

UOW Enabling Framework for Student Equity 2021-2024

Equity at UOW: Guiding Principles

At UOW we adopt a **whole student, whole journey, whole of institution** approach to facilitating access and success of equity group students (as defined under the Federal *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program*).

Whole Student: pedagogy is fortified by an empathetic institutional approach that focuses on learning outcomes that value, respect and empower our diverse student cohort, and facilitate student success. Our intention is to enhance connectedness, student agency and grit as students develop discipline knowledge and expertise. We empower students to effectively navigate their journey into and through higher education to achieve outcomes they value.

Whole Institution: embracing equity access and success as an institution involves assessment of policies with an equity lens and where appropriate policy adjustment. Success will depend upon the continued use of quality cycles, underpinned by robust systems that effectively test policy implementation and include active schedules of renewal.

Whole Journey: involves a cohort-based collaboration between students, Faculty staff and professional units in order to enhance student experience.¹ In this way we identify solutions for impediments to students transitioning into university, across first year and middle year programs, to preparing for their career. This cohort based approach benefits all UOW students in the cohort.

Collaborative Partnerships: involves a partnership between the student and the University that is based on trust, shared responsibility, collaboration, interdependence as we work towards the achievement of a mutually beneficial goals.² The intention is to bring together existing services, programs and activities across the University in order to achieve a shared goal³ of increasing participation and success of students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Evidence Based: Policies, strategies, pedagogy, programs and activities must have a strong evidence-base practice model⁴ that will involve standardised approaches to evaluation of equity outcomes. In this respect the design and implementation of identified strategies will be informed by the equity literature and contextual evidence, underpinned by cycles of continuous improvement.

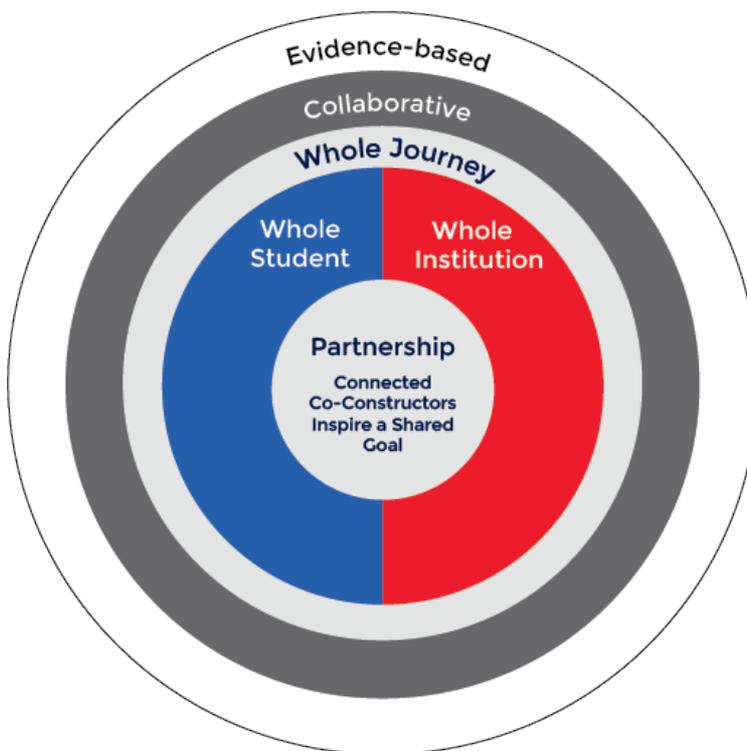


Figure 1: UOW Enabling Framework for Student Equity

¹ Hickey-Moody et al. 2010, p232, Smyth 2012, Gale & Mills, 2015

² Waddock, 1991; Billett, Ovens, Clemans, Seddon, 2007

³ Billett, Ovens, Clemans, Seddon, 2007

⁴ Hoffman, Bennett, & Mar, 2016

Over the next four years we will:

- embed our equity related endeavour within our response to the UOW Education Strategy 2020-2025, and the UOW Civic University Strategy 2020-2025 in ways that raise awareness of equity student needs and enhance their outcomes;
- adopt a students-staff partnership model to develop, implement and evaluate tailored strategies for identified cohorts that spans the student lifecycle and enhances career readiness (*i.e., in large undergraduate courses where we have identified high levels of students from Low SES backgrounds, regional and remote areas, and who identify as being Indigenous*); and
- Adopt a praxis-based approach⁵ to more deeply inform our equity work and its governance.

This will involve activities across the following five domains:

- Pre-Access (Outreach)
- Access
- Induction and Transitions
- Retention and Re-engagement
- Evaluation and Discovery

We will achieve this through:

- ***Institution-wide programs*** that provide longevity to our effort and are targeted in ways that provide the highest return for the investment with respect to student outcomes⁶;
- A competitive ***UOW Enabling Equity Discovery Grant*** to support students-staff projects that deepen our understanding and serve as a catalyst for improvement in our approach; and
- Engagement in the competitive ***HEPPP National Priority Pool competitive grants process*** and the ***Regional Partnership Pool*** administered by the Federal Government.

⁵ “bringing together of critical reflection and action” (p 16. Burke, 2018)

⁶ It is important to note that the approach is of benefit to the experience of all students enrolled in cohorts where strategies are adopted.

The Student Experience

Keith Brandy (Wiradjuri) – Bachelor of Arts Graduate

After returning to study five years ago, decades after completing my Higher School Certificate at TAFE, I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Indigenous Studies and History. Despite an incredibly difficult start in life, I realised you are never too old to study. The reality is, even if you think it's too late, you can do it. I spent five years attaining my degree, as I was studying part time, and interning at a Sydney-based engineering company, all while in my 60s. I would not hesitate to add to my tertiary education. But, for the moment, I am focusing on my work and my social activism, serving as a mentor for young Indigenous men, particularly in the field of men's health.



Adelaide Ellis – Bachelor of Communications and Media (Deans Scholar)



Attending a university that was so far away from my rural childhood home was daunting to say the least. University was so foreign to me in the beginning as I was the first in my family to enroll. In my first year of study I was driving the 4.5 hour trek home most weekends to cater for the hunger my homesickness constantly left me with. I was starving for the community I had grown up with, for scenery which resembled the rolling hills of the central west and for a place to call home. Little did I know that I would soon find these things all within my grasp at the University of Wollongong. Now recently enrolled in postgraduate study, I have solidified my place in the illawarra with a love for where the coast meets the cliffs and a sense of gratitude for all of the sporting, academic and social endeavours the university has connected me with. The skills which I have learnt in building my own sense of community are priceless.

Della Hoskins (Gumbayniggirr) – Bachelor of Social Work

I entered university as a mature aged student who didn't finish year 10 in high school. I come from a family of 11, and my family responsibilities have always been my priority. Sometime after I left school, completed a Certificate IV in Community Services and progressed into a Diploma. This opened the opportunity for me to study Social Work at University. I am the first in my family to come to University. This in itself has a ripple on effect as it is motivating my entire family, they see me achieving high and it motivates them. I want to embed education into our family so that they can reach for higher goals. The best thing about university is the social and UOW community interactions, and having a safe space like WIC that we can come to has made this journey easier for me.



Rouaa Altinawi - Bachelor of International Studies - Bachelor of Commerce



“Coming from a refugee and non-English speaking background straight to high school was not easy at all for me but it is definitely rewarding. There were many challenges that I have faced along the way such as learning English, trying to meet new people and really just being able to achieve the goals I have set for myself. Receiving an Early Entry to UOW was something very exciting and made the process less stressful for me. I am so proud to look back and see the long way I have crossed to get where I am today. I am also so grateful for the unlimited opportunities that I get to experience at UOW. I highly encourage all students that are having or have had similar challenges as me to continue to put the hard work in and to believe in themselves that they can make it.”

Janaya Quirk (Wiradjuri) – Bachelor of Primary Education

Starting university as a mature age student was slightly nerve-racking. I made the move from QLD to NSW at the end of 2018 to start my Bachelor of Primary teaching degree at UOW with the dreams of changing the way we look, see and teach education, particularly Indigenous studies. I'm a proud Aboriginal woman and a single mother, aiming to raise my daughter in a home where she has the opportunity to attend university as I am. Being welcomed into WIC has helped me to re-connect with my heritage and they have encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams while supporting me every step of the way. I am also the proud recipient of the Lorna Earl and William Woodbury scholarship for 2021 with the aim of graduating university with honours.



The Legislative Context

The Federal Government's *Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program* (HEPPP) was implemented in response to the 2008 Bradley Review. Through HEPPP, all public universities receive funding to conduct programs and activities that increase access and improve the retention and completion rates of students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds within higher education including, individuals from low socioeconomic (Low SES) backgrounds, individuals from regional and remote areas, and First Nations people.

The legislation guiding the HEPPP is the [Higher Education Support Act 2003](#) and [Higher Education Support Amendment \(Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students\) Bill 2020](#)

On 19 October 2020, the Australian Parliament passed legislation for the Job-ready Graduates Package of reforms to higher education. The Job-ready Graduates Package includes measures to enact recommendations from the [National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy 2019](#) (often referred to as the *Naphthine Report*). This involves a reframe from 2021 of the use of HEPPP funding, and the introduction of new funding pools.

Measures within the package of importance to student equity include (see [here](#) for more detail):

- **Tertiary Access Payment:** \$159.1 million over four years to encourage and assist outer regional and remote students to access tertiary study immediately following school (Year 12)
- **A guaranteed place for Indigenous students from regional Australia:** in 2021 an additional 160 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote areas will have access to a guaranteed Commonwealth supported place at a university of their choice (rising to over 1,700 students by 2024)
- **Strengthen and expand the Regional University Centres program:** \$21 million over four years to establish up to eight additional Regional University Centres (RUCs) and strengthen the existing RUC program
- **Improved Fares Allowance:** reduce the waiting period from six months to three months to allow relocated tertiary students to return home during their mid-year break in their first year of study
- **Reform of equity funding:** HEPPP now operates under the newly created Indigenous, Regional and Low SES Attainment Fund (IRSLAF), and from 2021 has been broadened to support regional, remote and Indigenous students as well as those from a lower socio-economic (LSES) background instead of a sole focus on domestic undergraduate LSES students. The Package changes the methodology that is applied to HEPPP allocations for universities. While the amount granted nationally will remain the same, the amount granted to each individual university may change, depending on their student load as per the new criteria. The change in methodology is explained below:
 - a. HEPPP funding was previously distributed to universities by formula in annual allocations based on their share of low SES students.
 - b. From 2021, the formula-based component of the HEPPP is being allocated based on each university's share of low SES students, regional and remote students, and Indigenous students:
 - i. 45 per cent of the funding will be allocated based on a university's share of LSES students,
 - ii. 45 per cent will be based on its share of regional and remote students, and
 - iii. 10 per cent will be based on its share of Indigenous students.
 - c. The HEPPP Refocus is being implemented in a staged transition over three years, commencing in 2021, to allow universities time to plan and implement any changes to their programs as a result of the funding shifts:
 - i. In 2021, 75 per cent of the funding will be allocated under current formula (LSES only) and 25 per cent will be allocated using the new formula (45% per cent LSES + 45 per cent RRR + 10 per cent Indigenous).
 - ii. In 2022, it will be 50/50.

- iii. In 2023, it will be 25 per cent current and 75 per cent new.
- iv. In 2024, 100 per cent of the allocation will be by the new formula.
- d. The National Priorities Pool (continuing) and the new Regional Projects Pool are also HEPPP components available to all Table A universities through competitive grants. As these components are granted through competitive grants, they are not relevant to the analysis leading to HEPPP allocation to Universities.

Strategic Positioning

Two UOW strategic elements are of importance to our work with equity groups defined under the HEPPP legislation. These are the [UOW 2020–2025 Education Strategy](#), and the [2020–2025 Civic University Strategy](#).

Our 2020-2025 Education Strategy aims to activate the five objectives outlined in Goal 1 of the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan and highlights the key focus areas for the period to 2025. These objectives reflect our ongoing commitment to graduate success, to digitalise our education provision, expand work-integrated learning and develop new offerings to support lifelong learning, to grow student mobility and transnational learning opportunities, to build a transdisciplinary course portfolio in order to develop T-shaped graduates, and to harness data and learning analytics ethically to deliver personalised support and an exceptional experience for our students.

Our 2020-2025 Civic University Strategy provides a roadmap towards 2030, guiding our journey towards being a truly civic university where our teaching, research and civic engagement is aligned to national priorities and local needs, providing a platform for economic and social regeneration. We intend to drive equitable access to, and participation in, tertiary education for all. This includes disadvantaged groups, and/or groups traditionally underrepresented in tertiary education. In addition, we will provide inclusive and safe educational environments that celebrate equity and diversity.

These strategies are supported by underpinning UOW enabling strategies, frameworks and plans of importance to equity, including:

The Indigenous Student Completion Plan – [Woolyungah Indigenous Centre](#)

[Student Career Development & Employability strategy & plan](#)

Student Mental Health Strategy

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy](#)

[Accessibility Action Plan 2019-2021](#)

Regional and Metropolitan Campus Strategies

The UOW Enabling framework for Equity Students 2021-2024 will contribute towards projected UOW Council Key Performance Indicators related to access, retention and completion rates of students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds within higher education including, individuals from low socioeconomic (Low SES) backgrounds, individuals from regional and remote areas, and First Nations people.

Appendix 1: Key Definitions

ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are those who self-identify upon enrolment via a positive response to the question ‘Do you identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?’
ACCESS	The process of enabling entry to higher education, i.e., usually associated with widening access, that is, facilitating the entry of a wider range of people into higher education than are traditionally included
ATTRITION	TEQSA defines attrition as the ratio of first-year higher education commencing students in a year who neither completed nor returned to study in the following year, to the total commencing students in that year.
EQUITY GROUPS	The Federal Government has established that the primary focus of HEPPP funding involves the following three groups: low socio-economic status backgrounds, regional and remote, and Indigenous. It is important to note the cumulative impact of disadvantage for these groups that also includes being the first in the family to attend university and living with a disability.
EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH	An evidence-based approach involves complex and conscientious decision-making which is based not only on the available evidence but also the context to which it is being applied.
HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM (HEPPP)	An Australian Government program that aims to ensure that students from underrepresented groups (specifically, low socio-economic status backgrounds, regional and remote, and Indigenous) who have the ability to study at university have the opportunity to do so. It provides funding to assist universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access, retention and completion rates for such students.
LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	Socio-economic status (SES) in Australian higher education is determined using a student’s residential address. The SES of an individual student is proxied by the SES of the area in which they reside, known as the Statistical Area 1 (SA1), which is typically smaller than a postcode. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses census data on household educational and occupational status to construct the Socio-Economic Index for Areas – Index of Education and Occupation (SEIFA). Each SA1 in Australia receives a SEIFA score which is standardised against a national mean of 1000. All SA1 areas in Australia are then ranked on the basis of their SEIFA scores. Low SES students are defined as those students who live in the bottom 25 per cent of SA1 areas in this ranking.
PRE-ACCESS / OUTREACH	Pre-access programs variably focus on primary/pre-primary students, or those in their final years of high school; on some of the most educationally disadvantaged young people, or on high achievers in disadvantaged schools (NCSEHE 2017)
TRANSITIONS	“...more than just a move between educational contexts, or a bounded period of time; instead transition is understood as a complex social phenomenon in which the relationships between individuals and their contexts are inextricably linked. Identity shifts may be experienced at the level of the individual, but these come about through the process of participation and experience in the social context” (pg 11 O’Donnell, Kean, Stevens, 2016)
REGIONAL AND REMOTE	Specific classes of remoteness under the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), as used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and other organisations to provide comparable statistics. The ASGS has five

	<p>classes of remoteness based on relative access to services: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. For statistical purposes the “remote” category generally includes “remote” and “very remote areas”, unless otherwise specified (see National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy, 2019).</p>
RE-ENGAGEMENT	<p>The process by which the university re-establishes communication with students who are disengaged from study, and students who have chosen to leave the University prior to completing their qualification. Re-engagement aims to re-engage students in study, and to keep discontinued students engaged in the university in ways that provide pathways to their chosen outcome.</p>
RETENTION	<p>A measure of the rate at which students persist in their education at an institution.</p> <p>See TEQSA Good Practice Note: Improving retention and completion of students in Australian higher education – February 2020</p>