

Australian Catholic University

*Submission to the Higher Education Participation
and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) Evaluation*

September 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australian Catholic University (ACU) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP).

ACU supports the continuation of the HEPPP program. HEPPP funding has greatly assisted students from low socioeconomic (low SES) backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from rural and remote areas and broader equity groups such as students with disability to access and attain a university education.

Programs facilitated by the HEPPP have served to create awareness, raise aspirations and assisted prospective students to explore pathways to university. Much has been achieved through partnerships and building internal and external relationships to improve access, participation and attainment of disadvantaged groups. This work needs to continue.

The realisation of HEPPP objectives is a long-term commitment, and it is imperative that funding is not retracted before its benefits and impact are allowed to be seen through to full development and delivery.

With the support of HEPPP funding, ACU has conducted a broad range of outreach activities in schools and communities. With over 250 school and community partnerships established, ACU has worked with its partners in a complementary capacity.

Early outreach programs (Years 4-10) have concentrated on STEM related activities and aspiration building. Access programs (Years 11-12) concentrate on improving students' academic skills and offering students transition and pathways to university through academic workshops, University Step Up and Principal's Recommendation Program opportunities. Participation programs have been developed and implemented by faculties and professional units of ACU to assist these students with access to university, transitioning successfully to university and attaining success. HEPPP funds have also supported equity bursaries at ACU.

HEPPP funding has reached a broader range of students than would be possible under a scholarship scheme alone. Although much has been achieved in recent years to improve participation and attainment for disadvantaged groups, more can be done. In addition to ongoing and adequate support through the HEPPP program, ACU would welcome measures such as scholarships to assist in further improving outcomes.

A September 2016 statement by the Minister for Education and Training points to significant increases in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education in recent years as well as students from low SES areas and regional and remote Australia. HEPPP initiatives have made a substantial contribution in this regard.

Continuation by the Commonwealth of the HEPPP program would cement improvements made in access to university by targeted groups to date, ensure the partnership work commenced from primary school onwards comes to fruition, and that students at university are appropriately supported to successfully complete their studies.

CONTEXT

- The HEPPP aims to ensure that Australians from low socioeconomic background and other disadvantaged backgrounds who have the ability to study at university are afforded the opportunity to do so.¹
- HEPPP funding supports important initiatives and programs that raise awareness, aspiration and educational attainment amongst disadvantaged groups with respect to university education. It plays a significant role in supporting national objectives of widening access to and participation in higher education, which are vital to national development and meeting the skills needs of the Australian economy into the future.
- ACU's domestic low SES background student enrolments have grown from around 1,800 in 2009 to over 3,550 in 2015 (97%) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments have grown from 343 in 2009 to 444 in 2015 (29%).²
- The demand driven system has opened up participation in university and improved access to higher education for a greater number of individuals. However, while it has resulted in a significant increase in participation by students from low SES backgrounds, there remains a persistent underrepresentation of equity groups in higher education. Continued support is needed.
- With HEPPP funding support, ACU partners with over 250 primary and secondary schools, VET providers and community organisations to raise awareness and aspirations of their students regarding higher education, and to support students to access higher education. ACU has partnered with other universities to deliver some of these programs, such as the Bridges to Higher Education program.³
- There is significant work being undertaken at ACU through HEPPP funding, to support students and help them to succeed at university through teaching and learning, such as:
 - ACU Smart - a pre-orientation transition program designed for first year low SES background and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
 - PASS Peer Assisted Student Support Program - a HEPPP supported pilot program which led to its embedding in ACU.
 - ACU Taskforce on Student Achievement and Retention Strategy (TSAR) support.
 - Online diagnostics and self-help programs.
 - Learning analytics used to drive curriculum renewal to address barriers to student learning.
 - Transition pedagogies developed and implemented and work integrated learning being embedded in all courses.
 - Professional development of ACU academic staff to address low SES, pathway, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners in the classroom.

¹ Department of Education and Training - Australian Government, 'Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)', at <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-participation-and-partnerships-programme-hePPP>

² ACU's low SES background students at September 2016 are estimated at 3731 (107% increase since 2009); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are estimated at 500 (46% increase).

³ See the Bridges to Higher Education website at <http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au/>

RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is the HEPPP improving access to undergraduate courses for people from low SES backgrounds and improving their retention and completion rates? What HEPPP activities have been most effective in achieving these objectives?

HEPPP funding is vital for ACU to offer a suite of initiatives to support students from low SES backgrounds, regional and remote areas, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to access and succeed at university. Initiatives to improve retention and completion amongst students from disadvantaged groups are incorporated into ACU's Attainment programs which focus on supporting students during their studies at ACU.

Programs and activities supported by HEPPP funding which have been effective include:

- **ACUgate** offers programs to promote and support access to university and is delivered in partnership with schools, VET providers and community groups.
- **ACU Smart** helps to prepare new students from low SES backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for university studies by easing the transition from school to university. A two to three day course is conducted the week before Orientation in a supportive, interactive and friendly environment. The program builds students' confidence and provides an opportunity for students to meet teaching and support staff as well as current students. In 2015, a total of 436 students participated, with 92-100% students reporting more confidence starting university.
- **ACU's Office of Student Success** provides student counselling, disability services, careers development and academic skills advice. The office delivers a range of initiatives including HEPPP support for academic literacy and English language and resources to support student achievement and retention. HEPPP has also enabled Saturday academic skills sessions in the campus libraries. In 2015, 5774 students attended Orientation workshops organised by the office and 4785 students attended 30 minute booked appointments for personalised support. Support has also been provided to students with a disability to help make their studies more accessible. The **Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC)** also works closely with ACU Faculties on ongoing development of curriculum and teaching methodology to cater to the changing needs of students. Collaboration with Faculties, ACUcom, Libraries, and the Office of the Academic Registrar, has already been integral to attainment programs so that resources and systems can properly and effectively accommodate the needs of students from under-represented groups.
- **Student2student** is a peer support program where current ACU students support delivery of HEPPP programs such as in Meet the Professor (aspiration raising) and ACU Smart (attainment), for example by speaking with students about life as a university student and study options, and being available to help them through their early days at university. Student2students are trained and supported by Equity Pathways staff. 150 ACU students participated in 2015 on 758 occasions in ACUgate and Attainment programs. Participating students reported commitment to and enjoyment of the program, it developed a community of practice within the student body, increased ACU student awareness of low SES issues and developed valuable skills for the student peers.
- **Phone assistance to new students** – ACU's Student Administration Directorate was supported by HEPPP to conduct a phone call follow up for low SES background,

regional, remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students newly enrolled at ACU to guide them on enrolment processes and to provide advice on support and transition programs available to them at ACU. The feedback received from students was that they were impressed by the care and personal contact received from ACU, and that they were more comfortable with their university arrival.

- **Equity Access and Attainment in Law:** for LSES students constituting 15% of first year Law students in 2015 on both Melbourne and North Sydney campuses. Mentoring included academic skills help, time management, placements in low SES communities, particular emphasis for the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and encouraging students back to community in an ambassadorial role.
 - **ACUcom** provides students wishing to enrol at ACU who do not have sufficient prerequisites to commence a degree course with pathways options that include Diploma courses. HEPPP has provided support towards a number of students from partner schools who were unsuccessful in gaining entry to a degree course through the Principal's Recommendation Program accessing a pathway option. ACUcom continues to develop broader pathway options for students wishing to enter ACU degree courses.
 - The **Catholic Teacher Education Consortium (CTEC)** works to develop, implement and evaluate an integrated transition program to increase the participation of students from low SES schools in university education, particularly in secondary Education courses, initially in the western and northern suburbs of Melbourne. The CTEC works to increase numbers of students from targeted areas who are aware of teaching as an occupational pathway, and to raise aspiration amongst students towards a university experience, particularly focused on teaching. CTEC schools are encouraged to participate in *ACUgate* programs. Partner schools reported very positively on the integration of ACU practice teachers into their communities and schools,
 - The **Adopting Transparent Pedagogies** program was piloted in 2015 to improve the quality of teaching and student learning in first year units for first in family and low SES background students across three faculties at ACU: the Faculty of Education and Arts, Faculty of Law and Business and Faculty of Health Sciences. Three interdisciplinary workshops (four hours) were held in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane in 2015 with 285 participants, of which 93 per cent reported high engagement.
 - **Developing and Evaluation of Targeted Programs to Support the Transition of Students entering B Nursing course in 2nd year:** an initiative being undertaken in 2016, this is an example of initiatives HEPPP has enabled to support successful participation at university by pathways students.
2. **To what extent have HEPPP outreach activities with schools, state/territory governments, VET providers, community groups and other stakeholders improved low SES individuals' access to and participation and success in higher education? What types of outreach activities have been most effective?**

In partnership with over 200 schools in Queensland, New South Wales, ACT and Victoria, ACU provides a suite of programs under *ACUgate*, the University's HEPPP funded outreach program and to improve access, participation and success in higher education amongst low SES background and other disadvantaged groups. These programs fall under three categories with specific objectives, namely to raise:

- Awareness

- Aspiration
- Access

In 2015, ACUgate accounted for 17,826 students having access to the program. Effective and popular outreach initiatives include:

The **Awareness programs**, for students in years 4-6, include a focus on core skills of literacy, maths and science to ensure readiness for the more demanding secondary curriculum, and on visits to ACU campuses to Meet the Professor. In 2015 nearly 3000 students had the opportunity to participate.

Aspiration programs under ACUgate work with partner schools to engage secondary students in their education with a focus on career opportunities and pathways to those careers, with a focus on university access. Students are offered innovative and engaging online programs to develop their knowledge of careers and pathways and are provided with opportunities to visit and use university campuses, for example to experience 'a day in the life of a university student' by shadowing a university student. In 2015 ACU ran a total of 100 aspirations days for students, parents and teachers at schools and on its campuses.

Access programs are provided for students in Years 11 and 12 to assist in preparation for university study. These include:

- Year 12 workshops to enhance academic skills in English and Mathematics.
- Uni Step Up, which enables secondary students or community members (ACT) to undertake a selected range of first year university units of study which can then be credited towards an undergraduate degree course.
- Come to Dinner, in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students and their teachers are hosted to dinner by ACU where they meet staff and students of the university who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- Community events highlighting access opportunities, mainly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, guardians and students. In 2015, nearly 4000 people participated.
- The Principal's Recommendation Program which is offered to partner schools for students who have experienced educational disadvantage. This program enables Principals to recommend students for entry to an ACU degree program.

3. How have projects funded under the National Priorities Pool component of the HEPPP supported more effective implementation of the HEPPP nationally and at an institutional level?

The National Priorities Pool component has supported a number of universities to deliver a wide range of programs and initiatives to raise aspiration, awareness and success in university education amongst disadvantaged groups.

4. To what extent have HEPPP activities been incorporated into universities' standard approaches and standard activities?

HEPPP funding is effective due to its ability to initiate and support university-wide programs and activities which would not be possible in the absence of dedicated funding.

Without HEPPP funding, a range of projects such as numeracy and literacy specific programs targeting low SES background students and changing student cohorts; peer supported learning; language assessment; and the development and implementation of student achievement and retention strategies would not have been possible. Specific curriculum and methodology changes

also became possible and were developed and facilitated by all faculties at ACU through HEPPP funding.

Equity initiatives have been supported across the university and have fed directly into the mission of ACU. The Student2student program has established a community of practice in the student body not only increasing professional competence in the students but increasing the commitment to serving community.

Notably, the types of initiatives supported by HEPPP funding at ACU, while targeting low SES background students and other disadvantaged groups, have had wider implications for improving university approaches more broadly and broadening the benefit across whole cohorts of students. For example, changes to the first year curriculum for particular units of study which aim to improve the experience for first-in-family and low SES background students benefit all students undertaking those units.

5. To what extent are HEPPP activities providing individual, societal and economic benefits? What flow-on effects have there been to the community and the economy?

HEPPP-funded activities are providing significant benefits to individuals, society and the economy. As identified in other parts of this submission, the HEPPP has been serving to raise aspirations and attitudes towards university engagement amongst low SES background students, schools and communities. The experiences of low SES background and first in family students have flow-on effects and benefits amongst their families, friends and community members.

While limited studies (see the findings on the Bridges to Higher Education Program below) have been undertaken on the economic and community impact of HEPPP funded programs, the raising of aspiration amongst low SES students and improvements in higher education retention and completion have a direct economic and wider community impact on graduates and their families. This includes a broader macroeconomic impact on employment and income levels.

A notable evaluation conducted on a HEPPP funded program is a KPMG analysis of the 'Bridges to Higher Education' program.⁴ In this \$21.2 million program (2011-2014) five universities, including ACU, worked with primary and secondary schools, TAFE and community partners in Greater Western Sydney to engage young people who previously might not have considered higher education as an option. All universities participated in nine collaborative projects designed to lift participation, with students benefitting from support and aspiration building initiatives such as mentoring, tutoring, homework clubs, work experience, career coaching and scholarships incentives.

Significantly, a cost benefit analysis of the Bridges to Higher Education program conducted by KPMG⁵ in April 2015 estimated that the program delivered:

- An expected economic return to low socioeconomic status communities of \$54 million in projected earnings and tax revenues (equating to a sixfold return on the Government's investment to LSES communities and a threefold return to the NSW community at large).

⁴ KPMG, *Evaluation of Bridges to Higher Education – Final Report* (2015). Accessible at http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/898504/04302015Bridges_to_Higher_Education_Final_Report.pdf. Also see the Bridges to Higher Education website at <http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au>

⁵ KPMG, *Evaluation of Bridges to Higher Education – Final Report* (2015). Accessible at http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/898504/04302015Bridges_to_Higher_Education_Final_Report.pdf. Also see the Bridges to Higher Education website at <http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au>

- An expected economic return to the community-at-large of \$45 million in projected earnings and tax revenues (equivalent to a \$3 return for every extra dollar invested in all Bridges school projects).

Regarding impact on student participation in university education, the Bridges program identifies⁶:

- A 6.1% increase in offers made to school leavers at Bridges low SES schools, in comparison with non-Bridges LSES schools who achieved a 1% increase. This represents a 5.1% increase in offers made to students at participating Bridges low SES schools.
- 962 more higher education offers to students at Bridges low SES schools.
- A projected additional 671 low SEs background students to complete a higher education qualification.

The program also identifies the significant non-financial impacts education can deliver to graduates and the broader community, which have lasting effects. These include:

- Greater wellbeing and happiness.
- Improved health.
- Volunteering and community participation.
- Less crime and stronger relationships.
- Less reliance on welfare, as more graduates become employed.⁷

Across the range of programs the HEPPP enables, the flow-on effects and benefits of raising aspiration, awareness and attainment with respect to university education amongst low SES background and other disadvantaged groups include:

- Increasing awareness of university as a post school option in students at a young age, their parents, teachers and the communities.
- Raising aspirations and educational engagement in school students, their parents and teachers.
- Impacting schools and communities by creating a cultural shift where educational engagement has increased and is linked to success in the future.
- University presence in schools is enhancing the notion of the importance of continuing education beyond school years, which is representative of global shift in this direction.
- Enabling deep and meaningful partnerships and relationships between all educational providers and challenging them to work collaboratively towards agreed goals.
- Enabling targeted educational conversations across the educational spectrum, early childhood, primary, secondary, TAFE and universities.
- Retention and completion improvements have direct economic impact on graduates and their families, as well as a broader macroeconomic impact on employment and income levels.

6. Has the need that the HEPPP addresses changed over time? Do the reasons for the creation of the HEPPP still exist to the same extent?

There remains a strong need for HEPPP funding to be directed to assist students from low SES backgrounds and other disadvantaged groups to study at university. While low SES background student enrolments have grown under the demand driven system (by 48.5 per cent from 2009 to 2014⁸), low SES background students are still under-represented compared to their population

⁶ Bridges to Higher Education, 'Bridges Effect', at http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au/about/bridges_effect

⁷ Bridges to Higher Education, 'Bridges Effect', at http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au/about/bridges_effect

⁸ Domestic undergraduate commencing student numbers. See Department of Education and Training, *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2015* (2016), at 31. Accessible via

share.⁹ HEPPP funding plays an important role in enabling universities to implement strategies to support low SES background students to access and successfully participate in university education.

Recognising that the demand driven system has facilitated participation by students from low SES and other disadvantaged backgrounds in university education, there is still enormous capacity for the HEPPP to sponsor development of innovative initiatives that provide informed and targeted support for particular equity groups, considering any factors that might be impacting on university participation and attainment amongst particular groups. In a study by ACER preliminary analysis found that of students who completed their studies, there was very little difference in employment and salary outcomes for students from equity groups and non-equity groups. This means that the attainment of a higher education qualification effectively eliminated disadvantage.¹⁰ The HEPPP continues to be a key factor in helping more students achieves this outcome.

The Bradley Review, which prompted the introduction of the demand driven system, recommended a sophisticated approach to access focused on three areas:

- Awareness of higher education
- Aspiration to participate
- Educational attainment¹¹

HEPPP funding has enabled universities to respond by implementing programs to develop and deliver the kind of outreach initiatives and support services envisaged as being necessary to improve access for students from low SES backgrounds. This need continues.

7. Is the structure of the HEPPP effective and efficient for achieving its objectives?

Annual and uncertain HEPPP funding flows limit the effectiveness of the program. Uncertainty as to future funding makes the longevity of all the partnerships and availability of the awareness, aspirations and access programs uncertain. Internal planning, including ensuring adequate staffing, to deliver programs under both the outreach and the participations components are also hindered by lack of funding certainty.

As Universities Australia identified in its submission to the Australian Government's recent consultation on its Higher Education options paper¹², HEPPP has been "a successful program but has struggled to realise its full potential as a consequence of uneven and unpredictable funding flows... Inequity in access to university is a persistent, long-term problem which requires a long-term solution."¹³

With funding certainty ACU can continue effective and efficient program delivery and is targeting continuous improvement in this regard.

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/undergraduate_applications_offers_and_acceptances_2015_1.pdf

⁹ Department of Education and Training, *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2015* (2016), at 31. Accessible via

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/undergraduate_applications_offers_and_acceptances_2015_1.pdf

¹⁰ Edwards, D. and McMillan, J. – Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *Completing University in a Growing Sector: Is Equity an Issue?* (2015).

¹¹ Bradley, D., et al ('Bradley Review'), *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (2008), at 40.

¹² Australian Government, *Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education* (May 2016).

¹³ Universities Australia, *Submission in Response to the Government's Options Paper: Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education* (2016), at 14.

8. What changes to the HEPPP could further assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access, participate in, and succeed at higher education?

The HEPPP encourages institutions to design programs that have maximum impact on access and participation of low SES background students in higher education. Changes to the HEPPP which would support successful outcomes for students are:

- Certainty of funding over a three year period
- Clarity of HEPPP including what can be funded, and aligned accountability measures
- An agreed funding model that reflects the longitudinal nature of HEPPP work and its impact
- Streamlined funded evaluation programs running parallel to implementation of HEPPP programs
- Commitment to starting HEPPP programs in the early years of school mindful of research that supports this
- Commitment to both participation and access.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY PROFILE

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly funded Catholic university, open to people of all faiths and of none and with teaching, learning and research inspired by 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition. ACU operates as a multi-jurisdictional university with seven campuses across four states and one territory. ACU campuses are located in North Sydney (NSW), Strathfield (NSW), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Victoria), Ballarat (Victoria), Brisbane (QLD) and Adelaide (SA).

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English speaking world. Today, ACU has over 30,000 students and 2,000 staff.¹⁴

ACU graduates demonstrate high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning. ACU graduates are highly sought after by employers, with a 93 per cent employment rate.¹⁵

ACU has built its reputation in the areas of Health and Education and is a major producer of nursing and teaching graduates in Australia. ACU educates the largest number of undergraduate nursing and teaching students in Australia,¹⁶ serving to meet significant workforce needs in these areas. Under the demand driven system, ACU has sought to focus and build on these strengths.

Since 2014 ACU has had four faculties: Health Services; Education and Arts; Law and Business; and Theology and Philosophy. The consolidation of the previous six faculties has created a more efficient and competitive structure focused on the needs of industry and employment partners. ACU has also been moving towards the adoption of a shared services model where suitable, to improve efficiencies, internal processes and better allocate resources.

ACU is committed to targeted and quality research. ACU's strategic plan focuses on areas that align with ACU's mission and reflect most of its learning and teaching: Education; Health and Wellbeing; Theology and Philosophy; and Social Justice and the Common Good.

To underpin its plan for research intensification, ACU has appointed high profile leaders to assume the directorships, and work with high calibre members, in seven research institutes.¹⁷ In the last three years the quality of ACU's research has improved dramatically. In the 2015 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment ACU received high scores in the fields of research identified as strategic priorities and in which it has concentrated investment in order to achieve the highest levels of excellence. These include selected areas of Health, as well as Education, Psychology, Theology, and Philosophy.

ACU's research in Psychology, Human Movement and Sports Science, Nursing, Public Health and Health Services is rated in the top category under ERA of being "well above world standard." ACU's research in Specialist Studies in Education, Philosophy and Religion and Religious Studies is in the next ERA category as being above world standard. ACU's research in Education Studies in Human Society, Law and Legal Studies, History and Archaeology Education Systems, Curriculum and

¹⁴ As at July 2016. Student numbers refer to headcount figures while staff numbers refer to full-time equivalent (FTE).

¹⁵ Based on those available for full-time employment, results from the *Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) 2015*.

¹⁶ Department of Education and Training, *2014 Higher Education Data Collection – Students, Special Courses* (31 July 2015) at <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/38139>

¹⁷ Australian Catholic University, *ACU Research*, at http://www.acu.edu.au/research/research_institutes_and_programs



Pedagogy, Business and Management, Political Science, Sociology, Law, Applied Ethics and Historical Studies is at world standard.