



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**Educational Profile Submission for the 1999-2001 Triennium  
EQUITY PLAN**

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## 1. EQUITY OBJECTIVES

The strategic plan of the University identified seven core areas of activity as the basis for developing goals, objectives and strategies for achieving its mission. One of these goals refers to Equity and Access: *"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"*. The two principal student equity objectives for the 1999-2001 triennium that support this goal are:

- *Improve access for disadvantaged students with good academic potential.*
- *Provide special support for 'disadvantaged' students to improve their success rate in their University studies.*

Student Equity is managed at the highest level within the University and is the responsibility of the Registrar, who is a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive. At the next level, each Faculty Board within the University now has a standing agenda item pertaining to student equity. Day to day implementation of policy is managed within Student Services, where all equity projects are co-located, by the Director of Student Services, reporting directly to the Registrar.

The Student Equity Plan objectives for the 1999-2001 triennium are listed below. Detailed reports and plans for each equity group are available at [www.acs.uwa.edu.au/reg/stratplan.html](http://www.acs.uwa.edu.au/reg/stratplan.html) or on request.

- Improve access for students from designated equity groups so that the diversity of the student population is a reflection of the broader national community in which the University exists.
- Provide appropriate support programmes for these students to improve success and enjoyment in their academic studies and to achieve graduation as a result of a positive learning experience.
- Continue the philosophy of 'mainstreaming' equity so that University processes and procedures are flexible and accessible to all students.
- Continue the development of the Student Equity Group as an informed and expert source of information and best practice within the University.

The overarching equity goal, therefore, for The University of Western Australia, is to increase the participation and graduation of target equity groups at or above the standards that the University has established over recent years. This goal, with its associated targets and strategies, is 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. STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE

The groups specifically targeted at The University of Western Australia are listed in order of priority:

- (i) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students
- (ii) Socio-economically Disadvantaged Students (low SES)
- (iii) Rural and Isolated Students
- (iv) Students with Disabilities
- (v) Women (specifically Women in Postgraduate Research Studies and Women in Science and Engineering)
- (vi) Students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB)

### 2.1 Review and Evaluation of Strategies

The following reviews, papers and policy documents have been completed during 1997/8 and have been used to inform strategies for the triennium. All are available on request.

- Mature-Age Students at UWA. *Report 98/7. Institutional Research Unit, UWA*
- Non-English Speaking Background Students' Survey. *Report 98/8. Institutional Research Unit, UWA*
- Student Accommodation at UWA. *Report 98/3. Institutional Research Unit, UWA.*
- A Review of Student Accommodation at UWA. *Internal Review. UWA 1997.*
- Physical Access Audit for the University of Western Australia. *Robinson & Bryan, Post Secondary Education Disability Network (PSEDN). 1997. Perth WA.*
- An evaluation of accessible examination procedures for Students with Disabilities attending tertiary institutions in Western Australia. *Edwards MG (1998). PSEDN 1998.*
- Teaching with Diversity Checklist. *Teaching and Learning Committee, 1998.*
- Students and Family Responsibilities at the University of Western Australia. *Equity Office, UWA.*

The University of Western Australia has always viewed the entire State as its catchment area. UWA has a strong tradition of academic achievement, amongst the highest entry requirements, the youngest student population in the country and a single campus located in a well-established section of the capital city in a State with a sparse and declining rural and isolated population. Data (*Unistats 1997/98, ABS 1997, Secondary Education Authority 1997*) currently influencing strategies for target equity groups for the next triennium include:

- Aboriginal student numbers in Years 10, 11 and 12 in all parts of the State are declining.
- Retention rates for Year 12 students in Western Australia are 10% below the country as a whole.
- Total numbers in State maintained public schools are declining.
- A continuing programme of school closures in rural and isolated regions appears set to decrease TE subject choice (particularly in the physical sciences), compared to the Perth metropolitan area schools.
- Rural and isolated schools produce students with lower mean TEE scores than high SES public schools and independent schools. Some students are disinclined to choose UWA because of 'high entry' reputation.
- Subject choices for TEE continue to impede entry of women into engineering courses. Recent changes to "satisfactory performance" entry requirements for tertiary study will exacerbate this situation for science and engineering subjects.
- Parts of the State have employment markets that attract school-leavers to high earning but unskilled employment. Youth unemployment for the state is well below the national average with all indicators suggesting that the economic buoyancy for the youth market will continue at least for the duration of the next triennium.

- Many people in the community, particularly from target equity groups, do not understand HECS or the new Youth Allowance and are concerned about the future of AUSTUDY/ABSTUDY allowances.

## 2.2 Strategies for the 1999-2001 Triennium

The University will continue to monitor all target equity groups within the student body, will continue to support the inclusion of equity projects into the mainstream processes of the institution, particularly recruitment, and will continue initiatives for introducing cultural change in the teaching and learning processes of the University. Improvement in access (particularly), success and retention data 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. Additional funds will be directed towards new strategies and other equity staff will broaden their area of activity to include initiatives focussing on low SES issues in the state and within the University.

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

Almost 77% of the annual undergraduate intake are from the Year 12 school population and the University has the most competitive entry requirements in the country. The data indicating an advantage in TE scores to those in independent and high SES area public schools are reflected in the total number of commencing first year students. Numbers from metropolitan public schools have declined (967 in 1995; 883 in 1997; 844 in 1998) while numbers from the metropolitan independent sector have risen from 959 in 1995 to 1060 in 1997 to 1079 in 1998 (*Unistats 1997/8, Secondary Education Authority data*).

Success and retention levels for low SES students are maintaining a slow but steady increase. The 1998 access data indicate that the downturn in 1997 may have been related to events beyond the control of the University, particularly changes to HECS and AUSTUDY. When the data are disaggregated, the over 25 group perform less successfully than the under 25 age group (*Unistats 1997*).

The major change in strategy for the group will involve modification of the successful and established Transition Support Programme (TSP). From 1999 the low SES cohort will be disaggregated into two groups and a separate programme for those students over 25 will be developed alongside the established programme for school leavers. Data (*Survey of Mature Aged Students (IRU 98/7), DEETYAPAC*) indicate that the needs of the two groups require different interventions.

The strategies will involve 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 Kalgoorlie experiment (*UWA Internal Report, 1997 Equity Plan*) indicated that extended and consistent contact with Year 10 students was extremely productive with retention to Years 11 and 12 being a key issue for access to University. This experience will be extended to cover all targeted schools. A separate strategy will be used to encourage and support students over 25 who will be managed with specific and focussed supports tailored to individual need. The orientation activities for these students will be mainstreamed into the general orientation.

Peer support, study groups, support for individual computer needs and financial support will continue for all eligible students but will be managed within the two age cohorts. Much of this has been detailed in previous Equity Plans. A well resourced office with two staff members located in Student Services alongside the other equity programmes will continue to provide a contact point.

### 2.2.2 Rural and Isolated Students

The University is a single campus institution with no external modes of education delivery and high entry score requirements. 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 programme of school closures is continuing. Additionally, changes to employment

of teachers has meant that for certain subjects (mathematics, physical sciences) some schools in isolated regions have been unable to attract suitably qualified teachers. The economy of Western Australia is predicted to remain the most buoyant in the country. Despite these pressures, numbers of commencing rural students have remained steady at about 185 (4.6%) while isolated numbers have increased to 188 (4.7%) from 171 in 1996. Investigation has been hampered by inaccurate DEETYAPAC region codes (for example an isolated region such as Gascoyne Junction (pop 309) is coded as *urban* while Albany (pop 26,000) is coded *remote*. Other examples exist. DEETYA has been informed previously).

The University will continue to visit every secondary school in the State of Western Australia, a significant community contribution on behalf of other tertiary institutions. All rural and isolated students are automatically included in the Transition Support Programme for low SES students and are eligible for all associated supports and activities. A support office for the group is located in Student Services. A special entry programme, UWay, developed to allow flexible entry for rural and isolated students with lower than cut-off entry scores will continue. Numbers in 1998 increased to 23 indicating that the programme, started in 1995 with two students, is beginning to have an effect.

### **2.2.3 People with Disabilities**

Secondary Education Authority data indicate that in 1997 there were approximately 250 Year 12 students in public schools who registered having a disability. Data from independent schools is incomplete but is considered to be significantly less than this figure. In 1998, 72 new students with a disability were admitted to UWA as part of the 265 students with disabilities who notified the University of a disability that may affect their studies. Experience in the previous triennium indicates that some students will delay disclosure for as long as possible (for example until examinations or a requirement for a specific piece of equipment) while others will not need to disclose as their needs are being adequately met by the increasingly successful mainstream provision.

On the basis of the current enrolment data against known numbers in the school sector and the satisfactory participation and success of students with disabilities, the University will continue the substantial investment into the equity group. Two disability officers 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, teaching delivery and examination procedures. The recent review 'Assessment procedures for Students with Disabilities attending tertiary institutions in Western Australia', will be published later in 1998 and will be used to inform policy in this area across the State.

### **2.2.4 Women**

Women students now comprise 50.2% of the student body at The University of Western Australia.

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

In 1998 the percentage of women enrolled in postgraduate research degrees increased from 45.8% in 1997 to 46.4% in 1998 in line with the current strategies for this group. Strategies are in place to raise overall representation to 48.0% by 2000 and the expectation is that the trend of steady increase will continue.

Female student success and retention rates now closely resemble those for the total population. 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. As such the priority of the equity group has moved down the order but will be maintained and funded at current levels.

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

Year	Commencing Female Students	Participation	Success Ratio
1996	75 (19.6%)	253 (17.1%)	1.03
1997	94 (22.4%)	285 (18.6%)	1.03
1998	97 (22.9%)	313 (20.2%)	1.03

The WISE Project has continued to achieve very strong progress in the recruitment of young women into engineering and combined engineering courses in 1998. Data indicate that the percentage of commencing engineering students who are women increased from 22.4% in 1997 to 22.9% in 1998 (see table). Participation has continued its upward trend and success of women in engineering courses has also continued to compare favourably with that of men (*DEETYAPAC 1998*).

The WISE programme has developed two strategies for achieving its success. The external strategies are aimed at the secondary school sector, particularly years 8, 9 and 10. School visits, activities for science teachers, information evenings, career nights and other related activities and events have contributed to the continual increases in access. Particularly pleasing is that the number of women studying physics at Year 12 in WA increased from 879 (30.2%) in 1996 to 950 (32.1%) in 1997.

Internal strategies, aimed at participation, success and retention have also proved that long term, well funded strategies are the most useful. The Engineers Mentor Programme, which is open to female and male students, and links new first year students with second and third year students, is aimed to not only assisting new students but also to hasten cultural change within the faculty to a more inclusive and creative environment for all students. In 1998, 295 (49%) of all first year students in engineering requested and were matched with trained second and third year mentors. This is an impressive performance indicator of success of the strategy considering that in 1997, the first year of the mentor programme, only 154 (26%) students volunteered for the programme. The University will continue to fund the WISE project at current levels.

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

The most recent ABS data indicates that 11.5% of the Western Australian population over 5 years of age speaks a language other than English at home. Using this definition, *Unistats* data indicate that over the past triennium the representation of NESB at the University is in the order of 10%. Both DEETYAPAC data and internal University data indicate that NESB students at the University have success and retention rates either equal to or better than those of the student population as a whole. Participation data is less positive and access is declining.

An internal survey of NESB at the University (*IRU 98/8*), where language groups were disaggregated indicated that different language groups are performing at different levels. During the next triennium, the outcomes from this survey will be developed into a more strategic focus on recruitment activities and peer study groups to improve participation. This will incorporate the strategies used to develop the Transition Support Programme for low SES students as described under 2.2.1 above. The NESB group as a whole will remain a low priority for the University but certain language groups within the cohort will be identified and managed as a separate equity group.

### 3. STRATEGY FOR ALLOCATION OF HECS EXEMPTION AWARDS

#### 3.1 Publicity

- The University publicised the availability of the scholarships in every secondary school in the State during the annual visit from the Prospective Students Officer to that school. Subsequently, every School Principal received a letter detailing the selection criteria, an application form for copying and contact details for further information.
- Advertisements were placed in the statewide newspaper and in the twenty regional papers. Information was supplied to individuals on WISE and TSP equity databases, through the State disability coordinators and through teachers at specifically targeted schools.

### 3.2 Selection criteria

The criteria, in order of priority:

- (i) Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- (ii) Low socio-economic status based on DEETYA definitions and internal UWA criteria (attendance at a targeted metro school or any rural school, living in an isolated or remote region).
- (iii) Evidence of financial hardship (in the form of AUSTUDY/ABSTUDY, Health Care Card, disability, etc).
- (iv) University of Western Australia course of study offer in 1998 as a new to higher education student.
- (v) Secondary criteria included: first generation entrant to higher education; women into science/engineering course, a language other than English as the primary language; and membership of at least two UWA equity groups. Letters accompanying applications are considered.

A detailed questionnaire was developed by the Student Equity Group and sent to all applicants. In 1997 130 completed applications from *eligible* applicants were received compared with 107 in 1998. A ranking process resulted in seventeen full awards in 1997 and nineteen in 1998. A further three awards are supported by the Student Equity Group. Representation across the equity groups is as follows:

	1997	1998
Aboriginal	4	8
Low SES	20	19
Rural and Isolated	9	10
Disability	2	2
WISE	6	4
NESB	3	1
Females:males	14:6	10:9

#### Comment on progress 1997 to date

1 student deferred but has since re-enrolled  
1 student withdrew  
19/20 students still participating; 95% retention

#### Comment on 1998 cohort to date

All students still enrolled and progressing well

Progress of the award holders is monitored as part of the equity strategy. Each student is allocated an Equity Officer and regular contact has been maintained. To date all 1998 student recipients are progressing well. From the 1997 cohort all students who presented for year-end examinations passed and proceeded to second year, a substantial number with distinctions and high distinctions.

The process of allocation remains difficult and onerous. A review of the process (*Internal Report: HECS Exemption 1997, UWA*) resulted in a more appropriate field of applicants and a better ratio of male and female applicants. However it is still the case that the selected students are on the extreme margins of ability to cope with the social and financial impact of tertiary study. The Equity Group views the excellent participation and retention rate of the group as affirmation of the equity strategies adopted by this University.

## 4. CONTACT OFFICERS

Enquiries relating to equity from a University perspective	For DEETYA contact and information regarding specific programmes
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