



**CONTENTS**

1. EQUITY OBJECTIVES .....	1
2. NEW STRATEGIES AND ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE .....	1
2.1 Review and Evaluation of Strategies .....	2
2.2 Strategies for the 2002-2004 Triennium .....	2
2.2.1 People from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds (Low-SES).....	3
2.2.2 Rural and Isolated Students.....	4
2.2.3 People with Disabilities.....	5
2.2.4 Women .....	5
2.2.4.1 Women in Postgraduate Research Studies .....	5
2.2.4.2 Women in Science and Engineering (WISE).....	6
2.2.5 Students from Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) .....	6
2.2.6 HECS Exempt Merit-Based Equity Scholarships .....	6
3. MAINSTREAMING EQUITY AT UWA.....	7
4. CONTACT OFFICER.....	7
APPENDIX: 2001 EDUCATIONAL PROFILES EQUITY DATA .....	8



## EQUITY PLAN

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### 1. EQUITY OBJECTIVES

*"The University is committed to providing an environment of equal opportunity, free from discrimination, for existing and prospective students in the pursuit of their academic goals and the realisation of their potential to contribute to the achievement of the University's mission."* This goal for equity and access from the University's strategic plan is supported by the following objectives for the 2002-2004 triennium:

- Improve access for targeted students with good academic potential.
- Provide inclusive services so that participation, success and retention rates for targeted students are similar to those for the student body as a whole.

The management responsibility for student equity is located within the Student Services division of the Office of the Registrar, who is a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive. Implementation of policy and operational matters are managed by the Director of Student Services. In the collegial system equity matters are mainstreamed in the work of the Faculties and central committees; eg. each Faculty Board has a standing agenda item pertaining to student equity.

The Student Equity Plan operational priorities for the 2002-2004 triennium are:

- To continue to develop access strategies for students so that the diversity of the student population reflects that of the state of Western Australia.
- To provide inclusive services for these students to improve success and enjoyment in their academic studies, and to achieve graduation as a result of a positive learning experience.
- To continue the philosophy of 'mainstreaming' equity so that University processes and procedures are flexible and accessible to all students.

These objectives are consistent with the primary objective outlined in 'Equality, Diversity and Excellence: Advancing the National Higher Education Equity Framework' (April 1996, NBEET): *"To advance the capacity of the higher education system to contribute to Australia's social, cultural, political and economic vitality and strength through system and institutional action, which embraces the full diversity of the community and results in a student profile that fairly reflects that diversity"*.

### 2. NEW STRATEGIES AND ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE

The University of Western Australia has a strong tradition of outstanding academic achievement, amongst the highest entry requirements in the nation, the youngest student population and a campus located in a well-established section of the capital city in a State with a sparse and declining rural and isolated population. Alongside this the University has always viewed the entire state of Western Australia as its most significant catchment area.

The University considers that designing programs around the needs of targeted equity groups is no longer the most appropriate strategy. During the past decade the University has made significant progress in achieving greater student equity and is a more diverse community as a result. Diversity refers to a new paradigm that involves initiating and fostering cultures that value and accept the diversity of all staff, students and people in the broader community (*EEO definition, WA Government*). The programs offered in the 2002-2004 triennium will therefore focus on a changing view of equity and social justice, which celebrates diversity and encourages an inclusive culture.

Within this overall approach, the University will still take steps to encourage and monitor access, participation, retention and success, among the following Commonwealth-designated groups, to ensure that diversity within the student population continues to develop in line with the country as a whole:

- (i) Low-SES students
- (ii) Students educated in rural and isolated areas of the state
- (iii) Students with disabilities
- (iv) Women in science, engineering and postgraduate research
- (v) Students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)

Of these, low SES students will be the University's highest priority in 2002-2004.

## **2.1 Review and Evaluation of Strategies**

The following have been completed during 2000/01 and have been used to inform strategies for the triennium.

Inclusivity in providing services to students: responding to a diverse student body. *Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development Project 2000*. Six projects focussed on student diversity issues, including disability, NESB and religion and including:

- Perceptions and awareness of disability among University reception staff.
- Review of assessment procedures for students with disabilities attending tertiary institutions in Western Australia, 2001.
- Survey on student computer usage, including computer facilities provided by the University Library. *Report 00/11. Institutional Research Unit (IRU), UWA*.
- Student Network Access Survey. *Report 00/07. IRU, UWA*.
- Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) Year 12 Tertiary Destinations. *Report 2001. Student Services, UWA*.
- The First Year Experience at UWA. *Report 00/2. IRU, UWA*.

## **2.2 Strategies for the 2002-2004 Triennium**

The University will continue to monitor the diversity of the student population; continue to encourage inclusivity and diversity in teaching and learning processes; continue to develop new strategies to improve access; and will continue initiatives for introducing cultural change in the University. Improvement in access for low-SES students *with good academic potential* will be the priority strategy for the next triennium and will take precedence over other equity targets groups.

### **2.2.1 People from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds (Low-SES)**

The University has the most competitive entry requirements in the country; a direct result of an excess of demand for HECS liable places. Students from low-fee independent schools and low-SES government schools continue to be disadvantaged by less competitive TER.

Figures derived from postcodes using DETYAPAC show that access defined in terms of percentage of the local commencing students for low-SES students, both under 25 and over 25 increased in 2001. The under 25 figure increased from 8.69% in 2000 to 9.81% in 2001 and the over 25 data increased from 8.56% to 9.38% over the same period. This most pleasing result is the best outcome observed for this group in recent times even though it is still well below the national indicator for the group as a whole. In 2001 the University again offered a portfolio of scholarships to prospective students. The flagship of the portfolio was the UWA Leadership Awards, whereby the University guaranteed a place to one student from every senior high school in the state of Western Australia, irrespective of advertised TER (as long as the basic tertiary entrance requirements had been achieved). The philosophy of the scheme was to recognise excellence wherever it occurs. Implicit in this was the recognition that parts of the school sector (rural/isolated schools, low-SES schools) are not as competitive in achieving high TER. In 2001 the University introduced a new category of students from Special Language Centres. These Centres were invited to nominate students on humanitarian/refugee grounds. Four places were set aside for these awards.

In 2001, 90 separate Leadership Awards (from a possible 120 schools) were made to students to attend the University (awards were made to all schools who nominated a student). Of these, two were in the humanitarian/refugee category and overall, 24 were below the advertised cutoff for their course of choice. Twelve of the students who entered below cut-off came from equity groups (rural, isolated or low-SES). All students who entered below cut-off are receiving additional support as part of the well-established Transition Support Program (TSP), which includes a targeted orientation program, study groups and other supports individually tailored to each student. To date all students are still enrolled and progressing. The project was funded for two years from University Strategic Funds and will be formally evaluated in 2001 (including data on success, participation and retention) pending further funding in 2002.

Other strategies to improve access for this group include targeting specific schools in the State with the focus moving to include Years 9 and 10 students in activities and events tailored to encourage good academic progress to Year 12. The TSP continues to develop a school-based visits program using past and present TSP students to encourage school students to consider tertiary education.<sup>1</sup> In 2001 the appropriate Leadership award holders will participate in this program and return to visit their schools during the mid semester break.

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<sup>1</sup> The selection criteria for TSP includes factors such as whether a student is: receiving or likely to receive Youth Allowance, Austudy or ABSTUDY; from a family with a low income; from a rural or isolated area; from a school under-represented at UWA; likely to have little family support whilst studying; going to be responsible for looking after other family members; and coming from a family where neither parent has studied at university.

Participation rates for low-SES students under 25 have remained fairly constant for the past five years, well below the indicator for the group as a whole. The participation rate for low-SES students over 25 increased from 0.110 in 2000 to 0.130 in 2001. The new access initiatives will assist participation in future years as the numbers of students in this category increase.

During 2001 a separate program for mature aged students was run alongside the established program for the low-SES school-leaver cohort. The resulting data for 2001 indicate that gains have been made in the areas of access, participation and retention. Peer support, study groups, support for individual needs and financial support will continue to be offered to students within both age cohorts. A well-resourced office with three staff positions located in Student Services alongside the other equity projects will continue to provide a contact point for all low-SES students.

### **2.2.2 Rural and Isolated Students**

The State is vast with a sparse and declining rural population (*ABS data 1997*). The secondary education system is undergoing change, particularly in rural and isolated regions where a program of school closures and a lack of qualified teachers continues. Despite these pressures, numbers of commencing rural students have increased slightly over the past five years, due to a comprehensive set of strategies to attract this group. Numbers of students from isolated areas have remained reasonably stable. Recent changes to the DETYA definitions of rural and isolated students have reduced the number of isolated students and increased the number of rural students.

Access issues for rural and isolated students remain a priority for the University. In 2001, as part of the Scholarships 2001 portfolio, ten rural student scholarships of \$2000 each were awarded to students educated at rural and isolated senior high schools. Additionally, each rural and isolated school was able to nominate one student as part of the Leadership Awards initiative. In 2001, twenty-two Leadership Awards were made to rural school students.

The other major access initiative is the UWA Albany Centre (400km SE of Perth) which admitted students for the first time in 1999. Students are able to complete some of their degree requirements in Albany before moving to Perth to complete their degree. An expanded subject choice was available in 2001. The Albany Centre currently houses 66 students and offers \$25,000 in various scholarships. The campus has been well received in the community and also serves to provide an additional informational resource for the community with regard to studying at UWA.

Another strategy to address access issues involves the appointment of local agents in remote areas. The trained agents serve as expert sources of advice, information and contact to remote communities. Six standard (school leaver) and four non-standard places will continue to be reserved in the Medical course for rural and isolated students and from 2001, up to five places have been reserved in Agriculture for rural and isolated students. This is in addition to those rural and isolated students who gain entry on their own merit as part of the larger pool of students. In addition, in 2001 the University staged a travelling Medicine and Dentistry roadshow, going to all major rural centres, which was well received.

A special entry program, *UWay*, developed to allow flexible entry for rural and isolated students with lower than cut-off entry scores, will continue. This program, with its associated support within the TSP was offered to 31 students in 2001. TSP is currently supporting 30 students (taking into account deferrals from 2000 and 2001): 15 rural students and 15 metropolitan. The *UWay* program will continue into the 2002-2004 triennium.

Success, participation and retention levels remain stable, with success and retention for both rural and isolated students being above the Lin Martin indicator. Rural and isolated students are included in the Transition Support Program. The supports detailed in section 2.2.1 above apply equally to this cohort. In addition, these students have their own newsletter, are provided with additional housing and financial advice as required and receive particular attention from the TSP Coordinator with regard to issues related to relocation. Close relationships have also been developed with the residential colleges where some of these students are located during semester.

### **2.2.3 People with Disabilities**

In 2001, the University enrolled 116 commencing students (compared to 106 in 2000), thus improving the access and participation of these students. The success ratio exceeds the national indicator and the retention ratio is higher than that of the general population. By any standards, and most particularly for a University with the academic entry standards of UWA, this is an impressive outcome.

The range of disclosed disabilities and medical conditions in 2001 indicates an increase in those with psychiatric conditions and also an increase in those students with high and complex support needs. The University will continue the substantial investment into this equity group. Two disability officers (1.1 FTE) and a well resourced office and equipment provision will continue to meet the needs of individual students while supporting campus-wide changes to physical access, inclusive teaching and more appropriate and flexible examination procedures.

The following projects have been initiated in 2001 and will be used to inform strategies for the future:

- Improving Educational Services for Tertiary Students with Disabilities - project funded by the Evaluation and Investigations Program.
- Quality Online - Inclusive online disability resources for higher education teaching - joint initiative between the UWA Disabilities Office and the State Disability Liaison Office.

### **2.2.4 Women**

Women students comprise 50.95% of the student body at The University of Western Australia.

#### **2.2.4.1 Women in Postgraduate Research Studies**

The percentage of women in postgraduate research study has increased slightly to 48.73% (or 316 students) in 2001. Strategies to raise overall representation to 50% by 2003 are therefore well on target. All indications suggest that current strategies to increase female access, participation and retention in postgraduate research study areas will continue to be amongst the most successful in the country.

#### **2.2.4.2 Women in Science and Engineering (WISE)**

Due to the success of the Women in Science and Engineering program, the access and participation of women in engineering at UWA has continued to exceed the national targets on access and participation in the two areas of concern to DETYA (Architecture and Engineering). Success and retention of females in all non-traditional areas exceed that of the population as a whole. By any measure the strategies at UWA have been a success and have contributed not only to a substantive increase in numbers of students but have also assisted with changes to the prevailing culture on the campus.

The WISE project continued its program of providing events aimed at encouraging women into science and engineering, and maintaining contact with the growing number of school students on its database to promote science and technology activities. The Engineering Role Models program, which involves selecting and training engineering students to visit schools and give motivational talks to year ten students about Engineering as a career, has expanded to include a wider range of targeted schools within the low-SES cohort.

The *Uni Mentor Scheme*, which is open to female and male students, and links new first year students with senior students, aims to assist new students and to hasten cultural change within the faculty to a more inclusive environment for all students. In 2001, 53% of the first year students in the Faculty of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences participated in the scheme. This included 64% of first year women in the faculty.

#### **2.2.5 Students from Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)**

Access levels for NESB students at the University have declined over recent years, although 2001 saw a turn around with an increase from 3.64% to 3.71% as a proportion of local commencing students. Participation, success and retention ratios are substantially above national indicators, with retention rates again rising in 2001.

Strategies to assist with access include targeting the School Role Models program (described in 2.2.4 above) at schools with high ethnic diversity. The *Uni Mentor Scheme* operates on a group philosophy of two mentors and a group of first years. This facilitates a culture of inclusivity and has contributed to the success and participation ratios of these students. The *Uni Mentor Scheme* was run across the campus in 2001 and includes students from the NESB cohort.

The new Leadership Award Program scholarships which are given to students from Special Language Centres on humanitarian grounds are another strategy to assist encourage NESB students.

#### **2.2.6 HECS Exempt Merit-Based Equity Scholarships**

During 2000, 48 enrolled students held HECS Merit-Based Exemption Scholarships. Two other scholarship students deferred their studies in 2000 and re-enrolled in 2001. Of these 50 students, five students successfully completed their course at the end of 2000, one student has elected to discontinue her studies and five students have not met the academic requirements for continuation of their scholarship. Accordingly, in 2001 there are 39 scholarship holders still continuing their original course of study at UWA. The support services offered to this cohort of students

through the TSP will continue in 2001 and beyond. The progress of these students will continue to be monitored as part of the low-SES portfolio.

### **3. MAINSTREAMING EQUITY AT UWA**

In recent years, Equity staff have observed that there are common needs of students across various equity groups. It has become apparent that issues in areas such as transition, economic disadvantage, transport, difficulty accessing educational services, information technology, inflexible teaching or administrative systems have impacted on these students in very similar ways.

As well as this there are many students who fall in more than one of these categories of disadvantage. For example, students with disabilities are more likely to be faced with socio-economic problems. Consequently, there are some instances where similar activities are carried out among the different equity areas. These include, but are not limited to, recruitment of students, the provision of transition support, technology support, study group involvement, and academic access.

While the separation of these various equity groups may facilitate some project activities, it is also apparent that a more systematic and across-the board approach could also be an efficient way of delivering these services.

Until recently, the dominant approach to service delivery in the equity area has operated from a support model of disadvantage instead of an inclusive model of diversity and growth. The support model has several drawbacks. These include:

- It is reactive and therefore fundamentally at odds with the pro-active intent of state and federal legislation on discrimination and equal opportunity.
- Supports are often implemented too late.
- Support models assume that the problem is located "within" the student and subsequently does not look at the basic accessibility of the service being delivered. The support model does not address the need for a change and can lead to a static perspective on issues of flexibility or accessibility.
- Supports must be re-established for every student in each course that they attempt.
- The support model does not address the needs of those who do not disclose.

The alternative to the support model focuses on the inclusive nature of the service being provided. This approach removes barriers at their source and enables access at or before the point of delivery. In instances where high levels of support are required, inclusive methods of delivering courses can be combined with traditional support services to ensure individual needs are catered for. The inclusive model provides more systemic services across various groups and can supplement and complement more targeted traditional support services. For the 2002-2004 triennium, the Equity group will be exploring ways to offer their services in a more systemic, horizontally integrated way.

### **4. CONTACT OFFICER**

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**APPENDIX: 2001 EDUCATIONAL PROFILES EQUITY DATA****Table 1A: Equity Performance Indicators for Target Equity Groups**

	<b>Access(%)</b>	<b>Participation</b> (ratio equity group in student population to proportion of equity group in general State/Territory population) (a)	<b>Success</b> (ratio equity group progress to other student progress)	<b>Retention</b> (ratio of apparent retention rate for equity group students to that for other students)
<b>Low SES (Aged under 25) (a)</b>				
1997	9.13%	0.14	0.98	0.979
1998	8.87%	0.14	0.98	0.957
1999	9.19%	0.14	0.98	0.975
2000	8.69%	0.14	1.00	0.986
2001	9.81%	0.14	-	1.019
<b>Low SES (Aged 25 or more) (a)</b>				
1997	5.13%	0.08	0.97	0.868
1998	7.51%	0.10	0.90	0.970
1999	6.75%	0.10	0.94	0.946
2000	8.56%	0.11	0.97	0.994
2001	9.38%	0.13	-	0.961
<b>NESB</b>				
1997	6.01%	1.64	1.03	1.071
1998	5.19%	1.41	1.03	1.088
1999	4.74%	1.20	1.02	1.063
2000	3.64%	1.04	1.02	1.007
2001	3.69%	0.93	-	1.053
<b>People with Disabilities</b>				
1997	1.55%	0.50	0.92	0.920
1998	1.80%	0.44	0.91	0.921
1999	2.26%	0.56	0.94	0.992
2000	2.53%	0.75	0.91	0.932
2001	2.56%	0.80	-	0.973
<b>People from Rural Areas</b>				
1997	6.33%	0.51	0.99	0.943
1998	6.38%	0.49	1.00	0.987
1999	6.69%	0.50	1.00	0.990
2000	6.87%	0.52	1.01	0.974
2001	6.86%	0.54	-	1.008
<b>People From Isolated Areas</b>				
1997	2.84%	0.14	1.01	0.939
1998	2.87%	0.14	0.97	0.990
1999	2.24%	0.13	0.95	0.970
2000	2.53%	0.12	1.00	0.930
2001	2.38%	0.12	-	0.970

(a) The **low SES participation** indicator equals the ratio of low SES students to high SES students.

*Note: The data shown in this table have been generated using the 2000 and 2001 versions of the Equity module of the DETYAPAC.*

**Table 1B: Equity Performance Indicators for Women in Non-Traditional Areas  
(including Research)**

	<b>Access (%)</b>	<b>Participation (%)</b>	<b>Success (a) (ratio of women progress to other student progress)</b>	<b>Retention (ratio of apparent retention rate for women to that for other students)</b>	<b>Ratio Higher Degree Research to Undergraduate</b>	<b>Ratio Higher Degree Coursework to Undergraduate</b>
<b>Architecture</b>						
1996	51.15%	51.05%	0.99		0.482	n/a
1997	57.03%	52.75%	1.06		0.702	n/a
1998	53.85%	54.72%	1.06		0.912	n/a
1999	50.00%	52.71%	1.02		1.086	n/a
2000	53.79%	53.32%	1.04		0.937	n/a
2001	58.90%	56.50%	-		0.588	0.000
<b>Agriculture</b>						
1997	53.33%	45.45%	1.00		0.899	n/a
1998	53.10%	51.00%	1.02		0.859	n/a
1999	48.80%	48.74%	1.07		0.898	n/a
2000	53.08%	51.80%	1.02		0.917	n/a
2001	53.66%	51.64%	-		0.819	1.245
<b>Engineering</b>						
1997	22.22%	18.34%	1.03		0.832	0.992
1998	22.08%	19.62%	1.03		0.664	0.797
1999	19.43%	20.51%	1.03		0.642	0.710
2000	21.15%	21.27%	1.05		0.935	0.461
2001	20.32%	21.77%	-		1.108	0.600
<b>Business/Economics (Management &amp; Commerce from 2001)</b>						
1997	41.87%	39.48%	1.03		0.950	1.020
1998	40.30%	39.93%	1.03		1.057	0.995
1999	41.53%	40.97%	1.01		1.024	0.967
2000	42.07%	40.96%	1.05		0.945	0.927
2001	40.40%	40.42%	-		0.954	0.838
<b>Science</b>						
1997	46.53%	43.52%	1.02		0.831	0.725
1998	50.19%	45.72%	1.01		0.734	0.478
1999	49.68%	45.97%	1.02		0.686	0.594
2000	51.92%	47.32%	1.02		0.767	0.445
2001	-	-	-		-	-
<b>Total</b>						
1997	51.92%	49.52%	1.03	1.008	0.920	1.002
1998	51.37%	50.26%	1.03	0.995	0.911	0.906
1999	52.27%	50.65%	1.02	1.003	0.876	0.911
2000	52.28%	50.79%	1.04	1.012	0.931	0.845
2001	52.44%	50.96%	-	1.030	0.971	0.785

(a) Indicator for success is in Academic Organisational Unit Group, rather than Field of Study

*Note: The data shown in this table have been generated using the 2000 and 2001 versions of the Equity module of the DETYAPAC. The 2001 indicators are based on field of education, whilst prior years are based on field of study.*