

Australia

National Higher Education Equity Policy

Governance

The Department of Education and Training (<https://www.education.gov.au/>) is the Australian government agency responsible for defining and implementing national policies in higher education.

Higher Education Policy Documents

The Higher Education Support Act 2003 (updated 30 June 2013) is the most recent official document defining the country's national higher education priorities.

Transforming Australia's Higher Education System (2009) sets out the national higher education strategy and is the government's response to the 2008 *Review of Australian Higher Education* (the Bradley Review). The Bradley Review proposed funding strategies to address the continued challenges to provide equitable higher education.

Equity in the Policy Documents

What broad and specific equity objectives do the policy documents identify?

- The Higher Education Support Act asserts the need for higher education “characterized by quality, diversity and equity of access.”

Which equity target groups are identified in the policy documents?

- Low-income students
- Gender groups
- Minority groups: indigenous population, people living in remote regions, holders of humanitarian visas
- Students with disability

Does the country have concrete targets for the participation of specific equity groups?

The 2012 *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt Review) introduced targets related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and outcomes. The national parity target for this population was initially set at 2.2% (based on data from the 2006 Census) and recommended for reassessment.

Is there a standalone policy document dedicated to equity promotion in higher education?

Dawkins and, later, Gillard reforms further solidified the commitment to equity in higher education. The Dawkins reforms are outlined in *A Fair Chance for All: national and institutional planning for equity in higher education* (1990).

Australia has a number of specific anti-discrimination provisions embedded in the following pieces of legislation:

- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Disability Standards for Education 2005
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986
- Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012
- Age Discrimination Act 2004

The Government of Australia uses a series of financial and non-monetary instruments to promote equity.

Financial Policy Instruments

All public universities charge significant tuition fees. To protect needy students, the Government of Australia relies principally on two instruments: needs-based scholarships and grants, and a universal income-contingent loan scheme, called HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme (<https://www.education.gov.au/government-loans-students>)).

- Needs-based scholarships and grants / Other grants targeted for equity groups
 - Example: Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships
- Student loans: Australia was a pioneer in establishing the first large-scale income-contingent student loan system (HECS).
(<https://www.education.gov.au/government-loans-students>)
(<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-support-act-2003-and-guidelines>)

In addition, Australia has built equity-related financial incentives into the funding formula to allocate public resources to higher education institutions:

- The “Indigenous Student Success Program” provides support to universities so that they can in turn support the access and attainment of higher education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons. (January 2017) <https://www.pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/indigenous-student-success-program>
- Incentives for supporting the access of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds: The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) provides funding to institutions to back policies and activities that contribute to the greater participation and retention of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. HEPPP grants are available to higher education institutions through the Higher Education Support Act

(2013) (<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-participation-and-partnerships-programme-hepps>) .

- The Disability Support Program allocates funding to higher education institutions that are determined to be eligible to support them in their activities that promote access of students with disabilities. Grants are available to higher education institutions through the Higher Education Support Act (2013) (<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-disability-support-programme>).

Non-Monetary Policy Instruments

The Government of Australia supports several non-monetary programs to promote equity:

- Outreach and bridge programs: HEPPS funding contributes to outreach efforts for various equity target groups.
- Academic and career guidance and counseling:
 - Indigenous Higher Education Units <https://www.pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/indigenous-higher-education-units>
- Retention programs
- Regional Study Hubs (for students studying long distance from partner universities) This is a new program, where stakeholders can apply for funding to support students who stay local, while able to study remotely, delivered by other Australian universities. “Regional Study Hubs (RSHs) will provide infrastructure such as study spaces, video conferencing, computing facilities and internet access, as well as pastoral and academic support for students studying via distance at partner universities.” (<https://www.education.gov.au/access-and-participation>)

Financial Resources

What financial resources does the country devote to equity promotion measures?

- Amount / amount per beneficiary
- Proportion of higher education budget

Quality Assurance

The Higher Education Standards Framework of 2015 (Threshold Standards) take equity elements into consideration at two levels. in teaching and learning, and in monitoring the recruitment, participation and admission of certain sub-groups.

1. “Institutional policies, practices and approaches to teaching and learning are designed to accommodate student diversity, including the under-representation and/or disadvantage experienced by identified groups, and create equivalent opportunities for academic success regardless of students’ backgrounds.

2. Specific consideration is given to the recruitment, admission, participation and completion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
3. Participation, progress, and completion by identified student subgroups are monitored and the findings are used to inform admission policies and improvement of teaching, learning and support strategies for those subgroups.” (Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015)

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Who is responsible for monitoring the impact of equity promotion measures?

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is responsible for monitoring institutions in consideration of accreditation and registration (or registration). TEQSA will ask applicants and current providers to provide evidence for how they meet standards set out in the Threshold Standards (Guidance Note).

- What instruments, methods and data are in place to carry out the monitoring and evaluation

The Department of Education and Training’s Research and Economic Group is responsible for the collection of data pertaining to higher education, including the disaggregated student body data.

Dedicated Equity Promotion Agency

The Australian government funds a center dedicated to equity promotion in higher education, the National Center for Student Equity in Higher Education, which was established in 2013 at Curtin University (<http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/>). Its main responsibilities are as follows:

- Connecting research, policy and practice to improve higher education participation and success for marginalized and disadvantaged people;
- Producing, analyzing and disseminating research and recommendations to stakeholders — from policymakers and practitioners, to students and the general public.
- In March 2018, the Government created the Equity Research and Innovation Panel. “The Panel will provide strategic advice to the department on Australian Government-funded research and trials on student equity in higher education conducted under the National Priorities Pool component of the [Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)] (<https://www.education.gov.au/news/equity-research-and-innovation-panel>)
- What are the resources of this agency?
- Proportion of higher education budget?

Sources

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