

REPORT TO  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

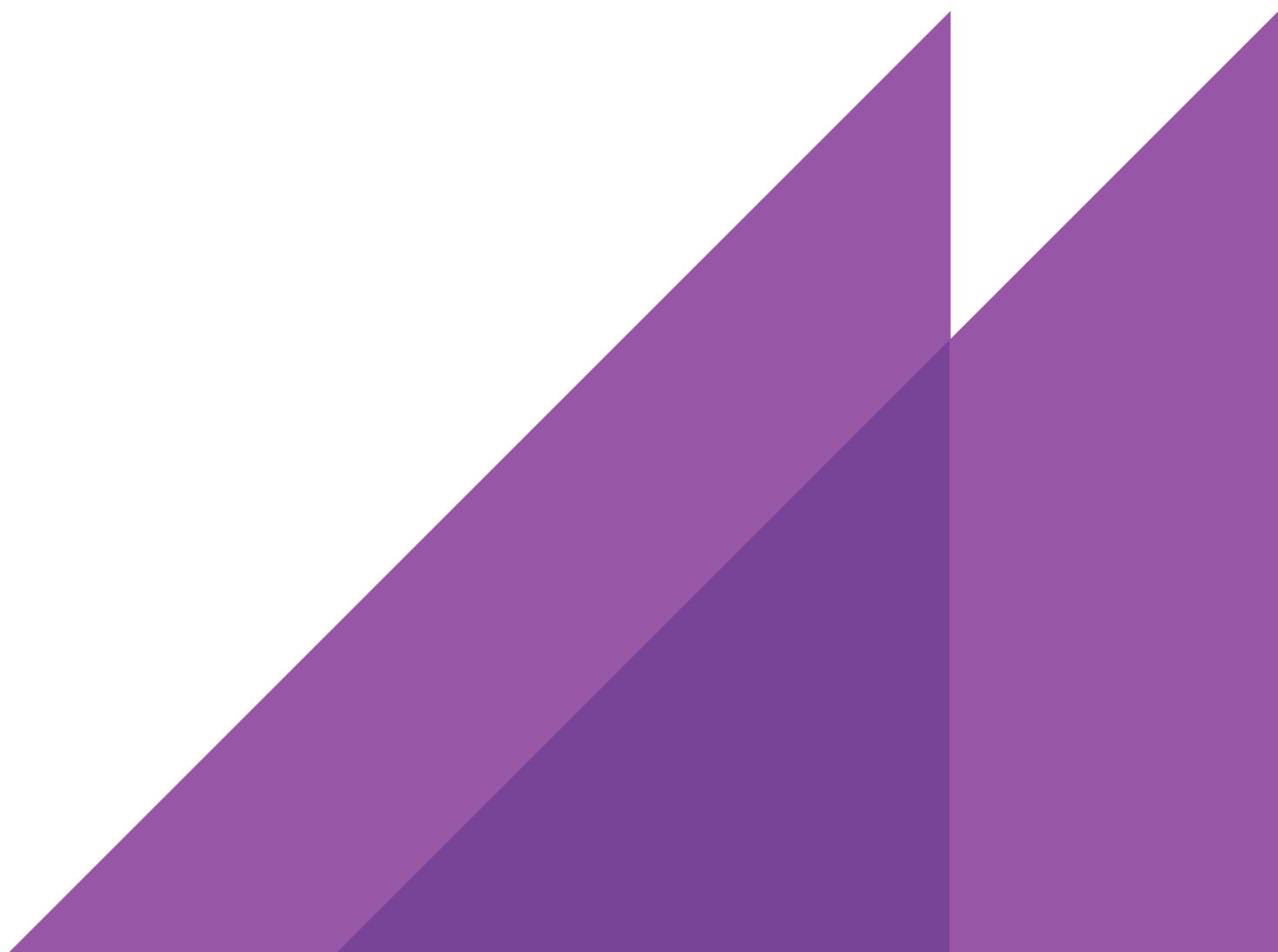
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16 MARCH 2017

# EVALUATION OF THE HEPPP



HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION  
AND PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM





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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACU	Australian Catholic University
ADCET	The Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training
AHEAD	Addressing Higher Education Access Disadvantage
AIME	Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience
ANU	The Australian National University
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATN	Australian Technology Network of Universities
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people
CIF	Critical Interventions Framework Part II
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CSU	Charles Sturt University
CUA	Children's University Australia
DDS	Demand Driven System
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	Department of Education and Training (also referred to as the Department throughout the report)
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DIICSRTE	Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
DIISRTE	Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
EIF	Equity Initiatives Framework

EPHEA	Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia
ESP	Higher Education Equity Support Program
FEE-HELP	Fee Paying Higher Education Loans Program
FTE	Full-time equivalent
Go8	Group of Eight
HECS-HELP	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HEEP	Higher Education Equity Program
HEIMS	Higher Education Information Management System
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme
HERR	Higher Education and Research Reform
HESA	Higher Education Support Act 2004
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage
IEO	The Index of Education and Occupation
IRU	Innovative Research Universities
IT	Information Technology
JCU	James Cook University
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
MyTED	My Tertiary Education Day
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NDCO	National Disability Coordination Officer Programme
NESB	Students from a non-English speaking background
NPP	National Priorities Pool
PASS	Peer Assisted Study Sessions
QTAC	Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RMIT	RMIT University
RUN	Regional Universities Network
SA1	Statistical Area Level 1
SCU	Southern Cross University
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SES	Socioeconomic status

STARS	Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention and Success Conference
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UAC	Universities Admissions Centre
UC	University of Canberra
UQ	The University of Queensland
UNE	University of New England
UniSA	University of South Australia
UNSW	The University of New South Wales
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
UWA	The University of Western Australia
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VU	Victoria University
WINTA	Women [studying] in Non-Traditional Areas
WSU	Western Sydney University



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the 2016 evaluation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP).

The HEPPP was established in 2010 and funds universities<sup>1</sup> to ‘undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds and improve their retention and completion rates.’<sup>2</sup>

ACIL Allen Consulting (ACIL Allen) and the Wallis Consulting Group (Wallis) were engaged by the Department of Education and Training (the Department) to undertake the evaluation of the HEPPP. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the program, in particular examining:

- the outcomes achieved by the program
- who has benefited from the activities of the program, with particular reference to all disadvantaged groups, including people from regional and remote Australia
- whether the program provides good value for money
- what changes might be required to the program

The terms of reference for the evaluation and the sections of the report where they are addressed are provided at the end of the Executive Summary.

The evaluation drew on information from the following sources:

- Document analysis—of program documentation, university reporting and evaluations, and international higher education equity programs.
- Quantitative data analysis—of implementation and outcomes data.
- Consultations—including interviews, surveys and a written submission process.

<sup>1</sup> Eligible universities are the 38 HESA Table A higher education providers. An agreement between the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and Charles Darwin University enables Charles Darwin University to receive Participation funding and undertake relevant activities on behalf of the Batchelor Institute from 2013 onwards. This means that in practice there are 37 universities involved in the Participation component of the HEPPP.

<sup>2</sup> Other Grants Guidelines (Education) 2012, Section 1.40.1

## Implementation

The HEPPP consists of three components, each with specific objectives and funding arrangements:

- Participation component—aimed at supporting the participation of current and prospective domestic students from low SES backgrounds in accredited undergraduate qualifications
- Partnership component—aimed at increasing the number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities
- National Priorities Pool (NPP)—aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the implementation of HEPPP nationally and at an institutional level.

Across the three components there have been some 2679 projects implemented at the 37 HEPPP universities between 2010 and 2015. This is an average of around 70 projects per university. More than 40 per cent of projects and expenditure have been targeted at directly assisting low SES students' transition into engaging with and progressing through university. Around 40 per cent of projects have worked with external partners, usually schools, to increase low SES applications to, offers from and commencements at university. The remaining HEPPP activity includes projects that have focused on pathways to university, the admissions process, and transitioning out of university. The HEPPP has also supported research to improve the effectiveness and impact of low SES equity practices in higher education.

Academic preparation and support has been the most common activity undertaken through the HEPPP, appearing in around one third of all projects reported from 2010-2015. Mentoring and peer support, and first year transition support were the two next most utilised activities.

Data provided by 28 universities indicate that around 310,000 students have participated in HEPPP projects at these universities, though this figure may be higher as not all contact may have been recorded. Further, many of these students have participated in multiple HEPPP projects (more than 30 per cent). The data provided also indicate that at least 2,913 partner organisations participated in HEPPP outreach activities over 2010 to 2016. In addition, HEPPP projects may also involve participation by school students and other people such as teachers and parents.

The NPP was introduced in 2014 and a total of 65 projects were funded in either 2014 or 2015. These projects focused on building the evidence base for future policy development, innovation in equity practice, or research to facilitate more effective HEPPP implementation.

## Effectiveness

In this report, the effectiveness of the HEPPP is considered within the four stages of the student life cycle in which equity initiatives can take place:

- Pre-Access: Outreach to Schools and Communities
- Access: Pathways and Admissions (including Enabling Pathways)
- Participation: Transition, Engagement and Progression
- Attainment and Transition Out.

Also considered are the effectiveness of HEPPP-supported research and the program overall.

### Pre-Access: Outreach to Schools and Communities

Outreach projects under the HEPPP often combine a number of different activities; they frequently include aspiration raising and academic preparation and support for school students and other individuals. While the lead times for this stage mean that the impact of some activities may not yet be observable, there is emerging evidence that the HEPPP objective 'to increase the total number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities' (the Guidelines) is being met by HEPPP outreach activities.

The surveys and interviews carried out for this evaluation indicate that university staff believe that HEPPP activities have had an impact on the higher education aspirations of school students and other participants. Similarly, the majority of the 98 written submissions from schools and other HEPPP

outreach partner organisations and participants expressed strong support for the HEPPP and described seeing positive impacts of HEPPP activities on students', teachers' and other individuals' understanding of university pathways. Many of these submissions also noted observance of positive increases in students' confidence and aspirations to attend university, as well as in the number of students' applications and enrolments to higher education.

Consistent with this, evaluations carried out by universities indicate that program recipients consider HEPPP outreach activities to have had positive impacts. Surveys of participants indicated that HEPPP outreach activities appear to be shifting the perceptions of low SES students regarding the feasibility of attending university, and improving their ability to undertake higher education through targeted academic support. Notwithstanding these shifts, application and enrolment data from participating schools show that the impact of HEPPP outreach activities has not been consistent across all such schools. Moreover, the evaluations conducted by universities have rarely included counterfactual or control groups with which to establish positive causation.

### **Access: Pathways and Admissions**

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Access projects under the HEPPP have included the development and implementation of inclusive entry processes, and the facilitation of pre-university qualification pathways. There have been relatively few university evaluations undertaken of Access projects but a high proportion of students participating in these activities proceed to study degree programs and there is some evidence that they have higher retention rates than for students overall.

Where projects have had student surveys or other feedback mechanisms, they have been found to improve student confidence and preparedness for university, as well as helping to develop supportive peer relationships.

Such evidence was reaffirmed through the evaluation's consultations and suggests that the HEPPP is having a positive impact at the Access stage through extending existing university activities and initiating new measures to encourage low SES students into higher education pathways.

### **Participation: Transition, Engagement and Progression**

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HEPPP Participation projects most commonly involve academic preparation/support, and activities to support transition to university for low SES first year students. The academic skills gained in this first year are also aimed at supporting retention into second and later years of study. Universities have reviewed student data to identify courses with high enrolments of students from equity cohorts and have introduced academic programs that complement the coursework, either embedded within the course or delivered concurrently to the coursework, and where the learning support is heavily contextualised.

There have been a considerable number of evaluations carried out by universities of HEPPP Participation stage activities. These evaluations have often involved surveys of participating students which the universities have used to improve the design of their HEPPP projects. Some evaluations have also examined participating student academic outcomes, but have not been able to establish definitive impact and effect sizes for HEPPP projects due to issues around small sample sizes and a lack of suitable counterfactuals. Despite this, the evaluations do indicate that the activities in this area are likely to be having a positive impact on student retention and success, and hence course completion.

This is further supported by the evidence collected as part of this evaluation, including staff and student surveys, stakeholder interviews and written submissions, indicating increases in the participation, retention and completion of equity cohorts arising from HEPPP activities.

### **Attainment and Transition Out**

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The Guidelines specify that the HEPPP is intended to improve higher education access, retention and completion rates for students from low SES backgrounds. Activities to assist students after they have graduated from university are not included in the HEPPP. As such, activities at the Attainment and Transition Out stage of the student life cycle represent a relatively small component of HEPPP (around 1 per cent of all HEPPP expenditure). They have tended to focus on career guidance and



work-based learning during study, with a small number of activities focusing on the transition between study and employment. At this stage, there are limited data with which to assess the impact of these activities on low SES students.

### Research and other activities

Research projects have only been funded through the NPP component of the HEPPP since 2014, so many of these are still ongoing or in the pre-publication process. Of projects funded in 2014, the majority have led to conference presentations, and almost half have led to journal or other publication submissions.

Feedback collected through this evaluation and provided in NPP reports shows that NPP funding has encouraged universities to explore new approaches and analyses, and that these have informed university decisions on how to best meet the needs of disadvantaged students. Many research teams indicated that they would continue to collect data or undertake longitudinal research emanating from the NPP project. University submissions also expressed strong support for the NPP, particularly the value of the unique funding pool and the opportunity to undertake trials as well as research.

### Overall effectiveness analysis

The collective impact of all HEPPP components was examined through data on university applications, offers, commencements, enrolments, retention, success, and completions.

Across a number of measures, low SES individuals are increasingly accessing higher education—the number of low SES individuals applying for, being offered a place at, commencing at and enrolling in university has increased considerably. Growth on each of these measures is higher in the low SES group than the medium and high SES cohorts. This growth has seen the share of higher education students from low SES background increase from 14.8 per cent to 16.1 per cent and the proportion of low SES individuals from the Australian population in higher education increase from 2 per cent to 2.5 per cent over 2010-2015. Despite this growth, however, low SES students continue to be under-represented in higher education.

The data that would allow the separation of the impact of the HEPPP on these trends from the impact due to the co-introduction of the demand driven system (DDS), or from the impact due to other government programs and societal changes, are not available. As such, while it is likely that the HEPPP is contributing to the increase in applications and enrolments, the extent of this impact is not able to be quantified.

Once at university, low SES students have lower retention, success and completion rates than other students—econometric analysis indicates that the extents of these differences have fallen slightly relative to the pre-HEPPP period 2006-2009. Again it is not possible to directly attribute this change to the HEPPP. Low SES student outcomes have varied across universities, but there is no apparent pattern that indicates any particular mix or focus of HEPPP activities is correlated with improvements in low SES student retention and success. As with enrolment outcomes, other evidence analysed in the evaluation suggests it is likely that HEPPP is contributing to improvements in student outcomes, but the extent of this impact is not able to be quantified with the currently available data.

### Efficiency

Total HEPPP funding grew from \$56 million in 2010 to a peak of \$189 million in 2013, before falling to \$172 million in 2015. Between 2010 and 2014 the majority of funding was provided through the Participation component (69 per cent) and the Partnership component (30 per cent), mainly allocated on a formula basis, with around a quarter of total HEPPP funding allocated through grants processes.

Funding levels per university have differed based on the share of low SES students enrolled at the university and the success of each university in being awarded competitive grants under the program. The average amount of HEPPP funding received by metropolitan universities and regional universities was similar—\$22.4 million per university compared with \$21.9 million.

While there is no clear definition of administrative costs under the HEPPP (or in the higher education sector more broadly), an analysis of university HEPPP reporting indicates that the share of administrative costs relative to total expenditure is around 2 per cent of the total HEPPP budget.

While there is some evidence that the HEPPP may be displacing funding universities would otherwise expend on student support services, it is also leading to additional sources of funding that are being used to enhance or extend equity projects.

## Recommendations

### Continuing the HEPPP

Overall, HEPPP funding has encouraged universities to implement a wide variety of activities and projects aimed at increasing the number of low SES students interested in attending university, being prepared for and admitted to university, and progressing through and graduating from university.

A large number of evaluations have been carried out by universities and the qualitative impacts identified by these evaluations are almost universally positive, and accord with the various stakeholder consultations carried out as part of this evaluation.

Administrative data also show that the key indicators HEPPP is designed to impact are mostly moving in the right direction—importantly, low SES enrolments have increased considerably since 2010, including as a share of all enrolments—though it is not possible to separate the precise role or contribution of the HEPPP to this, particularly in relation to the co-introduction of the DDS.

Overall, therefore, the HEPPP appears to be positively influencing the quantity and rigour of higher education equity activities and policies, even though HEPPP funding is not a large proportion of universities' revenue or of government funding for universities. Notwithstanding this, low SES individuals are still under-represented in higher education as compared with their population presence, so there is a continued need for action if the low SES equity target is to be achieved. A potential contributing factor is that not all of the HEPPP funding is targeting the intended low SES cohort, with evidence that some HEPPP projects are aimed at other equity groups, and in some cases even at the broader student cohort. It is also not clear to what extent some projects funded under the HEPPP are additional to what would be implemented as part of normal university operations.

As such, improvements have been identified in a number of areas which could further increase the effectiveness of the HEPPP—first in sharpening its focus on the activities, projects and equity groups to be targeted, second in revising the funding arrangements to support this focus, and third in designing and embedding a stronger evaluation framework with which to collect the necessary data to better measure and monitor its impact and inform future improvements.

### RECOMMENDATION 1

That, given the evidence of emerging impact on student access and equity, HEPPP be continued as a funded program to further encourage and build on the progress achieved. At the same time, there are a number of areas which have been identified as requiring improvement. The focus of the activities, projects and equity groups to be targeted and the funding arrangements to support this focus require improvement. Also required is the development of an embedded evaluation framework with which to collect the necessary data to better measure and monitor impact, and inform future improvements.

### Focusing the HEPPP

Three key issues have been identified in the Participation component:

- First, the Participation component should provide universities with a clear incentive to target HEPPP projects at low SES students, and to ensure HEPPP projects are additional to what they would otherwise deliver in the area of university student support. The current HEPPP Participation component does provide some incentive for universities to enrol and retain low SES students (as, all

things being equal, funding increases for each low SES student a university has enrolled), but current practice suggests that this could be strengthened through improved targeting.

- Second, incentives around success and completion could also be strengthened—success and completion rates for low SES students continue to track below those of medium and high SES students.
- Third, more specific data on whether Participation activities are impacting low SES students' retention, success and completion rates would help universities better evaluate and determine which types of equity projects are the most effective to implement.

Within the general principle of maximising the flexibility of universities to implement projects to suit their specific context, these issues can be addressed through a stronger requirement for standardised evaluation, using this to steer the intended performance and outcomes. Funding should continue to be based on low SES enrolments and success (weighted towards enrolments), and maintain the current Guidelines approach to provide broad direction to universities on the activities which should be delivered. The funding would be contingent, however, on universities evaluating HEPPP projects using a standardised framework, allowing both individual project evaluations and an overall program evaluation to take place.

A key feature of this approach is that it does not require the level of program administration that would be involved in establishing performance or pre-agreement based funding. Its effectiveness rests heavily on the design and strength of the evaluation framework adopted, through which universities would need to show the impact of HEPPP on low SES student outcomes, and demonstrate a causal relationship between these outcomes and HEPPP funded projects.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

That the Participation component of the HEPPP be retained with a requirement that universities adhere to and report using a standardised HEPPP evaluation framework to ensure universities are targeting low SES students and are improving outcomes for low SES students. The funding formula for the Participation component should include a component which accounts for the success rate of low SES students at each university.


While the Partnerships component addresses an important aspect of HEPPP, the evaluation has found two key issues that may be impacting its effectiveness—first, the unintended use of HEPPP funding for university-specific promotion/recruitment and second, the potential for over- or under-servicing of some schools with Partnership activities.

There is insufficient direct evidence to draw any strong conclusions regarding the extent to which Partnerships funding is being used for institution-specific promotion/recruitment, or the level of under- or over-servicing, but improvements to the design of the Partnership component could decrease the risk of any such unintended practices.

The current Partnership funding approach (that is, allocated by the same formula as the Participation component) should be maintained but funding should focus on inter-university collaborative activities. Universities within a set geographical region would be required to set out how they will ensure all relevant schools receive an appropriate level of Partnership activity, and their approach for ensuring activities do not unduly promote individual institutions. This would mean that all universities continue to receive some Partnership funding, and so are all contributing to increasing access of low SES individuals to higher education and driving Australia-wide coverage of Partnership activities. It would also offer a ready approach to ensure all relevant schools receive Partnership activities, and would require less administrative effort for universities and for the Department than the grant-based approach to partnership funding that was used in previous years.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**

That the Partnership component of the HEPPP be retained, with universities required to collaborate within defined geographical regions to ensure coverage of relevant schools and to reduce the extent to which Partnership activities promote any particular institution.




It is clear that university HEPPP implementation could be improved by greater access to evidence on what works, but that this kind of research is unlikely to be generated by universities without dedicated funding. A review of the projects commissioned under the NPP do not clearly point to research that will fill the gaps in evidence identified through this evaluation, namely:

- Which types of activities are more effective than other types of activities, for example, are mentor programs or scholarships more effective in increasing completion rates
- Within a type of activity, what are the characteristics of effective projects, for example, what are the characteristics of successful mentoring programs
- What sustains educational inequity (for example, why intergenerational inequalities in educational mobility continue to persist).

Research into these areas will assist universities with the design of their projects and the allocation of funding between different types of activities. The research will likely need to be based on quasi-experimental or experimental designs, which allow for stronger conclusions to be drawn on causal impacts. Such research is normally more resource intensive than the projects funded by the NPP, but would be more effective at building a body of knowledge to inform HEPPP implementation.

**RECOMMENDATION 4**

That the NPP be retained to support research on higher education equity, but with a greater focus on more rigorous evaluative research that can help identify the most effective approaches.



The design of the HEPPP explicitly targets individuals from low SES backgrounds. This is evident in the Guidelines, which set out the objectives for the HEPPP and the manner in which Participation and Partnership funding is allocated to universities based on each universities' share of low SES students. Despite this, other higher education equity groups have also received project focus under the HEPPP. In part, this is because there is an overlap between low SES and other equity groups (this was reflected in a round of Partnership grants which focused on low SES Indigenous students), and because universities find it difficult to target low SES students as a specific cohort.


There is also evidence that some universities target HEPPP projects at other equity groups, regardless of their overlap with the low SES cohort. This can be based on universities' own analysis and identification of groups they see as facing barriers to higher education participation and success.

There is a strong case for maintaining low SES individuals as a target group of the HEPPP—low SES individuals remain under-represented in higher education, and there is considerable evidence that this is due to the fact they come from low SES backgrounds.

The case for inclusion of other equity groups within HEPPP is less clear and would need to be considered alongside other funding available for these groups. There is currently underway a NPP funded Review of Identified Equity Groups. This is expected to report in November 2017 and will be able to examine the suitability of other target groups in more depth. Additionally, these equity groups are not exclusive and often people may belong to more than one group. For example, a person from a low SES background may also be from a remote area, which means that targeting low SES individuals also targets people from other equity groups who are most financially disadvantaged.

**RECOMMENDATION 5**

That, pending the results of the NPP funded Review of Identified Equity Groups, the HEPPP continue to be targeted at low SES students.


**Funding the HEPPP**


The HEPPP funding level was originally set at 2 per cent of teaching and learning grants funding in 2010-11, and budgeted to increase to 4 per cent by 2012-13—the 4 per cent level was recommended by the Bradley Review (2008). Funding for the program has not reached this level and in 2014 was 2.9 per cent of teaching and learning grants funding.<sup>3</sup>

The Base Funding Review (2011) recommended that the Participation component of the HEPPP be set at \$1,000 per low SES student equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) in 2012 and maintained in real terms. HEPPP Participation funding exceeded the Base Funding Review recommended level in 2012-2014, before dropping below it in 2015. Based on the forward estimates, HEPPP funding will continue to be below the Base Funding Review recommendation over the coming years.

Given the demand driven system may continue to expand the number of low SES students in higher education—although there is some evidence that enrolments under the DDS may be peaking—the level of HEPPP funding, particularly the level of the Participation component, should be reviewed to establish whether it is adequate to enable the HEPPP achievements identified to date to be continued and meet the low SES enrolment target identified in the Guidelines—namely that, by 2020, 20 per cent of domestic undergraduate students must be from low SES backgrounds.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

That, in view of the slower than expected progress towards the low SES enrolment target that, by 2020, 20 per cent of domestic undergraduate students are from low SES backgrounds, as well as the anticipated future growth in low SES student numbers, funding levels be modelled to determine their adequacy to meet the low SES student target, and revised as appropriate.



Some stakeholders argued that there are economies of scale in delivering HEPPP projects, particularly if the fixed costs are high. Others contended that a greater concentration of low SES students at a particular university leads to higher per student costs (or diseconomies of scale).


The lack of data currently available, particularly in relation to HEPPP administrative expenditure within universities, means that it is difficult to test for economies of scale in HEPPP implementation. Nor is it possible to estimate the impact of greater concentrations of low SES students, although there is a correlation between the concentration of low SES students and low SES student outcomes.

There is a need for further research on economies of scale and the impact of greater concentrations of low SES students. Such research should be used to inform any modification of the funding formula in the same way Gonski et al. (2011) used such research to recommend changes to school funding policy.

<sup>3</sup> 2014 is the most recent year for which funding data are available.

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

That suitable data be collected and analysed to identify economies of scale and the impact of greater concentrations of low SES students relevant to the HEPPP, and the findings be used to inform the HEPPP funding formula.



A broader question is whether the HEPPP funding formula should focus purely on enrolment and retention of students from low SES backgrounds, or whether it should also take into account a broader suite of measures, such as their completion rates and/or other measures of success.


The formula could be redesigned to better focus on these student outcomes measures, although the success measure has some advantages over retention and completion measures. Completion rates, while measuring a key outcome for students, have a significant time lag (at least four years) and are generally less reliable, relative to retention and success rates, when disaggregated by SES. Success rates, by measuring whether students are passing units of study, do capture how well low SES students are coping with the level of academic work required at university. Retention rates on the other hand only measure whether students continue their study, and also have a time lag (of one year), while success rates can be calculated based on one year's worth of data.

Even though success rates appear to be the best and most practical measure with which to introduce greater incentive into the HEPPP funding formula, careful attention is required in determining how to weight success rates in the formula. For example, there is a negative correlation between each university's share of total low SES enrolments and its low SES student success rate. And over the last 10 years, most universities have seen little variability in their annual low SES success rates, indicating that university success rates are determined, to some extent, by historical and cohort factors.

To avoid these issues the HEPPP funding formula could incorporate a measure of the annual change in a university's low SES success rate. This would provide an incentive to improve the success rate of low SES students while avoiding funding based on raw success rates, which would unnecessarily advantage those universities that currently have lower numbers of low SES students. The balance between this success rate measure and the 'share of total low SES enrolments' measure in the funding formula would also need to be determined.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

That consideration be given to modifying the current funding formula to incorporate an allocation based on the change in each university's low SES success rate.



Under the HEPPP, funding is currently determined annually, with universities being informed of their allocation for the year in the second half of the preceding year. The evaluation received strong and consistent feedback that the lack of funding certainty year-to-year severely restricts the ability of universities to design and plan projects over multi-year periods, and to develop the necessary partnerships and long-term relationships with schools, other universities and external partners.

A longer funding cycle would provide greater certainty to universities in managing and resourcing their HEPPP funded projects. In public submissions, some universities propose three year funding cycles, while others recommend a funding cycle of between three to five years. A three year funding cycle would strike the right balance between providing greater certainty to universities and allowing the Department to allocate funding based on low SES enrolments and success.



**RECOMMENDATION 9**

That the HEPPP be shifted to a three year funding cycle, along with the appropriate allocation performance measures, to give greater certainty to universities in managing and resourcing their HEPPP funded projects.

Funding for the HEPPP Participation and Partnership components is currently allocated using a formula based on the share of low SES students at each university. To establish whether a student is low SES, all Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1) regions in Australia are ranked using the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Education and Occupation (IEO). The lowest ranked SA1 regions which collectively account for 25 per cent of the total population of all SA1s are determined to be low SES SA1 regions. In the HEPPP funding formula, low SES students are defined as those with a home address in one of these low SES SA1 regions.

SEIFA IEO is an area-based measure, not an individual-based measure; therefore relatively disadvantaged areas can have people who are relatively advantaged (as well as advantaged areas containing disadvantaged people). This issue could be addressed by using a SES measurement methodology based on the individual circumstances of each student, taking into account factors such as parental education, parental occupation, parental income or household income.

In adopting such an approach it would be necessary to undertake research into the extent which these factors can reliably be used as a measure for the SES of mature-age students. Any changes to the measure of low SES to improve accuracy would also need to take account of the additional costs or reporting requirements for universities and Tertiary Admission Centres (TACs).

Beyond informing the allocation of funding under the HEPPP, the collection of data to allow a SES measure to be developed based on the individual circumstances of each student is likely to generate considerable value through supporting and improving research into student equity.

**RECOMMENDATION 10**

That a cost benefit analysis of implementing a low SES measure based on students' individual circumstances be undertaken to test whether the costs associated with such a measure would be outweighed by the benefits of improving the accuracy of the allocation of HEPPP funding. The individual circumstances would likely include but not necessarily be limited to parental occupation and/or education.

**Evaluating the HEPPP**

The evaluation found many areas of the HEPPP where determining effectiveness and impact has been difficult due to a lack of rigorous collection of data or consistent ongoing evaluations.

Having said this, there is considerable support within universities for the development and embedding of a HEPPP evaluation framework to enable improved measurement of the impact of the HEPPP and to provide greater guidance on the outcomes sought under the program. Many universities also expressed support for standardising their individual evaluative activities through the development of a national HEPPP evaluation framework.

A national HEPPP evaluation framework should be established to structure and guide three levels of evaluation:

- overall program evaluation of the HEPPP
- quality improvement evaluations of HEPPP activities
- impact evaluations of HEPPP activities.

Evaluation of the overall impact of the HEPPP will require, at minimum, information which can be linked to the Higher Education Student Data Collection on each student who participates in each

HEPPP project, key standardised characteristics of each HEPPP project, and project inputs, outputs and outcomes which can be linked to the HEPPP program logic model.

The framework would also provide guidance and principles for university-run evaluations aimed at generating evidence for quality improvement as well as impact evaluations. Currently, most HEPPP project evaluations focus on the former, as generating evidence for such evaluations is less resource-intensive and allows universities to improve how their HEPPP projects operate.

As indicated earlier in Recommendation 1, it is important that the evaluation framework support and drive improved targeting and performance measurement of the overall HEPPP investment. As such, a condition of HEPPP funding could be that universities are required to undertake a number of rigorous impact evaluations of HEPPP projects and make these evaluations available to all other universities. The number of rigorous impact evaluations would be less than the number of quality improvement evaluations, recognising the greater effort and resources required for impact evaluations.

Currently, universities report to the Department annually on their HEPPP activities funded through the formula-based allocation. Given the establishment of a stronger evaluation framework, there is an opportunity streamline the current annual reporting back to the minimal information required for funding, audit and acquittal purposes. This could be through a spreadsheet template that complements but does not replicate the information collected and reported for program evaluation.

To ensure the full value of the revised annual reporting is made available to the sector, all annual reports should be collated and published, similar to the analysis of the project inventory presented in this report.

#### RECOMMENDATION 11

That a HEPPP evaluation framework be established to collect information for overall program evaluation of the HEPPP and guide universities in individual project quality improvement and impact evaluations. It should be a condition of HEPPP funding for each university that the overall program evaluation data be collected and a number of each university's programs be evaluated annually and in accord with the HEPPP evaluation framework. The annual reporting should be streamlined to only require the minimal additional information necessary for funding, audit and acquittal purposes.

The consultations and written submissions also indicate that universities are seeking greater sharing of the HEPPP material reported—that is, the annual report and evaluations of HEPPP projects carried out by universities.

The revised evaluation reports and annual reports could be published on the Department's website to promote information sharing and learning across universities, thereby better informing universities of available evidence for different equity activities and assisting to improve the implementation of the HEPPP. This information should be summarised in the form of a 'state of higher education equity' report, providing universities and the public with key information on equity practice and outcomes.

There is a precedent for this type of report in the Department's 'Higher Education Report' (the last such report was published for the years 2011-2013). The report could also build on or integrate the Department's statistical publications on equity groups and equity performance, NCSEHE's annual report on student equity performance, and other data indices as required, such as QILT, the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching initiative.

#### RECOMMENDATION 12

That a state of higher education equity report be produced annually by the Department, including reporting of sector-level outcomes and HEPPP activity.



## Terms of reference

**TABLE ES 1** TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RELEVANT REPORT SECTIONS

	Terms of reference	Corresponding report section
1	<p>The extent to which the program is meeting its objectives, as described in the <i>Other Grants Guidelines (Education) 2012</i> [based on the Guidelines the objectives of the HEPPP are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– ‘to increase the total number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities’</li> <li>– ‘to encourage and assist providers to meet the Commonwealth Government’s ambition that, by 2020, 20 per cent of domestic undergraduate students must be from low SES backgrounds’</li> <li>– ‘to increase the participation of current and prospective domestic students from low SES backgrounds in accredited undergraduate qualifications’ at Table A universities</li> <li>– ‘improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds and improve their retention and completion rates’</li> <li>– through the National Priorities Pool (NPP) ‘more effective implementation of HEPPP nationally and at an institutional level’]</li> </ul>	<p>Chapter 2 sets out the HEPPP objectives. Chapters 4-9 examine the extent to which these objectives are being met. More specifically:</p> <p>Chapters 4 and 5 examine HEPPP activities targeted at increasing access and participation. Chapter 9 examines trends in applications to university, offers of university places, acceptance rates, enrolments and participation rates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Chapters 6 and 7 examine HEPPP activities targeted at improving retention and completion. Chapter 9 examines trends in retention, success and completions.</li> <li>– Chapter 8 examines the NPP and the extent to which it has contributed to more effective implementation of the HEPPP</li> </ul>
2	The outcomes that have been achieved by the program to date	The outcomes of the HEPPP are detailed in Chapters 4-9
3	Which groups of low socio-economic status people are benefitting most from HEPPP activities, with particular attention to be paid to people from regional and remote backgrounds	Chapter 3 sets out the groups benefiting from HEPPP activities. Chapters 4-8 detail the groups benefiting from HEPPP activities at each stage of the student life cycle. Chapter 9 shows the groups targeted by NPP activities.
4	Which HEPPP-funded activities are contributing most to achieving program objectives	Chapter 3 details the scope and types of HEPPP-funded activities. Chapters 4-8 discuss the relative impact of HEPPP activities at each stage of the student life cycle.
5	The extent to which HEPPP activities can be said to provide individual, societal, and economic benefits	The individual and societal benefits of HEPPP activities are detailed in Chapters 4-9, with Chapter 10 detailing the potential economic benefits of the HEPPP
6	Whether HEPPP is the most efficient means of achieving equity objectives in higher education	The efficiency of the HEPPP is examined in Chapter 10. Potential changes to the HEPPP to aid efficiency are discussed in Chapter 11.
7	Whether universities require a quarantined funding source (such as HEPPP) to provide adequate support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds	<p>The need for a quarantined funding source is discussed in Chapter 11.</p> <p>Other equity-related funding sources are detailed in Chapter 2 and discussed in Chapter 10.</p>
8	Whether there have been any unintended consequences of the program and what impacts these have had	Chapters 4-8 discuss HEPPP activities at each stage of the student life cycle, including any unintended consequences at the project-level. Chapter 11 discusses unintended consequences at the program-level.
9	What changes may be required to the program to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds (particularly those in regional and remote areas) into the future to access, participate in, and succeed at higher-education	Recommended changes to the HEPPP to assist disadvantaged students to access, participate in, and succeed in higher education are set out in Chapter 11.
10	What changes may be required for the program to operate effectively in a fiscally constrained environment.	Recommended changes to the HEPPP in relation to funding are set out in Chapter 11.

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING



# PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE HEPPP





*This chapter provides an overview of the HEPPP evaluation, including the evaluation's context, research questions and method.*

## 1.1 Evaluation overview

### 1.1.1 Evaluation objectives

ACIL Allen Consulting (ACIL Allen) and the Wallis Consulting Group (Wallis) have been engaged by the Department of Education and Training (the Department) to undertake the evaluation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP).

The purpose of the evaluation is to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of HEPPP, in particular examining:

- the outcomes achieved by the program
- who has benefited from the activities of the program, with particular reference to all disadvantaged groups, including people from regional and remote Australia
- whether the program provides good value for money
- what changes might be required to the program.

The terms of reference for the evaluation are:

1. the extent to which the program is meeting its objectives, as described in the Other Grants Guidelines (Education) 2012
2. the outcomes that have been achieved by the program to date
3. which groups of low socio-economic status people are benefitting most from HEPPP activities, with particular attention to be paid to people from regional and remote backgrounds
4. which HEPPP-funded activities are contributing most to achieving program objectives
5. the extent to which HEPPP activities can be said to provide individual, societal, and economic benefits
6. whether HEPPP is the most efficient means of achieving equity objectives in higher education
7. whether universities require a quarantined funding source (such as HEPPP) to provide adequate support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds
8. whether there have been any unintended consequences of the program and what impacts these have had
9. what changes may be required to the program to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds (particularly those in regional and remote areas) into the future to access, participate in, and succeed at higher-education

10. what changes may be required for the program to operate effectively in a fiscally constrained environment.

### 1.1.2 Evaluation research questions

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The evaluation research questions are at Appendix A and are structured according to the following evaluation areas of enquiry:

- Implementation<sup>4</sup>
- Effectiveness
  - Access, participation, retention, success and completion
  - Outreach to schools, TAFEs, and communities
- Efficiency
  - Efficiency analysis
  - Funding structure and formula
- Appropriateness
  - Program targeting
  - Program design.

### 1.1.3 Evaluation scope

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The evaluation covers all activities funded under HEPPP, across its three program components, namely:

1. Participation
2. Partnership
3. National Priorities Pool (these three components are described in Chapter 2).

The evaluation has examined all HEPPP activity from the program's inception in 2010 to 2015, though large scale HEPPP expenditure did not commence until 2011 and that activities for 2016 were not completed by conclusion of the evaluation in September 2016.

## 1.2 Evaluation method

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The HEPPP evaluation method comprised the following activities, described in further detail below:

- Document analysis—of program documentation, university reporting and evaluations, and international higher education equity programs.
- Quantitative data analysis and economic modelling—of implementation and outcomes data.
- Consultations—including interviews, surveys and a written submission process.

### 1.2.1 Document analysis

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#### Program documents

The HEPPP policy and program documentation analysed has included relevant legislation, key policy architecture reports such as the Bradley Review, the Higher Education Base Funding Review and the Kemp Norton Review. The analysis of program documentation considered the HEPPP's funding models, governance, and accountability mechanisms and reporting requirements.

#### HEPPP annual reports and other university reporting

Universities funded under the HEPPP provide annual reports on their formula-based funded HEPPP activities to the Department. Universities also report on any grant-based HEPPP projects.

There have been 223 annual reports and around 100 grant-based project reports covering 2010-2015.

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<sup>4</sup> Including HEPPP structure, the Participation component, the Partnership component and the National Priorities Pool component.

The evaluation has compiled these reports into a detailed inventory of HEPPP projects. For each HEPPP project, the inventory records key project attributes, including categorisation based on the Equity Initiatives Framework (EIF) Student Life Cycle framework (refer Section 1.3). The project inventory records more than 3,000 HEPPP projects for 2010-2015 and has provided a basis for the analysis presented throughout the evaluation report.

### **University evaluations of HEPPP-funded projects**

The evaluation sought from universities copies of any evaluations they had conducted of HEPPP-funded projects. Thirty-two universities provided copies of their evaluations, totalling more than 500 evaluation documents. The evaluations provided by universities vary from short evaluations of small scale projects to extensive evaluations of large university consortium projects.

The university evaluations were categorised using the EIF Student Life Cycle framework, and analysed to examine the impact of different types of HEPPP projects and to examine good practice.

### **Review of international literature**

A literature review was conducted of comparable programs in other countries aimed at improving participation and completion of higher education by low SES students. The literature review focused on countries similar to Australia with instructive approaches (based on outcome achieved) to higher education equity (see Appendix B).

## **1.2.2 Quantitative data analysis**

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### **Student data**

De-identified student data from the Higher Education Student Data Collection and the University Applications and Offers Data Collection were analysed to explore the impact of HEPPP on student outcome measures such as enrolments, retention and completion. The data cover 2005-2015. (The method for the econometric analysis is in Appendix D.1.)

The evaluation sought information from universities on the number and type of HEPPP projects each university student had been involved in from 2010 to 2015. Data were received from 28 universities. In most cases, these data were provided in a form that allowed the data to be merged with the Higher Education Student Data Collection. The data provided vary in the number of years of the HEPPP covered, and in comprehensiveness with regard to each university's HEPPP projects. These data were used to provide some indication of the breadth and reach of the HEPPP.

### **Outreach data**

The evaluation asked each university to provide the data on the partner organisations involved in their outreach activities. The partner organizations are largely schools and TAFEs. Universities were asked to provide the number and type of HEPPP project/s in which each partner organisation was involved. These data allowed for an analysis of the scope of university HEPPP outreach activities.

Data on partner organisations were received from 29 universities. As with the student-level HEPPP project data, the years covered and proportion of projects covered by the outreach data varied across data-providing universities.

### **HEPPP financial data**

Program financial data provided by the Department and the Financial Reports of Higher Education Providers dataset were analysed to examine the efficiency of the HEPPP. The HEPPP financial data cover 2010-2015, and the Financial Reports of Higher Education Providers dataset covers 2005-2014.

## **1.2.3 Consultations**

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Stakeholder consultations were conducted in four parts: interviews with university staff, interviews with students, surveys of students, surveys of university staff, and written submissions. Analysis of the consultations was carried out in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package.

## **Consultations with university staff**

### ***Interviews with university staff***

Interviews were undertaken with all 38 universities which receive HEPPP funding. The interviews focused on the design of the HEPPP, each university's HEPPP activities, and areas for improvement. Discussion guides were developed to provide background on the evaluation for the interviewees and included questions to guide and ensure consistency across the interviews.

A total of 121 interviews were conducted with university staff across the 38 universities. Staff interviewed included deputy vice chancellors, equity practitioners, HEPPP coordinators and HEPPP project managers.

Site visits to nine universities were carried out as part of the evaluation. Of the interviews, 43 were conducted face-to-face during these sites visits with the remaining 78 carried out over the phone.

### ***Survey of university staff***

University staff involved in HEPPP implementation were surveyed for their insights into the impacts arising from students' participation on HEPPP projects and barriers/enablers of success of the projects. All universities were invited to participate in the survey, with 25 taking part. A total of 359 survey responses were received.

## **Consultation with university students**

### ***Survey of university students***

Students who had participated in HEPPP projects were surveyed to gain their perspective on the HEPPP projects. All universities were invited to send the survey to relevant students, with 23 universities taking part. Participating universities provided the name of specific HEPPP projects; these were used in the survey questions to ensure students were aware of the project on which they were being asked to comment. A total of 3,544 survey responses were received.

### ***Interviews with university students***

Deeper exploration of university students' experience of HEPPP projects was undertaken through interviews with 30 students from 15 universities. Students were chosen to ensure coverage of the different types of university-based HEPPP projects implemented. Students were recruited for the interviews through an 'opt-in' for future research question in the survey. Interviews were undertaken over the phone and students were compensated for their time.

## **Written submissions**

The evaluation included a written submission process to provide all interested organisations or individuals the opportunity to contribute their views on the HEPPP in writing.

There were two written submission invitations:

- one for schools and other university outreach partners
- one for all other stakeholders (including universities, peak bodies and individuals).

The invitations included guidance as to questions that were of particular interest to the evaluation. In the case of the outreach partners' written submission invitation the questions focused on the impact of the HEPPP on school and vocational education and training (VET) students and their parents and communities. The other written submission invitation had broader questions covering the effectiveness and design of the HEPPP.

The response to the surveys demonstrates the level of stakeholder interest in the HEPPP; 136 written submissions were received, including 79 from schools, 22 from universities and 11 from higher education peak bodies. A list of the written submission received is in Appendix C.

## Consultation analysis

Notes and transcripts from the interviews, qualitative survey responses and the written submissions were analysed in NVivo, a data analysis software package that enabled rigorous coding and analysis of the large qualitative dataset generated by the evaluation.

### 1.2.4 Caveats and limitations

Despite the extensive data gathered and analysed, it has been difficult to establish causal relationships between HEPPP supported activity and the outcomes observed for low SES students.

This is in part due to the nature of the evidence collected as part of the program, but is also a common issue in evaluating social policy programs and public policy making more generally, where evidence is often 'ambiguous, sometimes partly contradictory... and there may be time constraints that restrict the gathering of evidence' (Wilkie and Grant 2009).

A useful categorisation for considering evidence is provided by Leigh (2009) for Australian policymakers, in decreasing levels of rigour:

1. Systematic reviews (meta analyses) of multiple randomised trials
2. High quality randomised trials
3. Systematic reviews (meta analyses) of natural experiments and before after studies
4. Natural experiments (quasi experiments) using techniques such as differences in differences, regression discontinuity, matching, or multiple regression
5. Before-after (pre-post) studies
6. Expert opinion and theoretical conjecture.

The evidence available and used by this evaluation falls into the final two categories.

Many of the university evaluations are before-after studies which compare student outcome indicators, for example retention rates, before and after a HEPPP project. The same approach is therefore also used for analysis of student data for the HEPPP as a whole (see Chapter 9). A limiting factor, however, with before-after studies is that it is not possible to define a counterfactual, that is, what would have happened in the absence of the program (although the econometric modelling in Chapter 9 attempts to estimate a counterfactual).

The surveys undertaken for this evaluation, and the project-level surveys reported by universities in their HEPPP evaluations, are also a form of before-after study, by asking survey respondents to estimate a counterfactual and then judge the program or project's impact from that counterfactual.

The interviews and written submissions contain both aspects of before-after estimations of impact, and expert opinion and theoretical conjecture, and were particularly valuable in providing insights into the appropriateness of the design of HEPPP and its implementation.

The lack of evidence from other parts in the evidence hierarchy has, however, made it difficult to evaluate the impact of the HEPPP and projects funded by the HEPPP with any degree of precision or assignment of causality. For example, '[measuring the] extent and calibration of effectiveness, including which programs have been more effective than others... is an extremely difficult task given the multiple causes affecting student success, achievement and retention; the absence of a consistent and detailed evaluation template for HEPPP programs; and the length of time required to assess effectiveness, e.g. the effectiveness of university outreach to primary schools in supporting student access to, and success at, university, would take more than a decade to determine, even if causation could somehow be isolated' (La Trobe University, Submission 119).

Assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the HEPPP has therefore relied heavily on expert opinion and judgment regarding its potential contribution to the observed changes for students. The recommendations in Chapter 11 discuss how more rigorous evidence of the impact of the HEPPP could be collected in the future.

## 1.3 Approach to categorisation and analysis

### 1.3.1 The Equity Initiatives Framework

The Equity Initiatives Framework (EIF) was developed as part of the Critical Interventions Framework Part II project, which was funded through the National Priorities Pool (NPP) component of the HEPPP in 2014. The project was commissioned by the Department to review evidence of the impact of higher education equity projects carried out by universities in Australia and internationally. It built on an earlier NPP project, 'A Critical Interventions Framework for Advancing Equity in Australian Higher Education', which had been undertaken in 2013.

The Critical Interventions Framework Part II was developed by researchers from the University of Newcastle, the University of Melbourne and La Trobe University, and reviewed 76 equity initiatives that 'demonstrated evidence of effectiveness in promoting good outcomes for students from equity groups as defined by stakeholders' (Bennett et al. 2015), across 34 Australian and nine international institutions.

The resulting EIF aims to provide 'a detailed frame of reference for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of equity programs... [spanning] the entire higher education program student life-cycle, from access initiatives that operate in schools and communities to programs that assist with graduate employment' (Bennett et al. 2015). It is intended to be used as 'a reference guide for planning, monitoring and evaluating equity programs and for building a stronger evidence base for effective strategies' (Bennett et al. 2015).

#### Structure of the Equity Initiatives Framework

The EIF identifies four stages to the student life cycle in which equity initiatives can take place:


- *Pre-Access*: Outreach to Schools and Communities
- *Access*: Pathways and Admissions (including Enabling Pathways)
- *Participation*: Transition, Engagement and Progression
- *Attainment and Transition Out*.

For each lifecycle stage, the EIF defines:

- target groups
- major principles and aims
- key program types.

The EIF also identifies a number of overarching sector- and institution-wide principles and procedures, and examples of different evaluation methods, for equity initiatives (Bennett et al. 2015). Figure 1.1 sets out the EIF target groups for, and the principles and aims of, equity initiatives for each life cycle stage.



**FIGURE 1.1** EQUITY INITIATIVES FRAMEWORK STUDENT LIFE CYCLE OVERVIEW


Student life cycle stage	PRE-ACCESS: Outreach to Schools and Communities	ACCESS: Pathways and Admissions	PARTICIPATION: Transition, Engagement and Progression	ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT
Target groups	Infants, primary and secondary school students, teachers, parents, and community members	Secondary school students and leavers, mature age students, VET students	Commencing / first year students, continuing later year students	Completing students, graduates, employer groups and professional associations
Major principles and aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting and developing aspirations and expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at university</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement and belonging</li> <li>• Academic literacies</li> <li>• Competencies in discipline area/relevant knowledges developed through inclusive pedagogies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employability</li> <li>• Postgraduate study</li> </ul>

SOURCE: BENNETT ET AL. 2015

### Further extension of the Equity Initiatives Framework

The Department has augmented the EIF by refining the EIF key program types and introducing additional disaggregation into the student life cycle. Table 1.1 maps these program types to the student life cycle, and shows that many of the 22 key program types can be delivered at multiple points in the student life cycle. The table maps the program types to the three HEPPP components.

**TABLE 1.1** HEPPP ACTIVITIES MAPPED TO THE EIF STUDENT LIFE CYCLE STAGES AND HEPPP COMPONENTS

Activity ↓	Equity Initiatives Framework Stage										HEPPP component		
	Pre-Access						Participation		Attainment				
	Access												
	Primary school	Secondary Yr 7-10	Secondary Yr 11-12	VET	Mature age	School leavers	First year students	Progression during studies	Completion	Graduate destinations	Partnerships	Participation	National Priorities Pool
Aspiration raising - pre-entry university experience		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					❖●	●	▲
Aspiration raising – non-university experience	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					❖●	●	▲
Careers advice		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	❖●	❖●	▲
Mentoring, peer support		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			❖●	❖●	▲
Academic preparation/support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			❖●	❖●	▲
Professional development	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	❖●	●	▲
Parent/community information/support	✓	✓	✓				✓				❖●	●	▲
Other outreach	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						❖●	●	▲
Pre university qualification pathway				✓	✓	✓						❖●	▲
Foundation programs for extra academic skills				✓	✓	✓						❖●	▲
Inclusive entry processes				✓	✓	✓						❖●	▲
Orientation programs							✓					❖●	▲
First year transition programs							✓					❖●	▲
Scholarships				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				❖●	▲
Inclusive course design/pedagogies				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				❖●	▲
Alternative exit programs								✓				❖●	▲
Monitoring student progress							✓	✓				❖●	▲
Employment support pre-completion							✓	✓	✓			❖●	▲
Employment support post-completion										✓		❖●	▲
Monitoring/evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		❖●	▲
Research	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		❖●	❖●
Enhancing program implementation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		●	❖●

Note: ❖ indicates an activity that achieves the objective of this HEPPP component. ● indicates an activity that can be funded from this program component. ▲ indicates activities that can be the subject of research or innovative trials under the HEPPP National Priorities Pool

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2016

For the purposes of this evaluation the following EIF target groups are considered:

- infants
- primary school students
- secondary school students
- secondary school leavers
- primary school teachers
- secondary school teachers
- primary school parents
- secondary school parents
- mature age students
- community members
- VET students
- commencing/first year university students
- continuing later year university students
- completing university students
- employer groups and professional associations
- First in Family (to attend university)
- refugees.

### 1.3.2 The Equity Initiatives Framework in the evaluation

#### Project inventory

This evaluation analysed all the annual reports submitted by universities for 2010-2015. Each project in the annual reports was categorised according to a number of data fields, including those from the EIF (Table 1.2). The project inventory data are used in the following chapters to analyse the scale and scope of HEPPP activity.

**TABLE 1.2** PROJECT INVENTORY FIELDS

	Data field	Description
1	HEPPP project name	The name given to the project by the university
2	University	Name of university
3	HEPPP component—funding	One of Participation, Partnership, NPP
4	HEPPP component—activity	One of Participation, Partnership, NPP
5	Project initiation year	Calendar year the project was first implemented
6	Project completion year	Calendar year the project will end
7	Objectives	[free text] Objectives of the project
8	Equity groups	One or more of the six identified in <i>A Fair Chance for All</i> (see Section 2.4)
9	Evaluation	Whether the project has been evaluated
10	Number of recipients	Number of program recipients
11	Budget	Total budget for the project in dollars
12	HEPPP budget component	Dollar contribution of HEPPP
13	Other funding component	Dollar contribution of non-HEPPP funding
14	Source of other funding component	The type of institution that provided the additional funding
15	EIF - Student Life Cycle stage	One of four stages, or other
16	EIF - Target groups	One or more of the 17 EIF target groups

Data field	Description
17 EIF - Type of project	One or more of the 22 project types
SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING, BENNETT ET AL. 2015 AND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING	

### Evaluation analysis structure

The implementation, effectiveness and efficiency analysis chapters in this report are structured according to the EIF or use the EIF as an important categorisation and analysis tool.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of HEPPP implementation, in part analysing implementation according to the EIF.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 each correspond with one of the EIF student life cycle stages.

- Chapter 4: Outreach to Schools and Communities—covers the first life cycle stage (also called ‘Pre-Access’)
- Chapter 5: Pathways and Admissions—covers the second life cycle stage (also called ‘Access’)
- Chapter 6: Transition, Engagement and Progression—covers the third life cycle stage (also called ‘Participation’)
- Chapter 7: Attainment and Transition Out—covers the fourth life cycle stage.

Within each of these four chapters, the analysis is structured by the project types set out in Table 1.1 above. To the extent that a project type is relevant to more one life cycle stage, it appears in more than one chapter.

Chapter 8 covers those HEPPP activities which do not sit easily in any particular EIF life cycle stage, but cut across all stages, namely: monitoring/evaluation, research and enhancing program implementation (largely through program trials). In doing so it focuses on NPP activities.

Chapter 9 examines the efficiency of the HEPPP, including using an EIF categorisation.

## 1.4 Report structure

This report is structured as follows:

### Part 1: Introduction and overview of the HEPPP

1. Introduction (this chapter)
2. The design of the HEPPP and other higher education equity policy
3. Overview of HEPPP implementation

### Part 2: Effectiveness and efficiency of the HEPPP

4. Outreach to Schools and Communities
5. Pathways and Admissions
6. Transition, Engagement and Progression
7. Attainment and Transition Out
8. Research and other activities
9. Overall effectiveness
10. Efficiency of the HEPPP

### Part 3: Appropriateness of the HEPPP

11. Appropriateness and recommendations for the future design of the HEPPP
- Appendices



*This section provides an introduction to the HEPPP and its components, including its legislative background and recent history.*

## 2.1 Program overview and objectives

The HEPPP is an Australian Government program established in late 2010 under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA), with its first full year in 2011. The HEPPP is one of three programs outlined in the *Other Grants Guidelines (Education) 2012* (the Guidelines) in accordance with HESA Section 41-15(1), 'for the purpose of promoting equality of opportunity in higher education'.<sup>5</sup> The Guidelines provide the legislative basis for the HEPPP.

Each of the 38 HESA Table A higher education providers is eligible for the HEPPP (HESA 41-10(1)). An agreement between the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and Charles Darwin University enables Charles Darwin University to receive Participation funding and undertake relevant activities on behalf of the Batchelor Institute from 2013 onwards. This means that in practice there are 37 universities involved in the Participation component of the HEPPP (this component is discussed in more detail in Section 2.1.2).

The HEPPP and its aim are outlined in the Guidelines as follows:

*The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) provides funding to providers to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds and improve their retention and completion rates.*

*The HEPPP aims to encourage and assist providers to meet the Commonwealth Government's ambition that, by 2020, 20 per cent of domestic undergraduate students must be from low SES backgrounds.*

*Other Grants Guidelines (Education) 2012, Section 1.40.1*

The Guidelines note that a student is considered to have a low socioeconomic status (SES) background if their home address is in the lowest quartile of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Education and Occupation Index, based on the measure of low SES as determined by the Minister.<sup>6</sup> In practice this is currently measured at the ABS Statistical Area 1 (SA1) level. That is, students considered to be from a low SES background are those whose home address is located in the SA1 areas that contribute (cumulatively) to the lowest 25 per cent of the population on the 2011 SEIFA Index of Education and Occupation. This is the definition used

<sup>5</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.1.1. The additional programs outlined in HESA Section 41-15(1) are the Indigenous Support Program and the Higher Education Disability Support Program.

<sup>6</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.60.1.

throughout the report. Measurement criteria for SES are discussed further in Section 1.1.1 of this report.

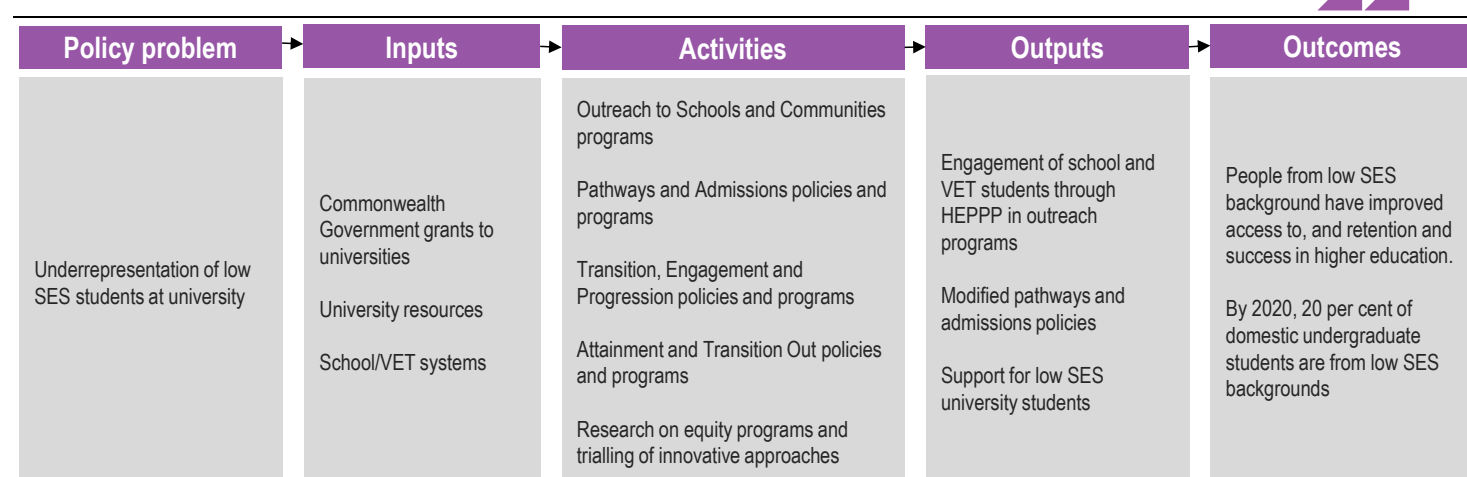
The ambition referenced above that, by 2020, 20 per cent of domestic undergraduate students will be from low SES backgrounds referred to in the Guidelines was originally recommended by the *Review of Higher Education* in 2008 (see Section 2.1.1). It was adopted by the Government in 2009.

The HEPPP consists of three components, with differing objectives and funding arrangements. The three components of the HEPPP are:

1. Participation component—aimed at increasing the participation of current and prospective domestic students from low SES backgrounds in accredited undergraduate qualifications
2. Partnership component—aimed at increasing the total number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities
3. National Priorities Pool (commenced in 2014)—aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the implementation of HEPPP nationally and at an institutional level.

The individual components have changed over time (refer Section 2.1.1), but are considered collectively in Figure 2.1, a high-level logic model overview of the program. The model outlines how the identified core policy problem is addressed through the program, with various inputs and activities at different stages of the student life cycle targeting a number of outputs and intended outcomes.

**FIGURE 2.1** LOGIC MODEL FOR THE HEPPP



Note: The model is based on program documentation and input from the Department.

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING 2016

### 2.1.1 History of the HEPPP

The establishment of the HEPPP in 2010 built on more than twenty years of higher education equity policies and reviews in Australia, throughout which time people from a low SES background have been identified as an under-represented group in higher education.

The most recent, comprehensive *Review of Higher Education* (2008), commonly called the Bradley Review, recognised that ‘the most under-represented groups are those from remote parts of Australia, Indigenous students, those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and those from regional locations’. The Bradley Review called for the establishment of a HEPPP-type program with increased funding, to improve the participation of students from low SES backgrounds.

*That the Australian Government increase the funding for the access and participation of under-represented groups of students to a level equivalent to 4 per cent of the total grants for teaching. This would be allocated through a new program for outreach activities and a loading paid to institutions enrolling students from low socio-economic backgrounds...*

*Bradley Review 2008, Recommendation 31*

The broader higher education equity landscape and preceding policy background to the HEPPP is discussed in greater detail in Section 2.4.

A number of changes have been made to the HEPPP since it was established in 2010. These are discussed in Section 1.1.1, with a timeline of the HEPPP from 2010 to 2016 showing the key points of change for each component (Figure 2.2).

### 2.1.2 Participation component

The objective of the Participation component of the HEPPP, as outlined in the Guidelines, is 'to increase the participation of current and prospective domestic students from low SES backgrounds in accredited undergraduate qualifications' at Table A universities.<sup>7</sup>

The Guidelines provide a list of examples of activities which may be funded through the Participation allocation.<sup>8</sup> These activities include:

- developing and implementing appropriate support services and programs for domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds enrolled or seeking enrolment, such as, but not limited to:
  - inclusive entry processes
  - transition programs to support cultural and geographical issues of inclusion
  - academic preparation
  - modifications to teaching delivery and learning methods to better meet the needs of students from a low SES background
  - mentoring, peer support, tutoring and continued academic support
  - education programs for parents of low SES students, particularly those with children who are first in their families to access higher education
  - monitoring of student progress
- administering application and selection processes for Commonwealth Scholarships
- continuing to offer institutional equity scholarships targeted at low SES students
- undertaking research and monitoring the impact and effectiveness of activities aimed at improving the participation of current and prospective domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds in higher education
- developing and implementing partnership activities for the purpose of encouraging the aspirations and building the capacity of people from low SES backgrounds to access higher education.

Universities may also use Participation funding to supplement their Partnership activities.<sup>9</sup>

The Participation component of the HEPPP consists of an annual funding allocation to universities, which is calculated using a formula based on their proportion of the national total of domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds (refer Section 1.1.1).

### 2.1.3 Partnership component

The purpose of the Partnership component of the HEPPP is to increase access and participation to higher education for people from low SES backgrounds. The objectives of the component are 'to increase the total number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities with appropriate stakeholders including, but not limited to, schools, State/Territory Governments, VET providers and community groups'.<sup>10</sup>

Funding is provided to universities to enable them to undertake outreach and other partnership activities with relevant stakeholders. Funding has been allocated in various ways for the Partnership component since 2010 (Figure 2.2).

<sup>7</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.55.1

<sup>8</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.65.1

<sup>9</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.50.1

<sup>10</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.70.1

Activities undertaken by universities under this component are intended to:

- support collaboration between universities to ensure a coordinated approach to identifying and engaging with appropriate stakeholders...to encourage the participation of prospective domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds in higher education
- concentrate resources to most effectively target low SES communities where aspirations to enter higher education are low and where matriculation to universities is poor.<sup>11</sup>

These activities may:

- assist in improving the understanding and awareness of higher education as a viable post-school option
- assist in pre-tertiary achievement, either at school or via an alternative pathway, to enable consideration for access to higher education
- encourage an increase in the proportion of people from low SES backgrounds who apply for attendance at a Table A university
- support people from low SES backgrounds in linking with Table A universities.<sup>12</sup>

The Guidelines outline a number of conditions of funding under the Partnership component.<sup>13</sup> As well as meeting the prescribed objectives for the component, universities must also demonstrate their 'capacity and commitment' to undertake activities reflecting the following principles:

- collaboration with stakeholders throughout both the design and implementation phases, and engagement with student communities rather than targeting individuals
- early intervention and continuing engagement throughout pre-tertiary years
- promoting awareness of pathways to higher education
- integrated and multi-layered, complementing rather than duplicating existing work
- focused on promoting participation in higher education in general, not at a specific provider
- evidence-based, including intended outcomes, methodology and measures for tracking outcomes.

#### 2.1.4 National Priorities Pool component

The third component of the HEPPP, the National Priorities Pool (NPP), was established in 2014 (Figure 2.2) and is outlined in the Guidelines. The objective of the NPP is:

*to inform more effective implementation of the HEPPP, both by updating the policy basis for the programme and enhancing on-ground delivery at the national level and within individual institutions. It supports projects that develop evidence, trial innovative ideas, build capacity and reform systems to maximise opportunity and outcomes for low SES people in higher education.*

*National Priorities Pool Investment Plan – 2016*

Funding through the NPP is provided on a discrete project basis and guided by an annual investment plan approved by the Minister, which outlines the Minister's priorities for spending the allocated NPP funds for that year. The priority funding areas identified for 2014-2016 are provided in Box 2.1. In 2016, as well as these priority funding areas, low SES students from regional and remote Australia were identified as a particular target group for NPP projects. The NPP is discussed in further detail in Chapter 8.

<sup>11</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.70.5

<sup>12</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.70.1

<sup>13</sup> The Guidelines, Sections 1.80.1 and 1.80.5



**BOX 2.1** NPP PRIORITY FUNDING AREAS 2014-2016***Building the evidence base***

Research and projects commissioned from this priority area will gather the evidence on which future policy development will be based. It will explore opportunities for improvement in current practice and achievement, and investigate new developments in approaches to increasing access, participation and success in higher education.

***Fostering innovation***

Projects commissioned from this priority area will promote innovation within current program delivery by trialling new ideas and practices that assist low SES groups to access and succeed in higher education. This funding area will also target new barriers to higher education, address current gaps in program delivery and assist universities to expand activity to new areas.

***More effective program implementation***

Projects commissioned from this priority area will promote cooperation between policy-makers and the higher education sector, encourage information-sharing and collaboration among equity practitioners, and improve current practice in program delivery.

SOURCE: NATIONAL PRIORITIES POOL INVESTMENT PLANS, 2014-16

**2.1.5 Funding formula**

Funding for the Participation and Partnership components of the HEPPP is allocated by a formula based on each university's proportion of the total number of students from low SES backgrounds. An overview of the changes to the program and the funding formula from 2010 to 2016 can be seen in Figure 2.2, below.

From 2010 until 2014, the formula provided in the Guidelines was used. This formula includes students from low SES backgrounds and students who meet relevant support payment criteria (Box 2.2).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.60. The payment support criteria are: Dependent Youth Allowance (full-time students), ABSTUDY (Living Allowance), Austudy, Pensioner Education Supplement, ABSTUDY Pensioner Education Supplement, ABSTUDY Away from base assistance.


## BOX 2.2 HEPPP FUNDING FORMULA, 2010-2014

1. According to the Guidelines, the indicator is calculated by the following formula:  $C = \frac{(2 \times A + B)}{3}$   
 where:  
**A** = total number of domestic undergraduate students enrolled at a Table A university who have home addresses in the lowest quartile of the SEIFA Education and Occupation Index, based on the measure of low SES as determined by the Minister  
**B** = number of domestic undergraduate students who meet relevant income support payment criteria  
**C** = indicator of undergraduates from low SES backgrounds
2. Annual funding for the Participation component of HEPPP for each provider is then calculated according to the following formula:  $\text{Funding} = \left(\frac{C}{D}\right) \times E$   
 where:  
**D** = total of the indicators of domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds enrolled over all Table A universities  
**E** = Participation funding in that year

SOURCE: OTHER GRANTS GUIDELINES (EDUCATION) 2012, SECTIONS 1.60.1 AND 1.60.10

Between 2010 and 2014, membership of the lowest quartile of the SEIFA Index of Education and Occupation was determined using census district. In 2015 a revised approach to measuring SES was adopted in response to feedback from providers and analysis by the Department in its discussion paper, *Moving to an Enhanced Indicator of Higher Education Students' Socio-Economic Status* (2013). The paper investigated alternative measures of SES, including individual measures of parental education or secondary school background, rather than geographical measures. It ultimately recommended continuing to use a geographical measure of SES with the SEIFA Index of Education and Occupation, though using SA1 level geographical areas rather than census district, due to the greater accuracy of the SA1 level.

The Department's 2013 paper also recommended removing the income support criterion from the formula, based on sector feedback. Both of these recommendations were adopted and the formula was changed in 2014 to comprise only the proportion of low SES students. The amended formula was adopted for use in the HEPPP in 2015 and continues to be used at the time of this evaluation.

**FIGURE 2.2** THE FUNDING APPROACH TO THE HEPPP OVER 2010—2016


	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Participation</b>							
Low SES indicator	Proportion of low SES students and those on Centrelink benefits	Proportion of low SES students and those on Centrelink benefits	Proportion of low SES students and those on Centrelink benefits	Proportion of low SES students and those on Centrelink benefits	Proportion of low SES students and those on Centrelink benefits	Proportion of low SES students	Proportion of low SES students
Determination of membership of lowest quartile of SEIFA IEO	Using Census district	Using Census district	Using Census district	Using Census district	Using Census district	Using SA1	Using SA1
<b>Partnership</b>							
Partnership baseline	\$355,505 per university	\$355,505 per university	\$250,000 per university <sup>1</sup>	\$250,000 per university			
Grant rounds		2011 Competitive Grants Round <sup>2</sup>		2013 Competitive Grants Round <sup>3</sup> ; Behrendt projects			
Allocation by formula <sup>4</sup> with university-specified projects				2013 Partnership projects	2014 Partnership projects		
Allocated as one allocation with Participation funding						Proportion of low SES students	Proportion of low SES students
<b>National Priorities Pool</b>							
Commissioned projects					Specified National Projects	Specified National Projects	Specified National Projects
University-proposed projects							

<sup>1</sup> The Department's funding record is unclear here; some universities appear to receive negative amounts.

<sup>2</sup> The 2011 Competitive Grants Round was also known as 'Round 1'.

<sup>3</sup> The 2013 Competitive Grants Round was also known as the 'Indigenous Round'.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the same formula as for the Participation component.

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA, AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT BUDGET

## 2.1.6 Reporting requirements

Eligible universities are required to report to the Department each year regarding the activities they have undertaken through the HEPPP and the outcomes that have been achieved. The Guidelines specify that 'as part of assessing outcomes, providers will be required to demonstrate the progression of domestic undergraduate students from a low SES background, by year, in terms of participation, retention and success'.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the reporting requirements set out in the Guidelines, reporting for the Partnership grant rounds and for the NPP grants are detailed in the associated Conditions of Grant documents.

### Participation component

In relation to the Participation funding allocated through the formula, universities are asked to provide the Department with relevant information about the activities they have undertaken with the funds. Universities are 'required to report on program activities undertaken, including engagement and support strategies and alternative pathways to university for students, consistent with the objectives at Section 1.55.1 and the activities mentioned in Subsection 1.65.1'.<sup>16</sup> The objective and activities referred to here are discussed earlier in this report, in Section 2.1.2.

<sup>15</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.85.10

<sup>16</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.85.15

This information is provided to the Department at the end of each calendar year in a standardised annual report format. While the template format for the reports has changed a number of times since 2010, the reports generally include the following information for each project:

- title
- type (for example, inclusive entry processes, mentoring, administering student scholarships)
- objectives
- activities
- target group (including equity group)
- location of project
- progress achieved
- expenditure (total and by source).

### **Partnership component**

Reporting requirements for the Partnership component of the HEPPP differ for each funding type. For baseline funding provided from 2010 until 2013, universities were required to:

- explain how the Partnership activities undertaken link with their institution's mission statement and strategic plan
- provide an outline of their institution's Partnership strategy and any memorandums of understanding (MOU)/agreements entered into with partner organisations such as schools, VET providers, community groups, state and territory governments, or industry
- outline the key Partnership activities undertaken indicating:
  - number, type and geographic location of schools or other institutions involved
  - number of students who participated and, where possible, their age and/or year level for school attendees
  - activities directed towards other target groups
- provide any information indicating how Partnership activities meet the prescribed objectives of the component.<sup>17</sup>

For the submission-based grant rounds—in 2011, 2013, and 2014—the reporting requirements were outlined in the relevant documents as part of the competitive grants process. Universities were required to provide a report to the Department on the performance of their partnership project/s for each round, which described the project and its outcomes, and included any relevant university-published reports. Audited financial statements that showed acquittal of the grant money were also required.

Reporting for Partnership activities in 2015 and 2016 is included in the relevant annual reports (the format for which is outlined above), along with reporting for Participation activities, as funding was provided as a single formula-based allocation covering both components.

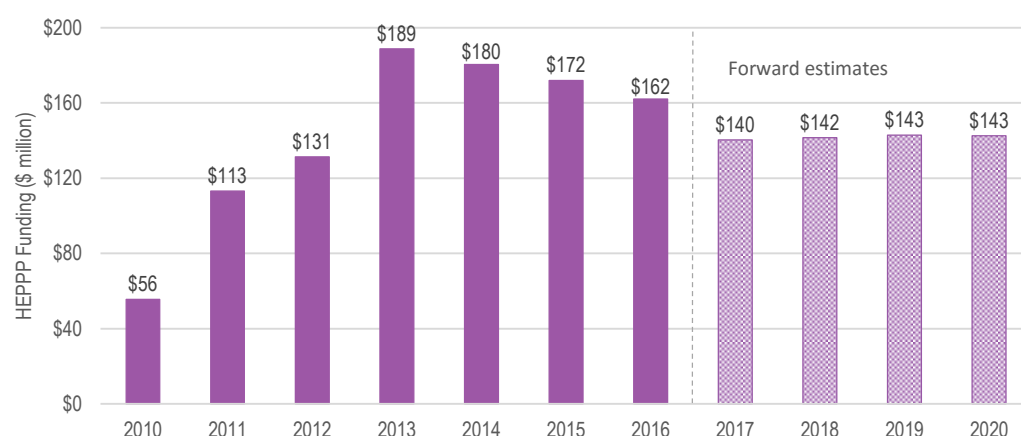
### **National Priorities Pool component**

As with the Partnership grant rounds, the reporting requirements for the NPP are outlined in the relevant grant documentation. Grant recipients are required to provide a final report for the project, which includes an acquittal report comprising an audited income and expenditure statement.

#### **2.1.7 Overview of HEPPP funding**

Total program funding for the HEPPP increased from 2010 until 2013, before a reduction in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Forward estimates show an additional decrease in funding in 2017, after which the funding level is forecast to remain relatively constant until 2020 (Figure 2.3). As a proportion of teaching and learning funding, HEPPP funding grew from 1 per cent in 2010 to 2.7 per cent in 2014 (refer Chapter 10).

<sup>17</sup> The Guidelines, section 1.85.20

**FIGURE 2.3** ANNUAL HEPPP FUNDING, 2010-2020

Note: Figures for 2010-2015 reflect actual expenditure (i.e. funds allocated less any underspends), while figures for 2016 onward reflect PBS figures.  
 SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION, ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING 2016

## 2.2 Other policy supporting higher education equity

While the HEPPP is the Australian Government's targeted program to improve low SES participation in higher education, there are a number of other programs within the higher education system in Australia that support equity while not necessarily targeting low SES individuals.

The most important of these is the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) which provides an income contingent loan to eligible higher education students to cover university tuition fees. Loans are repaid by recipients once their income exceeds a minimum threshold. The HELP removes the significant potential barrier to university study of upfront fees and means that students are able to access higher education regardless of their ability to pay tuition fees.

In addition to the HEPPP and the HELP, the Australian Government has a range of other programs and policies that support equity in higher education. These include a number of additional access and participation initiatives that are targeted at other equity groups, as well as income support arrangements that provide financial assistance to university students (and others) that are not targeted specifically to students from equity groups, but provide additional support for these and other students. These programs are outlined below in Table 2.1.

These programs are not in scope for this evaluation, but they are detailed here to provide the broader higher education system context in which the HEPPP operates.

**TABLE 2.1** ADDITIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT, 2016

Program title	Target group <sup>a</sup>	Description
Access and participation		
Indigenous Student Support Program <sup>18</sup>	Indigenous people	The Indigenous Student Support Program provides grants to higher education providers to assist them to meet the needs of their Indigenous students.
Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme — Tertiary Tuition	Indigenous people	The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme provides funding for additional tuition support for Indigenous students.

<sup>18</sup> The Australian Government announced in the 2016-17 Budget that the Indigenous Support Program, the Commonwealth Scholarships Program, and the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme — Tertiary Tuition program would be consolidated under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy on 1 January 2017.

Program title	Target group <sup>a</sup>	Description
Disability Support Programme	People with disability	The Disability Support Programme provides funding to eligible higher education providers to undertake activities that assist in removing barriers to access for students with disability. It has three components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Additional Support for Students with Disabilities</li> <li>– Performance-based Disability Support Funding</li> <li>– The Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET).</li> </ul>
National Disability Coordination Officer Programme (NDCO)	People with disability	The NDCO Programme works strategically to assist people with disability access and participate in tertiary education and subsequent employment, through a network of regionally based NDCOs.
Higher Education Loan Program (HELP)		
HECS-HELP	Commonwealth-supported students	The HECS-HELP scheme provides loans to eligible students studying in a Commonwealth supported place, to cover the student contribution amount of their university fees. Until 1 January 2017, students are offered a 10 per cent discount for upfront payments under the scheme. Loans are repaid by recipients once their income exceeds a minimum annual threshold.
FEE-HELP	Fee-paying students	The FEE-HELP scheme provides eligible fee-paying students with assistance towards their university fees, on a loan basis. Loans are to be repaid by recipients once their income exceeds a minimum threshold determined by the Government.
Student income support		
Youth Allowance	Young people (various eligibility criteria)	Youth Allowance provides financial assistance for people aged 16 to 24 years who are studying full time, undertaking a full time Australian Apprenticeship, training, looking for work or sick.
Austudy	Full time students or apprentices aged 25 years or more	Austudy provides financial assistance for people aged over 25 years who are studying full time or undertaking a full time Australian Apprenticeship.
ABSTUDY	Indigenous people	ABSTUDY provides financial assistance for Indigenous Australians who are studying or undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship.
Student Start-Up Loan/Scholarship	Recipients of Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY	The Student Start-Up Loan is a voluntary, tax-free loan for higher education students receiving another form of student income support. Loans are to be repaid by recipients once their income exceeds a minimum threshold determined by the Government. Before 1 January 2016, the program was provided on a scholarship, rather than a loan, basis.
Relocation Scholarship	ABSTUDY or Youth Allowance students relocating from a regional or remote area for study	The Relocation Scholarship is an annual payment to help eligible ABSTUDY or Youth Allowance students with their higher education if they have relocated to or from a regional or remote area to study.
Commonwealth Scholarships Programme	Indigenous people	The Commonwealth Scholarships Programme provides support to eligible Indigenous higher education students with the general costs of study and support where they have had to move from a rural or remote area to study. A number of scholarships are offered through the program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Indigenous Access Scholarship</li> <li>– Indigenous Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarship</li> <li>– Indigenous Commonwealth Accommodation Costs Scholarship</li> <li>– Indigenous Enabling Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarship</li> <li>– Indigenous Enabling Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship.</li> </ul>

Program title	Target group <sup>a</sup>	Description
Child care assistance – Child Care Benefit – Child Care Rebate – Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance	Parents	The Commonwealth provides various forms of support to assist with the cost of child care for families, including additional assistance for parents receiving income support payments and undertaking approved study or work-seeking activities.
Commonwealth Grant Scheme		
Regional loading for universities	Regional universities	The Commonwealth provides regional loading funding to assist with the additional costs associated with operating regional universities.

<sup>a</sup> These programs provide support to students from equity groups or universities that may have a significant proportion of students from these equity groups. However, the programs are not necessarily intended *only* for students from these groups. For example, child care assistance is available for parents who are studying, independent of any equity group background.

SOURCE: GALE AND PARKER 2013; BUDGET PAPERS; DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, STUDY ASSIST AND DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEBSITES

## 2.3 Current policy context

The HEPPP was introduced during a period of broad and significant change for the higher education sector and has had a strong influence on equity objectives in subsequent years. Recent reforms and the current landscape of higher education policy are discussed below, including the introduction of the demand driven system (DDS) in 2012, the reform packages proposed in 2014, and the Government's current consultation process and review of the sector.

### 2.3.1 Demand driven system

The Bradley Review (2008) made 46 recommendations in total, including a number regarding equity. It also recommended introducing 'a demand-driven entitlement system for domestic higher education students, in which recognised providers are free to enrol as many eligible students as they wish in eligible higher education courses and receive corresponding government subsidies for those students' (Recommendation 29). The Australian Government adopted the recommendation and the DDS was implemented in 2012. As a form of transition to the system, universities were given permission to over-enrol Commonwealth Supported Places by 10 per cent from 2010 (Department of Education and Training 2015).

Since the DDS was implemented, the sector has seen an increase in university enrolments across all student segments, including students from low SES backgrounds (Kemp Norton 2014). The impact of the DDS on participation is discussed further in Chapter 3 of this evaluation report.

### 2.3.2 Proposed higher education reform

The Australian Government proposed a range of reforms to the higher education sector in 2014, through the 2014-15 Budget, the Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014 and, following recommendations by the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee and negotiations with various Senators, the subsequent Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014. The Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014 has not passed the Parliament; however its Schedule 9A proposes a number changes for the HEPPP which are important to note for recent policy context of the program.

The Bill proposes replacing the HEPPP with the Higher Education Participation Programmes, comprising:

- a grants programme, the Higher Education Participation (Access and Participation) Programme
- a scholarships programme, the Higher Education Participation (Scholarships Fund) Programme
- retention of the National Priorities Pool, through the Higher Education Participation (National Priorities Pool) Programme.



An overview of these programs, and their key differences from the existing HEPPP, is provided in Figure 2.4. The major differences are:

- the programs would target a broader group of students, those from six disadvantaged groups, rather than only those from low SES backgrounds:
  - people from a low SES background
  - people with disability
  - Indigenous people
  - people from regional or remote areas
  - people from a non-English speaking background
  - women in non-traditional areas of study
- the scope of the programs would be broadened to include students undertaking postgraduate degrees as well as undergraduate degrees
- the Participation funding and reporting period would shift from annual to a three-year period
- the formula for calculating funding allocations would change to incorporate low SES students' success as well as the number of low SES students
- institutional eligibility would change for the first two components, to include those Table A universities with a proportion of low SES students which is above a given threshold, to be determined by the Minister.

The six 'disadvantaged' groups proposed by the Bill are largely in line with the original six groups identified in *A Fair Chance for All* (refer Section 2.3).

**FIGURE 2.4** CHANGES PROPOSED IN THE 2014 BUDGET AND THE HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH AND REFORM BILL 2014

Existing HEPPP (2010-2016) <i>(see Figure 2.2 for program changes over time)</i>	Proposed but not implemented	
	HEPP (2014 Budget)	HEPP (HERR Bill 2014)
Participation component <i>Formula: number of low SES students</i>	Access and Participation Fund <sup>1</sup> <i>Formula: number of low SES students; success of those students</i>	Access and Participation Fund <sup>1</sup> <i>Formula: number of low SES students; success of those students</i>
Partnerships component <i>Formula: number of low SES students</i>		Scholarships Fund <i>Formula: number of low SES students; success of those students</i>
National Priorities Pool <i>(introduced in 2014)</i>	National Priorities Pool	National Priorities Pool
<b>Eligibility:</b> All Table A universities <b>Target group:</b> People from a low SES background <b>Funding cycle:</b> Annual	<b>Eligibility:</b> All Table A universities <b>Target group:</b> Six disadvantaged groups <b>Funding cycle:</b> Three years	<b>Eligibility:</b> Table A universities with % low SES students above a given threshold would be eligible for the two funds. All Table A universities would be eligible for the NPP. <b>Target group:</b> Six disadvantaged groups <b>Funding cycle:</b> Three years

<sup>1</sup> The Access and Participation Fund would fund activities previously eligible under both the Participation and Partnership components.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2016

### 2.3.3 Higher education reform consultation

In 2016, the Department of Education and Training undertook a public consultation process on the future of higher education funding and reform. A discussion paper, *Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education*, was released in May 2016 for public comment. The discussion paper outlined a range of issues for Australia's higher education system and suggested potential policy changes. The consultation process closed on 25 July 2016, and the Government has indicated that it intends to appoint an expert advisory panel to provide advice on the content and



implementation of the final higher education reform package. The HEPPP evaluation was outlined in the 'Fairness and equity' chapter of the paper. Particular reference was made to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students and those from regional and remote areas.

## 2.4 Preceding higher education equity policy

Equity in higher education has been a consideration of the Australian Government for a number of decades, with participation of students from low SES backgrounds consistently identified as an area for attention.

### 2.4.1 Higher Education Equity Program

#### Dawkins White Paper

The Australian Government has allocated equity funding to higher education providers since 1985, originally using an annual competitive grants process (Broadbent 1994). The first comprehensive higher education equity policy in Australia was developed through the Green Paper and White Paper processes undertaken in 1987 and 1988 by then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, The Hon. John Dawkins AO (Ramsay 2005).

The White Paper drew attention to the importance of equity in higher education, and identified a number of key disadvantaged groups that remain the focus of contemporary equity policy, including people from families with low incomes, those from rural areas, people with disability, Indigenous people, and women in non-traditional areas of study. These groups broadly follow from the disadvantaged groups identified with respect to school education in the 1970s (DEST 2007). The White Paper notes the importance of sector growth as well as the need for 'direct and specific strategies' at the institutional, state and federal levels to promote equity, and it identifies the 'crucial role' of schools as well as higher education institutions in improving equity (Box 2.3).

#### BOX 2.3 HE EQUITY POLICY DIRECTION FROM THE DAWKINS WHITE PAPER

'The Government is committed to improving access to and success in the higher education system. This goal is critical to our ability to realise the full potential of all Australians and to produce the highest quality graduates. Inefficiencies arise because significant barriers still exist to the full participation of disadvantaged groups in higher education. Capable and qualified people from families with relatively low income levels, from rural areas and the disabled, draw less on the benefits of higher education than others. As well, for reasons related not only to income, Aboriginals face distinct disadvantages in terms of access and some migrant groups face particular cultural and language barriers to successful participation and inadequate recognition of qualifications gained overseas. Furthermore, women now account for more than half the total enrolments in higher education, but they remain heavily concentrated in a narrow range of courses and disciplines. This high degree of concentration is not only a significant barrier to women's full and equal participation in subsequent employment but is also a major source of structural rigidity and inefficiency.

Improvements in access and equity are heavily dependent on growth in the system. Without new places in the system, it will be difficult to change the balance of the student body to reflect more closely the structure and composition of society as a whole.

While growth will facilitate the achievement of greater equity in higher education, growth alone will not be sufficient. As a complement, more direct and specific strategies are needed at the institutional, State and national levels. The development of these strategies requires a close examination of factors influencing both access to higher education and the success rates of those who gain entry. Schools as well as higher education institutions will have a crucial role to play in this process.'

SOURCE: DAWKINS 1988

The Dawkins White Paper also proposed a range of key higher education reforms, including the establishment of the HECS scheme (now HECS-HELP). This reform agenda led to the development of a public discussion paper in 1990, *A Fair Chance for All*, by the Department of Employment,

Education and Training and the National Board of Employment, Education and Training. *A Fair Chance for All* has continued to provide a foundation for higher education equity policy in the decades since.

### ***A Fair Chance for All***

The Department's discussion paper, *A Fair Chance for All* (1990), formally identified the following six 'specific groups' as the focus of equity policy:

- people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- women, with particular emphasis on non-traditional courses and research and higher degrees
- people from non-English speaking backgrounds
- people with disabilities
- people from rural and isolated areas.

Although operational definitions for the groups were not established until 1994—in Martin's (1994) *Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education* report—*A Fair Chance for All* set out specific objectives and targets for each group, and provided a range of strategies that could be used to achieve these (Box 2.4). The six equity groups continue to shape higher education equity policy in Australia, including as the six disadvantaged groups proposed as the target for HEPPP in the reforms discussed above.

#### **BOX 2.4** OBJECTIVES, TARGETS AND STRATEGIES FOR PEOPLE FROM SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS, *A FAIR CHANCE FOR ALL*

##### ***Objective***

To improve the participation in higher education of people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds so that the mix of commencing students more closely resembles the mix of the general population.

##### ***Target***

All institutions to develop special entry arrangements for people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds by 1992.

##### ***Strategies to achieve the objective and target***

- 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.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND NATIONAL BOARD OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING 1990

A number of features of current equity policy as manifested through the HEPPP are visible in the strategies and broader objectives of *A Fair Chance for All*. These include the specific focus on outreach (through schools and communities, as well as the VET sector), the importance of special entry arrangements and support programs, and the focus on participation and improving the representation of people from low SES backgrounds to be more aligned with that in the broader population.

*A Fair Chance for All* identified the responsibilities of both the Government and higher education institutions to achieve national equity goals (Box 2.5), and these responsibilities formed the Higher Education Equity Program (Broadbent 1994).

**BOX 2.5** COMMONWEALTH AND INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY RESPONSIBILITIES**Commonwealth responsibilities**

- develop a national overview of equity problems, initiatives and gaps in provision
- fund and evaluate specific purpose programs (such as HEEP and the Aboriginal Participation Initiative)
- disseminate information on successful and innovative equity strategies
- monitor national progress toward the achievement of equity.

**Institutional responsibilities**

- develop detailed equity plans for their own institution each year
- integrate equity objectives into the financial plans of the institution
- examine the composition of the student population to determine which of the six disadvantaged groups are the most appropriate to target within their institution
- develop ways of monitoring the success of specific equity initiatives
- prepare annual reports on progress towards achieving equity objectives.

SOURCE: BROADBENT 1994

**Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP)**

The HEEP required institutions to submit equity plans and progress reports to the Department each year (Box 2.5). Institutions did not have to target all of the six equity groups, and could tailor plans to their specific student population and catchment area. Indigenous students were supported through the separate Indigenous Support Funding program (James et al. 2004). The equity plans were included in the education profiles that universities provided to the Department, and covered a three year period (Ramsay 2005). The first equity plans were developed in 1990, covering the 1991-1993 period (Broadbent 1994).

The Government provided funding to universities based on their equity plans—approximately \$4 million in total funding per year, equivalent to almost \$7 million in 2016 (Broadbent 1994). This was ‘not meant to represent the sum total of institutional resources allocated to equity issues, but rather [was] provided as an incentive payment’ to encourage universities to integrate equity objectives into their broader planning and decision-making processes, and to invest their own resources into these objectives (Broadbent 1994).

At the time, low SES was defined at the postcode level, using the ABS Index of Education and Occupation. Funding was calculated using the number of urban low SES students in each university, ‘to avoid the double counting of students from rural or isolated areas’ (James et al. 2004).

In 1994, Broadbent’s evaluation of the program found that in contrast to the other equity groups, which had increasing participation rates and were meeting their set targets, no specific participation targets had been set for the low SES or rural/isolated groups in *A Fair Chance for All*. Their participation rates remained less than the broader population, although recent trends could not be determined. Broadbent proposed a number of future directions, including the development of measurable and consistent definitions of disadvantaged groups, improved data collection, reassessing access and participation targets, greater emphasis on program effectiveness and increased information-sharing between stakeholders.

A further review of the Government’s higher education equity policy was undertaken between 1995 and 1996 by the Higher Education Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training. The report of that review, *Equality, Diversity and Excellence: Advancing the National Higher Education Equity Framework*, examined progress towards the equity objectives set out in the White Paper and *A Fair Chance for All*, and provided recommendations for an equity framework for the following five years.

The report noted that access and participation had improved significantly for several groups since 1990, and that people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds or isolated areas were now the most under-represented in higher education. The review also noted that there had recently been an increased focus on student outcomes, that is, success and retention rates, as well as access and participation. It recommended mainstreaming the equity program into higher education planning

and management at the institutional and system level, and also recommended the awarding of performance-based equity funding to universities on a three-yearly basis. However, the report's recommendations were not adopted and the HEEP continued 'as per the original framework' until changes were announced by the Commonwealth in 2003 (Ramsay 2005).

## 2.4.2 Higher Education Equity Support Program

Between 2003 and 2005 a number of changes were made to equity policy as part of the Australian Government's broader higher education reform program, *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future*. Equity was identified as one of the four principles underpinning the reform, along with quality, sustainability, and diversity (DEST 2007). The quantum of total equity funding was increased by \$45 million per year, which included the introduction of Commonwealth Learning Scholarships that were targeted to low SES, rural and isolated, and Indigenous students (Ramsay 2005). Additionally, research was commissioned into the performance of the equity groups in higher education over the preceding decade, and into whether the six equity groups that had previously been defined were still appropriate. The resulting report, *Analysis of Equity Groups in Higher Education 1991-2002* (James et al. 2004), examined the access, participation, success and retention rates for five of the equity groups—the performance of Indigenous people was not included in the research scope.

The report found that higher education access and participation rates for people from low SES backgrounds had remained relatively stable between 1991 and 2002, and were significantly lower than their population share and the rates for people from high SES backgrounds (James et al. 2004). In comparison, the 'mean success rates for the three SES groups fluctuated only marginally'. Differences in enrolment patterns—including subject discipline, course level and university type—also varied between SES groups, in similar patterns to those seen today (Gale and Parker 2013).

A key conclusion from the report was that:

*Special emphasis should be given within the equity policy framework to people from low socio-economic backgrounds due to the continuing extent of under-representation of this group, with recognition of the particular effects of socio-economic background for people from rural and isolated backgrounds.*

James et al. 2004

Following this report, two new programmes were established by the Australian Government, the Higher Education Equity Support Program (ESP) and the Higher Education Disability Support Program (DEST 2007). Guidelines for the ESP were contained in previous versions of the *Other Grants (Education) Guidelines*.

Under the ESP, HESA Table A universities—and the Australian Maritime College in 2006 and 2007—were allocated funding based on the enrolment, retention and success of students from low SES backgrounds, with a weighting for those from rural and isolated backgrounds.<sup>19</sup> This was a change from the HEEP, through which funding had been provided based on performance across the equity groups. An additional change was that the equity group of women in non-traditional areas of study was replaced by a 'broader equity objective of overcoming educational disadvantage associated with gender' (DEST 2007).

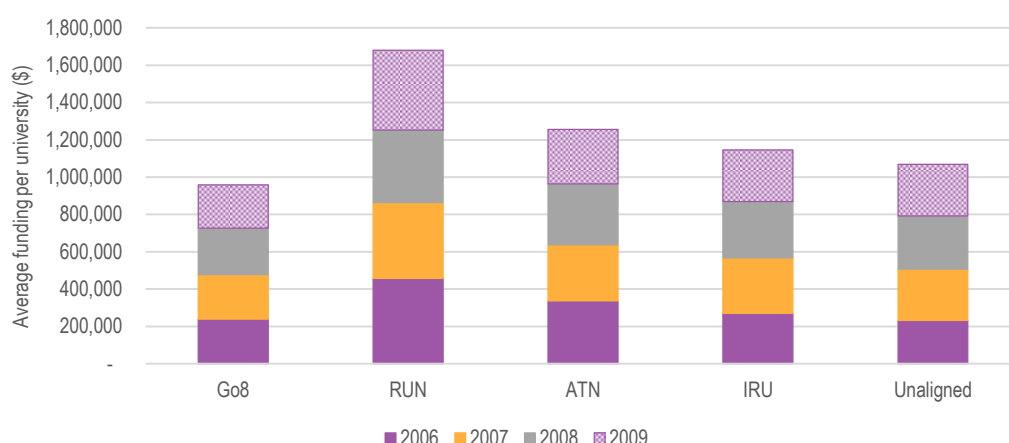
Annual Commonwealth expenditure on the program grew between 2006 and 2009:<sup>20</sup>

- 2006: \$11.028 million
- 2007: \$11.249 million
- 2008: \$11.474 million
- 2009: \$11.715 million.

Average annual funding per university under the ESP, when analysed by university grouping, shows that universities in the Regional Universities Network received significantly more funding than other universities over the life of the program, while the Group of Eight universities received the least funding (Figure 2.5). The annual funding received within each group is relatively stable over the years.

<sup>19</sup> From 2008, this was changed to students from 'regional and remote' backgrounds.

<sup>20</sup> Expenditure on higher education programs table, Higher Education Reports 2006 through 2009, DEST and DEEWR.

**FIGURE 2.5** AVERAGE ESP FUNDING PER UNIVERSITY, 2006-2009

Note: Funding is depicted in each year's dollars.

SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION REPORTS 2006 THROUGH 2009, DEST AND DEEWR

In order to receive ESP funding, universities were required to fulfil certain eligibility criteria, including:

- running outreach programs to attract disadvantaged students into higher education
- offering specialised support services for disadvantaged students to assist their progression through higher education
- administering the application and selection process for Commonwealth Learning Scholarships
- providing institutional equity scholarships to complement the Commonwealth Scholarships (DEEWR 2009).

As under the HEEP, universities had the flexibility to target their activities under the program towards the equity groups that were most relevant to their circumstances and environment (DEST 2007).

In 2008, the Australian Government commissioned an expert panel comprising Professor Denise Bradley AC, Mr Peter Noonan, Dr Helen Nugent AO, and Mr Bill Scales AO to undertake a review of the Australian higher education system (the Bradley Review). The panel's final report and recommendations included a significant emphasis on equity and were the catalyst for the development of the HEPPP and its implementation in 2010, replacing the ESP (refer Section 2.1.1). The HEPPP was announced in the 2009–2010 budget and replaced the ESP from 2010 (DEEWR 2009).

### 2.4.3 Higher education reviews since 2010

Although there has not been a specific evaluation of the HEPPP, there have been a number of reviews of higher education since 2010 which have discussed the HEPPP and equity objectives for higher education more broadly.

In 2011, a review of higher education base funding was undertaken by an Expert Panel appointed by the Australian Government (the Lomax-Smith Review). The review discussed the under-representation of students from low SES backgrounds in higher education, their increasing participation, and the increased costs to universities from enrolling and supporting these students. The review recommended continuing government support of this differential cost, and uncapping the Participation component of the HEPPP to maintain the value of funding per low SES FTE student. It also recommended expanding the Partnership component of the program.

The *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* undertaken in 2012 (the Behrendt Review) also provided a number of recommendations for the HEPPP. The Review recommended revision of the Guidelines to provide further clarification that funding under the program should be targeted at promoting higher education in general, rather than promotion of courses at specific institutions, as the panel had 'heard anecdotally that some universities are using HEPPP funding for marketing activities...rather than to encourage participation

in higher education more broadly' (Behrendt Review 2012). Additionally, the Behrendt Review recommended amending the Guidelines so that projects targeting Indigenous young people have a greater focus on developing the academic skills of school students, as well as building individual and community aspiration and knowledge about higher education.

The *Review of the Demand Driven Funding System* (the Kemp Norton Review 2014) examined sectoral participation trends and rates of participation by students from low SES backgrounds. It found that the DDS was responsible for increased enrolments in higher education by low SES students and that low SES students would benefit from increased access to sub-bachelor courses. Kemp and Norton recommended not having set enrolment share targets for low SES students, due to the risk this may incentivise the recruitment of students who were not likely to succeed at university simply to meet the target.

In their report, Kemp and Norton discuss the HEPPP (2014), finding it to be 'a theoretically plausible program' which is 'likely to increase low SES higher education participation over the medium term' when combined with an 'improved design of the demand driven system', although they note that at the time of writing, it was 'too early to make any findings about its effectiveness'. In particular, outcomes data from universities' outreach activities have a lag time of several years, as the activities are often targeted at primary and secondary students who are in the Pre-Access stage of the student life cycle. As the HEPPP has now been in operation for six years, those students are entering the Access stage of the life cycle, and data covering the relevant time period are becoming available, providing one of the first opportunities to evaluate the program's impact on these students.

## 3

IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE HEPPP

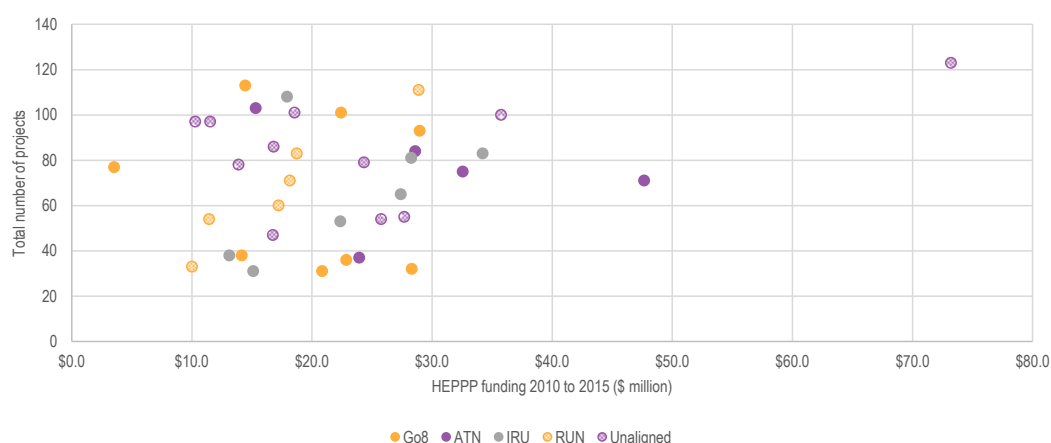
*This chapter provides an overview of implementation of the HEPPP, including the nature and extent of projects carried out by universities.*

### 3.1 Overview of HEPPP activity

Analysis of the annual reports indicates there were 2,679 projects across the 37 universities between 2010 and 2015; an average of around 70 projects per university. The number of projects and the distribution of funding is not even across the sector (Figure 3.1), reflecting each university's share of low SES students, whether universities have been awarded competitive grant funding under the Partnership grant rounds or the NPP, as well as the universities' specific implementation strategies.

The number of projects undertaken by a single university varied from 31 to 123 for the period, with total funding received by each university varying significantly, from \$3.5 million to over \$73 million.

**FIGURE 3.1** TOTAL PROJECTS AND FUNDING BY UNIVERSITY, 2010-2015



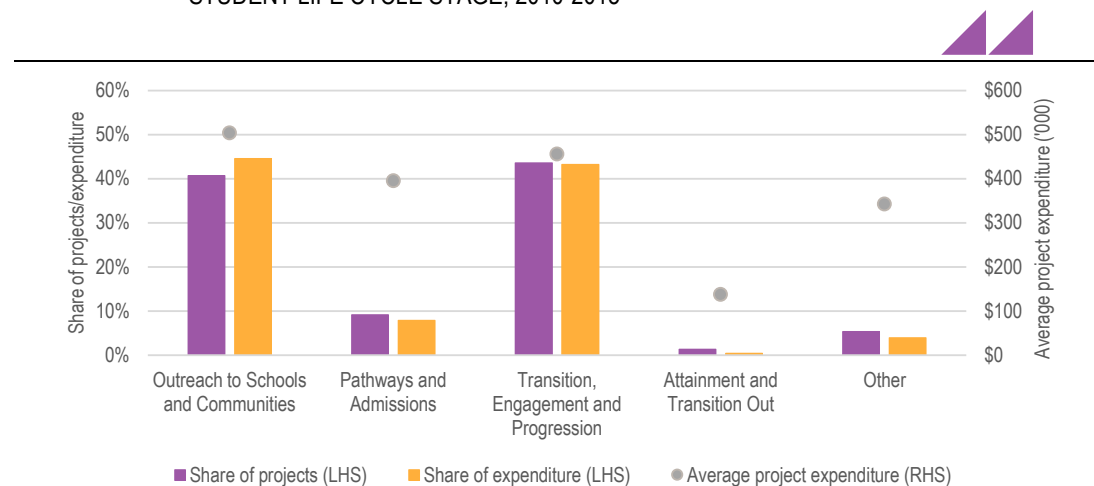
SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS, HEPPP FINANCE DATASET

Similarly, projects and expenditure are not evenly distributed across the student life cycle, with 44 per cent of projects and 43 per cent expenditure targeted at the Transition, Engagement and Progression stage (Figure 3.2). Around 41 per cent of projects and 45 per cent of expenditure are at the Outreach stage—this stage also has the highest average project expenditure at \$504,000. Pathways and Admissions account for around 8 per cent of projects and expenditure, and Attainment



and Transition Out has around 1 per cent of projects, reflecting universities' focus on assisting low SES students with their studies, rather than preparing them to transition out of university (which is not an activity listed in the Guidelines). Approximately 4-5 per cent of projects and expenditure do not clearly link to any particular stage of the student life cycle; these projects include administration, research and staff training (refer Chapter 10).

**FIGURE 3.2** SHARE OF PROJECTS/EXPENDITURE, AND AVERAGE PROJECT EXPENDITURE BY STUDENT LIFE CYCLE STAGE, 2010-2015

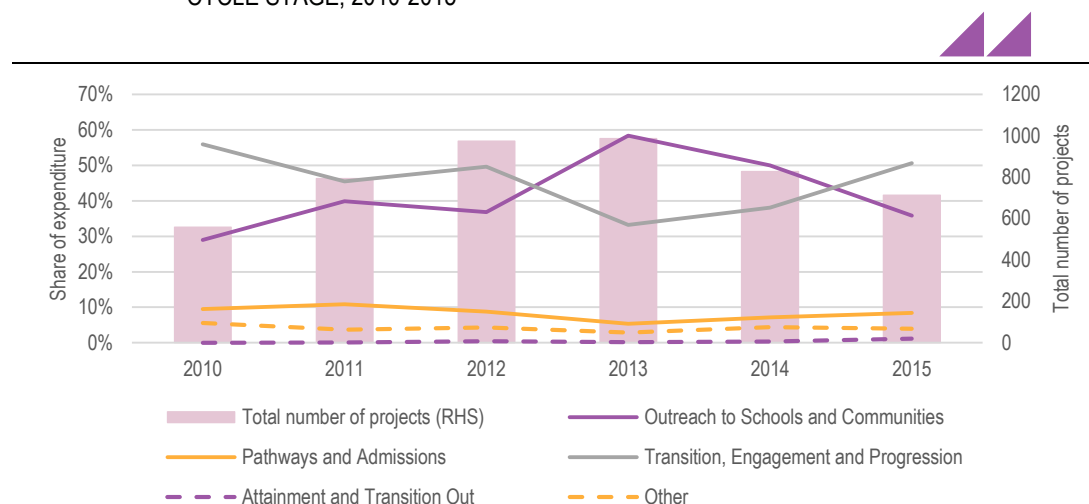


SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

The number of new and ongoing projects being implemented in each year rose from around 560 projects in 2010 to over 900 in 2012 and 2013, before falling to 713 in 2015 (Figure 3.3). These data are consistent with information gathered through the consultations for this evaluation—universities generally reported that over recent years they have become more strategic around HEPPP expenditure, and reduced the number of HEPPP projects to focus on what are considered to be key areas of impact.

The share of all HEPPP expenditure spent on Outreach projects rose from 29 per cent in 2010 to a peak 58 per cent in 2013 before falling over 2014 and 2015 (Figure 3.3). In part, this reflects the Partnership grant rounds in 2011 and 2013 (refer Chapter 2). The share of expenditure on Transition, Engagement and Progression projects also varies, in large part counterbalancing the fluctuations in Outreach expenditure. The share of expenditure for the other stages is relatively steady over time.



**FIGURE 3.3** TOTAL NUMBER OF PROJECTS AND SHARE OF EXPENDITURE BY STUDENT LIFE CYCLE STAGE, 2010-2015

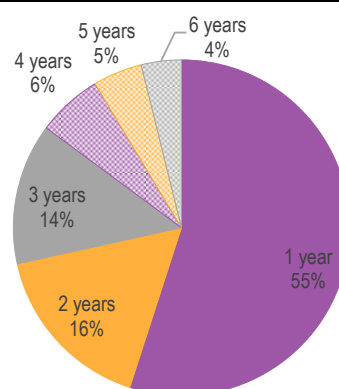
Note: The same project can appear in more than one year.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

Data on the length of HEPPP projects indicate that most projects start and finish within a single year. Figure 3.4 shows the duration of HEPPP projects that began in 2010-2013—this time period is chosen to show a more valid estimate of project length than would be produced by considering all projects, as projects that commenced in 2014 and 2015 could only be running for a maximum of two and one years respectively.

The relative shortness of HEPPP projects—71 per cent of projects conclude within two years—has two contributing factors. Universities reported in interviews for this evaluation that, in some cases, particular interventions were trialled with HEPPP funding and shown to be ineffective and ceased. In other cases, activities trialled under HEPPP were shown to be effective, and were then funded by other sources, normally general university revenue.

The second factor driving short project durations is the HEPPP's annual funding cycle. Through the interviews and written submissions, universities almost unanimously reported that the one year funding cycle impacted their ability to design and plan projects over multi-year periods. This in turn, made it more difficult to develop partnerships with external organisations, and challenging to hire and retain experienced and qualified staff. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 11.

**FIGURE 3.4** DURATION OF HEPPP PROJECTS, 2010-2013

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

### 3.2 HEPPP activity by university groupings and regionality

HEPPP activity, including funding and project life cycle stages, varies between universities. In this section, the share of expenditure spent on projects at different stages of the student life cycle is analysed by university groupings and across metropolitan and regional universities. The share of average university funding is also compared.

The university groupings are set out in Table 3.1. For the purposes of this evaluation, universities for which the headquarter campus falls within one of the following ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure Areas are referred to as 'regional universities':

- Inner Regional
- Outer Regional
- Remote
- Very Remote.

Universities that have their headquarter campus address within the classification of Major Cities of Australia are not considered regional or remote for the purposes of the evaluation. This includes, but is not restricted to, areas such as:

- Canberra (ACT)
- Central Coast, Gold Coast, Newcastle, Queanbeyan and Wollongong (NSW)
- Sippy Downs and Sunshine Coast (Queensland)
- Mawson Lakes (SA)
- Geelong (Victoria).

Regional universities are identified in bold text in Table 3.1 below.

**TABLE 3.1** UNIVERSITY GROUPINGS AND REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Grouping	Universities	
Australian Technology Network (ATN)	Curtin University of Technology Queensland University of Technology (QUT) RMIT University	University of South Australia University of Technology Sydney (UTS)
Group of Eight (Go8),	Monash University The Australian National University (ANU) The University of Adelaide The University of Melbourne	The University of New South Wales (UNSW) The University of Queensland (UQ) The University of Western Australia (UWA) University of Sydney
Innovative. Research Universities (IRU),	<b>Charles Darwin University (CDU)</b> Flinders University Griffith University	<b>James Cook University (JCU)</b> La Trobe University Murdoch University
Regional Universities Network (RUN)	<b>Central Queensland University</b> <b>Federation University Australia</b> <b>Southern Cross University</b>	<b>The University of New England (UNE)</b> <b>University of Southern Queensland</b> University of the Sunshine Coast
Unaligned	Australian Catholic University (ACU) <b>Charles Sturt University (CSU)</b> Deakin University Edith Cowan University Macquarie University Swinburne University of Technology	The University of Newcastle The University of Wollongong University of Canberra <b>University of Tasmania</b> Victoria University (VU) Western Sydney University (WSU)

## Grouping

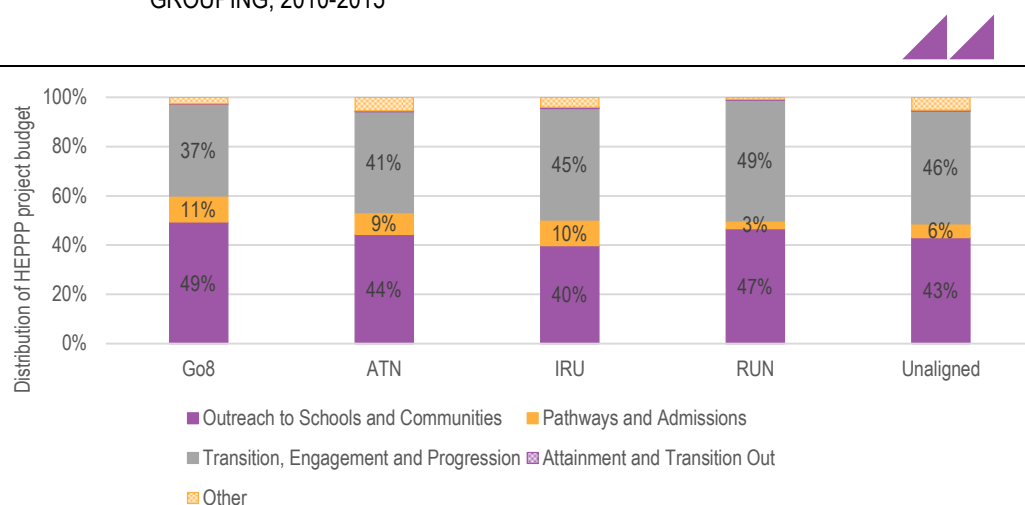
## Universities

Note: The nine regionally headquartered universities which are referred to as 'regional universities' are bolded. The non-bolded universities are referred to as 'metropolitan universities'.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The relative share of HEPPP expenditure on projects at different stages of the student life cycle differs by university grouping (Figure 3.2). Outreach activities are given the greatest share of expenditure by the Go8, accounting for almost half of the group's HEPPP activity, and the RUN universities (47 per cent). The RUN, Unaligned, and IRU university groups each spend 45 per cent or more of their HEPPP allocations on projects at the Transition, Engagement and Progression stage—this is significantly lower for the Go8 at 37 per cent. In interviews with universities from across the groupings, the focus of Go8 universities on Outreach activities was seen to reflect a relatively lower need to support the high calibre low SES students attending the high ATAR Go8 universities.

**FIGURE 3.2** SHARE OF EXPENDITURE BY STUDENT LIFE CYCLE STAGE, BY UNIVERSITY GROUPING, 2010-2015



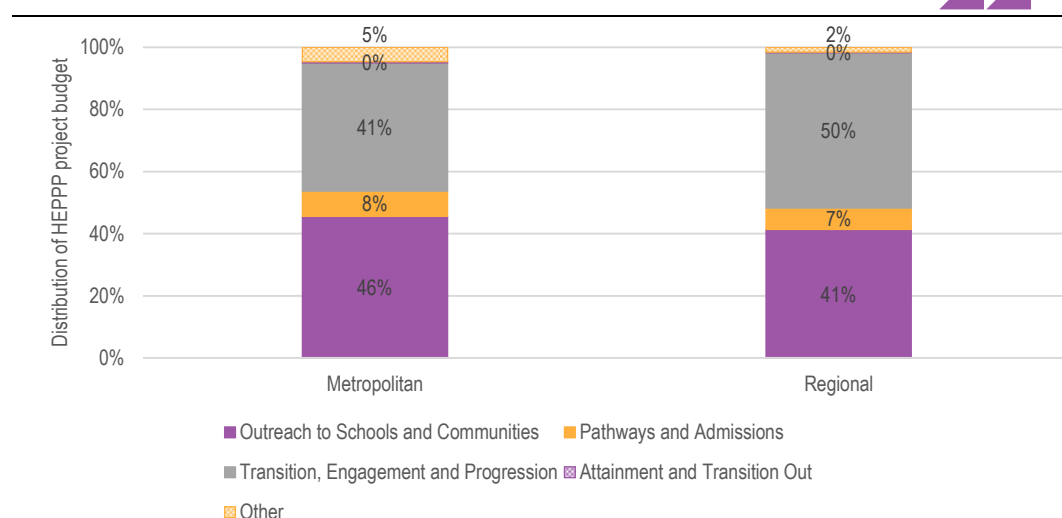
Note: Administration includes some NPP funding.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

The share of expenditure by student life cycle stage by metropolitan and regional universities varies with regional universities devoting more of their HEPPP activity towards the Transition, Engagement and Progression life cycle stage (50 per cent), while metropolitan universities undertake more Outreach activities (46 per cent) (Figure 3.3). Interviews with universities did not provide any particular insights as what may be driving this difference, but it could be due to the greater share of Partnership grant projects awarded to metropolitan universities on average<sup>21</sup> and that all the Go8 universities, which have a much greater focus on Outreach, are all metropolitan universities.

<sup>21</sup> Over 2010-2015, metropolitan universities received an average of \$5.01 million in funding through the partnership grants rounds; regional universities received an average of \$3.96 million.

**FIGURE 3.3** SHARE OF EXPENDITURE BY STUDENT LIFE CYCLE STAGE, BY METROPOLITAN/REGIONAL UNIVERSITY, 2010-2015



SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

### 3.3 HEPPP activity by project types

HEPPP projects have been categorised for the evaluation according to 22 types of equity activities, many of which can be delivered across multiple EIF student life cycle stages (for example, career advice activities can take place at the first three life cycle stages (refer Chapter 1). Each HEPPP project can have more than one activity type, for example a project may provide first year transition support and scholarships to students commencing university—around 70 per cent of HEPPP projects incorporate more than one activity.

The second column in Table 3.2 shows the proportion of HEPPP projects in which each type of equity activity occurs. For example, the 'Aspiration raising - pre-entry university experience' activity occurs in 15 per cent of all HEPPP projects. The four right-hand columns show how each equity activity is utilised across the student life cycle stages. For example, 95 per cent of 'Aspiration raising - pre-entry university experience' activity takes place in the Pre-Access stage, with the remaining 5 per cent occurring in the Access stage.

Across the HEPPP, academic preparation/support was the most utilised activity, appearing in around one third of all projects. This is likely a response to low SES student need for such preparation and support, and also due to the fact that academic preparation/support can take place at three of the four EIF student life cycle stages—34 per cent of academic preparation/support takes place at the Pre Access stage and 61 per cent at the Participation stage, with the remainder in the Access stage. Mentoring and peer support, and first year transition support were the two next most utilised activities.

Some activities are spread across EIF stages (such as 'mentoring and peer support', 'academic preparation/support' and 'professional development'), while others are concentrated in one particular stage such as 'monitoring student progress' in the Participation stage.

**TABLE 3.2** HEPPP PROJECTS BY ACTIVITY TYPE

EIF activity	Proportion of HEPPP projects in which the activity takes place (does not sum to 100%, see note below)	Share of activity cross the EIF stages			
		Pre-Access: Outreach to Schools and Communities	Access: Pathways and Admissions	Participation: Transition, Engagement and Progression	Attainment and Transition Out
Aspiration raising - pre-entry university experience	15%	95%	5%	n/a	n/a
Aspiration raising - non-university experience	16%	98%	2%	n/a	n/a
Careers advice	5%	66%	4%	15%	15%
Mentoring, peer support	21%	34%	5%	61%	n/a
Academic preparation/support	32%	40%	6%	54%	n/a
Professional development	10%	45%	n/a	55%	n/a
Parent/community information/support	11%	88%	n/a	12%	n/a
Other outreach	9%	91%	9%	n/a	n/a
Pre university qualification pathway	4%	n/a	100%	n/a	n/a
Foundation programs for extra academic skills	3%	n/a	100%	n/a	n/a
Inclusive entry processes	14%	n/a	100%	n/a	n/a
Orientation programs	3%	n/a	n/a	100%	n/a
First year transition programs	17%	n/a	n/a	100%	n/a
Scholarships	10%	n/a	12%	88%	n/a
Inclusive course design/pedagogies	12%	n/a	9%	91%	n/a
Alternative exit programs	0%*	n/a	n/a	n/a	0%
Monitoring student progress	13%	n/a	n/a	100%	n/a
Employment support pre-completion	1%	n/a	n/a	67%	33%
Employment support post-completion	0%*	n/a	n/a	n/a	100%
Monitoring/evaluation	13%	23%	14%	61%	1%
Research	12%	22%	15%	61%	2%
Enhancing program implementation	9%	14%	12%	74%	0%

\* figures rounded down to zero.

Note: 'Proportion of HEPPP projects' column does not sum to 100 as projects can have multiple activities.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

Twenty eight universities provided the evaluation with student level HEPPP project participation data for from one to all years across 2010-2016 (refer Chapter 1). The chart below shows the share of universities providing data in each year.

There are considerable limitations with these data, primarily as universities were not required to collect such data at the time and have compiled the data retrospectively where possible. As such, HEPPP participation is likely to be under-reported, skewed towards reporting generally well recorded HEPPP activities such as scholarships rather than activities where individual student participation is more difficult to record, such as study support services. Further, the university/year combinations in the university-provided data are not representative of all university/year combinations across 2010-2015 (Figure 3.4).

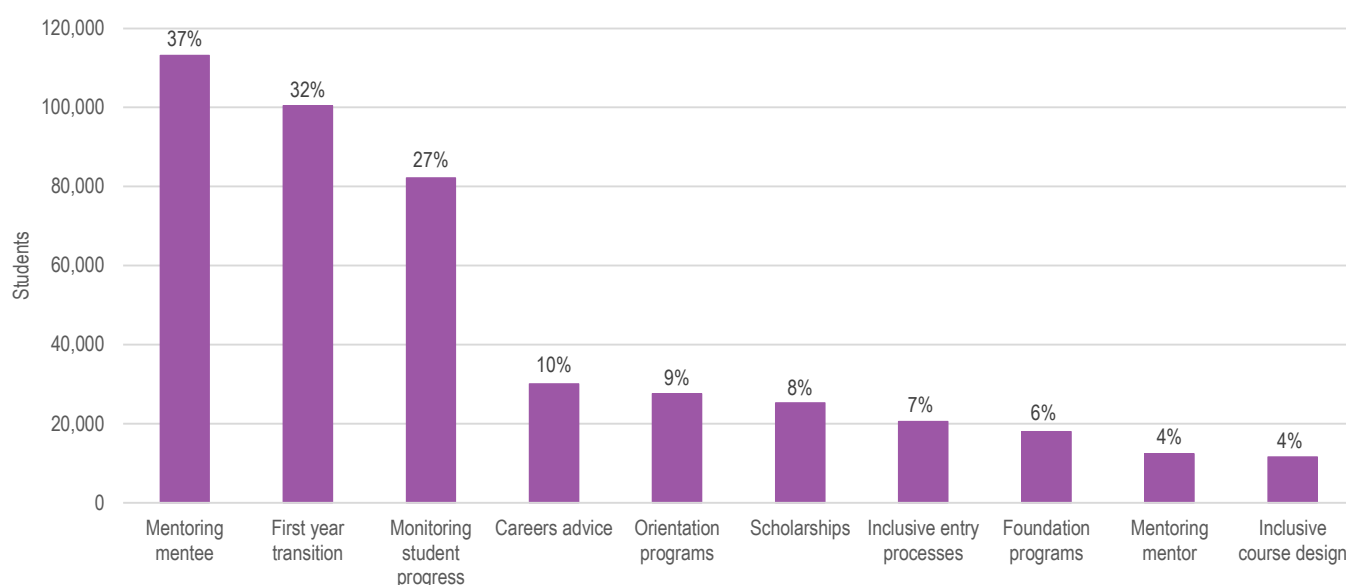
**FIGURE 3.4** SHARE OF UNIVERSITIES PROVIDING STUDENT LEVEL HEPPP PROJECT PARTICIPATION DATA

Note: Share of university providing data are calculated by dividing the number of universities that have provided data by 38, for each year; 38 being the number of universities funded under the HEPPP.

SOURCE: STUDENT LEVEL HEPPP DATA PROVIDED BY UNIVERSITIES

Based on data provided by 28 universities, around 310,000 university students have participated in HEPPP projects. This figure should be seen as a lower bound of total HEPPP reach—as noted above, data provided does not cover all universities or all years of the HEPPP, nor does it include the school students engaged through Partnership activities.

The most common form of student participation in the HEPPP is in a mentoring project (37 per cent of students in the university-provided data have been a mentee). Participation in first year transition projects (32 per cent) and projects that monitor student progress (27 per cent) are also common (Figure 3.5). These figures broadly accord with the data based on the university HEPPP annual reports presented above that show that mentoring, transition and monitoring projects are the most common types of HEPPP projects delivered on campus.

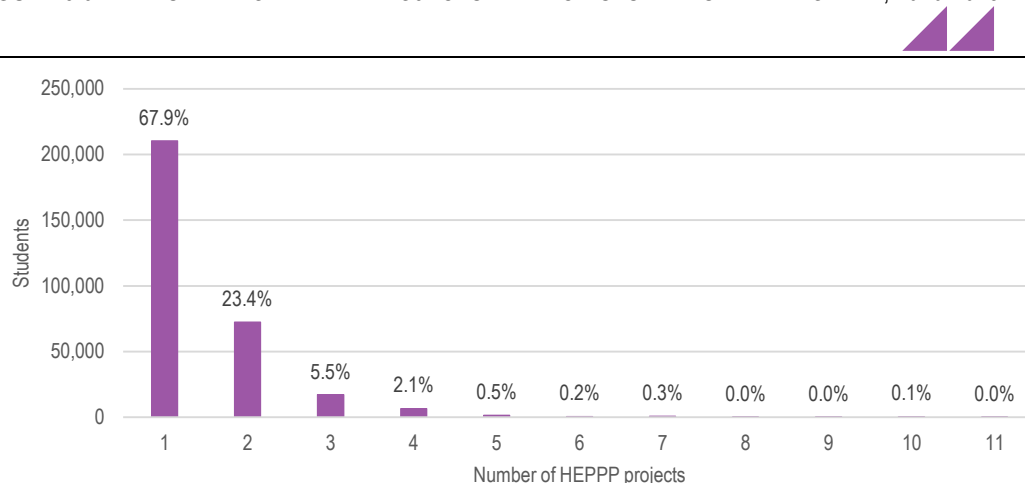
**FIGURE 3.5** STUDENT HEPPP PARTICIPATION BY PROJECT TYPE, 2010-2015

Note: n=447,543. Percentages sum to more than 100 as a student can participate in more than one type of project.

SOURCE: STUDENT LEVEL HEPPP DATA PROVIDED BY UNIVERSITIES (N=28)

The university-provided data offers an indication of the range of students' involvement with HEPPP projects. For example, more than 30 per cent of students have participated in more than one HEPPP project, with 3 per cent involved in four or more (Figure 3.6). It does not however reflect the intensity of involvement, for example in the number or length of the HEPPP activities. Considering that some HEPPP projects are of relatively low intensity or contact, for example first year transition and orientation programs, students' involvement with multiple HEPPP projects is to be expected.

**FIGURE 3.6** NUMBER OF HEPPP PROJECTS IN WHICH STUDENTS ARE INVOLVED, 2010-2015

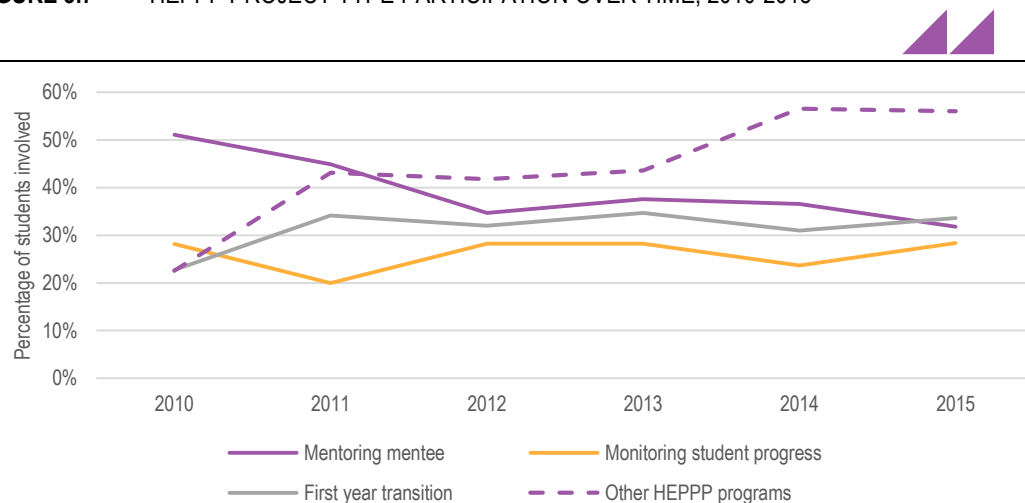


Note: n=309,851

SOURCE: STUDENT LEVEL HEPPP DATA PROVIDED BY UNIVERSITIES (N=28)

The university-provided data shows that the types of HEPPP projects students are participating in have changed over time. In 2010, half of the students in the dataset were involved in a mentoring program, with this falling to 31 per cent in 2015 (Figure 3.7). Conversely, other HEPPP programs, including careers advice and orientation programs, have increased in prominence over this time period. These changes may reflect universities changing priorities as the HEPPP has matured, although the incompleteness of the dataset may also be a factor in these results.

**FIGURE 3.7** HEPPP PROJECT TYPE PARTICIPATION OVER TIME, 2010-2015



Note: n=447,543

SOURCE: STUDENT LEVEL HEPPP DATA PROVIDED BY UNIVERSITIES (N=28)

### 3.4 HEPPP activity by participant characteristics

This section examines the ways in which the 2010-2015 HEPPP projects were targeted at different recipient groups within the low SES equity group, using two different and separate groupings: equity groups and EIF target groups.

#### 3.4.1 Equity groups

The higher education sector since the mid-1990s has referred to the following six 'equity groups':

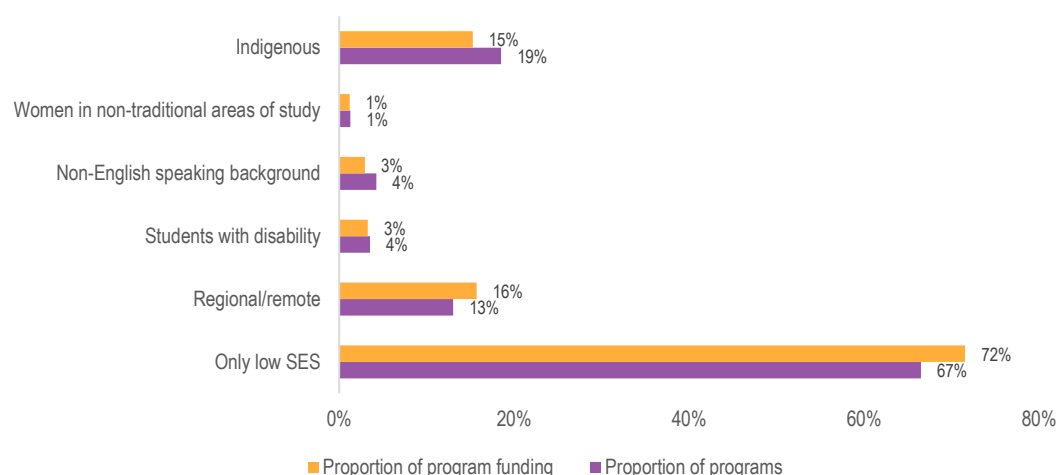
- Indigenous Australians
- people from low SES backgrounds
- people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)
- people from regional and remote areas
- people with disability
- women in non-traditional subject areas (WINTA).

While the HEPPP funds universities to implement projects targeted at people from low SES backgrounds, some projects focus on low SES individuals that are also part of one of the five non-low SES groups listed above.

The majority of HEPPP projects (67 per cent) targeted only low SES individuals, with the remaining 33 per cent directly targeting low SES individuals who are also a member of one of the other equity groups (Figure 3.8). It should be noted that students who belong to multiple equity groups, such as those from regional or remote areas, may also be included in the low SES target group.

Low SES Indigenous people and low SES people from regional and remote areas were targeted in 19 per cent and 13 per cent of projects respectively. That these two groups were the explicit targets of numerous HEPPP projects is in part due to universities deciding that these cohorts are in need of additional support, relative to other low SES individuals. The targeting of low SES Indigenous people is also driven by the 2013 Partnership round which had a focus on projects targeted at low SES Indigenous individuals. (Chapters 4-7 analyse these data on an EIF student life cycle basis.)

**FIGURE 3.8** DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAMS AND PROGRAM FUNDING BY EQUITY GROUPS, 2010-2015



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can target multiple equity groups. See Appendix D for further disaggregation.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS 2010-2015

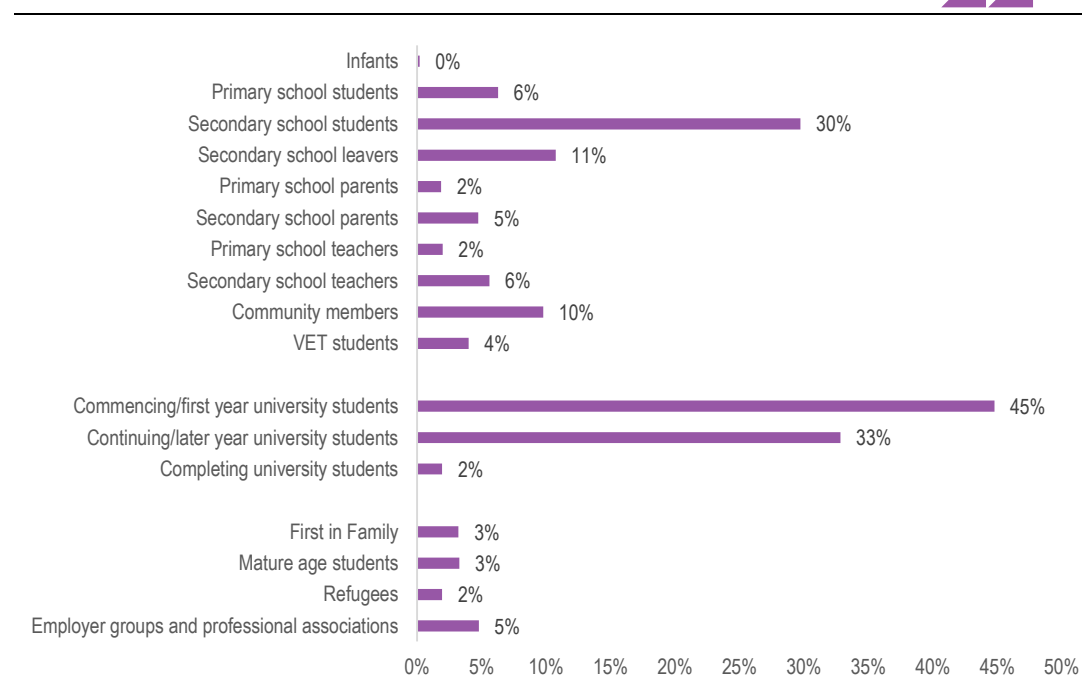


### 3.4.2 Equity Initiatives Framework target groups

This report is using the EIF to analyse HEPPP activity (refer Chapter 1). The EIF establishes list of groups that are distinct from the aforementioned equity groups, and focus more on the stage of education or role in the education system of an individual.

The most common EIF target groups were university students—46 per cent of HEPPP projects targeted commencing/first year students, and 34 per cent targeted continuing/late year students—and secondary school students, who were targeted in almost a third of projects (Figure 3.9). The least commonly targeted groups were infants, including kindergarten students, (in only 0.1 per cent of projects), followed by primary school parents and teachers. This indicates that Partnership projects are normally targeted at secondary school students and parents, rather than primary school students and parents. (Chapters 4-7 analyse these data on an EIF student life cycle basis.)

**FIGURE 3.9** SHARE OF PROJECTS INCLUDING EIF TARGET GROUPS, 2010-2015



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can have multiple EIF target groups.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

## 3.5 Summary of HEPPP implementation

This chapter has analysed HEPPP implementation at the program level, showing the types of projects implemented, differences between groups of universities, and student participation and target groups. The following four chapters build on this analysis and examine the implementation and impact of HEPPP over the four student life cycle stages.

**KEY FINDING 1** HEPPP IMPLEMENTATION

There have been 2,679 projects across the 37 universities between 2010 and 2015. This is an average of 70 projects per university. More than 40 per cent of projects and expenditure have been targeted at the Transition, Engagement and Progression stage. Around 40 per cent of projects are at the Outreach stage, while Pathways and Admissions account for 8 per cent

Across the HEPPP throughout 2010-2015, academic preparation/support was the most utilised activity appearing in around one third of all projects. Mentoring and peer support, and first year transition support were the two next most utilised activities. Some activities are spread across EIF stages (such as mentoring and peer support, academic preparation/support and professional development), while others are concentrated in one particular stage such as monitoring student progress in the Participation stage.

Based on data provided by 28 universities, around 310,000 students have participated in HEPPP projects—this figure should be considered a lower bound of total HEPPP reach. More than 30 per cent of students have participated in more than one HEPPP project, with 3 per cent involved in four or more.

The majority of HEPPP projects (67 per cent) targeted only low SES people. Low SES Indigenous people and low SES people from regional and remote areas were explicitly targeted in 19 per cent and 13 per cent of projects respectively.





## PART 2: EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF THE HEPPP





*This chapter provides an analysis of the range and impact of HEPPP activities carried out by universities at the Pre-Access stage of the EIF student life cycle.*

Outreach to schools and communities is the first stage of the student life cycle in the EIF, covering the student's life up to the point of access to higher education (Bennett et al. 2015). The following stage, Pathways and Admissions, covers the entry process to higher education, and targets school leavers as well as mature age and VET students.

The primary aim for outreach activities, as identified in the EIF, is to 'increase awareness of higher education pathways, opportunities and associated careers by supporting and developing aspirations and expectations'. Activities are targeted at school students and their communities—including infants, primary and secondary school students, and their teachers and parents, as well as members of their broader communities (Bennett et al. 2015). Additionally, a number of HEPPP partnership projects have been targeted towards prison communities.

Outreach activities are considered to be Partnership activities under the HEPPP, although they may be funded through either the Partnership or the Participation component. Chapter 2 in this report has further information about each component, including the objectives, intentions and principles for Partnership activities that are prescribed by the Guidelines.

## 4.1 Overview of HEPPP Pre-Access stage activities

The types of outreach activities undertaken by universities under the HEPPP 'vary in structure, length and approach' (Bennett et al. 2015), although they generally fit into one or more of the following categories:

- aspiration-raising – pre-entry university experience
- aspiration-raising – non university experience
- careers advice
- mentoring, peer support
- academic preparation/support
- professional development
- parent/community information/support
- other outreach.

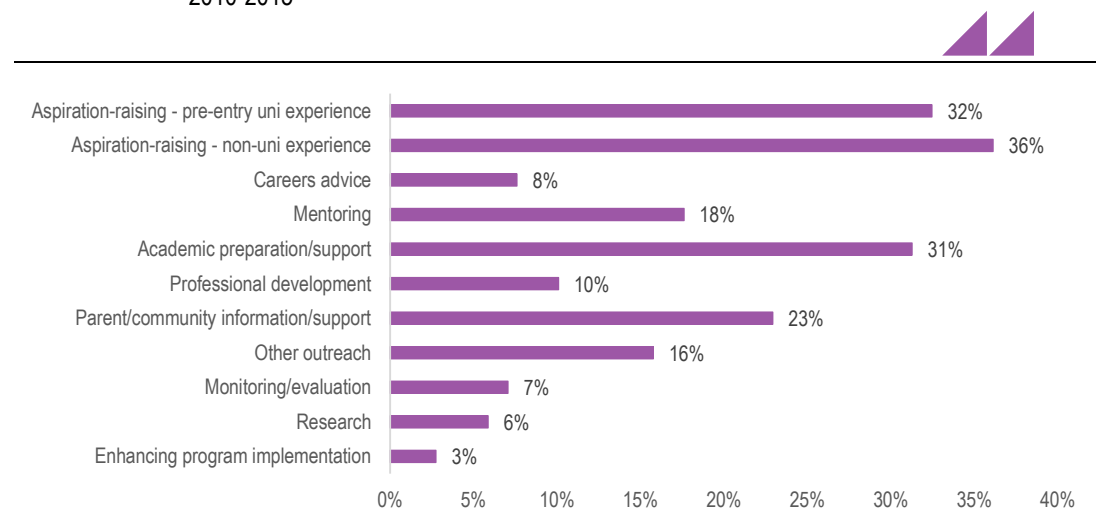
Each of these is discussed in depth below in Section 4.2, including the purpose of the activity and the types and impact of relevant projects that have been undertaken through the HEPPP.

### 4.1.1 Nature and extent of activities

Projects undertaken by universities using HEPPP funding between 2010 and 2015 (Participation, Partnership grant, baseline and formula) were categorised according to their type and location within the EIF Student Life Cycle, using the annual reports universities provided to the Department.

Activities intended to raise participants' aspirations for higher education were the most common type of activity undertaken at the Pre-Access stage of the life cycle (Figure 4.1). In total, these activities were included in 68 per cent of Pre-Access projects—36 per cent of projects involved aspiration raising through non-university experience, and 32 per cent involved providing participants with pre-entry university experience. The next most common type of activity was academic preparation/support, which was included in 31 per cent of projects. The provision of information and support for parents and community members was also relatively common (23 per cent), as was mentoring (18 per cent).

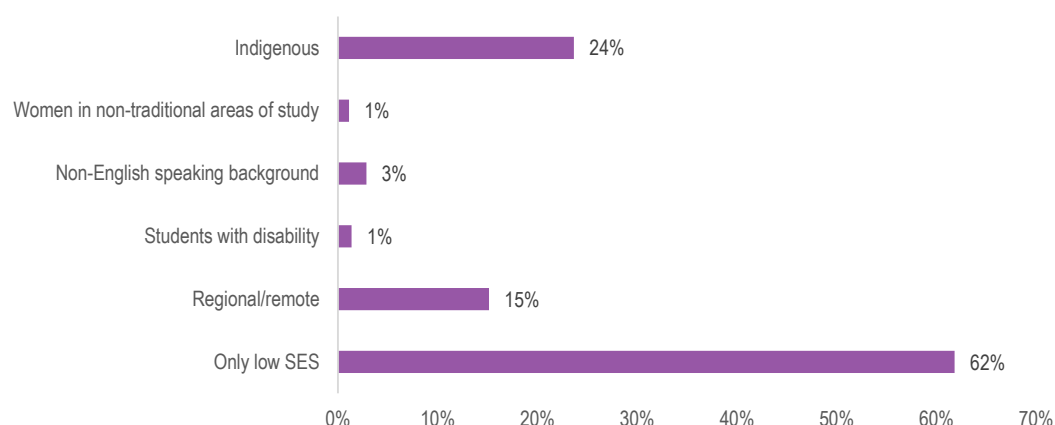
**FIGURE 4.1** PROPORTION OF HEPPP OUTREACH PROJECTS CONTAINING EACH ACTIVITY, 2010-2015



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can have multiple activities.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS 2010-2015

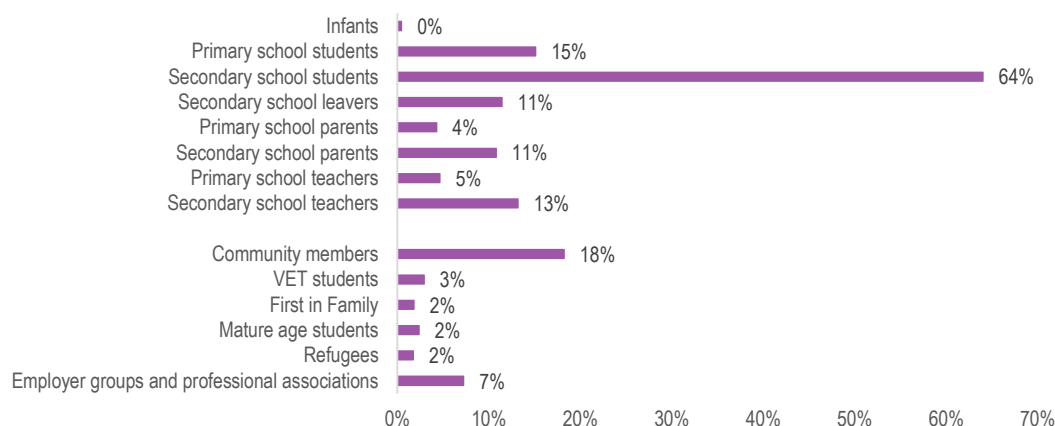
The intention of the HEPPP is to fund projects focused on low SES individuals, although some projects may target low SES people from additional equity groups (Figure 4.2). The majority of projects at the Pre-Access stage targeted only low SES students (62 per cent). Although they are not directly targeting intersecting subgroups, in many cases, these projects may capture the subgroups as well, meaning that more granular interventions may be unnecessary. However, a significant proportion of HEPPP Outreach projects were also targeted towards these subgroups. Almost a quarter of projects targeted low SES Indigenous students, and 15 per cent targeted low SES students from regional and remote areas. The proportions of programs targeting low SES students from non-English speaking backgrounds, low SES students with disability and low SES female school students studying in non-traditional areas were much lower (3 per cent or less).

**FIGURE 4.2** PROPORTION OF HEPPP OUTREACH PROJECTS TARGETING EACH EQUITY GROUP

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can target multiple equity groups. See Appendix D for further disaggregation.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

Secondary school students were the most common EIF group targeted through Pre-Access activities (Figure 4.3). Almost two thirds of Outreach projects focused on secondary school students, with the next most commonly targeted group, community members, in only 18 per cent of projects. This was followed closely by primary school students (15 per cent of projects) and secondary school teachers (13 per cent of projects).

**FIGURE 4.3** PROPORTION OF HEPPP OUTREACH PROJECTS TARGETING EACH EIF TARGET GROUP

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can have target multiple EIF groups.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

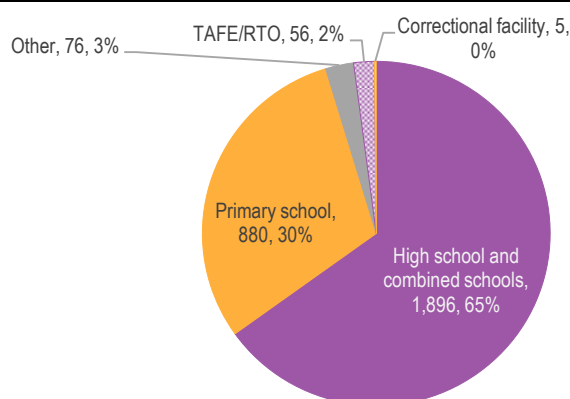
#### 4.1.2 HEPPP Outreach activities partner organisations

Twenty nine universities provided data on partner organisations involved in their outreach activities (Section 1.2.2). As with the student-level HEPPP project data analysed in Chapter 3, the years covered and proportion of projects covered by the outreach data varied across data-providing universities.

Based on the data provided, 2,913 partner organisations participated in HEPPP outreach activities over 2010 to 2016—this should be considered a lower bound for the number of Outreach partners under HEPPP over this period. The majority of these organisations were schools (95 per cent)—

65 per cent were high schools and combined (primary and secondary) schools, and 30 per cent were primary schools (Figure 4.4).

**FIGURE 4.4** NUMBER AND SHARE OF DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN HEPPP OUTREACH ACTIVITIES, 2010-2016

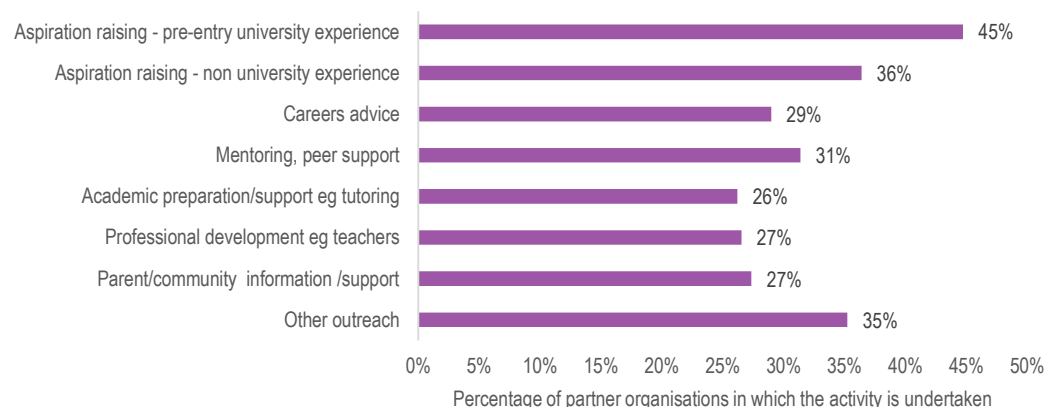


Note: n=2,913

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY-PROVIDED DATA

Analysis of the different types of Outreach activities that were undertaken in partnership with each organisation, and their relative frequency shows a fairly even spread (Figure 4.5). Aspiration raising – pre-entry university experience was the most common activity, being undertaken with 45 per cent of organisations. The rest of the activity types were conducted in between 26 and 36 per cent of organisations.

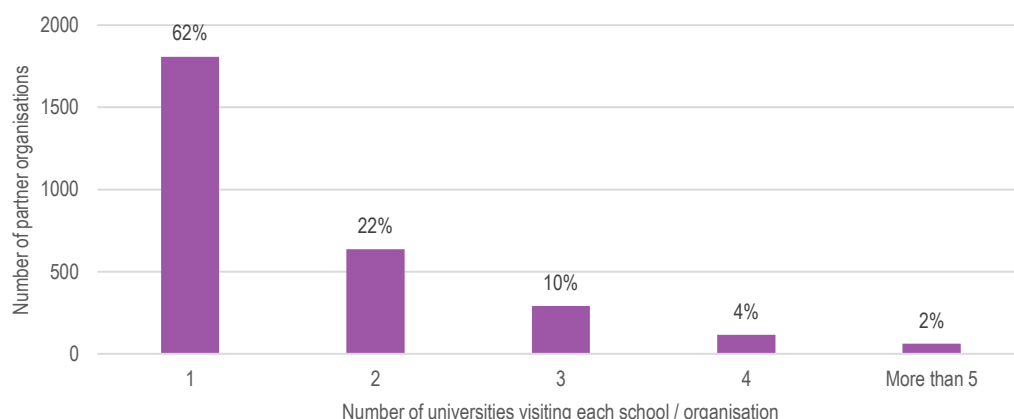
**FIGURE 4.5** PROPORTION OF ORGANISATIONS IN WHICH EACH OUTREACH ACTIVITY WAS UNDERTAKEN, 2010-2016



Note: Based on data on 2,913 partners organisations. Percentages do not sum to 100 as an organisation can participate in more than one type of activity.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY-PROVIDED DATA

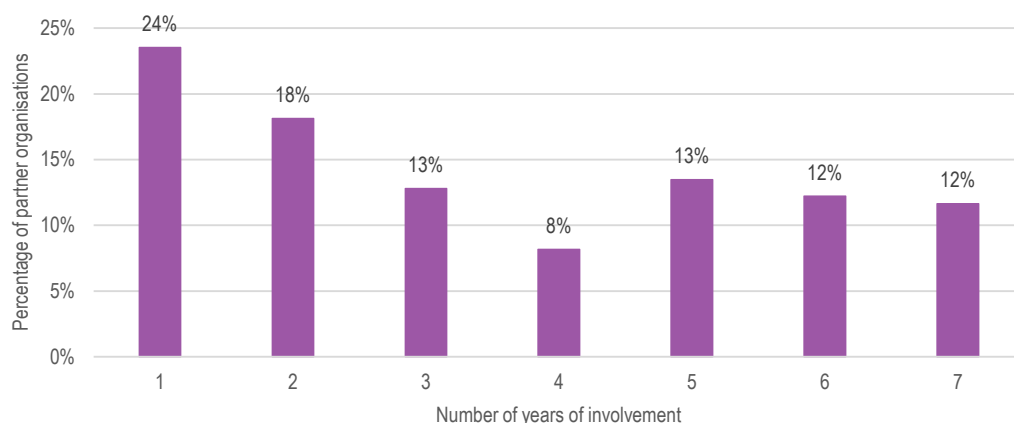
In many cases partner organisations delivered HEPPP activities with more than one university over 2010-2016, based on the data provided by universities (Figure 4.6). The majority of organisations were involved with one university, but 38 per cent partnered with two or more universities. As data were only received from 29 universities, this is likely an underestimation of how many organisations are or have been working with more than one university, possibly concurrently. This may indicate that some partner organisations are being over-served by multiple universities, although data are not available to confirm this.

**FIGURE 4.6** NUMBER OF UNIVERSITIES INVOLVED WITH EACH PARTNER ORGANISATION, 2010-2016

Note: n=2,913

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY-PROVIDED DATA

Most partner organisations have been involved with the HEPPP for multiple years (Figure 4.7). Between 2010 and 2016, only a quarter of organisations participated in HEPPP activities for one year, with 58 per cent involved for three or more years. Again, these data likely underestimate the number of years the organisations in the dataset have been involved in the HEPPP. This analysis concurs with a consistent message from universities in the interviews and written submissions for this evaluation that long term relationships with partner organisations are actively pursued and are important for effective Outreach activities.

**FIGURE 4.7** NUMBER OF YEARS OF INVOLVEMENT WITH HEPPP OUTREACH ACTIVITIES, 2010-2016

Note: n=2,913

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY-PROVIDED DATA

One of the research questions for this evaluation is to determine the proportion of low SES schools in each state and territory that have been the subject of HEPPP activities.

In the school education sector, the Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) is the measure most similar to the SES measure used in higher education. ICSEA places schools on a scale based on their students' family backgrounds (parents' occupation, school education and non-school education) and school-level factors (such as geographical location and the proportion of Indigenous enrolments).



The HEPPP does not provide universities with a definition of low SES schools, nor an indication of what measure of SES to use, and universities do not receive a list of schools by ICSEA or any other index. However, ICSEA scores are publicly available at the school-level on the My School website. Based on consultations for this evaluation, universities target schools for Outreach activities using what could be considered local knowledge of schools within their region, or the suburb or region in which school is located where the suburb or region is known to have a high proportion of low SES individuals. Universities may also target schools in consultation with the Department of Education in the relevant state, for example, the Queensland Widening Participation Consortium works with the Department of Education Queensland to identify schools for the outreach program.

The university-provided Outreach data did not include a field indicating whether each school is low SES, for the reasons noted in the preceding paragraph, but did include the state or territory in which the each school is located. The Department provided data which disaggregated all schools in Australia (n=8,637) by ICSEA quartile and primary/secondary/combined (ICSEA school level data were not able to be provided).

Table 4.1 sets out, disaggregated by primary and secondary/combined, the number of schools in each state and territory participating in the HEPPP, divided by: all schools in that state/territory, and ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools in that state/territory. These denominators are used to provide an indication of the proportion of schools involved in the HEPPP and the reach of the Partnership component at the school-level, as the Guidelines do not specify a particular ICSEA or other target category for schools.<sup>22</sup>

**TABLE 4.1** PROPORTION OF SCHOOLS INVOLVED IN HEPPP OUTREACH ACTIVITIES, 2010-2016

State/territory	Percentage of schools with HEPPP outreach activities	Primary schools	Secondary/combined schools
NSW	All schools	23%	85%
	ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools	44%	178%
Victoria	All schools	3%	69%
	ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools	7%	153%
Queensland	All schools	23%	77%
	ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools	39%	144%
South Australia	All schools	6%	90%
	ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools	14%	128%
Western Australia	All schools	11%	72%
	ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools	21%	189%
Tasmania	All schools	5%	18%
	ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools	6%	25%
Northern Territory	All schools	0%	24%
	ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools	0%	26%
Australian Capital Territory	All schools	15%	100%
	ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 schools	183%	189%

Note: n=2,913

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY-PROVIDED DATA

This analysis shows that in six jurisdictions, universities have partnered with more secondary/combined schools than there are ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 secondary/combined schools. It is

<sup>22</sup> The Guidelines specify that Partnership activities, such as 'effective outreach and related activities' are to be undertaken with 'appropriate stakeholders including, but not limited to, schools...' (Section 1.70.1) and note that Partnership activities should be intended to 'support collaboration between providers to ensure a coordinated approach to identifying and engaging with appropriate stakeholders including, but not limited to, schools...' and to 'concentrate resources to most effectively target low SES communities where aspirations to enter higher education are low and where matriculation to universities is poor' (Section 1.70.5).

not clear from the data available whether universities have achieved complete coverage of ICSEA quartile 1 and 2 secondary/combined schools and are also partnering with some ICSEA quartile 3 and 4 schools; or whether outreach partner schools are spread more evenly across the ICSEA quartiles.

The share of primary schools involved in HEPPP is considerably lower than secondary/combined schools. This is consistent with data presented in Figure 4.3.

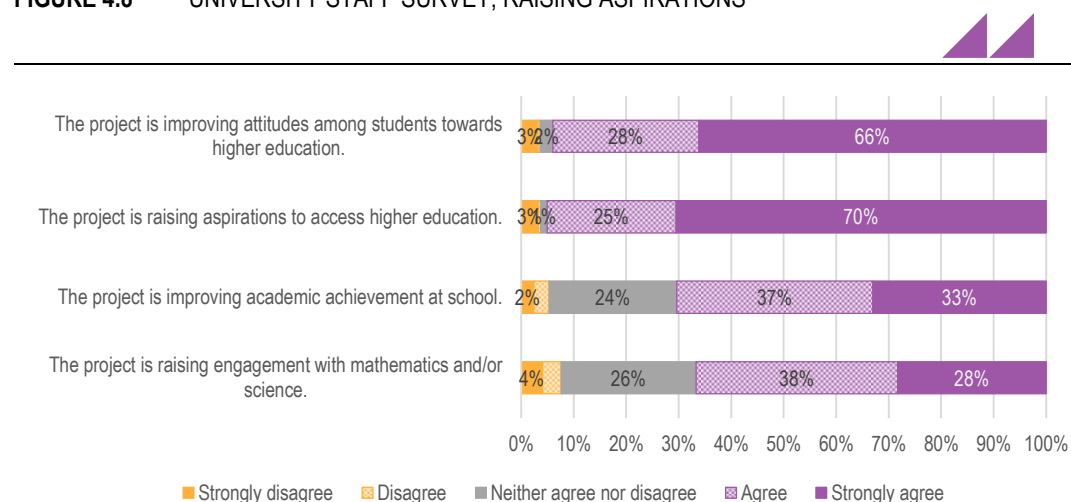
### 4.1.3 Survey results

University staff who have been involved in implementation of the HEPPP were surveyed for this evaluation (refer Section 1.2.3). The results of this survey relevant to Outreach activities are provided in the figures below, with Participation stage survey results reported in Chapter 6.

The survey results shows staff views aggregated across the 15 universities involved in the surveys and aggregated from the multiple HEPPP projects within each university. As such the results provide an insight into HEPPP Outreach activities at a high level, but cannot be analysed for project-specific insights—the subsequent section of this chapter examines HEPPP Outreach projects.

The majority of respondents—over 90 per cent—strongly agreed that the Outreach projects with which they were involved were improving students' attitudes and aspirations towards higher education (Figure 4.8). Fewer respondents, although still a majority, considered the HEPPP projects to be producing a positive impact on students' academic achievement (70 per cent) and engagement with mathematics and/or science at school (66 per cent).

**FIGURE 4.8** UNIVERSITY STAFF SURVEY, RAISING ASPIRATIONS



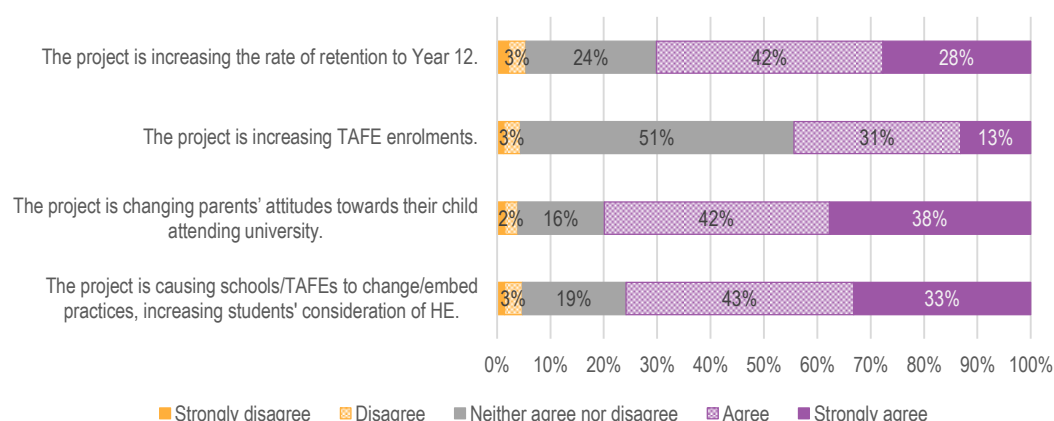
Note: from top to bottom, n=248, 244, 206, 198

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING AND WALLIS CONSULTING GROUP

Staff also consider the HEPPP projects to have had a positive impact on student and institutional practice, as well as parents' attitudes (Figure 4.9). Seventy per cent of respondents considered the HEPPP project they are involved in to be increasing the rate of retention to Year 12, and 80 per cent believed that the projects are changing parents' attitudes towards their children's participation in higher education. Additionally, most staff considered that the project was causing schools and/or TAFE institutions to change or embed practices that lead to greater consideration of higher education among students (76 per cent). However, less than half of the respondents agreed that the project was increasing TAFE enrolments (44 per cent), with most neither agreeing nor disagreeing (51 per cent).

These factors align with the objectives of the HEPPP, particularly those for the Partnership component, in 'improving the understanding and awareness of higher education as a viable post-school option'.<sup>23</sup>

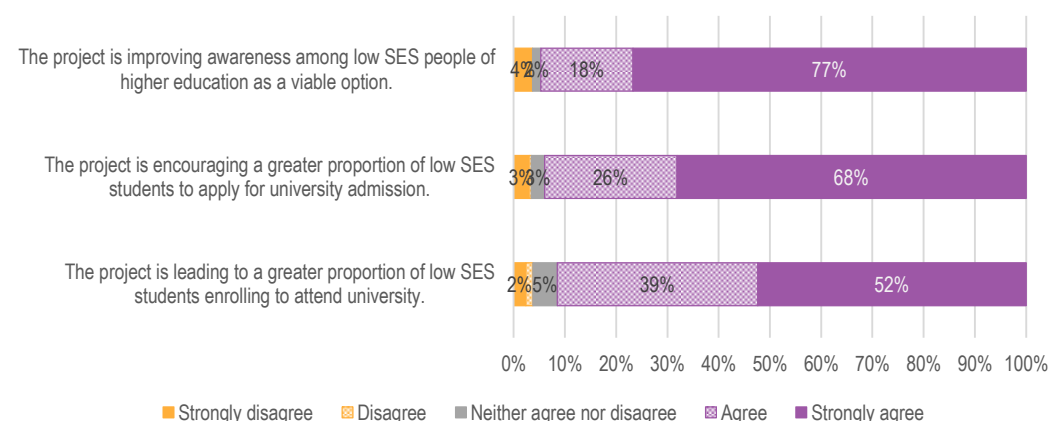
<sup>23</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.70.1.

**FIGURE 4.9** UNIVERSITY STAFF SURVEY, CHANGING ATTITUDES AND PRACTICE

Note: from top to bottom, n=184, 160, 204, 211

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING AND WALLIS CONSULTING GROUP

Although less than half of respondents agreed that the projects were increasing TAFE enrolments (Figure 4.9), the majority considered that the projects were increasing university applications and enrolments (Figure 4.10). Nearly all of the respondents agreed that the projects were improving low SES people's awareness that higher education was a viable option, and were encouraging a greater proportion of students from low SES backgrounds to apply for university. Staff also saw a positive impact on university enrolment rates, with over half of the respondents strongly agreeing that the projects were leading to a greater proportion of students from low SES backgrounds enrolling in university and an additional 39 per cent agreeing (91 per cent in total).

**FIGURE 4.10** UNIVERSITY STAFF SURVEY, APPLYING TO AND ENROLLING IN UNIVERSITY

Note: from top to bottom, n=245, 232, 212

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING AND WALLIS CONSULTING GROUP

## 4.2 The impact of individual HEPPP activities at the Pre-Access stage

This section examines the impact of different types of HEPPP outreach activities, based on project evaluations conducted by universities and consultations with stakeholders. It also provides a number of case studies which detail specific projects and their key activities.

### 4.2.1 Aspiration-raising

Aspiration to participate in higher education was one of three key ‘precursors to entry’ identified in the Bradley Review (2008), along with awareness of higher education and educational attainment. As defined in the report, ‘addressing aspiration means increasing the desire to attend university and putting it firmly on the ‘radar screen’ of potential higher education participants while they are still at school’. Aspiration levels in low SES communities were also included in the Guidelines as one of the means of targeting partnership activities. The Guidelines outline that partnership activities undertaken through the HEPPP are intended to support collaboration between stakeholders and to ‘concentrate resources to most effectively target low SES communities where aspirations to enter higher education are low and where matriculation to universities is poor’.<sup>24</sup>

A range of views have been expressed in consultations on the assumptions that may underlie aspiration-raising and emphasising the need for caution to avoid perpetuating a deficit perspective of low SES participation<sup>25</sup>. However, projects that intend to raise the aspirations of participating students for higher education are very common throughout the HEPPP (Figure 4.1). These projects often include additional types of activity, for example, the Partnership project undertaken by Deakin University and discussed by Lynch, Walker-Gibbs and Herbert (2015) involved student mentoring with the intention of raising aspiration.

There are two types of aspiration-raising activities through the HEPPP—pre-entry university experience and non-university experience (Section 4.1). Pre-university experience involves visits to university campuses and other forms of physical familiarisation activities, and is identified as one of the key characteristics of effective HEPPP outreach initiatives (Bennett et al. 2015). Many projects undertaken through the HEPPP Partnership component involve these activities, including:

- Aspire UWA (Box 4.1)
- University of Newcastle’s AIM HIGH
- Flinders University’s mentor programs
- UTS’s U@Uni Summer School
- University of Canberra’s UC 4 Yourself
- University of South Australia’s UniCamps and UniReady
- UNSW Aspire
- UQ’s Young Achievers Program.

These programs vary in length, from single sessions (for example, UniReady) to intensive programs (for example, U@Uni Summer School) or those delivered over a substantial period of time (for example, Flinders University’s mentoring programs).

<sup>24</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.70.5

<sup>25</sup> The assumptions and implications of the goal of aspiration raising are also discussed in the literature; see for example Gore et al. 2015; Gale et al. 2010; Harvey et al. 2016; Lynch et al. 2015.

**BOX 4.1** ASPIRE UWA, THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Aspire UWA is a large outreach program run by the University of Western Australia. It was funded through a HEPPP Partnership grant<sup>a</sup> for the period from 1 December 2011 to 31 December 2015. Its objective is 'to encourage and support students from low SES backgrounds to continue to higher education'. The program has expanded significantly since it was established in 2009, from 25 schools to 63 in 2016—22 in Perth and 41 in regional and rural Western Australia. The program initially worked with students in Years 9 to 12, and was expanded in 2015 to include students from Years 7 and 8. In 2015, more than 10,300 students were associated with the program.

The program consists of three components, delivered by different areas of the university:

- a core learning framework for students in Years 7-12 in all partner schools (UWA Student Life division)
- an outreach program specifically for Indigenous students (UWA School of Indigenous Studies)
- a pathway program to the professional degrees of medicine and dentistry for low SES and rural students (UWA Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences).

Data show an upwards trend in enrolments from Aspire UWA schools to West Australian public universities from 2009 to 2013. First year enrolment figures from partner schools grew from 567 in 2009 to 815 in 2013, before declining to 733 in 2014. There were 501 first year enrolments in 2015; however this reflects a smaller cohort of school leavers in WA due to changes in the primary school entry age 12 years ago.

Additionally, the program has seen a positive response from stakeholders, including schools, student participants and their parents, and student ambassadors from UWA. A survey of secondary school teachers and principals in 2013 (70 per cent response from partner schools) found that 99 per cent agreed that Aspire UWA was valued by their school, 97 per cent were satisfied with its quality and range of activities, and 96 per cent considered it to be a very effective program.

A number of written submissions were received from schools that are involved with the Aspire UWA program, and the response was unanimously positive. The program was considered by respondents to be 'highly effective', with the relationship 'demonstrably positive in its outcomes' for students (Belmont City College, Submission 44) and it was commended 'without reservation' (Girrawheen Senior High School, Submission 16). Several schools noted that Aspire UWA provides a unique opportunity for students to experience university life first-hand, which they would not be able to do without it, and which increased their exposure to and consideration of higher education opportunities (Broome Senior High School, Submission 1; Kiara College, Submission 24; Derby District High School, Submission 111).

<sup>a</sup> The Partnership grant provided through the HEPPP contributed 97 per cent of total income, with 2 per cent provided by interest and 1 per cent by corporate support and individual donations.

SOURCE: SKENE, POLLARD AND HOUSE 2016, VARIOUS WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Activities that provide non university experience involve other forms of aspiration raising, for example, in-class or otherwise school-based activities, such as the University of the Sunshine Coast's My Tertiary Education Day (MyTED) project (Terton and Greenaway 2015), the University of Canberra's Aspire UC, and the Children's University program, hosted by the University of South Australia and also delivered through the University of Tasmania and the University of Newcastle (Box 4.2).

**BOX 4.2** CHILDREN'S UNIVERSITY, THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

The Children's University program, developed in the United Kingdom, was established in Australia by the University of Adelaide in 2013. The University of Adelaide continues to manage the program, primarily targeting disadvantaged schools, although it is available for any schools that express interest. The University of Tasmania began implementing the program in 2015 and the University of Newcastle in 2016.

The Children's University provides learning activities outside the school environment for children aged 7-14 years at a range of 'Learning Destinations' in their community, for example, performing-arts centres and sports clubs. Students' learning activities are recorded in a 'Passport to Learning', and when they reach a required number of hours they participate in a graduation ceremony at the relevant university. Participation in the program is voluntary, and the children choose which activities they would like to pursue. Students aged 15-18 can volunteer through the program.

Evaluations of the Children's University in Australia and internationally have consistently found positive impacts for children participating in the program. Results from the pilot program in 2013 showed positive effects on the behaviour, attendance and lateness of the pilot cohort in one term. An evaluation of the Children's University in the UK, undertaken in 2012 (MacBeath 2013), found that:

- student participants had better school attendance records than non-participants in the same school
- student participants attain more highly than non-participants in the same school
- there is a positive correlation between length of involvement with Children's University and performance in tests and exams
- the attitudes of students, parents, teachers and coordinators had changed and student aspiration had grown.

The NCVER is conducting an evaluation of the program for the University of Adelaide, which commenced in May 2015. The interim report concludes that 'early work from graduation ceremonies highlights participants' and parents' positive perceptions of CUA. However, CUA participants who did not graduate may have different perceptions of the program'.

SOURCE: HARRISON AND SKUJINS 2016, MACBEATH 2013, UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE 2013

**4.2.2 Careers advice**

Increased awareness of 'how higher and further education is related to professions and careers' is one of the key areas in which outreach activities in Australia have been found to have an impact (Bennett et al. 2015).

Under the HEPPP, the provision of careers advice and information about study-to-career pathways is often incorporated into other forms of outreach activity as part of raising students' aspirations or awareness about opportunities in higher education, such as Federation University's Regional Schools Outreach Program (Effective Change 2014) and the mentoring project run through the Deakin Warrnambool campus (Lynch et al. 2015). Careers advice and support is also provided throughout the Access and Participation stages of the student life cycle (Bennett et al. 2015). However, a number of HEPPP Partnership projects have been specifically designed to provide careers advice to participants, or similarly, specific careers modules or components have been incorporated into larger projects.

AIM HIGH, a large outreach program developed and delivered by the University of Newcastle, incorporates careers projects for primary school students into a broad range of other outreach activities. The Careers through Reading and Careers through Science programs run over four weeks for Year 5 and Year 4 students respectively, and include in-class sessions led by university students. Outcome data are not yet available as students who have participated in this program have not yet completed secondary school, however surveys of participating students show an increase in the number of students considering university-relevant careers and in the number who aspire to higher education (Bennett et al. 2015). Data from the University of Newcastle's annual HEPPP report show that in 2015, 1,333 individual school students participated in the Careers through Science program, through 113 school visits. Before they participated, 31 per cent of students agreed 'I can imagine having a career where I will use Science', and after the program this had increased to 50 per cent of student respondents. Similarly, 1,375 students participated in the Careers through Reading program in 2015, through 130 school visits. The percentage of student respondents who reported they knew what



happens at a university rose from 32 per cent before participating in the program to 52 per cent afterwards.

The Week Of Work at UNSW is another example of Outreach designed around careers advice and support (Lee 2014). In 2014, a group of year 10 students from regional schools were hosted at UNSW for the week through the university's outreach program, Aspire. The week involved a range of activities, incorporating students' work experience placement and the university open day, as well as leisure activities and workshops on topics such as resume writing and professionalism in the workplace. Participants were also supported by student ambassadors for activities such as preparing lunch budgets and grocery shopping. Qualitative feedback on the event from participants and school teachers who attended was positive, and they reported increased confidence in ability and increased motivation to enter higher education, as well as increased knowledge of study options (Lee 2014).

The Prison Outreach Engagement Program run by Curtin University—as part of Curtin's larger Addressing Higher Education Access Disadvantage (AHEAD) project—also involves specific career development activities and advice. Program participants are residents in two low-security prisons in Perth. Sessions are run on site in the prisons by the Curtin AHEAD career consultant, and include an initial group session followed by one-on-one appointments with prison residents, ongoing career guidance to residents following their release, and weekly resume writing support. Qualitative feedback from prison staff and participants has been positive (Stewart, Submission 135). Staff from the prisons and from AHEAD have reported observing 'a significant change in residents' self-esteem, self-confidence and outlook' after participating in the Outreach Engagement Program (Munindradasa 2016).

#### 4.2.3 Mentoring, peer support

Mentoring 'stands out as an important aspect of effective outreach initiatives' (Bennett et al. 2015). Although it is a broad concept, in this context it is generally understood as peer mentoring and peer support, where university students, often from similar backgrounds to the participant school students, 'build relationships with high school students' and assist them to develop their awareness of higher education opportunities and pathways (Bennett et al. 2015).

Mentoring activities are also run through subsequent stages of the student life cycle (namely, Access and Participation), such as the Student Futures mentoring program at Federation University which provides a later-year student mentor for each commencing student (Federation University 2016).

Different universities approach mentoring and peer support activities in different ways. These activities are often incorporated into broader outreach programs, for example UNSW Aspire, Aspire UWA, AIM HIGH at the University of Newcastle, and the Young Achievers Program at UQ. The Inspire Mentor program for secondary school students, part of the Journey to Higher Education Program—a joint outreach project from the University of Adelaide, Flinders University and the University of South Australia—offers weekly mentoring activities in an online format for rural and remote students (Journey to Higher Education 2016). The Journey to Higher Education program was funded through the Partnership component in the 2013 Competitive Grants Round. Mentoring is also a significant part of the outreach activities undertaken through the Queensland Widening Participation Consortium (Box 4.3).

In many cases, mentors are students who were involved with outreach activities while they were at secondary school and/or come from equity backgrounds. Qualitative feedback from student mentors/ambassadors, in surveys undertaken by universities and in consultations undertaken for this evaluation, shows that mentors believe that their programs are helping to increase students' aspirations for and awareness of higher education. In the surveys mentioned in Box 4.3, 100 per cent of respondents (university student mentors) agreed that the relevant activities were helping to 'raise students' higher education aspirations and awareness' about higher education (Cupitt, Costello & Mitchell 2015).

Student mentors interviewed for this evaluation provided positive feedback on the programs, noting that it had provided participating student mentees with exposure to opportunities and information about university they may not have been able to access otherwise, particularly for those from rural areas.

### BOX 4.3 MENTORING AND PEER SUPPORT THROUGH THE QUEENSLAND WIDENING PARTICIPATION CONSORTIUM

The Queensland Widening Participation Consortium was established in 2009 as a collaboration between the eight public universities in Queensland, for the purpose of increasing the participation of low SES and Indigenous people in higher education. Each university, along with the Queensland Department of Education and Training, signed a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the Consortium's philosophy and approach to outreach. Progress reports are provided by each member university, compiled, and provided to the Department on a six-monthly basis. The Consortium agreement was renegotiated in 2016, with six universities.

Mentoring and other forms of peer support, including role models and ambassadors, are commonly used by the universities in their outreach activities. The use of role models was included in the MOU as a key activity area for 'providing encouragement and inspiration', along with 'de-mystification experiences', with which mentors can also assist.

The universities use mentors in different ways; for example, a number of universities had mentoring programs in place for commencing or continuing undergraduate students. James Cook University (JCU) has a student mentor program for commencing students, including a specific program for Indigenous students. Griffith University also has an extensive mentoring program for undergraduate students.

Surveys at Griffith University and UQ have shown that the student mentors overwhelmingly believe that the programs are helping to increase participating school students' awareness of university options and pathways, and their aspirations to attend (Cupitt, Costello & Mitchell 2015).

#### ***Young Achievers Program, the University of Queensland***

Mentoring is also an important component of the Young Achievers Program through UQ, which runs across the pre-access through to participation stages of the student life cycle. In 2015, HEPPP funding contributed \$499,625 to the program budget, with an additional \$914,500 from donor funding.

The program is targeted towards low income students attending state secondary schools with low participation in higher education. Students are nominated for the program by their Principals, and participants are chosen through a Selection Committee. The program involves a range of activities, including mentoring, residential university experiences, customised information and advice about study and career opportunities, bonus rankings to assist with university entry, specialised transition and support services, and financial assistance.

Over 680 students have been involved in the program since it commenced in 2009. Forty university students were mentors in the program in 2015, including 20 program alumni. There were 93 Young Achievers who graduated from Year 12 in 2015, 90 of whom submitted an application to a higher education institution. Of these students, 84 accepted a higher education offer—65 accepted an offer from UQ.

Student participants interviewed for the program's longitudinal Impact Research Project 'consistently identified' mentoring as important. Bennett et al. (2015) note that 'evaluation of the program shows that it helps to develop better awareness of pathways, course options, support services and the practical aspects of university for students. It increases students' recognition of their own capabilities and increased family, community and school pride'.

SOURCE: BENNETT ET AL. 2015; BROWN 2016; CUPITT, COSTELLO AND MITCHELL 2015; UQ HEPPP ANNUAL REPORT 2015

#### 4.2.4 Academic preparation/support

Stakeholder interviews commonly noted that academic achievement is a significant barrier for students from low SES backgrounds in accessing higher education. The Bradley Review (2008) supports this, identifying 'educational attainment to allow participation' as one of the three precursors to entry that need to be addressed, along with awareness and aspiration.

Academic preparation/support, in the context of the HEPPP outreach activities, is often incorporated with other outreach activities, and can take many forms. The variety of projects undertaken that have an academic support or development aspect is broad, ranging from the University of the Sunshine Coast's MyTED e-book project for Year 4 students (designed to develop literacy skills while raising aspirations for higher education) to the Digital Divas project run by Monash University, Deakin University and Swinburne University of Technology to increase female high school students' skillset, interest and confidence in pursuing IT studies (Bennett et al. 2015).



Digital Divas, along with a number of other HEPPP outreach projects, involves the development of specialised curriculum and teaching modules for teachers to deliver in class. The AIM HIGH and Aspire outreach programs, run by the University of Newcastle and UWA respectively, also include school-based projects that are incorporated into the curriculum and academic extension activities. Specialised curriculum has also been developed for the Uni Bridges program through La Trobe University (Box 4.4).

#### BOX 4.4 UNI BRIDGES PROGRAM, LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Uni Bridges (also known as Curriculum Bridges) is an outreach program developed by La Trobe University. It was primarily funded through the HEPPP Indigenous Grants Round in 2013 (part of the Partnership component) for the period from 20 December 2013 until 31 March 2016. The first stage of the program, before the HEPPP grant, was funded through the Victorian Department of Education. The key objectives of Uni Bridges are:

- to increase participation and achievement in STEM by students from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- to increase university aspirations and transition rates among Curriculum Bridges cohorts
- to improve pedagogical practices within participating schools.

Uni Bridges involves partnerships with 12 secondary schools across Victoria—seven schools in the northern Melbourne metropolitan area and five regional schools around Bendigo. Specific curriculum is developed by participating schools and integrated into various subjects, and students participate in ‘hands on’ science activities and engage with experts and students from other schools through visits to La Trobe campuses and a digital learning platform, *The Uni Bridge*. Additionally, through the Uni Bridges Pathway, students may receive an early offer into selected courses at La Trobe based on a school recommendation, regardless of their ATAR.

Students who participated in the program at three pilot schools have already completed high school, with students from five additional schools to complete at the end of 2016. Although the program period funded through the HEPPP grant has concluded, outreach workshops will continue to be held, and the Pathway will be available until the final cohort of participating students completes Year 12.

A 15 month evaluation of the program (beginning in 2014, with the final report released in 2016) found that:

*the extent and range of student benefits due to implementation of UB depends, inter alia, on the degree to which the program has run its full term in the schools. Implementation in Years 10 and 11 reveal that in most schools there is evidence that the program has resulted in significant student cognitive and affective outcomes. Taking a Year 10-12 perspective, there is evidence that achievement of these outcomes leads to application to, and enrolments in universities and other forms of further education. The view of UB coordinators is that these are outcomes that would not have been achieved for the cohort of students if they had not enrolled in UB.*

For example, in one of the pilot schools, 16 of the 28 participating students enrolled in a STEM-related further education course after completing high school. This was seen by staff as a ‘major achievement’ in terms of student retention and aspiration. At another pilot school, 16 of the 18 students who completed Uni Bridges in 2014 have enrolled in further education—14 of these in STEM courses, and eight at La Trobe University. Data on the progression to STEM subjects for students from the same schools prior to the implementation of Uni Bridges are not available.

SOURCE: CURRICULUM BRIDGES PARTNERSHIPS REPORT 2016, UNI BRIDGES WEB PAGE, AND OWEN, CALNIN AND ANDREW 2016

#### 4.2.5 Professional development

Many of the outreach activities undertaken through the HEPPP include professional development for school teachers and careers advisors, whether through a formal program or their exposure to information about higher education pathways and opportunities, and current entry requirements. The value of this exposure was mentioned in a number of written submissions, particularly those from rural and remote schools, where teachers may not often be able to attend campus visits or other professional development sessions in person.

*Staff are better informed of entry, courses, pathways, study options and have an opportunity to ask one to one questions of the presenters which in rural areas is rare. This is used by staff for subject counselling for all year levels and helping students select pathways and prerequisite subjects for*

*university/TAFE/VET courses. It helps our Indigenous students, students with disabilities (blind), international students and students who need alternative pathways into higher study.*

*Tenison Woods College, Mount Gambier, Submission 25*

Formal professional development activities are included in many outreach activities, including those that involve enhanced curriculum and/or IT, such as La Trobe's Uni Bridges program (Box 4.4). Professional development opportunities through Uni Bridges included:

- opportunities to collaborate with other staff, within the school or with colleagues in other participating schools
- availability of expert advice about teaching and learning in a digital environment
- periodic out-of-school meetings involving Uni Bridges coordinators, teachers and school leaders, as well as an annual conference
- the creation of Curriculum Development Groups involving teachers from different STEM disciplines (Owen et al. 2016).

The Aspire UWA program also involves professional development for school staff. Skene et al. (2016), in their case study of the program, report that 'the model of sustained, whole-of-school engagement encourages a school culture where high academic achievement is an expectation rather than the exception. Assisting teachers with professional development opportunities has helped to support this aim, particularly in regional schools with high staff turnover'. Additional careers resources to support professional development for teachers were developed through a National Priorities Pool project in 2014 (refer Section 4.2.6).

#### **4.2.6 Parent/community information/support**

Outreach activities such as undertaken through the HEPPP have been found in the literature to have a positive impact in 'building broader community support for higher and further education' (Bennett et al. 2015), and this is reinforced by the findings of this evaluation. Many outreach projects target and include parents, either actively or more passively through knowledge diffusion from their children. For example, student participants in Central Queensland University's Indigenous Youth Sports Program 'showed a marked increase in discussing aspirations with family, friends, teachers and community Elders, an effect which broadens the impact of the initiative' (Bennett et al. 2015). Parents are also included in the Children's University program through the provision of information, the out of school learning activities and the graduation ceremony. Their responses to the NCVER evaluation team 'show overwhelmingly that it is a positive experience' (Harrison and Skujins 2016).

Some projects report that engaging parents in the activities is difficult. In 2014, UWA undertook a project funded through the National Priorities Pool, 'Influencing the key influencers', to address this challenge and 'to trial targeted engagement strategies with parents in the Mid-West and Gascoyne' (Skene et al. 2016). A 'comprehensive suite of resources and strategies to engage students, teachers, parents and the wider community' was developed through the project (UWA HEPPP NPP Report 2014). In their case study, Skene et al. (2016) observe that 'when parents of students living in regional communities see the impact of students' engagement, they appreciate the opportunity their children have, especially those attending Aspire's 3-day residential camps in Perth'.

The Bridges to Higher Education collaborative outreach program in New South Wales includes a specific project targeted at parents, with the aim of increasing 'parents' capacity to support students to aspire to, engage with and succeed in higher education' (KPMG 2015). The project involved the development of activities and resources to assist parents, guardians and carers, and included a campus-visits program. The KPMG evaluation of the Bridges program found that over 98 per cent of parents interviewed agreed that the campus visits and associated activities had helped them to support their children and their children's future education and career goals. The evaluation also found evidence of parents' increased awareness of higher education pathways and opportunities. Additionally, the partner schools provided positive feedback on the resources and strengthened relationships with parents that were developed through the Parents Project.

### 4.3 The overall impact of HEPPP Pre-Access stage activities

A key objective of the HEPPP is 'to increase the total number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities'.<sup>26</sup>

There is emerging evidence that this objective is being met. The number of low SES individuals accessing higher education has risen strongly since 2010 (refer Section 9.2). Although establishing causal links for interventions in education policy is difficult, evidence where available often shows increased aspirations and in some cases increased applications and enrolments to higher education. Staff and students at universities and their outreach partners, most often schools, have responded positively to the activities undertaken through the HEPPP.

The surveys and interviews carried out for this evaluation indicate that the university staff delivering outreach projects are observing an impact on the higher education aspirations of school students and other participants due to HEPPP activities (refer Section 4.1.3). There is also evidence that the university students often involved in HEPPP outreach activities as mentors or ambassadors consider the activities to be increasing school students' confidence, and their aspirations for and awareness of higher education (Section 4.2.3). In many cases, student ambassadors were themselves involved with HEPPP projects when they were at school.

Similarly, the evaluation received 98 written submissions from schools and other HEPPP outreach partner organisations and participants, a significant majority of which expressed strong support for the HEPPP and reported positive impacts of HEPPP activities on students', teachers' and other individuals' understanding of university pathways and on students' aspirations for and access to higher education. A number of examples are provided below.

Data provided in the submission from Sarah Redfern High School in New South Wales (Submission 99) show a significant increase in students' access to university after the school partnered with WSU in 2009. Between 2003 and 2009, only two students enrolled in university through UAC (from a total of 373 Year 12 graduates), while between 2010 and 2015 there were 33 university offers made to students from the school (from a total of 314 Year 12 graduates). This is an increase in students' rate of higher education access from 0.5 per cent (2003-2009) to 10.5 per cent (2010-2015).

The rate of Year 12 completion (attainment of QCE) increased at Queensland's Deception Bay State High School from 78 per cent in 2011 to 100 per cent in 2015, following the school's involvement with Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) Explore Uni program. The submission notes that 'there was a 250 per cent increase in the number of students destined for university' between 2011 and 2014 (Submission 101).

Many school submissions did not include quantitative data regarding access, although they were strongly supportive of the HEPPP. For example, the submission from Roxburgh College in Victoria notes that 'the college data on tracking students to university and TAFE has demonstrated that the HEPPP-funded program has played a significant role in ensuring that the college's transition of students to tertiary education exceeded Dept of Ed benchmark standards' (Submission 51). For Woodenburg Central School, although the submission observed no significant impact in students' academic achievement at school, retention to Year 12, or TAFE enrolment, there was 'a significantly increased impact' on the probability of students applying to university and being offered a place since the school has been involved with Griffith University (Submission 12).

One submission, from Katanning Senior High School in Western Australia (Submission 121), noted that its involvement with the HEPPP had been limited to a single visit, which 'provided some short term motivation but no more' and did not lead to any changes for students. The submission suggested that a greater investment of time would be needed for the program to be of more value to the school.

Some university evaluations accord with the stakeholder views collected through this evaluation, reporting positive impacts of the outreach programs. A number of these were discussed throughout this chapter. While many evaluations are based on participant surveys, some analyse application and enrolment data, and these show inconsistent evidence of impact. For example, the evaluation of the New South Wales collaborative Bridges to Higher Education program showed that growth in the

<sup>26</sup> The Guidelines, Section 1.70.1.

proportion of students who applied to university and received an offer was considerably higher for Bridges schools than non-Bridges schools (5.37 per cent versus 3.15 per cent).<sup>27</sup> In contrast, enrolment data from schools involved in the Aspire UWA program show increasing enrolment numbers from 2009 until 2013, after which they declined (Box 4.1).

The Queensland Widening Participation Consortium has undertaken a number of detailed evaluations of its outreach programs, including comparison of application, offer, deferral and enrolment rates between participating schools—the Consortium agreement provides for outreach to be undertaken at all eligible (low SES) schools in the state—and other schools (medium and high SES).

The *Monitoring Consortium Applications* 2016 report analyses data at the Consortium/state level (using QTAC data), and is not disaggregated by individual universities. For example, ‘the application rate refers to the proportion of Year 12 completers who apply for First Semester study at a Consortium university through the Queensland Tertiary Admission Centre’ (Queensland WP Consortium 2016).

The report indicates a wide gap in application rates between the two school groups (participating and not participating) in 2015. The Year 12 completer application rate for participating schools was 32.5 percent in 2015 (an increase of 1.5 percentage points since 2011), compared with 56.6 per cent for other schools (1.8 percentage point increase since 2011). The gap between the two narrowed from 25.6 percentage points in 2014 to 24.5 percentage points in 2015, for the first time since 2011. The report also found that ‘larger improvements in application rates occurred in schools where greatest engagement with [Widening Participation] activities occurred’.

The gap in offer rates between participating and other schools is much lower, at just 2.8 percentage points in 2015 (from 3.3 percentage points in 2014, and 4 in 2011). The offer rate for participating schools was 90.8 per cent, compared with 93.6 per cent for other schools. Changes in enrolment rates across the state since 2011 are largely consistent with the changing application rates.

In some cases, data at the university level within the Consortium show greater evidence of impact—although it follows that some universities’ activities have had less impact than observed at the Consortium level. The evaluation of outreach activities undertaken by QUT between 2010 and 2014 compared QTAC data from schools where QUT undertook outreach with all Queensland schools (QUT Equity Services 2015). This evaluation found that application rates (number of applications as a proportion of Year 12 completers) had increased by 4.9 per cent from QUT outreach schools between 2010-11 and 2013-14 (from 31.3 per cent to 36.2 per cent), compared with a 2.2 per cent increase across all schools. Similarly, the enrolment rate for QUT outreach schools increased by 4.9 per cent (from 20.3 per cent to 25.5 per cent) compared with a 3.4 per cent increase at all schools.

However, it may not be accurate to use changing application/offer/enrolment rates from different universities’ outreach jurisdictions as a way of comparing the relative or overall effectiveness of their activities, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is not possible to control for external variables such as macroeconomic conditions or changing higher education policy and any differential effects this may have on students from different backgrounds. Secondly, the number, location and profile of schools within each university’s jurisdiction (as allocated under the Consortium MOU) are different, and this may have a varying influence on students’ access to higher education. For example, QUT and ACU share the northern Brisbane region—QUT covered 33 schools with 20,845 students and ACU covered 29 schools with 6,132 in 2014. In comparison, JCU covered 54 schools with a total of 52,384 students in north and far north Queensland, while the University of the Sunshine Coast covered 56 schools with only 7,126 students, in the Wide Bay and Fraser Coast region. It is possible that differential factors such as proximity to university campus may have an impact on the access rates of students from different schools and jurisdictions.

In addition, there are several further limitations to the evaluation of HEPPP outreach activities. A natural limitation is that the ultimate impact of such activities is not known until participants graduate from high school. Working with school students to prepare them to apply to and progress through university is a long term, collaborative task, and due to this, many of the ultimate impacts of HEPPP outreach activities are yet to materialise. There may also be a time delay in the partnership

<sup>27</sup> When the comparison was confined to Bridges and non-Bridges schools in low socioeconomic areas, the difference was even more marked (6.09 per cent for low socioeconomic Bridges schools, compared with 0.97 per cent for low socioeconomic non-Bridges schools, a difference of 5.13 per cent). The corresponding difference between Bridges and non-Bridges schools in non-low socioeconomic areas was only 0.24 per cent.

development between universities, schools and other stakeholders that is necessary for effective outreach activities, as QUT notes in its evaluation report (QUT Equity Services 2015).

A further issue is that all but one of the HEPPP outreach projects have been unable to define suitable counterfactual or control groups against which to measure impact.<sup>28</sup> The Bridges to Higher Education evaluation (KPMG 2015) discussed above demonstrates how a counterfactual may be introduced, by developing a set of non-participating schools similar to the Bridges schools.

Finally, based on data provided by 29 universities (refer Section 4.1.2), it is possible that some schools are being over-served by outreach activities while others are not being reached by the HEPPP. This may have an effect on the overall impact of outreach activities when considered on a population (state or national) basis. The coverage of low SES schools could be improved through improved coordination and collaboration between universities, an issue discussed further in Chapter 11.

## KEY FINDINGS 2 OUTREACH

Outreach projects under HEPPP often combine a number of different activities in order to provide school students or other EIF target groups with multiple supports. Aspiration raising and academic preparation/support are the most common types of outreach activities.

The majority of outreach projects target only low SES students, although they may also capture intersecting equity subgroups. A significant proportion of projects are specifically targeted to Indigenous low SES students. Most programs worked with high school students.

There is emerging evidence that the HEPPP objective 'to increase the total number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities' (the Guidelines) is being met by HEPPP outreach activities.

The surveys and interviews carried out for this evaluation indicate that university staff are observing an impact on the higher education aspirations of school students and other participants due to HEPPP activities.

Similarly, the evaluation received 98 written submissions from schools and other HEPPP outreach partner organisations and participants, a significant majority of which expressed strong support for the HEPPP and reported positive impacts of HEPPP activities on students', teachers' and other individuals' understanding of university pathways. The majority of submissions also reported positive increases in students' confidence and aspirations to attend university, as well as increasing the number of student applications and enrolments.


Consistent with this, some evaluations carried out by universities indicate that HEPPP outreach activities are considered to have positive impacts by program recipients, including school students, teachers and community members. Qualitative surveys of participants indicate that HEPPP outreach activities appear to be shifting school students' and other individuals' views on the feasibility of attending university, and building students' and other individuals' ability to undertake higher education through targeted academic support.

However, application and enrolment data from participating schools show an inconsistent impact from HEPPP outreach activities. Some submissions provide quantitative data showing an increase in enrolment rates from their school, as does the Bridges to Higher Education evaluation and QUT outreach data. However, data from the Queensland Widening Participation Consortium show little change in the application and enrolment rates of students from participating schools compared with other schools at the state level.

There are several limitations to assessing the impact of HEPPP outreach activities. The long term nature of outreach activities may mean that impact is not yet apparent in some cases; for example, many participating students are yet to complete high school. Evaluations of the activities have rarely been able to provide adequate counterfactual or control groups. Additionally, there is some evidence that not all low SES schools are being serviced to the extent intended under HEPPP.

<sup>28</sup> Several evaluations discussed in this section compare participant schools' university application rate with other schools or all schools within the relevant state. While this comparison is useful, it is more instructive to compare participant schools with similar schools.





# 5

## ACCESS: PATHWAYS AND ADMISSIONS

*This chapter provides an analysis of the range and impact of HEPPP activities carried out by universities at the Access stage of the EIF student life cycle.*

The Pre-Access stage—Outreach to Schools and Communities—addressed in the previous chapter is the first stage of the student life cycle in the EIF, covering the student life cycle up to the point of access to higher education and comprising outreach to schools and communities (Bennett et al. 2015). The next stage—Access (Pathways and Admissions)—addressed in this chapter covers the entry process to higher education, and targets school leavers as well as mature age and VET students.

The primary aim for the Access stage is to ‘provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at university’ (Bennett et al. 2015). Access activities are considered to be Participation or Partnership activities under the HEPPP, depending on their EIF target group, and may be funded through either component. For example, Access activities that are conducted in partnership with schools are considered to be Partnership activities, but may be funded through either the Participation or Partnership components. As can be seen from the analysis of HEPPP expenditure in Chapter 3, the universities have invested less HEPPP funds in Access-related activities than in these other stages of the student life cycle. This is perhaps to be expected as the time period involved at the Access stage of the student life-cycle is relatively short.

### 5.1 Overview of HEPPP Access stage activities

HEPPP-funded activities at the Access stage have been aimed at assisting students from low SES and other equity groups by:

- building confidence and increasing knowledge of what universities have to offer
- providing scholarships to low SES and other equity groups
- raising academic knowledge to the levels necessary to commence undergraduate studies (e.g. foundation studies)
- making use of alternative selection criteria and other entry requirement tools
- providing assistance during admission processes and in the first week at university.

While the types of activities undertaken through this stage of the life cycle vary, they generally fit into one or more of the categories below:

- aspiration raising - pre-entry university experience
- aspiration raising - non-university experience
- careers advice
- mentoring, peer support
- academic preparation/support
- other outreach
- pre-university qualification pathway
- foundation programs for extra academic skills
- inclusive entry processes
- scholarships
- inclusive course design/pedagogies.

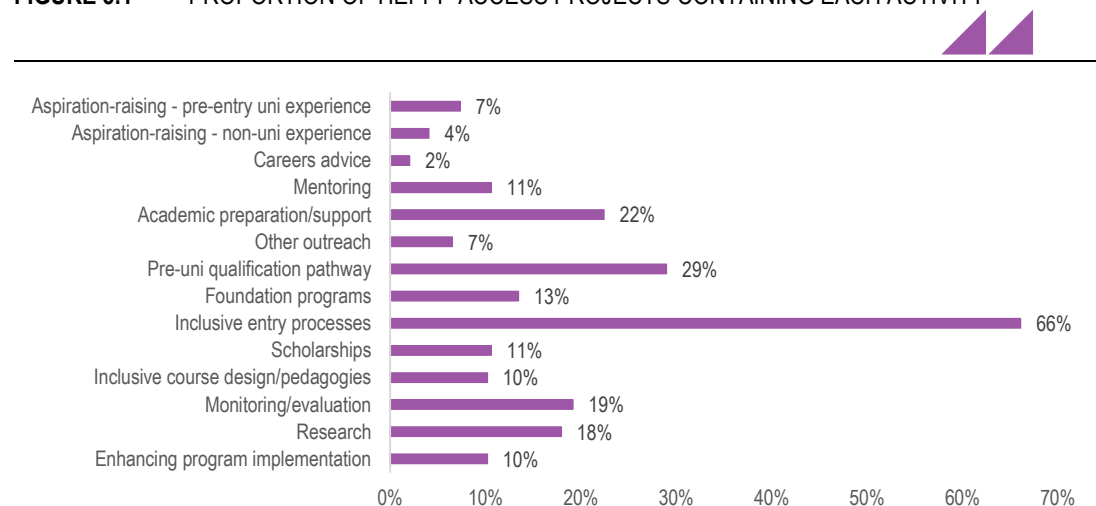
Many of the Access-related activities supported by the HEPPP overlap with earlier Pre-Access and following Participation stages. As such, this chapter focuses specifically on:

- pre-university qualification pathway and inclusive course design/pedagogies.
- foundation programs for extra academic skills
- inclusive entry processes
- scholarships
- other outreach

### 5.1.1 Nature and extent of activities

Analysis of the type of activities undertaken at the Access stage between 2010 and 2015 shows that inclusive entry processes are the most common activity by a significant margin, included in two thirds of Access projects (Figure 5.1). The next most common activity is pre-university qualification pathways, in 29 per cent of projects. Careers advice and aspiration raising – non-university experience were the least common activities at this life cycle stage.

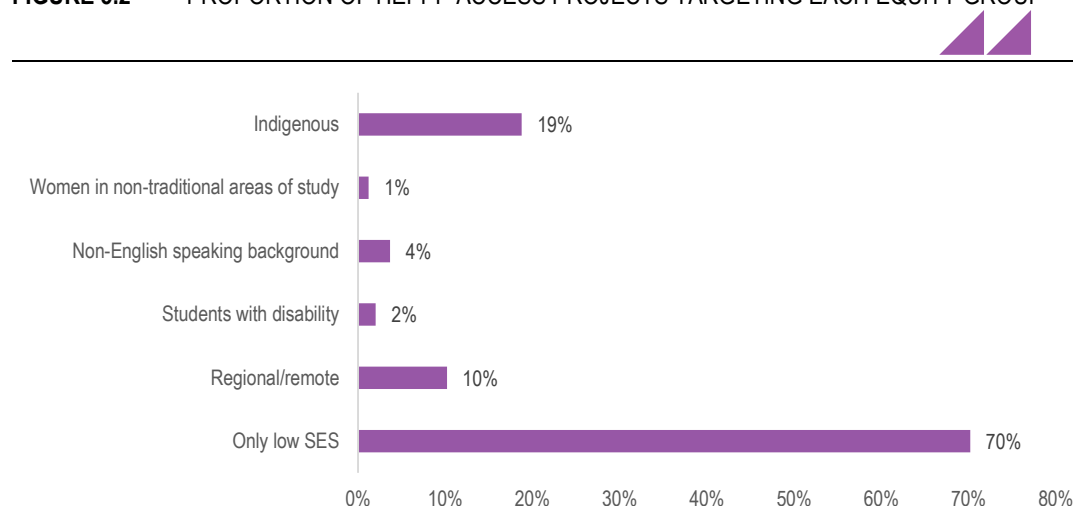
**FIGURE 5.1** PROPORTION OF HEPPP ACCESS PROJECTS CONTAINING EACH ACTIVITY



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can have multiple activities.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS 2010-2015

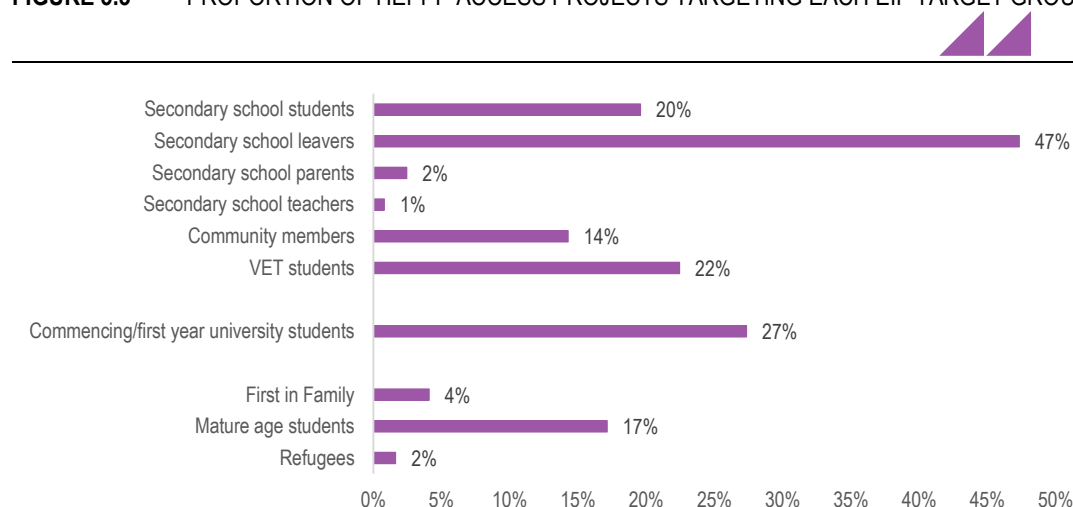
The majority of Access projects—70 per cent—were targeted towards only low SES people (Figure 5.2), although almost 20 per cent of projects specifically targeted low SES Indigenous people. Low SES people from regional and remote areas were specifically targeted in 10 per cent of Access projects.

**FIGURE 5.2** PROPORTION OF HEPPP ACCESS PROJECTS TARGETING EACH EQUITY GROUP

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can target multiple equity groups. See Appendix D for further disaggregation.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS 2010-2015

Access projects targeted a range of different EIF target groups (Figure 5.3). Almost half of the projects were targeted towards secondary school leavers (47 per cent). Other students—commencing/first year university students, VET, secondary school and mature age students—were targeted in between 17 and 27 per cent of projects, and community members in 14 per cent.

**FIGURE 5.3** PROPORTION OF HEPPP ACCESS PROJECTS TARGETING EACH EIF TARGET GROUP

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can target multiple EIF groups.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS 2010-2015

It is important to note at this stage of the student life cycle that there are challenges regarding the assignment of SES when the participant is a mature-aged student. It is not clear whether the SES level of policy interest is that which the participant held during their primary and secondary education (as for other EIF groups), or whether it is their current SES level. As such, it may be considered differently at different universities, although there is limited information available on this.

## 5.2 The impact of individual HEPPP activities at the Access stage

This section examines the impact of different types of HEPPP Access activities, based on project evaluations conducted by universities and consultations with stakeholders. It also provides a number of case studies which detail specific projects and their key activities.



A range of Access activities have been undertaken to address the objectives outlined in Section 5.1. Some of the measures that have been adopted through HEPPP funding are new. In other cases, existing activities have been enhanced and expanded using HEPPP funding.

### **5.2.1 Pre-university qualification pathway and inclusive course design/pedagogies**

Pre-university qualification pathway programs, or 'enabling' programs, provide an alternative higher education entry pathway for students. Completion of these courses is designed to allow students to meet the entry or curriculum requirements for a course of study that leads to a higher education award. In many cases HEPPP projects work with existing enabling programs to develop more inclusive course design or pedagogies that are aimed at students from low SES backgrounds.

For example, Deakin University provides a pre-university qualification pathway through the Deakin Learning Centres, which are supported with HEPPP Participation funding. These centres offer community-based programs through a supported online learning environment, with academic and mentoring support for students' transition to university at outer metropolitan Melbourne sites in Dandenong, Werribee and Craigieburn.

Griffith University also undertakes a range of activities targeted at mature age students and adult learners (Box 5.1). Griffith has used HEPPP funding to support the delivery of a range of outreach activities, including presentations and information sessions, on-campus events, parent information workshops and transition support events. Resources to engage and support this cohort have also been developed and disseminated.

**BOX 5.1** ADULT LEARNER PROJECT, GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

Griffith University's Adult Learner Project aims to share information and provide decision-making support about which pathways and courses provide the most appropriate higher education options for adult learners from low-income and equity backgrounds. It targets adult learners enrolled in bridging and pathway programs at TAFE or with private providers as well as community-based programs that include specific groups such as refugees or adults/parents from low-income backgrounds.<sup>a</sup> Program activities have been designed to encourage the higher education aspirations of non-school leavers and improve their confidence and skills for successful transition to tertiary study.

Some 93 events were delivered in Brisbane, Logan, Gold Coast and northern NSW regions in 2015, involving 22 partner organisations. There were 2,286 engagements with potential students from equity backgrounds and 13 mentors were involved.

During Adult Learners Week in September 2015, 34 Awards were presented to adult learners by Dr Jim Chalmers MP, federal member for Rankin. These bursaries acknowledge academic potential and encourage tertiary aspirations. The second Adult Learners' Week Celebration 2015 was held 2 September on the Logan campus to recognize the diverse experiences of adult learners and to celebrate and reward their academic efforts. The event attracted 115 participants and involved potential students enrolled in various local TAFE pathway programs, Senior Secondary Colleges and some community-based partner organisations.

A new transition support program for mature age students was developed in 2015. The 'Coffee Catch Up Club' was developed recognizing that mature age students from low SES and equity backgrounds have specific support needs as they transition from TAFE, VET or alternative pathways. 152 student engagements were achieved via this initiative in 2015.

Overall, participants have rated their experiences positively. Evaluation data collected from a range of student groups who attended an On-campus Experience showed that 91 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that their on-campus visit increased their understanding about university and 90 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that their on-campus visit increased their confidence in attending university.

One written submission to this evaluation noted:

*Assistance provided by Griffith University to the Adult Tertiary Preparation program (ATP) delivered at the TAFE QLD Brisbane – Logan Campus, has created a partnership by both institutions to collectively support students on further career pathways.*

*Assistance provided to TAFE QLD Brisbane Senior College has produced positive opportunities for year 12 students to consider a University Pathway. Activities under the HEPPP funding have encouraged students to consider a University Pathway that previously they may not have thought they were able to achieve.*

*Working collaboratively with Griffith University our ATP students have benefited not only from the (TAFE) curriculum but [also] the range of activities and rewards that Griffith University has offered. This has increased self-esteem and confidence of students in readiness for University. Griffith clearly define requirements and support mechanisms for year 12 students who identify as wishing to follow a University pathway.*

*TAFE QLD Brisbane, Submission 59*

<sup>a</sup> As noted in Section 1.1.1, there may be issues around consideration of 'low SES status' for mature age students, and in some cases low-income is used as a proxy.

SOURCE: GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORT 2015, ANNUAL HEPPP REPORT; GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY ADULT LEARNER EVALUATION SUMMARY 2012-2016; TAFE QLD BRISBANE, SUBMISSION 59

### 5.2.2 Foundation programs for extra academic skills

Foundation studies and other preparatory courses have been available for some time. In the past, they have often focused on assisting foreign students to meet university entry requirements; however there are now courses open to all students and many for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Several universities use these types of programs to facilitate the entry of students who have experienced educational disadvantage but have been identified as having the potential to succeed at university. School principals, in consultation with the relevant faculty, can recommend such students to participate in a special access or degree program.

Relatively little HEPPP funding has been invested in these types of courses, possibly because they are already an established part of access arrangements. In addition, entry to many courses is not contingent on the student having a low SES background, but is either open to all students or to students from otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds, which may mean that the program is only partially funded through the HEPPP. For many programs it may not be possible to restrict entry to a

particular cohort (for example, low SES students), and during consultations stakeholders also noted that even if it were possible it could be counterproductive by leading to stigmatisation of low SES students. The University Preparation Program at the University of Tasmania is designed for mature age students, people who did not complete Years 11 and/or 12, and for students currently enrolled in a degree who are struggling with their studies, rather than for the low SES student cohort. The program receives funding through the HEPPP and directly from the university.

In many cases, universities' foundation programs predate the HEPPP; however universities have used HEPPP funding to provide additional support for students from equity groups or to embed more inclusive pedagogies into the programs. In the case of ACU, students from equity groups participate in ACU Smart and are supported by an academic skills advisor throughout their first year. Students wishing to enrol at ACU who do not have sufficient pre-requisites to start a degree course have a variety of entry pathways available to them that include Diploma courses, or VET courses offered by ACUcom. This is discussed in more detail in Box 5.3 below. Since 2010, the program has received over \$10,000 HEPPP Participation funding annually.

The University of South Australia also provides a Foundation Studies program at the UniSA College, a one-year full-time on-campus course to build students' literary skills and confidence. The program was designed as part of the university's Participation Strategy, to increase the participation of students from low SES and other traditionally under-represented backgrounds. Since it was established in 2010, the College has received funding through the HEPPP Participation component each year—over \$1 million annually from 2011 to 2015. In 2015, 87 per cent of the 225 students who completed the Foundation Studies program received an undergraduate offer at the University of South Australia (University of South Australia HEPPP Annual Report 2015).

The University of Newcastle has used HEPPP funds for the design and implementation of a suite of learning support measures to assist enabling students with the transition to university (Box 5.2).

**BOX 5.2** OPEN FOUNDATION SUPPORT, UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

The University of Newcastle's Open Foundation Program was established in 1974. It 'provides students with a pathway to university and a preparation for tertiary study' (Bennett et al. 2015). The University has used HEPPP funding to introduce extra support measures that were intended 'to increase the retention and success of students from low SES backgrounds' enrolled in its enabling programs, as it recognised that these programs 'contain a higher percentage of low SES students than other student cohorts in higher education'. As noted earlier in this chapter, in many cases entry to such programs is not restricted to low SES students only. For example, in 2015 approximately 36 per cent of enabling program students were from low SES backgrounds and 62 per cent were the first in their family to access higher education.

The University reports that 'the HEPPP has provided an opportunity to refine teaching and learning practices within enabling programs so that support is embedded into programs, rather than an optional extra for students'. These support measures include embedded career information and advice, as well as an expansion of earning support models such as Peer Assisted Study Sessions and tutorial support clinics. Student Liaison Officers also monitor student engagement and follow up with students identified to be at risk of not completing their program, through scheduled appointments, drop-in visits, class presentations, telephone calls and online contact.

Participant feedback is positive, with 81.7 per cent of participants rating the online Open Foundation Program as 'excellent'. The program underwent an internal review by the university in 2013, which found that, over the life of the program (since 1974), approximately 90 per cent of Open Foundation students went on to study degree programs. It also found, for example, that in 2011, almost 13 per cent of the students who received the University Medal (awarded annually to undergraduate students who have shown exceptional academic merit) had completed the Open Foundation course as their pathway to university entry.

Changes continue to be made to the program in response to student need—for example, since the Online Learning Coordinator position was introduced in 2015, a 500 per cent increase in online forum posts/engagement has been observed. Early engagement with the forum is considered to be critical to students' retention and success.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE HEPPP ANNUAL REPORT 2015; BENNETT ET AL. 2015

### 5.2.3 Inclusive entry processes

The purpose of inclusive entry processes is to take into account factors other than previous academic achievement in admitting students to universities. Some universities have specific admissions policies to assist students from low SES backgrounds and other equity groups to gain entry. This may be through accepting a lower ATAR for students from low SES schools or arrangements for VET and mature age students to gain admission to universities, including recognition of prior learning. University admission policies to facilitate entry for students from low SES and other equity groups have not drawn on significant HEPPP funding. However some new admissions arrangements have been piloted or expanded through the HEPPP.

Examples of admissions policy measures supported by the HEPPP include consideration of students' demographic information in addition to academic results. For example, Early Offer Year 12 (E12) is an admissions pathway program offered by the University of Sydney. It is targeted towards Year 12 students across New South Wales from low SES backgrounds, regional and remote areas, and/or Indigenous students. The program's objective is 'to provide an admissions scheme which fairly assesses students from disadvantaged backgrounds' (University of Sydney HEPPP Annual Report 2015). Accepting a lower entry ATAR cut-off for students from low SES schools is a part of this admission process. In late 2014, 1,264 applications were received for the E12 scheme, with 625 early conditional offers made prior to the commencement of students' Year 12 exams. In January 2015, 408 firm offers were made to students, and 235 enrolments occurred. Thirty five university courses were made available through the E12 pathway, across 14 faculties.

UWA's Fairway program provides an alternative entry pathway for students entering the university, along with a range of other activities and support measures for participating students. Spanning the Pre-Access, Access and Participation stages of the student life cycle, the Fairway program supports

students from Year 12 (they are selected for the program in Year 11) through the completion of their schooling and their entry to university, as well as through their university studies, with mentoring, scholarships and other support, including an on-campus residential program. The program is open to 'students who demonstrate financial disadvantage and other significant challenges in achieving their higher education goals' (UWA HEPPP Annual Report 2015). Students who complete the Year 12 program successfully are eligible for an offer from UWA that is up to 10 points lower than the standard UWA ATAR cut-off of 80.00. In 2015, 115 students commenced the program, with 90 completing. Of the completing students, over 96 per cent received university offers (87 students). This is representative of other years, with 96.4 per cent of Fairway-completing students between 2012 and 2015 receiving an offer from a university in Western Australia. Student feedback was also positive, with 100 per cent of survey respondents indicating that they would recommend the program to others, and 97.8 per cent agreeing that it had enhanced their motivation to succeed in Year 12.

The uniTEST is an alternative selection tool for access to undergraduate courses (except undergraduate Medicine) at Flinders University, developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research. It is intended to help identify students who have the ability to succeed at university but who may not be eligible based on Year 12 academic results alone. The program was first piloted at Flinders University in 2008 with pre-HEPPP funding from the Department, and has been expanded through HEPPP funding since 2010. There were 167 schools participating in the program in 2015 (an increase from 130 in 2011), with a total of 2,071 students sitting the test. Almost 80 per cent of participating schools are considered to be low SES. In total, 267 students received offers to a course at Flinders University as a result of their participation in uniTEST in 2015 (an offer to participation rate of 12.9 per cent). Of these, 234 received offers for their preferred course, an increase of 46.2 per cent from 2014.

Positive feedback on the project has been received from stakeholders. In its submission to the evaluation, participating school Banksia Park International High School noted that although it did not have data on applications or acceptances at Flinders University following the uniTEST, the school appreciated the 'flexible nature of the entry process which is helpful for some students' (Submission 8). The submission from Tyndale Christian School Strathalbyn, another participating school, observed that the uniTEST has 'encouraged students to commit to considering university enrolment' even though they may be facing financial and other challenges, and deciding between tertiary study (immediate or delayed) and full-time employment (Submission 68).

UTS has also used HEPPP funding to expand and strengthen access schemes and admission pathways into UTS to assist low SES and Indigenous students gain access to university. This includes recognising academic potential beyond ATAR attainment and increased enrolment at UTS by low SES students and TAFE students. For example, the UTS-Sydney TAFE Pathway, through the U@Uni Pathways Project, focuses 'on improve[ing] UTS processes to support TAFE pathways to the university, along with expand[ing] information and support to students currently studying at TAFE' (UTS HEPPP Annual Report 2015). While much of the evaluation data from this project are from participant surveys, they indicate that the TAFE cohort's understanding of university is increasing. Eighty nine per cent of TAFE students who participated in UTS's classroom visits in 2015 agreed that they had a greater understanding of what university offers, and 91 per cent felt that they had a greater understanding of pathways to enter university (200 of 320 students responded to the survey request). In 2015, there were an additional 23 UTS students with a TAFE background. These data were not provided for earlier years.

ACU offers an inclusive entry pathway for low SES students through its Principal's Recommendation Program. Students who enrol in the university through this path are then provided with extra support through the HEPPP-funded ACU Smart program (Box 5.3).

**BOX 5.3** ACU SMART, AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

The ACU Smart program began in 2010 and is now conducted on all ACU campuses. ACU Smart's primary objective is to improve student performance in the first year of higher education, by providing opportunities to develop the more generic skills that students need to succeed at university. In the first phase of the program, students attend transition courses of one or two days in the week before orientation. The courses are conducted by Equity Pathways staff, lecturers and staff from the Office of Student Success (which also received HEPPP Participation funding) and the academic skills team. Staff introduce students to the skills that they will need at university, including academic, technological, logistical, study and time management skills. In the program's second phase, students' progress is tracked throughout their first year at the university.

This program is funded under the Participation component of HEPPP, recognising that students from regional and low SES backgrounds can feel isolated, lack confidence in the new environment, and be under prepared for higher education. The ACU Smart aims to improve retention and, ultimately, academic success by addressing these issues. In 2015 there was a total of 436 students participating in the program, across all six campuses. This is an increase from 345 students across four campuses in 2013 and 310 students across five campuses in 2014.

Invitations are issued to all new low SES students who have achieved an ATAR below a particular score, via mail, email and mobile phone. Students from partner secondary schools (low SES) entering under the Principal's Recommendation Program are expected to attend ACU Smart.

The program obtains feedback from participants by questionnaire and structured feedback from course presenters. Feedback from students in 2015 shows that 92-100 per cent report more confidence in starting university and an increased understanding of academic expectations after the program. Additionally, 95-100 per cent of respondents reported the formation of new and valued relationships with fellow students through the program.

SOURCE: ACU EQUITY PATHWAYS 2010-2014 REPORT

### 5.2.4 Scholarships

The provision of scholarships for students from low SES backgrounds, Indigenous students, and/or those from rural and remote areas is widely recognised as necessary to address the concerns and capacity of some students to meet the costs of studying at university. This commonly takes place at both the Access and the Participation stages of the student life cycle. At the Access stage, scholarships are provided to raise students' aspiration to attend university and ease the financial burden of this access. This is discussed below.

At the Participation stage, discussed in Chapter 6, scholarships are intended to support students during their studies and decrease attrition, for example by reducing the number of hours they need to work to support themselves while studying. Scholarships may also be provided in the Participation stage to allow low income students to participate in other activities, such as international exchange programs, that they may not otherwise be able to afford.

Universities have discovered that there are often misunderstandings among low SES school students about the costs of attending university, and that these students may lack knowledge of available sources of financial support (Bennett et al. 2015). In some cases this knowledge gap is addressed through outreach programs, including mentor programs which provide school students with a less formal and potentially less intimidating way of gaining information about the range of supports available (see discussion in Chapter 4). These supports include scholarships, such as those embedded in the low SES entry pathways program at QUT (Box 5.4).

It should be noted that some pathways and admissions measures, including scholarships, are directed at particular courses, such as nursing, agriculture, or science, technology and mathematics (STEM) courses. For example, UNE's GRASS Industry Placement Scholarships program aims to raise school leavers' awareness of the broad range of science-based careers supporting agriculture, and to draw attention to the course options available as pathways to these careers.



**BOX 5.4** Q-STEP SCHEME, QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

The Q-Step scheme is QUT's entry program for students from low-income backgrounds. The objective of the program is 'to redress the negative effects of poverty on achievement, and provide practical assistance'. The scheme provides recipients with a boost to their rank or 'Overall Position' (known as OP—a student's position in the state rank order, based on their achievement in certain subjects) for entry to university, as well as a guaranteed scholarship. The scholarship amount has increased from \$1,000 until 2012, to \$2,500 in 2013 and 2014, and \$3,500 in 2015. Applications and assessments for the scheme, including facilitation of the bonus points, occur through QTAC's Educational Access Scheme.

Through the scheme, QUT staff also conduct QTAC and general information presentations at low SES schools, provide assistance with QTAC applications, and distribute QTAC vouchers to students who cannot afford the application fee or for whom the need to pay by credit card presents a problem.

The Q-Step scheme pre-dates the HEPPP, having been implemented in the 1990s; however HEPPP funding has been used to significantly expand the reach of the program. In 2010, HEPPP Participation funds were used to double the size of the on-campus visits and school presentations arm of the program.

In 2015, staff provided information talks for more than 1,390 Year 12 students across 16 schools and distributed 155 vouchers (valued at \$5,580 in total). There were 737 successful Q-Step applications. Retention rates for the 2015 Q-Step cohort were higher than for other cohorts—87 per cent for Q-Step students compared with 85.9 per cent for all low SES students and 86.6 per cent for all QUT students.

The evaluation of QUT's 2010–2014 Widening Participation program notes that the number of applications and offers to students from low-income backgrounds through the scheme has increased substantially in that time:

*While not suggesting there is a causal link, it is heartening to note that during the HEPPP funding period both overall and target school Q-Step Scheme/QTAC EAS financial hardship category applications have increased. QUT course offers to students assessed as meeting the financial hardship criteria increased between the 2009–2010 and 2012–2013 admissions years (from 313 to 729) with a slight dip to 683 in 2013–2014.*

SOURCE: QUT WIDENING PARTICIPATION EVALUATION REPORT 2010–2014; QUT HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

### 5.2.5 Other outreach

Universities' HEPPP-funded activities to build student confidence and increase their knowledge of what universities have to offer have included information sessions for prospective students from low SES and other equity groups, as well as their parents. While some of these confidence-building activities start in the Pre-Access stage of the student life cycle, many continue into the Access phase. These information activities are particularly important at the time when students are considering seeking entry to university because it is at this time that low SES students may have concerns about whether they will meet admissions requirements and, if they are successful in gaining admission, how they will manage the logistics of commencing university studies.

For Indigenous students, there are a number of examples where universities have provided these information sessions to Indigenous Councils and other organisations. In some cases, universities have used current students who are nearing the completion of their studies to help raise the confidence of prospective students.

A common concern of students from low SES and other equity groups is what their costs at university are likely to be and how they will finance their studies (refer Section 5.2.4). Students from regional and remote areas and Indigenous students often have to live away from home, and can encounter difficulties in finding affordable accommodation. University information services and, in some cases scholarships and other financial assistance, can be important at this stage, and universities are being proactive in providing information about the availability of this assistance to new students. This includes telephone contact with them to identify and address any problems, as well as support services available by telephone. These concerns are also commonly identified by students in the Pre-Access stage of the life cycle, and in some cases are addressed through outreach activities to schools and communities (Bennett et al. 2015). Support services for commencing students during the admissions period and the first week of university, such as those provided through the ACU Smart program (Box 5.3) are also very important.

### 5.3 The overall impact of HEPPP Access stage activities

The HEPPP-supported Access measures target a critical step in getting low SES, Indigenous and other equity groups to make the transition to university studies, which is one of the key objectives provided by the Guidelines. The Access stage of the student life cycle is focused on a relatively short time-frame and as a result, it has received less funding by universities than the preceding and subsequent phases of the student life cycle (see Figure 3.2).

There is emerging evidence that the objective of increasing low SES access rates is being met, which is relevant to both the Pre-Access and Access life cycle stages (refer Section 4.4). Since 2010, there has been a significant increase in the number of people from low SES backgrounds entering higher education, with both the DDS and the HEPPP likely contributing (Section 9.2).

Compared to projects undertaken in the other student life cycle stages, universities have undertaken relatively few evaluations of their Access projects. However, most projects have been the subject of student surveys and other feedback mechanisms, and some evaluations are still underway. Additionally, comparative retention data across cohorts has been collected for some projects, such as the Q-Step entry program at QUT (Box 5.4). There are limited data available on the access rates of students participating in Access stage activities.

There are a number of reasons for the limited number of evaluations undertaken. Firstly, access and admissions measures have been undergoing frequent change, making evaluation difficult. Some of these changes have been adopted in response to student surveys and other feedback mechanisms. Secondly, it is difficult to attribute student outcomes such as retention and completion to activities and policies that cover the relatively narrow Access period, and there are limited data available on access rates.

Some data are available on Access projects, for example, approximately 90 per cent of students who have completed the University of Newcastle's Open Foundation program have gone on to study degree programs (Box 5.2). Bennett et al. (2015) discuss this program and note that 'enabling programs have a strong impact on student access to higher education'. However as discussed above, in this case and many others, these programs are not targeted to specific cohorts, and thus data on specific changes to low SES people's access as a result of the activity are not available. Further to this, HEPPP funding for these programs is often directed to adding additional supports or to embedding more inclusive curriculum, rather than to implementing the access or pathways programs themselves, so it is difficult to determine the marginal impact that the HEPPP-funded part of the program has made.

There are also some data available on retention rates, such as QUT's Q-Step entry scheme. Retention rates are higher for students from the Q-Step program (who are all from low-income backgrounds) than for all QUT students and QUT students from low SES backgrounds, which suggests that the program is improving outcomes for its participants (Box 5.4). This level of data are unavailable for the majority of programs, however, with many relying on opinion and affect data from participants. This is generally positive, with feedback showing the programs can help build students' confidence and preparedness for their university studies, as well as supporting them to develop peer relationships.

Stakeholders also expressed positive views on HEPPP Access activities through the evaluation's consultation process. For example, several written submissions from secondary schools in South Australia expressed support for the uniTEST entry pathway at Flinders University.

As a result of the limited data available on the impact of HEPPP Access activities, it is difficult to draw strong conclusions about the effectiveness of pathways and access measures. In these circumstances, this analysis relies on input from university staff, student surveys, submissions and annual HEPPP reports provided to the Department. These indicate that the HEPPP is having a positive impact on student access to university.



### KEY FINDINGS 3 ACCESS

The Access stage of the student life cycle is smaller than the Pre-Access and Participation stages in terms of both period of time and degree of HEPPP funding invested by universities. In many cases, HEPPP funding has been used either to pilot new programs or to expand existing access activities, including the provision of extra supports within them for students from disadvantaged groups.

Inclusive entry processes rate as the most common activity undertaken in the Access phase, included in more than two thirds of projects. This is followed by pre-university qualification pathways and academic preparation/support.


Almost half of the HEPPP projects undertaken at this stage of the life cycle targeted secondary school leavers. Commencing/first year students and VET students were the next most common EIF target groups. Most projects targeted only people from low SES backgrounds, although many targeted low SES Indigenous students and low SES students from regional and remote areas.

There have been relatively few university evaluations undertaken of HEPPP Access projects. There is some evidence that a high proportion of students participating in Access activities go on to study degree programs; for example, over 90 per cent through the University of Newcastle's Open Foundation Program go on to study for a degree. Where data are available, higher retention rates for students participating in Access activities than for all students can be seen (for example, through QUT's Q-Step scheme).

Some projects have been the subject of student surveys and other feedback mechanisms and these suggest that these projects are improving students' confidence and their feelings of preparedness for university studies, as well as supporting them to develop peer relationships.

The evidence that is available, along with additional information from the consultations undertaken for the evaluation, suggests that the HEPPP is having a positive impact at the Access stage and is extending existing university activities and encouraging the initiation of new measures.





# 6

## PARTICIPATION: TRANSITION, ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRESSION

*This chapter provides an analysis of the range and impact of HEPPP activities carried out by universities at the Participation stage of the EIF student life cycle.*

The Participation stage of the student life cycle covers students' transition to university and their engagement and progress during studies. These activities are funded through the HEPPP Participation component.

Activities at this stage are intended to recognise that the transition to university study is a significant life experience that may require the student to adapt to new environments, new forms of learning and different expectations of behaviour and performance. Activities also provide support intended to help students remain connected to their studies and have a clear view of their progression through study and into employment.

Key types of projects at this stage of the student life cycle include orientation programs and first year inclusive transition programs. After the first year of study, initiatives include extra-curricular learning and academic support programs, outside or in addition to normal classes, and curriculum and course design (Bennett et al. 2015).

The Participation stage may also include activities that support the Outreach, and Pathways and Admissions stages, such as bridging programs, careers advice regarding educational pathways, and mentoring and role models. Where Participation programs are focused on careers advice and employment support pre-course completion, they may also support programs in the next stage of the student life cycle, Attainment and Transition Out.

## 6.1 Overview of HEPPP Participation stage activities

### 6.1.1 Nature and extent of activities

Participation stage activities undertaken by universities under the HEPPP concentrate on orienting students to the higher education environment, offer various forms of academic learning development and seek to foster a sense of belonging in new students.

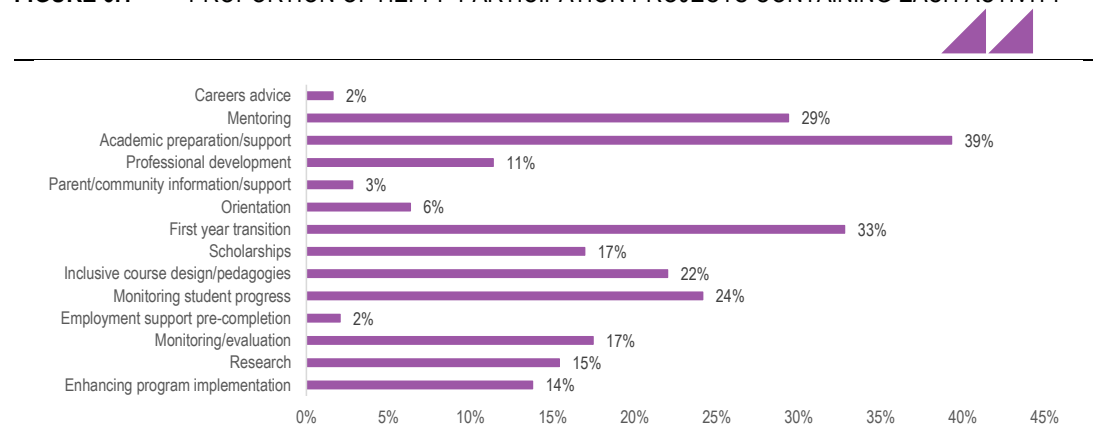
The range of Participation stage activities includes:

- orientation programs and first year transition programs
- academic preparation/support
- inclusive course design/pedagogies
- monitoring student progress
- mentoring, peer support
- professional development
- scholarships
- careers advice, employment support pre-completion and alternative exit programs.

Each of these is discussed in further detail in Section 6.2, including the purpose of the activity and the types and impact of relevant projects that have been undertaken through the HEPPP.

Academic preparation/support is the most common type of activity undertaken at the Participation stage, included in 39 per cent of projects (Figure 6.1). First year transition activities and mentoring were also common, in 33 per cent and 29 per cent of projects respectively. Perhaps related to the importance of academic preparation and support in successful higher education participation, student progress was monitored in one quarter of Participation projects, as a means of identifying students in need of support.

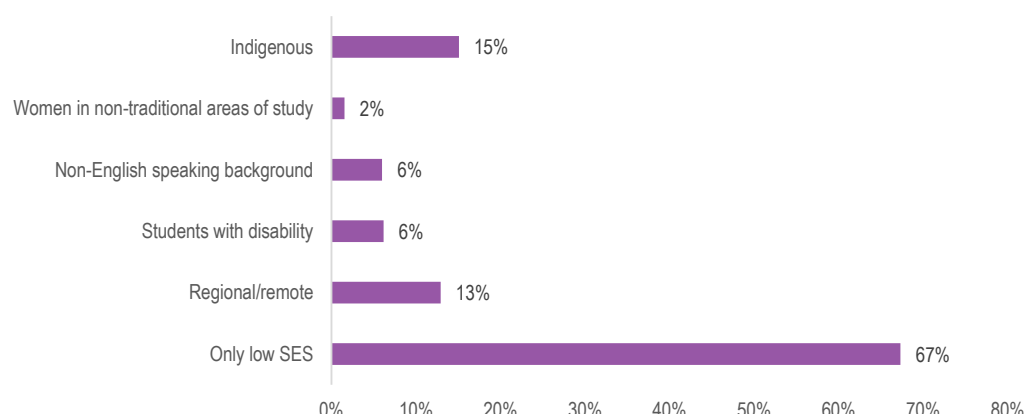
**FIGURE 6.1** PROPORTION OF HEPPP PARTICIPATION PROJECTS CONTAINING EACH ACTIVITY



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can have multiple activities.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

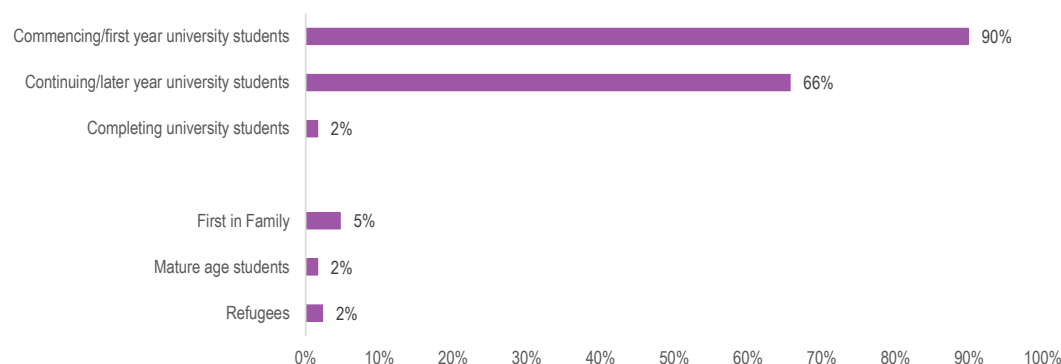
Analysis of target groups shows that over two thirds of Participation projects target only low SES students (Figure 6.2). Low SES Indigenous students and low SES students from regional and remote areas are targeted in 15 and 13 per cent of projects respectively. The proportion of programs targeting students with a disability and those from non-English speaking backgrounds is 6 per cent, with only 2 per cent of programs targeting women in non-traditional areas of study.

**FIGURE 6.2** PROPORTION OF HEPPP PARTICIPATION PROJECTS TARGETING EACH EQUITY GROUP

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can target multiple equity groups. See Appendix D for further disaggregation.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

Projects in the Participation stage can target more than one EIF group. Most projects in this stage targeted commencing/first year university students (90 per cent), with two thirds targeting continuing/late year students (Figure 6.3). Few projects targeted the other EIF groups at this stage of the student life cycle (5 per cent or fewer).

**FIGURE 6.3** PROPORTION OF HEPPP PARTICIPATION PROJECTS TARGETING EACH EIF TARGET GROUP

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can target multiple EIF groups.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

### 6.1.2 Survey results

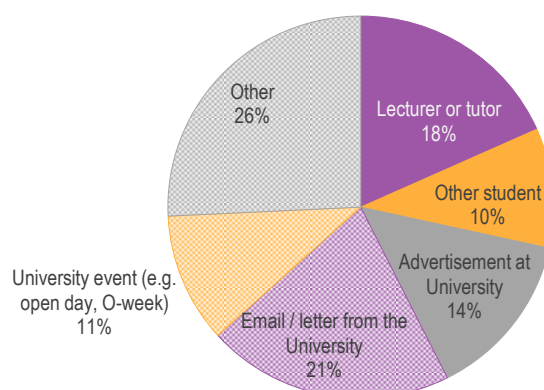
University staff who have been involved in implementation of the HEPPP were surveyed for this evaluation (refer Sections 1.2.3 and 4.1.3), and students who had participated in HEPPP projects were also surveyed. The results of these surveys relevant to Participation activities are provided in the figures below, aggregated across the 15 universities involved in the surveys and aggregated from the multiple HEPPP projects within each university.

Students were asked how they had first found out about the HEPPP projects offered by their university (Figure 6.4); excluding those who indicated 'other means', the most common way of learning about HEPPP projects was through an email or letter from the university (21 per cent). Students also found

out about HEPPP projects through their lecturers or tutors (18 per cent) or through advertisements at the university (14 per cent).

**FIGURE 6.4** STUDENT SURVEY, FINDING OUT ABOUT HEPPP PROJECTS

How did you first find out about the HEPPP project you participated in?

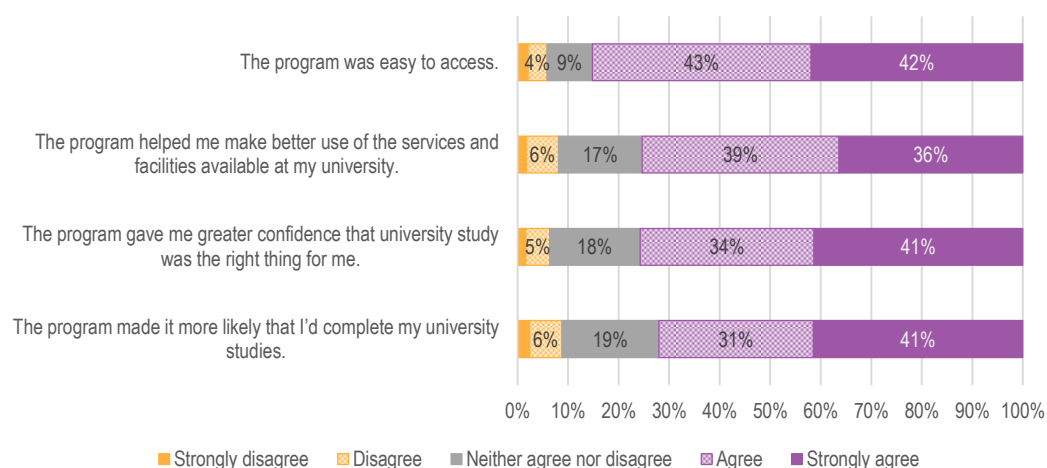


Note: n=3,447

SOURCE: STUDENT SURVEY DATA

The majority of students agree that the HEPPP projects are easy to access and had a positive impact on their studies and their experience at university (Figure 6.5). Three quarters of student respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project with which they were involved had helped them make better use of the university's services and facilities, and the same proportion agreed that the program gave them greater confidence that university studies were right for them. Additionally, 72 per cent of respondents indicated that the projects had increased the likelihood that they would complete their university studies.

**FIGURE 6.5** STUDENT SURVEY, IMPACT ON RETENTION AND COMPLETION



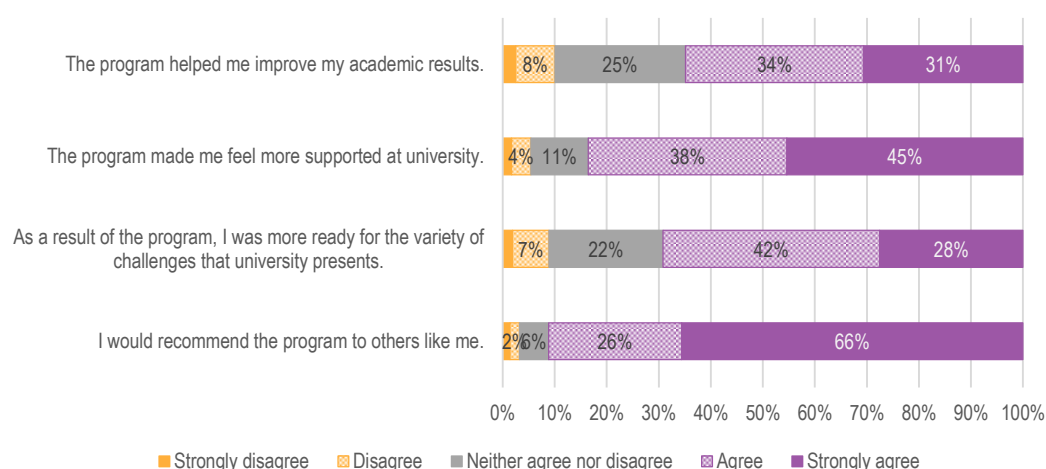
Note: from top to bottom n=3,502, 3,422, 3,418, 3,432

SOURCE: STUDENT SURVEY DATA

Students were also asked how HEPPP projects have supported them and helped them to improve their academic results (Figure 6.6). A significant majority of students felt that the projects had made them feel more supported (83 per cent) and more prepared for the challenges associated with university life (70 per cent). Most students said they would recommend the project to others in a

similar situation (92 per cent), and 65 per cent agreed that it had helped them to improve their academic results.

**FIGURE 6.6** STUDENT SURVEY, IMPACT OF SUPPORT AND RESULTS

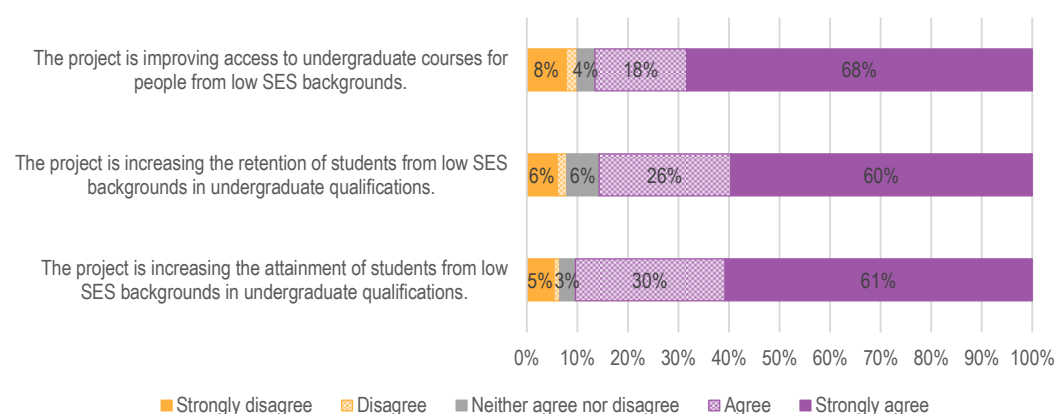


Note: from top to bottom n=3,407, 3,446, 3,430, 3,510

SOURCE: STUDENT SURVEY DATA

The majority of university staff, over 60 per cent, strongly agreed that the projects were having a positive impact on access, retention and completion for students from low SES backgrounds (Figure 6.7). Eighty-six per cent of staff respondents considered that the project was improving access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds and that the project was increasing the retention of low SES students in undergraduate degrees. Staff also agreed that the projects were increasing the undergraduate completion/attainment rates of low SES students (91 per cent). The overall impact of the HEPPP on these student outcomes is discussed in Chapter 9.

**FIGURE 6.7** UNIVERSITY STAFF SURVEY, ACCESS AND RETENTION



Note: from top to bottom n=281, 265, 260

SOURCE: STAFF SURVEY DATA

## 6.2 The impact of individual HEPPP activities at the Participation stage

This section examines the impact of different types of HEPPP Participation stage activities, based on project evaluations conducted by universities and consultations with stakeholders. It also provides a number of case studies detailing specific projects and drawing out key activities.

### 6.2.1 Orientation programs and first year transition programs

HEPPP activities are intended to assist students with adaptation to the cultural, learning and social environment of the university. The activities recognise that students may experience culture shock and will benefit from familiarisation with the university environment and available support services.

The Critical Interventions Framework Part II identified pre-course commencement programs as an effective transition initiative. These programs target specific group(s) and are more tailored than general bridging programs. The activities and materials are linked directly to the course material and provide students with guidance on how the course will be conducted, what types of study are appropriate and the particular learning resources available to them. These programs recognise that effective learning is supported by familiarity with academic styles and conventions and 'learning how to learn' within a university environment (Bennett et al. 2015).

A number of universities have adopted first year transition projects. JCU has implemented 'Enhancing the First Year Experience', involving the development of a coordinated approach to the first year experience and supported by resource development and professional development for staff. At the Faculty of Arts at CSU, a support network ('Building the First Year Experience of LSES Students') has been established for students to prevent isolation and poor performance in students studying with CSU's School of Theology, either at one of the four sites which are not located on CSU campuses or by distance education. The University of Southern Queensland has implemented a program to help NESB students overcome the challenges in social integration associated with the unfamiliarity with social norms in a new community.

The University of Melbourne program Student Connect aims to provide a sense of connectedness and opportunities for advising first year students. All first year students receive phone calls from peer advisors to discuss transition issues and establish appointments with advisors. Advisors provide a range of expertise in transition, course planning career and developmental advice. Participants reported increased sense of connectedness and value within the university community. Satisfaction and retention rates of first year students have shown some increase (Bennett et al. 2015). In both 2014 and 2015, 96 per cent of those who attended at least one appointment with Student Connect reported that they felt 'motivated' or 'connected' after they met with a peer advisor.

## BOX 6.1 TRACKS PRE-ORIENTATION PROGRAMS FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS, THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

UNE has used HEPPP Participation funds to support Indigenous students to participate in TRACKS – pre-orientation programs for commencing Indigenous students. The aim of TRACKS is to enable Indigenous students to start their university career with confidence and adequate knowledge, and to start it in a culturally supportive environment.

The programs were held at the Oorala Aboriginal Centre on the UNE campus. In 2015, 41 commencing Indigenous students and 4 Vice Chancellor's Scholars attended the TRACKS Pre-orientation program events.

The program contributed positively to the increase in the success rate of commencing TRACKS students in 2015 over 2014: 53 per cent (2015) compared to 45 per cent (2014). Indigenous students' GPA also improved from 2.4 (2014) to 2.9 (2015).

While overall enrolments in the TRACKS program increased from 33 to 62 students, course withdrawals decreased from 5 per cent in 2014 to 0 per cent in 2015. Nine students progressed from TRACKS to undergraduate study at the end of Trimester 2, with a further seven likely to do so in Trimesters 1 or 2, 2016. At the end of Trimester 2 2015, records showed that eight TRACKS students were working with an Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) tutor. The 'offer to enrolment' ratio improved from 0.70 (2014) to 0.84 (2015), which compares favourably to the UNE-wide 'offer to enrolment' ratio of 0.46. Enrolment sessions held during the on-campus pre-orientation event contributed to this improvement.

The overall satisfaction rating for TRACKS units for reporting period 1 2015 was 4.0 (out of a possible 5.0). Feedback received (informal feedback via email and Moodle learning management system) indicated a high level of satisfaction with the program and support received through the Oorala Centre.

SOURCE: UNE HEPPP ANNUAL REPORT 2015.

### 6.2.2 Academic preparation/support

At the Participation stage, academic preparation and support projects are designed to fill the skill/knowledge gaps of students, with particular focus on underprepared commencing students. They aim to increase academic achievement, increase social engagement with peers through mentoring and provide individual academic skills development through specialised academic skills staff (Lizzio & Wilson 2013; Tower et al. 2015).

Many universities deliver academic preparation workshops with HEPPP funding. For example, over 2011-2014 CSU piloted and then expanded Get Ready for Science workshops aimed at breaking down barriers and stereotypes that prevent some students from engaging with science, reducing students' science-anxiety and increasing their interest in science. To date, nine workshops have been run across three campuses, with 204 students participating. CSU reports that workshop attendees received higher average marks than non-attendees, that low SES attendees performed significantly better in the introductory bioscience subject than non-attendees, and that workshop attendees progressed through subjects at a rate 10 per cent faster than non-attendees.

Projects focused on providing academic support through peer assisted study sessions (PASS) are common under the HEPPP. The two key foundation stones of PASS are that the sessions are peer-led and collaborative in design. Sessions are often weekly and are facilitated by peer educators, who are high achieving senior students, trained to offer education services to their peers. The aim is to help students' master subject content while gaining discipline specific study skills. PASS sessions are often attached to challenging units or units perceived to be difficult by students (van der Meer & Scott 2013).

An example of such a project is the Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) program, which is provided by many of the Table A universities. At James Cook University, PASS is offered for first year subjects that have historically had a high withdrawal or failure rate (32 first-year subjects in 2015). In 2015, JCU found that the retention rate of PASS students was found to be 82 per cent, compared with 66 per cent for students who did not attend PASS, and attendance was also correlated with a higher



grade point average—students who attended PASS achieved an average GPA of 4.42 compared with 3.6 for those who did not attend. Students' outcomes were positively associated with increased attendance at PASS—those who attended more than six sessions achieved a retention rate of 74 per cent compared to a retention rate of 60 per cent for those who attended five or fewer sessions. It was also found that if a student attended more than 10 sessions the retention rate was approximately 91 per cent. As with many similar programs (such as discussed in Section 6.2.6), selection bias may be a factor in these figures. Notwithstanding this, the university reported that PASS was the second most impactful HEPPP project at the university, after the scholarship program.

#### **BOX 6.2** PEER ASSISTED STUDY SESSIONS, WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

WSU has offered PASS across its faculties since 2010. The PASS program targets low SES students enrolled in academically challenging subjects (as informed by historical data). In 2015, WSU refined its PASS offering to include PASSOnline, establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PASS Facilitator Network, PASSWrite and Research initiatives.

In 2015, 128 students attended 661 hours of PASSWrite sessions. In this year, the average mark of attendees was reported as being 15 points higher than non-attendees. Pre and post-testing by the University indicated that participants generally improved their writing styles, which is likely to have contributed to the aforementioned outcomes. Additionally, 85 per cent of surveyed participants reported higher confidence levels with regard to applying learned reading and writing techniques in assignments. Students interviewed for this evaluation who had been involved as PASS facilitators observed that the support helped students revise and solidify their knowledge, built their capacity to structure university life and increased their confidence.

Within the overall PASS program, the difference in GPA trend between the PASS and non-PASS cohorts increased from 0.26 to 0.92 between 2012 and 2015. Progression rates for the Spring 2015 PASS cohort were 86.3 per cent and 67 per cent for the non-PASS cohort.

Student Survey feedback from the Autumn 2015 cohort found that PASS is highly valued by the majority of survey respondents. Students regard it as a program that cultivates knowledge about content, independent learning, social networks on campus, an enjoyable learning experience, a clearer understanding of study expectations, confidence in communication, increased motivation towards completion, improved exam preparation, and enhanced capacities to work collaboratively and more productively.

Survey responses from PASS and ePASS facilitators from the Autumn 2015 session indicated that these programs assisted in improvements in a range of employability indicators, including career readiness, knowledge of organisational dynamics, higher level thinking and critical thinking skills, soft skills, belonging and self-improvement.

SOURCE: WSU HEPPP ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Using HEPPP funding, many universities are providing academic support through online learning tools. For example, the YourTutor online tool is being used by 11 universities under the HEPPP to provide tutoring support to students after hours. The online tool supports flexibility around work schedules and family commitments, particularly enabling low SES and mature age students to access academic support (Regional Universities Network, Submission 47). YourTutor states that 83 per cent of students using the service reported improved confidence in academic study (YourTutor, Submission 83).

#### **6.2.3 Inclusive course design/pedagogies and professional development**

Inclusive course design/pedagogies a strategy aimed at widening the participation of students from non-traditional backgrounds. The development of an appropriate pedagogy provides an approach that makes explicit the hidden forms of assumed knowledge that operate in higher education. For example, the approach reveals how students should not be presumed to be independent or adult learners on entry because their previous experiences of learning—about how to learn and perform—are vastly different to the ones they are presented with on entry to the university environment.

The purpose of this activity is to increase academic achievement and access to education support by embedding educational support within curricula. It also builds the capacity and awareness of staff of the changing needs of students.

For example, the Deakin University Inclusive Curriculum and Capacity Building project facilitated collaborative and targeted curriculum interventions by funding a team within the university to provide advice and support on inclusive practice to facilities. The result was the embedding of inclusive practice, academic literacies, digital literacy and career development learning into curriculum in targeted courses and units. The most detailed student outcome evidence for this project was from the Faculty of Arts and Education, where final grades and success rates were significantly higher after the project than for the pre-intervention 2014 cohort (final grade rose from 53 per cent to 69 per cent).

Similarly ACU piloted the Adopting Transparent Pedagogies project in 2015 to improve the quality of teaching and student learning in first year units for First in Family and low SES students across three faculties: Education and Arts, Law and Business, and Health Sciences. To date, three interdisciplinary workshops (each four hours' duration) have been held in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, with 285 staff participating (ACU, Submission 126). The project plans to generate quantitative and qualitative data to measure improvements in teaching and learning outcomes, although these data were not available to this evaluation.

With the increased popularity of online course delivery, a number of universities are using HEPPP funding to enhance their online offerings to better meet the needs of low SES students. The University of Wollongong has implemented the Designing for Diversity project which aims to support students from low SES Indigenous backgrounds who are learning online by developing and delivering training resources for teaching staff. The training focuses on embedding principles which align with best practice for teaching diverse students. There is no impact study on this project.

#### **BOX 6.3** REACHING ON, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

REACHingON is a course-based English proficiency enhancement program in the University of Southern Queensland that provides relevant and engaging academic material to strengthen low SES students' academic literacies. HEPPP Participation funds were allocated to the program in 2013 and 2015. It involves:

- development of online REACH modules supporting academic English reading and writing skills embedded in course content based on requirements for successful completion of assignments
- facilitation and communication of one hour sessions for 10 weeks in 3 first year courses
- production of online video clips that were embedded in 5 selected modules in three core course
- assessment of writing proficiency of some students in each of the 3 courses at the beginning and end of their course.

The program contributes to the university's development and monitoring of student support, participation and performance in targeted courses with high enrolment from CALD and NESB students. In 2015, the program involved 24 participants. HEPPP funds were directed towards updating REACH modules, focus group reviews of the program and research tasks (including literature reviews, ethics applications).

*SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND HEPPP ANNUAL REPORT 2015*

#### **6.2.4 Monitoring student progress**

Monitoring student progress is another activity under the Participation stage of the EIF student life cycle; it provides early flagging and intervention in areas where students may need additional academic or social support. It focuses on identifying, as early as possible, those students who may need additional support and linking them to the relevant support activities.

Early intervention, practised as 'active outreach' to students at high risk of withdrawal, can play an important role in maintaining student participation and retention. As the CIF has noted, the first two to six weeks of study are the most important, during which time students are at higher risk of withdrawing if they are not engaged and connected to their learning (Bennett et al. 2015).

A number of universities have transition programs that provide active outreach to first year students over the academic year (see Section 6.2.1) and some combine this with monitoring of student progress.

Universities have undertaken projects that involve direct contact with first year students to assess progress, as well as the use of data analytics to identify specific students meeting at risk criteria and triage those to students to ensure the most appropriate level of support is provided.

QUT implemented the Student Success Program (SSP), an institute wide, general transition initiative that monitors students to identify those at-risk of attrition. The SSP targets low SES, and Indigenous students and students are contacted and offered support, advice and referrals to other services. The SSP entails three campaigns: Welcome to QUT, Learning Engagement, Academic Progression. In 2015, 8,840 students were contacted across the program's three campaigns.

QUT data from 2014 shows that of those contacted through the Learning Engagement campaign, 86 per cent of First in Family students and 75 per cent of low SES students were still enrolled after the census date. In the same year, of those contacted through the Academic Progression campaign, 92 per cent of First in Family students and 67 per cent of low SES students were still enrolled after the census date. No comparison data are available for non-contacted students.

To monitor student progress, WSU has implemented the Transition Success program. Students from targeted cohorts are phoned by existing higher education students to monitor their progress with the objective of ensuring the retention of all students, to better understand the challenges they face and offer support where necessary. Peers used a comprehensive checklist and response assessment to identify potential concerns the participant may be encountering. During the autumn and spring campaigns in 2015, the Transition Success team spoke to 8,724 commencing students. The retention rate for those contacted was 10 per cent higher in the autumn session. Students who participated were surveyed, with 94.2 per cent agreeing that the contact was important and 65 per cent stating that it had made a positive difference to their university study or that they acted differently after the call (WSU, Submission 82).

Using a data-analytics approach, the University of Wollongong monitors at-risk students through the interrogation of learning data, applying this approach to large subjects with high enrolments of low SES students (University of Wollongong Submission 90). VU reported a similar approach during interviews, with their use of an Academic Support Development approach that alerts departments to students who have not logged into the learning management system.

#### **BOX 6.4** AUTOMATED WELLNESS ENGINE, UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

UNE's Automated Wellness Engine (AWE), funded under the HEPPP in 2014-2015, is a computer application that monitors individual student online interaction with the university. Besides confidentially identifying 'at risk' students, the app also generates daily trend reports relating to reasons for discontinuing studies, students' overall happiness and students' satisfaction levels within certain courses.

The objective of the Stage 2 AWE project is the early identification of students at risk of failure or withdrawal, and the associated triage of the student at the individual level to provide the appropriate services to assist the student to succeed. The Stage 2 project incorporated changes to data sources and to increase accuracy of at-risk identification resulting from data mining analysis.

The program is designed to support students who are at risk of disengaging from UNE and withdrawing from their course of study including those from low SES, Indigenous and rural and remote communities. From January to December 2015, the Student Support Team case managed 2,399 students who were identified by AWE Stage 2 as at-risk. This is an increase of over 1,000 students compared to the same period in 2014 (1,296 students). Data on the impact of this case management are not available.

SOURCE: UNE HEPPP ANNUAL REPORT, 2015

### **6.2.5 Mentoring, peer support**

At the Participation lifecycle stage, mentoring activities aim to improve academic engagement and achievement by increasing students' knowledge of university study and improving their levels of social engagement at university.

Mentoring is a common activity under the HEPPP with most universities implementing mentoring programs with HEPPP funding. Mentoring and peer support is provided in a number of forms, including individual face-to-face mentoring, group face-to-face mentoring, and online mentoring (see Box 6.5 for an example of group face-to-face mentoring).

Generally, under the HEPPP, mentoring projects match experienced, trained students, to help new students through their first year at university. Mentoring relationships can be course-specific (matching students in the same degree or unit), cohort-specific (matching similar with similar backgrounds) or simply university-based. Mentors often provide an orientation to the campus, link students with support services, provide strategies on how to succeed, facilitate peer engagement, and maintain regular communication with their mentees.

Interviews with university staff indicated mentoring programs were having an impact on students' university experience and had positively impacted student outcomes. But as with many other types of HEPPP activities measuring the effectiveness of mentoring programs is challenging, in large part due to selection effects—that is, students who chose to become mentees are likely to be different and therefore have different outcomes anyway, relative to students who do not chose to become mentees.

At JCU, the HEPPP-supported Student Mentor Program includes mentor training focused on the needs of equity groups and the associated JCU support services for these students (including low SES students, students with disability, Indigenous students, and students from rural and remote communities). JCU tracks mentees and compares their outcomes to nonparticipants to gauge the impact of the project. In 2015, mentoring program participants' retention rate was 82 per cent relative to 62 per cent for non-participants, with participants' GPAs averaging 4.2 compared to 3.5 for non-participants. These results are likely to be influenced by the selection effect mentioned above.

At Macquarie University, the HEPPP funds the integration of mentoring into a number of cohort and course-specific programs, including the Mentors@Macquarie Program which cooffers student-to-student mentoring and transition support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds from acceptance of offer through their first semester. To evaluate the project, Macquarie University carried out interviews with 23 mentors and ten mentees and found that almost all students reported that the project helped them navigate their way into university and helped them feel comfortable at university.

**BOX 6.5** STUDENT FUTURES PROGRAM (MENTORING), FEDERATION UNIVERSITY

Supported by HEPPP Participation funds between 2013 and 2015, Federation University's Student Futures Program consists of four sub-programs: mentoring, Peer Assisted Student Sessions (PASS), FedReady and Academic Skills and Knowledge (ASK).

The mentoring aspect of the Student Futures Program targets all commencing Federation University students through group face-to-face mentoring. Commencing students are provided a mentor who is in the second or third year of a matched course. Mentors support new students in their transition, which is crucial for improving retention rates and enhancing student experience, and mentors are supported by Mentor Assistants, Student Academic Leaders and Mentor Coordinators. The university reports that students who are actively engaged in their university experience and community are better equipped to persist in their study—the critical period for fostering active engagement is the first six weeks of semester.

In 2013, 121 second and third-year mentors were recruited and employed. The number of mentors grew to 147 in 2014. In 2014, 4,729 contacts were made through the Program by mentors across the year with 88 per cent of mentees stating that their mentor kept in regular contact with them and 91 per cent of responding students stated that their mentor showed a genuine interest in helping them. Those students who were perceived by the mentors as being disengaged were further supported through an outbound call project coordinated through the retention taskforce.

During consultations undertaken for this evaluation, the university also reported positive impacts for the students who were employed as mentors, as the program provided an employment opportunity to assist them in supporting themselves while studying.

SOURCE: FEDERATION UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

**6.2.6 Scholarships**

Scholarships are often used to address the concerns and capacity of students from low SES and other equity groups to meet the costs of studying at university, and may be used by universities at two stages of the student lifecycle—Access and Pathways, and Participation. At the Access and Pathways lifecycle stage, scholarships are designed to raise aspiration to university study and ease the financial burden of entering university (refer Section 5.2.4). At the Participation lifecycle stage, the purpose of scholarships shifts to supporting continued participation in study and reducing attrition, or to helping students access additional learning opportunities available outside of their program of study.

Many universities employ HEPPP Participation funding for scholarships, whether directly or coupling them with other support for students. For example, the scholarship program at Flinders University is designed to alleviate financial hardship and is implicitly coupled with mentoring services to provide an extra source of support for recipients. The scholarships funded through the HEPPP are provided to commencing, full-time university students who are from a regional or rural location, are considered to be from a low SES background or are otherwise able to demonstrate financial disadvantage. Flinders University reports that 90.7 per cent of 2015 scholarship recipients continued with their studies in 2016, which marks a 3.7 per cent increase from the previous year. However, the high rate of retention cannot be solely attributed to the scholarships, as it is conceivable that many recipients would have also accessed the available mentoring services and that this may also have an effect on retention rates.

Additionally, scholarships are also often provided for extracurricular experiences such as exchange programs, which enable the recipients to develop wider non-academic skills—for example, skills for the workplace, language skills, or intercultural communication skills. Financial assistance for students on exchange programs (Box 6.5) and placement programs are commonplace. An example of the latter is the Deakin University Work Integrated Learning (WiL) and Workplace Mentoring/Support Bursaries which provides financial assistance for low SES students to support practicum placement and work experience. In 2015, Deakin University awarded 182 WiL Bursaries with some recipients reported that they could not have completed their placement and in some cases, their course, without the financial support. One student wrote:



*...it means that I could finish my course. I was financially stressed after 3 years at university with so many placements and loss of income. The WiL bursary enabled me to complete my degree. I will be forever grateful.*

#### **BOX 6.6** LIN MARTIN GLOBAL SCHOLARSHIPS, THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Funded by the HEPPP Participation component between 2011 and 2015, the Lin Martin Melbourne Global Scholarship is a travelling scholarship for students who have experienced social, educational or financial disadvantage. The Scholarship program is strongly linked to the University's study abroad/exchange program. It enables students to take part in short study programs overseas with cohort support and special events. The Scholarship targets students from low SES, low educational and financially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Providing scholarships to students who are from disadvantaged backgrounds will encourage them to undertake overseas study at world class institutions which will provide them with life-changing and enduring academic, professional and personal benefits. Recipients are given the opportunity to foster language and intercultural communication skills, develop academic and professional networks, engage with a diverse range of people and develop confidence by learning to manage challenges while away from home.

In 2015, the University awarded 26 Scholarships over two selection rounds (administrative data) with further rounds in 2016 underway.

The majority of 2015 students were enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (15), followed by the Bachelor of Commerce (3) and the Bachelor of Science (3). More than half of the successful applicants undertook overseas study as part of an Exchange agreement. Most popular destination countries were the United Kingdom (8) and the United States of America (7) followed by France (4). Other countries included India, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE ANNUAL REPORT 2015

The most rigorous university evaluation of the impact of scholarships is the study 'Moving Beyond 'Acts of Faith': Effective Scholarships for Equity Students', which investigated the impact of equity scholarships at Deakin University, QUT and the University of Sydney (Zacharias et al. 2016). The evaluation compares retention and success rates for scholarship holders with other students, by equity group, across the three universities in the 2013 academic year.

The study finds that scholarship recipients generally have higher retention rates, although some equity groups at some universities do not see this positive effect (Table 6.1).

**TABLE 6.1** DIFFERENCES IN RETENTION RATE FOR STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT SCHOLARSHIPS, BY EQUITY GROUP, BY UNIVERSITY, 2013

	Deakin University	QUT	University of Sydney
Low SES students	+7.2%	+6.6%	+5.6%
Regional and remote students	+7.3%	-2.8%	-3.5%
Students with disability	+1.4%	+5.9%	-4.5%
Indigenous students	+6.0%	+0.8%	+9.0%

SOURCE: ZACHARIAS ET AL. 2016

The influence of scholarships on the success rates of recipients was less consistent; in particular, the impact was either negligible or negative in the QUT equity groups (Table 6.2). The authors of the study believe that this may be linked to variations in the design features of the scholarships or other institutional factors which were beyond the scope of the study to explore.

**TABLE 6.2** DIFFERENCES IN SUCCESS RATE FOR STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT SCHOLARSHIPS, BY EQUITY GROUP, BY UNIVERSITY, 2013

	Deakin University	QUT	University of Sydney
Low SES students	+7.1%	+0.5%	+6.1%
Regional and remote students	+5.0%	+0.5%	+2.9%
Students with disability	+8.6%	-3.5%	+1.5%
Indigenous students	+4.6%	-6.0%	+7.5%

SOURCE: ZACHARIAS ET AL. 2016

Overall, the study paints a mixed picture of the impact of scholarships, although methodological limitations prevent strong conclusions from the analysis. Most importantly, there are selection-bias issues with the study as none of the scholarships are awarded at random within cohorts—the University of Sydney scholarships are awarded on merit, while the other university scholarships are awarded on the basis of need- It would be reasonable to expect that the University of Sydney scholarship recipients are more likely to succeed at university, compared to those who were not awarded scholarships, regardless of the impact of the scholarship. A similar but opposite effect could be expected with the scholarships at the other two universities.

These issues notwithstanding, students in the study reported that scholarships made a significant difference, often enabling recipients to continue with their study rather than drop out and work in order to support themselves. The scholarships also supported increased social engagement as students could afford to access university activities and societies with membership fees. Students' comments also supported staff views that scholarships are a strong retention device, observing that the scholarships gave them a 'strong reason' to stay at university and helped improve their academic results since the financial support meant more time spent studying and less time working (Zacharias et al. 2016).

### 6.3 The overall impact of HEPPP Participation stage activities

There is evidence that Participation activities undertaken through the HEPPP are having an impact on low SES undergraduate students' retention and completion rates, a key objective of the program as outlined in the Guidelines.

HEPPP Participation projects most commonly involve academic preparation/support and activities to support transition to university for low SES first year students. The academic skills gained in this first year support students' retention into their second and later years of study. The specific equity groups of low SES Indigenous students and low SES students from regional/remote areas were often targeted in the projects, and most projects focused on first year/commencing university students, although continuing/later year students are also an important EIF target group.

Universities have reviewed student data to identify courses with high enrolments of students from priority cohorts and have introduced academic programs that complement the coursework in these courses. Some universities provide learning support that is placed within the course (embedded) or is delivered concurrently to the coursework, and where the learning support is heavily contextualised. Universities continue to provide learning support independently of courses and available to individual students on an as-needs basis.

There is some evidence that some HEPPP Participation projects are not being targeted at low SES students, and instead are being delivered to all SES groups within a particular cohort. In some instances this cannot be avoided, for example with inclusive course design/pedagogies projects, but in other types of projects this is not the case. Based on a review of HEPPP projects and consultations for this evaluation, it is clear that across a number of universities there is little or no targeting of low SES students in some first year transition projects and monitoring student progress projects. This practice is also apparent in some mentoring and peer support projects, and academic preparation/support projects. Universities report that some HEPPP projects are open to all students due to the

practicalities of identifying low SES students, and a broadly held principle among some universities that any identification or targeting of low SES students risks stigmatising these students.

There have been a considerable number of evaluations carried out of by universities of HEPPP Participation stage activities. These evaluations often involve surveys of participating students which universities then use to improve the design of their HEPPP projects. Some evaluations also examine participating student academic outcomes, but these studies struggle to provide definitive impact and effect sizes for HEPPP projects due to issues around a lack of suitable counterfactuals and small sample sizes (for example, Zacharias et al. 2016).

Despite this, the evaluations of HEPPP Participation stage projects indicate the universities' activities in this area are likely to be having a positive impact on student retention and success, both of which lead to course completion and employability.

Academic support programs, particularly those that targeted priority cohorts in the first year and/or were contextualised for the course (such as PASS), were shown to be effective in improving student academic outcomes and retention to later years of study. Mentoring and peer support was also shown to be effective in supporting students to remain engaged in their study, particularly in those programs designed to meet the specific cultural needs of the priority cohort.

There has been some increase in the number of universities using the HEPPP to undertake closer and more personalised tracking of student progress, and to adopt inclusive pedagogical practices. Early evidence provided by universities indicates that the use of data analytics to identify 'at risk' students in conjunction with personal contact is effective in supporting students to remain in study. The smaller number of projects targeting inclusive pedagogies and the lack of associated outcomes data so far mean that that effectiveness of these projects cannot yet be inferred.

Data from Participation stage scholarship programs demonstrate their effectiveness in retaining low SES students in study and improving their academic outcomes. Evaluation data indicate that this is attributable to the 'obligation to succeed' felt by recipients, the capacity for recipients to focus on study rather than working to support themselves financially and to the associated peer support and social activities that accompany the scholarship programs.

The evaluations are supported by the evidence collected as part of this evaluation, including staff and students surveys, stakeholder interviews and written submissions. In totality, those consulted report increases in the participation, retention and attainment of priority cohorts arising from HEPPP activities.



**KEY FINDING 4 PARTICIPATION**

HEPPP Participation projects most commonly involve academic preparation/support and activities to support transition to university for first year students.

The specific equity groups most often targeted in Participation projects, apart from low SES students generally, were low SES Indigenous students and low SES students from regional/remote areas. Most Participation projects focused on first year/commencing university students, although continuing/later year students are also an important EIF target group.

Based on university evaluations and consultations for this evaluation, there is evidence that Participation activities undertaken through the HEPPP are assisting to 'improve [low SES students'] retention and completion rates', one of the program objectives outlined in the Guidelines. There is also evidence that some HEPPP projects are not well targeted at low SES students, which could reduce the impact of the HEPPP on low SES students.

University evaluations of HEPPP Participation stage projects indicate the universities' activities in this area are having a positive impact on student retention and success, both of which lead to course completion and employability, though they have not yet been able to quantify this.

University evaluation findings in relation to Participation projects are supported by other evidence collected as part of this evaluation, including staff and students surveys, stakeholder interviews and written submissions. Those consulted report increases in the participation, retention and completion of priority cohorts arising from HEPPP activities.





*This chapter provides an analysis of the range and impact of HEPPP activities carried out by universities at the Attainment and Transition Out stage of the EIF student life cycle.*

The Transition Out stage comprises two elements: completion activities targeting current students, with a focus careers advice and employability skills; and graduate destinations targeting final year and graduate students, with a focus on study advice and support for postgraduate study. Universities may involve employer groups and professional associations to support activities undertaken as part of this stage.

Consistent with the information available to this evaluation, Bennett et al. (2015) notes that there are few studies on equity initiatives that focus on post-graduation outcomes.

The major principles and aims of activities at this stage of the student life cycle are employability and postgraduate study. Participation stage activities also contribute to these goals, and based on the project inventory developed from the HEPPP annual reports, universities have placed a much greater focus on the Participation stage relative to the Transition Out stage.

## 7.1 Overview of HEPPP Attainment and Transition Out activities

### 7.1.1 Nature and extent of activities

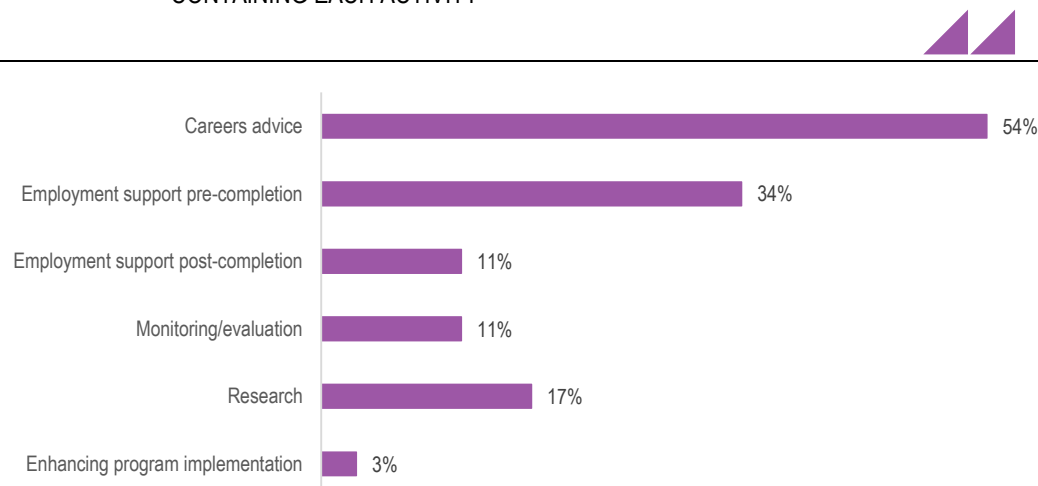
The range of Attainment and Transition Out activities includes:

- careers and employment support for students pre-completion, comprising work integrated learning and work placements.
- careers and employment search support, comprising careers advice and support to continue to postgraduate study including scholarship and grants for postgraduate study (noting that HEPPP is not intended to support postgraduate study or to support students post-graduation).

Each of these is discussed in further detail in Section 7.2, including the purpose of the activity and the types and impact of relevant projects that have been undertaken through the HEPPP.

Careers advice was the most common activity in the Attainment and Transition Out stage, included in over half of the projects at this stage (Figure 7.1). This is followed by pre-completion employment support for university students, which is included in over a third of projects.

**FIGURE 7.1** PROPORTION OF HEPPP ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT PROJECTS CONTAINING EACH ACTIVITY

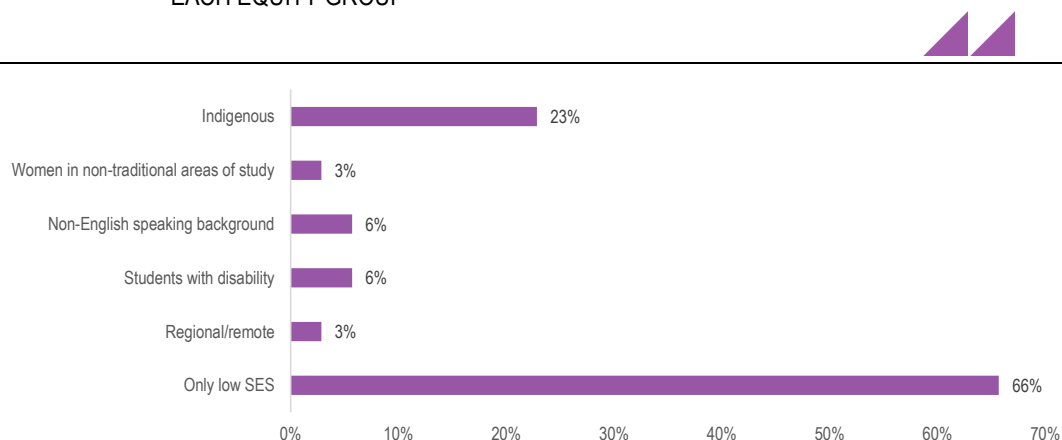


Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can have multiple activities. See Appendix D for further disaggregation.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

The majority of projects at this stage—66 per cent—were targeted at only low SES students, with 23 per cent of projects targeting low SES Indigenous students (Figure 7.2). Fewer projects were targeted towards low SES students from regional and remote areas than at other stages of the student life cycle.

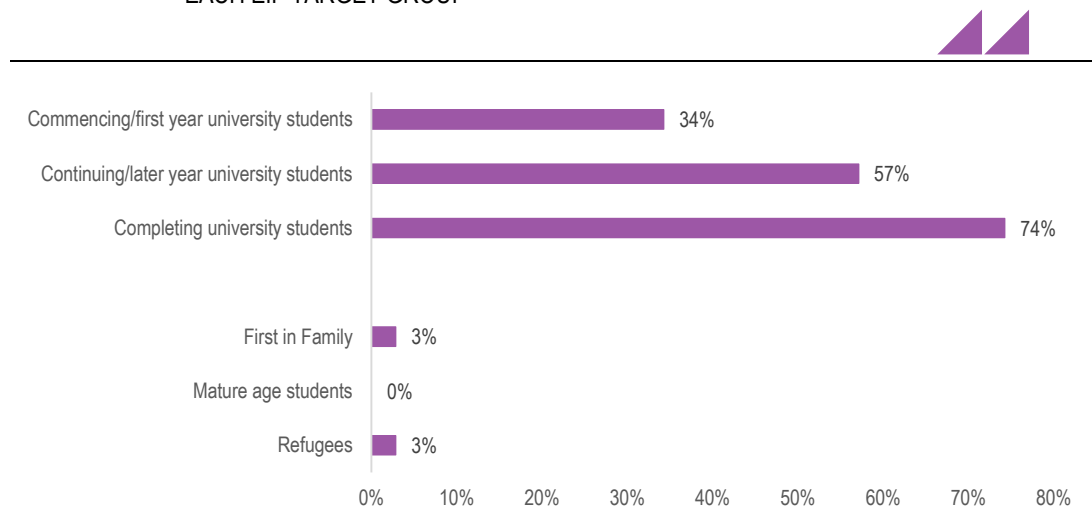
**FIGURE 7.2** PROPORTION OF HEPPP ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT PROJECTS TARGETING EACH EQUITY GROUP



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can have multiple activities. See Appendix D for further disaggregation.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

As is to be expected, completing students were targeted more often in Attainment and Transition Out projects than other EIF equity groups, in almost three quarters of projects (Figure 7.3). This is followed by continuing/later year students (57 per cent) and commencing/first year students (34 per cent).

**FIGURE 7.3** PROPORTION OF HEPPP ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT PROJECTS TARGETING EACH EIF TARGET GROUP

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects can target multiple EIF groups.

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

## 7.2 The impact of individual HEPPP activities at the Attainment and Transition Out stage

The activities described in this section are primarily concerned with careers advice and the professional development of students through work-based learning. Careers advice most often comprises information activities, advice on job search and preparation strategies and connection to graduate recruitment programs. Work-based learning focuses on the curriculum and pedagogy, so that student learning is derived from both academic and work contexts.

### 7.2.1 Careers advice, employment support pre-completion and alternative exit programs

The purpose of these activities is to provide students with advice and perspective on potential careers, particularly in contexts where such careers have not been visible to students in their families or communities. HEPPP activities at this stage have included work placement/experience to build social capital and access to professional networks, and projects aimed to facilitate student understanding of career development. Alternative exit programs seek to ensure that early leaving students experience success in higher education through pathways or alternative awards that recognise their achievement.

A number of universities have HEPPP-supported programs to encourage the employment of students on campus to provide additional income to students and to build employability skills. For example, at Curtin University of Technology, the Earn While You Learn project helps to source and recruit current students in second year or higher into part-time or casual paid work on campus, with an emphasis on students from low SES backgrounds, including Indigenous students and those from regional/remote areas. In 2015 the project assisted 403 students find work, with 58 per cent of these from an equity group—75 per cent of employed students surveyed said that being employed on campus impacted their decision to stay at university or return to complete further studies.

Careers advice is also offered under the HEPPP by a number of universities. At the University of Wollongong the Graduate Career Counselling project enhanced careers services for low SES students. This included a program called Career+, which supports students to begin career planning in their first year of study, access integrated career coaching, and experience informational interviewing and work shadowing in real workplace settings. Students reported that they were more motivated to complete their studies after participation in the project, as they now have a clear career goal in mind (University of Wollongong HEPPP Annual Report 2015).

**BOX 7.1** LUCY MENTORING PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

The Lucy Mentoring Programme, a HEPPP-funded program at UTS, is a work integrated learning mentoring program that targets female undergraduate students who can demonstrate disadvantage. The program links students with mentors in their potential field of employment 'to help inspire and educate the students about various career options'.

Project reach in 2014 includes the participation of 46 Engineering and Information Technology students identified as disadvantaged in transitioning from study to employment with 42 students completed the program. The project achieved 230 student contacts in 2014, not including the minimum 35 hours of workplace contact with their mentors.

An evaluation of the project was undertaken and included point interviews with student mentees and industry mentors, written evaluation by students and mentors, guided student reflective journals, direct observation and informal feedback.

The evaluation found that 58 per cent (n=25) of 2014 mentee respondents indicated that their participation in the Lucy Mentoring Program helped them secure an internship. The Program also improved mentees with industry knowledge and an understanding of the realities of the work environment. Career planning and development, coaching advice and building support and knowledge occurred during the mentoring experience, leading to increased confidence, awareness and knowledge about career options for students.

SOURCE: 2014 UTS HEPPP ANNUAL REPORT, SMITH-RUIG 2014, BENNETT ET AL. 2015

### 7.2.2 Work-based learning

The purpose of work-based learning is to increase student understanding of the world of work, the applicability of their studies to their career path and the particular characteristics of their industry. Common approaches to work-based learning under the HEPPP include mentoring and work placements, professional development of students (to build capability or awareness) and careers support.

Southern Cross University developed and implemented a work placement program using HEPPP funding for low SES students and Indigenous students enrolled in either the Associate Degree in Law or Bachelor of Legal and Justice Studies. Enrolments were determined by reference to postcode and identified cultural group and all students were from regional/rural NSW and Victoria, such regions identified as having lower than average wages and salaries, and higher unemployment rates. Specialised learning materials were developed and teaching delivery was been modified to suit the cohort.

As part of its HEPPP-funded Graduate Employability Program, Deakin University runs the Work Placement Program (WPP), which assists students from low SES backgrounds to undertake meaningful, project focused, paid work within a professional organisation. The goal of the WPP is to develop students' understanding and practice of appropriate workplace behaviours, and provide an opportunity for a résumé building activity, which can provide an edge in the graduate recruitment process. The WPP also offers a pre-placement workshop designed to provide career development and information to maximise the benefits of the placement.

In 2015, 39 participants each undertook 116 hour placements across different disciplines and industry sectors, with 25 host organisations. Most students (79 per cent) surveyed about the program reported that it was 'extremely helpful', and the benefits realised included the acquisition of relevant skills, knowledge and experience, increased understanding of employer expectations, networking opportunities and a likely smoother transition from university to employment.

**BOX 7.2** WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING, CURTIN UNIVERSITY

The Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) program at Curtin University, co-funded by the HEPPP, is embedded in the curriculum and is designed to:

- contribute to the enhancement of students' work-ready skills
- expose students to new and innovative ways of teaching and learning
- involve industry, business, government and community in curriculum design, assessment, feedback and research
- provide students with the opportunity to link with industry, business, government and community organisations.

Curtin University is working to ensure that its WIL program is inclusive and recognises that student backgrounds and experiences affect their capacity to access WIL and maximise its benefits.

To this end, Curtin University commits to recognising and valuing diversity among its students and adopt a holistic approach taking into account all aspects of student lives and circumstances. This begins with recognising that there are a range of barriers to access and participation:

- student-centred (personal circumstances attributes, skills and experience)
- stakeholder views (differing views on the value and purpose of WIL, expectations that students should 'fit in')
- practice of WIL (modes/models of delivery, cost to students, placement length, shortage of placements, partner preferences and selection criteria).

A Curtin University-led research collaboration is investigating inclusive WIL practices, and program design. To date it has identified the following enablers of access and participation in WIL:

- capacity building of students (before, during and after experience), partners and host/workplace supervisors
- institutional commitment through policies, curriculum, structures, support, resourcing that engages with difference
- curriculum design that helps students work through the issues
- alternative models/mode such as simulations, virtual placements or live case-studies
- flexibility through attention to timing, sequencing and form of assessment.

SOURCE: WINCHESTER-SEETO 2014 "

### 7.3 The overall impact of HEPPP Attainment and Transition Out activities

Attainment and Transition Out stage activities are a small part of the HEPPP. Attainment activities are not normally distinguished from Participation stage activities (examined in Chapter 6) and Transition Out activities focused on post-graduation support are not within the scope of the HEPPP, which focuses on outreach and at-university activities and outcomes.

Work-based learning programs are becoming more widely adopted by Australian universities but their impact on low SES students has not been evaluated. The two projects discussed at Section 7.2.2 address the gaps in priority cohorts' knowledge of the work environment and support the development of their professional skills and networks. This approach is consistent with Participation activities that seek to develop students' understanding of university life and their capacity to participate fully in academic and social activities.

The Lucy Mentoring Program also echoes the successful approach of Participation stage mentoring activities. Rather than a peer or 'near peer' approach, career development mentoring utilises experienced mentors as a guide to the world of work. Further research is needed to understand whether this type of mentoring is as successful for Attainment and Transition Out activities as it is for Participation stage activities.

More broadly, Bennett et al. (2015) observe that there is very little published research in Australia regarding evaluated equity programs focusing on graduate employment and outcomes.

**KEY FINDING 5** ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT

HEPPP activities have placed a greater focus on Participation stage projects as a means of achieving increased attainment among priority cohorts (based on evidence collected from university HEPPP annual reports).


Transition Out activities have focused on career guidance and work-based learning during study, with few activities or research focusing on the transition between study and employment, consistent with the objectives of the HEPPP.

In the limited cases where HEPPP activity could be classified as taking place at this student life cycle stage (around 1 per cent of HEPPP funding is spent at this stage), careers advice is the predominant activity undertaken by universities, with a smaller proportion focusing on pre-completion employment support.

There are limited data on the impact of these activities, so any assessment will require additional specific research.







# 8

## RESEARCH AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

*This chapter provides an analysis of the research and other activities undertaken by universities through the National Priorities Pool component of the HEPPP.*

### 8.1 Overview of the National Priorities Pool

This chapter examines the activities funded through the National Priorities Pool (NPP) component of the HEPPP. The NPP was established in 2014 with the objective:

*to inform more effective implementation of the HEPPP, both by updating the policy basis for the programme and enhancing on-ground delivery at the national level and within individual institutions. It supports projects that develop evidence, trial innovative ideas, build capacity and reform systems to maximise opportunity and outcomes for low SES people in higher education.*

*National Priorities Pool Investment Plan – 2016*

NPP funding is provided to universities on a project basis, guided by an annual investment plan that is approved by the Minister and which outlines the Minister's priorities for spending the allocated NPP funds for that year (refer Chapter 2).

Two types of project are funded through the NPP – projects commissioned by the Australian Government to meet specified Government needs and goals and projects proposed by universities in line with the NPP annual investment plan priorities. Commissioned projects are often designed to investigate more complex or overarching equity policy issues.

Three priority areas have been identified in the investment plans to date:

- building the evidence base—'to gather the evidence on which future policy development will be based... to explore opportunities for improvement in current practice and achievement, and investigate developments in approaches to increasing access, participation and success in higher education'.
- fostering innovation—to 'promote innovation within current program delivery by trialling new ideas and practices' and to 'target new barriers to higher education, address current gaps in program delivery and assist universities to expand activity to new areas'
- more effective program implementation—to 'promote cooperation between policy-makers and the higher education sector, and encourage information-sharing and collaboration among equity practitioners and improve current practice in program delivery.'

In 2016 the Department ran a university proposed project funding round that invited universities to also submit proposals for projects that targeted low SES people from regional and remote Australia. Projects with a low SES regional and remote focus that addressed the priority funding areas were to

examine and/or test mechanisms for addressing the continuing under-representation of low SES students from regional and remote areas in higher education.

### 8.1.1 Application and selection process

Expressions of Interest processes are run for NPP projects proposed by universities and may also be run for those commissioned by the Department.

All projects are required to produce outcomes that could be applied nationally and/or be adopted by other universities.

#### Commissioned projects

In 2014, the areas in which Expressions of Interest were sought by the Department were:

- Widening Participation – Longitudinal Study
- Social marketing campaign to low SES communities
- Enabling courses for low SES student groups
- Critical Interventions Framework Part II.

In addition, an Expressions of Interest round with multiple recipients was held to fund software solutions for universities to identify and support low-SES students to assist universities with equity initiatives.

Expressions of Interest were invited for two commissioned projects in 2015:

- a review of the six identified equity groups (this project was not awarded in 2015 and Expressions of Interest were again sought in 2016)
- Accelerating Indigenous Higher Education, a project intended to explore approaches to improving Indigenous outcomes in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines, increase the Indigenous academic workforce and improve whole of university approaches to higher education.

Additionally, the Curtin University contract to run the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education was extended in 2015.

#### University proposed projects

Under the NPP, universities are invited to propose projects which address one or more of the annual investment plan priorities, by providing an Expression of Interest to the Department. Data on the number of applications and the priority areas they addressed are provided in Table 8.1 below for the 2014 and 2015 application rounds. The number of funded projects was the same in both years, although there were significantly more applications from universities in 2015. There were 22 projects which were not categorised by priority funding area in 2015, as they did not meet the selection criteria for the assessment process.

**TABLE 8.1** NPP APPLICATION DATA FOR UNIVERSITY PROPOSED PROJECTS, 2014 AND 2015

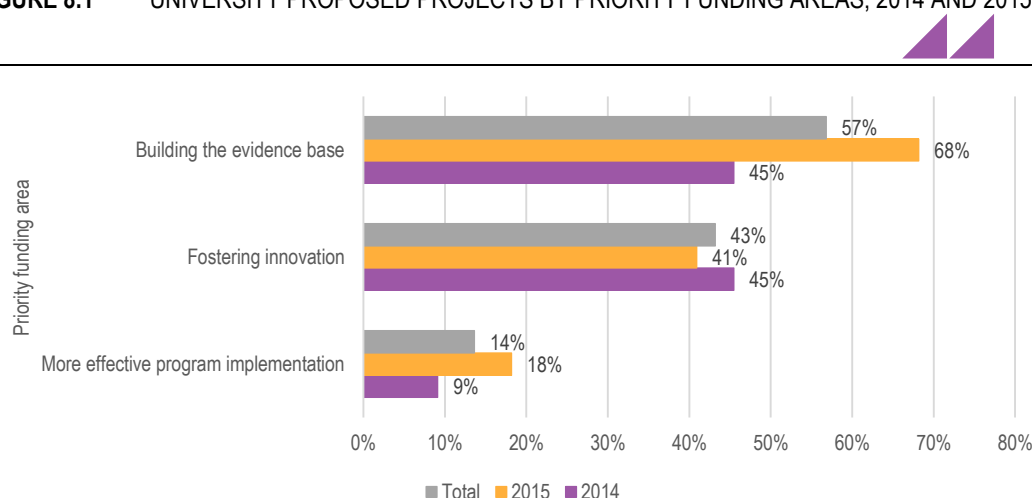
	2014			2015		
	Total number	Number approved	Success rate	Total number	Number approved	Success rate
All applications	38	22	58 per cent	62	22	39 per cent
By priority funding area:						
Building the evidence base	16	10	63 per cent	19	15	79 per cent
Fostering innovation	18	10	56 per cent	18	9	50 per cent
More effective implementation	4	2	50 per cent	7	4	57 per cent
Uncategorised	0	0	0 per cent	22	0	0 per cent

Note: Number of applications by priority funding area does not sum to total number of applications for 2015 as applications are categorised under multiple priority areas.

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN ANALYSIS OF DEPARTMENT DOCUMENTATION

Analysis of the university proposed projects (approved applications) in 2014 and 2015 shows that 57 per cent of projects were targeted at the 'building the evidence base' priority area with 43 per cent of projects involved in the 'fostering innovation' area. 'More effective program implementation' was the least common priority area, addressed in 14 per cent of projects (Figure 8.1).

**FIGURE 8.1** UNIVERSITY PROPOSED PROJECTS BY PRIORITY FUNDING AREAS, 2014 AND 2015



Note: Percentages for 2015 do not sum to 100 as projects are categorised under multiple priority areas. There were 22 projects in each year.

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN ANALYSIS OF DEPARTMENT DOCUMENTATION

### 8.1.2 NPP project implementation

Sixty five NPP projects were funded in 2014 and 2015—23 commissioned and 42 university proposed projects (Table 8.2). Roughly the same number of university proposed projects were funded in each year, though there were only two commissioned projects funded in 2015, compared with 21 in 2014. In total, around \$7.2 million was committed to university proposed projects and \$9.2 million to commissioned projects.

The table also shows the number of final reports that have been submitted to the Department for NPP projects. When final reports have not been submitted, it is assumed that the projects are not yet completed. The final reports have been analysed and are discussed throughout the chapter.<sup>29</sup>

**TABLE 8.2** OVERVIEW OF NPP PROJECTS IN 2014 AND 2015

	2014		2015	
	Commissioned	University proposed	Commissioned	University proposed
Number of projects funded	21	21	2	21
Number of projects reporting	14 <sup>a</sup>	16	0	0
Total funding provided	\$5,638,761	\$4,684,779	\$3,635,000	\$2,444,525

<sup>a</sup> Reports from one project, 'The Aspiration Initiative' at University of Canberra were provided as Partnership documentation, as this was a Partnership project.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT DOCUMENTATION AND NPP FINAL REPORTS

### Project reporting

Successful applicants in 2014 and 2015 were required to provide a final report to the Department, which included an audited acquittal report as well as discussion of whether the project objectives had been achieved. In many cases, the final reports are to some extent an evaluation of the project and, as such, have been examined as an important input to this evaluation.

<sup>29</sup> One project is not included in the analysis for this chapter, as the project was also funded through the Partnership component and its documentation has thus been included in Partnership analysis.

### 8.1.3 Structure for review of the NPP projects

As the NPP was only initiated in 2014, it is too early to determine the extent to which projects funded under the NPP have supported more effective implementation of the HEPPP nationally and at an institutional level or have informed broader equity practice within universities. However, analysis of the outcomes and reach of the projects is conducted below with the evidence available. Analysis for this chapter has been undertaken using the NPP final reports, other documentation from the Department, such as funding information, and insights from universities gathered in interviews and through the written submission process.

The outcomes of the projects are analysed below, with case studies illustrating the range of project topics and trials. Project reach is also examined in Section 8.4—including stakeholder and community engagement, and number of journal/other publication submissions and presentations resulting from the project. This information is provided in the final reports that project teams are required to provide to the Department. In most cases it is too early to tell whether the submitted articles will be accepted or published, and so it is not possible to use the common method for determining research impact of examining the citations the articles receive. Therefore the number of submissions and presentations is used to consider the extent to which project findings have been relevant to and shared at the national sector level.

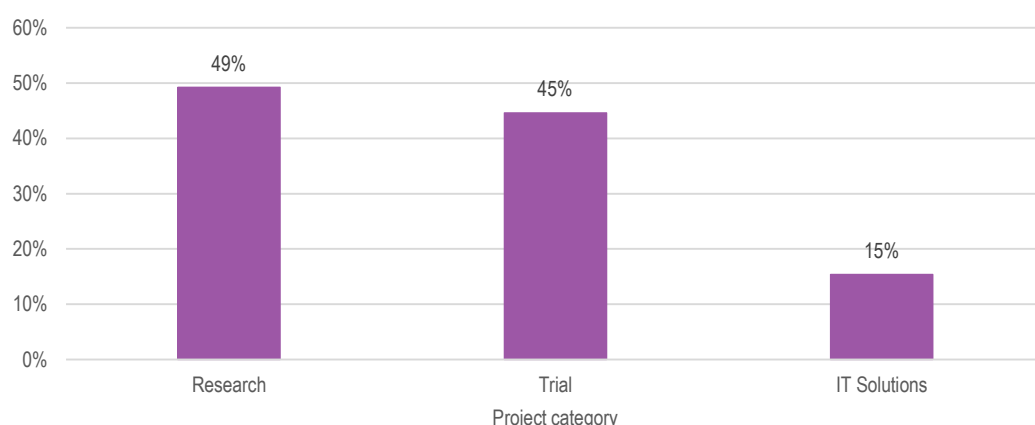
#### Project categorisation

Given the similarities between the commissioned/university proposed categories, NPP projects have been evaluated according to the following two groupings:

- *NPP research projects*—including commissioned research projects and university proposed projects aimed at ‘building the evidence base’
- *NPP trial projects*—including commissioned IT and trial projects, and university proposed projects aimed at ‘more effective program implementation’ and ‘fostering innovation’.

The split between research and trial projects is relatively even, at 49 per cent and 45 per cent respectively (Figure 8.2). Fifteen per cent of total projects were intended to develop ‘IT solutions’.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Of the 65 total projects (including commissioned and university proposed), six fell into both categories as they addressed the ‘building the evidence base’ priority area as well as another priority area.

**FIGURE 8.2** NPP PROJECTS BY TYPE (RESEARCH, TRIAL OR IT SOLUTIONS)

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 as projects may be in multiple categories (if they address multiple priority areas). This is the case for six of the 65 projects.  
 SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN ANALYSIS OF DEPARTMENT DOCUMENTATION

## 8.2 NPP research projects

Under the NPP, there have been 29 projects conducted which focus on research and building the evidence base for higher education equity practice.<sup>31</sup> Two thirds of these projects are centred on research on low SES people only, and six projects are focused on low SES people from Indigenous backgrounds and three projects on low SES people from regional and remote areas).<sup>32</sup>

Nearly all of the NPP research projects have reached completion according to their original plans. Much of the work undertaken has been, or is planned to be, presented at conferences and some projects have been the subject of articles submitted to refereed journals.

### 8.2.1 Research projects

A wide range of research has been conducted through the NPP—six projects are detailed below which give an indication of this breadth, and to demonstrate how the findings of the research have been communicated to the sector and other stakeholders.

#### Critical Interventions Framework Part II project

Another key piece of commissioned NPP-funded research is the report from the Critical Interventions Framework Part II project. This project was commissioned through the NPP in 2014, and the final report was published in December 2015. The project team conducted a review of evidence of impact of a wide range of equity initiatives in Australian higher education, and produced the EIF which has influenced the structure of this report.

Two conference papers resulted from this project in December 2015, for the Australian Association for Research in Education and for the UK Society for Research in Higher Education. This project built on an earlier report from the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, 'A Critical Interventions Framework for advancing equity in Australian higher education,' which was commissioned by the Department.

<sup>31</sup> There are an additional six projects which intend to build the evidence base as well as addressing another priority area. This section will analyse the 29 projects that are intended to build the evidence base only.

<sup>32</sup> Research projects have varied in size, from \$34,000 to \$500,000 (for the NCSEHE Fellows Programme).

### **Pathways to higher education: the efficacy of enabling and sub-bachelor pathways for disadvantaged students**

The 'Pathways to higher education' project was commissioned by the Department in 2014. The project reviewed current enabling programs and examined the extent to which current enabling courses were an effective means of increasing access to, participation and success in undergraduate courses for domestic students from disadvantaged groups.

The report provided evidence for the effectiveness of enabling programs in ensuring the success and retention of equity group students who enrolled at university. As well as the final report, available publicly on the NCSEHE website, the project resulted in a number of additional publications—three conference papers, two book chapters, and an online article for the Australian Association for Research in Education. Papers were presented to three conferences in 2015.<sup>33</sup> The project's final report for the Department notes that the research team is continuing to prepare papers for publication.

### **The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education**

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) is currently funded under the NPP 'to inform public policy design and implementation and institutional practice, to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people' (NCSEHE 2015).

The NCSEHE was established in 2008 and initially based at the University of South Australia. The Department initially provided \$630,000 to establish the Centre, and \$590,000 annually towards running costs. In 2013 the Department held a competitive Expression of Interest process to determine the next host university, which was won by Curtin University for the period until June 2019. In 2015, the NCSEHE received a \$3.6 million grant through the NPP.

Since 2014, the NCSEHE has funded an annual grants program for research projects. In 2014 and 2015, 12 projects were funded through the program, with 10 projects in 2016. The topics addressed in projects through the grants program are wide ranging, and often address issues for different equity groups. More information can be found at the NCSEHE website (<https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/grants>).

The NCSEHE also manages the Equity Fellows Programme, which was commissioned by the Government under the NPP. The aim of the Equity Fellows Programme is 'to support Fellows to undertake strategic, high-impact, high-profile leadership projects targeted, sector-wide, at improving the access, participation and success in higher education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds' (NCSEHE 2016 )

The NCSEHE is currently the subject of a separate review.

<sup>33</sup> Namely, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program: National Forum on Indigenous Pathways and Transitions into Higher Education (Darwin, NT); the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia conference (Sydney, NSW); and the Australian Association for Research in Education (Perth, WA).

### BOX 8.1 A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS' SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AT UNIVERSITY, AND MENTAL HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

In 2015 'A Longitudinal Study of the Relations Between Students' Socioeconomic Status, Social Integration at University, and Mental Health' was supported by NPP funds to the value of \$67,000 (through the 2014 university projects round). The aim of the research project was to explore the relationship between university students' SES, their social integration and mental health. The overall aim of the project was to inform policies aimed at reducing students' mental health problems, improving student satisfaction and reducing student attrition.

Two waves of data were collected from students from University of Newcastle in 2015, one in Semester 1 and one in Semester 2. Working with a sample size of 1,063 students, the study found that subjective social class was negatively related to depression levels and positively to levels of life satisfaction. Rubin and Wilkinson conclude:

*This means that subjective social class predicted the amount of social contact that students had with other students at university, which in turn predicted their levels of depression and satisfaction with life. These relations were tested longitudinally, meaning that we can infer that social contact is the mechanism through which social class and mental health are linked. Therefore, social class determines the level of social contact that students have at university, and social contact, or lack thereof, determines the level of mental health that students experience.*

The results were presented at two conferences in 2015, the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference (Fremantle, WA) and the 14th Australian Psychological Society Psychology of Relationships Interest Group Conference (Melbourne, Vic).

More data (Wave 3) is currently being collected to enhance the existing research, and one of the research assistants involved with the project has now commenced a PhD in the area.

Rubin and Wilkinson foresee their research informing universities in the development and integration of programs that aim to improve low SES students' social contact at university. These could include programs relating to students' commute to university, subsidised access to convenient accommodation and access to on-campus childcare.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE NPP FINAL REPORT 2015

### A picture of success

The 2014 university-proposed project, 'A picture of success', built an evidence base of outcomes and 'success' of low SES students at the university. The results showed that 'support initiatives contribute in multiple and diverse ways to low SES student success' (UNSW NPP Final Report 2016). The project also looked at low SES interactions with student services, co-curricular activities and support initiatives, using data analytics to investigate correlations between these factors and how they influenced students' success. In total, the project involved 789 student contacts.

An article stemming from the project was submitted to the peer-refereed Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association in 2016. Additionally, two conference presentations regarding the project were made in 2015.<sup>34</sup>

### Scoping the Widening Participation Longitudinal Study

The 2014 commissioned NPP project 'Scoping the Widening Participation Longitudinal Study' developed design specifications and indicative costings for a longitudinal study of equity groups in higher education. The project, completed in May 2016, developed strategies to collect data for the purpose of analysing barriers to participation in higher education, investigating influences on students' aspirations and ability to access higher education and assessing the effectiveness of equity interventions.

<sup>34</sup> Conference presentations were made to the Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia Conference (Geelong, Victoria), and the Australasian Association for Institution Research Forum (Wellington, New Zealand).



The project recommenced an accelerated cross-sequential longitudinal study covering three cohorts: primary school, secondary school, and higher education—equity interventions targeting higher education are delivered across all cohorts.

In order to delivery this study, the project recommended a targeted new survey data collection with secondary school and higher education cohorts that explicitly addresses equity interventions. The sample would be up to 1000 respondents from the five equity groups. This survey would be combined with administrative data (including school assessment data) and existing longitudinal survey data to measuring the effects of equity interventions that address disadvantage in higher education.

### 8.2.2 Discussion

The NPP has had only two years of implementation. The research projects detailed above, and the other research projects funded under the NPP, have provided useful insights into programs aimed at increasing equity in higher education and, while projects outcomes have been disseminated in various ways, it is too early to determine the extent to which they have informed on-ground practice.

But the research published to date has not provided moderate or strong evidence on the effectiveness of higher education equity interventions that could assist universities in how they should allocate HEPPP funding between different potential interventions (which stakeholders discussed in interviews for this evaluation).

The challenge of producing this evidence led to the commissioning of a 2014 NPP project to scope a longitudinal study. The project team examined options for the design of a longitudinal survey to measure the effectiveness of intervention programs designed to help equity groups access higher education. The 'Scoping the Widening Participation Longitudinal Study' notes that

*The effectiveness of these [equity] interventions is difficult to measure. Interventions are facilitated by a range of providers in multiple contexts and their impact is not well understood, making it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness and make evidence-based decisions on future program implementation.*

The scoping study proposed linking data from existing longitudinal surveys and administrative records, and targeted new surveys of secondary school and university students to explicitly collect data on equity interventions.

The scoping study was finalised in May 2016, with its recommendations currently being considered by the Department. Collection of longitudinal data on equity interventions would support the development of a more robust evidence base to inform university practice under the HEPPP, including choosing and designing equity inventions.

## 8.3 NPP trial projects and IT-based solutions projects

Sixteen trial and 14 IT-based solutions projects have been undertaken through the NPP to date.

Of the trial projects, 11 were intended to 'foster innovation' and five to promote 'more effective program implementation'. There were six additional projects that also addressed the priority funding area 'building the evidence base' (Table 8.3)<sup>35</sup>. The IT-based solutions projects aimed to assist universities to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access, participate and succeed at university or develop and use geocoding software to better measure student disadvantage.

The trial and IT-based solutions projects adopted a range of different approaches, addressing student and university needs. While some of these projects encountered challenges, these were largely overcome, with the projects reporting useful outcomes. Surveys were conducted for some of these projects to gauge student reaction to these initiatives and were in the main positive.

<sup>35</sup> The majority of trial projects targeted low SES people generally (80 per cent; 24 projects), although several were focused on low SES people from regional and remote areas (three projects). One project targeted each of the following categories: low SES people from Indigenous backgrounds, both low SES Indigenous students and those from regional and remote areas, and women studying in non-traditional areas (three projects in total).

**TABLE 8.3** NPP TRIAL PROJECTS AND IT-BASED SOLUTIONS PROJECTS

	Building the evidence base	Fostering innovation	More effective implementation
Trial projects	6	11	5
Number of IT-based solutions projects			
IT-based solutions projects		14	

Note: IT-based solutions projects are not categorised under 'priority funding areas.'

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN ANALYSIS OF DEPARTMENT DOCUMENTATION

### 8.3.1 Trial projects and IT-based solutions projects

Five projects are discussed below; selected as they provide an indication as to the scope of the NPP projects in this area, and provide lessons for potential future projects.

#### Collabor8 – Women in Engineering & IT Program

The 2014 university proposed project 'Collabor8 – Women in Engineering & IT Program' worked with 405 female Year 8 and 9 students and their teachers from seven low SES partner schools during its pilot year in 2015. This involved delivering four 'touch point' sessions over the school year, designed to broaden the students' awareness of engineering and IT.

An evaluation of the project recommended continuing the project past the pilot year and conducting follow-up research to measure any longitudinal effects. A conference paper on this project was accepted for the 26th Annual Conference of the Australasian Association for Engineering Education in 2015, with an additional abstract accepted for the European Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference 2016. UTS was 'highly commended' for the program and its other outreach activities in Engineering Australia's 2016 Gender Diversity Awards.

#### The Literacy App

The 2014 university proposed project 'The Literacy App' project designed, tested and delivered a free mobile software application to improve the literacy of undergraduate students, particularly those from low SES backgrounds. The project has provided information about the use of a mobile learning tool for improving literacy of low SES undergraduates, a data analytics framework for mobile learning apps and a practice guide for university educators on how to use the App.

The final report for the project indicates that by December 2015, three papers and one report had been published, with an additional paper submitted and two in progress. Four conference presentations were made, and one website and four apps were developed for the project.

**BOX 8.2** MEETING GREAT EXPECTATIONS TRIAL

The 'Meeting Great Expectations' is a university proposed NPP trial project aimed at understanding the needs of equity group students before they commence university. The rationale behind the project is that managing expectations during the pre-enrolment and enrolment stages can improve the self-awareness of students who have low expectations of themselves. In light of feedback, transitioning students are able to identify and adjust their own expectations of themselves and become aware of what is required to succeed at university.

The Student Readiness and Expectations survey (REX survey) was created to gain an understanding of equity students' degrees of readiness for tertiary study. Survey data was collected on VU students' level of academic experience and preparedness, their work/life balance, and level of English proficiency. Survey data were coupled with follow-up conversations to better provide recommendations to students in accordance with their level of 'readiness'. Students who are identified to be at risk of disengaging are subsequently contacted by Student Transition Mentors, provided with referrals as appropriate, and followed up as part of the university's Student Link program. This is recorded and will be used to assess whether there are better outcomes for equity group students who participated in the survey.

The pilot of the survey was implemented in February 2015. However, due to technical and human resources difficulties, the survey was completely re-tested in 2016. Approximately 1,000 students have been contacted over three iterations of the survey. The university was able to collect 569 valid responses during the first semester of 2016. Although 25 per cent of VU students are from low SES backgrounds, the proportion of the 569 respondents from equity groups was yet to be determined at the time of final project reporting. The project team intended to undertake an evaluation of the trial after student equity group identification was complete.

VU is currently working to improve the sample size of the survey by targeting students who are already participating in readiness workshops such as the VU Ready 1 program, an introduction to the university's IT systems. Results from the trial were presented as a poster at the 2015 Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention & Success (STARS) conference, under the title 'Meeting Great Expectations: Reframing the Provision of Undergraduate Support Services to Commencing Undergraduates'.

SOURCE: VU NPP REPORT 2016

### 8.3.2 Discussion

The trial projects detailed above and other trial projects for which reports are available appear to have provided universities with a good opportunity to test new approaches and technology. As is to be expected when trialling new approaches, not all approaches proved appropriate or successful.

In some cases, trial projects were not able to show, with a strong degree of confidence, whether an intervention was successful, usually due to a lack of counterfactual. The use of quasi-experimental<sup>36</sup> or randomised controlled experimental approaches would likely allow a greater share of projects to better determine the impact of new approaches on key student outcomes. While such projects could take place in a single year, there is also the potential for a wider range of impacts to be measured if projects are multiyear.

## 8.4 Reach of NPP projects

Twenty nine final project reports were available and analysed in the course of this evaluation (refer Section 8.1). The template for these reports included details of any journal submissions, conference presentations and stakeholder engagement undertaken for the project. As such, these reports provide a picture of the reach of both research and trial NPP projects, discussed below.

### Stakeholder engagement

Almost two thirds of NPP projects involved contact with students, many through surveys or interviews. For the 18 projects that involved student contact, half involved contact with more than 1,000 students.

<sup>36</sup> Quasi-experimental studies control assignment to the intervention using a criterion other than random assignment. The closer to random the criterion is, the more rigorous the results are likely to be, all things being equal. Quasi-experimental designs are suitable when randomisation is impractical and/or unethical.

Only four of the 18 projects involved contact with less than 100 students. This shows that many projects were designed to have large numbers of student contacts, such as through the collection of survey data.

Close to 20 per cent of projects involved engagement with schools and community organisations (Table 8.5). Each of these projects engaged with more than one school or organisation—between three and 70 schools, and between two and 15 community organisations. Two of the 29 projects reported engagement with universities.

### Knowledge-sharing

The sharing of information about or from the NPP projects through journal submissions or conference presentations was common, and featured more commonly than stakeholder engagement in many cases. In total more than 50 journal submissions and 80 conference presentations were undertaken for these NPP projects.

Although data are only available for journal submissions, rather than acceptances or publications (often because of the time lag between submission and publication in journals), researchers submitted at least one article to a journal in about half of all projects (Table 8.4).<sup>37</sup> Additionally, conference presentations were given for 62 per cent of projects. For more than half of these (11 of 18 projects), two or more presentations were made.

**TABLE 8.4** KNOWLEDGE-SHARING THROUGH NPP PROJECTS

	Journal submissions	Conference presentations
Total number	54	83
Percentage of projects in which it is present	48 per cent	62 per cent
Maximum number per project	11	45 (9) <sup>a</sup>
Average number across sample	1.86	2.86
Average number when present	3.86	4.61

<sup>a</sup> Charles Darwin University's 'Building Evidence about Indigenous pathways and transitions into Higher Education' project involved hosting a Forum with 45 presentations. The next highest number of presentations was nine, for the University of Newcastle's 'Who seeks access to what, when, and why?' project.

Note: n=29

SOURCE: NPP FINAL REPORTS

For those projects that did not involve conference presentations or journal submissions, many were part of the IT Solutions commissioned round, which were not expected to produce journal articles in most cases. Only one of 14 IT Solutions project resulted in journal or other publication submissions, and only two in conference presentations. This may be because the nature of the projects meant that many focused on internal university data collection and management systems to improve the identification and support of students from low SES backgrounds. If IT solutions are not included in analysis, the percentage of projects that led to journal submissions rises from 48 per cent to 62 per cent of the sample (13 of 21 projects).

## 8.5 The overall impact of the NPP

The NPP has had two years of implementation to date, limiting the data that are available to provide insight into its overall impact. For example, the reports for NPP projects undertaken in 2015, which would detail their outcomes and any stakeholder engagement and/or knowledge-sharing, are not yet available, so the analysis in Section 8.4 has focused on 2014 projects. Even for completed projects, in most cases it is too early to determine whether the research has had an effect on practice at the university and system-level, and longitudinal data are limited.

<sup>37</sup> For the majority of these projects, more than one journal submission was made (with an average of almost four), and 11 publication submissions were made for one project from Charles Darwin University, 'Building Evidence about Indigenous pathways and transitions into Higher Education'. This project involved the preparation and publication of a co-edited book (due to be published in September 2016), entitled: *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education: From Policy to Practice*.

Notwithstanding this, a number of observations can be made about the NPP component of the HEPPP. A wide range of research projects have been funded and are reported to have provided useful insights into identifying, attracting and effectively supporting low SES and equity group students. Interviews with universities and their NPP reports indicate that these have encouraged universities to explore new approaches and have generated analysis to inform university management decisions on how to best meet the needs of low SES students.

### **Publications and knowledge sharing**

Almost half of the NPP projects analysed in Section 8.4 led to journal submissions, although in most cases it is too early to tell whether these submissions will be accepted and published. This means that the impact or reach of the publications cannot yet be determined. In total, 54 submissions were made, with an average of 1.86 per project across the sample.

There has been a significant degree of knowledge-sharing through the NPP projects. Almost two thirds of projects—62 per cent—led to conference presentations, with 83 presentations made in total (refer Section 8.4). This is a high number of presentations for one year of projects (most projects in the sample were undertaken in 2014), with an average of more than 2.8 presentations per project. This also does not capture less formal knowledge sharing produced by the projects.

Presentations related to the projects have been made at subject-specific conferences, such as the Australian Psychological Society Psychology of Relationships Interest Group Conference, as well as conferences that are directly relevant to equity practitioners, such as the EPHEA bi-annual conference and the STARS conference. The diversity of conferences at which NPP findings have been presented suggests that the NPP has enabled beneficial sharing and awareness of knowledge across the higher education sector more broadly, rather than just with equity practitioners.

### **Support from researchers**

Strong support for the NPP was expressed by universities and the research community. Universities reported that the NPP provided a unique source of funding for research in this area (UTS, Submission 71) and that it had increased the 'quantity and quality of research into student equity in higher education' (La Trobe University, Submission 119). Support for both the research and trial arms was expressed, as well as the opportunities the NPP provides for universities 'to learn from each other' (UNSW, Submission 84). The Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australia submission noted that NPP funding was particularly valuable for 'universities that receive only small institutional allocations' (Submission 75).

Some stakeholders called for greater dissemination and sharing of research project results and outcomes, and trial findings (for example, Queensland Consortium, Submission 80, and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium, Submission 87). Given that the majority of projects involved conference presentations, and almost half resulted in journal submissions, this may reflect the fact that in some cases, the presentations were made to conferences that were for particular audiences (for example, the Australasian Association for Engineering Education) as well as the length of time between an article's submission to a journal and its publication. The NCSEHE, through its newsletter and website, also shares recent research publications and developments, and updates on NPP projects.

### **The potential for improved evidence from the NPP**

While HEPPP implementation could be improved by greater access to evidence on what works, university interviewees indicated that research that produces this kind of evidence is unlikely to be generated by universities without dedicated funding, such as that provided by the NPP. At the same time, the NPP projects completed to date have not always produced research that will provide evidence to fill the key HEPPP-related knowledge gaps identified through this evaluation (such as, which types of activities are more effective than others, and within an activity type, what are the characteristics of effective projects).

More rigorous evaluative research techniques, such as based on quasi-experimental or experimental design, or longitudinal studies, whether initiated through the NPP or continued by researchers after their NPP project concludes, can play a valuable role in understanding the relative impacts of HEPPP

activities. Without such studies it will be difficult to attribute successes in increasing the retention and attainment of low SES students.


#### **KEY FINDING 6 NATIONAL PRIORITIES POOL**

The NPP was introduced in 2014, and 65 projects were funded in total in 2014 and 2015. This includes projects commissioned by the Department, and many on topics proposed by universities.

To a large extent, it is too early to determine the impact of the NPP on institutional and research practice. Preliminary measures of engagement and reach of projects completed to date have been analysed, such as the number of conference presentations, journal submissions and stakeholder engagements, however the outcome of these in most cases is not yet visible, and reporting for 2015 projects is not yet complete. Nonetheless, the 2014 NPP reports show that information about/from the project was shared with stakeholders for the majority of NPP projects—62 per cent led to conference presentations, and almost half led to journal or other publication submissions. The level of stakeholder engagement was also high, with 62 per cent of projects involving student contact.

Stakeholder feedback collected through this evaluation and provided in NPP reports shows that NPP funding has enabled and encouraged universities to explore new approaches and has generated analysis to inform some university decision-making. In many reports, research teams indicated that they would continue to collect data or undertake research that had commenced with the NPP project.

Strong support for the NPP, or an equivalent program, was expressed by universities through the written submission process for this evaluation. Universities noted the value of the unique funding pool and the opportunity to undertake trials as well as research. Some submissions consider that there is scope to improve the dissemination of findings and build a deeper understanding of good/best practice in higher education equity policy and activities through greater sharing of NPP research results, as well as promoting more rigour in HEPPP evaluation practice.







# 9

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS ANALYSIS

*This chapter provides an analysis of the overall effectiveness of the HEPPP in improving the access, retention and success of people from low SES backgrounds in undergraduate courses.*

### 9.1 Overview of analysis

The HEPPP is expected to have an impact on applications to university, offers, commencements, enrolments, retention, success, and completions (refer the HEPPP Guidelines). These issues are examined in this chapter through both trend and econometric analysis. The analyses provide some insight into the impact of the HEPPP on higher education participation and student outcomes, but there are limitations (refer Section 1.2).

The trend analysis is a before-after study which compares student outcome indicators before HEPPP and after up to five years of HEPPP implementation. The major limiting factor with before-after studies is that it is not possible to define a counterfactual, that is, what would have happened in the absence of the program (refer Section 1.2).

The econometric analysis attempts to estimate a counterfactual by using the 2005-2009 pre-HEPPP time period to control for meaningful changes in the student cohort between this period and the HEPPP period (2010-2015). The ability to control for differences between these two time periods is limited by the variables in the dataset being used—the Higher Education Student Data Collection does not capture many factors which could be driving differences between these two periods, such as other relevant government or university programs, general economic conditions, changing cohort characteristics that are not recorded in the dataset, or changing teaching methods. Due to these data limitations, the econometric analysis cannot attribute changes in student outcomes between the pre-HEPPP and HEPPP time periods to the impact of the HEPPP.

#### Details on the datasets

The data presented in this chapter are taken from two datasets—Applications And Offers data which spans 2009-2016 and a selection of data from the Australian Government's Higher Education Student Data Collection ranging from 2005-2015.

Data used in this chapter are for domestic onshore undergraduate enrolments, where undergraduate is defined as students undertaking the following qualifications: Bachelors graduate entry, Bachelors honours, Bachelors pass, Associate degree, Advanced diploma, Diploma and other undergraduate award courses.



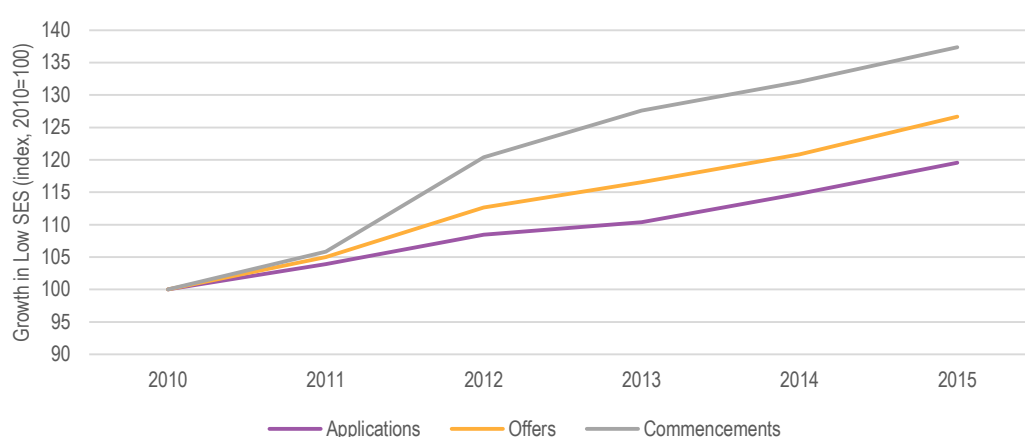
Data are for Table A providers (as these providers are eligible for HEPPP funding). In the analysis presented in this chapter, SES is determined at the SA1 level<sup>38</sup>, with the exception of the completions analysis in which SES is determined at the postcode level (due to the time period covered in this analysis).

From 2012 the Australian Government removed limits on the number of Commonwealth supported places for domestic bachelor degree students at public universities (excluding medical places) (refer Chapter 2). Although this demand driven funding system was fully implemented in 2012, it was preceded by a transition period where the previous 5 per cent over-enrolment cap increased to 10 per cent for 2010 and 2011.

## 9.2 Applications, offers and commencements

Low SES applications to study at university have increased 20 per cent since the introduction of the HEPPP in 2010, with offers increasing at a faster pace, and commencements up more than 35 per cent to 2015 (Figure 9.1). The increases observed in low SES applications, offers and commencements could be the result of many factors including the introduction of the DDS, increased interest in and preparedness for higher education among low SES students, or even an increased focus from universities on low SES students. All of these factors were raised in consultations for this evaluation, but it is not clear the extent to which each has contributed to the growth since 2010.

**FIGURE 9.1** GROWTH IN LOW SES APPLICATIONS, OFFERS AND COMMENCEMENTS

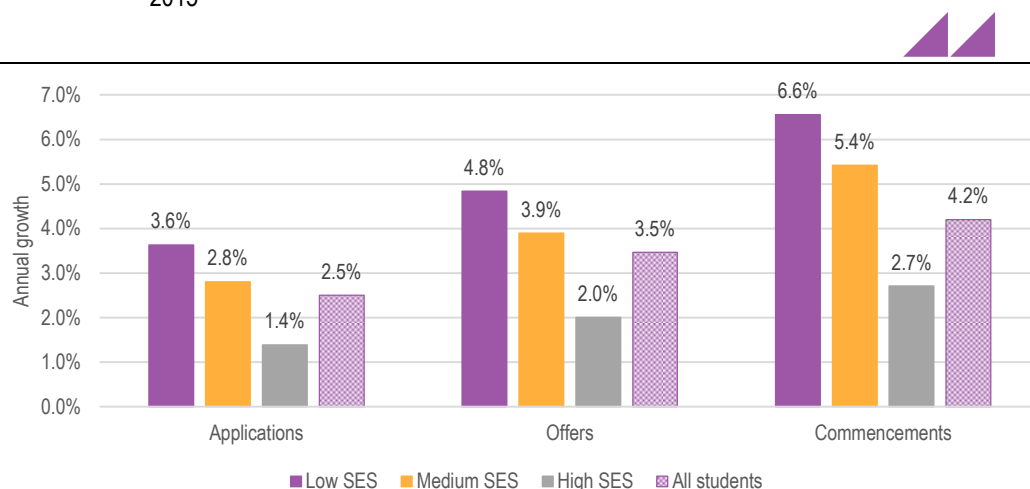


SOURCE: APPLICATIONS AND OFFERS DATASET

<sup>38</sup> Students' addresses to an ABS 2011 SA1 (54,805 regions, with populations in the range 200-800, for the 2011 Census), with the SES value derived from the ABSs' Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Education and Occupation (IEO) for SA1 areas. SA1s in the bottom 25% of the population aged 15-64 are classified as low SES (the middle 50% are classified as medium SES and the top 25% are classified as high SES). An estimate of the number of low SES students is made by counting the number of students whose SA1 is in a low SES area. Address information for a small proportion of higher education students is not available. In this case, the postcode of permanent home residence of the student is used to determine their SES status. A small number of students are unable to be classified to a 'low', 'medium' or 'high' SES status, these students are therefore assigned to 'unknown'.

Over the same time period, medium and high SES applications, offers and commencements have also grown, albeit at a slower rate than the low SES cohort (Figure 9.2).

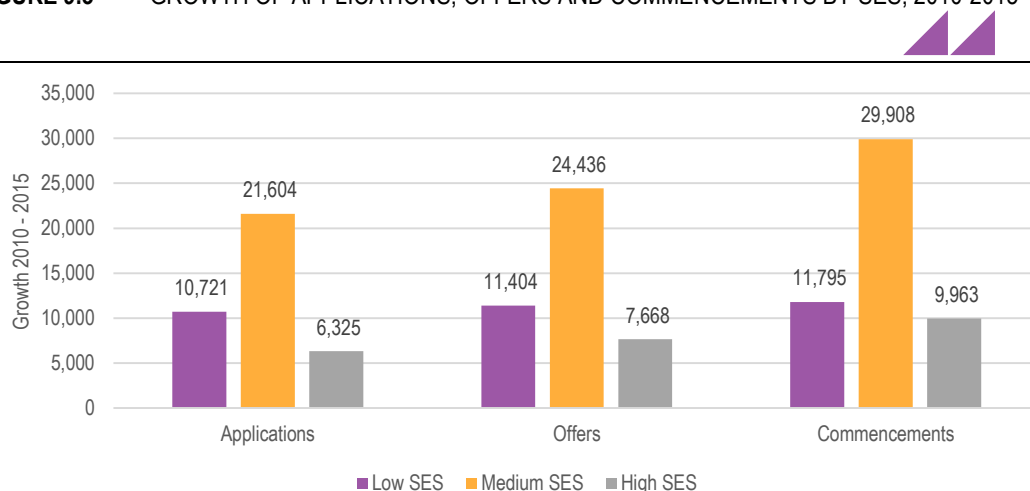
**FIGURE 9.2** ANNUAL GROWTH OF APPLICATIONS, OFFERS AND COMMENCEMENTS BY SES, 2010-2015



Note: All students includes students whose socioeconomic status could not be determined. Annual growth is a compound annual growth rate from 2010 to 2015  
SOURCE: APPLICATIONS AND OFFERS DATASET

The number of additional low SES applications, offers and commencements from 2010-2015 also exceeds that of the high SES cohort (Figure 9.3). The medium SES group has seen greater number growth than low and high SES as it accounts for half of the population whereas low and high SES each account for 25 per cent respectively.

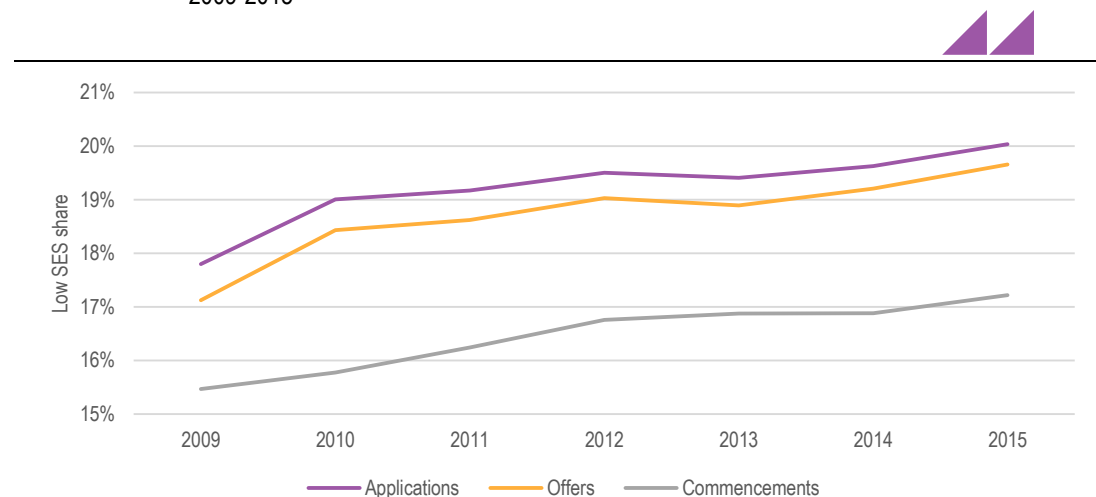
**FIGURE 9.3** GROWTH OF APPLICATIONS, OFFERS AND COMMENCEMENTS BY SES, 2010-2015



SOURCE: APPLICATIONS AND OFFERS DATASET

The greater pace of growth in low SES individuals applying to, being offered a place at and commencing at university has increased the share of applications, offers and commencements that are low SES (Figure 9.4). Since 2010, the low SES share of applications has increased 1 percentage point while the share of commencements has increased 1.4 percentage points. The share of low SES offers has increased by 1.2 percentage points.<sup>39</sup>

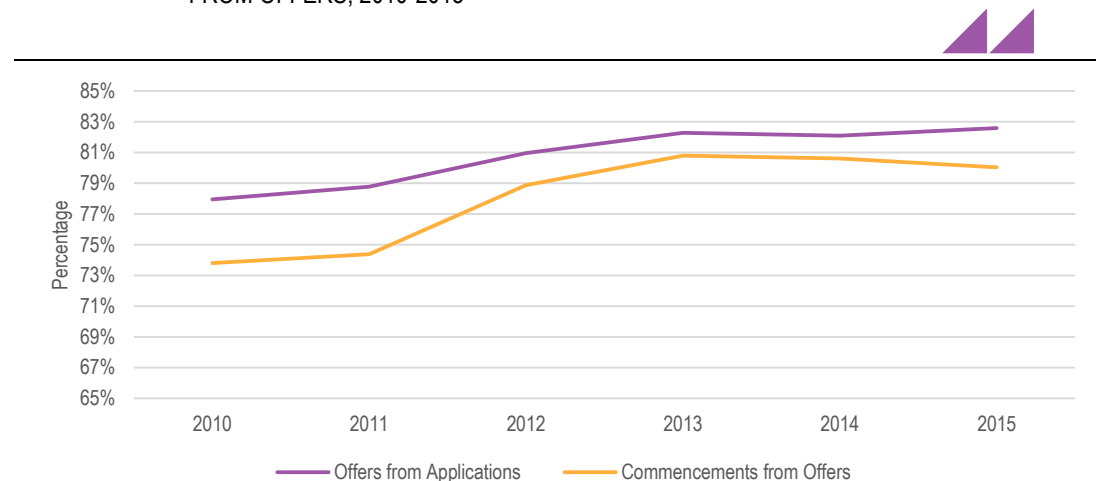
**FIGURE 9.4** SHARE OF APPLICATIONS, OFFERS AND COMMENCEMENTS THAT ARE LOW SES, 2009-2015



SOURCE: APPLICATIONS AND OFFERS DATASET

The percentage of low SES individuals receiving an offer after applying to study has trended up since 2010, as has the proportion commencing after receiving an offer, although this fell slightly in 2014 and 2015 (Figure 9.5). As discussed at the start of this chapter, it is not clear from the Higher Education Student Data Collection what is driving these trends.

**FIGURE 9.5** PERCENTAGE OF LOW SES OFFERS FROM APPLICATIONS AND COMMENCEMENTS FROM OFFERS, 2010-2015



SOURCE: APPLICATIONS AND OFFERS DATASET

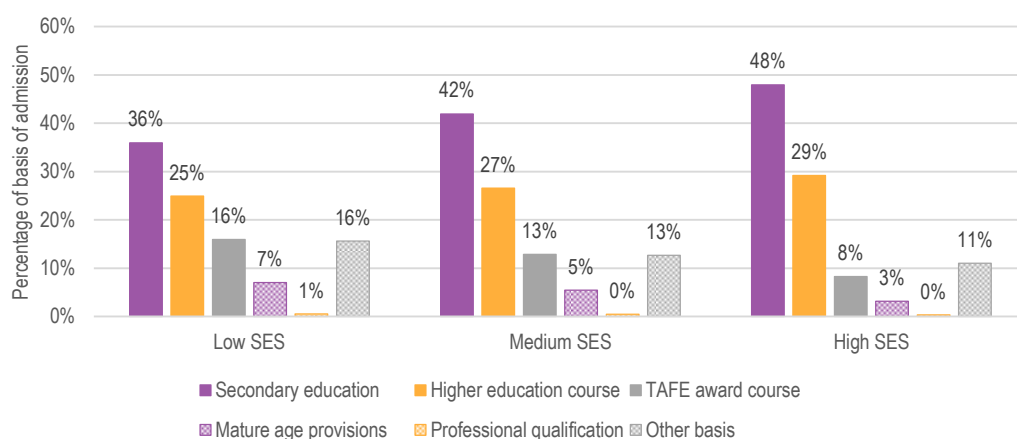
### 9.3 Basis of admission

HEPPP Partnership activities may facilitate alternative pathways to university (refer the HEPPP Guidelines, and Chapters 2 and 5). Alternative pathways are important for low SES individuals, with

<sup>39</sup> The share of high SES applications, offers and commencements has declined over this period, while the medium SES share has grown. The share of low SES applications has grown quicker than the share of medium SES applications.

pathways other than school entry and prior higher education entry accounting for 40 per cent of low SES enrolments, compared with 22 per cent for high SES students (Figure 9.6). This could be the result of low SES students having an older age profile than medium and high SES enrolments (31 per cent of low SES enrolments are 25 or older, compared with 26 and 21 per cent for medium and high SES enrolments, respectively) and thus more likely to be considered on a basis other than secondary education.

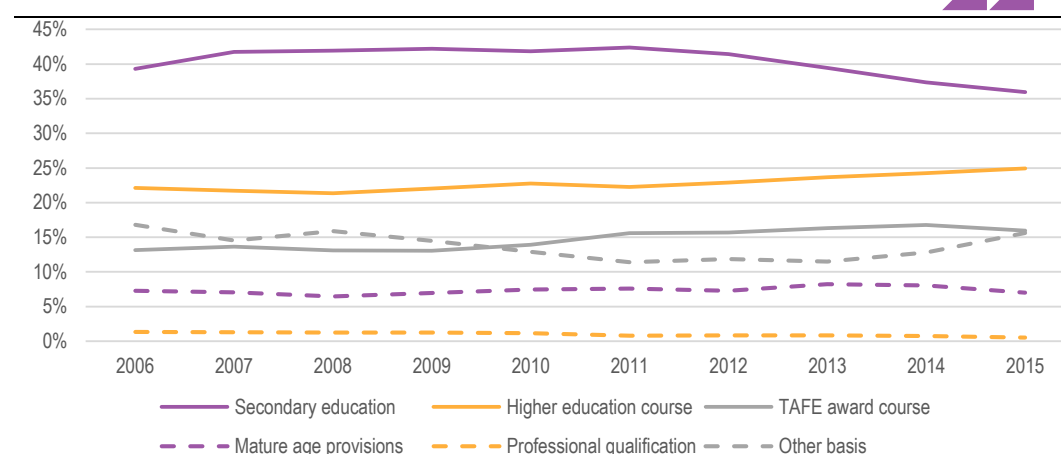
**FIGURE 9.6** 2015 ENROLMENTS BY BASIS OF ADMISSION BY SES



SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

Over time, 'other basis' and 'higher education course' pathways have become more important as entry into university for low SES individuals, with all other pathways either stable or showing a slight decline as a share of low SES admissions (Figure 9.7).

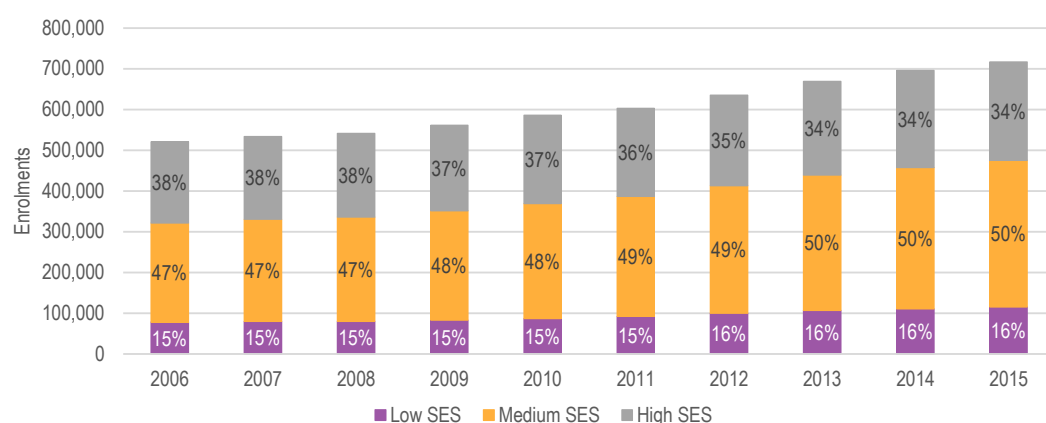
**FIGURE 9.7** SHARE OF BASIS OF ADMISSION FOR LOW SES ENROLMENTS, 2006-2015



SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

## 9.4 Enrolments

The increase in low SES commencements discussed in Section 9.1 has been accompanied by an increase in low SES enrolments, rising from 86,400 in 2010 to 115,164 in 2015 (an increase of 33 per cent). While overall enrolments have also been growing strongly, the share of enrolments that are low SES has increased from 14.8 per cent in 2010 to 16.1 per cent in 2015 (Figure 9.8).

**FIGURE 9.8** ENROLMENTS BY SES, 2006-2015

SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

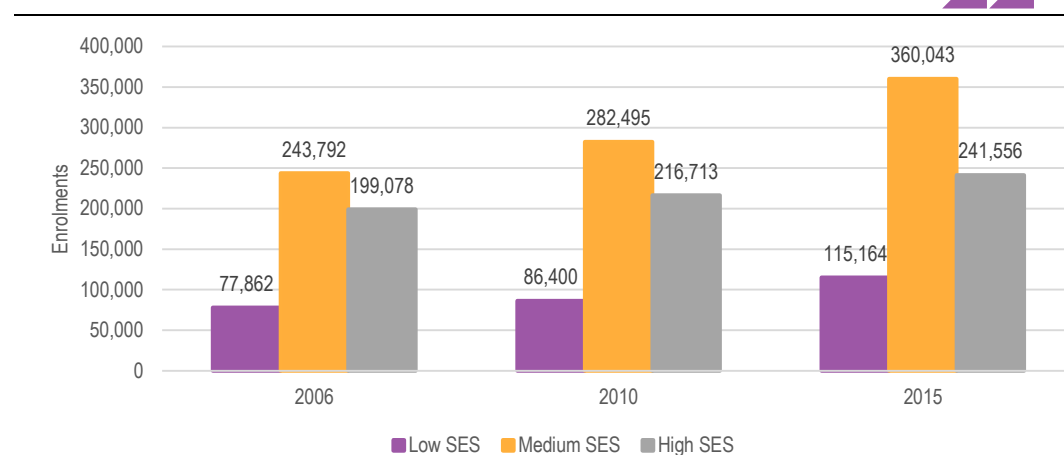
Growth in low SES enrolments has been higher than growth in medium and high SES enrolments for most years since the introduction of the HEPPP and the DDS. Although the strong growth seen in 2011-2013 appears to have softened (Figure 9.9)—it is unclear at this stage why this is the case, although some higher education peak bodies argue that the initial surge of 'unmet demand' for a university education uncovered by the DDS is levelling off (Dodd 2016).

**FIGURE 9.9** YEAR TO YEAR GROWTH OF ENROLMENTS BY SES STATUS, 2007-2015

SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

Overall, there has been an increase of low SES students of more than 28,000 between 2010 and 2015, a greater increase than that of high SES students (25,000) (Figure 9.10). The large increase in the number of low SES enrolments represents a considerable increase in the accessibility of university to this cohort.

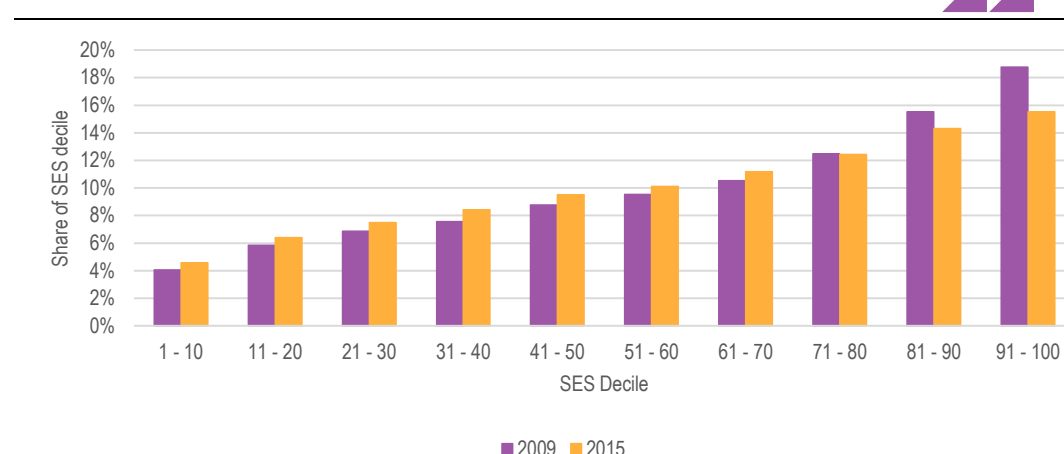
**FIGURE 9.10** ENROLMENTS BY SES STATUS, 2006, 2010 AND 2015



SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

Student enrolments can also be examined by SES decile, rather than the three SES groups (Figure 9.11). Between 2009 and 2015, the share of students at each decile below 71-80 has increased, while the share of the two top deciles has decreased. The largest decrease has occurred in the 91-100 decile, a decrease of 3.2 percentage points. The largest increase has occurred in the 31-40 decile (which is outside the low SES cohort), with an increase 0.9 percentage points.

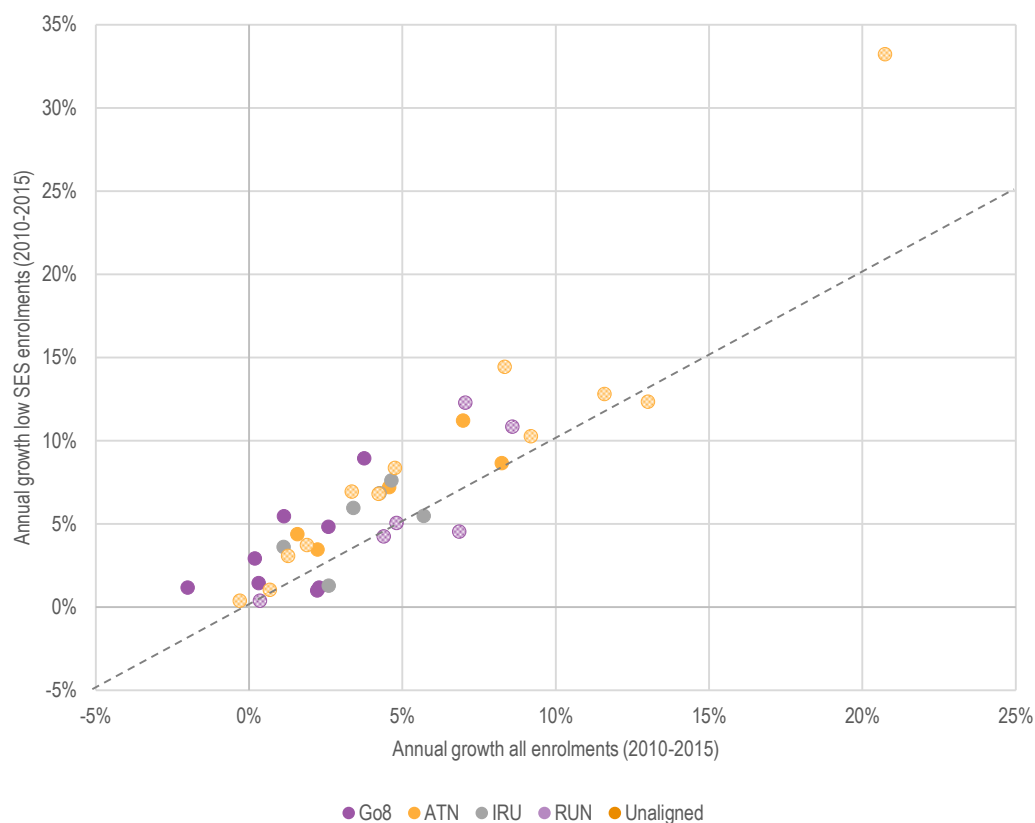
**FIGURE 9.11** SHARE OF ENROLMENTS BY SES DECILE



SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

The growth in low SES enrolments has not been spread evenly across universities, with seven universities seeing annual growth rates in low SES enrolments of more than 10 per cent over 2010-2015. The majority of universities (those above the dotted line in Figure 9.12) have increased low SES enrolments at a faster rate than overall enrolments—the universities that have not, are generally lower overall enrolment growth universities, with only three having overall growth greater than 5 per cent.

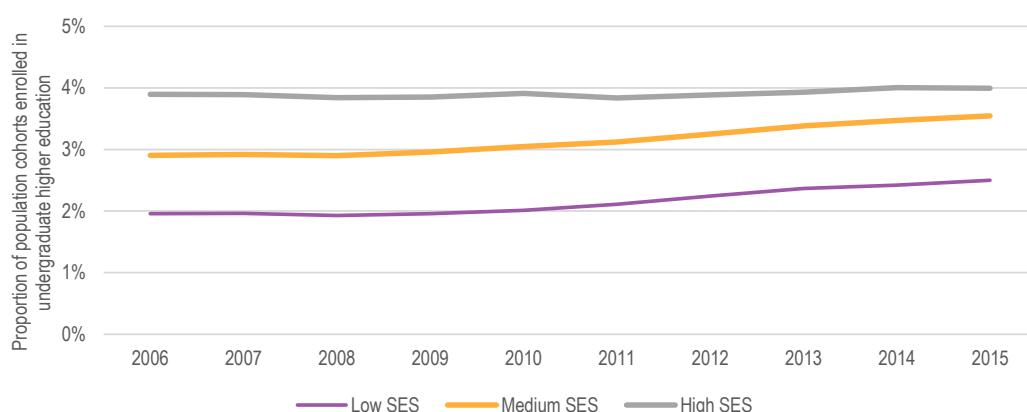
**FIGURE 9.12** ANNUAL GROWTH OF LOW SES ENROLMENTS AND TOTAL ENROLMENTS BY UNIVERSITY GROUPING, 2010-2015



SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

The population participation rate is the proportion of the population enrolled in a university course, and is an important measure of higher education take up and representativeness. Higher education population participation rates for low SES individuals have risen steadily since 2010, in line with medium SES individuals, while rates for high SES individuals have risen only slightly (Figure 9.13).

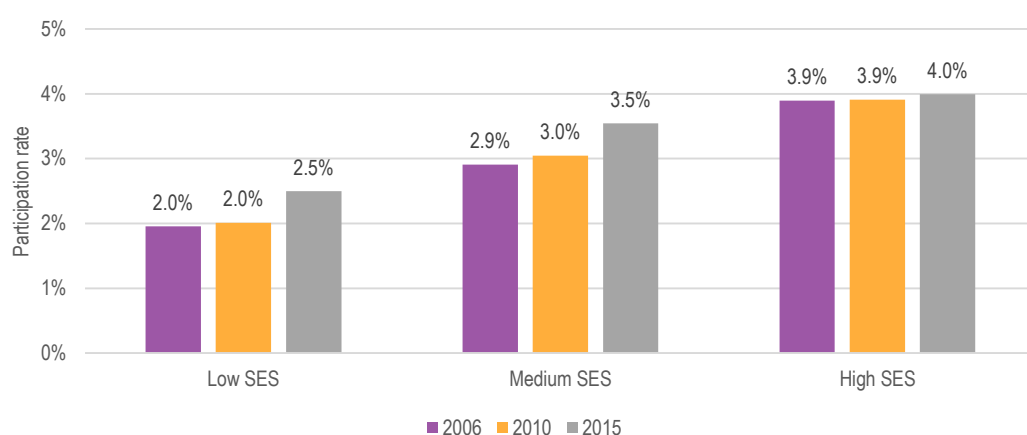


**FIGURE 9.13** POPULATION PARTICIPATION RATE BY SES, 2006-2015

Note: Population figures are on a SA2 basis

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS, CAT NO 3101.0 – AUSTRALIAN DEMOGRAPHY STATISTICS, HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

The strong correlation between the low and medium SES participation rates may indicate that these increases are being driven by the DDS, or that HEPPP outreach activities are influencing both low and medium SES cohorts as these cohorts are likely to be represented at the same schools in many cases. Participation rates have increased for both the medium and low SES groups by 1.5 percentage points, while high SES participation rates between 2006-2010 were relatively constant (Figure 9.14).

**FIGURE 9.14** PARTICIPATION RATE BY SES, 2006, 2010 AND 2015

Note: Population figures are on a SA2 basis

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS, CAT NO 3101.0 – AUSTRALIAN DEMOGRAPHY STATISTICS, HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

## 9.5 Retention, success and completion

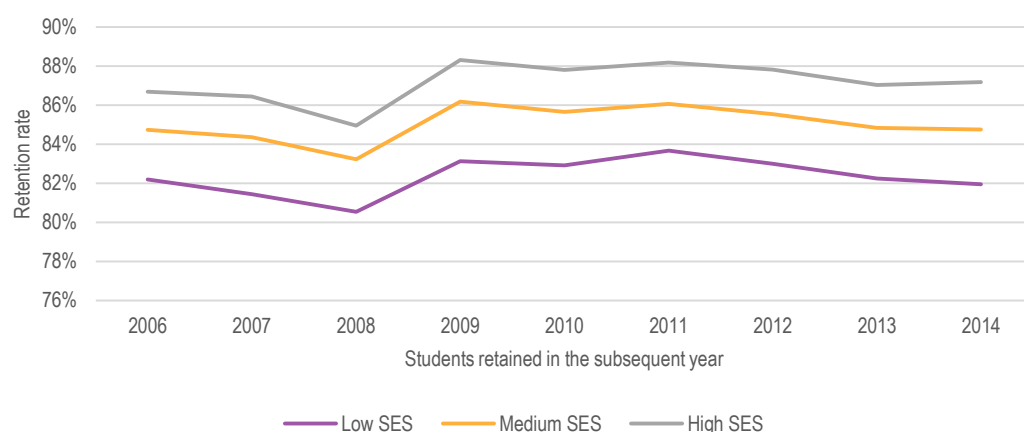
The HEPPP aims to support universities to increase the access, retention and completion rates of low SES students. The activities universities have undertaken to target to these measures are detailed in Chapters 6 and 7, along with project-specific data indicating the impact of individual projects. This section examines retention, success and completion rates at a system level.

### 9.5.1 Retention rates

Student retention<sup>40</sup> refers to whether a student returns to university studies in the following year—the latest year for which these data are available is students enrolled in 2014. Low SES student retention rates are lower than other SES groups, at around 82 per cent in 2014 compared to 85 and 87 per cent for medium and high SES groups respectively.

Retention rates for all SES groups have been trending down slightly over 2011-2014, falling 1 percentage point for high SES enrolments and 1.7 percentage points for low SES enrolments (Figure 9.15). It is not clear what is driving the general downward trend, or why the trend is more pronounced in the low SES cohort.

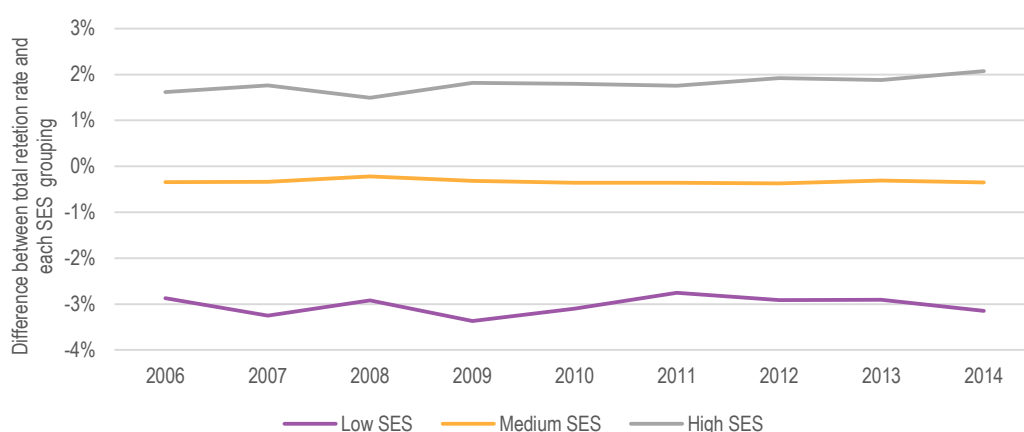
**FIGURE 9.15** RETENTION RATE BY SES, 2006-2014



SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

Relative to overall retention rates, low SES rates are around 3 percentage points lower (medium SES retention rates are about the same as overall rates, while high SES retention rates are 2 per cent higher) (Figure 9.16). The difference between low SES retention rates and overall rates has not changed significantly over 2006-2014.

**FIGURE 9.16** SES RETENTION RATE RELATIVE TOTAL RETENTION RATE, 2006-2014



Note: Total retention rate includes enrolments unable to be classified to a SES grouping

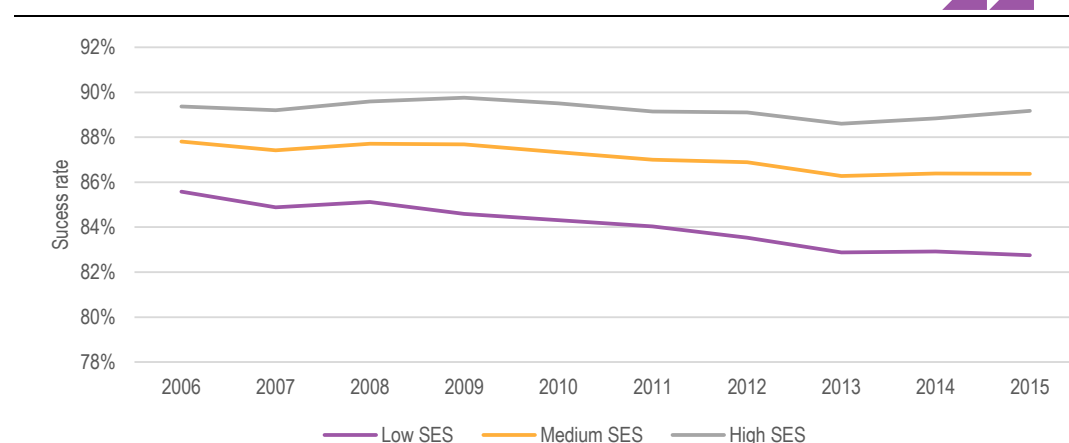
SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

<sup>40</sup> More formally, retention rate for year(x) = the number of domestic onshore students who commenced an undergraduate course in year(x) and continue in year(x+1) as a proportion of students who were enrolled in an undergraduate course in year(x) and did not complete the course in year(x).

### 9.5.2 Success rates

In university statistics, the term success<sup>41</sup> refers to the proportion of subjects that students pass in a year. Low SES success rates fell from 84.3 per cent in 2010 to 82.8 per cent in 2015. Other SES groups have also seen a fall in success rates over this period, although to a lesser extent (Figure 9.17). It is not clear what is driving the downward trend among the low SES cohort. Some universities discussed in interviews that the expansion of the higher education sector coincident with the DDS has changed the composition of the low SES cohort (more than it has other cohorts because the low SES cohort has seen a greater increase), although it is not possible to rigorously test this hypothesis.

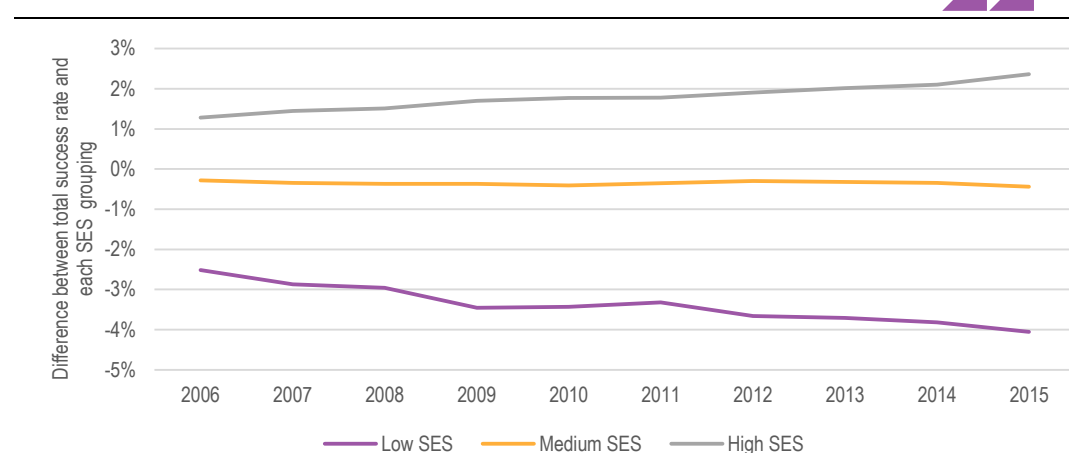
**FIGURE 9.17** SUCCESS RATE BY SES, 2006-2015



SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

As a result, the gap between overall success rates and low SES student success rates has increased at a steady pace since 2006 from -2.5 percentage points to -4 percentage points (Figure 9.18). This gap has been steady for medium SES students, while the gap between high SES students and all students has increased to 2.3 percentage points.

**FIGURE 9.18** SES SUCCESS RATE RELATIVE TOTAL SUCCESS RATE, 2006-2015



Note: Total success rate includes enrolments unable to be classified to a SES grouping.

SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

<sup>41</sup> More formally, the success rate for year(x) is the proportion of actual student load (EFTSL) for units of study that are passed divided by the EFTSL for all units of study attempted (passed + failed + withdrawn) (where withdrawn refers to withdrawn from after the relevant census date(s)).

### 9.5.3 Completions rate analysis

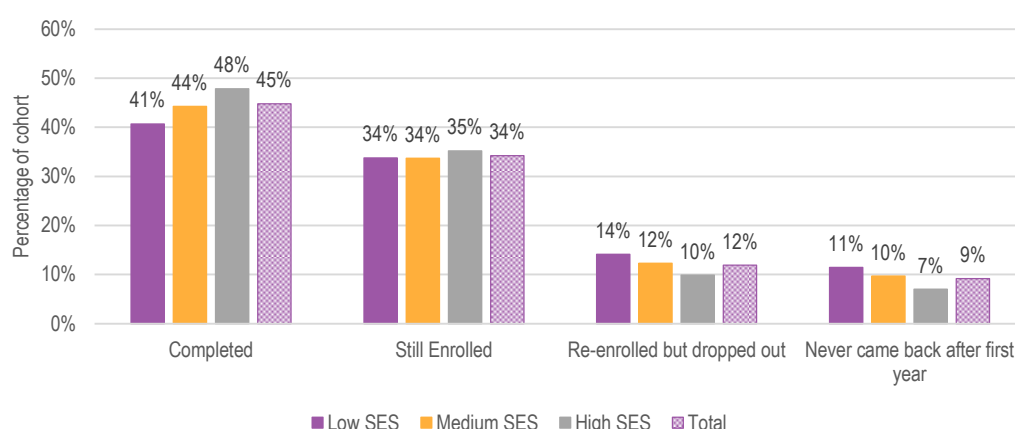
The analysis of higher education course completions examines cohorts of students commencing in a given year, and assigns each student to one of four categories at a defined period post-commencement (normally a minimum of four years). The four categories are:

- Completed. The proportion of students who have completed their course; also called the completion rate.<sup>42</sup>
- Still enrolled. The proportion of students still enrolled at university.
- Re-enrolled but dropped out. The proportion of students who came back some time after their first year but then dropped out.
- Never came back after first year. The proportion of students who dropped out before beginning their second year and never returned.
- The methodology tracking student completions allows for students to change course and still be counted as completed if they have finished an award course. The course completion may not necessarily be at the same course level, within the same field of education or at the same institution. The Department advises that this methodology captures the greatest number of completions possible and, as such, is an accurate measure of students' completion rate.
- For each increase in time period over which completions are measured, there is an increase in the proportion of students who have completed. The Department advises that it has been established that the vast majority of students who complete a course have done so after nine years. Although the proportion of students who have completed a course after four years is less than 50 per cent, this data provides an early outcome assessment of more recent student cohorts.

The most recent student cohort that can be analysed commenced in 2011 (2014 is the latest year for which data are available, and 2011 is four years prior to 2014). Considering the HEPPP was first introduced in 2010, and full-scale implementation at the university-level was only reached in 2012, the analysis presented below is unlikely to capture many potential HEPPP impacts. The analysis is included for comprehensiveness and to provide a trend and baseline against which HEPPP can be assessed in the future.

Completion rates are correlated with SES status—based on the 2011 commencement cohort, low SES students have lower four year completion rates, and higher first year dropout rates compared to total and medium and high SES students (Figure 9.19). Low SES students are also more likely to drop out in first or subsequent years than medium and high SES students.

**FIGURE 9.19** COMPLETIONS ANALYSIS FOR STUDENTS COMMENCING IN 2011, BY SES



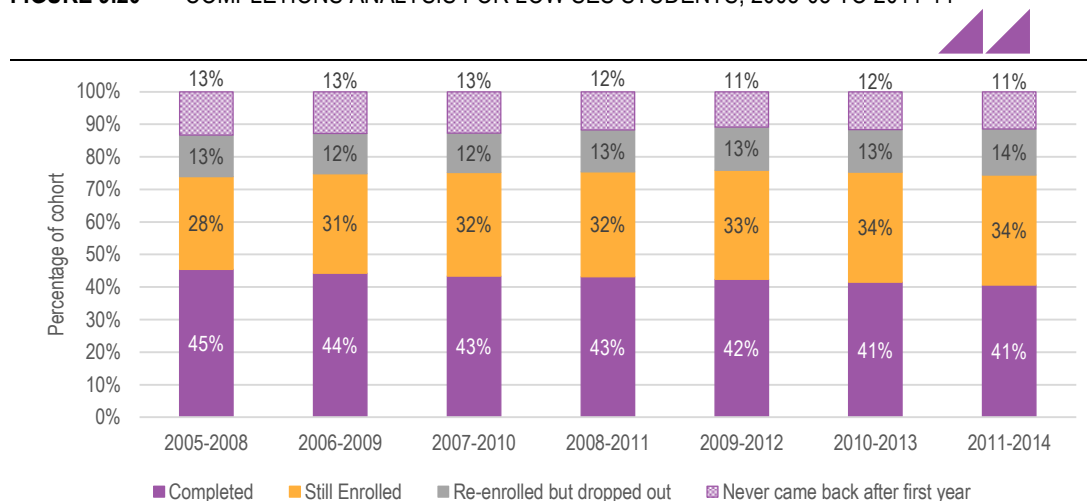
Note: Low SES postcode measure is based on the students' postcode of permanent home residence, with the SES value derived from the 2006 SEIFA EOI. This chart shows one, four year cohort.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, COHORT ANALYSIS

<sup>42</sup> Completion rate for year(x) is the proportion of students who commenced in year(x) and completed their studies of all students who commenced in year(x) across a defined time period normally four, six or nine years.

Over the last seven years of cohorts for which data are available, low SES students' completion rates have dropped from 45 per cent to 41 per cent (Figure 9.20). This change has led primarily to a greater proportion of low SES students being still enrolled after four years, although there has also been an increase in students dropping out after in their second, third or fourth year.<sup>43</sup> In the increase in students still enrolled after four years is consistent with medium and high SES students and is likely due to an increase in part time students, and mature age students who are more likely to defer their studies for employment and family commitments.<sup>44</sup>

**FIGURE 9.20** COMPLETIONS ANALYSIS FOR LOW SES STUDENTS, 2005-08 TO 2011-14



Note: Low SES postcode measure is based on the students' postcode of permanent home residence, with the SES value derived from the 2006 SEIFA EOI. This chart shows eight, four year cohorts.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, COHORT ANALYSIS 2005-2015

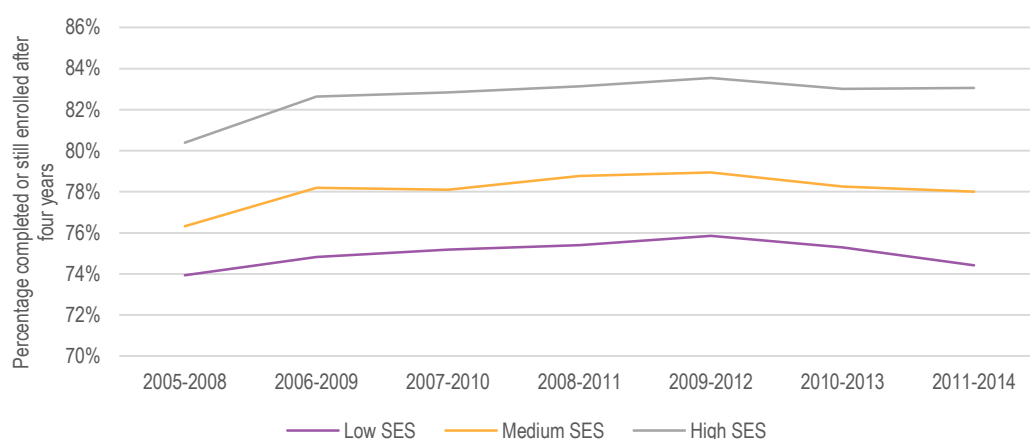
Completions analysis shows the gap between low SES, and medium and high SES students widening since the 2005 commencing cohort. In the completion rate of the 2005 cohort was 4 percentage points lower for low SES students than high SES students, and by the 2011 cohort this gap had widened to 7 percentage points; the gap between low and medium SES rose from 2 to 4 percentage points over this time.

There has been an increase across all SES groups in the proportion of students still enrolled after four years. To account for this, Figure 9.21 shows the proportion of students by SES group who have completed their course or are still enrolled—in effect it shows the proportion of students who have not dropped out within four years of commencing. The analysis shows a gap between the SES groups, and that this gap is widening. Consultations for this evaluation did not shed light on potential drivers for this trend.

<sup>43</sup> There are challenges in determining whether a student has dropped out of a course. A student may take a break from study of more than four years and still complete their course, but depending on the time period being studied, this student could be counted as having dropped out. As result, completion data should be interpreted cautiously.

<sup>44</sup> This impact is based on data analysis undertaken for this evaluation and consultations with universities.

**FIGURE 9.21** STUDENTS COMPLETING OR STILL ENROLLED FOUR YEARS AFTER COMMENCING, BY SES, 2005-2008 TO 2011-2014



Note: Low SES postcode measure is based on the students' postcode of permanent home residence, with the SES value derived from the 2006 SEIFA EOI. This chart shows eight, four year cohorts.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, COHORT ANALYSIS 2005-2015

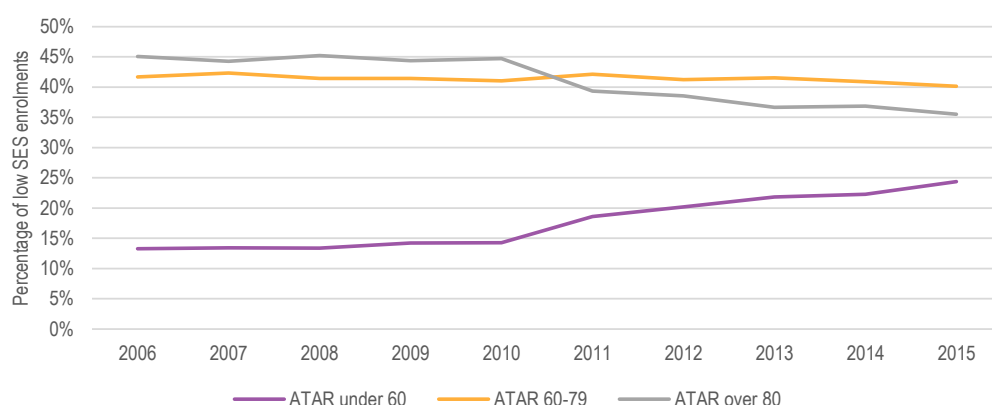
## 9.6 Econometric analysis of retention and success rates

This section presents an econometric analysis of the Higher Education Student Data Collection. The analysis compares outcomes of students in the 2005-2009 pre-HEPPP time period with student outcomes in the HEPPP time period (2010-2014<sup>45</sup>), and controls for differences in the characteristics of the student cohorts between these two time periods. See Appendix D.1 for more information on the analysis method.

As noted throughout the analysis presented in the previous sections of this chapter, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the HEPPP is influencing the observed trends in student outcomes, due, in part, to other changes occurring in the higher education sector over the HEPPP implementation period.

While the econometrics analysis cannot control for higher education programs and reforms being implemented concurrently with the HEPPP, it can, to some extent control for the impact of these programs and reforms on university student cohort characteristics. For example, the introduction of the DDS (in 2010-2012) has seen an increase in the proportion of commencing students with ATARs below 80 (Figure 9.22 shows this for just low SES). The econometric analysis determines the extent to which ATARs are related to student outcomes at university, and controls for this when comparing the pre-HEPPP and HEPPP cohorts, in effect removing the impact of changes in ATARs between the two time periods.

<sup>45</sup> The period 2009-2014 is used as 2014 is the last year for which retention data are available.

**FIGURE 9.22** SHARE OF LOW SES ENROLMENTS BY ATAR DECILES, 2006-2015

Note: The drop in percentage of higher ATAR low SES enrolments is driven by the increase in percentage of lower ATAR low SES enrolments

SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

The econometric analysis has modelled the impact of the following variables on student outcomes:

- Field of education
- Type of attendance (full time or part time)
- Whether student is on a scholarship
- How student is paying for course (CSP or Domestic FFS)
- ATAR
- Basis of admission into course
- Indigenous status
- Gender
- Age category
- Born in Australia or Outside Australia
- English or Non-English Language spoken at home

The analysis controls for these factors, and estimated retention rates and success rates for low SES students and medium/high SES students pre-HEPPP (2006-2009) and during HEPPP (2010-2014).

While the analysis uses the Higher Education Student Data Collection to control for meaningful changes in the student cohort between the pre-HEPPP and HEPPP student cohorts, there are many factors that are not captured in the dataset (such as other government or university programs, general economic conditions, changing cohort characteristics that are not recorded in the datasets, and changing teaching methods) for which the modelling therefore cannot control.

The econometric modelling results for success and retention rates for low SES students and for medium and high SES students are set out in Table 9.1. Low SES students have lower retention and success rates than medium and high SES students (consistent with the data presented in Section 9.5). The results show retention and success rates for both groups falling over the two time periods.

**TABLE 9.1** ECONOMETRICS ANALYSIS RESULTS: RETENTION AND SUCCESS RATES BY SES GROUPS

	Low SES		Medium/High SES	
	2006-2009	2010-2014	2006-2009	2010-2014
Retention rate	87%	86%	89%	88%
Success rate	67%	63%	70%	66%

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN MODELLING USING HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION



The results show that the difference between retention and success rates for low SES students and medium/high SES students fell between 2006-2009 and 2010-2014 (Table 9.2). Low SES retention rates were 1.38 percentage points lower than medium and high SES students in 2006-2009, and 1.17 percentage points lower in 2010-14.

While this analysis does not definitively establish a causal relationship between HEPPP programs and these outcomes, it does indicate that when controlling for changes in the student cohort since 2010, the gap between the retention and success rates of low SES students and medium and high SES students has reduced slightly. While broader economic, population and policy factors could be relevant to achievement of these outcomes, the analysis is constrained by the factors available in the Higher Education Student Data Collection.

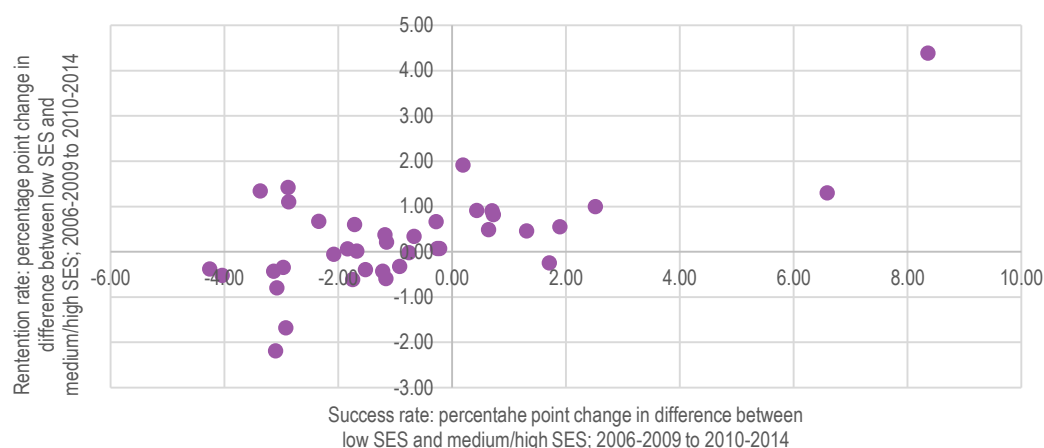
**TABLE 9.2** ECONOMETRICS ANALYSIS RESULTS: DIFFERENCE IN RETENTION AND SUCCESS RATES BY SES GROUPS

	Average difference between low SES and medium/high SES		Change in difference
	2006-2009	2010-2014	
Retention rate	-1.38 percentage points	-1.17 percentage points	0.21 percentage points
Success rate	-2.94 percentage points	-2.89 percentage points	0.05 percentage points

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN MODELLING USING HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

The econometric analysis also examined the retention and success rate differences between the two periods, by university (Figure 9.23). There are 10 universities (out of 37) for which the difference between low SES and medium and high SES student retention and success rates has fallen between 2006-2009 and 2010-2014.

**FIGURE 9.23** RETENTION AND SUCCESS RATE CHANGES AT EACH UNIVERSITY, 2006-2009 TO 2010-2014



SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN MODELLING USING HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

Using these university-level results, combined with the HEPPP project inventory<sup>46</sup>, it is possible to examine for any difference in the types of HEPPP projects implemented by universities which have achieved reductions in outcome gaps between low SES students and medium and high SES students.

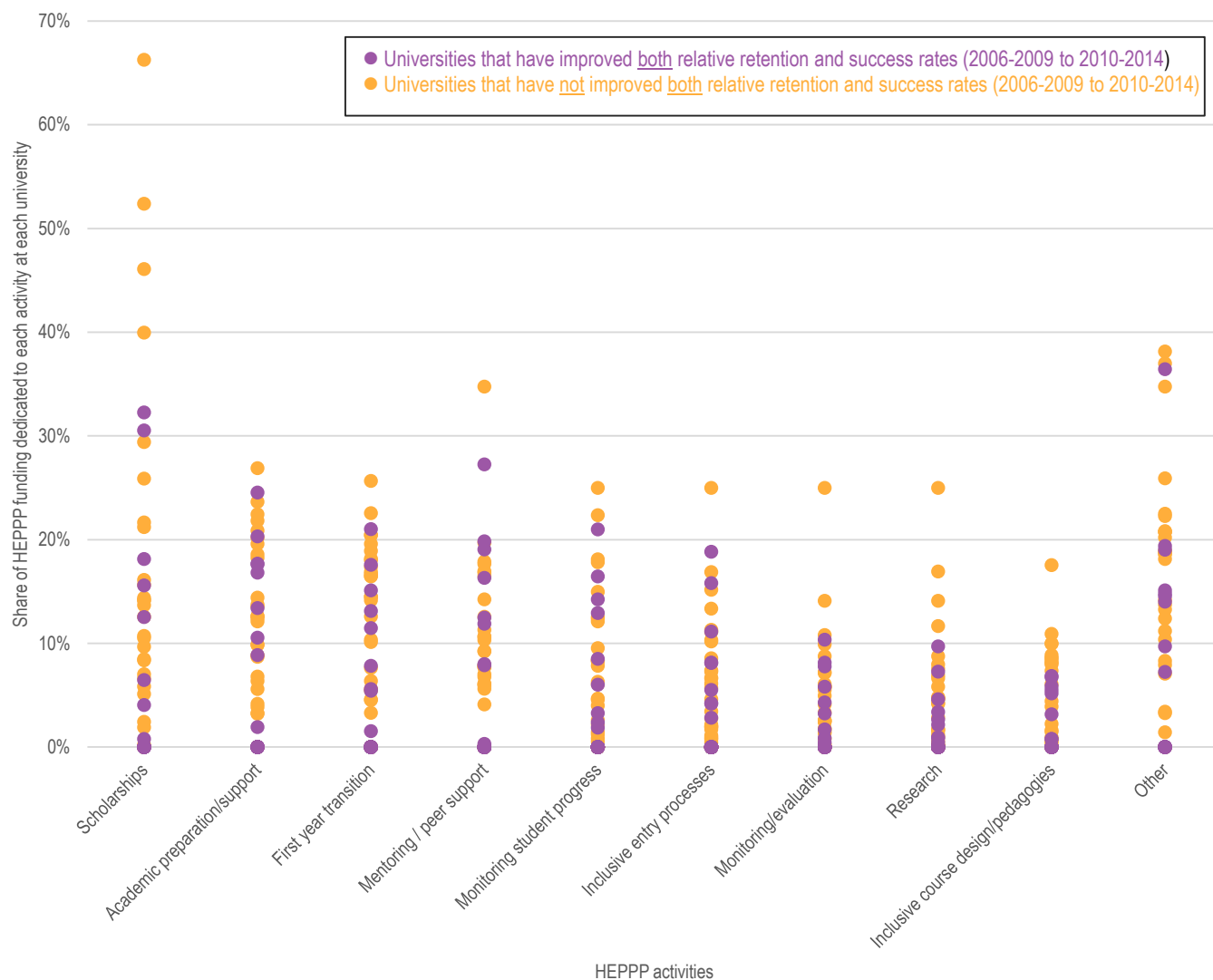
This analysis indicates there is little commonality in the relative focus given to different HEPPP activities by the universities that have improved both relative retention rate and success rates (Figure 9.24). There is no pattern in the HEPPP expenditure of universities that have improved both

<sup>46</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, the HEPPP project inventory has been compiled from the universities' HEPPP annual reports and includes 2679 projects.

relative retention rate and success rates, and those that have not, that could help explain the different outcomes these two groups of universities have achieved.

This may indicate that HEPPP project effectiveness differs more within project types, than between project types, although at this stage there are insufficient data to confirm this possibility (refer Chapters 4-7).

**FIGURE 9.24** SHARE OF HEPPP FUNDING PER ACTIVITY



SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN MODELLING USING HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION, HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

**KEY FINDING 7 OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

Across a number of measures, low SES individuals are increasingly accessing higher education—the number of low SES individuals applying for, being offered a place at, commencing at and enrolling in university has increased considerably. Growth on each of these measures is highest in the low SES group.

High enrollment growth for low SES individuals has also pushed up the share of low SES individuals in higher education from 2 per cent to 2.5 per cent.

It is not possible to disaggregate the impact of HEPPP, the DDS, other government programs and other societal changes on these trends with the currently available data. Other evidence presented in Chapters 4 and 5 suggests it is likely HEPPP is contributing to the increase in applications and enrolments, but the extent of this impact is not able to be quantified.

Despite the growth, and the share of low SES students rising from 14.8 per cent in 2010 to 16.1 per cent to 2015, low SES students continue to be under-represented in higher education.

Once at university, low SES students have lower retention, success and completion rates than other students—econometric analysis indicates that this difference has fallen slightly relative to the pre-HEPPP period 2006-2009, though it is not possible to directly attribute this change to the HEPPP.

Low SES student outcomes have varied across universities, but there is no apparent pattern that indicates any particular mix or focus of HEPPP activities is correlated with improvements in low SES student retention and success.

As with enrolment outcomes, other evidence presented in Chapters 6 and 7 suggests it is likely that HEPPP is contributing to improvements in student outcomes, but the extent of this impact is not able to be quantified with currently available data.





*This chapter examines the efficiency of the HEPPP, including an analysis of HEPPP funding across and within universities.*

The efficiency analysis examines how HEPPP funding has been allocated across activities, universities and target groups. It also considers the level of HEPPP funding, administration costs, and the extent to which other funding has been leveraged under the HEPPP, based on three main datasets:

- the HEPPP finance dataset which sets out funding under the program
- the Higher Education finance dataset which covers all revenue received by universities
- the project inventory based on the HEPPP annual reports.

The HEPPP finance dataset is the comprehensive source of HEPPP related expenditure. While the project inventory provides a finer level of detail, the universities do not account for project expenditure in the annual reports in a consistent manner. As a result the project inventory is primarily used for funding proportions rather than funding levels (that is, actual dollar values).

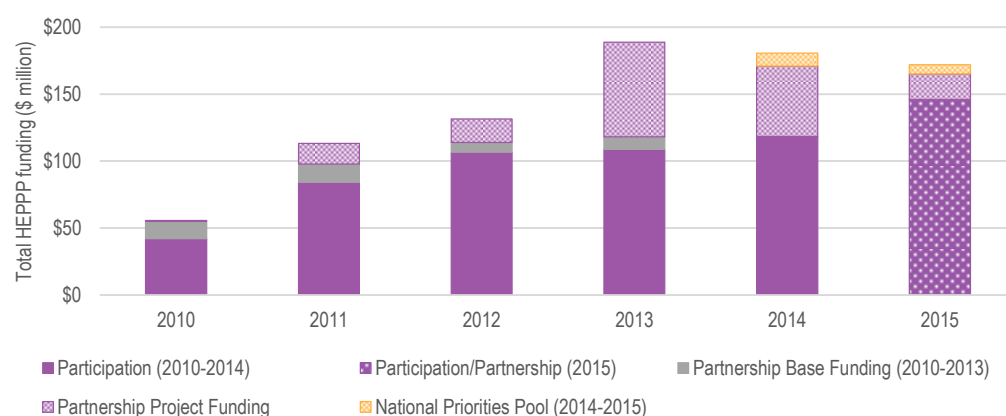
## 10.1 Overview of HEPPP funding

This section provides a summary of HEPPP funding, including by HEPPP component activity and as a proportion of university funding.

### 10.1.1 HEPPP funding by component

The HEPPP has three components: Participation, Partnerships and NPP (refer Chapter 2). Partnership funding was provided as a base funding component over 2010-2013 with Partnership project grant rounds in 2011 and 2013. In 2015, Partnership funding was allocated with Participation funding on a formula basis (based on the proportion of low SES students at each university). The NPP was introduced in 2014 (refer Chapter 8).

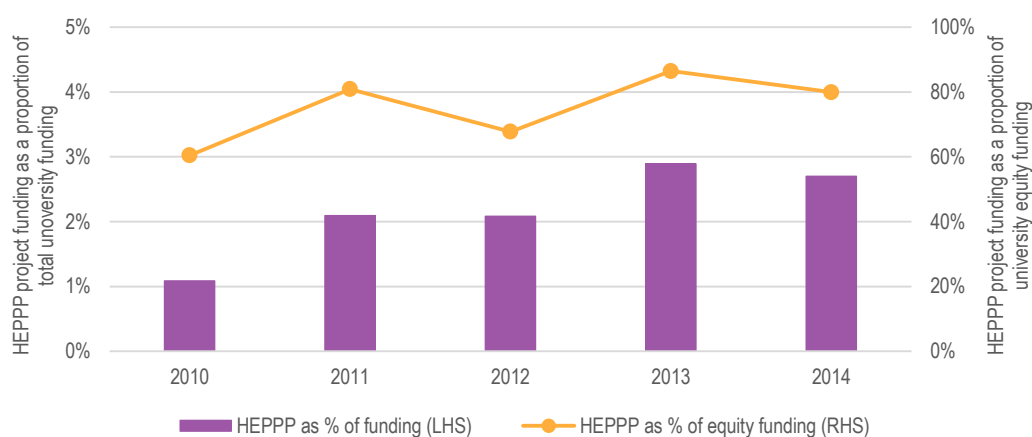
Total HEPPP funding grew from \$56 million in 2010 to a peak of \$189 million in 2013, then fell to \$172 million in 2015 (Figure 10.1). Between 2010 and 2014 the majority of funding was provided through the Participation component (69 per cent) followed by the Partnership component (30 per cent).

**FIGURE 10.1** TOTAL HEPPP FUNDING BY FUNDING STREAM, 2010-2015

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA

### 10.1.2 HEPPP funding as a proportion of university funding

HEPPP funding as a proportion of total university funding has grown from 1 per cent in 2010 to approximately 3 per cent in 2014 (Figure 10.2). HEPPP funding as a proportion of total university equity funding (defined as funding for HEPPP, the Indigenous Support Programme, Equity Programmes and Disability Support Programme) has fluctuated year on year but overall has shown an increase from 60 per cent in 2010 to 80 per cent in 2014.

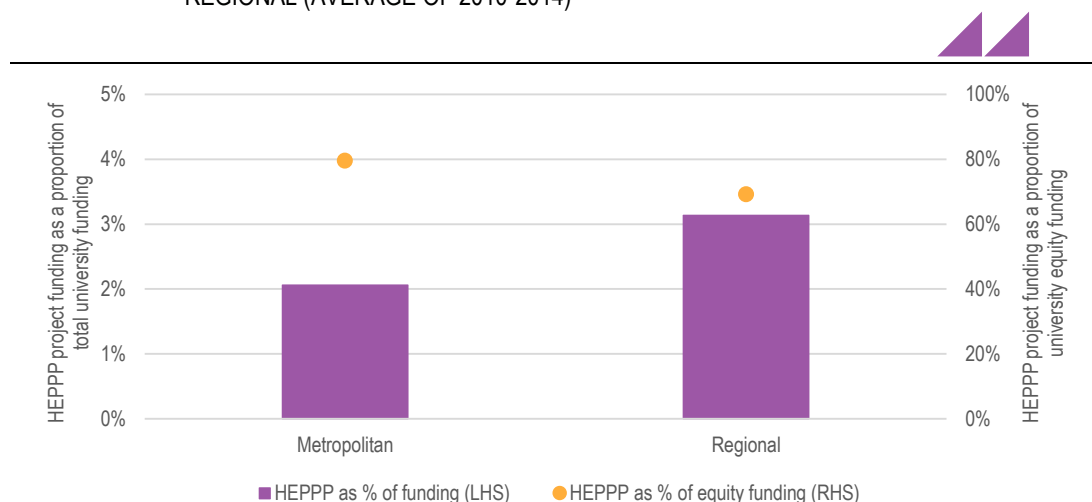
**FIGURE 10.2** HEPPP FUNDING AS A PROPORTION OF UNIVERSITY FUNDING, 2010-2014

Note: Total equity includes the following: HEPPP, Indigenous Support Fund, Equity Programmes and Disability Support Programme.

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA, HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCE DATA

HEPPP funding accounts for 2 per cent of total funding for metropolitan universities, as compared to regional universities where it accounts for 3 per cent (Figure 10.3). HEPPP funding accounts for 80 per cent of total equity funding for metropolitan universities, and 69 percent for regional universities. The reasons for this difference are not clear from the data available to the evaluation, although it may be related to the fact that regional universities are eligible for more funding under the 'other' higher education equity programs due to the composition of their student cohorts.

**FIGURE 10.3** HEPPP FUNDING AS A PROPORTION OF UNIVERSITY FUNDING, METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL (AVERAGE OF 2010-2014)



Note: Total equity includes the following: Indigenous Support Fund, Equity Programmes and Disability Support Programme.

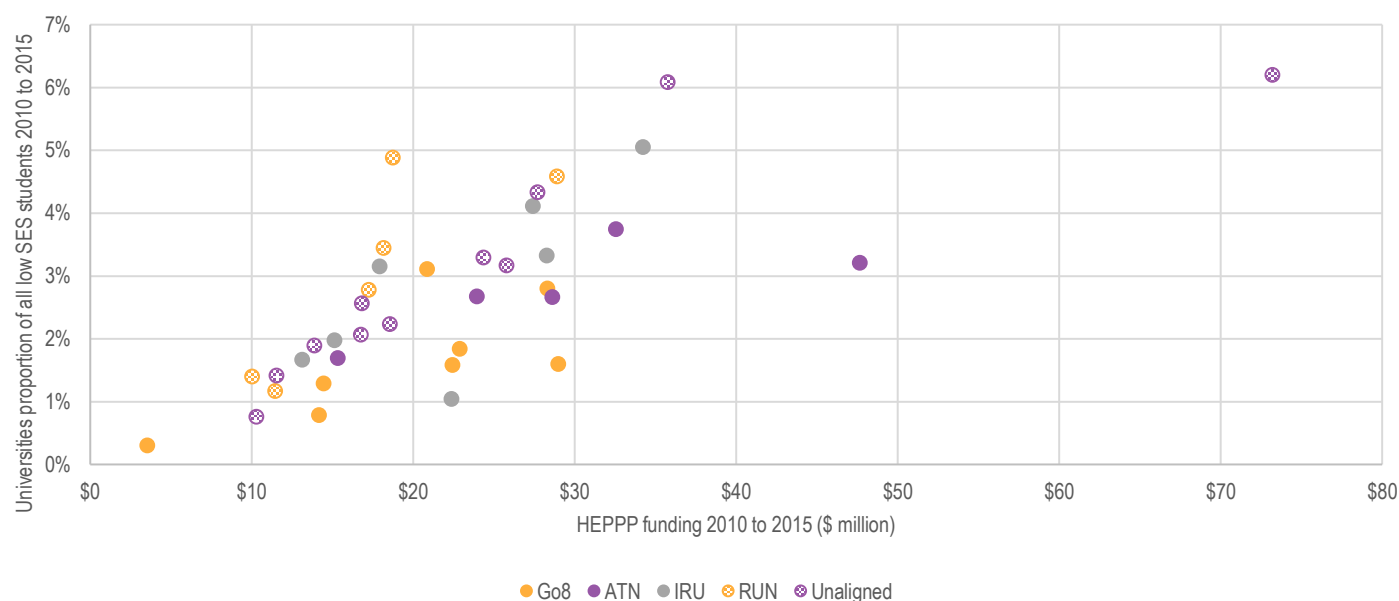
SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA

## 10.2 Allocation of HEPPP funding

This section outlines the distribution of HEPPP funding across universities, university groupings, and jurisdictions.

### HEPPP funding across universities

The level of HEPPP funding received by universities varies based on each university's share of low SES students and whether universities have been awarded competitive grant funding (Section 3.1). There is a clear relationship between a university's proportion of all low SES and the amount of HEPPP funding received, which is to be expected as the Participation component (and in 2015, the Partnership component) is funded based on each university's proportion of all low SES students (Figure 10.4).

**FIGURE 10.4** HEPPP FUNDING AND PROPORTION OF TOTAL DOMESTIC LOW SES ENROLMENTS, BY UNIVERSITY, 2010-2015

Note: The y-axis represents a universities proportion of all low SES students across all universities.

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA, HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

When Partnership and NPP funding is excluded, the strong relationship between each university's proportion of all low SES students and the amount of Participation funding received is evident (Figure 10.5). The relationship is not perfectly linear as from 2010 to 2014 Participation funding was allocated based on each university's proportion of low SES students (this received a 2/3 weighting) and the proportion of students who meet relevant income support payment criteria.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> The relevant income support payment criteria were relation to the following payment types: Dependent Youth Allowance (full-time students), ABSTUDY (Living Allowance), Austudy; Pensioner Education Supplement; ABSTUDY Pensioner Education Supplement; and ABSTUDY Away from base assistance.



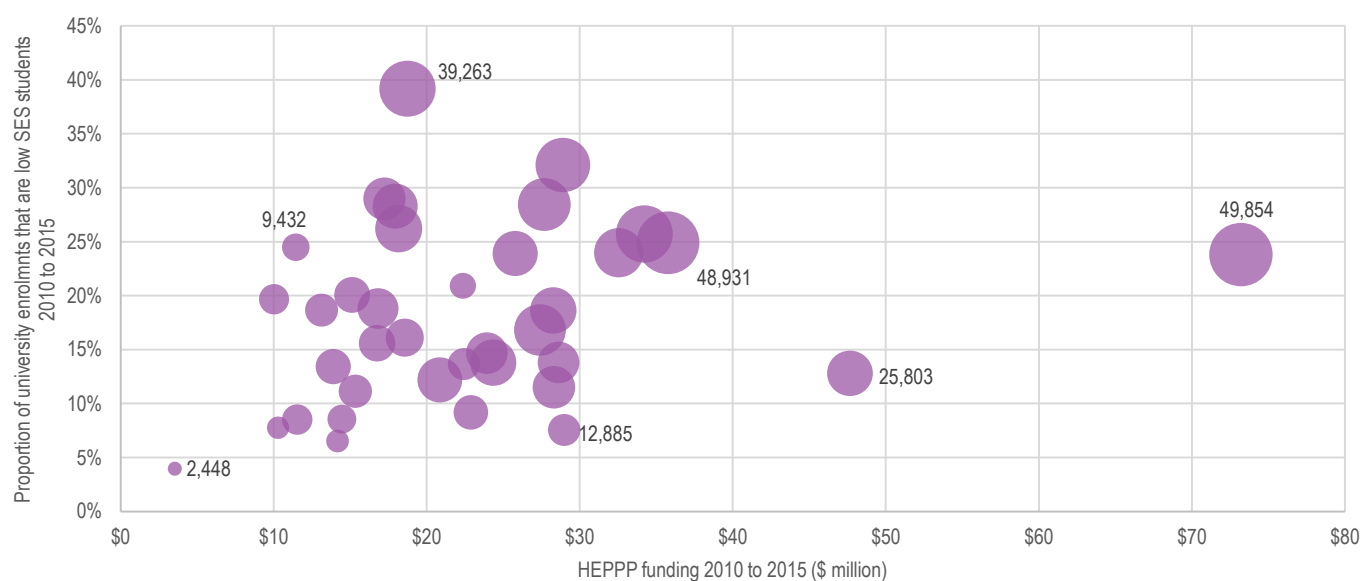
**FIGURE 10.5** UNIVERSITY HEPPP FUNDING AND PROPORTION OF ALL UNIVERSITIES COMBINED LOW SES STUDENTS, 2010 TO 2015

Note: The y-axis represents a universities proportion of all low SES students across all universities.

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA, HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

Figure 10.6 shows the total HEPPP funding each university received from 2010 to 2015, compared to the 2010-2015 proportion of their students that are low SES students, with size of the bubble indicating the number of low SES students enrolled over that time period.

Generally funding is higher for universities with a greater number of low SES students, reflecting the Participation funding formula (as detailed above). The chart, however, shows the impact of competitive grants on the overall funding allocation of each university, in that some universities with the same number of low SES students receive significantly different funding amounts—for example the two universities with 48,931 and 49,854 low SES students. The chart also shows that some of the smaller universities have a high proportion of their students from low SES backgrounds, but due to their size, not a large share of the total number of low SES students in the higher education system.

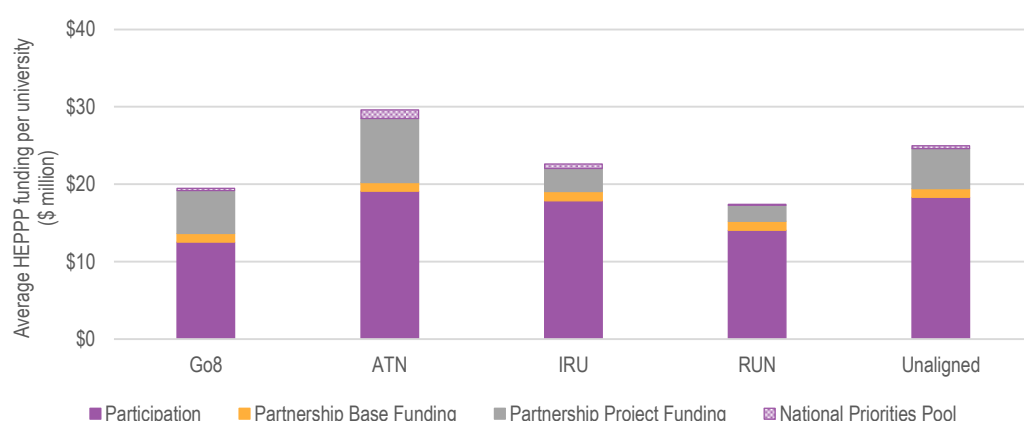
**FIGURE 10.6** UNIVERSITY HEPPP FUNDING AND PROPORTION AND NUMBER OF LOW SES STUDENTS, 2010-2015

Note: Some universities are given data labels to indicate the relationship between the size of the bubble and the number of low SES students.

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA, HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

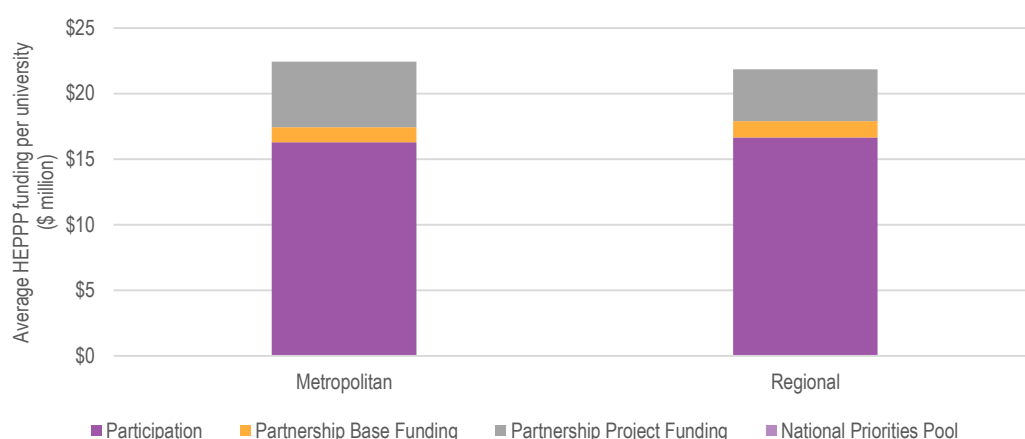
### Average HEPPP funding per university grouping

On average ATN universities received the most HEPPP funding per university, averaging \$30 million (Figure 10.7). Unaligned universities received an average of \$25 million per university, followed by IRU (\$23 million), Go8 (\$19 million) and RUN (\$17 million). HEPPP funding across the university groupings varies due to a number of factors including differences in the number of low SES students and students receiving income support across universities, and differences in Partnership and NPP project grant funding awarded.

**FIGURE 10.7** AVERAGE HEPPP FUNDING PER UNIVERSITY BY UNIVERSITY GROUPING, 2010-2015

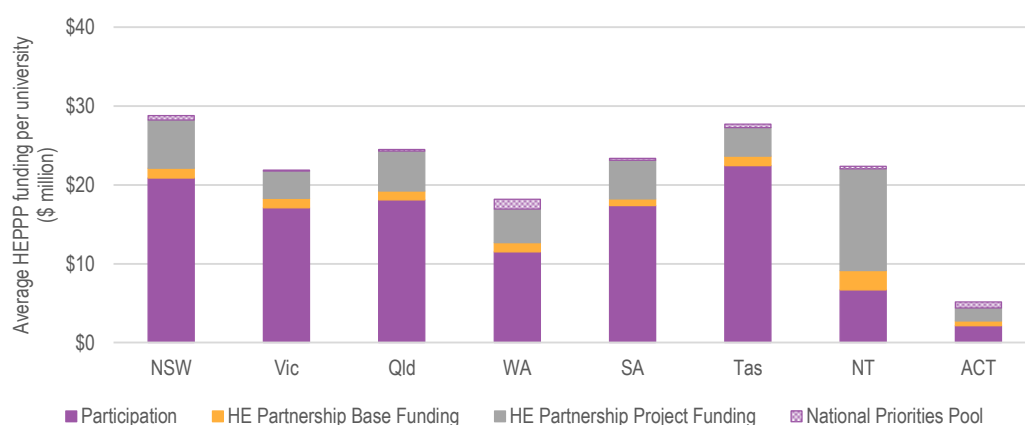
SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA

On average metropolitan universities (\$22.4 million) received slightly more HEPPP funding per university than regional universities (\$21.9 million), due primarily to differences in the amount of Partnership project funding received (Figure 10.8).

**FIGURE 10.8** AVERAGE HEPPP FUNDING PER UNIVERSITY BY LOCATION, 2010-2015

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA

The average HEPPP funding per university fluctuates by jurisdiction with NSW receiving the most funding per university at \$29 million. NSW is followed closely by Tasmania at \$28 million. The ACT on average received the lowest amount of HEPPP funding per university at \$5 million, largely due to the low number of low SES students in the ACT (Figure 10.9).

**FIGURE 10.9** AVERAGE HEPPP FUNDING PER UNIVERSITY BY JURISDICTION, 2010-2015

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA

## 10.3 HEPPP funding levels, administrative costs and leveraging of other funding

This section examines the suitability of the current and projected HEPPP funding level, administration costs of the program, and the extent to which HEPPP is leveraging other sources of funds.

### 10.3.1 HEPPP funding levels relative to key review recommendations

The Bradley Review, which provided the impetus for the establishment of the HEPPP, recommended:

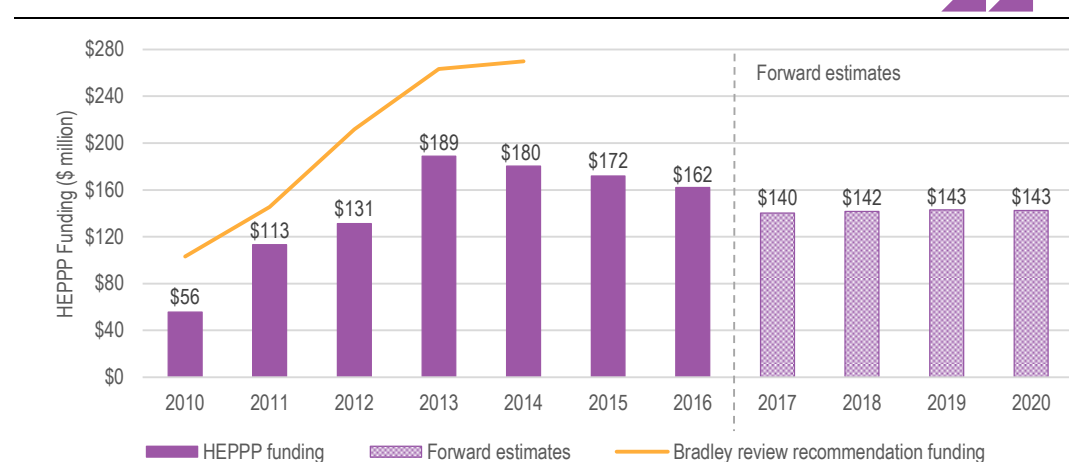
*That the Australian Government increase the funding for the access and participation of under-represented groups of students to a level equivalent to 4 per cent of the total grants for teaching. This would be allocated through a new program for outreach activities and a loading paid to institutions*

enrolling students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Funding for the Disability Support Program would be increased to \$20 million per year.

*The Bradley Review 2008, Recommendation 31*

A number of written submissions to the review (for example, IRU (Submission 96), UA (Submission 79) and Go8 (Submission 109)), noted that total HEPPP funding was below the recommended level set out in the Bradley Review. When HEPPP was introduced the program funding goal was 2 per cent of teaching and learning funding, increasing to 4 per cent by 2012-13 (UA, Submission 79). HEPPP funding for 2010 to 2013 fell below this trajectory and did not reach the 4 per cent Bradley Review recommendation in 2014 (Figure 10.10).<sup>48</sup> In 2014, HEPPP funding was equal to 2.7 per cent of teaching and learning funding.

**FIGURE 10.10** TOTAL HEPPP FUNDING COMPARED TO THE BRADLEY REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS



Note: The Bradley Review recommendation funding trajectory is based on 2 per cent of the teaching and learning in 2010 rising linearly to 4 per cent in 2013. It is not possible to calculate the funding level required to meet the 4 per cent recommendation for 2015 and 2016 as Higher Education Finance data, which reports the teaching and learning funding levels, is not yet available for 2015 and 2016.

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA, AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT BUDGET, HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCE DATA

Some interviewees pointed to the 2011 Australian Government commissioned review of universities base funding as an indication of a suitable level of HEPPP funding. The 'Higher Education Base Funding Review' recommended:

*The participation component of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) should be uncapped and paid on a demand driven basis to universities as a low socioeconomic status (SES) loading on base funding. In order to maintain the value at full implementation of the HEPPP in 2012 of about \$1,000 per low SES student equivalent full-time student load, the funding allocation should be increased.*

*Higher Education Base funding Review, Recommendation 27*

The \$1,000 per low SES student equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) is based on feedback from universities on the additional cost of supporting a low SES student the Base Funding Review received from universities.<sup>49</sup> Universities reported to the Base Funding Review that 'low SES students are more expensive to teach and support than other students' and the Base Funding Review argues that 'if low SES students are to achieve outcomes comparable to other students and they are associated with higher costs of teaching and support, these costs should be recognised by government and reflected appropriately in the funding model.'

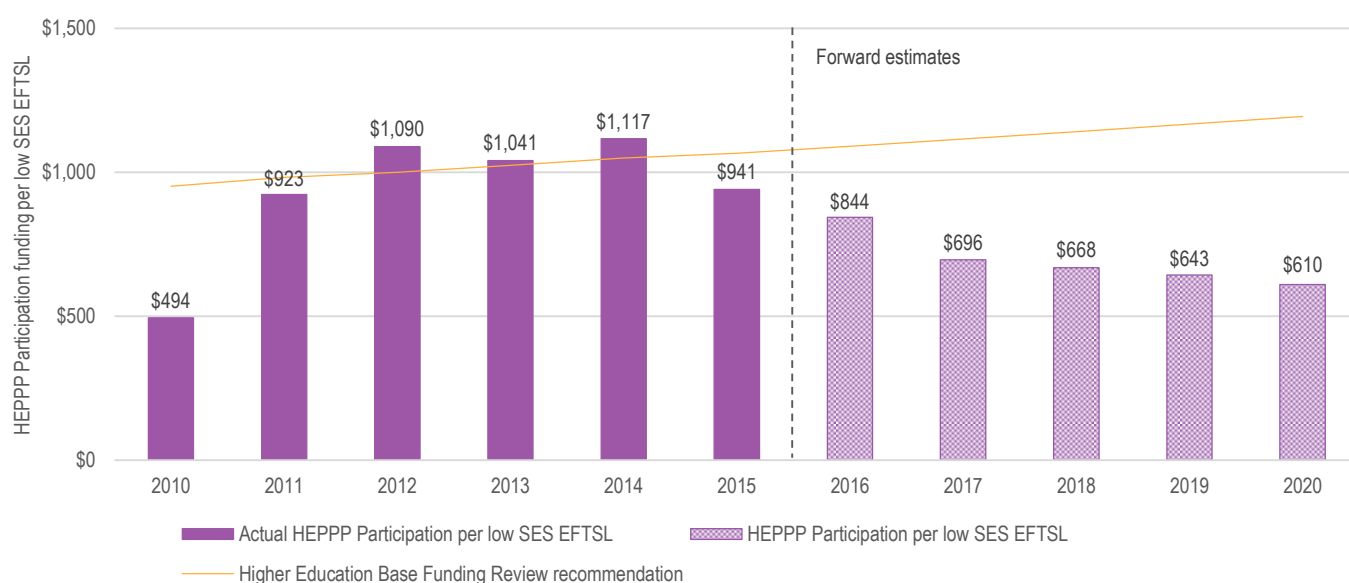
<sup>48</sup> It is not possible to calculate the funding level required to meet the 4 per cent recommendation for 2015 and 2016 as Higher Education Finance data, which reports the CGS funding levels, is not yet available for 2015 and 2016.

<sup>49</sup> According to information provided by universities to the Base Funding Review, 'the estimated additional cost of increasing the participation of low SES students ranged from nothing to around \$2,000 per EFTSL. The majority of institutions put the figure at between \$500 and \$1,000 per EFTSL.'

The Base Funding Review estimate is from 2011, which is largely prior to the DDS, and universities may have different estimates for the additional cost of supporting a low SES student in 2016. Adjusting only for inflation, \$1,000 in 2016 dollars equates to \$1,090 per low SES student.

HEPPP Participation funding exceeded the Base Funding Review recommended level in 2012-2014, before dropping below it in 2015 (Figure 10.11 shows the average HEPPP Participation funding per low SES student EFTSL and an estimate of the Base Funding Review funding level for each year). Based on the forward estimates, funding will continue to be below the Base Funding Review recommendation over the coming years. The difference between the forward estimates of HEPPP funding and the Base Funding Review recommended level grows to an estimated \$166 million by 2020.

**FIGURE 10.11** HEPPP PARTICIPATION FUNDING PER LOW SES EFTSL 2010 TO 2020



Note: Unlike in 2010-2014, in 2015 Participation and Partnership funding was provided as one funding allocation to universities. The 2015 Participation funding amount used in this chart was estimated by applying the ratio of Participation to Partnership funding for 2010-2014 to the 2015 joint component allocation.

Forward estimates of Participation funding were estimated using the annual change in funding from the Australian Government Budget. Forward estimates of EFTSL were estimated using the average compound annual growth rate from 2010 to 2015 of 5 per cent.

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA, HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

### HEPPP administration costs

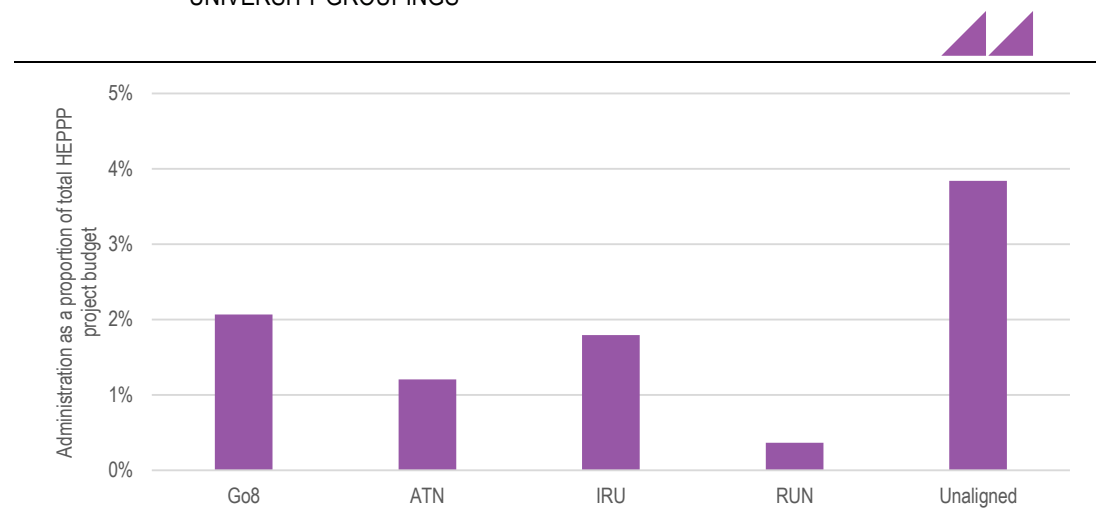
The term 'administrative costs' generally refers to the costs not associated with the direct delivery of a service (ACNC 2016). Outside of this general definition, there is no Australian Government, higher education sector or HEPPP defined set of activities that are considered administrative. In part due to lack of consistent definition and measurement, there is little conclusive evidence on university administrative costs (Graves et al. 2013, The Allen Consulting Group 2008).

As universities have not been required to report HEPPP administrative expenditure, the university-related administrative costs of the HEPPP have been examined by reviewing university annual reports and classifying those activities not directly associated with the delivery of a HEPPP project (or research) as administrative costs. Such classification should be treated cautiously, due to potential inconsistencies in reporting. Furthermore, based on consultations undertaken for this evaluation, some universities have funded all HEPPP administrative costs through non-HEPPP sources, which could lead to an underestimate of overall program administrative costs.

The non-direct HEPPP costs reported in the annual reports are shown in Figure 10.12 as a proportion of total HEPPP project budget, by university groupings—the average across all universities is 2 per cent. This is noticeably lower than the administration costs of the Bridges to Higher Education program (14 per cent) (KPMG 2015) and is significantly lower than some estimates of general

university administrative costs (Graves et al. 2013). As noted above however, this is likely an underestimation of the administrative costs of the HEPPP.

**FIGURE 10.12** ADMINISTRATION COSTS AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL HEPPP PROJECT BUDGET BY UNIVERSITY GROUPINGS

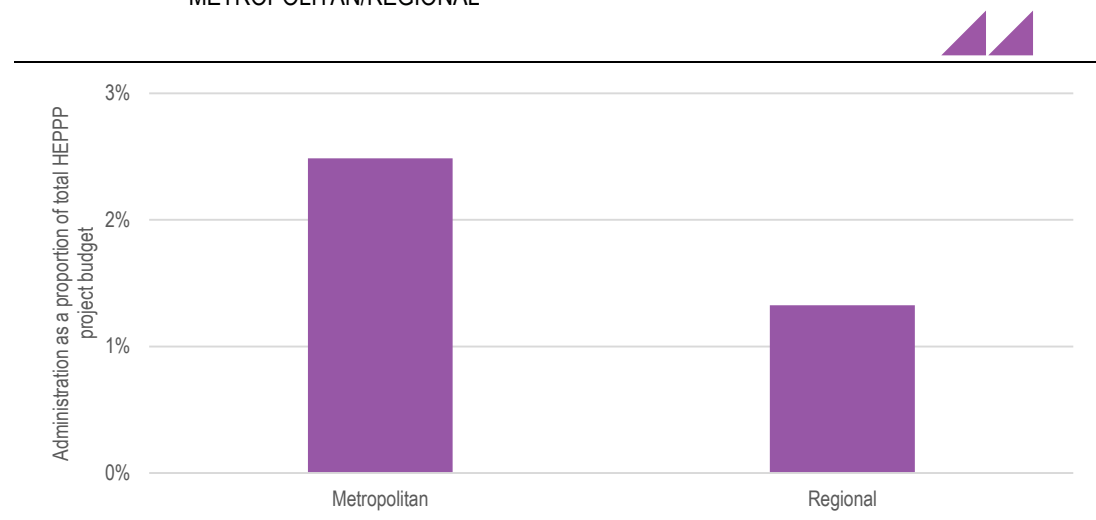


Note: The chart shows average values of the 2010 to 2015 period.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

Metropolitan universities on average spent a larger proportion of the HEPPP project budget on administration activities. It is not clear whether this is due to differences in the way the two groups of universities report administration costs in their annual reports or other due to other factors (Figure 10.13).

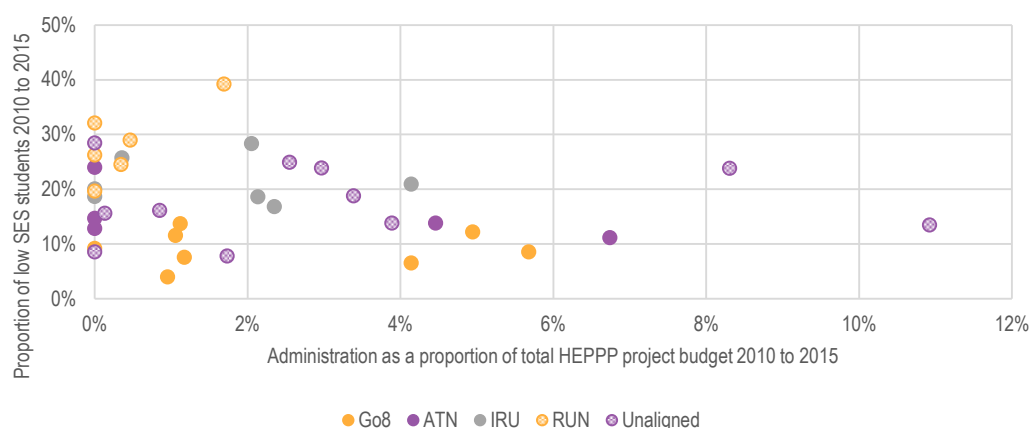
**FIGURE 10.13** ADMINISTRATION COSTS AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL HEPPP PROJECT BUDGET BY METROPOLITAN/REGIONAL



Note: The chart shows average values of the 2010 to 2015 period.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

There is a weak negative relationship between proportion of low SES students and proportion of the HEPPP project budget spent on administration (Figure 10.14). As the proportion of SES students increases, the proportion of the HEPPP budget spent on administration falls, this may be due to scale efficiencies for those universities with high concentrations of low SES students, however there are issues around the definition and reporting of administrative costs as noted above.

**FIGURE 10.14** RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROPORTION LOW SES STUDENTS AND ADMINISTRATION COSTS

Note: The chart shows average values of the 2010 to 2015 period. Correlation:  $r = -0.198$

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS, HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

An additional data source for a subset of the administrative costs of the HEPPP is the Australian Government commissioned 'Review of Reporting Requirements for Universities' (PhillipsKPA 2012). The review found that the average (mean) per university cost of HEPPP reporting requirements were 23 days of staffing effort and \$13,574 of recurrent costs.<sup>50</sup> This is assumed to cover the annual reports of formula allocated funding and reporting for grant-based funding. These costs are broadly similar to other Australian Government university equity programs, when adjusted for program size (Table 10.1).

**TABLE 10.1** REPORTING COSTS OF HEPPP AND THREE OTHER AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT UNIVERSITY EQUITY PROGRAMS

Program	2011 staff effort in days (adjusted mean)	2011 recurrent cost (adjusted mean)	2011 expenditure
HEPPP	23	\$13,574	\$113 million
Commonwealth Scholarships Programme	12	\$4,530	\$75 million
Indigenous Support Programme	10	\$5,004	\$36 million
Disability Support Programme	15	\$6,056	\$6 million

Note: adjusted mean is calculated by excluding any universities whose estimate of cost was identified as a major outlier.

SOURCE: HEPPP FINANCE DATA, PHILLIPSKPA 2012, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2014

### Displacement and additionality of funding

A program such as HEPPP, which provides funding for activities universities, might conceivably carry out regardless, and which provide considerable programmatic autonomy for universities, may lead to universities redirecting other funds that they would have spent on HEPPP-type activities.

Conversely, the existence of the HEPPP may encourage universities to leverage other resources to supplement HEPPP funding and therefore lead to more activity to support low SES students.

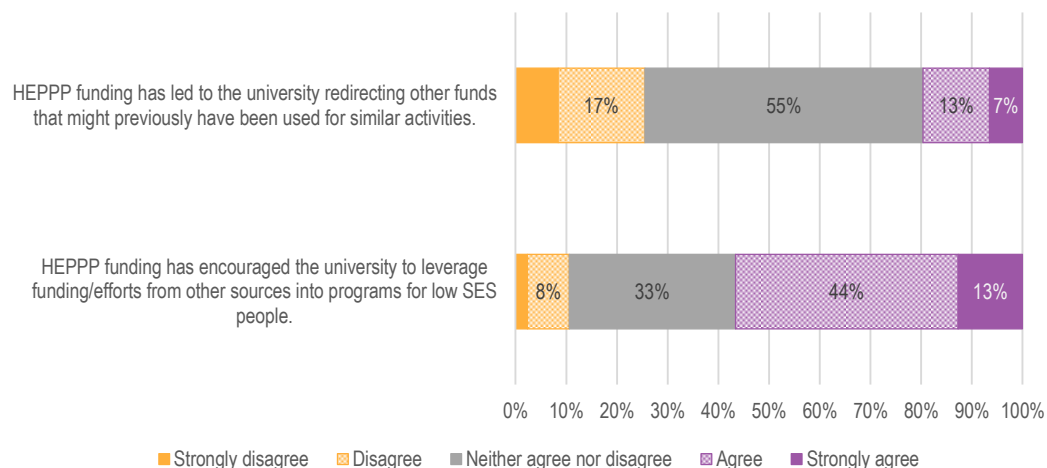
Stakeholders were asked in interviews whether HEPPP funding was displacing funding that universities would normally spend on outreach and students support services for low SES students. Most reported that outreach activities in particular would not have been undertaken in the absence of the HEPPP.

<sup>50</sup> The adjusted mean estimates of university staff effort and recurrent costs are 23 days of staffing effort and \$13,574 of recurrent costs.



The survey of university staff indicated 20 per cent reporting that HEPPP funding had led to their university redirecting funds that might previously have been used for similar activities, while 25 per cent disagreed (Figure 10.15). Note that 55 per cent indicated that they neither agree nor disagree.

**FIGURE 10.15** UNIVERSITY STAFF SURVEY, HEPPP AND UNIVERSITY FUNDING



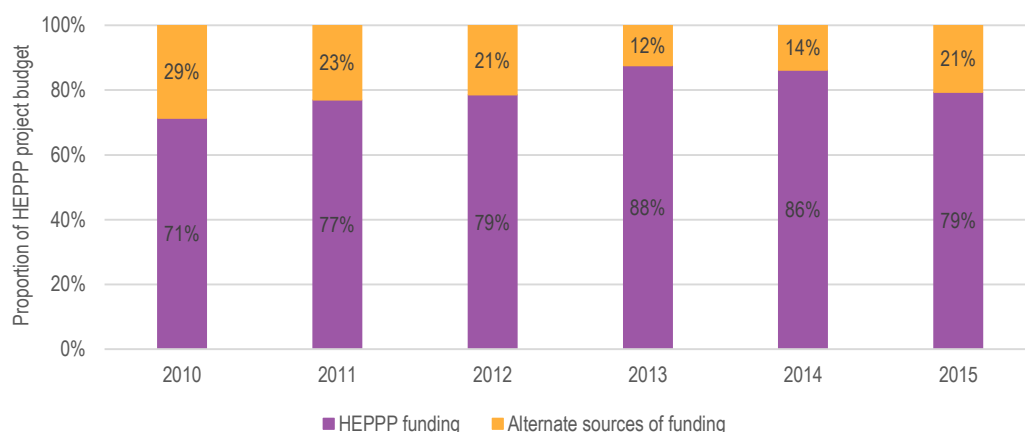
Note: From top to bottom: n=321, 339

SOURCE: SURVEY OF UNIVERSITY STAFF 2016

The survey also indicated that most university staff saw HEPPP funding as encouraging leverage funding from other sources into HEPPP projects to support people from low SES backgrounds (57 per cent).

The survey results in relation to leverage funding are supported by the evaluation's analysis of the HEPPP annual reports, with on average 18 per cent of funding for HEPPP projects since 2010 coming from non-HEPPP sources (Figure 10.16). This is likely an underestimate of the funding leverage by the HEPPP, as universities report providing significant in-kind support for the HEPPP, for example staff time.

**FIGURE 10.16** PROPORTION OF TOTAL HEPPP BUDGET BY SOURCE

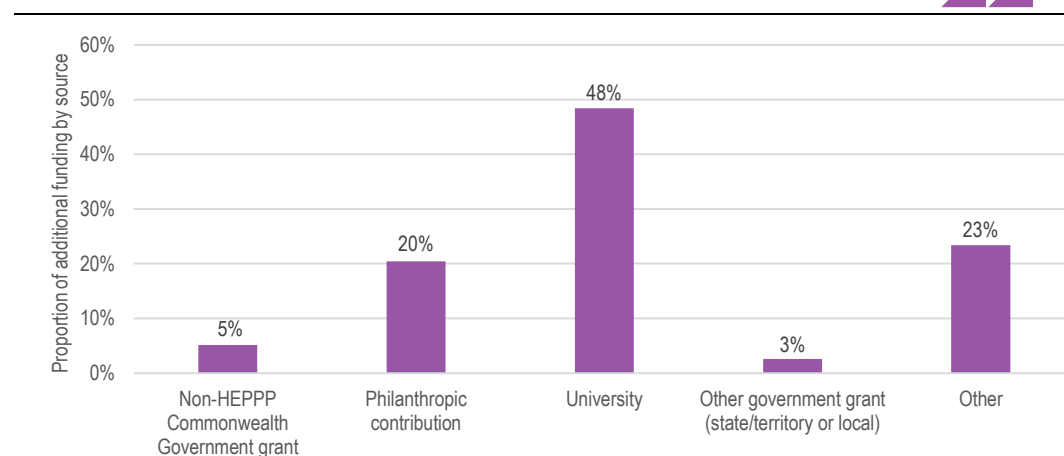


Note: This includes HEPPP funding and additional funding sources used to support HEPPP projects. Annual report funding data does not always match the HEPPP Finance Data collection due to reporting differences.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

The majority of additional funding to HEPPP projects is contributed from university budgets (48 per cent), followed by philanthropic contributions (20 per cent) (Figure 10.17).

**FIGURE 10.17** PROPORTION OF ADDITIONAL HEPPP FUNDING BY SOURCE



Note: This includes additional funding sources used to support HEPPP projects. Annual report funding data does not always match the HEPPP Finance Data collection due to reporting differences.

SOURCE: UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

Overall, there is evidence that the HEPPP is displacing some funding universities would otherwise expend on student support services, although it is not possible to judge the extent of this. Conversely, HEPPP is being leveraged with additional sources of funding sources to enhance or extend equity projects. There are insufficient quantitative data available to indicate the net of these displacement and leveraging effects.

#### KEY FINDING 8 EFFICIENCY OF THE HEPPP

There is considerable variety in HEPPP outputs, as implemented by universities, and a lack of comprehensive data on program participation. As such, it is not possible to determine a cost per output for the program.

HEPPP funding rose from 2010-2013, before falling in 2014-2015. The majority of HEPPP funding is allocated on a formula basis, with around a quarter allocated through grants processes. Funding levels per university differ based on the share of low SES students and the success of each university at winning competitive grants under the program. HEPPP funding is split relatively evenly on a per university basis between metropolitan and regional universities.

HEPPP funding has been consistently below the Bradley Review recommendation of 4 per cent of the total grants for teaching. Participation funding was above the Base Funding Review recommended level for 2012-2014, before dipping below this level in 2015.

There is no clear definition of administrative costs under the HEPPP (or in the higher education sector more broadly). Based on an analysis of university HEPPP reporting, the share of administrative costs relative to total expenditure is around 2 per cent of the total HEPPP budget.

There is evidence that the HEPPP is displacing some funding universities would otherwise expend on student support services, although it is not possible to judge the extent of this. Conversely, HEPPP is being leveraged with additional sources of funding sources to enhance or extend equity projects. There are insufficient quantitative data available to indicate the net of these displacement and leveraging effects.



# PART 3: APPROPRIATENESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS





# 11

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*This chapter sets out recommendations that address the evaluation's terms of reference, drawing on the evidence presented in the preceding chapters of this report.*

### 11.1 Continuing HEPPP

HEPPP funding has encouraged universities to implement a wide variety of activities and projects aimed at increasing the number of low SES students interested in attending university, being prepared for and admitted to university, and progressing through and graduating from university. Some 2,700 projects have been initiated as a result of the funding and have conservatively involved some 310,000 university students and 2,900 school and other partner organisations since the inception of HEPPP in 2010.

While a large number of evaluations have been carried out by universities, these have been primarily aimed at establishing student views on the projects and how to make improvements to the projects. The impacts identified by these evaluations are almost universally positive, and accord with the consultations carried out as part of this evaluation (including interviews, written submissions, and surveys).

Administrative data also show that the key indicators HEPPP is designed to impact are mostly moving in the right direction. Importantly, low SES enrolments have increased considerably since 2010, including as a share of all enrolments, even though retention and completion rates are trending down among the low SES cohort consistent with overall student trends.

Overall, while the funding for the HEPPP is not a large proportion of government funding for universities (at less than 3 per cent—see section 10.1), the HEPPP appears to be positively influencing the quantity and rigour of higher education equity activities and policies. As such, it or an equivalent needs to be continued if the low SES equity target is to be achieved.

The direct impact of HEPPP, however, is difficult to measure, for reasons including the long time horizon over which impacts are to be expected, confounding factors such as the co-incident introduction of the DDS, and an absence of meaningful counterfactuals in the evaluations and data collected to date (self-selection into such programs is difficult to measure, particularly after the event).

Surveys conducted with university staff show that, while the majority of respondents agree that the present design of the HEPPP meets the current and future needs of low SES students, over 15 per cent disagreed (see Appendix D.2). Areas for improvement most commonly identified by these respondents were the length and level of the funding cycle, greater accountability and evaluation requirements regarding how the HEPPP funding is spent and the impact it makes, and a review of the equity groups.

The evaluation has identified that not all of the HEPPP funding is necessarily targeting its intended low SES cohort; with evidence of some HEPPP projects aimed at other equity groups, in some cases even the broader student cohort. It is also not clear the extent to which some of the projects funded are additional to what would be implemented as part of normal university operations.

As such, improvements are required in a number of areas to further increase the effectiveness of the HEPPP—first in sharpening its focus on the activities, projects and equity groups to be targeted, second in revising the funding arrangements to support this focus, and third in designing and embedding a stronger evaluation framework with which to collect the necessary data to better measure and monitor its impact and inform future improvements.

#### RECOMMENDATION 1

That, given the evidence of emerging impact on student access and equity, HEPPP be continued as a funded program to further encourage and build on the progress achieved. At the same time, there are a number of areas which have been identified as requiring improvement or development. The focus of the activities, projects and equity groups to be targeted and the funding arrangements to support this focus requires improvement. Also required is the development of an embedded evaluation framework with which to collect the necessary data to better measure and monitor impact, and inform future improvements.



## 11.2 Focusing the HEPPP

The three HEPPP components have distinct goals (refer Chapter 2), and there is some evidence of achievements under each component (refer Chapters 5-9).

Measured funding for Partnership projects (which is tied to outreach activities) over 2010-2014 has averaged around 30 per cent of total funding<sup>51</sup>. The research component (NPP) funding has averaged around 5 per cent (for the two years (2014 and 2015) it has been in place) with the remaining 65 per cent allocated to the Participation component, which universities can allocate to activities aimed at improving retention and success, or use for additional outreach activities.

There is evidence that each is a valid component of a portfolio approach to improving student equity in higher education, based on theory, international practice and feedback from program recipients. Quantifying how much should be spent on each component is hindered by the lack of direct evaluative evidence available at this time in relation to the relative impact of outreach, participation or research.

Given the complexity of and the interrelationships between the HEPPP components, more data need to be collected at the subcomponent level to assist with any further refinement of funding allocations. In particular, it will be important to gather information on which types of outreach/support programs are the most effective, and how such programs should be designed and implemented to be most successful.

#### *Participation component*

There is a wide spectrum of activity carried out using the Participation component of the HEPPP, as detailed in Chapter 3. The autonomy granted to universities under the HEPPP allows universities to develop interventions suitable for their students and local conditions.

Due to the difficulties in understanding how best to prioritise interventions, universities have largely taken a portfolio approach to allocating Participation funding (refer Chapter 3). That is, funding within a university is normally allocated across a broad range of services designed to support low SES students, including entry processes, transitioning to university programs, mentoring, study skills, and scholarships/bursaries.

Consultations and university reporting indicate that many HEPPP projects are open to all students, that is, there is often not specific targeting of HEPPP Participation projects to low SES students.

<sup>51</sup> This analysis does not include partnership activities that may have been funded using Participation component funding.

Universities report this as due to the practicalities of identifying low SES students, and a broadly held principle among universities that any identification or targeting of low SES students risks stigmatising these students. In practice, universities design some projects to address the kinds of issues low SES students may face with the assumption that such projects will primarily attract low SES students, while other projects are simply delivered to all students.

University consultations indicated that Go8 universities are more likely to use Participation funding for outreach activities, as a result of the proportion of low SES students in their university student bodies and the relative strength of their existing university support services.

Based on the evidence collected through this evaluation, there are three key issues to be considered for the Participation component:

- The program needs to provide universities with a clear incentive to target HEPPP projects at low SES students, and to ensure HEPPP projects are additional to what they would otherwise deliver in the area of university student support. The current HEPPP participation component does provide some incentive for universities to enrol and retain low SES students (as, all things being equal, funding increases for each low SES student a university has enrolled), but as discussed above current practice suggests that this could be strengthened.
- Incentives around success and completion could also be strengthened—success and completion rates for low SES students continue to track below those of medium and high SES students.
- There needs to be greater data on whether Participation activities are impacting low SES students' retention, success and completion rates—to help universities evaluate and determine which types of equity projects are the most effective to implement.

The current literature, reinforced by the evaluation's interviews with universities and written submissions, points to three program design elements that could assist in addressing these issues:

- Performance measures using centrally collected student level data
- Pre-agreement of HEPPP activities/outputs between universities and the Department
- Rigorous evaluation of performance data regarding HEPPP outcomes.

The HEPPP builds in these aspects to some degree. The program currently funds universities based on their share of enrolments and so provides universities an incentive to enrol and retain low SES students. The HEPPP Guidelines also establish some pre-agreement between the Department and all universities on what activities can be carried out with Participation funding, although there is limited accounting of this. The current HEPPP also includes a program level evaluation, but does not require project-level evaluations, although universities have to varying degrees carried out evaluations of many of their projects.

There a number of ways in which these elements could be adjusted as discussed below.

### ***Option 1—Funding based on low SES enrolments***

This option acknowledges and makes explicit the current practice whereby universities largely determine the most appropriate ways in which to target the funding. It draws from the Bradley Review model and the IRU written submission (see Appendix D.3 for a summary of the IRU proposal), and provides a high degree of autonomy to universities. Funding would be allocated based on enrolments, but with no cap on the total amount of funding—universities would be funded on the number of low SES enrolments (not their share of the total number of low SES students). Funding would flow through the Commonwealth Grants Scheme (CGS), with no specification or reporting of what activities universities are to deliver with the Participation funding.

As this option does little in the way of performance measures or pre-agreements, it would be difficult to request an evaluation requirement at the university level, so a whole-of-program evaluation would also likely be limited.

### ***Option 2—Funding linked to outcome performance***

This option has a strong focus on performance funding and, similar to Option 1, provides considerable autonomy to universities. Funding would be allocated based on a mix of low SES enrolments, success and completions, with a greater weighting for success and completions to incentivise universities to

offer the necessary supports needed by low SES students to improve their success and completion rates.

Similar to Option 1, universities would not face any reporting or evaluation requirements, or any requirement to specify the activities they will undertake with the funding.

### ***Option 3—Funding linked to pre-agreements***

This option would have a greater focus on defining the activities universities will undertake with Participation funding, and draws from the institutional access agreements policy in place in England. Each university would have a multiple year HEPPP agreement with the Department which would set out the university's Participation activities for the coming years and how the activities will support the university's equity strategy. There would be a requirement on universities to evaluate HEPPP projects using a standardised framework, and a program level evaluation would also take place. Funding would be based on enrolments and success of low SES students, with the former receiving a greater weighting for administrative ease.

### ***Option 4—Evaluation driven funding***

This option combines a focus on university autonomy with a strong emphasis on evaluation. As with Option 3, funding would be based on low SES enrolments and success (weighted towards enrolments), but it would maintain the current Guidelines approach to provide broad direction to universities on the activities which should be delivered rather than the level prescribed in Option 3. Funding would be contingent on universities evaluating HEPPP projects using a standardised framework, allowing both individual project and an overall program evaluation to take place.

### ***Comparing the options***

While Option 1 provides universities significant autonomy and minimises reporting burden, it provides the Department only one policy lever with which to influence university practice—namely the current funding arrangement linked to each low SES student enrolled. Furthermore, relative to the current HEPPP, there would not be a more systematic approach to HEPPP activity evaluation.

Option 2 also provides considerable university autonomy with minimal reporting, instead relying on sharpened performance-based funding to improve outcomes under the HEPPP. There are, however, a number of issues associated with this approach.

First, outcomes measures such as success and completion can be a product of a number of factors, not just the actions of the university, and will need to take some account of each university's unique student cohort. Finding a broadly acceptable approach to this is likely to prove difficult. There is also the possibility that some of the performance indicators may operate to counteract each other. For example, the fact that low SES students have in general a lower success rate than other students, may result in enrolments being steered towards low SES students that are likely to have a high success rate.

Second, a payment on performance approach would also require some accounting provision for adjustments-in-arrears, such as through claw-back or reduction in future years' funding, which may be complex to implement.

Given these difficulties, the sole use of performance funding to drive improved outcomes under HEPPP is considered to pose both administrative complexity and an unduly high risk of unintended consequences which may not drive the intended improvements in key equity outcomes.

Option 3 relies for its effectiveness on strong pre-agreements between universities and the Department to ensure that HEPPP projects are effectively targeted. However, these agreements would require universities to specify their HEPPP activities in detail over say a three year period, and are likely to require substantial administrative effort in their establishment and ongoing tracking, as well in providing adequate flexibility to allow new projects or continuous refinement of existing projects.

Option 4 addresses the above issues in that it provides a high level of autonomy to universities, and uses a standard evaluation framework to drive and report on outputs and outcomes within this



autonomy rather than requiring the intensive effort of establishing pre-agreements. As with Option 3, it incorporates a performance-based funding component, although not to the same extent, relying more on the requirement that universities carry out and report on evaluations to drive improvements in HEPPP-related outcomes. Moreover, the availability and use of such an evaluation framework was strongly called for in consultations conducted with universities.

A key feature of this option is in its balance of metrics, agreements and evaluation to drive the intended outcomes with much fewer administrative overheads than Options 2 and 3, and with greater focus—equally less risk—than Option 1. Its effectiveness rests heavily on the design and strength of the evaluation framework adopted. The key elements of the evaluation are outlined in Section 11.3. Universities would need to show the impact of HEPPP on low SES student outcomes, and demonstrate a causal relationship between these outcomes and HEPPP funded projects.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

That the Participation component of the HEPPP be retained with a requirement that universities adhere to and report using a standardised HEPPP evaluation framework to ensure universities are targeting low SES students and are improving outcomes for low SES students. The funding formula for the Participation component should include a component which accounts for the success rate of low SES students at each university.

### Partnership component

Universities' Partnership projects generally focus on schools (around 95 per cent of projects), with some activity around TAFE and other adult education delivery, and community groups (around 5 per cent of projects).

Evidence gathered through the evaluation points to two key issues that may be impacting the effectiveness of the Partnership component—the unintended use of HEPPP funding for university-specific promotion/recruitment, and the potential for over- or under-servicing some schools with Partnership activities. These issues are discussed in turn.

The Guidelines which govern the HEPPP stipulate that 'Partnership activities, strategies and messages from providers are to promote the benefits of and encourage participation in higher education generally... [rather than] ... directed at promoting the benefits of a single provider.'<sup>52</sup> Some stakeholders reported that this was not always the case in practice. The 2015 university annual reports provide a certain level of support for this view, describing activities which focus heavily on their specific institution rather than the higher education sector in general. The Behrendt review received similar feedback in regards to HEPPP Partnership activities and recommended that Partnership funding should be better 'targeted at generic promotion of higher education rather than promotion of universities' individual courses'.

The universities themselves interviewed for this evaluation reported a strong distinction between their Partnership projects and their promotion/recruitment activities, and that it is general practice for them to have separate parts of their organisation undertake the delivery of outreach and promotion/recruitment activities—although this does not remove the possibility that Partnerships activities are used to promote the benefits of a single provider.

In relation to the second issue, some stakeholders argued that under-servicing was concentrated in regional areas due to the higher costs of delivering Partnership activities, whereas over-servicing was more likely to occur in capital cities close to university campuses. Here over-servicing refers to a school receiving HEPPP activities that would be better delivered to another school, rather than receiving HEPPP activities that it does not want—schools can decide to turn down the offer of HEPPP activities.

<sup>52</sup> Guidelines section 1.80.5(e)



While there is insufficient direct evidence to draw any strong conclusions regarding the extent to which Partnerships funding is being used for institution-specific promotion/recruitment, or the level of under- or over-servicing, certain program changes could decrease the risk of unintended practices.

The Partnership component should be redesigned to facilitate greater collaboration between universities, which would assist with ensuring better coverage of schools and further encourage universities to promote higher education, rather than their individual institution. Greater collaboration could be achieved through a return to the grant-based approach used in 2011 and 2013 for the Partnership component. The grant process could require universities to bid in consortia and define how their activities will ensure coverage of relevant schools within a geographic area and how such activities will promote higher education generally.

Another option could be to maintain the current Partnership funding approach (that is, allocated by the same formula as the Participation component) but make the funding conditional on universities collaborating. Universities within a set geographical region would be required set out how they will ensure all relevant schools receive an appropriate level of Partnership activity, and their approach for ensuring activities do not unduly promote individual institutions. This design could provide a number of advantages over the grant-based approach, including ensuring all universities receive some Partnership funding, and so are all playing their part in increasing access of low SES individuals to higher education, and driving Australia-wide coverage of Partnership activities. It also offers a ready approach to ensure all relevant schools receive Partnership activities and does not rely on the grant process to produce the required collaborations. Moreover, while more rigorous than the current Partnerships model, it would require less administrative effort for the Department and for universities than a grant-based approach.

Two Partnership projects provide an insight into the possible benefits of universities working together on Partnership activities. The Widening Participation project, a collaboration between the eight public universities in Queensland, led to the minimisation of ‘gaps and duplication... across the State’ and where schools have had more than one university partner, ‘communication between universities has ensured program offerings were complementary and program coherence was maintained for schools.’

The Widening Participation consortium also reports that:

*Queensland universities have seen program benefits in taking a collaborative approach to school outreach including improving the quality of their outreach work, sharing expertise and improved focus on prioritised low SES schools. The Consortium approach has also enabled universities to undertake some large scale evaluation tasks and access data on schools and tertiary applications and enrolments.*

The Bridges to Higher Education project was delivered by five universities and an evaluation of the project indicates that the ‘collaboration between the five universities promoted access to a wide-ranging academic speakers’ and developed ‘communities of practice [which] have enhanced the capacity to share lessons and experiences between universities and problem solve collectively.’ Similar to the Widening Participation, ‘schools observed a more coordinated approach’ under Bridges and reach was ‘enhanced through the development of shared resources’.

Some stakeholders suggested that a more competitive higher education landscape may be leading to a reduction in collaboration between universities, including in how Partnerships projects are implemented. For example, the Queensland Widening Participation has seen the withdrawal of some universities in recent times. Changes to the Partnership component which encourage universities to collaborate provide an opportunity to address this trend to the extent that it exists but in any event should improve school coverage and reduce the extent of university specific promotion/recruitment.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

That the Partnership component of the HEPPP be retained, with universities required to collaborate within defined geographical regions to ensure coverage of relevant schools and to reduce the extent to which Partnership activities promote any particular institution.



### National Priorities Pool component

The NPP component has been in operation since 2014 to fund universities to undertake research and trials to support ‘effective implementation of the HEPPP nationally and at an institutional level.’

Chapter 8 details evidence, including conference presentations and journal article submissions, regarding how the NPP is supporting HEPPP implementation and informing broader higher education equity practice. As an example, the EIF is widely accepted by equity practitioners within universities and has informed HEPPP implementation at many of the universities.

Having said this, the NPP component is still in its formative period with more than half of projects funded under NPP still to be completed. Additionally, there is a time lag between research/trials being undertaken and their impact on practice, so it is too early to be conclusive on the impact of the NPP. Consultations indicate that university HEPPP implementation could be improved by greater access to evidence on what works, but that this kind of research is unlikely to be generated by universities without dedicated funding.

At the same time, a review of the projects commissioned under the NPP indicates that they do not clearly point to research that will provide evidence to fill the key HEPPP-related knowledge gaps identified through this evaluation, namely:

- Which types of activities are more effective than other types of activities (for example, are mentor programs or scholarships more effective in increasing completion rates?)—this will assist universities to allocate funding between different types of activities.
- Within a type of activity, what are the characteristics of effective projects (for example, what are the characteristics of successful mentoring programs?)—this will guide universities’ design of projects.
- What sustains educational inequity (for example, why do intergenerational inequalities in educational mobility continue to persist?)—this will also guide universities’ design of projects.

These are most likely to be addressed by more rigorous evaluative research using, for example, quasi-experimental or experimental design, and longitudinal studies, which allow for stronger conclusions to be drawn on the causal impact of program interventions or social factors. Such research is normally more resource intensive than the projects funded by the NPP, but would be more effective at building a body of knowledge to inform HEPPP implementation.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

That the NPP be retained to support research on higher education equity, but with a greater focus on more rigorous evaluative research that can help identify the most effective approaches.

### Equity groups

The design of the HEPPP explicitly targets individuals from low SES backgrounds. This is evident in the Guidelines which set out the HEPPP’s objectives and the manner in which Participation and Partnership funding is currently allocated to universities based on each university’s share of low SES students.

Chapter 2 discusses that higher education equity policy focuses on six equity groups as identified in *A Fair Chance for All* in 1990:

- Indigenous Australians
- people from low SES backgrounds
- people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)
- people from regional and remote areas
- people with disability
- women in non-traditional subject areas (WINTA).

Despite the design of the HEPPP as a low SES program, these other equity groups have also received project focus under the HEPPP. In part, this is because there is an overlap between low SES

and other equity groups which has been reflected in the administration of the HEPPP—for example, in 2013, the Partnership grant round was for projects targeted at low SES Indigenous individuals. This has also led to some universities targeting HEPPP projects at other equity groups, as well as that universities find it difficult to target low SES students as a specific cohort.

There is also evidence that some universities target HEPPP projects at other equity groups, regardless of their overlap with the low SES cohort. In some cases this is based on universities' own analysis and identification of groups they see as facing barriers to higher education participation and success. In other cases, universities are focusing on the non-low SES *A Fair Chance for All* equity groups, this apparently driven by the fact that these are government-approved equity groups in higher education and the belief that the HEPPP has a broad equity focus. Some universities even argued for more clarity on whether non-low SES equity groups can be targeted with HEPPP funding.

This evaluation has been tasked to examine the following research questions:

*Is it appropriate that the HEPPP target people from low SES backgrounds? Are there people from other disadvantaged backgrounds who should be supported in addition to, or instead of, low SES?*

Relevant to this, there is currently underway a NPP funded Review of Identified Equity Groups. This is expected to report in November 2017 and will be able to examine the research questions in more depth. As such, the following discussion does not intend to pre-empt the Review's findings, but rather draws out evidence collected through this evaluation. (For context, Table 11.1 contains each equity group's share of undergraduate enrolments and the proportion of the population aged 15-64 years old.)

**TABLE 11.1** EQUITY GROUPS SHARE OF ENROLMENTS AND POPULATION, 2015

	Share of undergraduate enrolments <sup>a</sup>	Share of 15-64 years old Australian population
Low SES	16.1%	25.0%
Indigenous	1.7%	2.8%
Regional	18.8%	29.2%
Remote	0.9%	2.3%
Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)	3.7%	5.1%
People with disability	6.2%	8.4%
	Share of WINTA course enrolments that are women <sup>a</sup>	Target
Women in non-traditional areas (WINTA) <sup>b</sup>	40.2%	(40.0% <sup>b</sup> )

<sup>a</sup> Table A and Table B universities—that is the Higher Education Providers set out in HESA, which includes the 38 universities eligible for the HEPPP (Table A providers) and three additional universities: Bond University, The University of Notre Dame Australia, MCD University of Divinity (the Table B providers).

<sup>b</sup> The Martin Report (1994) classified non-traditional areas as those where female student enrolment was less than 40 per cent. These areas were: 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).

SOURCE: NCSEHE, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2016, APPENDIX 5 - INSTITUTIONAL STUDENT EQUITY PERFORMANCE DATA, 2009 TO 2015

There is a strong case for maintaining low SES individuals as a target group of the HEPPP—low SES individuals remain under-represented in higher education, and there is considerable evidence that this is due to the fact they come from low SES backgrounds.

The case for inclusion of other equity groups in HEPPP is less clear. Indigenous Australians and people with disability are also under-represented in higher education, due mainly to the institutional barriers faced by these groups. But unlike low SES, there are other specific programs in place to address disadvantage among these cohorts. For Indigenous students there is the Indigenous Student Support Program (previously the Indigenous Support Programme and the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme—Tertiary Tuition). For students with disability there is the Disability Support Programme and National Disability Coordination Officer Programme (NDCO).

In the case of WINTA, the Martin Report (1994) classified non-traditional areas as those where female student enrolment was less than 40 per cent.<sup>53</sup> Women now make up more than 40 per cent of these areas (although there are differences across course types), thereby questioning the case for expanding HEPPP to directly target WINTA (Table 11.1).

Regional and remote students were specifically identified in consultations as an equity group in higher education, consistent with the Bradley Review. Their specific targeting through HEPPP, however, was queried on the basis that the disadvantage associated with regionality is thought to be the result mainly of other factors, including SES and hence already factored in. Further, some stakeholders argued that issues such as longer travel times also impact students from non-regional areas who may live in the outer suburbs of capital cities. Another complicating factor is that the most widely accepted measure of regionality, the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC) Remoteness Structure, may not reflect the challenges often associated with students from regional areas. For example, Hobart is classified as 'inner regional' and Darwin is classified as 'outer regional'—students residing in these cities are unlikely to face any regionality-based barriers.

In the case of people from NESBs, it is not clear that this in itself is a strong indicator of disadvantage, and would again need to be viewed through the lenses of SES or highest level of parent qualification. Moreover, there are transitional support programs such as the Australian Migrant English Program and Skills for Education and Employment which could provide pathway opportunities to higher education. Also relevant would be any higher education reforms in the area of sub-degree qualifications.

#### RECOMMENDATION 5

That, pending the results of the NPP funded Review of Identified Equity Groups, the HEPPP continue to be targeted at low SES students.

## 11.3 Funding the HEPPP

### Funding level

The HEPPP funding level was originally set at 2 per cent of teaching and learning funding, and budgeted to increase to 4 per cent by 2012–13. The 4 per cent level was recommended by the Bradley Review (2008). The 2014 level of HEPPP funding was 2.7 per cent of teaching and learning funding (2014 is the most recent year for which funding data are available).

The Base Funding Review (2011) recommended that the Participation component of the HEPPP be set at \$1,000 per low SES student equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) in 2012 and maintained in real terms. HEPPP Participation funding exceeded the Base Funding Review recommended level in 2012–2014, before dropping below it in 2015 (refer Chapter 10). Based on the forward estimates, HEPPP funding will continue to be below the Base Funding Review recommendation over the coming years.

Given the DDS may continue to expand the number of low SES students in higher education—although as noted above there is some evidence that enrolments under the DDS may be peaking—the level of HEPPP funding, particularly the level of the Participation component, should be reviewed to establish whether it is sufficient to enable the HEPPP achievements identified to date to be continued and meet the targeted levels.

<sup>53</sup> These areas were: 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).

## RECOMMENDATION 6

That, in view of the slower than expected progress towards the low SES enrolment target that, by 2020, 20 per cent of domestic undergraduate students are from low SES backgrounds, as well as the anticipated future growth in low SES student numbers, that funding levels be modelled to determine their adequacy to meet the low SES student target, and revised as appropriate.



### Funding formula

The HEPPP is aimed at improving low SES individuals' access to and achievement in higher education, and a key consideration is the extent to which the funding formula appropriately encourages and accounts for the cost of delivery towards these goals.

The current funding formula targets access and retention goals by funding universities based on their share of all low SES enrolments. An issue with this is that universities receive payment for increased access at their own university, while the HEPPP Partnership component is aimed at increasing access to higher education more generally (that is, students may experience one university's partnership program and enrol in another university (UNSW, Submission 84)). This issue is addressed in part in Recommendation 3.

While the current funding formula does make explicit payment to universities for improving access to higher education, some universities and RUN (RUN, Submission 47; USQ, Submission 78), argue that the formula should have a sharper focus to improve access and so that the program is 'concentrated where participation rates and university access is low'. The RUN, as an example, proposes that a revised funding formula be based on three tiers of university low SES student shares (less than 10 per cent low SES enrolments, 10-17 per cent, and more than 17 per cent). This approach also has support from the IRU, which argues this evaluation 'should look at options to increase the performance incentive, such as requiring a minimum number or proportion of low SES students for a university to be eligible for funding...', although this is proposed for the eventuality that the IRU's preferred funding model (discussed above) is not adopted.

Other universities such as the Go8 argue against such an approach, holding that 'funding design should not incorporate a threshold of low SES (such as by percentage of total student numbers at the university)' as 'funding should follow students to the largest extent possible' (Go8, Submission 109).

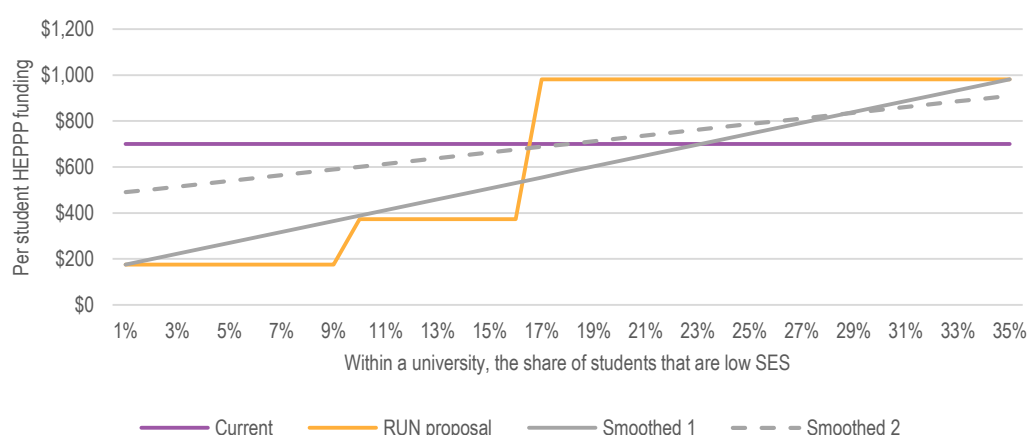
The theoretical basis behind the choice of any tiers is also not clear. If the formula is to further encourage universities to enrol and retain low SES students, funding per low SES student could increase with each additional percentage point of low SES student share, rather than at discrete levels.

The figure below models the impact of the RUN proposal on per student HEPPP funding, depending on the proportion of students at a university that are low SES. The proposal suggests three tiers or levels of per student funding. Irrespective of the overall funding amount, the 'less than 10 per cent' group receives 75 per cent less funding on a per student basis than under the current formula, the '10-17 per cent' universities receive 47 per cent less, and the 'more than 17 per cent' universities receive 40 per cent more funding per student than they currently do.

It is also evident that large steps occur as universities transition between the three funding levels, which could be removed by moving to a smoothed funding formula that continuously increases a university's per student funding amount according to its proportion students from a low SES background. In Figure 11.1, 'Smoothed 1' and 'Smoothed 2' show this approach. 'Smoothed 1' uses the lowest and highest per student funding amounts from the RUN proposal to set the gradient of the line. 'Smoothed 2' represents the same overall funding but uses a flatter gradient which reduces the impact of universities' proportion of low SES students on their per-student funding. The most appropriate gradient, or even whether the relationship should be non-linear, would need to be modelled on the extent to which universities with greater shares of low SES students are expected to

have a larger impact on low SES individual's access and participation—at this point there are insufficient data for such analysis.

**FIGURE 11.1** MODELLING OF POTENTIAL HEPPP FUNDING CHANGES



Note: The modelling assumes, for simplicity, that total HEPPP funding allocated by formula is \$112 million and there are 160,000 low SES enrolments across the system, resulting in a per student HEPPP funding amount of \$700.

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN

Some stakeholders also considered that there are economies of scale in delivering HEPPP projects, particularly if the fixed costs are high. Others contended that a greater concentration of low SES students at a particular university leads to higher per student costs (or diseconomies of scale). These can occur when a greater concentration of low SES students at a particular university may lead to higher per student HEPPP costs. It is possible that a greater concentration of students from low SES backgrounds leads to poorer outcomes for students, and that a higher level of per student HEPPP funding is required to counteract this effect. This relationship has been identified in school education—Gonski et al. (2012) found that ‘concentrations of students from certain socioeconomic groups within a school has a strong impact on the educational outcomes achieved by all students at the school.’ This led Gonski et al. (2012) to recommend that ‘in relation to Indigeneity and low socioeconomic background... [funding] should be structured to reflect concentration of disadvantage so that higher [funding is] provided where disadvantage is more concentrated.’<sup>54</sup>

It is difficult to test for economies of scale in HEPPP implementation, or estimate the impact of greater concentrations of low SES students, given the data currently available, particularly in relation to HEPPP administrative expenditure within universities. Nor is it possible to estimate the impact of greater concentrations of low SES students, although there is a correlation between concentration of low SES students and low SES student outcomes (see Figure 11.2 below).

There is a need for further research on economies of scale and the impact of greater concentrations of low SES students. Such research should be used to inform any modification of the funding formula in the same way Gonski et al. (2012) used such research to recommend changes to school funding policy.

#### RECOMMENDATION 7

That suitable data be collected and analysed to identify economies of scale and the impact of greater concentrations of low SES students relevant to the HEPPP, and the findings be used to inform the HEPPP funding formula.

<sup>54</sup> Gonski et al. (2012) provided indicative ranges for this additional funding—for low SES: 10 per cent extra for each low SES student in schools with under 10 per cent of students in the lowest SES quarter; up to 50 per cent extra for each low SES student in schools with more than 75% of students in the lowest SES quarter.



### Outcomes-based changes to the formula

A broader question is whether the HEPPP funding formula should focus purely on low SES enrolments and retention, or whether it should also take into account students' success and completion.

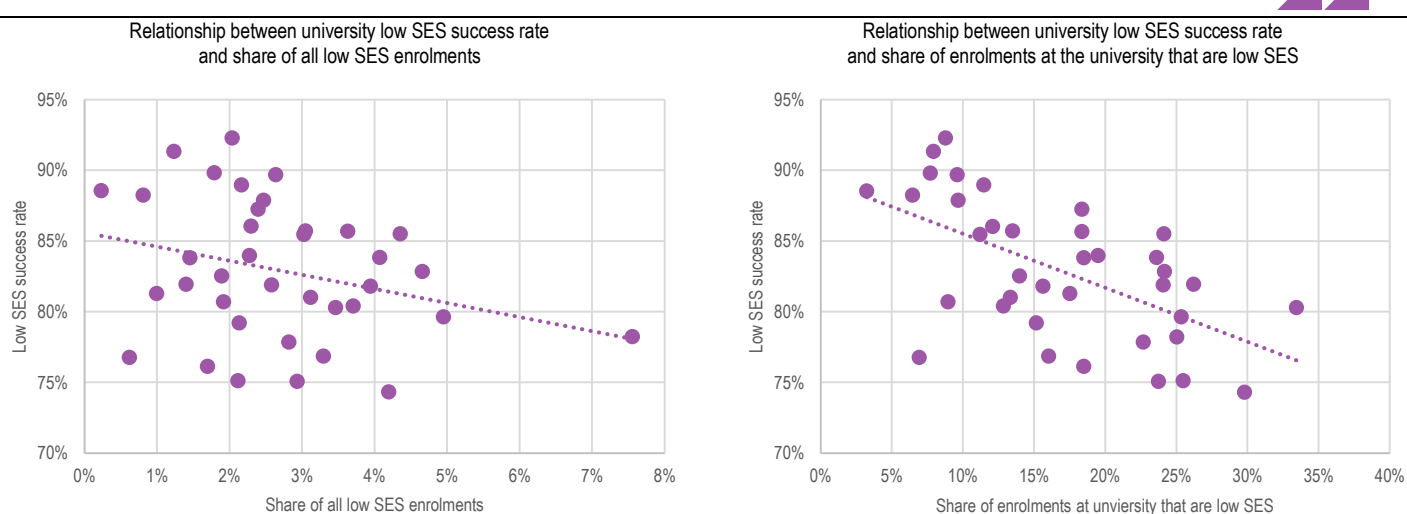
While there has been a large increase in low SES enrolments and an increase in the share of all enrolments that are low SES students, success rates for low SES students since 2008 have been falling for all except Indigenous students, and the gap between low SES success rates and medium and high SES success rates has been widening (refer Chapter 9). Completion rates for low SES students are also trending downward, although there is considerable lag for these rates with the shortest period over which they can be calculated being four years (that is, for students commencing in 2012).

The HEPPP funding formula could be redesigned to better focus on these student outcomes measures, although the success measure has some advantages over retention and completion measures. Completion rates, while measuring a key outcome for students, have a significant time lag (at least four years). Success rates, by measuring whether students are passing units of study, also capture how well low SES students are coping with the level of academic work required at university. Conversely, retention rates only measure whether students continue their study. Retention rates also have a time lag (of one year), while success rates can be calculated based on one year's worth of data.

While success rates appear to be the best and most practical measure with which to introduce greater incentive into the HEPPP funding formula, care is required in determining how great a weight to give success rates in the formula. For example, there is a negative correlation between each university's share of total low SES enrolments and its low SES student success rate (Figure 11.2). As the funding formula is currently determined solely by each university's share of total low SES enrolments, introduction of success rates into the formula is likely to shift funding towards those universities with a lower share of all low SES students.

There is an even stronger negative relationship between each university's proportion of enrolments that are low SES and its low SES student success rate. The RUN proposal discussed above argues for each university's proportion of enrolments that are low SES to be incorporated into the funding formula—the incorporation of success rates could have an impact on funding allocations that is broadly counter to the funding outcome proposed by RUN.

**FIGURE 11.2** RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOW SES SUCCESS RATE AND LOW SES ENROLMENT SHARES

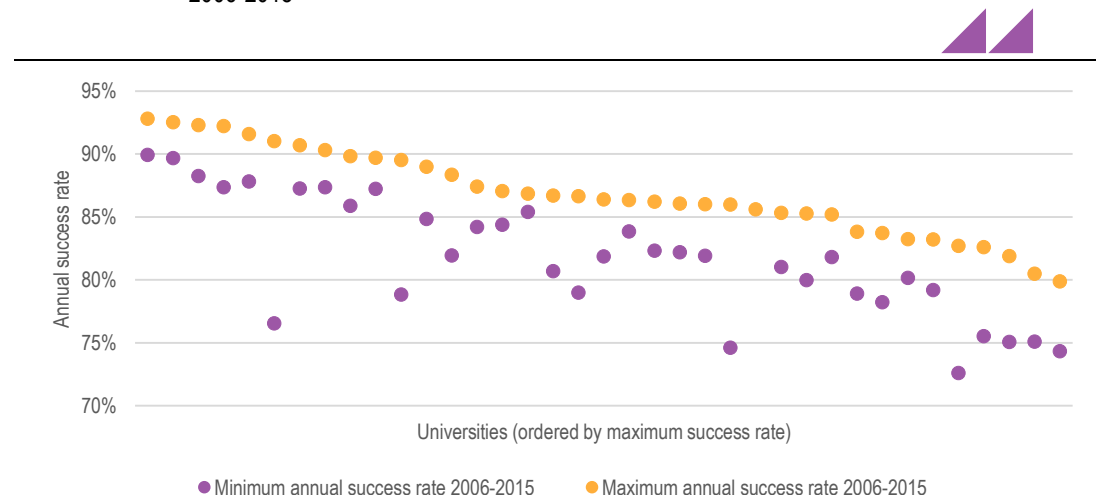


SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN ANALYSIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

More generally, the use of universities' raw low SES success rates in the HEPPP funding formula risks funding universities for past actions and/or the nature of their student cohort, rather than

providing an incentive for improving the success rates of low SES students. Over the last 10 years, most universities have seen little variability in their annual low SES success rates (Figure 11.3), indicating that university success rates are determined, to some extent, by historical and cohort factors.

**FIGURE 11.3** MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM ANNUAL SUCCESS RATES FOR EACH UNIVERSITY, 2006-2015



SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN ANALYSIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DATA COLLECTION

To avoid such retrospectivity and/or giving to greater weight to the composition of the student cohort, the HEPPP funding formula could incorporate a measure of the annual change in a university's low SES success rate. This would provide an incentive to improve the success rate of low SES students while not allocating funding based on raw success rates which would unnecessarily advantage universities with lower numbers of low SES students. The balance between this success rate measure and the 'share of total low SES enrolments' would also need to be determined.

#### RECOMMENDATION 8

That consideration be given to modifying the current funding formula to incorporate an allocation based on the change in each university's low SES success rate.

#### Funding cycle


Under the HEPPP, universities are currently funded on an annual basis, with universities being informed of their funding allocation in the second half of the preceding year. The evaluation received strong and consistent feedback that the lack of funding certainty year-to-year severely restricts universities' ability to design and plan projects over multi-year periods, and to develop the necessary partnerships and long-term relationships with schools, other universities and external partners. Hiring and retaining experienced and qualified staff under the one year funding cycle is also challenging, with many universities using one year contracts for staff to align with the funding cycle. Moreover, even one year contracts are extremely sensitive to the announcement timing of the funding allocations in the preceding year.

A longer funding cycle would provide greater certainty to universities in managing and resourcing their HEPPP funded projects. In written submissions, some universities propose three year funding cycles, while others recommend a funding cycle of between two to three to five years. A three year funding cycle would strike the right balance between providing greater certainty to universities and allowing the Department to allocate funding based on low SES enrolments and success.



**RECOMMENDATION 9**

That the HEPPP be shifted to a three year funding cycle, along with the appropriate allocation performance measures, to give greater certainty to universities in managing and resourcing their HEPPP funded projects.


**Measure of low SES**

As noted above, funding for the HEPPP Participation and Partnership components is currently allocated using a formula based on the share of low SES students at each university.

To establish whether a student is low SES, all Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1) regions in Australia are ranked using the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Education and Occupation (IEO).<sup>55</sup> The lowest ranked SA1 regions which collectively account for 25 per cent of the total population of all SA1s are determined to be low SES SA1 regions. In the formula, low SES students are defined as those with a home address in one of these low SES SA1 regions.

The current approach has strengths relative to low SES measure used in the formula in 2010-2014, which was based on census Collection Districts—primarily that the SA1 region is a more geographically and demographically accurate measure than the census Collection District.<sup>56</sup> The move to the SA1 low SES measure in the HEPPP funding formula for the 2015 and 2016 allocation, and a shift in demographics between the 2006 and 2011 censuses, lead to regional universities receiving a greater share of HEPPP.


While the shift to the SA1 measure has improved how the funding formula measures low SES, a more fundamental issue with using SEIFA IEO is that it is an area-based measure, not an individual-based measure, and means that a relatively disadvantaged area can have people who are relatively advantaged (and advantaged areas can contain disadvantaged people). This issue could be addressed by using a SES measurement methodology based on the individual circumstances of each student, taking into account factors such as parental education, parental occupation, parental income or household income (refer Appendix D.4).

In adopting such an approach it would be necessary to undertake research into the extent which these factors can reliably be used as a measure for the SES of mature-age students. Any changes to the measure of low SES to improve accuracy would also need to take account of the additional costs or reporting requirements for universities and TACs.

Beyond informing the allocation of funding under the HEPPP, the collection of data to allow a SES measure to be developed based on the individual circumstances of each student is likely to generate considerable value through supporting and improving research into student equity.

**RECOMMENDATION 10**

That a cost benefit analysis of implementing a low SES measure based on students' individual circumstances be undertaken to test whether the costs associated with such a measure would be outweighed by the benefits of improving the accuracy of the allocation of HEPPP funding. The individual circumstances would likely include but not necessarily be limited to parental occupation and/or education.



<sup>55</sup> The ABS derives three other socioeconomic indexes for areas: The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage; The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage; and The Index of Economic Resources. Each of the four indexes include different components, and the indexes are correlated.

<sup>56</sup> The ABS moved to a new statistical geography for SEIFA in 2013, which saw data collected by SA1s, rather than by census Collection Districts. SA1s are more accurate as they are relatively consistent in population size and character, whereas census Collection Districts are inconsistent in population size and heterogeneous in character (ABS 2014).

## 11.4 Evaluating and reporting the HEPPP

The report has repeatedly referred to areas where determining the effectiveness and impact of HEPPP has been difficult or not possible as result of the lack of rigorous collection of data and of consistent ongoing evaluations of HEPPP activities. This is also commonly recognised by both the universities and researchers. In its submission to this evaluation, the NCSEHE notes that ‘while HEPPP overall has conceivably been very effective, the magnitude of that success cannot be clearly quantified with any certainty’ (NCSEHE, Submission 42).<sup>57</sup>

There is considerable support for the development and embedding of a HEPPP evaluation framework to enable improved measurement of the impact of the HEPPP and to provide greater guidance to universities on the outcomes sought under the program (La Trobe, Submission 119; University of Southern Queensland, Submission 78; University of Wollongong, Submission 90, Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australia, Submission 75).

The Go8 (Submission 109) argues for ‘a streamlined and enhanced evaluation methodology for consultation as soon as practicable’, and UA recommends the development of ‘a detailed and rigorous evaluation framework’ to be ‘incorporated into HEPPP Program design’ (Submission 79). Many universities in both interviews and written submissions also expressed support for standardising their individual evaluative activities through the development of a national HEPPP evaluation framework (University of Sydney, Submission 114; WSU, Submission 82; UNSW, Submission 84; Griffith University, Submission 86).<sup>58</sup>

In addressing the issues raised above, any such national HEPPP evaluation framework should establish, structure and guide three areas of evaluation:

- overall program evaluation of the HEPPP
- quality improvement evaluations of HEPPP activities
- impact evaluations of HEPPP activities.

### Overall program evaluation

Evaluation of the overall impact of the HEPPP will require at a minimum:

- information which can be linked to the Higher Education Student Data Collection on each student who participates in each HEPPP project
- key standardised characteristics of each HEPPP project, including stage of the EIF targeted by its activities, as well as inputs, outputs and outcomes which can be linked to the HEPPP program logic model.

Such information, if collected by universities and combined with student retention, success and completion data from the Higher Education Student Data Collection, will provide a strong starting point for measuring the impact of the HEPPP on overall student outcomes. Over time, regression analysis could be used to examine and take account of the different combinations of HEPPP-funded supports that individual students may have received.

The framework would also provide guidance and principles for university-run evaluations aimed at generating evidence for quality improvement as well as impact evaluations. Currently, most HEPPP project evaluations focus on the former, as generating evidence of this type is less resource-intensive, and allows universities to improve how their HEPPP projects operate (Naylor 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Also: ‘The proliferation of equity support initiatives funded through HEPPP has been accompanied by an insufficient assessment of the value of those initiatives; an inconsistency in program evaluation across and between programs and institutions; and a lack of independence on measuring the efficiency of public expenditure. Given these factors, it is unclear how efficient some support programs are in achieving their stated aims.’ (NCSEHE, Submission 42)

<sup>58</sup> One submission argued against any further reporting or evaluation requirements: ‘the ongoing focus on reporting specific activities and acquittal of the funds... discourage an integrated approach to student services delivery that ensures all students gain needed support. Further, the reporting that universities meet for the smaller programs such as HEPPP are more intensive than for the major Commonwealth Grant Scheme and research block grant programs...’ (IRU, Submission 96).

### Quality improvement evaluations

The guidance for quality improvement evaluations should include key indicators to measure which will vary according to the type of HEPPP activity, advice on evaluation methods, and where possible data collection tools with standardised and modifiable sections (for example, survey tools to which universities can add questions).

Quality improvement evaluations need not necessarily be exhaustive, but a minimum number should be required (say a ratio of evaluations to HEPPP funding total) and made available to all other universities. Universities may continue to carry out further such evaluations for their own internal purposes, as they do now.

### Impact evaluations

The guidance for impact evaluations will need to be more extensive, rigorous and prescriptive. A key component will be direction on how to establish an acceptable counterfactual (for example how to establish like schools with which to compare the outcomes of schools that have or have not received outreach services). It will also be useful to establish a research standard, whereby universities must pre-register their study protocols before beginning data collection, to guard against the bias towards non-publication of null results or towards hypothesis-generating (exploratory) analysis at the expense of hypothesis-testing.

As indicated earlier in Recommendation 1, it is important that the evaluation framework support and drive improved targeting and performance measurement of the overall HEPPP investment. As such, a condition of HEPPP funding could be that universities are required to undertake a number of rigorous impact evaluations of HEPPP projects and make these evaluations available to all other universities. The number of rigorous impact evaluations would be less than the number of quality improvement evaluations, recognising the greater effort and resources required for impact evaluations.

### Annual reporting

Currently, universities report to the Department annually on their HEPPP activities funded through the formula-based allocation. In their annual reports universities provide information on each project funded by HEPPP including project type, objectives, activities, target group, progress achieved and expenditure (refer Chapter 2). The annual reports have been the primary input used to develop the HEPPP project inventory used in this evaluation.


The *Review of Reporting Requirements for Universities* found the cost of HEPPP reporting to be on average (median) 20 days of staffing effort and \$10,000 of recurrent costs per university and some universities reported being unclear as to how and for what purpose this information used (refer Chapter 10).

The establishment of a stronger evaluation framework would also provide an opportunity to streamline the current annual reporting to the minimal information required for funding, audit and acquittal purposes. This could be through a spreadsheet template that complements but does not replicate the information collected and reported for program evaluation. The template would seek quantitative information on each project similar to that presented in this report (as detailed in section 1.3.2).

To ensure the full value of the revised annual reporting is made available to the sector, all annual reports should be collated and published, similar to the analysis of the project inventory presented in this report.

**RECOMMENDATION 11**

That a HEPPP evaluation framework be established to collect information for overall program evaluation of the HEPPP and guide universities in individual project quality improvement and impact evaluations. It should be a condition of HEPPP funding for each university that the overall program evaluation data be collected and a number of each university's programs be evaluated annually and in accord with the HEPPP evaluation framework. The annual reporting should be streamlined to only require the minimal additional information necessary for funding, audit and acquittal purposes.


**Information sharing**

HEPPP university staff consistently reported strong interest in being more aware of other HEPPP activities nationally as well as the successes and challenges experienced in implementing HEPPP projects. The HEPPP and the university sector more broadly has a number of structures in place to facilitate such information sharing, including:

- The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)
- Peak bodies, including Universities Australia
- Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia

The NCSEHE, as the HEPPP-funded research centre for higher education student equity, is well placed to undertake an even greater role in synthesising and presenting and promoting equity program evidence. For example, the NCSEHE website could be used to provide universities with access to evidence and good practice on HEPPP programs.

The consultations and written submissions also indicate a desire from universities for greater sharing of reporting produced through HEPPP—that is, the annual report and evaluations of HEPPP projects carried out by universities (La Trobe, Submission 119; Queensland Consortium, Submission 80; Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australia, Submission 75).

The revised evaluation reports and annual reports could be published on the Department's website to promote information sharing and learning across universities, thereby better informing universities of available evidence for different equity activities and assisting to improve the implementation of the HEPPP. This could be in the form of a 'state of higher education equity' report, providing universities and the public with key information on equity practice and outcomes.

There is a precedent for this type of report in the Department's normally annual 'Higher Education Report' (the last such report was published for the years 2011-2013). The report could also build on or integrate the Department's statistical publications on equity groups and equity performance, and NCSEHE's annual report on student equity performance.

**RECOMMENDATION 12**

That a state of higher education equity report be produced annually including reporting of sector-level outcomes and HEPPP activity.

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# APPENDICES





## A.1 Effectiveness

4. To what extent is the HEPPP achieving its objectives to:
  - a) fund eligible universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds and to improve their retention and completion rates
  - b) meet the Commonwealth Government's ambition that, by 2020, 20 per cent of undergraduate students must be from low SES backgrounds
  - c) increase the participation of current and prospective domestic students from low SES backgrounds in accredited undergraduate qualifications
  - d) increase the total number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities with schools, State/Territory governments, VET providers, community groups and other stakeholders.
5. What strategies have universities implemented to improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds and improve their retention and completion rates?
6. What activities have universities implemented to improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds and to improve their retention and completion rates?
7. What activities have been most effective in achieving the HEPPP objectives?
8. What effect has the HEPPP had over time on low-SES undergraduate university students in terms of:
  - a) the number of students enrolled in university studies
  - b) their access and participation rates
  - c) their retention rate at the end of the first year of university and in subsequent years
  - d) their success rates in the first-year of university and in subsequent years
  - e) their grade point average over their degree
  - f) their completion rate?
9. Despite these not being stated objectives of the HEPPP, what effect has the HEPPP had on low-SES undergraduate university students over time in terms of:
  - a) their enrolment in professional degrees
  - b) their graduate outcomes?
10. To what extent have Partnership activities under the HEPPP:
  - a) assisted in improving the understanding and awareness by low SES people of higher education as a viable post-school option

- b) assisted low SES people in pre-tertiary achievement, either at school or an alternative pathway, to enable consideration for access to higher education
- c) encouraged an increase in the number, and in the proportion relative to the whole student population, of low SES people who apply for admission to university?

#### **A.1.1 School-related outcomes**

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11. What effect has the HEPPP had on low-SES primary and secondary school students over time in terms of their:
  - a) attitudes towards higher education
  - b) aspirations to access higher education
  - c) academic achievement at school
  - d) mathematics and science achievement (despite this not being a stated objective of the HEPPP)
  - e) rate of retention to Year 12
  - f) TAFE enrolments (despite this not being a stated objective of the HEPPP)
  - g) probability of applying for admission to university
  - h) probability of being given an offer of a place at university
  - i) probability of enrolment at university?
12. What pathways to higher education other than school have been supported by HEPPP activities?
13. To what extent have low-SES schools changed their practices, or embedded existing practices, as a result of HEPPP activities, particularly in terms of:
  - a) executive staff, teachers and counsellors (e.g., changes in teacher/counsellor attitudes; changes in the extent to which teachers/counsellors are knowledgeable about university options and processes)
  - b) the way that schools engage with universities to help students go to university?
14. To what extent have parents and low SES communities changed their attitudes and behaviour as a result of HEPPP activity, particularly in terms of parents' attitudes towards and support for their child attending university?
15. What number and proportion of low SES schools in each State and Territory have been the subject of HEPPP activities?

#### **A.1.2 University activities and impacts**

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16. To what extent have HEPPP activities been incorporated into universities' standard approaches and standard activities?
17. What has been the relative impact of Participation activities and Partnerships activities under the HEPPP in terms of:
  - a) funds spent
  - b) number of low SES people impacted
  - c) increases in access and participation by low SES people and their retention and success?
18. What amount and proportion of HEPPP funding and HEPPP project activity has been allocated to the following specific groups of low SES people as opposed to low SES people in general:
  - a) low SES people with disability
  - b) low SES people from regional and remote areas
  - c) low SES people who are Indigenous
  - d) low SES people from non-English speaking backgrounds
  - e) low SES women studying in non-traditional areas?
19. To what extent have projects funded under the National Priorities Pool component of the HEPPP supported more effective implementation of the HEPPP nationally and at an institutional level?
20. To what extent have projects funded under the National Priorities Pool component of the HEPPP informed broader equity practice within universities?

21. Is the structure of the HEPPP effective for achieving its objectives?
22. To what extent have HEPPP activities provided, or will they provide, individual, societal and economic benefits? What flow-on effects have there been to the community and the economy?

## A.2 Efficiency

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23. Are activities conducted under the HEPPP the most efficient way to influence low SES people's:
  - a) attitudes towards higher education and aspirations to attend higher education
  - b) mathematics and science achievement in school and university
  - c) rate of retention to Year 12
  - d) academic achievement in school and in university
  - e) probability of applying for admission to university
  - f) probability of being given an offer of a place at university
  - g) probability of enrolment at university
  - h) retention rate at the end of the first year of university
  - i) academic achievement in the first-year of university
  - j) access and participation rates at university
  - k) retention rate at the end of the first year of university and in subsequent years
  - l) success rate in the first-year of university and in subsequent years
  - m) completion rates.
24. Are some activities more efficient than others in achieving the outcomes referred to in question 20?
25. Is the structure of the HEPPP most efficient for achieving its objectives?
26. What effect has the HEPPP had on the existence and extent of other funding contributions to low-SES students? Has the provision of funds through the HEPPP meant that universities have redirected other funds that they would, in the past, have spent on HEPPP-type activities? Has the existence of the HEPPP meant that funding and/or effort has been able to be leveraged from other sources?
27. At each university and overall, what is the ratio of the administrative costs of the program to the expenditure of the program? Are there differences between regional and metropolitan universities? Do universities with a large number of low-SES students gain economies of scale?
28. Are HEPPP funding arrangements efficient and how do they impact the program's effectiveness? For example, is the use of annual HEPPP allocations efficient, do year to year fluctuations in HEPPP funding, amount and timing affect its efficiency and effectiveness?
29. To what extent does the HEPPP funding formula direct funding to universities that require it most in order to achieve the HEPPP objectives?

## A.3 Appropriateness

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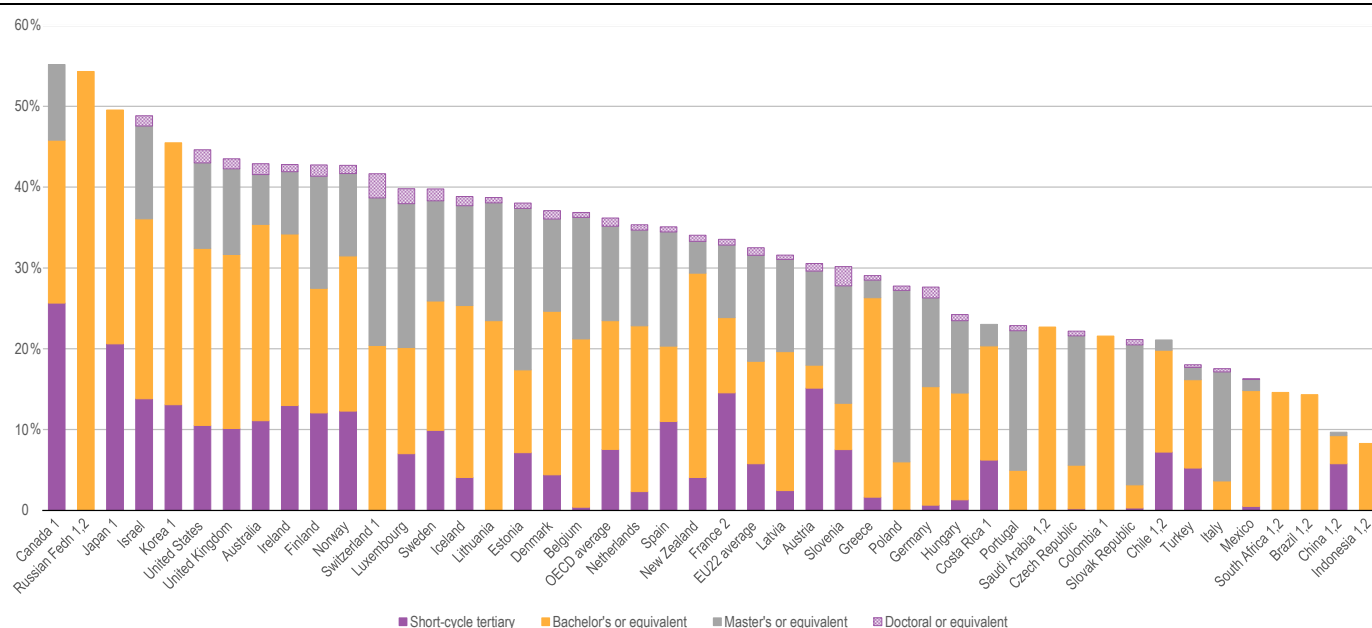
30. Do the reasons for the creation of the HEPPP still exist? Has the need that the program addresses changed over time? What is the extent of ongoing need for an intervention like the HEPPP?
31. Is the present design of the HEPPP best suited to meet the current and likely future needs the program will address? What alternative designs could be considered? For example, should HEPPP funding be included as part of the base funding of universities? What would be the pros and cons of any new approaches?
32. Is it appropriate that the HEPPP target people from low SES backgrounds? Are there people from other disadvantaged backgrounds who should be supported in addition to, or instead of, low SES?
33. Is the current definition of low SES people appropriate and fit for purpose under the HEPPP?
34. Is the current HEPPP formula targeted at achieving change in universities or at sustaining efforts that they are already undertaking? What would be the best use of a formula approach? Is there a better formula that could be considered?



This section of the report provides an overview of policies and programs with a similar aim to the HEPPP that are undertaken in a number of other countries: England, Scotland, Ireland, the United States and Canada (Ontario province). In general, each country or region has been selected because it has a high tertiary attainment rate (Figure B.1)—Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States have higher adult tertiary education rates than Australia—and because its government has an explicit policy focus on improving participation in higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, although this may be defined in different ways. The range of countries has also been selected to demonstrate the different approaches that can be taken to achieve this objective.

These countries also have policies to increase participation of other under-represented groups, such as students with disability or students from minority ethnic groups, however the case studies below only examine those policies targeting students from low SES or similarly disadvantaged backgrounds.

**FIGURE B.1** PERCENTAGE OF 25-64 YEAR OLDS WITH TERTIARY EDUCATION, BY EDUCATION LEVEL, 2015



Note: Available from OECD Statlink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933396600>

SOURCE: OECD EDUCATION AT A GLANCE 2016, TABLE A1.1

## B.1 Summary of different approaches to equity in higher education

Table B.1 provides an overview of the different approaches taken to equity in higher education by the countries/regions analysed in the case studies below.

**TABLE B.1** SUMMARY OF APPROACHES

	England	Scotland	Ireland	United States	Ontario, Canada
Definition of low SES for HE equity programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– geographic measure</li> <li>– HE participation rate in census ward areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– geographic measure</li> <li>– deprivation across seven domains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– individual measure</li> <li>– socioeconomic grouping/occupation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– individual measure</li> <li>– low income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– family income or parents' education level</li> </ul>
Other equity groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– people from black and minority ethnic communities</li> <li>– people with specific learning difficulties or mental health needs</li> <li>– also, within low SES group, a focus specifically on young white males</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– entrants from different protected characteristic groups</li> <li>– gender balance of student population</li> <li>– undergraduate entrants with care experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– first time, mature student entrants</li> <li>– students with disabilities</li> <li>– part-time/flexible learners</li> <li>– further education award holders</li> <li>– Irish Travellers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– first generation students</li> <li>– individuals with disabilities</li> <li>– people from black and minority ethnic communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– francophone/bilingual students</li> <li>– students with disability</li> <li>– Aboriginal people</li> </ul>
Body administering HE equity program	Higher Education Funding Council and Office for Fair Access	Scottish Funding Council	National Access Policy Office, Higher Education Authority	Office of Postsecondary Education, US Department of Education	Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development; Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
Approach to university equity funding	Student opportunity funding provided to institutions, based on weighted FTE student numbers	Outcome agreement grant funding	Access weighted grant allocations to universities	Various institutional grant programs, including for institutions with high proportion of minority and financially disadvantaged students, and for institutions to undertake support activities for disadvantaged students	Special purpose grant funding for equity groups provided to universities
Approach to university equity reporting	In order to charge fees at the maximum level, universities must have access agreements approved by the Office of Fair Access, outlining their access targets and measures	Institutions must provide outcome agreements to the Scottish Funding Council, and report against the measures within, including widening participation measures		Annual Performance Reports for institutional grants	Universities provide Strategic Mandate Agreements to the Department for three-year periods, including widening participation activities

	England	Scotland	Ireland	United States	Ontario, Canada
Higher education student fees	Variable fees with upper limits (for UK and EU students) set by the Government. Grants available to assist eligible students.	Free for full-time undergraduate students who are UK and EU residents	Free for full-time undergraduates with EU nationality and three year residency history. Grants available for eligible students, including postgraduate students	Variable fees with a range of loans and grants available for eligible students	Free for students from low income families, from 2017-18 academic year. Grants available for eligible students
Student loan scheme	Tuition Fee Loan and Maintenance Loan (to assist with living costs). Repayment begins once income meets a minimum threshold, and interest applies.	Loans available for postgraduate students	-	A range of loans available, some (including subsidised loans) dependent on financial need. Repayment begins when a student leaves college or drop below less than half-time enrolment	Various loans available for eligible students through the Ontario Student Assistance Program

SOURCE: VARIOUS AS BELOW, AND GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

Each case study in this chapter has specific strategies for improving equity in higher education, including supporting the access and participation of people from low SES or similarly disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this is measured in a variety of ways:

- The primary measure of disadvantage used in English widening participation literature is the POLAR classification—participation of local areas. In this method, census ward areas are classified into quintiles (most disadvantaged to least disadvantaged), based on the proportion of 18 year olds who enter higher education aged 18 or 19 years (HEFCE, 2015c).
- The Scottish literature refers to deprivation, rather than disadvantage. This is measured using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, which divides the country into 6,976 small 'datazones', each with approximately 760 people. The deprivation level of each area is measured across seven domains: employment; income; health; education, skills, and training; geographic access to services; crime; and housing, and combined into a single indicator which is ranked against other areas (The Scottish Government 2016b).
- In Ireland, socioeconomic group (a classification system used in the Irish census) is one of the primary ways in which the issue of equity in higher education is examined. Socioeconomic groupings are based on the occupation and employment status of individuals aged 15 years and older. In the 2011 Census, these groups were: employers and managers; higher professional; lower professional; non-manual; manual skilled; semi-skilled; unskilled; own account workers; farmers; agricultural workers; all others gainfully occupied, and unknown (Central Statistics Office 2011).
- Many higher education equity programs in the United States use low-income status as the means of establishing disadvantage, although there are also many programs that target specific minority groups. A 'low-income individual' is considered to be an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year was not greater than 150 per cent of the poverty level as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (OPE 2016c).
- Two measures of disadvantage are commonly used in Ontario's equity policy and approaches, family income level and parents' education level. As discussed below, parental education is recognised as having a greater impact on whether an individual attends higher education than family income (Doran et al. 2015; Finnie et al. 2011, Rae 2005), and 'first generation' (first-in-family) individuals are one of the key under-represented groups. However, financial support is also provided for students from low-income families.

## B.2 England

Widening participation in higher education is an explicit goal of the English Government. Former Prime Minister David Cameron identified two key high-level goals (known as the Prime Minister's goal/s) in 2015, and in 2016 the Government adopted an additional three priority target areas based on current higher education disparities (Box B.1).

### BOX B.1 ENGLISH GOVERNMENT'S HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY GOALS

<i><b>Prime Minister's goals</b></i>	<i><b>Priority target areas</b></i>
— double the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds entering higher education by 2020 from 2009 levels	— access for young white males from disadvantaged backgrounds
— a 20 per cent increase in the number of students from black and minority ethnic communities studying in higher education by 2020 from 2014	— outcomes for students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds
	— access, retention and outcomes for students with specific learning difficulties or mental health needs

SOURCE: UK GOVERNMENT 2016

The two public bodies responsible for implementing national higher education equity policy and programs are the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). The organisations have 'complementary but unique roles' and jointly published the 'National strategy for access and student success in higher education' in 2014.

### B.2.1 Funding for equity activities

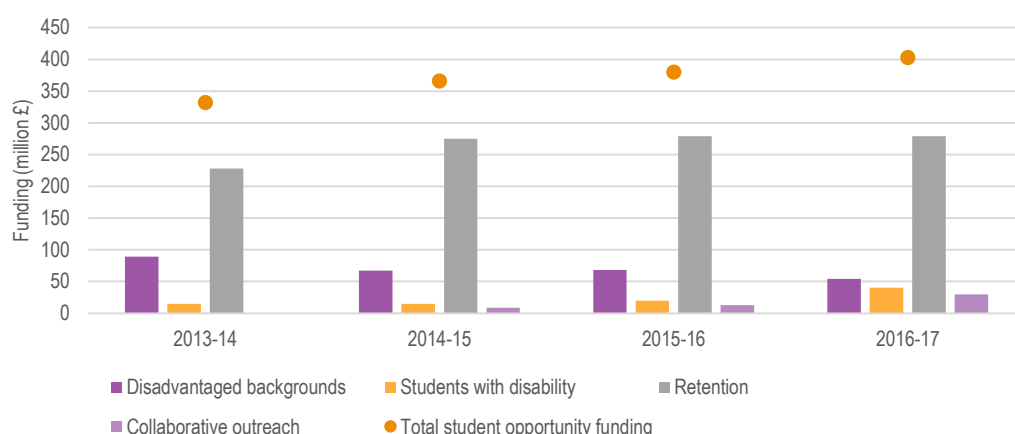
The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is responsible for regulation and funding of the higher education sector, and also conducts data and policy analysis. Student opportunity funding is the main way in which HEFCE supports widening participation. It is provided to institutions (universities and further education colleges) to assist with the costs of recruiting and supporting students in the following areas:

- widening access for people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- widening access and improving provision for students with disabilities
- improving retention.

It is the largest targeted funding allocation for institutions and is provided through the teaching grant allocations (HEFCE 2015a). The annual student opportunity allocation for each area is calculated on a pro rata basis, based on weighted FTE student numbers (Figure B.2).

For students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the allocation is determined using postcode information from individualised student records, where students are 'mapped' to a specific census ward area and then weighted according to the young higher education participation rate (for young full-time undergraduate students) or the proportion of adults with a higher education qualification (for part-time or mature-age students) for that area. It is 'designed to target funding towards those institutions that do more to widen participation or that recruit students who are likely to need more support' (HEFCE 2015a).



**FIGURE B.2** TOTAL HEFCE STUDENT OPPORTUNITY FUNDING, 2013-2017

Note: 2016-17 is planned funding.

SOURCE: HEFCE 2015A, HEFCE 2014 AND HEFCE 2016A

HEFCE has also provided funding for collaborative outreach—outreach network programs—since 2014-15. In 2014-15 and 2015-16, HEFCE funded the National Networks of Collaborative Outreach scheme, for institutions to build local networks to provide coordinated outreach activities. There are currently 34 local networks, involving 200 universities and further education colleges, as well as four national networks targeting specific groups: care leavers, older learners, students wishing to progress to Oxford or Cambridge, and a pan-London coordination group for all London-based networks (HEFCE 2016d). A new four-year program will be introduced in 2016-17, the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (HEFCE 2016c). HEFCE has invited applications from university-led consortia to undertake intensive outreach programs in areas where participation in HE is lower than expected based on high school results.

HEFCE is currently undertaking a consultation process into the future of teaching funding, including funding to support widening access and successful student outcomes (HEFCE 2016b).

### B.2.2 Institutional access agreements

Tuition fees for higher education in England are variable, however the Government sets maximum limits for most undergraduate courses at publicly-funded universities. A student loan scheme and support grants are also available for eligible students. Loan repayment begins when a recipient's income meets a minimum threshold. The Government establishes a 'basic fee' limit and a higher 'maximum fee' limit, which universities may charge if they have approved access agreements detailing how they will use a portion of the extra income for widening participation activities. The access agreements must be approved by the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education, in the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). OFFA, an independent public body, was established expressly for this purpose in 2004 (OFFA 2016a). The Government provides guidance to OFFA regarding its strategic direction and access priorities (for example, see ). For undergraduate courses, the 'basic fee' is currently £6,000 per full-time student, with a maximum fee limit of £9,000 if institutions have an approved access agreement (OFFA 2016b).

Access agreements must include:

- the institution's proposed tuition fee limits
- the access and student success measures the institution intends to put into place
- how much these measures will cost
- the institution's targets and milestones
- how the institution will tell students about the financial support they are offering (OFFA 2016c).

They are negotiated regularly, with institutions providing an initial access plan to OFFA and negotiations being undertaken if OFFA does not consider these to be appropriate. Prior to 2012-13, access agreements could cover a period of up to five years, and since 2012-13 agreements are approved on an annual basis (OFFA 2016c). In total, 172 agreements for 2015-16 were submitted by 123 higher education institutions and 49 further education colleges, with negotiations undertaken with 33 institutions, most often because the spending levels/balance of spend or the targets initially proposed were considered inappropriate. The agreements were revised by institutions and all were eventually approved (OFFA 2014).

Institutions also submit an annual monitoring report which covers their access agreements, student opportunity allocation and the National Scholarship Programme and is used by OFFA, HEFCE and the Department. A template is provided by OFFA, and summary monitoring reports are made publicly available on the OFFA website.

The *Higher Education and Research Bill*, currently tabled in Parliament, proposes the establishment of a new body, the Office for Students, which would incorporate duties currently undertaken by both HEFCE and OFFA.

### B.2.3 Other initiatives

The Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) is a non-profit monitoring, evaluation and analysis service for higher education institutions, established in 2011 (HEAT 2016). HEFCE has provided initial funding of £3 million (2014 to 2017) for its roll-out, however on an ongoing basis HEAT is funded by its member institutions' subscriptions (HEFCE 2015b). There are currently 57 member universities. HEAT allows universities to record and track individual students' participation in access and outreach activities, enables sharing of data between partners, and provides measures of impact at the individual level.

In 2015, the Minister of State for Universities and Science commissioned the peak body for universities, Universities UK, to establish a Social Mobility Advisory Group comprising relevant industry stakeholders. The purpose of the Advisory Group is to provide advice to Government regarding how to achieve the Prime Minister's goals and improve higher education outcomes and participation for students from the priority target areas (Box B.1) (Universities UK 2016). The Group will provide its final report this year. It was also asked to consider:

- how to work with organisations such as schools and employers in developing an action plan
- how progress against the action plan will be monitored and evaluated
- the accessibility and relevance of the data currently available in supporting social mobility objectives.

Aimhigher was a partnerships-based government program that ran from 2004 until 2011, intended to raise the awareness, aspirations, and attainment of children from under-represented groups, especially those from low SES or disadvantaged backgrounds (Higher Education Authority 2015). Partnerships comprised schools, further education colleges and universities, and were managed by central coordinating bodies. Between 2008 and 2011 there were 42 partnerships across England (Higher Education Authority 2015). An evaluation of the program was commissioned by HEFCE and undertaken in 2010. It found that there was an association between participation in the program and improved outcomes, including raised aspirations and attainment, improved progression, higher than predicted attainment at GCSE and greater confidence among learners (NFER 2010).

## B.3 Scotland

The Scottish higher education system varies from the English system in a number of ways, including that tertiary education is free for full-time undergraduate students who are UK and EU residents. Loans are available for postgraduate students. The approach to widening participation also differs in a

number of ways from the English approach, although there is a similar high-level goal. In the 2014-15 Scottish Programme for Government, the following ambition was outlined by the First Minister:

*I want us to determine now that a child born today in one of our most deprived communities will, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our least deprived communities.*

*That means we would expect at least 20% of university entrants to come from the most deprived 20% of the population.*

Following this commitment, the First Minister established the Commission for Widening Access in 2015. The Commission provided its final report in March 2016, setting a number of detailed targets that have been adopted by the Government (Box B.2).

#### **BOX B.2** SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S TARGETS FOR EQUALITY OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

*To realise the First Minister's ambition of equality of access to higher education in Scotland:*

- By 2030, students from the 20 per cent most deprived backgrounds should represent 20 per cent of entrants to higher education. Equality of access should be seen in both the college sector and the university sector.

*To drive progress towards this goal:*

- By 2021, students from the 20 per cent most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 16 per cent of full-time first degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole. By 2026, students from the 20 per cent most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 18 per cent of full-time first degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole.
- By 2021, students from the 20 per cent most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 10 per cent of full-time first degree entrants to every individual Scottish university. In 2022, the target of 10 per cent for individual Scottish universities should be reviewed and a higher level target should be considered for the subsequent years.

SOURCE: THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT 2016A

### **B.3.1 Funding for equity activities**

#### **Impact for Access Fund**

The Commission for Widening Access interim report (The Scottish Government 2015) notes that there is limited evaluation of the Scottish widening participation program, but that an attempt to address the gap is the two-year Impact for Access fund that was introduced by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in the 2014-15 academic year. It was established to 'develop standards on access and build the principles that underpin successful access activity', and its aim is 'to build quality improvement principles and embed a focus on evidencing impact into access work across the full student cycle' by providing funding for new projects, from institutions, groups, academics or other organisations, that will help to develop evidence for 'what works' in widening access (SFC 2014). The SFC provided a total of up to £2 million for the fund in each of its two years. It identified the following focus areas for projects:

- outreach to schools, colleges and prospective mature students
- summer schools for prospective students
- admissions systems
- outcomes for students.

In the first round, four projects received funding (March 2015) from a total of 23 initial bids. Five projects received funding in the second round (May 2015) from a total of 34 initial bids. Following the second round, bids were assessed on a rolling basis and one was approved in December 2015 (SFC 2016a). Interim findings, where available, were outlined in the Impact for Access update brief provided by SFC in February 2016.

### Schools for Higher Education Programme

The SFC Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) comprises four regionally-based school outreach sub-programs:

- ASPIRENorth (north of Scotland)
- Lift Off (Fife and Tayside region)
- LEAPS (Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools, southeast Scotland)
- FOCUS West (Focus on College and University Study – West of Scotland).

Each sub-program includes a group of local universities and schools and is targeted towards students from S3 to S6 (approximately 13-17 years of age). SFC (2016b) identifies the following as focus areas for SHEP:

- targeting activity on those pupils who are at risk of not achieving their full potential and / or those achieving but who don't recognise their potential for progression to higher education (in both colleges and universities)
- targeting only those schools in each region identified, based on a five year average, as having less than 22% average progression to HE
- establishing baselines against which future performance will be measured
- tracking, with Skills Development Scotland, the progression of pupils to inform performance reporting
- adhering to a set of national delivery principles, including strategic agreements with local authorities and partner institutions and sustained engagement with specific groupings of pupils.

A 2014 report found that on average over the previous three years, '39 per cent of pupils who have received support from Lift Off have progressed to higher education, compared with an average of 17 per cent across the 13 schools Lift Off works with' (Universities Scotland 2014).

### B.3.2 University outcome agreements

The SFC is responsible for regulating and providing funding to higher education institutions and further education colleges. In the 2012-13 academic year, it introduced the outcome agreement process, which requires higher education institutions and colleges to provide a plan for what they will deliver in return for their funding.

Outcome agreements are encouraged to cover a three-year period, but they can be revised annually (SFC 2015). SFC provides guidance outlining a range of aims and priorities to which the institutions must respond. For the three-year period from 2014-15, the guidance identified 11 key priorities, with five of these addressing students from disadvantaged or under-represented backgrounds. The latter three priorities below were added for 2016-17, with outcome agreements to be revised accordingly:

- an increase in the proportion of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants from the 40% most deprived postcodes
- a more representative proportion of entrants from different protected characteristic groups
- an improvement in the gender balance of the total student population and in particular subjects where there is a severe imbalance
- an increase in the number and proportion of undergraduate entrants with care experience
- an increase in the retention rate of full-time undergraduate entrants with care experience.

'Protected characteristics' are defined in the *Equality Act 2010*, namely, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Providers must also report against a range of national measures outlined in the guidance, to allow standardised reporting, and are encouraged to supplement these with their own measures. For the period beginning in 2014-15, the measures and outcomes are captured under seven key institutional aims, with the first aim addressing widening participation: 'improve access to higher education for people from the widest possible range of backgrounds' (SFC 2015).

Legislation passed in 2013 (the *Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill*) also requires SFC to conduct triennial reviews of widening access, with the first to be undertaken in 2016. The draft report was released in May.

## B.4 Ireland

Ireland has seven universities and 14 institutes of technology, as well as three Colleges of Education and three institutions (Keane 2013). Tuition fees for full-time undergraduate students with EU nationality (and who have been a resident in an EU member state for at least three years prior to entry) are covered by the Government, under the 'Free Fees Initiative' (HEA 2016a). There are also state-funded grants available for eligible students, including postgraduate students.

Ireland is recognised in the European Union for its comprehensive commitments to equity in higher education, and is considered to have 'the most comprehensive set of targets related to under-represented groups' in the European Union (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2014).

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory funding, planning, and policy-advisory body for higher education and research in Ireland (HEA 2016b). From its inception in 1971, one of its key functions was 'promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education' (Government of Ireland 1971, Section 3(d)). The National Access Policy Office (formerly the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education) was established in the HEA in 2003, with the following core functions:

- develop and implement a national action plan to achieve equity of access to higher education
- monitor and report on progress in implementing the plan and achieving set targets and outcomes
- provide advice on national policy
- promote the rationale for access to higher education.

### B.4.1 Funding for equity activities

Funding for access and participation activities by HE institutions primarily occurs through core grant funding from HEA, one of three elements of the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM). The allocation is 'access weighted' using Equal Access data:

*The allocation of the core grant is determined on a formula basis - based on a standard per capita amount in respect of weighted EU student numbers (and non-EU research) in four broad subject price groups... An adjustment is made within the core grant allocation to reflect the costs to the institutions of attracting and supporting students who come from non-traditional backgrounds. An additional weighting of 33% is currently used.*

HEA 2014

The additional elements of the RGAM are:

- performance-related funding, which is being phased in from 2014. HEA proposes that 'up to 10% of the annual core recurrent grant will be linked to performance by HEIs in delivering on national objectives set for the sector' (HEA 2014).
- targeted/strategic funding, which may be allocated to institutions on a competitive basis in support of national strategic priorities for the sector.

Equal Access data are provided through a National Access Policy Office initiative that was introduced into HE institutions' registration process in the 2007-2008 academic year, to collect data from first-time students regarding their socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Keane 2013). Student participation in the survey is voluntary.

An additional funding stream for equity activities was the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF), which operated over two cycles between 2006 and 2012. It was intended to be a €510 million multi-year fund, through which grants would be allocated to HE institutions through a competitive process and institutions were required to provide matching funding of at least 50 per cent (HEA 2013). The objectives of the program were:

- to enhance the delivery of education and research
- to prepare for the expansion and development of postgraduate education

- to support innovation and quality improvement in teaching and learning
- to support access, retention and progression (HEA 2013).

However, due to national financial pressures over the period, including the impact of the global financial crisis, the funding amounts were reduced and in total only €92.05 million was provided to institutions through the fund. This was less than was originally awarded to institutions for projects under each cycle, with 95 per cent of the original award provided to institutions under SIF Cycle 1 but only 51 per cent provided in SIF Cycle 2. The fund was prematurely brought to a close in 2012, however many of the projects were mainstreamed throughout the sector (HEA 2013).

#### **B.4.2 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education**

As mentioned above, one of the National Access Policy Office's key functions is the development and implementation of national equity action plans. Each plan covers a number of years (2005-2007; 2008-13) and the third plan, *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-2019*, was released last year. The underlying principle for its equity approach is 'that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in post-secondary education and that the population of new entrants to higher education should be broadly representative of the general population' (HEA 2015).

Five priority goals were developed through the Plan:

1. to mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HE institutions
2. to assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access to higher education
3. to gather accurate data and evidence on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us
4. to build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education
5. to develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education with a particular focus on mentoring.

The target groups identified in the Plan, due to historical and ongoing under-representation, are:

- entrants from socioeconomic groups that have low participation in higher education (see Section B.1)
- first time, mature student entrants
- students with disabilities
- part-time/flexible learners
- further education award holders
- Irish Travellers.<sup>59</sup>

#### **B.4.3 Other initiatives**

Irish HE institutions run their own 'access programs' which may involve pre-entry, admissions or in-course activities (Keane 2013), however these are not formally regulated or required, and are only referred to twice throughout the *National Plan*. This may be in line with the plan's focus on 'mainstreaming' the delivery of access equity throughout and across institutions (see Goal 1).

However there are a number of other initiatives intended to promote collaboration and widen participation, including programs that promote and/or provide non-traditional entry pathways, in line with Goal 4, above.

In 2013, a system of four regional clusters was implemented for Ireland's higher education bodies—universities and further education colleges—with the aim of promoting collaboration, improving quality and developing stronger and clearer pathways between organisations. The *National Plan* calls for 'deeper collaboration' between universities and colleges, including the co-development of HE access and foundation courses (HEA 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Irish Travellers are an Indigenous minority group, with a population estimated at between 22,000 and 36,000 in the Republic of Ireland. As a group, Irish Travellers have poorer outcomes than the broader population across a range of indicators, including education, employment and health. The Government of Ireland developed a *National Traveller / Roma Integration Strategy* in 2011 and is currently undertaking consultation to develop a new strategy for 2016-2020 (Department of Justice and Equality 2016).



The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is an admissions scheme, through which a certain number of places are reserved for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds at reduced grade points' levels (Keane 2013). The scheme is administered by individual institutions, although students still apply through the traditional Central Admissions Office process, and can apply for HEAR during that process. Financial and other support services are generally also provided for students enrolled through the HEAR. A similar scheme is in place for students with disability.

## B.5 United States of America

The higher education system in the United States is substantially larger than the others examined in this report. In 2012-13 there were approximately 7,253 accredited postsecondary institutions, however many of these are vocational colleges, with approximately 4,726 'degree-granting' institutions (NCES 2016). Accredited institutions are those eligible for Title IV student aid programs as per the Higher Education Act 1965. Tuition fees vary according to courses and institutions, and there are a range of grants and loans available to students, with some available only to students with demonstrated financial need. Loan repayment begins when a student leaves college or drops below less than half-time enrolment, with a grace period of six months often available.

The United States has a long-standing policy approach to improving equity in higher education. A number of the Federal Government's equity programs were established through the Higher Education Act 1965 and continue today, and the Higher Education Act (now the Higher Education Opportunity Act, HEOA) was amended and reauthorised most recently in 2008. The Federal Government's current programs, administered by the Department of Education, address the access, participation, and attainment stages of the student life cycle. Many states and institutions also administer programs intended to widen participation in higher education. An overview of a number of the Department of Education's programs is provided below. These programs are separate to the student financial aid program.

### B.5.1 Federal funding for equity activities

Federal higher education equity programs in the United States are administered by the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) in the Department of Education. OPE has three divisions:

- Higher Education Program
- Office of International and Foreign Education
- Office of Policy, Planning and Innovation.

Equity programs are managed through the Higher Education Program, which has an Institutional Service branch and a Student Service branch. The Institutional Service branch 'administers grant programs designed to improve academic quality, institutional management and fiscal stability, and strengthen physical plants and endowments of institutions of higher education, with an emphasis on institutions that enrol large proportions of minority and financially disadvantaged students' (OPE 2016a). There is a wide range of grants available—there are 32 current programs listed on the branch website—including grants for institutions with 50 per cent or more students receiving Federal student aid and for institutions with a large percentage of students from minority groups (for example, designated Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Predominantly Black Institutions, and Hispanic-Serving Institutions) (OPE 2016b).

The Student Service branch of OPE administers grant programs that provide direct assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds—specifically, low-income, first-generation students or students with disability—through all stages of the student life cycle (OPE 2016a). There are 15 current individual programs listed on the branch website, including two programs for graduate students. The largest umbrella program is the TRIO Program, with eight of the 15 programs. In the 2014 financial year, the total funding allocation for the TRIO Program was US\$828,616,131 (this is equivalent to approximately AU\$1.1 billion in August 2016) and 2,787 projects were undertaken. Grants for TRIO Programs are provided for five years, except those for the Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs Staff, which are for two years (OPE 2016d). The TRIO Programs are outlined in Table B.2.



**TABLE B.2** US TRIO PROGRAMS

Program	Year established	Overview	Average grant amount	Stage of student life cycle
Educational Opportunity Centers	1972	This program 'provides counselling and information on college admissions to qualified adults who want to enter or continue a program of postsecondary education'.	US\$370,458	Access
Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement	1986	Through this program, grants are awarded to higher education institutions to prepare eligible participants for PhD studies. To be eligible, students must be from a disadvantaged background and have demonstrated strong academic potential.	US\$220,000	Transition out
Student Support Services	1968	This program provides grants to institutions to provide services such as academic tutoring, advice and assistance in postsecondary course selection and in exploring and applying for financial aid, counselling, and mentoring to higher education students.	US\$290,949	Participation
Talent Search	1965	The Talent Search program identifies individual high school students who have the potential to succeed in higher education, and provides them with a range of support and preparatory services, including academic, career and financial counselling.	Maximum of US\$230,000 in 2011	Pre-access and access
Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs Staff	1976	This program provides grants to higher education institutions and other public and private non-profit organisations to support training for staff employed through the TRIO Programs.	US\$348,250	-
Upward Bound	1965	Upward Bound projects provide intensive support to low-income or first-in-family students, including academic instruction in a range of core subjects, information on financial aid programs, and assistance with access to higher education or alternative education programs.	US\$321,079	Pre-access and access
Upward Bound Math-Science	1990	This program is a form of Upward Bound 'designed to strengthen the math and science skills of participating students'.	US\$258,749	Pre-access and access
Veterans Upward Bound	1972	Through the Veterans Upward Bound program, institutions provide a range of support for veterans with the intention of increasing their rates of enrolment and completion in higher education, including academic instruction in a range of core subjects.	US\$280,429	Pre-access and access

SOURCE: OPE 2016D

A number of evaluations of the TRIO programs have been undertaken, with varying findings. In general, however, the evaluations have found positive impacts for measures such as graduation from high school, applications to higher education, applications for financial aid, enrolment in higher education and degree completion rates (Cahalan 2013).

Another key program administered by the OPE Student Service branch is GEAR UP—Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. GEAR UP's objective is 'to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education' (OPE 2016e). It offers state and partnership grants on a matching basis, with the maximum federal award for state grants capped at US\$5,000,000 per year. Partnership grants are restricted to \$800 per student (OPE 2016e). Grants are allocated for six-year periods through a competitive process, and projects must follow an entire cohort of students from no later than seventh grade through their high school years.

## B.5.2 Other initiatives

There are a number of collaborative and knowledge-sharing initiatives for higher education equity practitioners in the United States. The Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences manages the 'What Works Clearinghouse', which provides a central point for resources and evidence on effective ways of improving student outcomes (IES 2016).

The Department of Education also invites submissions from higher education institutions detailing 'promising and practical strategies, practices, programs, and activities that have improved rates of postsecondary success, transfer, and graduation' and compiles them publicly on its 'Promising Strategies' website (U.S. Department of Education 2016).

Additionally, the national Council on Opportunity in Education and state-based Educational Opportunity Organizations provide a way for institutions to share knowledge and professional development, and undertake activities such as policy development and advocacy to Congress (Cahalan 2013).

## B.6 Ontario, Canada

This case study varies from those above, as the education system in Canada is decentralised. Each province and territory is responsible for its own education system, although there is some federal funding at the postsecondary level such as the Canada Student Loans Program (Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011). This case study examines the higher education system in Ontario, Canada's second largest province, which has a relatively high rate of participation compared to other provinces. In 2015, 26 per cent of 18-24 year olds were enrolled in higher education, second only to Nova Scotia with 29 per cent (Weingarten et al. 2015). Over 80 per cent of secondary students will continue to some form of postsecondary education (Norrie & Zhao 2011). The higher education system in Ontario consists of 20 public universities, 24 colleges, and more than 400 registered private career colleges (Government of Ontario 2016).

### B.6.1 Funding for equity activities

In the past decade, the Government of Ontario has implemented a number of policies with the objective of widening participation in higher education. Between 2003 and 2014, full time enrolment in the postsecondary system grew by 170,000 students, and the Government increased funding to the system by 83 per cent (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development 2014).

There are currently a large number of grants and loans available through the Ontario Student Assistance Program to assist students with their tuition fees. The Government has recently announced changes to the student financial aid program, which will reduce the range of existing grants into a single grant and provide free tuition for students from low income families (CA\$50,000 or less), beginning in the 2017-18 school year (Ministry of Finance 2016).

In much of the literature regarding widening participation in Ontario, parental education is recognised as having a greater impact on whether an individual attends higher education than family income (Doran et al. 2015; Finnie et al. 2011; Rae 2005). Three under-represented groups are identified by the Government as a focus for widening participation activities: Aboriginal, first-generation (that is, First in Family), and students with disabilities. These groups are explicitly included in the Strategic Mandate Agreements that universities must negotiate with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (Doran et al. 2015). These Agreements are a requirement of the Government's Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education (2013), which aims to help universities leverage their different strengths to build a more globally competitive higher education sector. The framework lists 'access for all qualified learners' as one of the Government's priorities.

*Recognizing the value of postsecondary education to an individual and to Ontario's future, the government will continue to build on the gains it has made in increasing access to higher education for all qualified students over the past decade. This also includes an ongoing commitment to making postsecondary education accessible on the basis of ability to learn, not ability to pay.*

*Government of Ontario 2013*

Activities with the objective of widening participation and increasing participation by under-represented groups are largely undertaken by individual institutions. The Strategic Mandate Agreements, which cover a three-year period, include a section addressing the student population, outlining each institution's strengths, strategies and the metrics that are used to measure participation of the three target groups and any other under-represented groups that individual universities identify.

An analysis of the range of activities being undertaken by universities found that 'each university has one or more initiatives to improve access to PSE [postsecondary education] for under-represented groups' and that these initiatives cover all stages of the student life cycle (Doran et al. 2015).

Some funding for these activities is provided by the provincial government, through 'special purpose grants'. In 2015-16, CA\$100 million—3 per cent of the Government's total university funding—was allocated for access activities through special purpose grant funding (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities 2015): This included:

- approximately \$59 million for francophone/bilingual programming and supports at seven universities
- approximately \$24 million for programs and supports for students with disability
- approximately \$17 million for Aboriginal initiatives and first-generation groups.

The majority of the Government's funding for universities is allocated based on each university's baseline historic enrolments. The university funding model is currently being reviewed by the Government, with a consultation process undertaken in 2015.

A significant part of the Government's support for access and equity initiatives is through scholarships and bursaries. In 2012-13, the Government allocated CA\$1,805,762 for first generation bursary through its special purpose grants (to 23 universities), and CA\$4,387,177 for first generation projects (to 17 universities).

### **B.6.2 Other initiatives**

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, established in 2005 as an agency of the Government, is tasked with conducting research and evaluations into the postsecondary sector in Ontario and providing recommendations to the Minister. Its three current priority areas are access, learning outcomes, and system design. It recently formed a partnership with six universities, the Access and Retention Consortium, through which researchers from each institution administer and evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions (HEQCO 2016).

The Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada also provide funding to Indspire, a national Indigenous-led non-profit organisation that provides financial awards and delivers programs with the aim of closing the gap in Indigenous education. In 2015-16, Indspire awarded over \$12.2 million through 3,792 scholarships and bursaries to Indigenous students (Indspire 2016). A recent report from the organisation found that the average graduation rate of recipients was 93 per cent (Indspire 2015).



The table below sets out a list of the written submissions provided to the evaluation.

**TABLE C.1** WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Number	Submission author
1	Broome Senior High School
2	Geraldton Grammar School
3	[Confidential]
4	Dapto High School
5	Meriwa Central School
6	Willmot Public School
7	Gulargambone Central School
8	Banksia Park International High School
9	Coolah Central School
10	Canterbury Boys' High School
11	Woodridge State High School
12	Woodenbong Central School
13	Kingscliff High School
14	Mabel Park State High School
15	Ingle Farm East Primary School
16	Girrawheen Senior High School
17	Western Sydney University student
18	Queensland Academy for Health Sciences
19	St Francis College
20	Granville Boys High School
21	Tennille Vitagliano
22	Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong
23	Open Access College
24	Kiara College
25	Tenison Woods College

Number	Submission author
26	Department of Education Public Schools Wagga Wagga Directorate
27	Lion
28	School in Queensland
29	Deception Bay Flexible Learning Centre
30	Swallowcliffe P-7
31	Monto State High School
32	Lake Cargelligo Central School
33	Ungarie Central School
34	Hope Christian College
35	Mendooran Central School
36	Holroyd High School (Principal)
37	Birrong Girls High School
38	JJ Cahill Memorial High School
39	St. John's Catholic Primary School Baradine
40	Granville South Creative and Performing Arts High School
41	Condobolin Public School
42	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (Curtin University)
43	Western Sydney Debating Union
44	Belmont City College
45	Condobolin High School (High School Teacher)
46	McCarthy Catholic College
47	Regional Universities Network
48	TAFE Queensland Brisbane, Caboolture campus
49	Dandenong High School
50	Bass High School
51	Roxburgh College
52	McGuire College
53	Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE) Program, Western Sydney University
54	[Confidential]
55	Gilgandra Public School
56	Gilgandra High School
57	Victoria University Secondary College
58	Bond University
59	TAFE Queensland Brisbane, Logan campus
60	Chester Hill North Public School
61	Lightning Ridge Central School
62	Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE)
63	Distance Education Technology Infrastructure Unit (DART) NSW Department of Education Learning Systems Directorate
64	Meekatharra District High School

Number	Submission author
65	Coolah Central School
66	Kuranda District State College
67	Jess Lloyd
68	Tyndale Christian School Strathalbyn
69	Caboolture State School
70	North Bundaberg State High School
71	University of Technology Sydney (UTS)
72	PCYC Launceston (Inc)
73	[Confidential]
74	Dunedoo Central School
75	Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA)
76	Tom Price Senior High School
77	Western Australian Department of Corrective Services
78	University of Southern Queensland
79	Universities Australia
80	Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium
81	Bankstown Girls High School
82	Western Sydney University
83	YourTutor
84	University of New South Wales (UNSW)
85	The University of Queensland
86	Griffith University
87	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium
88	Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)
89	Edith Cowan University
90	University of Wollongong
91	Australasian Corrections Education Association (ACEA)
92	Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)
93	James Cook University (JCU)
94	Condobolin High School (Careers Advisor)
95	Queensland re-engagement school
96	Innovative Research Universities (IRU)
97	Bribie Island State High School
98	Nanango State High School
99	Sarah Redfern High School
100	Holroyd High School (Head Teacher Science)
101	Deception Bay State High School
102	Yeronga State High School
103	James Meehan High School
104	Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)

Number	Submission author
105	Mercy College
106	Copperfield College
107	Strathfield South High School
108	Matraville Sports High School
109	Group of Eight Australia (Go8)
110	[Confidential]
111	Derby District High School
112	The University of Western Australia (UWA)
113	Narre Warren South P-12 College
114	University of Sydney
115	Minaret College
116	Kilcoy High School
117	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association (NATSIPA)
118	Narrogin Senior High School
119	La Trobe University
120	University of South Australia
121	[Confidential]
122	Katanning Senior High School
123	Central Queensland University
124	National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU)
125	Clontarf Aboriginal College
126	The University of Adelaide
127	Australian Catholic University
128	Great Southern Migrant Services
129	Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)
130	Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC)
131	Boronia Pre-Release Centre for Women
132	Tweed Heads South Public School
133	The Smith Family
134	Macquarie University
135	Boronia Pre-Release Centre for Women
136	Department of Education Public Schools Wagga Wagga Directorate
SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN	



## ADDITIONAL CHARTS BASED ON UNIVERSITY HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

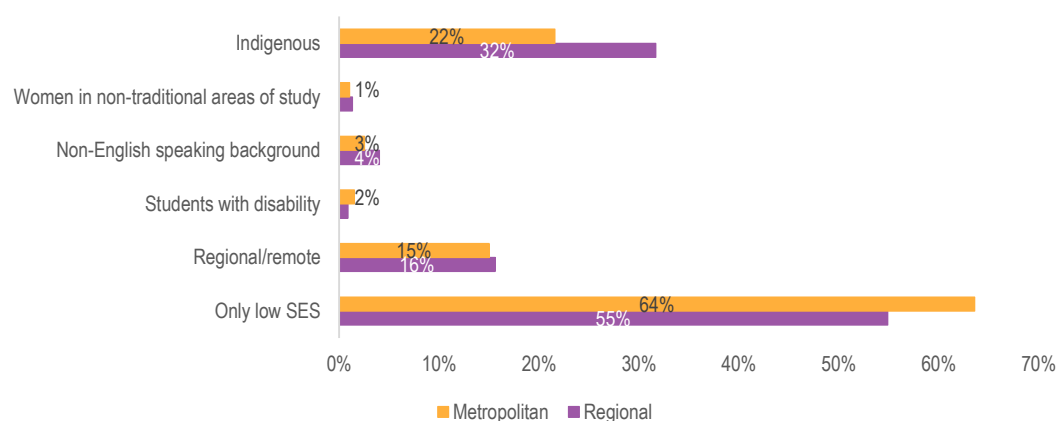
# D

This appendix includes additional analysis of the data extracted from the university HEPPP annual reports.

### Proportion of projects by priority target groups and region

The four charts below show the proportion of projects at each stage of the student life cycle by priority target groups, disaggregated by metropolitan and regional.

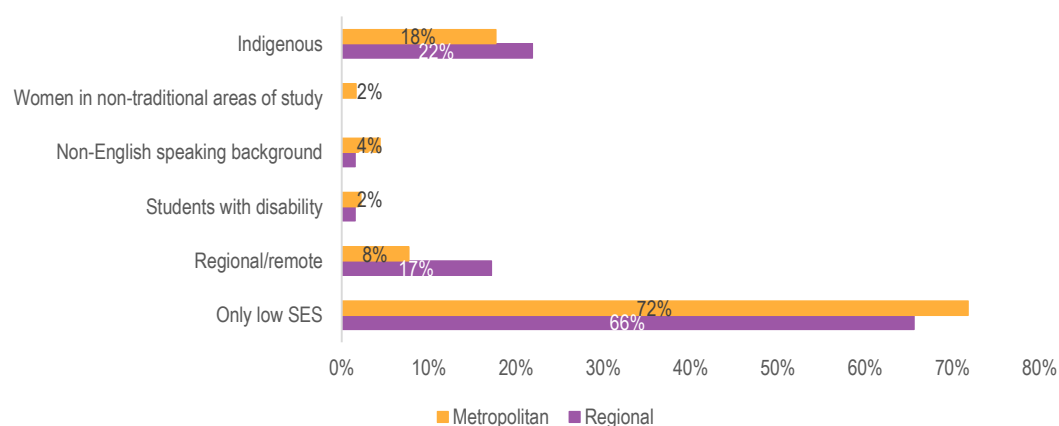
**FIGURE D.1** PROPORTION OF OUTREACH TO SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES PROJECTS BY PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS, BY METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL (AVERAGE OF 2010-2015)



Note: The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 per cent as project can be classified as more than one category

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

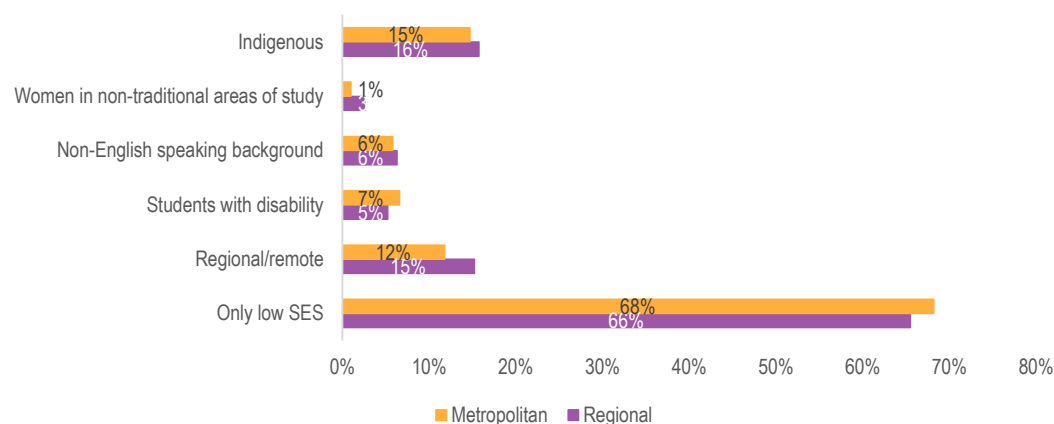
**FIGURE D.2** PROPORTION OF PATHWAYS AND ADMISSIONS PROJECTS BY PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS, BY METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL (AVERAGE OF 2010-2015)



Note: The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 per cent as project can be classified as more than one category

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

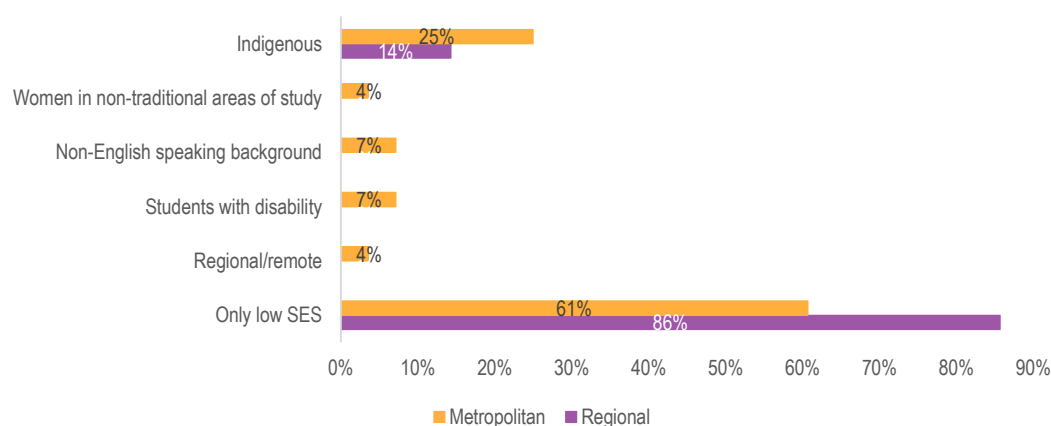
**FIGURE D.3** PROPORTION OF TRANSITION, ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRESSION PROJECTS BY PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS, BY METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL (AVERAGE OF 2010-2015)



Note: The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 per cent as project can be classified as more than one category

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

**FIGURE D.4** PROPORTION OF ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT PROJECTS BY PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS, BY METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL (AVERAGE OF 2010-2015)



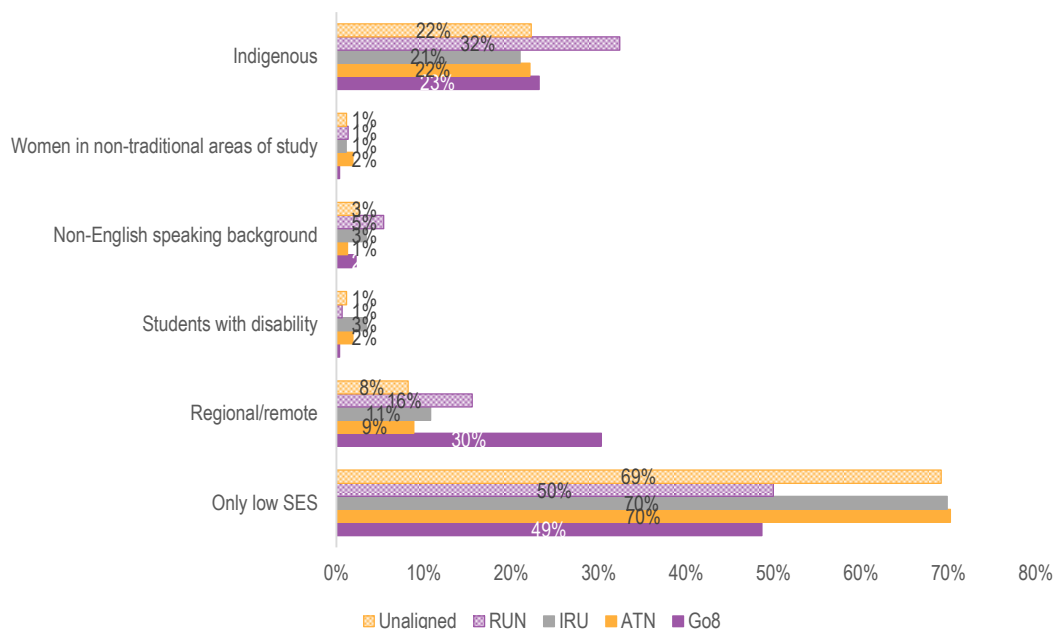
Note: The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 per cent as project can be classified as more than one category

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

### Proportion of projects by priority target groups and university grouping

The four charts below show the proportion of projects at each stage of the student life cycle by priority target groups, disaggregated by university grouping.

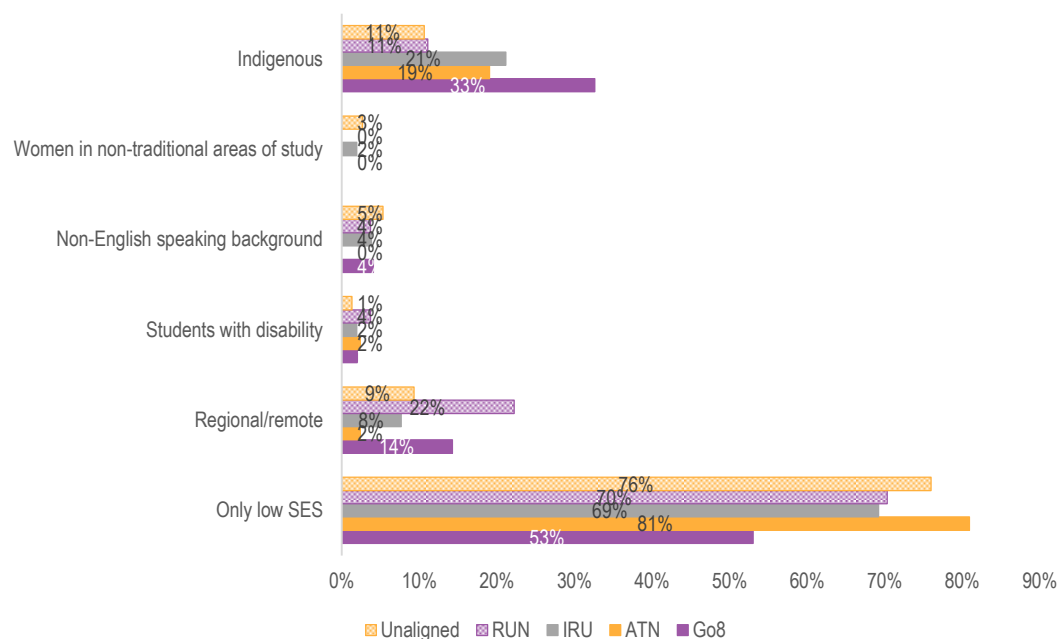
**FIGURE D.5** PROPORTION OF OUTREACH TO SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES PROJECTS BY PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS, BY UNIVERSITY GROUPING (AVERAGE OF 2010-2015)



Note: The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 per cent as project can be classified as more than one category

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

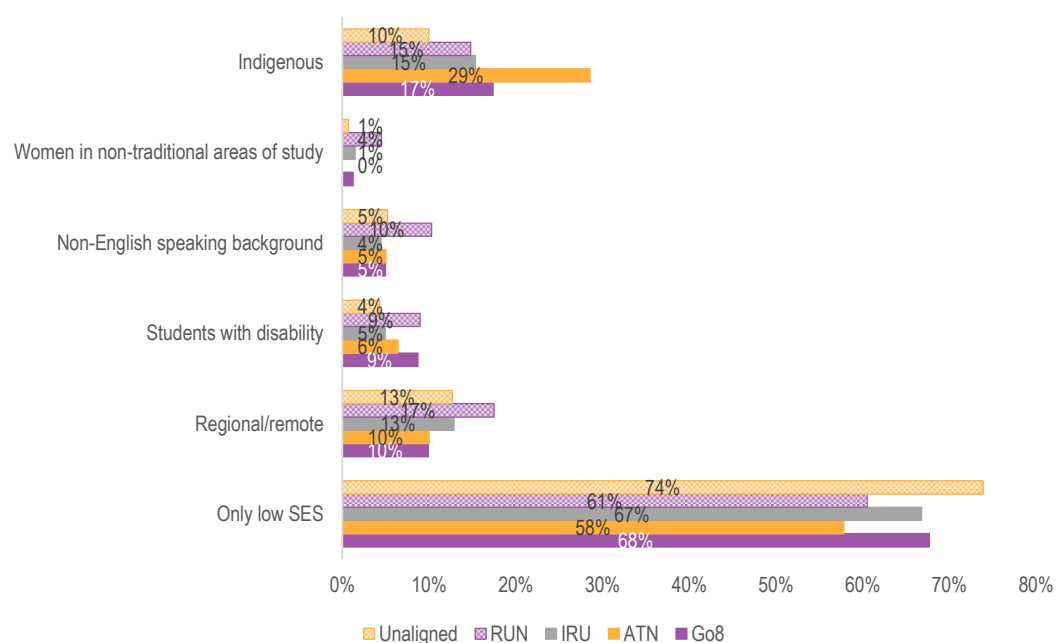
**FIGURE D.6** PROPORTION OF PATHWAYS AND ADMISSIONS PROJECTS BY PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS, BY UNIVERSITY GROUPING (AVERAGE OF 2010-2015)



Note: The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 per cent as project can be classified as more than one category

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

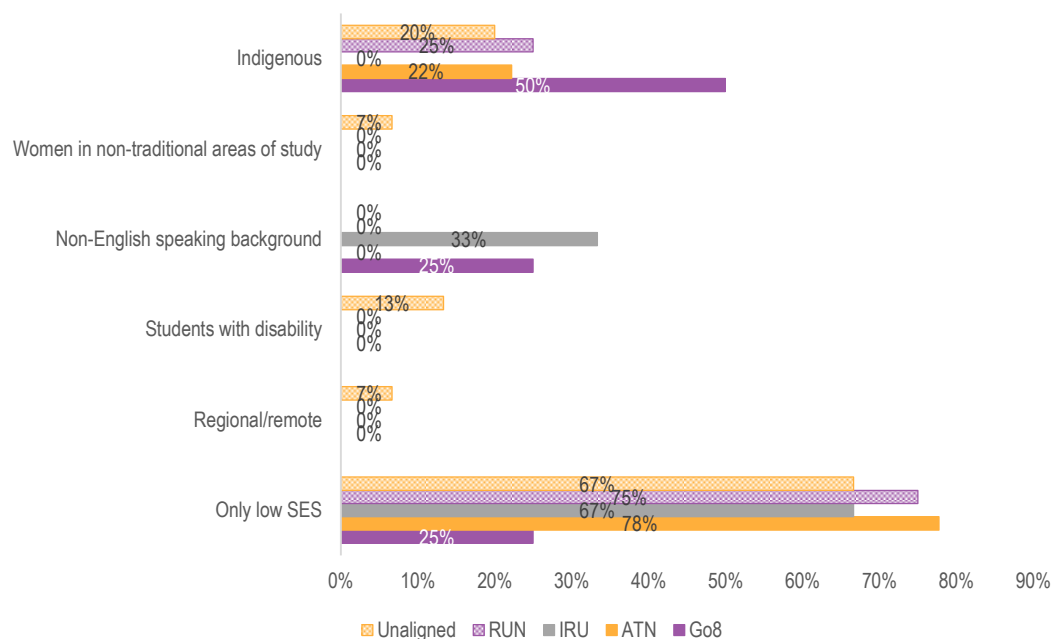
**FIGURE D.7** PROPORTION OF TRANSITION, ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRESSION PROJECTS BY PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS, BY UNIVERSITY GROUPING (AVERAGE OF 2010-2015)



Note: The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 per cent as project can be classified as more than one category

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS

**FIGURE D.8** PROPORTION OF ATTAINMENT AND TRANSITION OUT PROJECTS BY PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS, BY UNIVERSITY GROUPING (AVERAGE OF 2010-2015)



Note: The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 per cent as project can be classified as more than one category

SOURCE: HEPPP ANNUAL REPORTS



This appendix includes additional information that supports the discussion in Chapters 9 and 11.

## E.1 Econometrics method

This section summarises the econometric analysis method used to arrive at the results reported in Chapter 9. The econometric analysis aims to test the impact of socioeconomic status on student outcomes before and after the introduction of the demand driven system and HEPPP. The analysis considers retention, attrition, success and completion as functions of socioeconomic status and other explanatory factors that are available in the Higher Education Student Data Collection dataset.

As each of the above outcome variables (retention, attrition, success, and completion) can be thought of in a binary manner (does student  $i$  remain in their course next year? does student  $i$  complete?), the analysis comprised several probit (binary choice) models. These models are a standard statistical technique for analysing binary outcomes, where the *propensity* for a student to achieve an outcome is modelled as a linear combination of explanatory variables. The probability of that outcome can then be calculated by evaluating a function (in this case a normal cumulative distribution function) at the value of the propensity for each student.

The analysis involved estimation of one such model for each outcome, for each university, in each year. Each model was then used to consider the probability of the relevant outcome for a representative student (that is, a student with average characteristics), but with a particular socioeconomic status. For example, Section 9.6 shows the average retention and success probabilities for low SES and high SES students (with otherwise identical characteristics) before and after the introduction of the demand driven system and HEPPP. By varying the SES of the representative student, the analysis considers the partial effect of SES on outcomes, holding other factors constant.

While this analysis does not establish a causal relationship between HEPPP programs and these outcomes, it does provide a comparison of outcomes for low SES students against those for other students, and contributes to the broader evidence base for the project. For example, if outcomes for disadvantaged students improve over time relative to outcomes for non-disadvantaged students, this may provide evidence that HEPPP contributes to positive outcomes.

The additional factors (control variables) considered in the economic analysis include:

- Field of education
- Type of attendance (full time or part time)
- Whether student is on a scholarship
- How student is paying for course (CSP or Domestic FFS)
- ATAR

- Basis of admission into course
- Indigenous status
- Gender
- Age category
- Born in Australia or Outside Australia
- English or Non-English Language spoken at home

Some other key data processing rules applied to this analysis include:

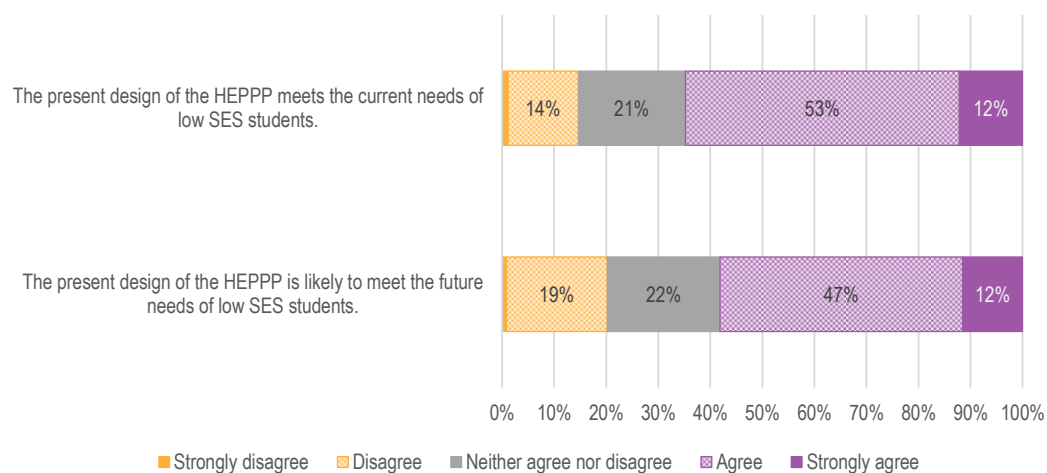
- students with more than one recorded 'enrolment' in any year of data are omitted from the analysis (approximately 4 per cent of students)
- all data for students who are not identify as 'enrolled' in at least one year, but who have data on grades in that year, are omitted from the analysis (approximately 5 per cent of students)
- students who are not identified as 'enrolled' in a year, but who have data on grades, are treated as enrolled within that year, for the purpose of this modelling.

## E.2 Staff survey questions on overall effectiveness

The surveys conducted with university staff also show that, while the majority of respondents agree that the present design of the HEPPP meets the current and future needs of low SES students, over 15 per cent disagree (Figure D.1).

The area for improvement most commonly identified by these respondents is the length of the funding period. An extended funding period, it was suggested by many staff, would allow greater project/program sustainability and provide increased stability and consistency for staff and for staffing arrangements. Respondents also suggested increasing oversight and improving accountability and evaluation requirements regarding how the HEPPP funding is spent and the impact it makes. A range of other recommendations for improvements were made, including an increased level of funding and a review of the equity groups.

**FIGURE E.1** UNIVERSITY STAFF SURVEY, PROGRAM DESIGN



Note: From top to bottom: n= 355, 356

SOURCE: SURVEY OF UNIVERSITY STAFF 2016



### E.3 The IRU funding proposal

The IRU proposes (Submission 96) that, based on the Bradley Review, the HEPPP be separated into two:

- an outreach program
- a loading for low SES enrolments (specifically, ‘the participation payment per low SES student should be a loading added to the commonwealth grant scheme’.

The IRU argues that a loading would ‘emphasise the payment is over and above discipline-driven allocations to supplement a factor they do not cover’ and would produce the following benefits:

- ‘much less input controlled accountability’, that is, ‘there would be no need for complicated reporting.’
- funding would have ‘remained the same per low SES student over time’—‘as a loading it would expand as student numbers grew.’

### E.4 Background on the low SES measure

The SEIFA IEO ‘is designed to reflect the educational and occupational level of communities’ and is composed of variables which measure educational attainment, education being undertaken and employment (Table D.1) (ABS 2013).

**TABLE E.1** SEIFA IEO VARIABLES

Variable	Loading
% of employed people who work in a skill Level 1 (highest) occupation	0.89
% of people aged 15 years and over whose highest level of educational attainment is a diploma qualification	0.68
% of people aged 15 years and over at university or other tertiary institution	0.57
% of employed people who work in a skill Level 2 occupation	0.34
% of people (in the labour force) unemployed	-0.49
% of people aged 15 years and over whose highest level of educational attainment is a certificate III or IV	-0.54
% of employed people who work in a skill Level 4 occupation	-0.74
% of employed people who work in a skill Level 5 (lowest) occupation	-0.80
% of people aged 15 years and over whose highest level of education is Year 11 or lower	-0.88

SOURCE: ABS 2013

As the ABS (2013) explains, ‘indexes are assigned to areas, not to individuals’ and ‘indicate the collective socioeconomic characteristics of the people living in an area.’ As a result ‘a relatively disadvantaged area is likely to have a high proportion of relatively disadvantaged people’ but it ‘is also likely to contain some people who are relatively advantaged’ (see also, Wise and Mathews, 2011).

A number of researchers have examined this issue as it relates to the SEIFA IEO. Using individual SES measures developed from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) Karmel and Lim (2013) show that ‘considerable numbers of high-SES individuals live in [SEIFA IEO] low SES areas and vice versa.’ Using one method they estimate that the total level of correct classification of low SES individuals using the SEIFA IEO is ‘a little less than 30 per cent.’ Dockery, Seymour and Koshy (2015) develop a measure of likelihood to attend university using Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) data and find that ‘among 17-year olds classified as being in the bottom quartile of SES by the area-based measure, around one-third actually have a better than average probability of entering university.’ (See also Coelli, 2010, Lim & Gemici, 2011, and Edwards and van der Brugge 2013).

This issue could be addressed by using a SES measurement methodology based on the individual circumstances of each student (Universities Australia 2008; Bradley et al. 2008; Karmel & Lim 2013, Dockery, Seymour & Koshy 2015). The literature indicates that one or a combination of parental

education, parental occupation, parental income or household income are likely to be most appropriate student level indicators of SES (Western 1998; Jones 2002; James et al. 2008; Karmel & Lim 2013; Dockery, Seymour & Koshy 2015). Practically, the collection from students of their parent or parents' occupation and education is most feasible and likely to yield the most reliable data (Bradley et al. 2008; Western 1998; Jones 2002). This is a similar approach taken in the Australian school system where since 2005 nationally defined background characteristic information is collected for all Australian students, including parental education and occupation—school systems then use this information as an input into their school funding formulas (Bracks 2015).

In adopting such an approach it would be necessary to undertake research into the extent which these factors can reliably be used as a measure for the SES of mature-age students. Any changes to the measure of low SES to improve accuracy would also need to take account of the additional costs or reporting requirements for universities and TACs.

Beyond informing the allocation of funding under the HEPPP, the collection of data to allow a SES measure to be developed based on the individual circumstances of each student is likely to generate considerable value through supporting and improving research into student equity.

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