Social justice and equity issues in the higher education context

Annotated Bibliography

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Good practice for safeguarding student learning engagement in higher education institutions
https://safeguardingstudentlearning.net/

Support for this publication/activity has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this publication/activity do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.
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Preface

This Annotated Bibliography presents a summary of the literature accessed as part of the development of a literature analysis and synopsis for the Office for Learning and Teaching funded project\(^1\) Good practice for safeguarding student learning engagement in higher education institutions.

The aim of the review was to examine the literature on social justice in the higher education sector. Principally the review attempts to examine and define ‘social justice’ in order to assist in the development of a set of social justice principles and then apply this knowledge to monitoring student learning engagement initiatives in higher education. For this to be achieved it was necessary to also examine the higher education ‘Widening Participation’ agenda (particularly in Australia) and also explore issues around student engagement, specifically equity groups such as low socio-economic status and indigenous students.

*Please note:* Not all of these references are included in the final literature analysis. Several references were utilised as points of interest or for further reference.

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\(^1\) The project Good practice for safeguarding student learning engagement in higher education institutions commenced in 2010 as a Competitive Grant with funding provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (The research is now overseen by the Office for Learning and Teaching within the Australian Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education).
Websites/Web pages


An online article from Educause about the Purdue University’s Signals program – a learning analytics program that actively monitors student learning engagement so that intervention and outreach activities can be prompted to support students showing signs of disengagement.


The website presents data from the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) as well as research briefings on particular cohorts and issues derived from the data.


AUQA’s Good Practice database presents a case study of Auckland University of Technology’s early “at-risk” intervention strategy. The program, run by the FYE team, is involves a systematic intervention and follow-up for students who trigger ‘at-risk’ criteria. These criteria are designed to identify students in need of specialist support to assist them improve their success rate.


In September 2007, after over 20 years of negotiation by governments and Indigenous peoples from around the world, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration). Indigenous peoples around the world were involved in drafting the Declaration however, Australia voted against it (along with Canada, New Zealand and the USA). In 2009 the Australian Government reversed its position and gave the Declaration formal support.

The Declaration is the most significant achievement in the protection of Indigenous peoples’ rights at the international level. It is sourced from existing international human rights and informs how these rights apply to Indigenous peoples. The Declaration is a positive document that maps out a path for Indigenous peoples to be free from discrimination and secure in our identities and life choices.

This web page has links to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, various Australian media releases, draft statements and responses, community guides, fact sheets and other resources that summarise and outline the declaration.
In October 2012 Australia’s Race Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Helen Szoke, launched the Principles to promote and protect the human rights of international students at the Australian International Education.

The objective of the implementation of these high-level, human rights-based Principles is to enhance the safety and well-being of international students in Australia. The Race Discrimination Commissioner encouraged all those working with international students to consider how these principles can be effectively adopted and implemented in the ongoing development of policies and services relating to international students.

Broadly, the Principles can be used:
- as a guide for all organisations and government agencies that provide services to international students
- to inform the ongoing development of policies and services relating to international students, and
- to provide international students and their representative bodies with a guide on how their human rights can be better promoted and protected, to support their advocacy with governments, service providers and other agencies.

DEEWR’s website dedicated to HEPPP – outlining the submission process reporting and statistics.

DEEWR’s HE statistics listed by year.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) works with academic and institutions to assist in the development and dissemination of evidence-based practice in the sector. HEA is funded via four UK higher education funding bodies and offers grants for project work and the development of resources. Student Engagement is one component of their work and the website provides information and links to current reports, projects and resources in this arena.

Themes: Widening participation and engagement – resources, references
Definitions, target groups and approaches differ between the four countries in the UK, but in general all countries are concerned to see improvements relating to entry rates to HE; retention, achievement and progression; and subsequent opportunities in employment and learning. HEA’s focus here is primarily on the student experience.

The Academy has undertaken and commissioned a number of research studies relating to improving the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds and works with institutions, partnerships and sector-wide bodies to develop evidence-informed approaches to improving the student experience, and transforming HE to make it more appropriate to the needs of a diverse student body. This work forms part of a programme of activity to promote access and success for all students.

Themes: Widening participation and engagement – resources, references


The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) promotes and funds high-quality, cost-effective teaching and research, meeting the diverse needs of students, the economy and society. A key focus is ‘Widening Participation’ and the website has a dedicated area for policy information, resources, reports, news and events relevant to this topic in the UK. Recent commissioned reports are available to access on this site and the emphasis is on promoting good practice within the higher education sector.

Themes: Widening participation and engagement – resources, references


The 2010 edition of Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators enables countries to see themselves in the light of other countries’ performance. The indicators show who participates in education, how much is spent on it and how education systems operate. They also illustrate a wide range of educational outcomes, comparing, for example, student performance in key subject areas and the impact of education on earnings and on adults’ chances of employment.

Themes: Comparative HE data and outcomes


Tinto details the growth in participation in America’s higher education system and the public commitment to provide access to any individual who seeks entry to postsecondary education and notes that the gap in access between high and low-income youth has shrunk as greater
numbers of economically disadvantaged students have enrolled in college. Tinto adds that as access has increased so too has stratification of participation by income. Tinto notes: “For too many low-income students the door to higher education is only partially open because financial constraints limit their choices of where and how they attend college”.


The web page features a video of how the Early Alert system operates - the tool identifies students at risk of possible disengagement from university.
Journal Articles


The author infers that literature around educational administration has largely failed to address the problem of the justice and fairness of social and educational arrangements. This article goes on to examine the necessary relationships between ethical leadership, community and the notion of social justice. Such relationships are argued to be necessarily political, although the field of leadership has historically seen administration as a substitute for politics. The relationship between social justice and disadvantage is examined, as are current approaches to community, choice and diversity. The importance of both redistributive and recognition approaches to social justice is emphasised as a basis for a model of educational administration centred on the problem of the justice and fairness of social and educational arrangements.

Key themes: social justice in educational administration


This article draws on a study of student retention and graduate destination at seven HE institutions in South Africa, focusing on the University of the Western Cape which caters for a large proportion of impoverished students. The study found many students left before completing a qualification because they were too poor to stay. A model of student departure is presented which draws on the work of Vincent Tinto but also allows for greater emphasis than he did on students’ ability to pay (real or perceptual) and demarcates the times in the academic calendar when finances present their greatest challenge to retention. The model also invites consideration of the national and international factors which impact on the social/economic/political milieu in which students’ persist-or-depart decisions are made.

Themes: Academic persistence, social disadvantage


Essentially the article provides a thematic analysis approach to explore “internationalisation” in 14 AUQA audit reports published between 2006 and 2010. The findings of the study have led to first, the development of a definition of social engagement as an aspect of the international student experience. Second, they identify the key contexts targeted by universities as being relevant to the social engagement of international students. Third, the findings focus on the strategies adopted by universities in enhancing social engagement. Together with a focus on social engagement from the student’s own point-of-view, the findings of this study are likely to be a useful resource for university staff considering the contexts in which the social engagement of international students is targeted and the strategies they adopt.
Themes: international student experience and engagement


Clancy and Goastellec provide a comparative analysis of how access and equity are defined and how policies have evolved reveals a number of commonalities and differences between countries. The overall trend is a movement from the priority given to 'inherited merit' in the admission process through a commitment to formal equality, towards the application of some modes of affirmative action for selected under-represented groups. This overall convergence, which is accompanied by a growing appreciation of the complexity of social identities, is complemented by significant national specificity in respect of the social categories which are used to define social diversity. In the absence of appropriate comparative measures of participation a Higher Education Participation Index is developed to facilitate cross-country comparisons. A review of current attempts to measure equity in access to higher education points to the need to develop a programme of comparative research which focuses on the social characteristics of students who are currently enrolled in higher education.

Themes: Defining access and equity, measuring equity


Coates documents the development and application of a typological model of online and general campus-based student engagement. Knowing how campus-based students engage in key online and general learning practices can play a central role in managing and developing university education. This paper reports on the statistical analyses used to develop the model, and analyses the model's structure and substance. The model is exemplified by considering what it says about how increasingly powerful and pervasive online technologies might be leveraged to enhance campus based student engagement.


Nancy Fraser explores the relationship between redistribution and recognition emphasising the need to consider both as central for social justice:

The ‘struggle for recognition’ is fast becoming the paradigmatic form of political conflict in the late twentieth century. Demands for ‘recognition of difference’ fuel struggles of groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, ‘race’, gender, and sexuality. In these ‘post-socialist’ conflicts, group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilization. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle.

The discourse of this paper operates at two levels. Firstly, the authors examine social justice perspectives within the academic literature. Secondly, the paper details research concerning the practices of teachers in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities within 'mainstream' classrooms. These two discussions are drawn together through their collaborative interest in recognising social justice and the paper's critique also extends to questioning whose interests are served (and whose are not) by various social justice perspectives and their applications to schooling.

*Themes: Social justice and education*


This article provides a synoptic account of historically changing conceptions and practices of social justice in Australian higher education policy. It maps the changes in this policy arena, beginning with the period following the Second World War and concluding with an analysis of the most recent policy proposals of the Bradley Review. Concurrently, it explores the different meanings ascribed to social justice, equity and social inclusion over this time span and what these have meant and will mean for students, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds. It concludes that a relational understanding of social justice - 'recognitive justice' - is yet to inform student equity policy in higher education, although this is now what is required in the context of the planned shift from mass to universal participation.

*Themes: Historical analysis of social justice in the Australian HE sector, critical discourse*


Within recent studies of education policy, social justice has been an under-theorised concept. This paper attempts understand social justice in education policy. It critically examines some of the most prominent ways in which social justice has been and is being thought about within various traditions of social theory and concludes by outlining a framework for conceptualising social justice in the context of education policy research.


This paper builds both on previous work (1998 above) and on Iris Young’s work to argue that social justice in education has to be understood in relation to particular contexts of enactment. The author argues that it is not possible to make cross-national or other comparative assessments of social justice without consideration of the ways in which justice is enacted in practice. This contextualised approach is illustrated using an interview with one mother’s encounters with the English education system.

Goastellec examines the increasing necessity to legitimate the organisation of their access to higher education. Commonly used as a yardstick to compare societies, the level of access to higher education is often presented as an indicator of the level of development and the capacity to produce knowledge, as well as a workforce adapted to the economic and social development. But increasingly, the issue is shifting from the outputs of general access to higher education to the specific institutions from which students gain admission. This raises the question of the fairness of higher education systems, their ability not to duplicate society but to produce social mobility, at least in the students' influx to and within the higher education sector.

**Themes:** access, equity, social inclusion


In Australia, indigenising the curriculum is increasingly acknowledged as a possible avenue for addressing Indigenous under-representation in tertiary science education in a culturally appropriate and relevant manner. While no Australian university has implemented such a program, there is much to be learnt about the inherent complexities of indigenising curriculum before it is pursued. In Canada, however, innovative university programs have been implemented that imbed Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum. This article details key findings from research that sought to learn from Canadian practices in indigenising tertiary science curriculum, by exploring the practices and experiences of two Canadian programs: Trent University’s Indigenous Environmental Studies program, and Cape Breton University’s Integrative Science program.

**Themes:** Indigenisation of the curriculum (case studies)


The paper reports on a study that examined the participation rate amongst higher education students determined as low SES and those students living in rural and remote parts of Australia. The paper also recommends findings that could used in regards to policy and programs.

**Themes:** Low SES, regional and remote student participation in HE, access and equity


This paper reports on seven calibrated scales of student engagement emerging from a large-scale study of first year undergraduate students in Australian universities. The analysis presents insights into contemporary undergraduate student engagement, including online, self-managed, peer and student-staff engagement. The results point to the imperative for
developing a broader understanding of engagement as a process with several dimensions. These must be acknowledged in any measurement and monitoring of this construct in higher education. The paper calls for a more robust theorising of the engagement concept that encompasses both quantitative and qualitative measures. It considers implications for pedagogy and institutional policy in support of enhancing the quality of the student experience.

Themes: longitudinal analysis, reflective discourse on FYE


Kuh summarises the role and contributions of the scholarship and current institutional research dedicated to student engagement and its relevance for student development professionals and others committed to enhancing the quality of the undergraduate experience. As well, Kuh describes the evolution of the student engagement concept and attempts to understand its importance to student development. Finally the paper summarises and implications of relationships between student engagement and selected activities including participation in high-impact practices, employment, and some other experiences of relevant a relevance to the current generation of undergraduates.

Themes: student engagement, academic development


This paper examines how one institution responds to those changing expectations within student engagement. While student non-completion is a feature of the contemporary higher education landscape, little analysis of the role played by higher education institutions in stabilising retention rates has entered the public domain. The paper acknowledges the influence by state policies and of student disposition towards higher education as factors that may affect non-completion rates but questions the role played by higher education institutions themselves in reducing the rate of non-completion. From a theoretical perspective, barriers are identified which, coupled with institutional data, provide a first-cut analysis of possible strategies that could work to limit poor retention rate trends. An underlying question embedded within the paper is: should universities faced with high first-year non-completion rates expect students to accommodate to university life, or should they seek to adjust institutional culture to adapt to changing student demands and expectations?

Themes: Student expectations, retention and attrition


Abstract:
Strategies to enhance socio-economic equity in higher education embody one or both of two objectives. The first strategy is to advance ‘fairness’ by changing the composition of participation, bringing higher education into line with the ideal model of a socially representative system. The second strategy advances ‘inclusion’ by broadening the access and completion of under-represented groups. Governments often focus on both objectives. For example current Australian policy mentions both objectives while giving priority to fairness. But as Amartya Sen notes, the two approaches embody heterogeneous traditions of social justice. They also have diverging implications for freedom, and for social status in education (the ‘elephant in the room’). The utopian fairness approach emphasises the proper functioning of institutions. The realist inclusion approach emphasises the agency of those excluded. OECD country experience suggests that while measures of fairness provide useful information, a programmatic focus on enhanced inclusion is both more achievable and more fruitful.


The paper draws together theoretical propositions from the higher education sector over the past decade and suggest some foundational principles that may help establish a framework for indigenous education as a discipline in the HE sector. The paper discusses the current body of knowledge (historical, political and cultural) that has been produced by those outside the indigenous community – ‘contested knowledge spaces’ and refers to this as the ‘cultural interface’. Nakata reiterates his view of the ‘indigenous standpoint theory’ as a method of inquiry and a process for making more coherent current knowledge about indigenous culture.


An interview with Professor Larkin and Yorke that explores issues around widening participation from the UK experience (Yorke) and from an Indigenous perspective (Larkin)

Themes: Widening participation


The importance of the first year experience (FYE) to success at university is well documented and supported with the transition into university regarded as crucial. While there is also support for the notion that a successful FYE should have a whole-of-institution focus and models have been proposed, many institutions still face challenges in achieving institution-wide FYE program implementation. This paper discusses the origins, theoretical and empirical bases and structure of an institution-wide approach to the FYE. It uses a case study of the Transitions In Project (TIP) at the Queensland University of Technology to illustrate how institution-wide FYE program implementation can be achieved and sustained. TIP had four inter-related projects focussing on at risk students, first year curriculum, learning resources and staff development. The key aim of TIP was to identify good practice and institutionalise it in a sustainable way. The degree of success in achieving this is evaluated.

Themes: retention, FYE, engagement and transition

The paper specifically draws on the Indigenous Education Strategy in place at Charles Sturt University in NSW to address reconciliation and social justice. It also discusses a model of cultural competence and its application at Charles Sturt University – plus the role cultural competence can potentially play in social justice and reconciliation in the wider academic community. The authors acknowledge that the notion of Cultural Competence is highly contested, especially in relation to the work and thinking that has emerged around Indigenous knowledge systems and contested spaces.

Themes: Cultural Competence, Indigenous Knowledges


North pulls together the work of several social justice theorists – example, Young and Gerwirtz elaborating on Gewirtz’s earlier “mapping” of social justice theories by examining the tensions that emerge when various conceptualisations of social justice collide and, in turn, their implications for the field of education. By presenting a model of the complex, fraught interactions among diverse claims about social justice, the author seeks to promote continued dialogue and reflexivity on the purposes and possibilities of education for social justice.


The authors discuss the Australian Government’s social inclusion agenda and the implications on the national equity policy. They note that social inclusion is important for any university and is likely to be part of university compacts, along with teaching and research.

Themes: Widening participation debate in Australian HE and social inclusion


This introductory paper summarises the submissions in a special issue on social justice in education and is useful in that it neatly summarises the interpretations of several social justice theorists – Young, Rawls – as well as introducing the work of Sen (The Idea of Justice 2009).

The Rudd Government has outlined a goal that by 2025, 40 per cent of Australians aged 25 to 34 should hold a Bachelor’s level qualification and that, by 2020, around 20 per cent of undergraduate enrolments at Australian universities should be filled by students from low socio-economic-status (SES) backgrounds. The current level of low SES participation is 16.3 per cent, with substantial diversity in outcomes between institutional groupings and states and territories. This paper considers three policy options for raising national participation levels of students from low SES backgrounds: (i) uniform increases across all institutions to meet the 20 per cent national target; (ii) differential increases in indirect proportion to current levels of low SES participation by institutions; and (iii) differential increases proportional to the share of the low SES population located within each state and territory. The authors find that a national approach to achieving the 20 per cent target needs to consider both current enrolment patterns across institutional groupings as well as differences in the low SES population across the states and territories. Students’ SES is currently determined by their postcode. The authors argue that this is unsatisfactory and that better measures must be developed before targets can be set for individual institutions.

Themes: Widening participation debate in Australian HE and low SES definitions


Two processes were trialled at an Australian regional university to support first year student success in their studies. Upon enrolment, students ‘at risk’ of failing are identified through their responses to the Student Readiness Questionnaire. Interventions are provided immediately to support these students. In a second process, staff working with first year students supported them to engage more effectively in their studies. The findings suggest that early identification of students considered ‘at risk’ prior to starting their university studies allows the university to focus resources to support these students early. Also, strategies supporting students to engage more fully in their studies from the outset of their degree support higher rates of success.

Themes: Early intervention and student expectations


In recent decades institutions of higher education have changed considerably in most European countries. In order to meet the growing demand for higher education, national higher education systems have “diversified” through the creation of second-tier institutions, such as the Polytechnics in Britain or the Fachhochschulen in Germany. There is a large body of research concerned with the sources, development and internal dynamics of institutional differentiation in higher education. In many countries higher education institutions also vary in reputation and prestige and in some countries these differences have even been reinforced by educational policy during the last decades.

Besides this vertical differentiation of institutions, horizontal differentiation within institutions of higher education can be observed also, i.e. a growing diversification of programmes, courses and fields of study. Different types of programmes such as academic versus professional programmes were introduced or different levels such as Bachelor and Master have been implemented. Not least due to the harmonisation efforts by the so-called
‘Bologna process’, these forms of differentiation have been accelerated and have become increasingly relevant in European higher education systems.

A few insights can be highlighted: In most of the analyses it turns out that differentiation in higher education actually leads to an inclusion of less privileged students but at the same time higher tier institutions have remained socially selective (e.g. McCoy and Smyth, Boliver). The presented analyses also showed that when studying inequality in access, it is a worthwhile effort to go beyond rough dichotomies (first-tier versus second-tier) and consider a more fine-grained schema of tertiary institutions which also includes smaller university types such as the semi-tertiary intuitions in Germany that might attract different strata of the population (e.g. Schindler and Reimer). Besides analysing the impact of parental class and education on access to higher education as has been done in previous research, two analyses showed that differentiation interacts with other dimensions of students’ family and living situation such as working during one's study (Roksa) or the broader family structure (Jacob) to produce unequal outcomes across socioeconomic groups.

Themes: HE and diversification within the sector


This paper reports on an action research initiative that has developed a model of engaged outreach as an alternative approach to traditional university outreach. Engaged outreach uses the principles of higher education community engagement to develop stronger relationships between universities and their local communities for the purposes of increasing aspiration and access to higher education. The project was designed using a reflective, collaborative process with local Pacific Island immigrant communities living in an area of high social deprivation in southeast Queensland, Australia. Research progressed in three key stages, which together form the basis of the proposed model of engaged outreach. While it is acknowledged that the success of engaged outreach will depend on its implementation as a long-term strategy, preliminary results from this pilot project suggest that it demonstrates real potential to address this important but seemingly entrenched issue in Australian higher education.

Themes: Outreach programs and early intervention, engagement, expectations


Critical issues face Australia’s HE sector. These include an increasing concern for student access and equity to ensure that disadvantaged students are not left behind and are instead accorded an equal opportunity to participate in higher education; the requirement that quality not be sacrificed during expansion of Australian higher education, including establishment of the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA), as an initiative of the federal and state government education ministers; and greater government focus on accountability by universities despite the government operating grants for publicly funded students being whittled away by a massive 40 percent between 1975 and 2001 per student in real terms. This chapter considers the associated issues and thereby provides an Australian perspective to the reader. This article offers an Australian perspective on a number of issues facing the nation related to access, equity, quality, and accountability.

This paper considers the various meanings of 'social inclusion' from both sociological and policy viewpoints. It shows how the perspective has been translated into particular policies and approaches to governance. After drawing some lessons from the policy experiences of other countries, it weighs the appropriateness of a 'social inclusion agenda' for Australia, a country with a particular history of social exclusion – of prisoners, indigenous people, and immigrants from around the world – and a special emphasis on dignity, respect and equal treatment.


A familiar discourse about higher education and social change today relates to higher education's socio-economic role within knowledge societies in a globalising world. This paper addresses how issues of social justice feature in such discourses; whether social justice in higher education has been appropriated into a neo-liberal strategy for growing competitive economies; and whether it is possible to deploy an instrument of new public management for advancing the purposes of social justice in higher education. The paper reflects on some of the normative, policy and strategic ambiguities in the notion of social justice as currently invoked in higher education and social change discourses.


Recent concerns about 'fairness' in university entrance have highlighted the need to review existing practices in admissions processes. The agendas for equity and social inclusion, however, must also apply to the processes and outcomes of higher education, where considerations of 'standards' are additionally crucial. As principles underpinning the assessment process, 'equity' and 'justice' and 'academic standards' are part of taken-for-granted cultures and practices which impact on decisions about progression, eligibility for awards and degree classification for individual students. Changing discourses of academic standards have given rise to contrasting decision-making processes rooted in the role and operation of assessment boards. Contrasting models of assessment board cultures are developed to highlight how practices are beset by conceptual confusions about what is being assessed and the basis for judgements about success and failure in higher education. There is a strong case, not only for critical review of assessment processes, but also for monitoring outcomes for different social groups.

There is both a social justice case and a business case for ensuring capable students can enrol and complete their degrees, regardless of their background and income, argues the author. This article discusses government initiatives to make higher education more affordable. A joint project of Australian Technology Network (ATN) universities to improve outcomes for low socioeconomic students, is discussed.

**Themes:** Access, low SES engagement


According to Willems, the Australian federal government has identified broad groupings of under-represented students, but has failed to shed light on the complexities underlying the issues of the educationally disadvantaged, such as the compounding problems of multiple equity-group membership or the overlay of the acute or chronic effects of equity sub-group membership. The author approaches this discussion from a psychological perspective - detailing the Equity Raw-Score Matrix. The matrix is a multi-dimensional indicator of potential disadvantage in learners, created for the specific purposes of diagnosing the complexities of educational disadvantage and creating pre-emptive strategies for the participation, transition and retention of students who are disadvantaged. The paper also describes the qualitative research study that was the catalyst for the creation of the matrix.

**Themes:** Equity sub-groups and group overlap


Yorke and Thomas reiterate that success in higher education for students from lower socio-economic groups and from disadvantaged backgrounds is becoming an increasingly important policy goal in the UK and abroad. An analysis of the HEFCE performance indicators identified six English higher education institutions performing above their benchmarks with regard to widening participation and also student retention and completion, and prompted an investigation of what these institutions had been doing that might account for their success. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers responsible for retention and completion, which focused on institutional strategy. Analysis of the interviews suggested that success in retaining students from lower socio-economic groups required a strong policy commitment to access and retention, backed up by practical action. A number of actions were identified as possible contributors to such success – as follows:

Factors likely to have a positive impact on retention and students’ subsequent success include the following:

• an institutional climate supportive in various ways of students’ development, that is, perceived as ‘friendly’;
• an emphasis on support leading up to, and during, the critically important first year of study;
• an emphasis on formative assessment in the early phase of programmes;
• a recognition of the importance of the social dimension in learning activities; and
• recognition that the pattern of students’ engagement in higher education was changing, and a preparedness to respond positively to this in various ways.

Above all is a deep commitment running through the institution, which seeks to maximise the success of its students.

Themes: Student retention and engagement (case studies)

The authors look at the ways in which educational needs have changed and how we might now understand inclusive education. As well, the authors explore various issues that are currently pertinent to inclusive education, especially within the context of UNESCO’s Education For All and the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. They consider the international, historical and social contexts of inclusive education policies and practices from the 1980s onward. Their discussion uses a range of methods which include documentary analysis of policy and theoretical perspectives as well as examples from both the Northern and the Southern hemispheres. They argue that ideas like inclusion, inclusive education and poverty are multi-dimensional and cannot be considered as isolated events.

Key themes: Widening participation, social inclusion


Budge addresses significant questions that arise out of the recent Bradley Review and the Australian government’s attempt to widen participation in the HE sector: Are institutions prepared in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to support further diversification and expansion of the sector? How will universities support academic teaching staff to cope with further diversification and the ensuing increase in overall student numbers? The paper also argues that institutions are under-skilled and unprepared to deal with a further diversified student cohort. It explores what an even more diversified student cohort might look like and the knowledge, skills and attitudes academics will need to teach this newer, expanding group of students.


Butler and Young outline the University of Newcastle’s approach to indigenised curricula – as identified in a recent AUQA audit (2008). The paper discusses the issues around defining the exact nature of indigenisation and what including indigenous content entailed and methods in which the faculty would be supported in regards to their approach to the indigenisation of the curriculum. Good practice examples and modelling are drawn from QUT, USQ, JCU, Griffith, Curtin and SCU.

Theme/s: Indigenisation of the curriculum

Gale proposes an expanded conception for social inclusion and an enlarged regard for what is being accessed by students who gain entry to university. Drawing on Connell’s conception of ‘Southern Theory’, the author discusses the power/knowledge relations in higher education and particularly ‘southerners’: “those under-represented in universities – often located south of ENTER (Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank) cut-offs – and whose cultural capital is similarly marginalised and discounted”.


Gale charts the history of equity issues in HE since the mid 1880s and notes that while access to university was not necessary universal but it was to be equitable Gale reminds us that the sector continues to struggle with the inequities in its schooling and higher education systems, highlighted by renewed interest by governments to address the issues. Although not of the same order of magnitude, there now appears to be an emerging policy agenda around equity in VET. As well as discussing the history the paper draws out principles to inform a revived equity agenda in vocational education and training.


This paper reflects upon the inclusion of Indigenous content, both overtly and incidentally, in several Australian studies units offered by the School of Humanities and Human Services at QUT in 2005. With much of the impetus behind this action arising from a teaching and learning large grant project to ‘embed’ Indigenous perspectives in the Humanities and Human Services curricula, the teaching approaches required students to think about their own identity and their understandings of society. In particular, the content requirements and objectives of the Australian studies units under investigation encouraged students to explore, critically analyse and question their views on culture, society and ethnicity in relation to Indigenous perspectives. The content particularly confronted racism and intolerance in relation to Indigenous/non-Indigenous contact, with the lecturers’ approach to teaching Indigenous issues.

Themes: Indigenisation of the curriculum (case studies)

The authors discuss transition activities in the context of a diverse HE cohort and a specific program to embed the “curriculum mediated” practices across the institution (administrative and academic).


The first part of this paper explains the linkage among higher education, internationalisation, development and social justice. The paper argues that universities are institutions that, in all societies, have performed basic functions which result from the particular combination of cultural and ideological, social and economic, educational and scientific roles that have been assigned to them. They are multi-purpose or multi-product institutions, which contribute to the generation and transmission of ideology, the selection and formation of elites, the social development and educational upgrading of societies, the production and application of knowledge and the training of highly skilled labour forces. This range of functions and duties shapes the main tasks of higher education systems, albeit with different emphases depending on the national context, the historical period, the specific sector and indeed the institution concerned. What is clear is that nowadays, universities are highly involved in literally every kind of social and economic activity in our increasingly dynamic societies.

The second part of this paper discusses another closely related and important issue of concern in the development of education in the last quarter century; this refers to private higher education. Private education is not a new phenomenon in many countries, though modern private education is of recent origins. The paper argues different aspects in private higher education and discusses myth and realities about the privatisation of higher education. This paper suggests that initial government investment on a large scale is important in higher education; but only after some time, and a certain level of educational and economic development is achieved. The private sector can or may complement the state effort in higher education.

Themes: role of education, internationalisation and education


This keynote address explored racial inclusiveness and the key challenges faced by Indigenous students – particularly first year students – in Australia. The author details participation rates by Indigenous students and concerns around the under-participation of Indigenous students in higher education.

Themes: widening participation; indigenous students in higher education

The conference paper outlines a diversity training initiative in a residential college within the University of Newcastle. The students were mainly rural or international and the project involved workshops and reflective discussion around diversity. While the project was essentially aimed at opening dialogue amongst students and staff it also was able to develop a set of re-usable resources.

Themes: Case study, reflective discourse on FYE


Student expectations and their realisation are regarded as having a significant effect on the successful transition of students into and their engagement with university. Students from the Faculties of Law (internal and external modes of study) and Information Technology (internal only) provided their expectations (week 1: 918 students) and reported the realities (week 13: 680) in the areas of experiences, challenges and management of their learning during their first semester at the Queensland University of Technology. While their expectations were diverse and the match and mismatch of expectations and reality were complex, and while they expected and reported having an overall rewarding and positive experience, they indicated that their expectations about developing new learning skills were not fulfilled. Implications of this for curricula and the design and management of learning environments are discussed.

Themes: student expectations, FYE


Nicol’s keynote presentation provided a frame of reference for the theory and practice of assessment in higher education. The author presents 10 principles of good assessment and feedback practice based on research. It also provides the rationale for these principles and their selection criteria. The dynamics innate in the implementation of these principles are analysed in relation to two dimensions: the engagement-empowerment dimension and the academic-social dimension. For the purposes of this literature review on social justice principles and in finding justification for the development of principles Nicol argues that principles are an essential tool for teachers as they design, implement and evaluate their practices. Additionally, the framework is applied to the design of, and the problems identified with, the first year experience in higher education.

Themes: assessment principles, theory-practice, first year experience

Through an analysis of the educational systems of Europe, North America and Australia, the author concludes that social justice is essential to a good education. Connell's thinking is based on the experience of the classroom: if the school system deals unjustly with some of its pupils, the quality of education for all is sullied. Connell calls for "curricular justice" which he views as rooted in a democratic framework, capable of opening the perspectives of the least advantaged, and thereby moving toward the creation of a more equalitarian society.

*Theme/s: Social justice and education*


The book details seven social science research projects within the context of HE in the UK and internationally around widening participation (funded by the HEFCE). David highlights as a principle concern the issue of widening participation to a diversity of individuals comprising the economically, educationally and socially disadvantaged. Key themes around access, equity and diversity are explored – related directly to recent expansions in the HE sector.

*Theme/s: Widening participation*


Chapter 1 deals directly with HE and social justice from a UK perspective
Chapter 2 deals with unequal access – again from the UK perspective

*Themes: social justice (related to UK experience)*


Just Schooling examines the cultural politics of teaching and is targeted at teachers asking them to rethink what they know about social justice and to rework how they engage in the practices of teaching (what they say and do), particularly in relation to how these influence the lives of students. Gale and Densmore explore social justice from an educational perspective and classify explanations of social justice as *distributive, retributive and recognitive*. The authors also argue for a democratisation of classroom relations, beginning with students' and teachers' personal lives and connecting these with wider contexts, as a way of addressing the advantages and disadvantages traditionally reproduced by schooling.

*Themes: Social justice and education*

Kuokkanen discusses what he terms the “sanctioned ingnorance” that he believes prevails in the higher education sector which fails to recognise indigenous epistemes other than western or mainstream. The following passage summarises this interpretation:

The university remains a contested site where not only knowledge but also middle class, Eurocentric, patriarchal, and (neo)colonial values are produced and reproduced. As Althusser and others have shown, the academy is one of the main sites for reproducing hegemony. Not surprisingly, then, the studied silence and wilful indifference surrounding the “indigenous” continues unabated in most academic circles. In the same way that indigenous peoples (and their epistemes) remained invisible when the nation-states were being shaped, indigenous scholarship remains invisible and unreflected in most academic discourses, including that of some of the most progressive intellectuals.

The author calls on “mainstreaming indigenous philosophies and worldviews.
(This book was viewed as an eBook via QUT Library)


Miller provides an overview of the empirical research and popular conceptions of justice – focusing on the scope social justice (drawing on the work of Rawls). Social justice = distributive justice – the main constituents of distributive justice are three principles (although some of the literature calls these ‘elements’): desert, need, and of equality. Need is a claim that one is lacking is basic necessities and is being harmed or is in danger of being harmed. Desert is a claim that one has earned reward based on performance. Equality refers to the social ideal that society regards and treats its citizens as equals, and that benefits such as certain rights should be distributed equally. Miller heads towards creating a culture of social justice when both institutions and individuals comply with principles/elements etc of social justice.

Themes: Conceptual analysis of social justice


Rawls is leading figure in moral and political fairness – wrote ‘A Theory of Justice’ which takes as its takes as its starting point the argument that ”most reasonable principles of justice are those everyone would accept and agree to from a fair position”

In A Theory of Justice, Rawls attempts to reconcile freedom and equality in a principled way, offering an account of “justice as fairness”. Central to this effort is his approach to the seemingly intractable problem of distributive justice. Rawls’s theories seek to establish a just social structure and that institutional arrangements must be in place to support these

Rawls offers up two principles of justice:
- Liberty Principle
- Equality Principle
Social and economic inequalities should be arranged so that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged (the Difference Principle) and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (fair equality)

(i.e. The Equality Principle is further subdivided into fair equality of opportunity and the Difference Principle)

Themes: Theoretical examination of justice, social justice


Amartya Sen offers a critique of the theory of social justice and defends one of Rawls' most fundamental theoretical concepts: justice as fairness. The transcendental theory of justice, the subject of Sen's analysis, prospered in the Enlightenment. Sen's approach favours the comparative judgments of what is "more" or "less" just, and on the comparative merits of the different societies that actually emerge from certain institutions and social interactions.

At the core of Sen's argument is a respect for reasoned differences in our understanding of what a “just society” really is. People of different persuasions might each reasonably see a clear and straightforward resolution to questions of justice; and yet, these clear and straightforward resolutions would be completely different. In light of this, Sen argues for a comparative perspective on justice that can guide us in the choice between alternatives that we inevitably face.

(This book was viewed as an eBook via QUT Library)


Sturman examines the issue of social justice in education – specifically in the Australian context and school education – however, this discussion is relevant to post-secondary. Sturman discusses the importance of social justice issues and the difference in the interpretation of views aligned essentially with the nature-nurture debate. The author comes from the view point that social justice is linked not only to the individual life chances but to the experiences of different societal groups. The author also noted that theorising over justice has been mirrored by recent debates around equity and equality.

Themes: Social justice in education


Second edition of a book and originally published in 1993, which deals with the concept of social justice. Outlines and analyses the historical development of the concept of social justice; applies the concept of social justice to the Australian situation with particular reference to the achievements, the policies and practices of the Federal Labor Government in the last decade; suggests ways in which action by government and individuals can be directed towards a more just social structure. This text provided some clarity around the concept of social justice as a starting point when determining definition and scope.

Tinto updates the current literature (US specifically) around student retention and persistence in the higher education sector, discussing the current nature in institutional culture that promotes retention and concludes with some identification of areas that still require additional research. Tinto points to four conditions – noted in the literature - for retention: expectations (around success and effort); support (academic, financial, social, self-efficacy); feedback (assessment) and involvement (sense of belonging). In conclusion Tinto focuses on key areas in the research that require further discussion around retention – specifically in the teaching context: the impact of pedagogy, assessment, faculty development, learning communities and part-time faculty.

Themes: Student retention and persistence


The book is arranged in two broad parts – the first part details specific HE systems internationally (South Africa, UK, Australia) and the rest of the book focuses on how institutions can increase the chances of student success. Principally, the authors recognise the social justice components in HE policy making and point to the growth in the use of quality assurance and performance indicators. Significantly, the authors conclude by pinpointing what institutions, professional and academic staff can do to address student retention.

Themes: Student retention and engagement


Young discusses justice but steers away from the focus on distributive justice. Rather, the author endeavours to develop a theory of justice independent of social context claiming a philosophical starting point in social domination and oppression and deriving a critical theory method to substantiate her theory. The book critically analyses the basic concepts underlying theories of justice.

This report explores the indigenous data on engagement pulled from the 2009 AUSSE Report. The 2009 AUSSE found that, in comparison to their non-Indigenous peers; Indigenous students are just as satisfied with their overall university experience; are engaged with learning at similar levels; and report higher general learning outcomes (especially in work-related skills). However, there are concerns about course completion and the authors recommend the inclusion of further questions in the AUSSE survey to address some unknowns in the data.


This report details the Australian government’s vision of a socially inclusive society where “all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society”. The report suggests that in achieving Australian will:

- Learn by participating in education and training
- Work by participating in employment, in voluntary work and in family and caring
- Engage by connecting with people and using their local community’s resources and
- Have a voice so that they can influence decisions that affect them.

Theme/s: Social inclusion


The aim of this paper is to apply some of the insights of the human capital model to better understand the education outcomes of Indigenous Australians. Regional and individual data from the census is interpreted alongside a selection of key articles and reports in order to help understand why it is that so few Indigenous people are undertaking formal education in Australia today.

Key theme/s: indigenous participation in education


This report is a milestone in Australia’s higher education timeline – the review of Australian HE addressed the under-representation of particular groups and found that increased participation in higher education had not resulted in increased social equity. This report identified three under-represented groups in higher education: students from low SES backgrounds, students from regional and remote areas and Indigenous students – and called for widening participation in the sector.

An early discussion paper by the then Higher Education Council and the Department of Employment, Education and Training on the development and implementation of a national plan for equity in higher education.

Themes: Equity agenda


A discussion paper that outlines a plan to redefine how low SES students are determined in the collection of demographic information in the higher education sector.


This is a response to the findings of the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education. The Australian Government commits funding to address the Review


This report focuses on the under-representation of students from regional and remote areas participating in higher education in Australia. Of the Australian population aged 15-64 years, 27.9 per cent live in regional or remote areas, whereas only 19.2 per cent of the higher education student population indicate that they are from regional or remote backgrounds. Regional and remote access and participation rates, as measured by administrative data, have deteriorated over the last five years. The second section of this report provides the recent policy context as background. Individual and broader level influences on regional participation form the focus of the literature review in the third section. The methodology underlying the present study is outlined in the fourth section. Discussion and analysis of results is presented in the fifth section before moving to conclusions in the final section.


A report commissioned by DEEWR and undertaken by the National Centre for Equity in Higher Education examined early interventions by universities in schools. Seven institutional outreach activities were examined in order to identify what constitutes an effective program. Tactical interventions that proved effective in cultivating higher participation contained the following characteristics:
- Collaboration
- Early, long-term and sustained
- People-rich
- Cohort-based
- Communication and information
- Familiarisation/site experience
- Recognition of difference
- Enhanced academic curriculum
- Financial supports and/or incentives

Themes: Case studies, critical discourse


The Guide includes an interactive online publication and videos developed by Sandra Griffiths, a visiting Senior Research Fellow (HEA), who has been working on this project in her university. The guide is aimed at staff interested in improving their teaching and improving student retention and inclusion. The guide defines and details the importance of inclusive teaching and offers suggestions, activities and reflections on teaching for inclusion.

Themes: Inclusive teaching research/resource


As the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Strategy and Services at the University of Sydney, Indigenous academic Shane Houston’s submission to the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People called for a move away from the ‘enclave’ model of Indigenous support in higher education. Houston noted that traditionally institutions locate all Indigenous matters related to education and support into one portfolio or unit and added “as a large, complex and diverse institution, it needs to break down its silos, not perpetuate them” (Houston, 2011).

Themes: Indigenous knowledges, access to higher education


Internationally, equity is usually considered to be one of the three fundamental measures of the effectiveness of a higher education system, alongside quality and efficiency. Equity is therefore one of the enduring issues for higher education policy-makers, to be ignored at their peril. The importance attached to equity in higher education is unsurprising. It touches our beliefs about justice and our hopes for a fairer society, for social change and for national development. The main focus of the paper is on the challenge of widening access for people from low socio-economic status backgrounds.
Themes: Equity, justice, low SES inclusion and engagement


This report reviews available literature and data relating to the participation and success of people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and Indigenous people in Australian higher education, including information on school achievement and retention where this is relevant to access to higher education. The analysis does not include international students. The report also contains a broad-brush summary of the equity activities and initiatives of Australian universities and a summary of equity policies, programs and trends in selected nations, in particular United Kingdom, USA and Canada.

The purpose of the report is to shed light on the factors associated with the persistent underrepresentation of low SES people and Indigenous people in Australian universities with a view to informing policies and strategies and providing a framework for further analysis of equity for people from low SES backgrounds. The report includes a summary of barriers and inhibiting factors as well as suggestions for possible ways of defining and measuring socioeconomic status for higher education purposes. Recommendations for future work are also proposed.

Themes: Widening participation, low SES, indigenous


This national level survey provides valuable insights through more than 15 years of survey data into the academic and social experiences of first year university students. The current study also provides valuable benchmark information on transition, teaching support and curriculum responses in the first year of study as the sector enters a period of significant reform.


This report was put together for the ‘Social Justice Research Collective’, a research body at the School of Education at Flinders University. McInerney concludes that while many books and articles address the issue of social justice and schooling, it is virtually impossible to map the field. The author divides the references into six sections: firstly, those which are concerned with the broad philosophical and political orientations to social justice; secondly, those which look more specifically at social justice within an educational context; thirdly, which those which focus on policy frameworks and discourses; fourthly, those which address particular forms of social injustice, oppression and educational disadvantage associated with class, ethnicity, gender etc; fifthly; those which offer resources, ideas and strategies for transforming unjust practices at the system, school and classroom level; and, sixthly, writings of particular relevance to teacher education programs.
A detailed list of references accompanies this overview.

Themes: Social justice perspectives in education – overview of literature


This report provides an analysis of trends in the perceptions and behaviours of first year undergraduate students in seven Australian universities. The report examines two surveys conducted in 1994 and 1999 by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of Melbourne. Additional survey questions in the later survey are related to student expectations and use of learning technologies - providing some new benchmarks for future monitoring. Expansion in student numbers, innovations in teaching and learning, and intense market competition between universities have changed the HE landscape. In particular, the context for undergraduate students commencing university has been changed with increased choice and flexibility in course design and modes of delivery, and the introduction of a range of institutional strategies to improve transition from school to university.

Themes: First year experience in higher education


This report assesses the progress of the higher education system towards meeting the original equity objectives set in the White Paper of 1988 and further enunciated in A Fair Chance for All: Higher Education That’s Within Everyone’s Reach (Commonwealth of Australia 1990), and provides advice to the Government on an appropriate framework for equity in the sector over the following five years.

Themes: Equity agenda in Australian HE sector


This Policy Brief looks at how to improve equity in education in three key policy domains: the design of education systems, practices both in and out of school, and resourcing. It proposes ten steps which would help reduce school failure and dropout rates, make society fairer and help avoid the large social costs of marginalised adults with few basic skills.

Themes: Strategies for equity design in education

As part of a suite of resources around student engagement provided by the HEA – Vicki Trowler has constructed a literature review about student engagement in the higher education sector. The review is essentially UK-centric (although recognises the significant literature internationally) and examines key focal areas like engagement ‘with what’, ‘for what’ and ‘with whom’ covering equality and social justice issues (9.3, pg 23). Significantly, the review also outlines the effects of engagement, critical success factors and strategies.

Themes: Student engagement, social justice perspectives


The Indigenous Cultural Competency (ICC) in Australian Universities Project was completed by Universities Australia and the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC), with funding support from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Indigenous cultural competency refers to the ability to understand and value Indigenous perspectives. It provides the basis upon which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians may engage positively in a spirit of mutual respect and reconciliation.

The objective of the project was to provide Australian universities with the tools to embed cultural competency at the institutional level so that they are encouraging and supportive environments for Indigenous students and staff and produce well-rounded graduates with the skills necessary for providing genuinely competent services to the Australian Indigenous community.

The Project ran from July 2009 to October 2011. It involved a number of pilots of Indigenous cultural competency activities in Australian universities as well as the creation of a National Best Practice Framework for implementing Indigenous cultural competency across the university sector.

The National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities has been created drawing upon lessons learned from international and domestic experience, including the results of the four ICC Project pilots. The Framework is formed around five key Guiding Principles:

- Indigenous people should be actively involved in university governance and management
- All graduates of Australian universities will have the knowledge and skills necessary to interact in a culturally competent way with Indigenous communities.
- University research will be conducted in a culturally competent way in partnership with Indigenous participants
- Indigenous staffing will be increased at all appointment levels and, for academic staff, across a wider variety of academic fields
- Universities will operate in partnership with their Indigenous communities and will help disseminate culturally competent practices to the wider community

The purpose of this report is to describe the extent of educational marginalisation in the UK and to consider the effectiveness of UK policy with regards to reducing this marginalisation. During recent decades the UK Government has introduced a wide range of policies aimed at both increasing educational quality and participation generally, and narrowing socio-economic, gender and ethnic gaps in education achievement. While not specific to Australian HE the report offers similarity in regards to the widening participation issue.

*Themes: Widening participation (UK perspective)*

The then Australian Minister for Education, Julia Gillard (under the then Rudd Government) announces the guidelines for the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) in order to increase enrolments of students from a low socio-economic status (SES) background. HEPPP funding also supports the Government’s target of achieving 40 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds with bachelor-level qualifications or above by 2025.


The then Australian Minister for Education, Brendon Nelson announces a comprehensive ten year plan to will create a more “diverse, equitable and high quality higher education sector for Australia’s future”.


Andrew Norton, from the Centre for Independent Research, explores the Gillard government’s approach to defining low SES students in line with the higher education policy on widening participation and increasing the number of students enrolling in this category. Norton warns that the current target creates an “unfair equity policy” by defining low SES in regards to among other things, postcode, rather than factors such as parental education or occupation.

Themes: Widening participation debate in Australian HE and low SES definitions