

How is COVID-19 affecting equitable access to HE in the Australian Context?

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Equitable access to HE pre COVID-19

- 12 years since the release of the Bradley Review and introduction of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP);
- Significant changes in the Australian higher education system over this period, but an ongoing commitment to equitable access by both sides of government (albeit short-term funding cycles);
- Between 2013 and 2018 the number of equity students enrolled in HE has increased, there has been divergent growth in regards to the enrolment proportion.

Equity Group	% increase in equity enrolment proportions from 2013-2018
Students from LSES backgrounds	1.2% >
Students with a disability	1.8% >
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	0.4% >
Women in non-traditional areas	0% -
Regional, rural and remote students	0.95 <
Non-English speaking backgrounds	0% -

COVID-19 timeline in the Australian Education context

- **25th January, 2020:** The first known case of COVID-19 in Australia.
- **10th March, 2020 – 22nd March, 2020:** Australian states and territories were incrementally making state and territory based decisions about access to primary and high schools (i.e. extension of school holiday periods; access for children of essential workers; shift to remote learning).
- **Late March, 2020:** University students had undertaken 3-4 weeks of face to face learning, with universities shifting students into a remote learning environment.
- **Early May, 2020:** Primary and high schools begun staggering their return to face to face learning, with the majority of schools returning to full operations.
- **Current situation:** State and territory based decisions / school based decisions dependent on outbreaks. Majority of universities delivering remotely until the end of the year (with course / university exceptions).



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Equitable access to higher education during COVID- 19

Challenges for primary and high school aged students:

- Limited access to devices and reliable internet in a remote learning environment (compounded by the national bushfire crisis);
- Parents and carers having to juggle multiple commitments in relation to work and remote learning;
- Additional pressures on families who have experienced job loss, with additional pressure on students to contribute to the income of the family;
- Disengagement from learning by students and uncertainty over their post school futures.



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Responses by the Australian Higher Education sector:

- Universities have shifted their widening participation activities to a remote delivery environment;
- Supporting schools to enable access to technology;
- Increased early admissions activity from Australian universities, with many focusing on Year 11 results, interviews etc.;
- Natural disasters and impact of the pandemic will be included in educational access schemes to universities for 2021.



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Equitable participation in higher education during COVID-19

Challenges for university students:

- Experiencing financial hardship at unprecedented levels;
- Unemployment rates increasing;
- Ability to find and secure affordable housing;
- Access to technology, including devices and reliable internet;
- Disengagement in remote learning, with increased attrition experienced by domestic student cohorts.

Equitable participation in higher education during COVID-19

Responses by higher education institutions:

- Introduction of large scale financial grant schemes aimed to address the impact of COVID-19;
- Increased access to technology to facilitate remote learning;
- Upskilling academic staff in delivering content and supporting students in a remote delivery;
- Financial impacts are changing the fabric of institutional structures and staffing conditions.

Responses by Federal Government:

- Introduction of a higher education reform package for 2021.

Questions?



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