary school pipeline, the relationship between the Vocational Education and Training (or VET) sector and higher education, the supports needed for Indigenous students in the university system, strategies for building Indigenous staff numbers, Indigenous research, and Indigenous

teaching and learning. The review also made a number of recommendations addressing the organisational arrangements required for the delivery of all these.

In addition the Behrendt Review paid some attention to the quality of educational outcomes. Data reviewed later in this chapter shows that, notwithstanding the growth in participation, Indigenous students lag behind their non-Indigenous peers in relation to completions. This issue informed the Behrendt Review approached a number of recommendations including those that addressed the targeted Indigenous higher education funding programs and the organisation of academic and support services for Indigenous students.

Another issue the review tackled was the need to open up access to a broader range of university disciplines, as well as pathways into the professions, for Indigenous students. Later in this chapter I will present data that characterises why this is problem, but the challenge of professional pathways was an issue that captured the attention of the Panel. In part this is because the professions have been seen to play a potentially significant role in economic development, social policy reform and political leadership (See Anderson 2015). However, the policy framework needed to develop cohorts of professional graduates requires the development both of leadership within professional bodies and of collaborative agendas between the relevant industries, professional groups and educational organisations.

In highlighting these issues, I do not want to reduce the purpose of higher education to a purely instrumental function for it also provides the means to realise the potential talent and creativity that exists within Indigenous Australia. Such creativity and innovation draws on a broad range of disciplines that includes the humanities, performing arts, science and business. But higher education does play a key role in enabling the Indigenous human capital needed for Indigenous economic and social development.

In this chapter, I will lay aside the more comprehensive reform agenda articulated in the Behrendt Review, and instead narrow the focus to Indigenous students – particularly in relation to the policy debate on participation rates and the quality of educational outcomes, and to broadening their access to a greater range of disciplines. I then consider the issues involved in developing professional cohorts by referencing two case studies: medicine and engineering. In conclusion, I return to re-contextualise the Indigenous higher education agenda for students, both the broader agenda for reform within higher education and the contemporary policy agenda for Indigenous affairs.

The Shifting Landscape of Australian Higher Education Policy

Before proceeding further, I am mindful that the current Indigenous reform agenda is being prosecuted at a time when there is considerable policy debate about financing in the Australian higher education system, in particular with regard to the

deregulation of policy restrictions on access to Commonwealth subsidies for students by course level, provider type and price. The proposed micro-economic reforms to higher education announced by the Abbott Coalition Government in the 2014 Federal budget were proposed to be in place by 1 January 2016. However, they proved unpopular, in part because they were enmeshed in a broader suite of budget measures aimed at expenditure reduction. The government's subsequent failure to negotiate a path through the Senate has taken the current legislative package off the table – but it has not taken the issues out of the debate.

Arguably, at least some of the micro-economic reform components of the budget initiatives were pre-figured in the *Review of the Demand Driven Funding System Report* (Kemp and Norton 2014) commissioned by the Federal Education Minister, the Hon. Christopher Pyne. Several of the proposals had direct relevance to Indigenous students' policy. It was proposed, for example, to remove the caps on domestic student contribution to fees and that universities would be allowed to set any fee they deem appropriate. However, 20 % of additional fee revenue has to be used for student equity and merit scholarships administered by universities. It was also proposed to broaden the deregulation of student places and remove caps on the enrolment in sub-Bachelor places. In addition, non-university and private providers were to be allowed access to Commonwealth funding for places. These reforms were tied to a number of program funding cuts. The Commonwealth grants scheme was to be decreased by 20 %, with further cuts proposed to programs such as the Higher Education Participation Program and the Research Training Scheme, all of which had potential flow-on effects to Indigenous students (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

In the lead up to the 2014 Budget, the Federal Education Minister committed his government to both an Indigenous and broader equity strategy in a speech at Monash University in which he stated: 'I believe that the world's best higher education system would enhance both quality and access' (Department of Education and Training 2014, p. 1). This is significant. What is not in contention for this government, and possibly for future governments, is that equity in higher education is an important policy issue. What is at issue is how the Indigenous higher education agenda is to be progressed in the context of a suite of proposals for the micro-economic reform of the sector. This is important, as it is unlikely that this latter agenda will fade away despite its relative lack of success in the 2014 budget proposals.

Indigenous higher education policy is also shaped by policy reform in Indigenous affairs more generally. The most significant recent development in this area has been the radical redesign of Australia's Federal program administration. In 2004 the Howard Coalition government radically reformed the administration of its Indigenous programs through the disestablishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the decentralisation of all programs (Anderson 2004, 2006). Following the election of the Abbott Coalition Government in 2013, Indigenous programs were re-centralised but this time into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPM&C). This overhaul included a number of

targeted Indigenous higher education programs[2] that had previously been administered by the Education portfolio. (They had been out of scope in the administrative reforms of 2004 as they were part of the portfolio of programs administered by ATSIC).

The programs that were moved to DPM&C have been subsequently drawn into a realigned program framework – the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). This has five program streams (Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014a):

- Jobs, Land and Economy
- Children and Schooling
- Safety and Wellbeing
- Culture and Capability
- Remote Australia Strategies.

The 'Children and Schooling Programme' supports activity that will achieve Indigenous outcomes such as, but not limited to, the following (Australian Government Department of The Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014b):

- Increasing participation and positive learning outcomes in early childhood development, care and education leading to improved school readiness.
- Increasing school attendance and improving educational outcomes.
- Increasing Year 12 attainment and pathways to further training and education.
- Increasing course completions in university-level study.
- Increasing the capacity of Indigenous families and communities to engage with schools and other education providers.

It is probably worth noting that there are two relatively unusual features of the IAS, the creation of which has been a relatively fraught process (Langton 2015c). The administrative authority for these targeted higher education programs now lies with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. However, the policy authority for Indigenous higher education lies with the Minister for Education who receives advice through a Ministerial Council, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

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[2] These targeted higher education programs include:

- the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Program (which provides additional tutorial support for Indigenous students);
- the away from base mixed mode delivery program (which supports university and VET students who study at home but are also required to spend periods of time at institutions) – this is regulated by Section 13 of the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*;
- the Commonwealth Scholarships Programme (for university students) – regulated under parts 2.4 of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*;
- the Indigenous Staff Scholarships (supporting the upskilling of Indigenous staff in universities) – regulated under parts 2.4 of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003;*
- the Indigenous Support Programme (supporting engagement of Indigenous students in university) – regulated under parts 2.3 of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*;
- the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) Superannuation (a reserve fulfilling superannuation obligations for some former ATAS employees). (Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014a)

Higher Education Council (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015).

Further, while the programs that were moved over to the DPM&C have been aligned with the Indigenous Advancement Strategy their legislative basis remains unchanged and under the delegation of the Minister for Education. This positioning of administrative and policy authority for Indigenous higher education with separate Ministers may increase risks of misalignment between policy, funding and implementation.

Participation Versus Quality Outcomes?

I will now lay out the key contemporary policy challenges that confront Indigenous participation in the higher education sector. Perhaps the overarching challenge is the tension between a policy strategy focused on participation and one that is focused on educational outcomes.

Indigenous participation in Australian higher education is, in historical terms, relatively recent. The first Aboriginal Australian to graduate from an Australian university, Margaret Weir, graduated in 1959 with a Diploma of Physical Education from the University of Melbourne. Some years later she reflected on this experience:

> Melbourne University was fantastic. I was in University Women's College, which was the college, and here I am, a little black girl in this great place. It was such a wonderful, free feeling. I was in with the children of the high flyers, Prime Minister Menzies' niece was there, the Lord Mayor's daughter was there. You know, the wealthy, the elite of not only Melbourne society but Tasmanian society and Canberra society, because in those days if you wanted to get Post Graduate courses you had to go to the University of Melbourne. So it was 'the' place to be, to learn about how the other half lived. (Elders on Campus Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Engagement University of Western Sydney 2014)

Margaret's story is poignant and reflects a time in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian universities were an anomaly. To a certain extent this remained the case for the next three decades – it was certainly the situation when *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Employment Education and Training 1990) was developed.

However, this is no longer the case. In 2013, there were 13,700 Indigenous Australians enrolled in the higher education system, with 6250 of them commencing their tertiary studies that year (Fig. 13.1). Similarly, over time completions have trended up (Fig. 13.2), which represents a growth of 52 % in overall Indigenous enrolments across the sector. Growth is strongest for undergraduate programs, although it is apparent also in postgraduate coursework enrolments (Fig. 13.3).

But despite this growth in enrolments, Indigenous students as a proportion of the higher education cohort remains largely unchanged (0.15 % growth for the 10 years to 2013) (see Fig. 13.4). This is significant from a policy perspective. For if the
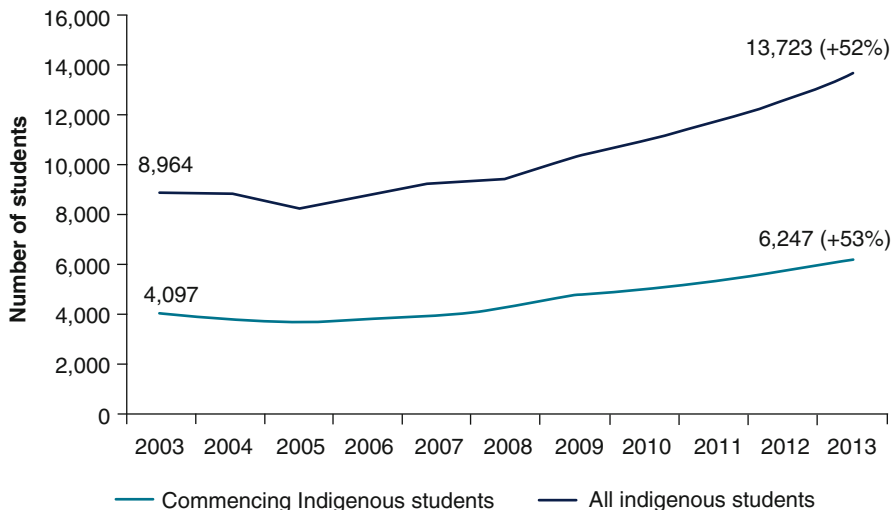
Fig. 13.1 Commencing and all Indigenous students 2003–2013 (Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014)
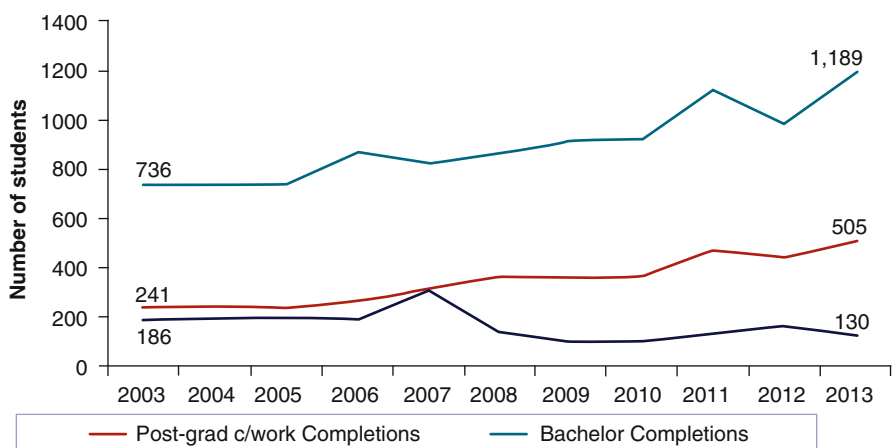
Fig. 13.2 Indigenous higher education completions, 2003–2013 (Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014)

policy objective is to create opportunity for Indigenous individuals to derive the benefits of a tertiary education by being competitive in a graduate labour market (a private good), increasing the absolute number of Indigenous Australians in higher education is a policy success.

If, on the other hand, our policy objectives extends to Indigenous social and economic development (a public good) the composition of the higher education cohort and graduate labour market remains important. The development of the Indigenous
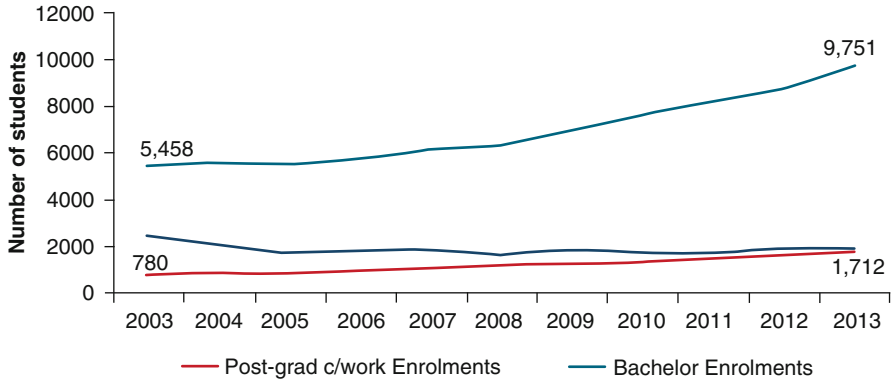
Fig. 13.3 Indigenous higher education enrolments 2003–2013 (Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014)
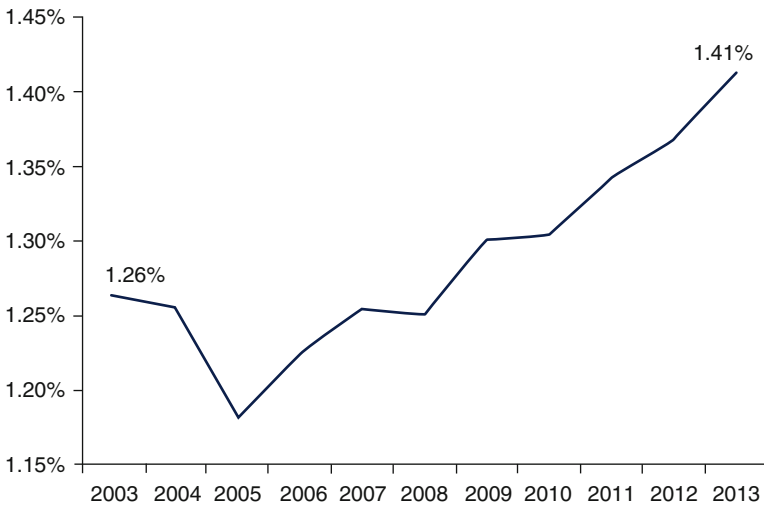
Fig. 13.4 Indigenous students as a proportion of domestic students (Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014)

economy depends, to a certain extent, on shifting the compositional structure of Indigenous Australia through improved educational outcomes. There remain, however, significant disparities between the educational outcomes of Indigenous people and the broader community. Notwithstanding the evolution of an Indigenous higher education strategy, compositional parity in participation continues to be a significantly important benchmark.

Completions

It goes without saying that completions are critical to ensuring graduate employment outcomes. However, with evidence to suggest that employment outcomes are poorer for those who do not complete their university degrees, the issue of attrition is critically important. Despite increased participation by, and growing numbers of completions for, Indigenous students, they are still significantly lagging behind their non-Indigenous peers (Edwards and McMillan 2015).

The Australian Government Department of Education conducted a cohort analysis in 2014 showing that completion rates remain fairly static for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students commencing (over a 6-year cohort period) in 2005, 2006 and 2007 (see Table. 13.1). It also found that while completion rates remain lower for Indigenous students than for non-Indigenous students, Indigenous students are more likely to remain enrolled at the end of the 6-year cohort period. Success rates (number of units passed divided by number of units attempted) for Indigenous students have remained fairly static across most fields of study over the period 2007–2013 (see Table. 13.2).

The reasons for these observed differences in completion rates or success rates are complex and there are potentially a number of factors at play. These include the following:

- There is a difference in the age distribution of the Indigenous higher education cohort, with the most significant under-representation in the younger (17–25) cohort and reaching parity or above in the mature age cohorts (Aurora Project 2011). This is particularly evident across fields of study such as the health sciences (NIHEC 2011). Research from non-Indigenous contexts has shown that the characteristics, motivations and outcomes for mature-age students differ from those of younger students. Yorke (Yorke 2001) found that completion rates for mature-age students were lower than those for traditional entry students and linked this finding to differences in the demographic profiles of these two groups. The relevance of these observations to Indigenous students is not known.
- There may be institutional factors that impact on observed differences. The patterns of enrolment vary between institutions, with some having relatively smaller

Table 13.1 Completion rates for Indigenous students

	Cohort (commencing)	Completed (in any year) (%)	Still enrolled at the end of the 6 year cohort period (%)
Indigenous	2005	40.9	13.8
	2006	41.1	13.4
	2007	40.0	15.1
Non-indigenous	2005	67.2	11.0
	2006	67.2	11.0
	2007	67.0	11.4

Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014

Table 13.2 Success rates

Broad field of education	Success rate (%)						
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Natural and Physical Sciences	63.21	64.18	63.26	65.39	64.23	64	64.4
Information Technology	60.13	62.24	61.08	62.58	62.39	64.8	63.83
Engineering and Related Technologies	80.79	83.08	79.66	79.93	79.52	78.47	80.18
Architecture and Building	84.88	86.47	82.47	81.01	80.26	81.52	81.16
Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	61.38	68.3	65.63	74.14	73.15	75.59	75.51
Health	79.41	77.47	79.14	78.09	77.95	79.96	81.57
Education	75.6	76.63	74.18	76.82	75.95	77.87	79.68
Management and Commerce	68.34	71.01	69.19	70.18	71.78	72.41	70.72
Society and Culture	66.5	67.61	67.9	68.8	68.71	69.53	70.76
Creative Arts	71.16	73.79	72.71	72.58	70.84	70.85	71.92

Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014

Note: Table A institutions only, includes all undergraduate students (bachelor and sub-bachelor)

cohorts and higher completion rates, while others have larger cohorts and lower completion rates (and some with a mixed pattern) (Pechenkina and Anderson 2011).

- Indigenous students report that they are more likely to be contemplating leaving university during their degree relative to their non-Indigenous peers (Asmar et al. 2011).
- It is likely that secondary school attainment also impacts upon higher education outcomes. Although we do not have good data on relative attainment at the completion of secondary school, the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) program does show significant differences in outcomes across reading, mathematics and science literacy in mid-secondary schools (Australian Council for Educational Research n.d.). What is important here is not only the mean outcomes, but the differences between the best performing Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers.

So while it is difficult to be definitive, it is likely that part of the solution to increasing completion rates for Indigenous university students lies in improving secondary school attainment and strengthening the pathway from school. We also need to ensure our investment in university education is well supported by strategies that focus on attainment and attend to those factors which impact on attrition.

However, and I need to underline this point, higher education interventions require a strategic focus on improving outcomes at all points across the educational continuum. We should, for example, aim to support Indigenous students to compete for the best graduate jobs. This means we cannot just be focused on 'students at risk'. Having said that, we do need to attend to the problem of attrition. This problem is not exclusive to Indigenous Australians, but the social harms are potentially

far greater for those who lack the social capital and networks to draw on if they exit higher education without completion.

Broadening the Disciplines and Pathways to the Professions

Currently, Indigenous participation in the higher education sector is clustered across three fields of study: society and culture, health, and education (represented in Fig. 13.5). This raises two important policy issues. Firstly, it suggests that if we are to optimise educational opportunity for Indigenous people we need to address the factors that may limit them choosing from a broader range of study options. Secondly, it suggests that we may be restricting their participation in important sections of the graduate labour market.

That Indigenous Australians are under-represented in the labour force is well understood and it is vital that national policy continues to focus strategic effort at addressing this issue. However, it also needs to address both the relative distribution of Indigenous Australians across the labour market and the quality of their employment.

The issue of relative distribution is important if we are to maximise employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians (Anderson 2015). For example, they are currently poorly represented across a range of sectors including information and media telecommunications, and financial and insurances services (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). If, for example, we are to ensure Indigenous Australians are positioned to take up opportunities in those sectors of the economy experiencing growth, we must align our strategies with the needs of sectors where Indigenous representation is currently quite poor.

The quality of employment focuses attention on issues that include the relative seniority of those currently employed. The Indigenous workforce is found predomi-
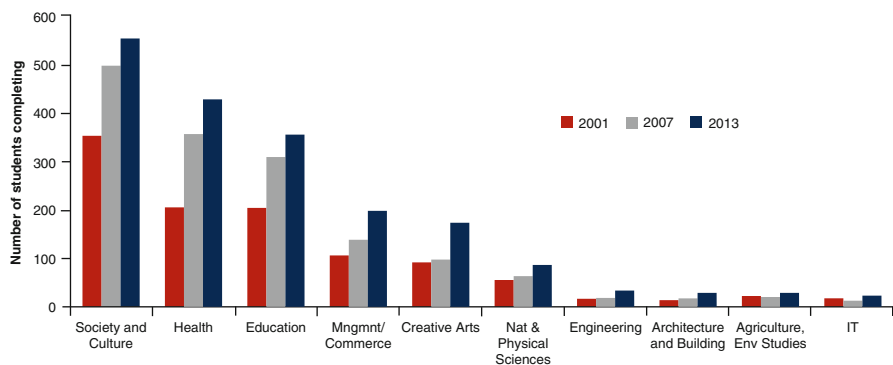

Fig. 13.5 Award course completions by broad field of education (Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014)

nantly in low-skilled occupations, with fewer managers, administrators and professionals than in the non-Indigenous population (Anderson 2015). A closer analysis of the professional workforce further elaborates this with Indigenous Australians being under-represented across the professions particularly at the elite end of professional structures. The reason why the current policy framework has identified pathways into the professions as a strategic priority is elaborated elsewhere (Anderson 2015). However, in this context it's worth noting that while there is an argument about which occupations, or part of occupations, should be considered as a profession, it is generally accepted that this is applied to a 'cluster of occupations in service and organisational management contexts that have both status and exercise different forms of authority over other occupations and citizens' (Anderson 2015, p. 11). To illustrate this further, I will now turn to consider issues in relation to engineers and medical doctors.

Indigenous Doctors

In 2012 Indigenous enrolments as a proportion of the first year domestic intake in medical degrees reached 2.5 %. This was slightly less than population parity, which at that time was 2.7 %. However, it was a noteworthy achievement and prompted the Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand (MDANZ) and the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) to put out a press release (Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association AIDA and Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand MDANZ 2012) announcing it. AIDA's membership records confirm that in 2015 there are approximately 204 Indigenous doctors and 310 Indigenous medical students in Australia (AIDA 2015). Given that the first graduations of Australian Indigenous doctors only occurred in the 1980s – nearly a century after comparable settler colonies such as Canada, the United States of America and New Zealand (Anderson 2008) – this seems a remarkable achievement.

However, in 2013 Indigenous Australians still represented only 0.4 % of the total medical practitioner workforce (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013) and, even with growing enrolments, there is still a significant lag in university course completions. The success rate for Indigenous students studying health-related courses in 2010, for example, was 76 % compared with 92 % for non-Indigenous students (Australian Government Department of Health 2012). Despite this, there is no doubting the growth in the Indigenous medical workforce over the past three decades.

A number of factors have built this momentum for change. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce National Strategic Framework in 2002 (Anderson 2002) identified the development of an Indigenous medical workforce as a strategic priority for Indigenous health policy. Since that time there has been a consistent policy signal about this priority including work undertaken by the National Indigenous Health Equality Council (NIHEC) that mapped trends in

Indigenous participation in medicine and a range of key professional groups, as well as some of the key underlying social determinants of health (NIHEC 2011).

The professional medical bodies – for example, Royal Australian College of Physicians, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Australian College of Rural and Remote Health Medicine, and the Australian Medical Association – have progressively developed an agenda for medical education and Indigenous health. This has variously incorporated a focus on the education of non-Indigenous doctors about Indigenous health, more general advocacy on Indigenous health issues and developing the pipeline into medicine for Indigenous people. The Australian Indigenous Doctors Association formed in 1998 has also played an active role in advocating with Australia's medical schools about pathways for Indigenous students (AIDA 2015).

In 2000, the Deans of Australia's medical schools, as the Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools (CDAMS), committed to a strategic agenda to build Indigenous student pathways into medical education. Subsequently, the Deans collectively endorsed a curricula framework for medical education in 2004 (Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand MDANZ 2010). The Australian Medical Council, the body responsible for the accreditation of medical schools, drew on the curricula framework to develop standards in relation to Indigenous health (Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand MDANZ 2010). CDAMS (now MDANZ) also supported the development of the Leaders of Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) Network to further the professionalisation of Indigenous medical education. The LIME Network has subsequently developed a number of resources for Indigenous medical education including a continuous quality improvement tool for medical schools (Anderson et al. 2009).

The policy priority has been institutionalised, with a shared leadership agenda and a number of facets to support change.

Indigenous Engineers

Today there are still only a handful of Indigenous engineers in Australia. Yet for nearly a decade a number of companies, including several in the mining industry, have invested in initiatives – such as the Indigenous Australian Engineering Summer School (Engineering Aid Australia 2013) – to promote Engineering to Indigenous secondary school students. Similarly, Engineering Australia, the professional body for engineers, has committed in its current Reconciliation Action Plan to promote Engineering as a career for Indigenous students, including through engagement with the Summer School and Engineering Aid Australia, and by influencing educators (Engineers Australia 2011). There have also been a number of cadetships and scholarships on offer to support Indigenous students to undertake Engineering degrees.

However, despite these initiatives the uptake of Engineering-related programs has been relatively weak to date. This is partly because it has proven difficult to find
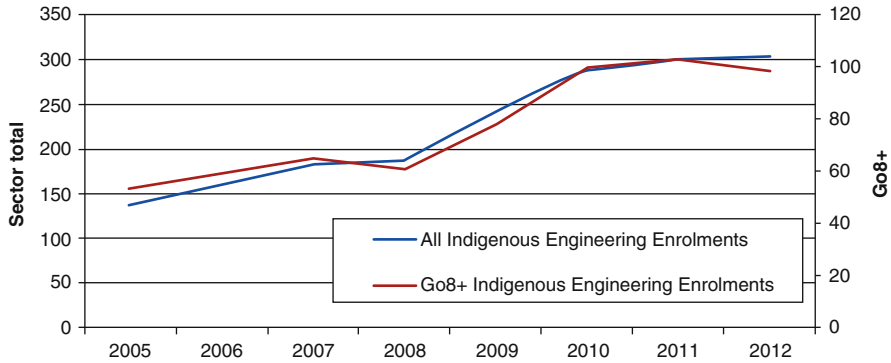
Fig. 13.6 Indigenous engineering enrolments, Go8 and sector 2005–2012 (Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014)
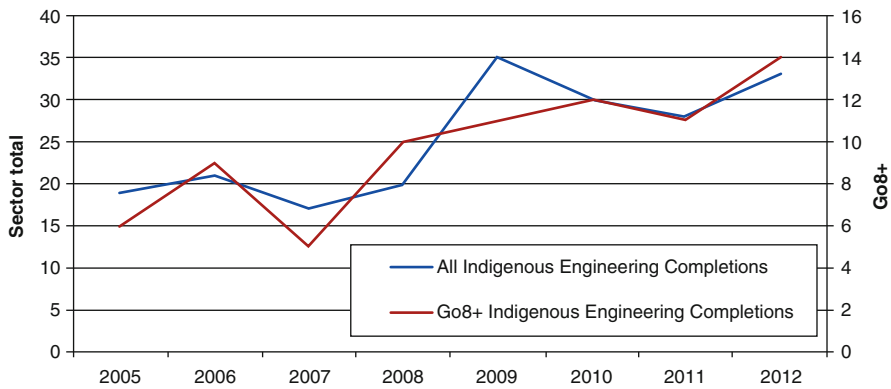
Fig. 13.7 Indigenous engineering completions, Go8 and sector 2005–2012 (Data source: Commonwealth Department of Education, 2014)

appropriate students to take up the various scholarships and cadetships. It has only been relatively recently that we have seen an increase in enrolments, although the flow through to completions is still not strong (see Figs. 13.6 and 13.7).

There are number of factors driving industry interest in this area. Several engineering companies have strong corporate responsibility agendas that now include a focus on Indigenous education. Significantly, this industry-driven agenda has gained momentum as particularly corporate leaders in the mining industry have realised there is a robust business case for the employment of Indigenous Australians – including as professionals.

This is largely because Indigenous employment (and the procurement of Indigenous business) is now one of the preconditions upon which contemporary agreements between native title holders and the mineral and resources sector are based (Langton 2012, 2015b). As these agreements have matured, there is a grow-

ing awareness in both sectors that a focus on entry-level employment alone is insufficient. Any realisation of the social benefits of mining in these regions requires the development of a professional Indigenous workforce who can take up the industry's management positions. This includes the engineers, the accountants and lawyers who can work with Indigenous corporations managing the mining royalties, the doctors and nurses operating in programs created through the investment of benefits generated by the mining industry, and other Indigenous graduates with professional qualifications working in middle to senior management in the corporations associated with mining and across the business and services sector in these regions.

Despite industry interest in fostering Indigenous employment and pathways into Engineering, the Deans of Engineering have not been as fully engaged in the process as the Medical Deans. Nor have Indigenous graduate engineers as yet formed an advocacy organisation. Although several of the Deans have an active interest in developing the Indigenous pipeline into Engineering courses, that development has not matured into a fully developed policy coalition. However, at a National Indigenous Engineering Summit in June 2015, Engineering Deans, professional bodies, Indigenous engineers and education experts committed to the strategies needed to realise parity in graduations for Indigenous students (National Indigenous Engineering Summit 2015).

What is most germane in the case of Engineering is that the flow of Indigenous students into Science, Technology, Engineering and, particularly, Mathematics (STEM) courses is still very weak, with Engineering a particular challenge as the discipline requires competencies in advanced Mathematics. This is a significant issue as, more broadly, the number of students taking intermediate and advanced Mathematics is declining (Broadbridge and Henderson 2008). At an even broader level there is significant policy concern more generally about STEM education in Australia (Marginson et al. 2013). The importance of an enhanced focus on STEM is reinforced in the recently released STEM capability statement by the Chief Scientist (Office of the Chief Scientist 2014).

Policy for Indigenous students needs to be cognisant of these broader systemic challenges for STEM education, while at the same time developing interventions to address the issues that are particular to the Indigenous context. However, although numerous reports have documented the relatively poorer outcomes for Indigenous students in Mathematics and Science in secondary school and earlier, there is a need for more research and evaluation work to guide the development of specific Indigenous STEM education strategies (OECD 2007, 2014).

Emerging Policy Agendas

Since the development of the discussion paper *A Fair Chance for All* (DEET 1990), Indigenous higher education policy has had, and continues to have, a focus on participation and completions. The current policy framework has a stronger line of sight between educational outcomes and Indigenous development. The other point

of difference is that the change model has shifted from a focus on special entry pathways and the creation of Indigenous units within universities to creating a whole-of-university environment that normalises accountabilities for Indigenous students.

This is perhaps well illustrated by the focus on faculty- or discipline-led reform in the case of Medicine and Engineering. The Behrendt Review (Behrendt et al. 2012) further exemplifies this approach by contextualising student strategy within the context of broader institutional reform through research and teaching and learning strategy. So while we can find the threads of this new paradigm in earlier policy frameworks it has matured into a much more sophisticated agenda for higher education reform, with issues of student equity integral to this broader reform.

However, as I flagged earlier, the Indigenous higher education reform agenda sits within a broader ecology of policy reform. While it is not clear how the deregulation agenda of the current Federal government will play out – it will impact on future policy thinking in the Indigenous higher education space.

One of the concerns raised in relation to the proposals for university fee deregulation was the effect it might have on Indigenous participation rates. Many commentators during the recent wider debate on the funding of universities have pointed out that, up until this point, price has not negatively impacted on demand in relation to university places. However, we do not really have data on the factors that influence Indigenous demand. There is some evidence from the United Kingdom suggesting that although recent price increases have not dampened overall demand, they have had an impact on where and what students from equity cohorts choose to study (Atherton et al. 2015). We cannot be so cavalier as to assume that there are not future tipping points. We will also need to monitor closely the demand for places from Indigenous Australians if fees do become deregulated.

The proposals first put forward in the Kemp Norton Review (Kemp and Norton 2014) to de-regulate the sub-Bachelor load, if realised, may create an 'in' for the sector to address the issue of pathways for those students who have completed Year 12 without the tertiary readiness for a Bachelor degree. However, if this opportunity is to be realised for Indigenous students it will require further policy attention to avoid the creation of educational *cul de sacs* for graduates of sub-Bachelor degrees who need to transition to university to optimise their success in the jobs market. The issue of quality and its impact on transition to Bachelor degrees is critically important.

More generally, in a deregulated system students are recast as consumers. However, prospective students make decisions of significant life consequence, without the experience to equip them fully for this choice, and such decisions impact on future job prospects. There is a social gradient at play here. Indigenous students do not generally have access to the networks that assist their more advantaged peers in making these decisions. Strategies are, therefore, required to build a social infrastructure that reproduces these networks for them. More is also needed to support Indigenous students through their undergraduate education – and not just in the career planning provided by university services. A comprehensive approach to

internships and similar learning opportunities is required, particularly within under-graduate degrees that have no clearly defined professional focus.

The other dynamic currently at play is the role of Indigenous higher education strategy vis a vis broader Indigenous policy. There is perhaps an unresolved policy dichotomy here, as it would seem as if there are distinct models of Indigenous development that sit in some tension with each other. The first is a development model that focuses on welfare reform and enabling the transition into the formal economy – as measured by growth in labour market participation. The key enablers for this are school attendance, completion of formal schooling and a more market-oriented skills and training sector. The Forrest Review is perhaps an expression of this – at least in part. The other model positions higher education as an enabler producing the human capital needed to sustain economic and social development. This latter model has been influential in Indigenous higher education policy.

These two models are not necessarily in competition with each other but neither are they completely aligned. A focus on higher education participation defers employment outcomes, notwithstanding the fact that the quality and economic returns of graduate employment are potentially higher than other forms of employment. However, the most difficult dynamic that will require attention is whether it is possible to maintain the momentum for Indigenous higher education reform under the current arrangements while there is such a disconnect between policy and program authority.

The new policy framework for Indigenous higher education is not a radical departure from that which was anticipated in *A Fair Chance for All* (DEET 1990). However, the subsequent elaboration of strategy has placed a stronger emphasis on both pathways into University as well as completions. There is been a significant elaboration of strategy with a much stronger emphasis on professional pipelines, the role of Faculties and the embedding of accountabilities across the whole of the University.

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Chapter 14
Ladders of Opportunity: Postgraduate Equity, Professions and the Academic Workforce

Sharon Bell and Robyn May

Introduction

Universities are increasingly intertwined with an economic system (Kirp 2003) and are expected to comply with requirements of professional bodies and produce 'work ready' graduates (Blass et al. 2012). Commentators such as Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) emphasise that higher education institutions are in fact initiating academic capitalism. Within this knowledge-economy paradigm, as Roberts observes, students have been recast as 'rational, self-interested, choosers and consumers'… while education itself is increasingly being re-conceptualised 'as a commodity: something to be sold, traded and consumed' (Roberts 2007, pp. 350–351, as cited in Shore and Taitz 2012).

With extraordinary prescience Lyotard noted in his 1984 essay on *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, that: 'The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer "is it true?" but "What use is it?" . . . This creates the prospect for a vast market for competence in operational skills.' (Lyotard 1984, p. 51).

The significant threats we face in this rapidly changing context to long held aspirations of a contemporary higher education system premised on equality of opportunity are increasing inequality conflated with and disguised by the rhetoric of 'diversity of the student experience' or the 'individualised learning experience'. This is potentially accompanied by the erosion and concentration of the 'academy'

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into a sub-set of elite research intensive universities that assume the essential role of reproducing the core, highly credentialed academic workforce, supplemented by a contingent workforce – a disseminating army of 'knowledge workers', with the attendant reinforcement of an elite status quo and erosion of diversity of academic lineage (Blass et al. 2010).

This emerging reality was foreshadowed as a set of tensions in the same era Lyotard was defining 'the postmodern condition' in Dawkins *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (Dawkins 1988) that preceded the discussion paper *A Fair Chance for All* (1990). In the 1988 policy statement community responses to the Policy Discussion Paper articulated concerns regarding the potential erosion of the traditional role and community expectations of universities:

> The concern was commonly expressed, for example, that the Government's proposals for reform and reorientation of higher education should not distort the system's traditional functions of intellectual inquiry and scholarship; likewise, that an increased emphasis on science, technology and business studies should not jeopardise the important role of the arts, humanities and social sciences.

> Many respondents were concerned to avoid a situation where higher education courses would be tailored to narrow vocational or 'instrumentalist' objectives; others that quality should not be compromised for the sake of quantity; and others that the quest for efficiency and concentration of effort in higher education teaching and research should not lead to a grey uniformity throughout the country (Dawkins 1988, p. 5).

In response the government reaffirmed its intention that:

> …an increasing share of total higher education resources should be directed to those fields of study of greatest relevance to the national goals of industrial development and economic restructuring. It emphasises, however, that this priority will be implemented gradually as part of a significant expansion of total higher education effort. It is not the intention of the Government that institutions should lessen their commitment to the arts, social sciences and humanities, either in teaching or research. Indeed, these fields may well share in the benefits of growth. (Dawkins 1988, p. 8).

The government also reinforced a significant commitment to the vocational dimension of higher education:

> The traditional distinction between broadly based and vocationally specific education is narrowing, and the long-term interests of students will be best served by courses that incorporate elements of both 'vocational' and 'general' education (Dawkins 1988, p. 9).

Importantly the Government coupled this emerging vocationally oriented and instrumentalist agenda with a strong, and in many ways sophisticated, commitment to principles of equity:

> As a nation, we have consistently voiced our demands for a fair and free society. All Australians expect and deserve an equal chance to succeed in life, with positive assistance given where necessary to make up for financial or other disadvantages.

> Access to education is vital. Education is one of the principal means for individuals to achieve independence, economic advancement and personal growth. But in the past, the benefits of higher education have been enjoyed disproportionately by the more privileged members of our community. Those benefits need to be shared more widely and more equitably in the future (Dawkins 1988, p. 6).

A Fair Chance for All (Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1990) established the Commonwealth's equity framework for participation in higher education. Since 1991 information has been systematically collected and analysed on access, participation and completion rates on the identified equity groups (people from low socio-economic backgrounds; people from rural or isolated areas; people with a disability; people from a non-English speaking background; women, particularly in non-traditional courses and post-graduate study; and Indigenous people.) With the exception of the equity group 'women in non-traditional courses and post-graduate study' the focus on equity outcomes and reporting, and therefore the highest policy priorities, have been on undergraduate participation and success with analysis of outcomes at the postgraduate level difficult to accurately ascertain (James et al. 2004, 2008).

It is noteworthy that at the time of framing *A Fair Chance for All* data was not collected on the socio-economic background of students so a number of proxy indicators, including parental occupation, were invoked (1990, pp. 14–15) to confirm that there had been little change in the socio-economic profile of students commencing higher education 1970–1985 and that there was high and increasing imbalance in some fields of study. The targets set under the objective of improved participation for people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were in the context of lower levels of completion of year 12 of schooling and thus reflect threshold rather than aspirational measures including: special entry measures, bridging and support programs, higher education awareness programs and links with Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and the long-term unemployed (1990, p. 14–15).

In this paper several important sources of cognate analysis are considered to inform understanding of the aspirational end of the equity spectrum: postgraduate experiences and outcomes. This includes: data generated by the Department of Education and Training and its predecessors; Universities Australia university student finances data; and the National Research Student Survey (NRSS) data.

The Student Equity Profile

The dominant equity narrative suggests that the higher education sector has provided differential opportunities for equity groups. The relative success in terms of the participation of women and students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) is often contrasted with that of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (James et al. 2008) and rural and Indigenous students (Harvey and Andrewartha 2013). For the latter equity groups it is noted that patterns of participation have not changed significantly and parity of participation with population has not been achieved (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 30).

The Departmental (DET) data suggests that equity groups remain differentially represented in postgraduate education, even though there has been significant growth in the postgraduate student cohort, especially in postgraduate coursework

which has doubled its share of total enrolments from 11 to 22 % over the past 30 years (Norton and Cherastidtham 2014, p. 20). It has been observed that people with low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds and those from rural and isolated areas have remained underrepresented at levels commensurate with population parity in the professional fields of study with the most competitive entry standards (medicine, law and architecture) at the undergraduate level and in postgraduate education. James at al report that students from low SES backgrounds comprise less than 10 % of postgraduate students when they constitute just over 15 % of undergraduate students (2008, p. 2). This is significantly below population parity, which defines low SES as the bottom quartile (25 %) of the population residing in postcodes that house the most socio-economically disadvantaged.

There is evidence that the lower level of participation of low SES students in postgraduate education may reflect 'thin' undergraduate educational experiences, with a greater proportion enrolled part-time, and in external and multi-modal modes of study. Low SES students are also more likely to have reported needing to defer their study because of their financial situation (Bexley et al. 2013, pp. 80–89).

For a significant proportion of low SES students undergraduate studies are associated with hardship and duress. The Universities Australia 2012 survey of student finances (Bexley et al. 2013) generated a significant response rate from low SES students (16 % at the undergraduate level). The survey data (based on a total 11,761 responses) suggests that two-thirds of full-time domestic undergraduate students have incomes of less than $20,000 a year (p. 18). Half of all undergraduates have a personal budget deficit and the worst-off group was part-time, low SES undergraduates, amongst whom close to 63 % reported a personal budget deficit (p. 33).

The survey data reinforces the fact that the typical Australian university student is a working student and more than half of domestic undergraduate students (53 %) reported that their studies were adversely affected by their work commitments (Bexley et al. 2013, pp. 44–49). Two thirds of domestic undergraduates (primarily independent, mature age students) reported being worried about their financial situation and full-time, low SES students (22 %) were more likely to go without food and other basic necessities compared with other students (17 %) (p. 56). Such circumstances plausibly constitute evidence of significant impediments to progression to post-graduate studies, particularly fee-paying post-graduate courses.

The Universities Australia 2012 survey cited above indicates that, just as with undergraduates, the vast majority of postgraduate students combine study and work – 85 % of postgraduate coursework students and 84 % of research students. Nevertheless nearly 70 % of full-time, domestic postgraduate coursework students have a mean income of less than $30,000, and nearly 46 % have mean incomes below $20,000. The majority (60 %) of full-time domestic higher degree by research (HDR) candidates have incomes between $20,000 and $40,000 a year, and just under a third have incomes over $40,000 (Bexley et al. 2013, p. 16–18). 40 % of employed full-time HDR candidates indicated that their work commitments were adversely affecting their performance at university even though the hours worked per week were low (p. 49). Both postgraduate coursework students and HDR students, particularly older part-time students, reported being in budget deficit and

carrying loans (p. 39) and 74 % of full-time postgraduate coursework students and 63 % of HDR candidates indicated that their financial situation was a worry to them (p. 55).

The data throughout the Universities Australia report indicates a growth in the range of student circumstances (compared to the last survey in 2006), due to the increasing participation of students who had previously not been likely to participate in higher education. Those who worry about their financial situation are more likely to be over 25, financially independent and renting accommodation (Bexley et al., p. 58).

Such personal circumstances may constrain the ability of low SES students to take full advantage of postgraduate study opportunities, as may limited cultural capital (Harvey and Andrewartha 2013, p. 113) but actual levels of participation are possibly disguised by the fact that the established Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) postcode based measure of individual socioeconomic status is an inappropriate measure for postgraduate students, the majority of whom are over twenty-five. These students are more likely to have relocated from place of birth/ schooling to geographic areas that are proximate to employment or university. It is thus not possible, from the published Departmental equity data, to draw confident conclusions regarding equity and access in postgraduate education for low SES or rural mature age students (James et al. 2008: p. 9). This is in contrast to the equity categories women in non-traditional disciplines and Indigenous students, whose identity is more clearly framed. It is important to note however that these equity categories are not mutually exclusive and many students in the identified equity groups experience multiple disadvantage.

The data therefore generates the impression that certain more easily identified and tracked equity groups have maintained a disproportionately high share of participation in postgraduate coursework and higher degrees compared to their participation in undergraduate programs. This applies to people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) (James et al. 2004, p. 38). Since 2002 women have constituted over 50 % of those undertaking post-graduate coursework and postgraduate research degrees (James et al. 2004, p. 45). This is edging closer to being commensurate with their undergraduate participation.

It is also important to distinguish between patterns of participation in postgraduate coursework degrees, which may generate significant costs to the individual student in fee paying places, versus participation in higher degrees by research (HDR). HDRs do not currently attract fees and over half of HDR students hold either Australian or University Postgraduate Awards.

The Postgraduate Research Student Equity Profile

In addition to Departmental (DET) equity data and Universities Australia finance data there is another source of valuable data that adds to understanding of the equity profile of the postgraduate research student population, suggesting a different, and

more positive narrative. This is the detailed data on the higher degree by research (HDR) student population documented through the 2010 National Research Student Survey (NRSS). This survey was conducted in 2010 across 38 of the 39 universities in Australia. Almost 12,000 Higher Degree by Research students enrolled in PhD and masters by research degrees responded to the NRSS, providing a 25.5 % response rate. These response numbers represent the largest collection of survey responses from research students ever undertaken in Australia (Edwards et al. 2010, p. 8).

The NRSS primarily explores the career intentions and motivations of these students, particularly in terms of whether they intend to pursue an academic career. The authors note that:

> It is important to remember that the traditional notion of an academic being someone who has made a linear transition from school to university, to a HDR and on to academia is outdated. Research students come to the HDR from a diverse variety of professional backgrounds and have equally diverse aspirations for their careers after gaining their qualification. Some research students may already be working in universities in an academic capacity. Many intend to use their research degree as a springboard to a career outside of the university sector. Others undertake a research degree out of interest in the subject matter and simply for the pleasure of studying at an advanced level. Nevertheless, those research students who aspire to an academic career do represent an important source of future academics (2010, p. 9).

In addition to providing valuable data and analysis of the career aspirations of research students the report identifies a range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics indicative of the equity profile of those who have achieved at a high level in undergraduate studies. This data suggests that the postgraduate research population at the time of the NRSS was slightly weighted towards women (51 %); the majority were enrolled in a doctorate (85 %) studying on a full-time basis (73 %); and they were concentrated in the broad fields of education of Society and Culture (23 %), Natural and Physical Sciences (19 %) or Health (16 %) (2010, p. 105).

Nearly half of the respondents were aged between 25 and 34, although a reasonable number of more mature-aged students were present in the sample. The majority of respondents speak English as their main language (82 %), and most are citizens of Australia. Only a small group of research students identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent (0.5 %).

Table 14.1 is reproduced from the NRSS as it provides an overview of key characteristics that can be used as a proxy for socioeconomic status of the research student population. A significant finding is that a notable proportion of respondents had a father (43 %) or mother (33 %) who had a university-level undergraduate or postgraduate qualification as their highest level of educational attainment. In addition, nearly one-quarter of this population has a member of their immediate family who has worked in a university as an academic. The majority of students grew up in a capital city and only a small percentage (15 %) were raised in areas of low socio-economic status (SES), derived from the postcode of where students lived at the end of their primary school years, although caution must be exercised when drawing on data from historic postcode demographics.

Table 14.1 Characteristics of NRSS respondents

Variable		NRSS responses		NRSS weighted	
		Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent
Father's highest level of education	No school or primary school	616	6.1	2972	6.3
	Some secondary school	1823	18.2	8336	17.8
	Completed secondary school	1448	14.4	6751	14.4
	Vocational certificate or diploma	1670	16.6	7635	16.3
	Undergraduate university degree or diploma	2453	24.4	11,541	24.6
	Postgraduate university degree or diploma	1787	17.8	8522	18.2
	Not sure	168	1.7	782	1.7
	Not applicable	74	0.7	324	0.7
Mother's highest level of education	No school or primary school	742	7.4	3574	7.6
	Some secondary school	2033	20.3	9375	20.0
	Completed secondary school	1962	19.6	9329	19.9
	Vocational certificate or diploma	1751	17.5	8037	17.2
	Undergraduate university degree or diploma	2234	22.3	10,334	22.1
	Postgraduate university degree or diploma	1112	11.1	5198	11.1
	Not sure	134	1.3	677	1.4
	Not applicable	61	0.6	271	0.6
Immediate family member has worked as an academic	No	7644	76.2	35,623	76.1
	Yes	2381	23.8	11,200	23.9
Type of area where grew up	Isolated or remote area	131	1.3	593	1.3
	Rural or country area	1580	15.8	7281	15.6
	Regional or provincial town	2696	26.9	12,546	26.8
	Capital city	5140	51.3	24,089	51.5
	Overseas	473	4.7	2285	4.9
SES of area where grew up (using postcodes ranked according to the educational and occupational characteristics of residents based on ABS Socioeconomic Indexes for areas)	Lowest quartile	882	15.1	3970	14.7
	Middle 50 %	2374	40.7	10,997	40.7
	Highest quartile	2101	36.0	9766	36.1
	Grew up overseas	473	8.1	2285	8.5

Table 14.1 (continued)

Variable		NRSS responses		NRSS weighted	
		Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent
Main activity in year before beginning research degree	Undergraduate university study (excluding honours)	366	3.4	1799	3.6
	Honours at university	2179	20.3	10,130	20.4
	Postgraduate university study	1780	16.6	8075	16.2
	Vocational education and training (VET)	41	0.4	199	0.4
	Full-time employment	4887	45.5	22,667	45.6
	Part-time or casual employment	1,051	9.8	4,785	9.6
	Looking for work	100	0.9	475	1.0
	Caring for family	167	1.6	718	1.4
	Travelling	129	1.2	591	1.2
	Other	49	0.5	271	0.5
Total		11,710	100.0	53,480	100.0

Source: Edwards et al. (2010, p.18)

The NRSS data indicates that the majority of respondents were working prior to taking up postgraduate study – 46 % were in full-time work and close to a further 10 % were in part-time work, although this figure is undoubtedly inflated by the fact that it includes university staff who are undertaking higher degrees by research. There are also significant differences by field of research, with many science students (43 %) progressing directly from undergraduate to postgraduate studies.

The NRSS documents that 57 % of research students have worked at a university some time during their candidacy (2010, p. 9). 26 % will work as tertiary education teachers and an additional 18 % will work as science professionals if documented employment patterns are maintained (2010, p. 12).

These characteristics of the NRSS respondent population confirm that, based on the postcode of the area where the respondents grew up, the post-graduate research population is dominated by students from middle and highest quartile SES backgrounds (77 %). But lowest quartile SES background respondents constituted 15 % of the post-graduate respondent population which, contrary to the SEIFA based Departmental data, is commensurate with their undergraduate participation. This is consistent with data on pass and retention rates of low SES students (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 7) and on analysis provided by the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) which found that 'if students from a low socio-economic background get to university, their background does not negatively affect their chances of completing the course' (Marks 2007, p. 27).

To gain entrance to postgraduate research degrees a student must do better than 'completing the course' – they must excel. What is perhaps remarkable in this context is that a quarter of NRSS respondents' had a parent who had no school, only primary school or only some secondary school. This is indicative of evidence of profound, positive generational change in terms of educational attainment, even

though, as for low SES undergraduates, postgraduate study may entail significant financial hardship as discussed above.

The NRSS data suggests a revised higher education equity narrative: Whilst at the undergraduate level parity of participation of low SES students has not yet been achieved, success of those from the identified equity groups who participate in undergraduate studies is generally commensurate with their participation, as is their participation in post-graduate research. For a significant proportion of higher degree by research students this achievement is in marked contrast to their parents who may not have had the opportunity to attend school or complete secondary school. The exception to these high levels of attainment is students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who remain significantly under-represented at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Postgraduate Student Graduate Outcomes

Available data on graduate outcomes indicates that for many postgraduate students coursework degrees, particularly masters degrees, translate into positive employment and salary outcomes (Graduate Careers Australia 2014; Hugo and Morriss 2010).

The *Postgraduate Destinations* report compiled annually by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) documents the graduate destinations of those with postgraduate diplomas and graduate certificates; coursework masters degrees; and research masters and PhDs. These three groupings of graduates have differing employment histories before, during and after the completion of their award (GCA 2014, p. v). Of postgraduates available for full-time employment in 2013 83 % had full-time work at the time of the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), compared to 71 % of bachelor degree students (GCA 2014, p. 5). As has been the case consistently since the survey was introduced in 2003, postgraduates who undertook study on a part-time basis were more likely to be in full-time employment than those who had studied full-time (GCA 2014, p. 11). The private sector was the major source of full-time employment for coursework masters students, accounting for 44 % of respondents in full-time employment. In contrast, the education sector, primarily higher education (41 %), was the major source of full-time employment for research masters and PhD graduates, accounting for 50.5 % of respondents in full-time employment (GCA 2014, p. 14). The highest overall median salary was recorded by coursework masters students in the government sector ($91,000). Research masters/PhDs in all sectors reported median salaries of $80,000 or more, although males earned significantly more than similarly qualified females in most employment sectors for each level of award. (GCA 2014, pp. 15–16)

Graduate destination data raises the question: does undertaking a higher degree by research translate in to opportunities commensurate with research students' achievement and aspirations?

Ladders of Opportunity?

In addition to providing valuable information about postgraduate student demographics, the NRSS clearly documents the respondents' career aspirations. The NRSS tells us that the vast majority (83 %) of students commence higher degrees by research with the intention of pursuing an academic career. However there is a disjunction between students' aspirations to pursue an academic career and the reality of this as a career path. In fact 30 % of respondents who indicated they aspire to an academic career indicated that they recognised that finding an academic job was an unrealistic goal due to lack of available academic positions and/or low comparative salary levels (2010, p. viii). Many of these students also recognise that to achieve their aspirations they may need to work overseas, or at least spend some time overseas to gain a competitive level of academic research experience (2010, p. vix).

The NRSS concludes that:

> …three issues make it unmistakably clear that growth in this workforce [the academic profession] is inevitable: the growth trend recorded in recent years; the current policies for expansion for higher education in Australia; and the demographic imbalance of an ageing academic workforce (2010, p. xi).

This optimistic conclusion fails to take account of rapidly changing employment profiles and practices in the higher education sector. According to departmental data in 2013 Australia's universities employed just fewer than 116,000 people on a permanent or fixed-term contract basis. Of these staff the majority (64,400) were in non-academic job classifications and 51,400 held academic job classifications (Norton and Cherastidtham 2014, p. 32). This is a reflection of the increasing complexity of universities and the demands of the compliance driven sector within which they operate together with the growth in positions that are defined as professional but require high levels of academic credentials – Whitchurch's 'third space' employing 'unbounded' and 'blended' professionals (2008, p. 4).

In addition to these staff it is estimated that in 2010 universities employed an additional 67,000 people as casual academics, a greater number than the 'tenured core' (May 2011). About one half of these casually employed academics are postgraduate students and another quarter are professionals whose primary place of work is outside the university sector (May et al 2013, p. 264). However some academics have been employed casually for long periods of time, often at more than one institution (Strachan et al. 2012, p. 61).

This increasing dependence on casual or sessional academic staff has been documented as the population has grown over the past decade (Bexley et al. 2011; Junor 2004; Kimber 2003; Percy et al. 2008;) but it is apparent, again from the NRSS data, that higher education employment practices, specifically the growth in a contingent workforce, and therefore limited career prospects, is not as visible as would be expected to many research higher degree students. The move away from a majority of full-time, expert employees to a smaller workforce of 'high value' individuals and a growing number of contingent employees, or as Robyn May calls casual academics 'piece workers' (2013, p.4), is akin to participating in a game of career

snakes and ladders where the players both contribute to the shaping of the game but are blindfolded to its consequences. This contributes to high levels of dissatisfaction amongst early career academics (Bexley et al. 2011, p. 23).

Equity and the Changing Dynamics of Higher Education Employment Practices

One contributing factor to this lack of awareness in the Australian context may have been generated by the work of the late Graeme Hugo (2005, 2008; Hugo and Morriss 2010). Professor Hugo's demographic analysis has generated a dominant narrative that emphasises the older age structure of the continuing academic workforce, and looming skills shortages, and therefore emergent employment opportunities. Sadly these are opportunities that have not been realised for the majority of higher degree by research students due to increasingly casualisation and short-term employment. Moreover, as May (2013, p. 17) has argued this analysis has also created the space where the quality and suitability of the casual academic workforce is questioned (Hugo and Morriss 2010) or factored in to a casual academic workforce typology as the 'treadmill' casual academics (Coates and Goedegebuure 2010).

In this context it is important to note that Hugo's influential research and modeling fails to recognise the true crisis in the academic workforce as it is based on Departmental data that does not adequately capture the size and scale of the casual academic workforce. At least one equity group is well represented in this casual population as women form the majority of these staff (57 %) and, in contrast to Hugo's data, over half are 35 years or younger (May 2013, p. 48).

As indicated above the HDR student population is formally recruited through highly competitive processes, arguably attracting the 'best and the brightest' who become academic apprentices (Junor 2004). Universities are unusual in that they train and credential their own workforce, and they do this through the apprentice-ship model of research higher degrees, and through the opportunities to engage in casual academic teaching, although the latter is less highly valued (Probert 2014, p. 7). This is important as there is arguably a liminal space between Kimber's (2003) 'tenured core' and 'tenuous periphery' of the academic workforce – that of the HDR student. This liminal, apprentice population, simultaneously students and members of academic staff, blur industrial and professional practice. The HDR population reinforces an established set of career aspirations and academic identity formation (Probert 2014; Yates and Bell 2015) and simultaneously disguises inequitable employment practices relating to casual staff. This population also diffuses systematic identification of real academic workforce needs in terms of facilities, resources and staff development.

This masking is because HDR students enjoy high status relative to the undergraduate and postgraduate coursework student population, and high status relative to casual academic staff even though, as liminal beings, they make up over a third

(May 2013) and possibly up to two-thirds (Edwards et al. 2010) of the casual academic population. Their needs are most clearly defined and met through HDR support policies including policies relating to minimal resources for suitable research space, access to IT, information resources and development opportunities through conference travel (Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) 2012) – needs which often cease to be met once the PhD is completed and casual academic employment is then taken up.

There is no comprehensive data in Australia on the long term career prospects of doctoral students, although the Group of Eight note that in 2008, 28 % of recent PhD graduates were working in Higher Education, although its not clear in what types of jobs (2013, p. 25). For the very small number who transition from the PhD directly, rather than via insecure employment, into continuing academic employment this is unproblematic as their liminal status is superseded by becoming an academic, albeit a junior academic (level A or B). Retention of status and career prospects will be defined by their research productivity in the critical post-doctoral phase.

But for many the transition is increasingly a 'tipping point' from the high status but liminal position of the HDR student to the low status, marginalised and institutionally invisible position of the casual staff member who is employed on what is effectively an hourly piece rate on a sessional (effectively seasonal) basis. In this context their casual work experience counts for very little in the competitive academic employment market, and in fact cumulative casual teaching experience may be considered a negative due to its impact on research productivity. May's research suggests that after two years of casual teaching post PhD completion respondents' perceptions of gaining more secure employment were significantly reduced (May 2013, p. 232).

These post-docs enter a teaching and research academic workforce that is effectively freelance but, unlike the visual and performing arts, new entrants are not prepared for this freelance world of work and only some have the experience, support and strategies to maximise opportunities and avoid career traps. Moreover only some will gain employment in the institutional settings, the research-intensive universities, in which they have been students.

The Australian Qualifications defines the 'skills' expectation of the doctoral phase in the following way:

> Graduates at this level will have expert, specialised cognitive, technical and research skills in a discipline area to independently and systematically:
>
> - engage in critical reflection, synthesis and evaluation;
> - develop, adapt and implement research methodologies to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice;
> - disseminate and promote new insights to peers and the community;
> - generate original knowledge and understanding to make a substantial contribution to a discipline or area of professional practice (Australian Qualifications 2013, p. 1).

However, recent detailed research including a large-scale survey and case studies (Strachan et al. 2012) reveals that the recruitment processes for casual staff are ad

hoc and frequently based on individual networks and sponsorship (88 %) compared with 60 % of continuing academic staff who gained their positions through competitive recruitment processes. This raises the question of whether there is a self-perpetuating cycle within the academic workforce where at the critical post-doctoral career stage those who have commenced their studies with, or have accumulated significant social and political capital in addition to skills and expertise, are most likely to assume the mantel of the confident, autonomous academic researcher (Yates 2004) and constitute the class of 'graduate winners' (Norton 2012) –the overwhelming majority (88 %) who gain their first casual academic positions through networks and sponsorship. Another large survey (Bell et al. 2015) confirmed this dynamic in the fields of biological and chemical sciences where 97 % of respondents indicated that they believed success was based on networks, connections and knowing the right people as well as a good track record.

Perhaps the revised higher education equity narrative should read:

Despite the development of mass higher education and the participation of a wider range of students, including many from Australia's identified equity groups, the academy shows a remarkable degree of persistence in reproducing itself. Whilst at the undergraduate level parity of participation of low SES students has not yet been achieved, success of those from the identified equity groups who participate in undergraduate studies is generally commensurate with their participation, as is their participation in post-graduate research. For many higher degree by research students this achievement is in marked contrast to their parents who may not have had the opportunity to attend school or complete secondary school. However, in the critical post-doctoral career stage there is evidence that those who are most likely to succeed have either commenced their studies with, or have accumulated, significant social and political capital, in addition to skills and expertise. We know that for some equity groups, specifically women in non-traditional disciplines such as science, this post-doctoral stage is a 'tipping' point that pushes them out of the academy in to a wide range of other occupational categories (Yates and Bell 2015). Our knowledge of other equity groups at this critical career stage is limited, as is our achievement of diversity in the composition of the academy.

So whilst *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) 1990) established the Commonwealth's equity framework for participation in higher education the focus at the time was, not surprisingly, on undergraduate participation and success for the majority of equity group categories. With the increasing evidence of a wider range of participation and undergraduate experiences in the post-Bradley era the emergent imperative is to ensure that there is increasing emphasis on tracking the transition of equity group undergraduate participation to postgraduate participation and to better map graduate career outcomes. The imperative for this is underpinned by the deep knowledge that has been developed regarding women's participation in higher education and the differentials that emerge in terms of graduate outcomes.

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Chapter 15
From Equity to Excellence: Reforming Australia's National Framework to Create New Forms of Success

Ryan Naylor, Hamish Coates, and Paula Kelly

Growing Beyond Margins

Having a national higher education equity framework in Australia over the last 25 years has played a major role in putting the interests of disadvantaged people on institutional and policy maps. Yet to make the future better we cannot stretch decades-old innovation indefinitely, particularly given such marked transformation of society and higher education. The framework is increasingly dated, swamped by other social and policy changes, and delivering decreasing marginal returns. Twenty-five years is too long to sustain a national framework without serious reform. This chapter asserts the need to renovate and improve the framework to support and shape the future of higher education in Australia.

Australian society and higher education has changed substantially since the launch of *A Fair Chance for All*. In 1990, the average weekly income in Australia was $971 (2015 dollars), rising to $1446 in 2015. GDP per capita has risen from US$33,709 (2015 dollars) to US$37,493. In the year following the release of *A Fair Chance for All*, unemployment rose sharply from 6 to 8 %, reaching a peak of 11 % in December 1992. It has since returned to 6 %, well below the long-term average of 7 % (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2015). Regrettably, despite decades of economic advance, the number of people living in poverty is 12.8 % of the population, compared to 11.3 % in 1990 (Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) 2014).

Higher education has changed substantially in the last 25 years. The number of universities has grown from 27 in 1989 to 43 in 2015 after a number of mergers. The sector has diversified too, and in 2015 Australia had around 130 non-university higher education providers (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

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(TEQSA) 2015). The total number of students has grown from 485,075 to 1,313,766, including a rise from 28,993 to 328,392 in the number of international students (Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1993; Department of Education and Training (DET) 2015). Changes in technology and academic work have reshaped the nature of higher education (Coates and Mahat 2014; Coates and Goedegebuure 2012). The quality assurance and regulatory landscape has changed significantly, with new agencies emerging and increasing emphasis placed on performance. Policy and funding reforms—not least introduction of the income-contingent loans scheme, and the uncapping of places—have reshaped patterns of participation. Technically, the formation of this framework in the late 1980s played a role in the development of what has proven to be a quite robust set of national sector statistics in Australia. In 2015 the national and institutional data contexts in Australia are substantially more advanced, as is the analytical capacity in institutions and other agencies.

Such large changes signal the need to think differently about the nature of disadvantage, who is disadvantaged, and steps that can be taken to make a difference in promoting educational inclusion. The risks of complacency are enormous. Failing to engage all able and keen people in higher education reflects a loss of individual, and hence professional and national, capacity (Astin 1985). Failing to renovate Australia's national framework after 25 years renders it exposed to being further swamped and sidelined by other institutional and national initiatives, with such initiatives residing in an undefined fashion outside the framework. Anxious obsession with entrenched time series is unhelpful and even harmful if the statistics are constrained. It is important to be bold and creative, as during the inception of the framework.

In this chapter we assert the continued need for a national equity framework, but that the existing framework must be expanded to fit contemporary contexts and do more to ameliorate educational disadvantage in Australia. We advance the need to create a more sophisticated perspective on student success which shifts energy from access to outcomes. The 25-year-old framework has fed preoccupation with the prospects of a small number of tightly defined groups. We discuss rationales and options for moving un-anxiously from focusing on groups to focusing on individuals. The success of any such change rests on the availability of robust and accessible evidence. The concluding section of this chapter looks at current prospects and opportunities for development.

Foundations for Growth

Overview

As detailed in other chapters, Australia's higher education equity framework (Department of Employment, Education and Training DEET 1990) was developed to address the traditional under-representation of six groups. These groups included: people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, people from regional and remote

areas, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and women in non-traditional areas of study. The framework incorporated four main indicators of performance: access, participation, retention, and success. The performance of the groups could be tracked over time, and with reference to population reference data.

Contributions

As the other chapters in this volume convey, Australia has benefitted enormously from having a formal equity framework. We review advantages here, with an eye to affirming features that should flow-through to future enhancements.

First, we assert the continued value and need of a formal system-wide equity framework. The national equity framework has unquestionably had a profound impact on the Australian higher education sector, in terms of raising awareness of social inclusion and prompting universities and governments to take action through outreach and development programs. It may be a matter of debate whether the concrete effects of these programs have gone far enough or had enough impact, but the sector's scholarship, awareness and activities in this area are undoubtedly more mature than they were at the time of *A Fair Chance for All*'s publication. While allowing for localised adaptation and enhancement, the national scope of the underpinning framework has highlighted in an enduring and non-partisan way the importance of expanding higher education opportunity to those who are able but disadvantaged. The absence of such a mechanism fuels risks that disadvantaged people are ignored, or that their interests are subordinated to legal or political contingencies. Embedded after so many years into the deep structure of the system, the framework has helped affirm that equity matters.

The equity framework contributed in a formative way to the development of national data systems in Australia. Assessment and evaluation has always formed part of education, but publication in the United States in 1983 of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education (National Commission on Excellence in Education NCEE 1983) greatly stimulated interest in using indicator data as evidence for educational policy, planning and practice. The decade following the late 1980s saw rapid growth in the design and development of indicators and data collections in higher education. Indicator systems were designed by social researchers, policymakers, and international agencies (see, for instance: Cave 1997; Cuenin 1998; Johnes and Taylor 1991; Kells 1993). Built alongside the broader indicator development led by Linke (1991), Australia's national equity framework played an important role in defining technically—hence in terms of broader policy and practice—key ideas pertaining to access, participation, retention and success.

Along with key process and outcome indicators, the framework reified several groups. Undoubtedly, the framework has advanced the interests of people who are Indigenous, economically disadvantaged, from regional or remote backgrounds, from non-English speaking backgrounds, disabled, or women in engineering, infor-

mation technology or postgraduate study. An expansive review 10 years ago confirmed the sustained importance of these groups (Coates and Krause 2005), while noting the possible inclusion of others based on school attendance or admission practices.

Constraints

To be sure, however, the experience and outcomes of the framework have not been unconditionally positive. We note difficulties by way of pointing to areas in need of improvement.

A broad but powerful complexity associated with the incorporation of any such framework into the life of the system is that it compresses and flattens how all sorts of stakeholders think about and act on the matter to hand. It focuses attention on defined elements/groups at the exclusion of others. It sets various thresholds which, particularly without incentives for excellence, can lead to convergence around minimum standards. The framework, in short, reifies certain conceptualisations and standards of equity, excluding others. Particularly when used over such a long period of time, the framework gets confused with reality. Gaming and perverse outcomes invariably start to emerge. Concerningly, the framework blurs from a high-impact policy instrument into a feckless monitoring instrument. Given such radical change in almost all facets of Australian higher education in recent decades, it seems timely to step back and take stock—as this book suggests—to examine afresh contemporary prospects for conceptualising and operationalising equity. Importantly, such broad review might consider different and inter-locking frameworks, distinguishing those used for national policy, from those required for institutional management, and those required for broader analysis of contextualised practice.

The allocation of students into groups has been a core, though we contend increasingly limiting, assumption of the prevailing approach. As described above, students in higher education have conventionally been bundled into broad sociological groups defined by demographic and contextual variables. The popularity of such research is fuelled not just by convention, but also by data availability and analytic traditions. Such practice is problematic. For a start, it is always possible to reify other disadvantaged groups such as first-in-family, mature-aged, refugees, and Pasifika, or people who must travel great distances to campus, among others. Of course, many—and perhaps most—students are not grouped at all, including those who suffer disadvantage. Measurement problems confound existing groups, but rather than improve the grouping approach, we assert the need to go further and move beyond such practice. Inevitably, labelling leads to reification of certain groups over others, notably those defined on principled groups and where population reference data exists. It fallaciously ascribes group properties onto individual incumbents, conflating the diversity between individuals. It obviously excludes many people because they are not considered part of a defined group, or because

they defy neat classification. Such groups are invariably static. Hence below we assert the need to embrace a more sophisticated approach for understanding individuals who participate in higher education.

Constraints of Socioeconomic Grouping

There are problems surrounding the identification of socioeconomically disadvantaged people. This group is defined by the location of their permanent home address. Until recently, this was by means of their home postcode data easily and non-invasively collected upon enrolment. The simple locational measure, though easy to collect, reduces a complex group to a single indicator. By definition, this group accounts for approximately a quarter of the Australian population (although the definition was based formally on people from the most disadvantaged 25 % of postcodes, rather than the most disadvantaged 25 % of the population). Within this group, there is considerable overlap with students from regional and remote backgrounds and Indigenous people, as well as those from groups not formally recognised as equity groups such as refugees. Although as a whole, this group is under-represented in higher education, it is difficult to imagine that an individual from a second-generation-unemployed regional city with an Anglo background is educationally disadvantaged in the same ways as someone from a second-generation inner city Pasifika family or someone from a fifth generation rural Anglo background, although all might live in low socio-economic status (SES) areas (Gale 2012).

Equally, the postcode measure was criticised for not taking into account wealthier or better educated people living within low SES postcodes, or less privileged people living within higher socioeconomic areas (Gale 2012; James 2002; Palmer et al. 2011). This criticism led to the measure being refined from postcode to Australian Bureau of Statistics Statistical Areas (SA1), which are smaller and believed to be more likely homogenous. This change led to the apparent participation rate in 2013 for low SES people under 25 years of age dropping from 16.58 to 15.77 % (Department of Education 2015). This indicates that more advantaged people from low socioeconomic postcodes were more likely to gain access to university than poorer people in the same areas, which artificially inflated the participation ratio.

Changing to the SA1 measure has therefore improved the validity of the low socioeconomic group to some extent, but many of the criticisms of the postcode measure remain. Too much individual complexity within the low socioeconomic group is passed over by a single indicator (Gale 2012). Locational indictors based on permanent home address are poor indicators of educational disadvantage for mature aged and postgraduate students (Palmer et al. 2011); a school leaver's permanent address is likely to correlate relatively well with SES, but does an adult's current address adequately capture disadvantage? For that matter, to what extent is a postgraduate meaningfully educationally disadvantaged because of the circumstances of their childhood? Poor resolution in a locative indicator also may not sufficiently take into account variation within the area, or exclude those who are legitimately disadvantaged but live outside the required areas.

Other attempts to improve the validity of the construct, by incorporating whether people are eligible for Centrelink payments, for example, were abandoned due to privacy concerns and difficulty in collecting the data (Department of Education 2014), although these changes might have gone some way towards moving the focus away from group membership and back on to people who were socio-economically disadvantaged. Changes in the identification of low SES students (and in those from non-English speaking backgrounds, discussed below) indicate how difficult it is to create sociodemographic constructs that provide a valid identification of educational disadvantage. There are many tensions and trade off in using this type of construct, and those who have developed and refined them over the years have been sensitive to those difficulties. The tensions remain, however, and are important. These are not just definitional changes—institutional funding is allocated based on equity group participation, and HEPP funding provided to benefit members of this group. Thus, our ability to measure, quantify and collect data about disadvantage affects where and how institutions act to redress that disadvantage.

Constraints of 'NESB' Grouping

The non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) group provides another example that demonstrates the perverse effects of reification via grouping. *A Fair Chance for All* (1990, p. 35) defines NESB students as 'people from non-English speaking background groups that are under-represented in higher education' and the objective of 'improve[ing] the balance of participation of non-English speaking background students by sex and discipline'. The definition has changed over the years, and the group is currently defined as 'students from a non-English speaking background who have been resident in Australia for less than 10 years'. As well as shifting towards recent migrants rather than anyone from a NESB, much of the nuance in the original intention is lost. This is particularly problematic, given that nuance is noted as important in the discussion of the group in *A Fair Chance for All*:

> This data should enable the identification of specific NESS [non-English speaking student] groups who are educationally disadvantaged, and assist institutions to develop specific strategies
>
> Research indicates that students from different non-English-speaking backgrounds participate in higher education at different rates. Groups found to be well represented in higher education include those from Asian and Greek backgrounds. Some groups are extremely under-represented, notably those from Middle Eastern, Italian, Maltese and Yugoslav backgrounds (1990, p. 36).

Defining the NESB group in the current fashion is unquestionably easier to calculate and report. All that is required is meeting two requirements, whereas the original intention would have needed a much more detailed analysis that would have involved more frequent sectoral review to determine which NESB backgrounds or sexes were under-represented in which fields. However, that detail could have been important in addressing social inclusion in specific, targeted ways. The NESB

group as it stands is no longer notably under-represented in higher education, and has retention and success rates equal to or greater than those of mainstream students (Naylor et al. 2013; Norton 2014). This group should no longer be considered an equity group. Members from specific NESBs continue, however, to be educationally disadvantaged—a distinction that is sometimes lost within the current measurement and reporting structures. Further, while this framework persists, it prevents the formal recognition of related groups like refugees or NESB groups from specific parts of the world that are socially excluded or otherwise disadvantaged. Measurement matters here too—few systemic data on these groups exist, because they are not recognised as equity groups and therefore data is not collected. Because the data is not collected, it is difficult to prove that these groups are educationally disadvantaged and make systemic change. Also note that equity group membership is applied to domestic students only. A NESB student who migrates to Australia to complete Year 12 would be considered an equity group member (and possibly a member of other equity groups as well). Yet, if that same student migrated a year later, they would be registered as an international student. However, the difficulties the student faces in Australian higher education, and the burden on the university to support them, would be more or less the same.

Impact

Importantly, a few decades old, the prevailing framework is underpinned by dated technology. While its foundations have prevailed, Australia's national higher education data system has advanced since the formation of the equity framework. More particularly, the amount of data available within institutions has ballooned along with the development of more sophisticated analyses and reports. In the conclusion of this chapter we canvass the potential of such development.

While the above criticisms go to core facets of the national framework, they might be expected given the longevity of the model. A more far-reaching problem, which evokes the need for the re-thinking advanced in this chapter, arises from the lack of transformative impact. While the framework has helped monitor the performance of specified groups, it has not resulted in any radical improvement in the participation of able and under-represented people in higher education (Fig. 15.1). Other policy measures—like implementation of the income-contingent loans scheme (Chapman 1997) or the 2008 uncapping of student places—appear to have played a large role in expanding opportunity to higher education. The lack of rise in participation is not solely or mostly a product of the framework, of course, but mostly of the lack of associated sanctions or incentives. Nonetheless, the lack of impact does spur rationales for change. We examine prospects for future development in the following two sections of this paper, namely improved definition of what is meant by 'success', and shifting focus beyond groups to individuals.
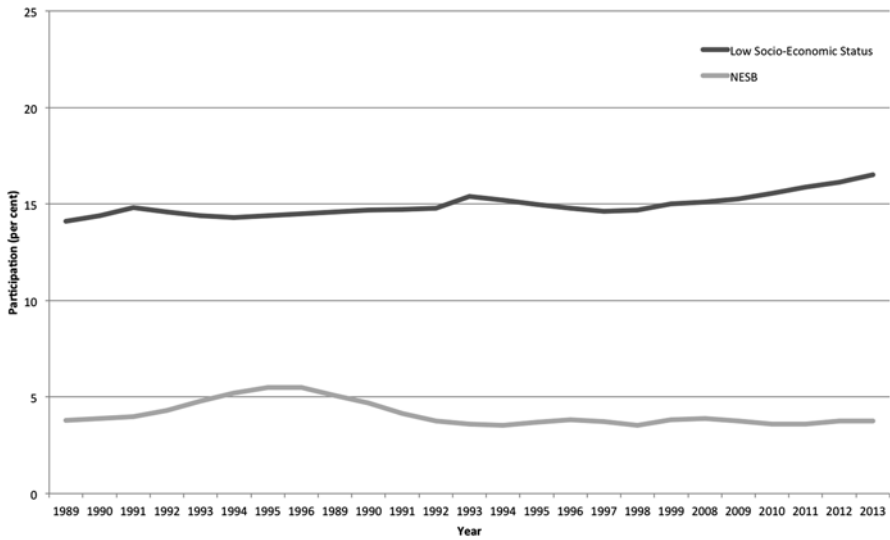
Fig. 15.1 Participation of selected groups 1989–2013

Nuancing Towards Success

The national framework is premised on a particular notion of what constitutes success for domestic students in higher education. There are other conceptions that could productively be used, which would lead to a richer understanding of educational disadvantage in Australia. The national framework mapped out a sequence of indicators—access, participation, retention and success—to define a person's pathway through higher education. We assert the value of expanding the suite of indicators and through this shifting focus from input-side considerations of access and participation, to an outcome-based conceptualisation of success. Such extension would embrace the large amount of relevant research insights produced in recent decades (Coates 2014b).

Strangely, the concept of student success is complex and, until now, has not been subjected to sufficient conceptual analysis. In this section, we model different facets of student success. Figure 15.2 provides an overview of the proposal model. Though not deterministically sequential, the model outlines several non-exclusive thresholds of increasing success. While it focuses primarily on academic matters, it does so in a contemporary way which recognises the broad nature of higher education engagement. The following description sets out the normative architecture of the model. Subsequent analysis explores how these ideas may play out in context, and be underpinned by data.
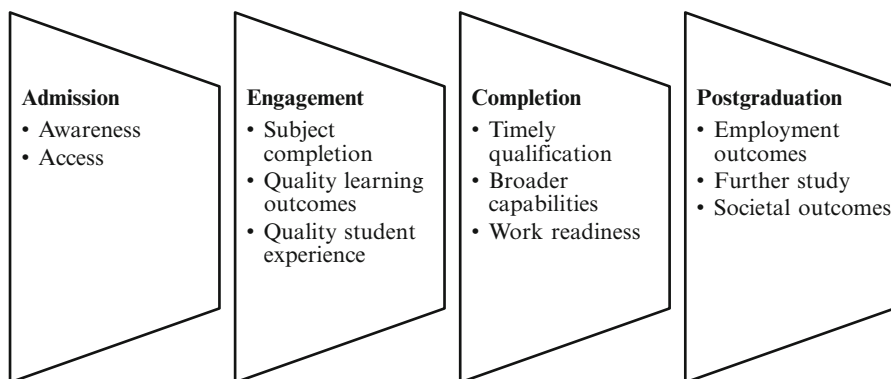
Admission
- Awareness
- Access

Engagement
- Subject completion
- Quality learning outcomes
- Quality student experience

Completion
- Timely qualification
- Broader capabilities
- Work readiness

Postgraduation
- Employment outcomes
- Further study
- Societal outcomes

Fig. 15.2 Student success model

Admission

Simply becoming aware of higher education is an important form of success, regardless of a person's ultimate attendance. While substantial work is unfolding to better link higher education with precursor opportunities—not least, or only, through better alignments between qualifications, more generalizable credit structures, and more transparent and granular learning outcomes—still the fraught nature of life, career and cross-sectoral transitions often renders incomprehensible even to industry experts entry into the complex world of higher education. Large-scale survey results (Coates 2014a) have affirmed that current students often hear about higher education during childhood, making clear the importance of a host of powerful and often tacit sociocultural cues regarding the value of higher education. Such cues may be particularly powerful for both school-leaver entrants, but are also likely to inflect the attitudes and aspirations of adults considering further education. It is reasonable to assume that not having such cues makes less likely the chances of participating in higher education, and reaping all the rewards this may convey. Hence, simply becoming aware of higher education is doubtless an initial albeit insufficient form of success.

For many potential students, the first measure of success in higher education is gaining access to an institution or course. A number of factors, including academic preparation, aspirations for further study, and ability to actually enrol and attend higher education, contribute to whether students are successful in terms of their access. To date, most research into access has focused on particular segments of the student population, such as people from structurally defined disadvantaged groups (whose access rates fall below expected demographic shares), or people entering selective courses (like medicine or engineering). Combined, such groups reflect a relatively small and shrinking subset of the student population. But it is important to recognise that most students would feel a sense of achievement in gaining access to higher education. In subsequent analyses, therefore, it is important to keep in

mind the need to move beyond specific demographic or contextual groups—often reified in policies that are decades old—in efforts at building more sophisticated understanding of higher education.

Engagement

Getting involved in higher education is of course just the first of many successes possible in higher education. Once engaged in study, a further basic sense of success involves passing the units in which a person enrols. Building on definitions established in the late 1980s, for instance, national statistics in Australia calculate 'success rates' as the proportion of actual student load for units of study that are passed divided by all units of study attempted, including failed units or those where students withdraw after the census date (Department of Education 2015). This, of course, implies a lowest common denominator conceptualisation of success (at least a 50 % grade achieved), which may be problematic in situations especially involving professional degrees where a particular standard of performance is expected and yet a student has achieved a bare minimal pass (noting that Australia has few professional licensing exams). It also raises questions as to whether '50 %' at one institution is equivalent to '50 %' at another—almost certainly not the case given the almost complete lack of cross-institutional calibration mechanisms (Coates 2010). Increasingly these are policy rather than technical complexities, and hint at the complexities surrounding even this basic threshold of success.

Given that defining success as simply passing subjects sets a very low standard for success, what other markers can be prescribed? Ideally, appropriate curriculum design implies that passing a subject involves developing particular academic outcomes. As most subjects are graded at more than just a pass/fail basis this suggests that we recognise different levels of quality. Similarly, concerns about falling academic standards and 'easy passes' suggest that there are particular thresholds of what we consider successful study, and what is simply adequate. In this view of success, while students who pass their subjects may be successful in certain ways, a 'real' success is a student who achieves a particular, higher, quality of academic outcomes. Recently, major efforts have been made to advance more encompassing and scientific notions of such success (Coates and Kelly 2015).

Even if attention focuses on academic achievement as success, a further definition might be achieving or exceeding academic expectations for students (whether those expectations are personal, familial, or broader). While this concept is clearly related to the idea of success as broader than a binary fail/pass outcome, it is a more student-centred definition that emphasizes the oft-quoted transformative nature of higher education. Here, success is defined as students living up to their personal potential. A gifted student that coasts through study with pass grades has not really been successful, according to this definition. This notion is strongly embedded in the liberal arts tradition (Boyer 1987). This broader notion of personal success also goes to the prospect that a student may appear

Student success may also be defined as relating to particular attributes of the student experience. Here, a successful student is one who is engaged in an appropriate way with her or his higher education experience, either with academic experiences or broader life outside the classroom (Zepke and Leach 2010). This type of success could apply to individual subjects or semesters, or as a reflection on a broader experience overall. For that reason, it seems appropriate to separate it from the conceptions of success that apply clearly during study, or at completion.

Completion

Several different types of success could apply at completion of a student's studies. We refer to 'completion' rather than 'graduation', because only one of these definitions implies that graduating from a course is required to be successful. A student may be successful according to the other conceptions without obtaining a formal qualification.

Closely related to the idea of success as completing subjects, albeit on a larger scale, is defining success as completing a qualification. Much current popular debate about higher education outcomes in Australia, discussing student debt and future employment, appears to rest on degree completion as success (e.g., Kemp and Norton 2014). Measures of attrition and retention are also based on this conception of success. Yorke and Longden (2004), however, critique this definition, saying that lower levels of government funding, the increased emphasis on lifelong learning, and the move away from traditional, full-time engagement in higher education weakens the rationale for such a definition. Australia does not currently define a fixed period for completion of degrees, although such a limit may be imposed in various institutional or international contexts.

This type of success is demonstrated by the graduate attributes agenda. Here, a successful student is one who graduates having developed generic capabilities to a particular level. Individual institutions define differently which graduate capabilities are appropriate and what level of capacity. Within Australia, the major research universities typically seek to develop traditional liberal arts abilities such as leadership or global citizenship, alongside other skills including communication, a high level of discipline knowledge and critical thinking. The sector's ability to measure success in terms of graduate capacities is currently very limited, though it is a matter of considerable debate if not yet investment (Oliver 2011).

As well as developing generic skills, a vocational view of higher education might define success as developing the skills required to practice in the role or career which a student has trained. The tension, particularly in professional degrees, between teaching discipline content as opposed to work-related skills, demonstrates that this is not quite the same as simply completing a qualification. Similarly, the previous definition focused on graduate capabilities as a whole and, to some extent, and ideal; this definition focuses on a graduate's ability to a career.

Postgraduation

Clearly, a host of outcomes flow from completion of a qualification. Gaining employment is particularly important (Coates 2014b). But is being employed enough, or is being employed in a career that substantively uses the skills developed in higher education enough? Has someone with an engineering degree who doesn't work as an engineer been successful? And does the extent of employment matter? Over what period of months or years should employment outcomes be judged (Coates and Edwards 2010)? Unlike emerging practice in the United States, Australia does not currently have a measure for return on investment in study, except perhaps crude graduate earnings, making it difficult to venture beyond presumption in establishing the net value of participating in higher education.

As well as vocational and broader social outcomes, student success in higher education often flows into further higher education. Someone completing an associate degree may move into a bachelor, or shift from bachelor to masters, or progress from masters to doctoral, then research or teaching roles at varying points along the way. In this way academic success carries potential to spur further academic success.

A broad societal view of success goes to the contribution made by higher education participants towards a more productive, well-informed, aware or just society. The emphasis on public engagement, as well as community access programs and the like, emphasises this role for universities particularly. Whether or not students pass their subjects, or are satisfied with their experiences, or complete their degrees, is not as important through this lens, as whether they are able to contribute more fully to society because of their study. Again, this is broadly the goal of a traditional liberal arts education.

From Stereotypes to People

Embracing Complexity

Clearly, succeeding in higher education means different things to different people. Obviously, while the preceding conceptualisation of success is deliberately decontextualised to the point of theoretical generality, to be of any use it needs to be made real in particular individual contexts. Hence in renovating the national equity framework for the next 20 years it is important to improve the approach to identifying people.

This section asserts the need to embrace substantially more complexity than has hitherto been the case. In essence, we assert the need to shift from viewing disadvantage through the structure of crude sociological groups, to instead looking through prisms that give life to each person. As the following discussion brings out, this is not just a linguistic slip, but a fundamentally different way of conceptualising the identity of those people who study in higher education. We believe that this shift—broadly, from treating each student as a group member, to treating each

student as an individual person—will likely require much work, particularly in developing robust education analytics, but will ultimately be productive.

Towards Hyper-intersectionality

We have contended that group-level classifications provide insufficient insight into disadvantage, due primarily to their lack of resolution and their static nature. Traditional equity research has provided frameworks to describe several aspects of student identity, such as ethnicity (Ferdman and Gallegos 2001; Kim 2002), sex and gender (Merrill 1999; Sax 2008), and sexual orientation (D'Augelli 1994). As the above analysis asserts, these frameworks are inadequate when trying to explain the complexity of student identity in which personal characteristics (socioeconomic status, gender, race, sexual orientation, plus a host of highly individual factors) intersect with features of the collegiate environment (institutional type, academic program, extra-curricular activities) (Braxton 2009).

An alternative approach is to look beyond aggregate groupings for an approach that more deeply unpacks the extent and nuances of disadvantage. A key step here is to shift from dissolving people's identity into broad, unchanging classifications, to exploiting the particularity and dynamism that patterns each person's experience. A first move in this direction involves the development of evidence-based typologies based on the needs, behaviours, or cognitive or motivational factors. Examples include those based on Clark and Trow's 1966 study, or Astin's more recent 1993 typology. Many student typologies in higher education have been developed in the United States, where there is more of a tradition of this type of research. They may therefore need some refinement before being generalised to other contexts. Most are based on analyses of many thousands of students, however, and similar categories have been identified over time and by multiple researchers, which may indicate the categories identified are both relatively robust and stable over time.

We draw on the idea of intersectionality to extend this approach. Dill and Zambrana (2009, p. 1) define intersectionality as 'an innovative and emerging field of study that provides a critical analytic lens to interrogate racial, ethnic, class, physical ability, age, sexuality, and gender disparities and to contest existing ways of looking at these structures of inequality'. Research in intersectionality presents a way in which the connection between aspects of identity are influenced by context (Torres et al. 2009). It is well known within the Australian context, for example, that disadvantage is compounded, rather than additive for some people (for example, Indigenous people from low socioeconomic or remote backgrounds), whereas field of study and gender may alter the effect of sociodemographic factors on attrition (Gale and Tranter 2011; James 2007). Despite this movement within higher education research being more in line with our experience, research in this area has been limited to mostly binary understandings of intersectionality, such as ethnicity and international status (Malcolm and Mendoza 2014), gender and race (Linder and Rodriguez 2012), or ethnicity and religion (Rockenbach et al. 2015). We see value

in extending the work of student typologies further, both conceptually and technically, to identify people as a series of intersecting vectors.

The concept of 'hyper-intersectionality' forwarded in this chapter is the idea of using intersecting vectors of quantitative metrics to account for differences in the numerous identity criteria listed above. Using algorithms to connect student admissions data, education analytics can predict student performance in desirable student outcomes such as grades, persistence, and retention. The appeal of this process is that, unlike the atheoretical nature of analysis of click-steam data for example, the interpretations of these findings can be applicable to theoretical understandings of student development. However, researchers are not currently well equipped to identify these vectors and meaningful intersections between them (Abes 2009). New typologies predicated on data beyond demographics information will need to be created.

Creating Better Evidence

The national framing of student equity has not changed significantly in around 25 years despite substantial change in Australian society and higher education. In this chapter we have advanced the need to renovate and extend relevant concepts, data and policies to ensure we do our best as a country to help all able and keen people succeed in higher education. We have identified that core facets of legacy framework should be retained, and that substantial enhancement and re-positioning is required. This final section sidesteps the inevitable short-run politics that surround such work, and extends the prior analyses by sketching a strategy for the technical work required.

Broadly, improving the framework will require large-scale research into the concepts and evidence required to ensure a more equitable future for higher education in Australia. This obviously requires extensive reviews of research and practice, and also widespread consultation with all sorts of groups and people. While these are very important, we focus on the data work required in this conclusion. Clearly, building more nuanced conceptualisations of people's success and identity hinges on improved data and analytical systems. Large-scale data systems are expensive to develop and maintain, but the risks of having no data or bad data can be worse. Data shapes planning and action, particularly when formed into extensive and multifaceted monitoring systems. But if equity-relevant data development could be achieved 25 years ago, it is feasible to do so today, not least given the exponential growth of data.

What data may well be required? First, we assert the desirable though not absolute need for population reference data. The prevailing approach to equity in Australian higher education has blended a mix of empirical and principled rationales. Focus has been placed on groups that are under-represented relative to population distributions, though not all such under-represented groups have been counted (e.g., males in certain fields, refugees), while other groups have even been

over-represented. Comparison of 'actual' against 'desirable' participants is helpful, particularly for monitoring purposes, but should not hinder any shift towards embracing more nuanced and telling data. Indeed, a fixation on population data may well exacerbate the task of discovering disadvantaged and able people who are eager to participate in higher education, as we contend has already likely been the case.

Second, if our provocations regarding success are to prevail then further data will be required to chart the threshold moments identified. Certainly at the national level and mostly at the institutional level, there is a need for data on the extent to which people are aware of higher education. Despite the promulgation of advisory services and websites, there is very little recent insight into how people build early and formative understanding of higher education. More is known about people's engagements once within higher education, though further development on this front is also required. While Australia now has both solid longitudinal data on the student experience (Baik et al. 2015) and a standard national student survey (Radloff et al. 2012), this does not yield sufficient individual-level data and contemporary explorations are investigating alternative empirical options. There are no standard or disclosed metrics regarding the quality of learning outcomes, a critical facet to factor into analyses of people's performing on intrinsic grounds and given its high correlation with attrition (Coates 2014b). Basic completion statistics exist, yet as with learning outcomes not information about the formation of broader capabilities and various forms of 'work readiness'. Via the national graduate census Australia has reasonable data on post-graduation destinations, though as with the student experience in the era of social networking there are opportunities to build better approaches. Clearly, advancing work in these areas is essential if achieving excellence through equity hinges on success rather than inclusion alone.

Third, substantially more data is required to build more nuanced portraits of people's disadvantage, as well more sophisticated analyses. Equity deliberations must look beyond national statistics to include also data from government systems beyond higher education and likely also more data from the mobile/social technologies that play such a vital role in how people intersect with social and institutional systems. The reasons people drop out from higher education—most of which are psychosocial (Coates 2014a)—have hitherto only loosely been linked with equity analyses. Broadening the database is essential to building better pictures of people hence identifying disadvantage, and also providing institutions with insights on how to promote success. As our prior assertions have implied, detecting patterns of disadvantage in bigger pools of data demands moving beyond bivariate statistical modelling to more complicated analyses. Of course, this data collection must also be balanced against privacy concerns, particularly where individuals could potentially be identified, and particularly in processes not directly related to supporting their study, such as internal or external reporting. This, however, is an ethical concern that has yet to be solved for education analytics generally, and the potential benefits of these technologies are substantial.

We conclude by asserting again the value of a national framework, and the need for this framework to be valid and feasible. As the past quarter-decade has shown,

Australia has the capacity to lead excellent work in this field. Combined with other contributions in this book, this chapter has sharpened rationales for progress and new directions.

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Chapter 16
Further and Higher? Institutional Diversity and Stratification

Emmaline Bexley

This chapter considers the relationship between institutional diversity and student equity. *A Fair Chance for All* was composed in the aftermath of the introduction of the unified national system (UNS), a transition in which colleges of advanced education, universities and other higher education providers were merged into a structurally homogeneous collection of 36 universities. Twenty-five years later, the division between vocational and higher education is blurring, as is the division between public and private education. Public Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) providers and a broad range of private providers are rapidly increasing their delivery of higher education, and mergers, dual sector institutions, and combined degrees are now common. Diversification is likely to continue apace if further deregulatory reforms proceed that allow public institutions to use price as a signalling device.

A broad, heterogeneous higher education sector should offer students choice, and an opportunity to find a course that closely suits their particular needs. However, although a preference for heterogeneity has been clearly signalled by the policies of successive governments, the 'landscape' of the differentiated market has itself been unplanned. Very large increases in participation in tertiary education, diversification of provider types and greater institutional differentiation within the university sector itself, has lead to new forms of stratification. No longer can notions of 'equity' centre around a consideration of those who do and do not participate in higher education (the underlying concern of A fair chance for all), but rather who participates where, and how - in short, the status game has shifted from the boundary of the academy to within it.

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Here, I describe the historical policy shifts that have shaped the sector into its present form, and examines the implications for student equity of a higher education market in which providers are numerous, funded to different extents by different sources, and driven by different institutional missions. In particular, I show how increased participation and institutional differentiation have produced status effects that necessitate a change in approaches to equity, based on a more nuanced understanding of the way social class is expressed through forms of participation. Finally, the chapter considers policy settings that might serve as pre-conditions for an Australian higher education sector which would see more students pursue a high quality education irrespective of provider type and funding source.

Background: From Binary to Uniformity to Diversity

It seems that each political generation discovers anew, three things: modern economic growth requires increased participation in tertiary education; expansion of education systems is expensive; and bigger systems mean steeper status differentials. While the language may be different, the Menzies Government's Murray Report on Australia's Universities of the 1950s is in tune with the Bradley report of 2008, when it exhorts that: 'Every boy or girl with the necessary brain power must in the national interest be encouraged to come forward for a university education, and there must be a suitable place in a good university for every one who does come forward' (Murray et al. 1957, p. 8). And, just as the present 'uncapping' of university places has caused unexpectedly sharp increases in cost, so too did Menzies find it necessary to establish an inquiry charged to 'find solutions to the problem of providing the necessary amount of tertiary education within financial limits which are relatively very much more modest than under our present university system' (Letter from Prime Minister to Chairman, quoted in Roche 2003).

That inquiry into 'The Future of Tertiary Education in Australia' – the 1964 'Martin Inquiry' – again pre-empted more recent policy conundrums, arguing that education should be 'regarded as an investment which yields direct and significant economic benefits through increasing the skills of the population and through accelerating technological progress' (Martin 1964, pp. 1–2). The report recommended a doubling of student numbers from 118,000 in 1963–248,000 in 1975, proposing as a solution to the financial constraints flagged by the Prime Minister the establishment of the binary system of tertiary education. The first Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were established in 1967 in order to offer higher education in technical and applied areas more efficiently and inexpensively than could universities. Indeed, a drive to create a more diverse and differentiated system of higher education was at the heart of the establishment of the CAEs. The introduction of CAEs and the drive to provide a much broader range of higher education offerings more than met Martin's target of 248,000 students by 1975: by that time 148,000 were enrolled in universities and a further 126,000 were undertaking higher education in the CAEs and teachers' colleges (Roche 2003). However, when the Whitlam

reforms of higher education saw the Commonwealth take over recurrent and capital funding of both universities and CAEs, as well as the abolition of tuition fees and introduction of the means-tested Tertiary Education Allowance Scheme (TEAS), the system became extremely costly.

The ebb and flow of higher education policy reform in Australia shows a remarkable consistency here too. When the Martin committee recommended the introduction of the binary system (tripartite when the teachers' colleges are included) the argument was based on the need for diversity of offerings in the face of historical uniformity:

> Australian universities have grown up according to a uniform and traditional pattern, and it is unrealistic to imagine that they alone can provide the variety of education needed by young people with a varying range of abilities and a broad array of educational objectives. The Committee believes that much of the pressure on young people by parents, relatives, friends and teachers in urging them to undertake university courses, together with their own desire to do so, is due to the lack of other tertiary institutions of comparable status in the eyes of the community (Martin 1964, quoted in Partridge 1969).

By the time of the Dawkins reforms during the third term of the Hawke government, increased levels of participation in higher education had come to be seen as fiscally unsustainable, even within the binary system devised to separate types of education by cost. The establishment of the UNS, the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), and the new advisory committees (National Board of Employment Education and Training, and under it the Universities Council, Schools Council, Skills Formation Council and Australian Research Council), were all designed to meet the challenges posed by what was now an extremely large and costly tertiary education system.

While the introduction of HECS is often seen as the hallmark of the Dawkins reforms, the abolition of the CAEs and introduction of the UNS was arguably more significant, and represented a profound shift in the way higher education was both conceptualised and administered. Over a brief but tumultuous few years, 19 universities and 46 colleges were transformed, often unwillingly, into 36 public universities. All were expected to have a research profile, and many staff who had previously seen themselves primarily as practitioners found themselves to be academics. The Martin report of the 1960s had warned of the 'danger of higher education becoming identified in the minds of the community with university education' (Martin 1964, in Roche 2003) should the introduction of CAEs not be embraced. With the introduction of the UNS, higher education became perforce a creature of the universities.

Ironically, Dawkins' argument for the abolition of the binary system and its replacement with the UNS was in large part that the status game in higher education was too uneven – the binary system had failed to provide 'other tertiary institutions of comparable status [to universities] in the eyes of the community' (Martin 1964, cited in Roche 2003). Dawkins wanted a system that was both high quality (read 'high status') and diverse, arguing that:

> The new arrangements will promote greater diversity in higher education rather than any artificial equalisation of institutional roles. Institutions that attempt to cover all areas of

teaching and research compromise their ability to identify, and build on, areas of particular strength and the achievement of areas of genuine excellence. The ultimate goal is a balanced system of high quality institutions, each with its particular areas of strength and specialisation, but co-ordinated in such a way as to provide a comprehensive range of higher education offerings. Diversity and quality are paramount; the unified system will not be a uniform system (Dawkins 1988, p. 28).

As history has shown us, ensuring that the introduction of the UNS would not enforce 'artificial equalization' proved difficult. In large part, however, this was due to other planks of the reforms that undermined the aim of differentiation. These included a new approach to the management of higher education: the introduction of education profiles as an agreement between institutions and the Commonwealth providing the basis on which an institution received funding; explicit encouragement of changes to universities' governance and management structures in line with Commonwealth requirements; as well as reforms of academic staffing and policy signals encouraging institutions to seek external funding sources. Ultimately, centralised control of university funding in Canberra, and the resultant ability of policy makers to tame the universities, proved too great a temptation to succeeding governments. Quite quickly the higher education landscape become one of relative uniformity, with all institutions offering a broad range of disciplines, comprehensive (if sometimes shallow) research and reasonably uniform governance structures.

It was into this broad context that the subject of this volume, *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Education, Employment and Training 1990), sought to address imbalances in university participation. The report, and the policies and practices stemming from it, addressed concerns about equity in terms of an aspiration to proportional equality of participation in higher education across a set of broadly defined 'equity groups' – low socio-economic status (SES) people, Indigenous people, those from rural and isolated areas, women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and those experiencing a disability.

The Education Landscape of *A Fair Chance for All*

Here, it is useful to pause and consider how the growth of participation in higher education described above had changed the character of university education more generally. Trow's classic contribution on the 'phases' of higher education systems is the tool with which to do so. As the preceding discussion illustrates, the drivers and enablers of the rise in participation in higher education in Australia were comprised of a set of political and social conditions unique to the Australian context. However, growth in participation in higher education occurred across most developed nations during these decades, for reasons that were broadly similar to those in Australia but of course idiosyncratic in their detail. Trow's typology of the phases of expansion of higher education systems (summarised in Brennan's 2004 summary of Trow's key 1974 work), paints a recognizable picture of the access, purpose and selection aspects of higher education systems in what Trow termed the 'elite', 'mass', and 'universal' phases of these systems:

ELITE systems (up to 15 % participation)
Access for those from privileged backgrounds; aimed at grooming for 'elite' social
    roles; access based on school performance as a proxy for 'merit'.

MASS systems (16–50 % participation)
Access "a right for those with certain qualifications"; aimed at preparation for white
    collar roles; access references merit but with compensatory equity schemes.

UNIVERSAL systems (over 50 % participation)
Participation becomes "an obligation" for middle and upper classes; aimed at shift-
    ing economy to knowledge intensive industries; access is relatively open.

While one might quibble with the participation rates proper to the various
phases, or with the applicability of the descriptions across systems and individual
institutions, what we can recognize here are traits more or less typical of the main
phases of post-war higher education in Australia (say, pre-1960s, 1960s-to-1980s
and 1990s onward), as well as the remnants of these traits in the institutions they
produced (the Group of Eight (Go8) 'sandstone' universities, the 1960s institutions,
and the Dawkins era institutions). Trow (2007), in his reflections on his earlier
(1974) ideas, also vacillates between using the signifiers 'elite', 'mass', and 'uni-
versal' to indicate eras and institutions. Indeed, Trow notes that 'while these forms
can be seen as sequential stages, it is not inevitable that the later stages will com-
pletely replace the earlier ones,' and quotes Brennan's (2004) observation that
'there are definite possibilities of examples of elite forms surviving in the mass and
universal stages' – likely with the US Ivy League and the UK Russell Group in
mind.

A Fair Chance for All sits squarely in the access and selection frame of the mass
system. Similarly, *A Fair Chance for All* can be seen as a direct consequence of the
preceding shift in the perceived function of higher education characterized in Trow's
Elite and Mass frames. In the mid-1980s, a series of inquiries and reviews were
undertaken to address high levels of youth unemployment and low levels of second-
ary school completion (the Quality of Education Review in 1985; Minister Dawkins'
Strengthening Australia's Schools statement in 1988; and the agreement by the
Commonwealth, State and Territory governments on the Common and Agreed
National Goals for Schooling – 'The Hobart Declaration' – in 1989, all cited in
Walsh 1999), culminating in Prime Minister Hawke's 'Clever Country' speech in
1990. Ostensibly, these policies were designed to shift the economy from a reliance
on primary industries to the knowledge intensive industries of the tertiary sector of
the economy, yet the impact of joblessness among youth of the time was likely a
bigger driver (see also Ryan and Watson 2004), compounded by the recession of
1990. Policy drivers and social reality aligned to facilitate a massive jump in high
school completion: from 46 % of students in 1985 and to 77 % in 1992 (Australian
Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2001).

High school completion is, of course, the primary pathway to university. When
very few complete high school, and these few are most likely drawn from the highest
socio-economic categories, university participation will be elite by definition. With

many more students – and many more disadvantaged students – completing high school, the preconditions were in place for a more diverse university student cohort. Figure 16.1, shows the remarkable increase in participation, especially by young people, over the three decades to 2010.

A Fair Chance for All came at a time when increased participation, mainly coming from the middle classes, focussed attention on lower rates of participation by other groups. The inequity of the distribution of the personal goods to be derived from obtaining a higher education became a pressing concern. What is important to bear in mind, however, is that the proposals in *A Fair Chance for All* were still based on the notion of higher education as a limited resource to be allocated to individuals according to (academic) merit. The purpose of the policy settings proposed by Martin was to recognise the barriers faced by certain groups to demonstrating their merit in a way that would be competitive with the non-disadvantaged. This second group, often referred to as 'traditional students' (with members of the equity groups being 'non-traditional students') were those whose characteristics were shared with participants from the elite era.

Similarly, national and institutional equity programs stemming from *A Fair Chance for All* were framed, like the report, by the 'participates or not' dichotomy. By these means, key groups falling outside the 'traditional' norm of university entrants (comparatively well-off school-leavers with a reasonably good quality secondary education), could be allocated compensatory measures to improve their participation. Such programs took the approach that 'non-traditional' students would undertake higher education if barriers were removed or mitigated. Essentially, this
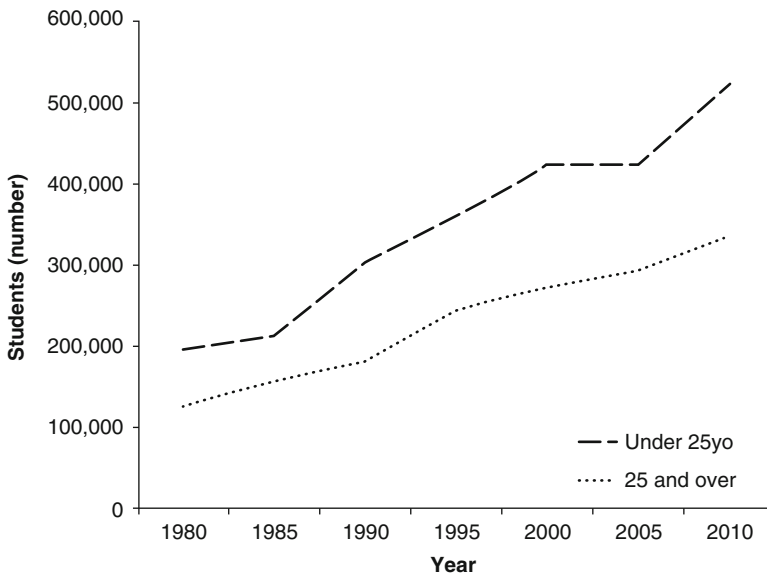

Fig. 16.1 Higher education students by broad age group, 1980–2010 (Data source: Education Selected Statistics, various years)

is a deficit model making appeal to the primary differentiating characteristics between the new and the dominant group through compensatory programs – income support; part-time and distance modes of study; bonuses applied to secondary school scores; learning support units, and so on.

In his later (2007) reflections, Trow observed that the conditions particular to 'elite' phases of higher education – indeed to elite institutions – are not sustainable in mass or universal systems or institutions:

> No society, no matter how rich, can afford a system of higher education for 20 % or 30 % or 40 % of the relevant age group at the cost levels of the elite higher education that it formerly provided for 5 % of the population. Insofar as egalitarians insist that there be no major differentials in per capita costs among various sectors of the system of higher education, and yet also insist on expansion, then they force a leveling downward in costs, and perhaps in quality as well (Trow 2007, p. 266).

Since *A Fair Chance for All*, the profile of the sector has changed dramatically. The main challenge for higher education equity policy in Australia at present is to shift our ways of thinking from the assumptions rooted in the pre-1990s elite/early-mass eras, and so clearly espoused in *A Fair Chance for All*, toward practices appropriate to today's large and diverse system.

The Present System of Higher Education

In the 25 years since *A Fair Chance for All* Australia's higher education system has continued to grow apace. Both international education and domestic postgraduate coursework programs have been deregulated in terms of constraints on numbers and on fee levels, and, in the face of static or declining Commonwealth investment in universities as a proportion of their overall revenue, these areas of higher education have seen very substantial growth. Arguably, the relative decline in Commonwealth funding has been more greatly responsible for diversification in university missions than has any overt policy measure. In 1990, universities received around 90 % of their recurrent revenue from the Commonwealth; presently, the proportion is around 40 % (Norton 2015) with a wide spread across institutions.

This relative decline in Commonwealth investment in higher education has driven the marketisation of higher education, and in turn institutional differentiation, to a point that would have been almost unimaginable 25 years ago. The landscape has been further complicated by the opening up of higher education to private providers, as well as the extension of vocational education and training (VET) beyond the TAFE system to both 'dual sector' universities and to private registered training organizations (RTOs) that might be owned by either universities or for-profit or non-profit private entities.

Australian tertiary education is now characterised by a lack of clear purpose, stemming from policy-makers' failure to conceptualise the tertiary education landscape and the role of the institutions that comprise it, as well as the lack of any instrumental view of objectives based on need. It has become unclear what

differentiates the VET sector from the university sector and, in turn, from private tertiary education providers. Enabling, bachelor and sometimes postgraduate level education is available from all three kinds of institution. Despite this, funding and regulation of VET and higher education is undertaken by state and federal governments respectively, and the regulation of private, international and postgraduate coursework education has been formed *ad hoc* rather than planned. The result: a series of policy and legislative artefacts formed on the hop rather and a coherent and systematised sector serving clear societal needs.

The lack of coordinated regulation of Australian tertiary education provision makes painting an accurate picture of the sector well nigh impossible. Non-university providers of higher education that do not access government funding have until recently not been required to report enrolment data (Norton 2015). Private providers of VET are not required to report student load for non-publicly-funded places (NCVER 2014). University data is collected at the national level, but where universities offer VET, these enrolments may be reported as enrolments at the host university, for the State register (except in Victoria) does not extend to self-accrediting institutions – i.e. universities (Wheelahan et al. 2012). An exception is where a university owns a VET institution as a commercial business (a Registered Training Organisation, or RTO), for these *are* regulated by the states. All this is a way of showing, by a kind of *argumentum ad absurdum* just how messy the tertiary sector in Australia is. Leesa Wheelahan, Australia's foremost expert on the VET sector said of trying to deduce how many mixed VET/HE organizations exist:

> How many educational institutions in Australia are registered to offer both higher education and vocational education and training programs? Ninety. How long did it take to find this out? Weeks. How will you feel if you go and try to find this out for yourself? Murderous. How can a student find all the tertiary education programs in IT, for example, in their state? Near impossible (Wheelahan 2011).

The lack of a national register for all tertiary education institutions is evidence in itself of the lack of any clear conception of the purpose of post-secondary education by government, and of the legacy of *ad hocery* stemming from half a century of policy confusion.

A broad brushstroke picture of providers, however, is possible. Presently, 2586 organizations are listed as approved VET providers (NCVER 2015). This includes TAFEs, private providers and universities. (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency TEQSA 2015) lists 165 providers of higher education, including the 39 public universities, 2 overseas-owned universities, one private university and one specialist universities. The remaining 122 institutions are non-university providers of higher education (NUHEPs). Of the NUHEPs, 88 are able to offer access to the deferred-repayment fee loan, FEE-HELP (similar to HECS, but with a very much higher cap on loan amounts), while the remaining 24 are up-front fee-paying. These are set out in Table 16.1, however note that there is cross counting, for some universities offer both HE and public VET, as well as owning private VET RTOs. There is no 'master data source'.

Table 16.1 Higher education and vocational education and training providers in Australia

Higher education	Universities	Public universities	39
		Private universities	1
		Overseas owned universities	2
		Specialist universities	1
		Total universities	**43**
	Non-University HEPs	Self-accrediting non-university higher education providers	5
		Non-self-accrediting, non-university higher education providers	125
		Total non-university higher education providers	**130**
	Higher education providers total		*173*
Vocational education and training	University owned		15
	TAFE		54
	Schools		445
	Community adult education providers		312
	Privately operated RTO businesses		3218
	Industry associations and government and non-government enterprises		544
	VET providers total		*4588*

Sources: TEQSA (2015), Australian Government (2015)

In higher education, the distribution of students favours universities, despite the diversity in the system. At present, over 700,000 Australian students are enrolled in an undergraduate degree at a university. By comparison, Norton (2015) estimates that only around 54,000 fulltime equivalent students are enrolled in non-university higher education institutions. However, while the proportion of students in non-university higher education is small, it has increased rapidly – in 1999 the private higher education sector enrolled less than 15,000 equivalent fulltime students.

The VET sector is much larger in terms of enrolments than the higher education sector in Australia, with 1,877,500 students enrolled in VET in 2013 (NCVER 2014), of whom 526,900 were international students (Note, however, that the provision of higher education in VET means some cross counting here too). In VET, the trend to private provision is even steeper than in higher education – over all, TAFE (the primary public provider of VET) teaches 55.6 % of publicly funded VET student load, and in Victoria the majority of publicly funded VET student load is in the private sector (50.5 %) (Wheelahan 2014). Because privately funded (upfront-fee paying) load in private providers of VET is not reported, the actual load in private provision is in fact much higher.

It is through this complex, largely unplanned and messy landscape that today's young people – and increasing numbers of older people – must navigate an educational pathway. The attainment target for 40 % of young people to hold a bachelor degree by 2015, set by the 2008 Bradley review of higher education (Bradley et al. 2008), is close to being met. In particular, attainment rates in south-eastern Australia, and for women are very high, with an overall attainment rate of 38 % (Carr 2014).

Equity in a Complex Landscape: Connection Between Class, Participation and Outcomes

The objectives of *A Fair Chance for All* are still important in the present, more complex tertiary education system, of course. While some groups, particularly women and those from non-English speaking backgrounds, have overcome historic hurdles to comprise reasonably representative proportions of the student body, participation by low SES people, people from rural and isolated areas, and Indigenous Australians has remained low and static. Despite proportions remaining low, however, the move to a universal system has been the rising tide lifting all boats – it may be that the proportion of students from what were once termed 'non-traditional backgrounds' has remained small, but in numerical terms there are many thousands attending university today. This raises the question: in such a large and diverse system, how is the equally large and diverse student body distributed?

In the present universal system of higher education, addressing a deficit in those who do not fit the 'elite' profile is a messy way of dealing with the diversity that is inherent in the very notion of 'universal.' Does our treatment of education equity, rooted as it is in the past, still serve the present system well enough? I argue here that it does not.

Education opportunity in schooling is stratified according to social class, and school outcomes reflect these disparities. It is both well established and unsurprising that young people and their families make very different choices about work and education destinations based on their social class. In a study of the participation choices made by students from different backgrounds, Gale and Parker (2014) show how these different choices play out. In 2011, only 26 % of students from an example non-selective government school in a relatively disadvantaged area (Hoppers Crossing Secondary College) went on to university after finishing their secondary education. This compared to 92 % of students from the example high-fee non-government school (Presbyterian Ladies College), or selective government school (Melbourne High School). Forty-two per cent of the non-selective government school students went on to TAFE/VET compared to 4 % and 1 % respectively from the private and government selective schools. Twenty per cent of the disadvantaged school students went on to employment, but only 1 % from each of the two affluent schools (Gale and Parker 2014, p. 8). The example is striking and shows the social sorting that happens even at the school leaver stage, which discounts the social disparity in rates of *early* school-leaving.

Much of this disparity stems from the very strong correlation between ATAR and socio-economic status. Figure 16.2 is drawn from Richard Teese's 2007 essay 'Structural Inequality in Australian Education: Vertical and Lateral Stratification of Opportunity.' It illustrates quite strikingly how better-off students are disproportionately distributed toward the top ATAR bands. Here, the line shows the percentage of students achieving at each ATAR decile who accept a university place. As we would expect, almost all university applicants scoring in the 90+ ATAR band take a place at university, compared to pretty much no one in the bottom band. The columns
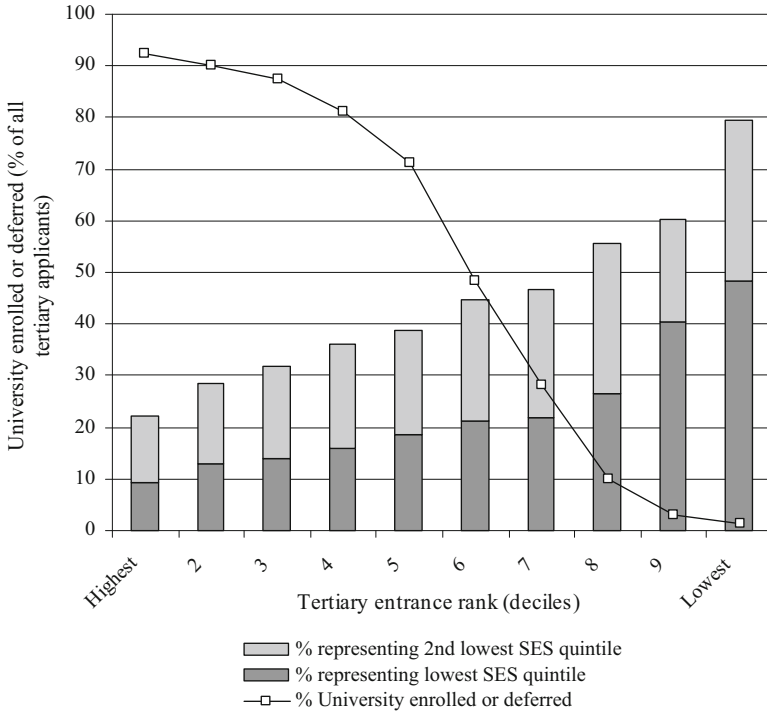
Fig. 16.2 Enrolling in university by general achievement band and social profile of each achievement band (Source: Teese (2007), reproduced with permission)

show the percentage of university students from the lowest two SES quintiles at each ATAR decile. Only 20 % of students scoring in the 90+ ATAR band are low SES. So, even within the diminished pool of disadvantaged young people who may wish to go to university, ATARs are more likely to be uncompetitive.

Disparity of ATAR according to social class affects the opportunities open to school-leavers regardless of their choices and preferences. Without a highly competitive ATAR, students will struggle to take a place at highly selective institutions, even where compensatory measures are in place. University students themselves say that their choices about study are constrained by their financial circumstances. A 2013 study of students' financial circumstances undertaken by the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education's (Bexley et al. 2013) found that undergraduates from low SES backgrounds were more likely than others to feel that their financial circumstances had affected their study choices.

The most competitive institutions, the Group of Eight, may exist within a mass/universal uncapped higher education system, but in practice their characteristics are closer to those of the elite era. These institutions, where demand for places most exceeds supply, have the lowest participation rates for disadvantaged students, as Table 16.2 shows.

Table 16.2 Low SES student
equity ratio, by institutional
groupings Table A providers,
2012

National – low SES	17.3
Group of eight	10.6 %
ATN group	16.0 %
IRU group	20.5 %
Regional Universities Network	30.0 %
Unaligned group	18.2 %

'Low SES' is the lowest quartile of the SEIFA index at the postcode and national level

Source education.gov.au data, also reported in Koshy (2014, p. 5)

The pressing roadblock to equity, for low SES people in particular, lies in the VET sector. Low SES students are over-represented it VET. Here, it is worth noting that where higher education statistics collected by the Commonwealth government report socio-economic disadvantage by quartile, for the VET sector it is reported by quintile. Nevertheless, in 2013, 23.2 % of VET students where drawn from the most disadvantaged quintile of society, and 22.5 % from the second most disadvantaged quintile. Together, this represents 55.7 % of VET students at disadvantage compared to a 40 % defined population rate. Many of these students are in sub-degree courses (Certificate levels). Wheelahan shows that only a very few low SES students, perhaps under 10 %, are enrolled in Diploma level courses – the courses that constitute the main pathway into higher education for disadvantaged students (Wheelahan 2010).

Even at university, this social sorting continues in the disciplines people study. The distribution of low-SES students within disciplines has remained remarkably consistent since *A Fair Chance for All*. In 1990, Architecture was the field in which low SES students were least represented, at 10 % of commencements. In 2011, Architecture remained the field with the lowest participation rate, although the low SES share had risen to 13 %. Agriculture had the highest share of low SES commencements in 1990, at 25 %, followed by Education at 18 %. In 2011 these fields were still the front runners, although Education had passed Agriculture, with a 24 % participation rate for commencements compared to Agriculture's 21 % (Education commissioned statistics). The anomaly is Health, which had a commencing participation rate of 16 % in 1990 and 20 % in 2011. The comparatively high participation rate here is likely due to fluctuation in the proportion of students in medicine and in nursing. What all of this shows is that people from disadvantaged families' options are more limited that those of their more advantaged peers.

Explaining Contemporary Inequity: Class, Status and Choice

The present uncapped system of higher education leaves universities free to accept as many students as they wish. Of course, this does not mean that students are free to pick and choose which institution to attend. Here, we might consider that most Australian of school leaver concerns: the notion of 'wasting your ATAR'. Harvey (in Hare 2013) has shown how students match their expected ATAR to their course choices. He found that in 2012 one in three Victorian school leavers with an ATAR of 98 or above applied to the same course at the same university (the high-status medicine degree at Monash University). Further, 90 % of students with an ATAR above 90 chose a course with a cut-off within ten points of their own ranking. In an accompanying media piece, Harvey observed that, 'the progression of elite students into a narrow range of courses and universities arguably has a distortionary effect on the workforce and society' (Hare 2013). The evidence suggests that many young people choose a course apparently not because they are intrinsically interested, but because of the status or prestige associated with being able to access a course with a very high ATAR cut-off.

A degree, then, is both a learning experience and a credential. And as a credential it is, in large part, a status signal. To understand some of the complexity associated with the connection between education, status and employment outcomes, we can turn to Spence's classic 1973 work on job market signaling. Spence argued that there is a feedback loop around students' decisions to invest in education based on perceptions about later wage rewards, the sorting that happens in the job market based on the signals the applicant's credentials send to the employer, and the reinforcement of beliefs about the value of particular qualifications in the employer and future employees. This is credentialing, and in a job market not in equilibrium it creates the conditions for credential creep, regardless of the actual skills or abilities the education credential gave to the individual. Students know this, and that is why they worry so much about ATAR. Universities know it too, and that is why they care so deeply about rankings.

Spence observed that 'Increases in [the quantity of education] improve the quality of the sorting not one bit' (Spence 1973). In short, it is rational to choose the education option that signals to employers that one is the best investment for them, as long as the signaling cost does not outweigh the returns in the form of wages. And this is the important point – where high school achievement scores are tightly linked to socio-economic status, and those scores are the coin with which entry to high status courses is purchased, outcomes and distributions will necessarily be very uneven between social groups. Of course, education is not just a credential, not just about status signals. But it would be naive to ignore the role status and status signaling play. Even the comparatively fair undergraduate system we have now – with so-called 'merit-based' selection and uniform fees by discipline, reinforces and reproduces social status.

Thinking about university study as a form of capital is helpful to understanding its role in a heavily differentiated and stratified system of higher education, for

doing so can help us avoid the *ad hoc* reinforcement of old class structures in the emerging system. Bourdieu refers fleetingly to a form of capital he calls academic capital in his 1979 book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. He says:

> Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family) (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]).

Bourdieu is explicit in his treatment of the non-mercantile forms of capital as capital per se, advocating an 'economy of practices' which 'would treat mercantile exchange as a particular case of exchange in all its forms' (Bourdieu 1986, p. 242). For Bourdieu, social and cultural capital are, ontologically, forms of currency in just the same manner as mercantile capital (Bexley 2007).

A very straight-forward way of seeing the transformation of the social and cultural capital inherent in a higher education credential into a financial return is through observation of the devaluation of that return as the employment market has become increasingly flooded with degrees. Graduate Careers Australia data show that since the mid-1970s, the median annual starting salaries for bachelor degree graduates have deteriorated steadily as a proportion of the annual rate of male average weekly earnings (MAWE), across most discipline groups (Graduate Careers Australia GCA 2012). In 2011, only graduates of dentistry, optometry and earth sciences had salaries above MAWE. The average starting salaries of graduates of all other disciplines were below MAWE in 2011 – somewhat of a shift from 1977, when graduates of engineering, education, computer science, social work, veterinary science, agricultural science and medicine all had starting salaries above MAWE. Medicine, in particular, has undertaken a remarkable fall, from a starting salary of 138.5 % of MAWE in 1977, to 91.4 % of MAWE in 2011, the most substantial decrease of any discipline. The only discipline for which starting salary has increased substantially against MAWE over this period is law, rising from 59.4 % in 1977 to 79.7 % on 2011, but not breaking 100 %.

Andrew Norton has shown convincingly in his *Graduate Winners* (2012) how one is still better off financially, and in the long term (and disregarding much of the performing arts), if one has a degree. This is to be expected: as having a degree becomes a basic prerequisite to most careers, of course those without one are more likely to be disadvantaged in career and economic terms. What happens in a credential-flooded job market is that the game becomes trickier; more nuanced.

The creation and maintenance of social class structures seems central to the nature of human societies. If everyone has something once seen as rare and valuable, say, a mobile phone, then we seem to need to inscribe hierarchies into the relative value of that thing: Have you got an iPhone or a Motorola? Or, indeed, where does our institution fit on the Shanghai Jiao Tong? Similarly, for Bourdieu: 'The strategies agents use to avoid devaluation of their diplomas are grounded in the discrepancy between opportunities objectively available at any given moment and aspirations based on an earlier structure of objective opportunities' (Bourdieu 1984 1979).

Bourdieu observed that as types or levels of education become more common, those wanting to maintain their place in the status game must find new signals (higher degrees, more elite institutions). As time passes, an education that would once have guaranteed a high status job outcome is insufficient:

> This … blighted hope or frustrated promise, is the common factor, behind all their differences, between those sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie to whom the educational system has not given the means of pursuing the trajectory most likely for their class and those sons and daughters of the middle and working classes who have not obtained the rewards which their academic qualifications would have guaranteed in an earlier state of the market… (Bourdieu 1984 [1979], p. 146).

The effects of this kind of creep can be seen in the steep increases in participation in higher degrees. Australia graduated nearly 8000 doctorates in 2013 (Education selected statistics), more than double the number graduating in 1999. We should expect deregulation of domestic undergraduate education, such as that proposed by the government in the 2014 Budget, to further condense social stratification according to institution and course type, because young people will be even less equally placed to make choices.

Possible Ways Forward

In 1995–1996, a review was commissioned by the Labor government to assess progress towards meeting *A Fair Chance for All* equity objectives. The review noted that there had been progress for most groups, but highlighted poor progress in increasing the representation of low SES and isolated groups. The findings of the review signalled a shift in focus from under-representation to a broader acknowledgement of disadvantage, and a recognition that disadvantage in part arises from the nature of the education system itself, especially at the school level. However, the outcomes of the review were never fixed in policy due to the defeat of the Keating government by the Coalition that year. This missed opportunity to rethink patterns of participation in higher education in more nuanced and whole-of-society terms has seen the continuation of the assumptions of the deficit model.

The more ubiquitous holding a degree becomes, the more we will see status signals and classing structures strengthening their place *within* the higher education system, and a more nuanced differentiation of the credential as capital. The old purpose of equity programs was to remove barriers to participation in higher education for those not from the elite part of society. The new purpose must be to mitigate barriers within the system, which stream people into programs, institutions and study modes because of their means and social background rather than their abilities and interests.

In a large and diverse higher education system with 'universal participation' the student profile will necessarily reflect more closely that of the broad population, and the assumptions of the elite era (the 'deficit model') become less relevant. We need to shift our thinking from equity of access and participation to equity of educational

experience. This has implications for income support – both the level of support and the way it is allocated, and for the way we think about higher education in the context of the national economy: universal participation sits uneasily with the not just the old equity assumptions, but with fundamental policies like HECS, which is premised on assessing the personal benefits of higher education against an outdated backdrop of non-universal participation.

We can go further, and observe how, in the Australian system at least, it is not simply that some forms of elite higher education have remained, perhaps instantiated in the sandstone of the Go8 institutions, but rather that many of the ideals of higher education – of the form of academic work; of expected student outcomes; of pedagogy and curriculum – are drawn directly from the elite era, and that it is this mismatch between ideal and reality that is creating the tensions presently evident in the system. These tensions include the constant need to weigh up with miserly scales the balance of public and private benefit of a higher education in this or that discipline, at this or that type of institution, to students and the broader society (for example Norton 2012). They include the difficulty that many designing curricula have in seeing deficiencies in students' language ability as other than deficiencies of intellect. They also include the failure of governments, institutions or the staff union to be able to envisage a new and differentiated kind of academic work (see Bexley 2013; Bexley et al. 2013).

The way forward will be difficult to navigate – not least because the assumptions of the Elite Era have persisted into the new, quasi-Universal system far beyond common-sense, effectively normalising their anachronisms. Certainly, the present 'uncapped' system, in which government is obliged to part-fund as many domestic undergraduate places as universities seek to offer, is unsustainable without a radical shift in approaches to investing in higher education. Perhaps it is time to ask if the HECS system of income-contingent deferred loans has passed its use-by date. After all, the system was designed to leverage investment from individuals on the assumption that they would benefit personally from being part of a university-educated 'elite few.' Once participation approaches fifty per cent, it seems more efficient to simply fund higher education through progressive taxation.

A clearer vision of the purpose of higher education is needed – by policy makers, academics, students and the community. Universities cannot be all things to all comers indefinitely. A return to explicit differentiation of institution types according to purpose would at least partially resolve the confused nature of tertiary education in Australia. The observation made in the 1964 Martin report echoes still: 'The Committee believes that much of the pressure on young people by parents, relatives, friends and teachers in urging them to undertake university courses, together with their own desire to do so, is due to the lack or other tertiary institutions of comparable status in the eyes of the community.' The difficulty remains far from being resolved. What is crucial, though, is that we move toward treating equity as a matter for *tertiary* education, not just *higher* education, a point made by Wheelahan (2010) that must not be ignored. To do so means we will continue to undermine equity efforts by blinding ourselves to the part of the tertiary sector where equity issues are blocked. A first step to seeing the whole tertiary sector clearly will be, of course, the

collection of thorough and consistent student data for both VET and HE, and regardless of provider type or fee-paying status.

Pressing inequalities in early education and schooling that lead to inevitable inequalities at the tertiary level; credential creep that is pushing all the way to the PhD; increasing stratification in the status of institutions, disciplines and modes of study – these are the contemporary frontiers for equity in Australian tertiary education. All call for a new conceptualisation of the purpose of tertiary and higher education, of training, of skills, supported by policy and funding mechanisms that recognise new realities rather than perpetuating old stereotypes.

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