

DASSH Response to ACIL Allen's Evaluation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) evaluation. It should be noted that DASSH represents the Deans of Faculties that teach and conduct research in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities across Australasia and therefore reflect a large and diverse range of higher education (HE) providers. While Australian universities differ greatly in the use of HEPP funding, it is the case the ASSH disciplines very frequently provide the core preparation and pathway support for students in literacy, critical thinking and an introduction into university education for a large number of students supported through HEPPP funding.

HEPPP funding has provided Universities with additional resources to support low SES students and those representing a wide range of equity groups, with additional support for their transition to university.

As reported in the [Universities Australia \(UA\) submission](#), the Department of Education and Training (DET) data shows that between 2008-2014 domestic student growth was 32.7% with growth in Low SES (45.79%), Indigenous (60.49%) and Students with Disability (78.59%) exceeding the overall domestic student growth.

In some cases, given the proportion of students from these groups who study part time or take time off from study, it may be too soon to assess whether HEPPP funded initiatives have been successful in improving retention and completion rates.

It should be noted that where HEPPP support has brought entirely new cohorts of students to study at university, there will likely be a long delay effect. For example, in the case of HEPPP funded projects to improve Indigenous participation in HE, research on school completion suggests that there will need to be demonstrated success by a number of Indigenous students in a particular community, before the number of students seeking HE from that community are likely to increase. HEPPP funding and a commitment to widening HE participation raises community (not just individual) educational aspirations.

Activities supported by HEPPP vary across the sector including: access to counselling and support, pathway programs, learning support, mentoring and scholarships.

DASSH shares the UA position that there is no quick fix for improving low SES participation in HE and a sustained and sensible commitment to supporting students, which each university is able to adapt to the needs of students at each particular institution is to be preferred over funding scholarships alone. While it is clear that the cessation of access to Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme funds has left a gap in support available for students to study, scholarships are therefore one of the ways that HEPPP funding could be used to support Low-SES participation in higher education. However, each university should make an assessment of the mix of scholarships, programs, outreach and activities that would best achieve the access needs of their student cohort.

Successful programs supporting student pathways to participation and support for student success do become incorporated into standard university approaches to enhancing the student experience, especially where they are demonstrated to improve learning outcomes and completion. However, the needs of a diverse student body also change over time and so the need to invest in new targeted support programs continues.

DASSH recognises the value to the whole community of improved HE participation across all strata of the community. Australia should seek to have its HE population reflect the diversity of its community given the evidence of the value of an educated citizenry to social cohesion, wellbeing and reduction of inequality. HEPPP resources should be directed to assist Australia to achieve population parity in the participation across all equity groups.

The value of embracing a diverse workforce including corporate leadership has been recognised internationally as having direct benefit on profit and loss in a global economy.¹ While the economic benefits of HEPPP activity will take some time before they can be measured, the positive impact on communities achieved through HEPPP, often through consortia of universities, including outreach, adaptation of programs to attract particular cohorts of students and tailored on-campus student support has been significant, especially in communities that have experienced industrial downturns.

Development of successful HEPPP programs takes time and commitment by each university, for this reason HEPPP resources should be reasonably predictable for universities so that they can develop and deliver quality programs and activities. While universities should be held accountable for their use of HEPPP funding, heavy handed government approaches could be counter-productive if they threaten the relationships of trust built between governments and students.

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About DASSH

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) is the authoritative agency on research, teaching and learning for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) in Australian and New Zealand universities.

DASSH supports those within these institutions who have responsibility for the governance and management of research and teaching and learning in their universities. DASSH also supports those who aspire to these positions through a Network of Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) and a Network of Associate Deans (Research).

¹ Forbes Insights, *Global Diversity and Inclusion: Fostering Innovation Through a Diverse Workforce*, July 2011, http://www.forbes.com/forbesinsights/innovation_diversity/index.html; Llopis, G. (2016), "Is Diversity Good For Business, *Forbes Magazine*, 23 April 2016. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2016/04/23/is-diversity-good-for-business/#1a2c0c8912e8> [Accessed 09/09/2016]