# Equity in Education Policy and Procedure

## 1 Purpose

To proactively provide accessible and equitable higher education opportunities to the diverse University student constituency, in particular to target groups identified as disadvantaged in their access to and participation in, higher education.

## 2 Scope

This policy applies to all students and prospective students of the University of Southern Queensland, in particular those who are recognised as being disadvantaged in their access to higher education. These students may be engaged in University-related activity either on University property or off-campus.

## 3 Policy Statement

The purpose of this Policy is:

1. To proactively identify and minimise the organisational and institutional barriers facing particular individuals and groups who may be disadvantaged in their access to, or participation in, higher education.

2. To ensure that the University provides members of groups who are at risk of being disadvantaged in their access to, or participation in, higher education, or of becoming members of more than one equity target group, with high quality and effective interventions to facilitate and support progression and retention in their studies.

3. To ensure that all programs focused on achieving educational equity, are rigorously assessed in relation to strategies employed to enhance engagement of members of groups who may be disadvantaged in their access to or participation in, higher education and improve equitable outcomes amongst these groups.

4. To ensure that appropriate strategies are in place to support the retention of and progression of members of groups from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds

5. To ensure that the University complies with its legal responsibilities in accordance with the broader University Equity policy framework for equal opportunity and anti-discrimination.

# 4 Principles

The University of Southern Queensland is committed to proactively providing accessible and equitable higher education opportunities to its diverse student constituency, with a focus on the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) target groups identified as disadvantaged in their access to, and participation in, higher education. A particular emphasis is given to supporting the aspirations of Indigenous Australians.

The University recognises that students can be enabled to achieve according to their own individual potential, regardless of their personal circumstances and backgrounds and commits to providing teaching and learning practices which are socially and culturally responsive and inclusive in order to ensure equitable opportunities for their success.

# 5 Procedures

## 5.1 Application

The policy will be applied to the University on the basis of the following broad approaches:

### 5.1.1 Planning and Organisation

The University structures its strategic plan around eight major goal areas, one of these areas being Equity & Multiculturalism. All University faculty and organisational sections are required to develop objectives and strategies as part of the annual strategic planning process that supports the University achieving identified targets in each of its identified goals.

The Student Equity office has institutional responsibilities for strategically driving, developing and evaluating equity initiatives including policy and governance. It works directly with staff from all faculties and organisational sections within the University to develop facilitate and encourage key strategies to support the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

### 5.1.2 Integration

Educational equity is considered a key strategic concern of the University. As such it is the responsibility of all managers and decision makers to ensure that educational equity is integrated in all matters of policy development, forward planning and performance review within the University.

### 5.1.3 Inclusive practice

The University is actively committed to protecting the rights of students to achieve their full potential in an environment which values and affirms diversity and is free from discrimination, harassment, victimisation and vilification. The University will seek to ensure that all teaching and learning environments, academic practices and language are non-discriminatory and that equity and diversity issues such as culture, gender and disability are embedded into the principles and practices surrounding such activities.

### 5.1.4 Course design and content review

Curricula should be inclusive and student centred, taking account of the diversity of student needs. LTSU staff will facilitate the process of embedding equity principles in curricula. The University will ensure that course content reviews and evaluations consider the need for equitable access and participation and ensure that students are able to contribute to these processes.

### 5.1.5 Specialist areas

Although the University provides a wide range of programs and services that target all identified equity groups, specific areas of specialist teaching and support will be maintained and funded. This will ensure that the University is able to draw on a range of staff with specialist skills in matters relating to educational equity, that clear foci exist within the University where prospective and existing students can seek specialist advice and assistance, that support is ensured for identified targeted groups and that the University's educational equity objectives are pursued in an efficient and effective manner.

### 5.1.6 Staff Development

Academic and General staff will be encouraged and supported to attend regular professional training and development activities provided by the Student Equity Office and the People Portfolio in relation to equity and diversity issues relevant to the University as per the Professional Development Policy.

### 5.1.7 Institutional Committees

The Social Justice Committee framework, established in 2004-5 provides a high level of coordination of equity and equal opportunity activities, and ensures stronger linkages to the decision making structures in the University.

### 5.1.8 Participation

The University will support participation by students in accessing learning resources relevant to their course by providing specialist support and information which is accessible in a range of formats including hard copy, CD-ROM and online. The University will attempt to be responsive to the unique circumstances of students experiencing educational disadvantage, within the parameters of normal administrative procedures and budgetary constraints.

## 5.2 Implementation

The Equity in Education Policy and Procedure will be implemented by:

1. Reflecting the principles of the Equity in Education Policy and Procedure in all University strategic planning processes including the UniSQ Strategic Plan, and the annual performance report to the University Council and DIISRTE.

2. Regular reporting on the Equity Plan by the Student Equity Office to the Social Justice Committee and the various sub-committees for advice and consideration.

3. Promoting the Equity in Education Policy and Procedure to staff and students via the University website.

4. Measuring the outcomes of equity strategies intended to assist educationally disadvantaged students in order to ensure that they are enhancing engagement and improving retention and outcomes and reporting on these to the Vice-Chancellor.

# 6 References

Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004 "Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future" Update March 2004.

Australian National Training Authority, 2000 "Equity in the Learning Society: Rethinking equity strategies for post compulsory education and training". www.ncver.edu.au

EdEquity Australia, ADCET - Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training

Leeder, S.R. 'Achieving equity in the Australian healthcare system', The Medical Journal of Australia, 2003; 179 (9): 475-478

Martin, L. 1994 Department of Education, Science and Training

Queensland Studies Authority, Equity Statement. https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/about/k-12-policies/equity-in-education/equity-statement

UniSQ Equity and Diversity Module for staff

UniSQ Policy on Multiculturalism. https://policy.usq.edu.au/documents/13370PL

# 7 Schedules

This policy must be read in conjunction with its subordinate schedules as provided in the table below.

# 8 Policy Information

| Accountable Officer | Provost |
|---|---|
| | |

| Responsible Officer | Dean (Students) |
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| **Policy Type** | Executive Policy |
| **Policy Suite** | |
| **Subordinate Schedules** | |
| **Approved Date** | 14/12/2021 |
| **Effective Date** | 14/12/2021 |
| **Review Date** | |
| **Relevant Legislation** | |
| **Policy Exceptions** | [Policy Exceptions Register](#) |
| **Related Policies** | [Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Policy](#)<br><br>[Performance Planning and Review Policy](#)<br><br>[Professional Development Policy](#)<br><br>[Recognition and Reward Policy](#) |
| **Related Procedures** | |
| **Related forms, publications and websites** | |
| **Definitions** | **Terms defined in the Definitions Dictionary** |
| | |
| | **Definitions that relate to this policy only** |
| | **Equality**<br><br>Implies similarity of status, capacity, opportunity, or receiving same treatment which is not the same as equity. The University aims to create equity in education amongst students by 'levelling the playing field' but treating everyone the same is not how this is achieved. Equity may mean that some things are done differently for one group of people in order to provide the same opportunities for success as for people who do not need this assistance. An example includes providing reasonable adjustments for students with a disability. By allowing a different set of circumstances for people with disabilities, the University provides a more equitable learning scenario for these students. Without the opportunity for reasonable adjustments, many students would not be able to participate in education to the extent |

they do.

The following disadvantaged groups were identified in Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education (Martin 1994) and are currently used by DIISRTE to monitor sector-wide and institutional performance:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

2. Students with a disability

3. Students from a non-English speaking background

4. Students from rural and geographically isolated areas of Australia

5. Students from a socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds

6. Women in non-traditional areas of study

In practice, the University will target its equity programs based on the general descriptors described by Martin (1994) using identification methods appropriate for the University context. In addition other disadvantaged groupings may be identified for the targeting of programs, for example:

1. Educationally disadvantaged;

2. Offenders in custody;

3. First generation students (that is, the first in family to attend higher education);

4. Second chance learners (that is, students undertaking higher education for the first time as adults after missing opportunities as youths);

5. Financially disadvantaged.

**Equity**

In education as a concept reflects a concern by the University to reduce unequal opportunities for education, often associated with

| | membership in certain identified disadvantaged groups. Pursuing equity in education means minimising educational disparities that are associated with underlying social disadvantage or marginalisation. Equity conveys a sense of fairness - it is ensuring that students have the same opportunities for success in their education. |
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| **Keywords** | Equity in education |
| **Record No** | 13/319PL |