

Preface

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

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

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

Chapter Overviews

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reference

Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET). (1990). *A fair chance for all: National and institutional planning for equity in higher education*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Student Equity in Australian Higher Education

Twenty-five years of A Fair Chance for All

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