A Fair Go Beyond the School Gate?

Systemic Factors Affecting Participation and Attainment in Tertiary Education by Queensland Students from LSES Backgrounds

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INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

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PROJECT SCOPE

The purpose of this project was to conduct an empirical study that would result in findings that inform systemic policy development aimed at improving tertiary participation and attainment by students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds in Queensland. The project focuses on systemic policy, initiatives and programs that encourage tertiary education participation and attainment by individuals from LSES backgrounds, rather than on institution-specific initiatives or programs. While the broad remit was to consider tertiary education participation, the study particularly highlights issues pertaining to LSES student participation and attainment in the higher education sector, given the notable under-representation of this demographic subgroup in Australian universities.

This study supports the strategic priority of addressing professional skills shortages and innovations aiming to improve human and social capital in the state of Queensland. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the enhancement of Queensland's education and training system by maximising participation and attainment by people from LSES backgrounds in higher education, thereby improving their quality of life and future life choices and opportunities.

The study addressed the following five research questions:

1. What are the major factors that promote or inhibit participation and attainment in tertiary education by LSES students in Queensland?

2. To what extent do systemic policies or practices (systemic factors) of Queensland's tertiary education system promote or inhibit participation and attainment by LSES students? That is, what features of Queensland's tertiary education system have a significant effect on participation and attainment by LSES students?

3. What system policies or practices are found to boost participation and attainment by LSES students in other jurisdictions?

4. What evidence is there to suggest that policies or practices that have boosted participation and attainment by LSES students in other jurisdictions would be successful if implemented in Queensland?

5. What are the implications of the research findings for Queensland's tertiary education system to improve participation and attainment by LSES students?

The project adopted a mixed methods approach to data collection. A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted to identify relevant state, national and international literature. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to collect data from a range of key stakeholders.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Literature Findings

Current literature demonstrates that students from LSES backgrounds are significantly under-represented in post-secondary education and training and, further, that those students who do participate are distributed disproportionately over the lower vocational certificate end of the spectrum and away from the higher academic and professional end. These patterns are highly stable over time and have largely resisted interventions designed to change them. Policy approaches to date have made little impact on these patterns. Although preliminary research highlights points at which change in systemic practices are likely to secure some change, there remains a shortage of detailed and carefully targeted research that identifies or evaluates specific changes and their effects.

Key points established in the current literature include the importance of:

■ addressing issues of aspiration and capability in LSES (and other disadvantaged) students;

■ effective communication between post-school providers and LSES school students, especially prior to the senior years of schooling;

- more extensive support for LSES students to prepare effectively for tertiary study;

- providing clear information regarding procedures for accessing post-school educational options;

- addressing potential delays in processing applications;

- active support once LSES students take up an offer of enrolment; and

- addressing issues of financial pressure on students once enrolled.

The literature points to a number of possibilities for further research designed to address systemic factors such as dissemination of information and support for potential tertiary students as they manage key processes related to the Queensland tertiary education system. These include managing the application procedure and the process of accepting placement offers in the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors.

While some of these systemic factors, particularly those related to broad policy directions and budgetary support, are firmly located within the scope of the Commonwealth government, they appear open to a degree of negotiation through existing bilateral governmental forums. Others offer scope for State level government as well as institutional initiatives.

These include:

- establishment of a State level framework to facilitate partnerships at State, regional and local levels between the higher education, VET and school sectors: at all levels, such partnerships should aim to improve information about tertiary education options and pathways for students in general, and specifically target LSES students and other under-represented groups, particularly in higher education;

- support for further empirical research on gaps in existing knowledge of factors shaping the participation of LSES students, particularly

those from rural and Indigenous backgrounds: such research should address widely identified conceptual and methodological issues, including those related to accurately identifying and monitoring LSES students;

- support for systematic programs across the higher education and VET sectors to improve support for LSES students;

- further support for systematic and comprehensive career education in schools, starting at least at Year 8 level.

Research Findings

A myriad of reasons exist for why students successfully participate and progress in higher education – no single factor operates in isolation. Research on students from LSES backgrounds reveals that economic costs play a significant role in their decision to participate in higher education. Empirical evidence also points to the fact that the combination of educational opportunities and subject choice during the school years, along with access to reliable and supportive advice from a range of sources, represents a powerful set of enablers or inhibitors, depending on the nature of these experiences. Specific barriers identified in the data gathered for this study include low level literacy levels, deficiencies in teaching and learning support, lack of parental experience and knowledge of higher education, and limited educational resources at home. The findings show that among the sample of university respondents, students from LSES backgrounds are more likely than students from other SES groups to be the first in their family to attend university and to have mothers and fathers whose education extended up to or below secondary school. These results illustrate the potentially limited working knowledge that parents of LSES students might be able to share with their children in relation to how universities operate and what might be expected of them.

Other limiting factors in the school context that were identified from the data include reduced subject choices, skilled teacher shortfalls in key areas such

as ICTs, Maths and Science. These factors were particularly evident in rural and remote schools. There is a lack of access to information about study options (again particularly evident in rural and remote schools), a lack of development of independent learning skills (particularly for students with disabilities who may not receive adequate support). Findings also point to the significant impact of teachers in terms of their values, expectations regarding post-school choices, and perceived knowledge and skills relating to career and study advice. In order to address the potential inhibitors to LSES student participation in higher education, enablers need to be built into the system. Recommendations 1 to 4 address this issue.

Alongside these limiting factors, interview data also suggested the importance of 'encouragers', that is, role models, family and friends who have a tradition of education that provides a positive influence, encouragement and a supportive learning environment. It is important to raise school students' aspirations in tangible ways through appropriate funding and incentives that are widely published, actively disseminated and promoted among LSES schools and communities. Suggestions for how these strategies could be implemented are detailed in Recommendations 5, 6 and 7.

Of particular concern to equity practitioners, managers and expert stakeholders who were interviewed during the study is the prevalence of VET options in secondary schools which, although offering positive vocational and training options, serve as a 'disincentive' for higher education by discouraging students to persist with school subjects that might require more academic effort and position them better for direct entry into higher education. Recommendation 8 details a proposed suggestion to alleviate this concern.

A systemic approach is required to ensure that students have access to various sources of information about post-school options. For university students, institutional Open Days were particularly important sources of information. For LSES students who may lack the social and cultural capital and experience of tertiary education of their more affluent peers, these opportunities to experience the culture of university campuses and learning environments are essential. In Queensland, this poses a particular challenge for the large proportion of OP-eligible students who may be unable to participate in such hands-on experiences for reasons of geographical remoteness. This is a significant systemic issue that needs to be addressed in a shared way across the sector. It is reassuring that individual institutions currently make various arrangements to engage students from rural and remote areas of the State with on-campus activities during their secondary school years; however, a more systemic approach is required to ensure that these opportunities are available to a much larger proportion of the LSES population in Queensland.

For all SES groups sampled in this project, institutional websites also featured as particularly important sources of information guiding decision-making. This finding draws attention to the importance of ensuring that all school students, regardless of socioeconomic status or location, have access to high-speed, reliable internet access and are provided with supplementary support in the form of face-to-face conversations with advisors, teachers and family to assist with advice. For university students, experienced advisors and mothers were identified as important sources of advice and information. Recommendations 9 and 10 outline the need to provide students from LSES backgrounds with relevant and timely access to such information sources.

A critical enabling factor identified by several student respondents is the role of teachers and support staff, particularly in under-represented LSES schools in Queensland. Teachers need to be adequately prepared for this important task, for example through pre-service teacher preparation to emphasise strategies for supporting students from diverse backgrounds including LSES. The findings also reveal a lack of consistency with regard to the roles of Guidance Officers in schools. In some cases, the roles of School Chaplains and School Nurses were being confused with the role of providing career advice. Recommendation 11 suggests a review of the structure of the role of school educational

Guidance Officers (or equivalent) and the nature of support provided across the state. Recommendation 12 aims to enhance pre-service and existing teacher preparedness to teach and support students from LSES backgrounds.

The research found there would be merit in reviewing the State-level tertiary entrance requirements for students from disadvantaged and under-represented schools and communities in the Queensland higher education system. Recommendation 13 outlines how the system could include more flexible approaches that take account of the systemic disadvantages experienced by a significant proportion of the Queensland population who come from rural, regional and remote areas of the State, and further, that respect the unique needs and experiences of people from diverse demographic subgroups (e.g., students from Indigenous backgrounds).

The current postcode method of defining SES has been widely recognised as an inhibitor to the successful monitoring and support for LSES student participation in higher education. Queensland is in a strong position to provide national leadership in systemic higher education equity policy and practice by trialling improved indicators for measuring LSES status, such as moving to a composite measure of SES (including parental income) as part of a State-based focus on improved measurement and monitoring of LSES with a view to improving the quality of life and educational outcomes of this demographic group (see Recommendation 14).

The importance of pathways for students among the school, VET and higher education sectors is critical, particularly for students who may not be adequately prepared for university when they leave school and who may wish to use vocational education or training as a stepping stone. Information on post-school options needs to be freely available and widely disseminated. Feedback received during the course of this study suggests that the QTAC system is going some way towards addressing this goal. Recommendation 15 and 16 identify ways to create a cross-sectoral, State-sponsored and outcomes-focussed approach. To achieve this, a system of financial and 'in-kind' incentives could be offered as rewards for collaboration.

The Queensland Government already subscribes to an evidence-based approach to policy-making which is particularly important in the context of the present study. While federally gathered student statistics reveal certain trends in LSES participation rates at the macro level, there is an imperative to ensure that meso-level, State-based data are gathered and strategically used. For instance, in the current global economic context, it is important for the State to adopt a proactive approach to monitoring the patterns of LSES student unemployment among those who might otherwise have entered the workforce. Evidence-based approaches should also be in place to ensure systemic responses to engaging with unemployed youth from LSES backgrounds with a view to raising their awareness as to post-secondary study options (Recommendation 16). It is also important that the State government develop and apply longitudinally and cross-sectorally a suite of indicators of effectiveness of programs to enhance participation and progress of students from LSES backgrounds in higher education (Recommendation 17).

Finally, the research project sought to examine best practice in terms of systemic policies or practices that boost participation and attainment by students from LSES backgrounds in other jurisdictions. Setting appropriate equity targets emerges as a key theme in existing national and international initiatives. As well as setting appropriate targets, responses to the challenge of widening participation tend to fall into three general categories: provision of financial assistance, awareness-raising, and capacity building. Financial support is seen as an essential element in the review of best practice from around the world and is a frequent LSES recruitment and support strategy offered by many universities in Canada and the UK. Raising awareness and providing academic support are evident in examples of initiatives gathered from England and Northern Ireland. Discussed in some depth as an exemplar is a key program called *Aimhigher*, which seeks to encourage partnerships between institutions and promote the notion that higher education is open to anyone with the ability to succeed, regardless of their background. Fostering effective partnerships is another key issue arising from the national and international review

of best practice. A number of successful partnership programs from Australia and the UK are discussed in some detail in the report. Although there are some notable differences among the cited jurisdictions discussed, the examples have been selected from a variety of initiatives on the basis of similarity of particular aspects. For example, the projects cited apply to social structures and tertiary education systems that are similar to those in Queensland, even though geographical features may vary. In all cases, socioeconomic status is the strongest predictor of tertiary participation.

In considering the implications of these findings for Queensland's tertiary education system, and particularly its higher education system, it is instructive to consider that this study takes place at a very significant time in the nation's history, particularly with respect to developments in the tertiary education sector. Two key reviews of Australian higher education have recently taken place: the Review of the National Innovation System (*Venturous Australia – building strength in innovation*) and the Bradley et al. *Review of Australian Higher Education*. The latter proposes significant changes to systemic arrangements in relation to VET and higher education connections. There are rapid developments in TAFE degree-offering options and several proposals regarding the nature and purposes of Australia's higher education system. All these factors, along with the global financial crisis and its implications for the Australian labour market, play a key role in the consideration of systemic strategies for enhancing the tertiary and higher education participation and success of students from LSES backgrounds. As outlined above, there are several important implications of this study and its findings for the State of Queensland. These implications are synthesised in the form of 17 recommendations arising from the data, as outlined below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: That the Queensland Government supplement existing federally funded scholarships for LSES students with an additional 500 'Smart State Equity Scholarships' each year to cover full higher education tuition costs, with applications restricted to OP eligible students from the most under-represented schools in Queensland universities (i.e., those in the bottom quartile for university participation rates).

Recommendation 2: That the Queensland Government encourage cross-sectoral and intra-sectoral collaboration in recruiting low SES students to Queensland's higher education institutions by initiating a five-year action plan to evaluate, reward and annually report State-wide systemic and collaborative strategies that inform, motivate, raise aspirations, and engage primary and secondary school students from LSES backgrounds in higher education. Further, that the Government consult with the sector to develop a system of financial and 'in-kind' incentives for supporting ongoing collaborative initiatives that yield positive and sustained results. (see also Recommendation 17)

Recommendation 3: That the Queensland Government introduce a suite of financial and support strategies to assist LSES students in higher education, including: a placement service to assist non-metropolitan students to find affordable accommodation and home-stays where practical; scholarships to assist with purchase of study tools (e.g., computers); and additional rental subsidy allocated according to agreed criteria for the first year of study to assist transition to higher education.

Recommendation 4: Develop and implement indicators to evaluate the short- and medium-term impact of higher education scholarship funding for Queensland students from LSES backgrounds in order to inform the future configuration of scholarship programs.

Recommendation 5: That the Queensland Government, in its response to LSES resourcing, give high priority to addressing the problem of limited subject choices in regional, rural, remote and other disadvantaged secondary schools which subsequently limit LSES students' higher education options. This should include resourcing for: comprehensive needs analyses; a five-year State-wide evaluation and impact strategy; enhanced flexible delivery particularly in key areas such as ICTs, Maths and Science; and widespread aspiration-raising and communication strategies for students, family and community members in relevant schools and communities.

Recommendation 6: That the Queensland Government provide up to 1000 annual 'Aspirational Scholarships' as incentives for low SES primary and secondary school students and their families to consider higher education as a viable post-school option. Further, that this scholarship program include such support mechanisms as mentoring and scaffolded individual support, particularly for young people in rural, regional and remote areas of the State, and that the impact of the program be evaluated and reported annually.

Recommendation 7: That the Queensland Government, together with higher education equity practitioners, document and disseminate data on existing institutional best practice for increasing the participation rate of students from LSES backgrounds in 'high status' higher education programs, such as Law and Medicine, with a view to systematising, monitoring and evaluating these strategies so as to inform sector-wide school-level initiatives for raising LSES student aspirations to enrol in 'high status' degree programs.

Recommendation 8: That the Queensland Government systematise a *Uni in Schools* approach in a similar manner to the TAFE in Schools initiative and report annually on outcomes. This would involve cooperation among universities who would share responsibilities for regional *Uni in Schools* programs in order to raise higher education aspirations and provide accessible and timely advice to secondary school students, their schools and their communities about university options.

Recommendation 9: That QTAC and QSA collaborate to provide accurate, low-cost and accessible information, particularly to regional, rural and remote secondary school and mature age

students. Further, that an ongoing program of school visits be funded and scheduled periodically to provide free face-to-face information sessions for regional, rural, remote and other under-represented schools and communities in the higher education sector, with regular reporting of outcomes to the sector. This would also require shared investment in online technologies between QTAC, QSA and the State Government in order to facilitate more frequent face-to-face contact in virtual environments (e.g., Wimba software), especially for dispersed and remote communities and schools.

Recommendation 10: That the Queensland Government, together with all Queensland universities, develop, resource and evaluate a systemic approach for coordinating university campus visits to ensure that every secondary school student in designated LSES and under-represented schools – particularly those in rural and remote areas - has the opportunity to visit Queensland university campuses at least once during their final two years of school.

Recommendation 11: That the Queensland Government review the structure of support provided to school educational Guidance Officers (GOs) and equivalent expert advisors across the State with a view to:

- assessing the efficacy and impact of the existing model of service delivery, particularly in terms of outcomes for LSES schools. Indicators of success would include evidence of raising aspirations and self-efficacy of students from LSES backgrounds, particularly in under-represented schools in higher education;

- introducing specially trained GOs (or equivalent expert advisors) in under-represented primary schools in LSES, rural and remote schools;

- ensuring closer liaison between GOs (or equivalent expert advisors) and classroom teachers so that their work is more embedded into the curriculum.

Recommendation 12: That the Queensland Government, as part of its *Believe Achieve Succeed* (BAS) initiative, provide five-year funding to support targeted research and development in BAS schools with the goal of enhancing preparedness of pre-service and existing teachers to teach and support students from low SES backgrounds.

Recommendation 13: That the Queensland Government and QTAC review and report on tertiary entrance requirements and admission processes with a view to extending the existing system to include even more flexible approaches that take account of the systemic disadvantages experienced by significant proportions of the Queensland population who come from rural, regional and remote areas of the State; and further, that respect the unique needs and experiences of people from demographic subgroups such as those from Indigenous backgrounds.

Recommendation 14: That the Queensland Government gather, document and disseminate data on VET and higher education participation rates using indicators of parental education to supplement existing postcode measures in order to maximise the validity of data collection methods and associated systemic policy-making. Further, that the relative merits of State-level composite measures be investigated including parental occupation and family income.

Recommendation 15: That the Queensland Government establish, maintain and monitor cross-sectoral, State-sponsored and outcomes-focussed partnerships among key stakeholders from school, VET and higher education sectors with the goal of increasing access, participation and success of students from LSES backgrounds in higher education.

Recommendation 16: That the Queensland Government initiate State-based research and evaluation programs to maximise Queensland's potential to achieve *Smart Queensland* targets. These programs should be enabled by a Statewide four-year longitudinal research and evaluation study that collects empirical data to inform systemic policy and practice across educational jurisdictions in Queensland.

This study would:

- track a representative cohort of school students from year 10 to post-school stage, including investigation of the impact of secondary school subject choices on post-school options;

- track a representative group of mature age people who re-enter tertiary education from the workforce;

- facilitate close examination of 'at risk' demographic subgroups, including unemployed youth, young Indigenous people and males from rural and regional areas, who are significantly under-represented in higher education; and

- provide a practical, outcomes-focussed vehicle to encourage cross-sectoral cooperation based on the sharing of a common database of empirical data.

Recommendation 17: That the Queensland Government develop and apply, both longitudinally and cross-sectorally, a suite of indicators of program effectiveness in order to enhance participation and progress of students from LSES backgrounds in higher education. These data should be reported annually. (see also Recommendation 2).

1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This study takes place at a significant time in the nation's history, particularly with respect to developments in the tertiary education sector. On the federal policy landscape, the Rudd Government's social inclusion agenda is high on the list of national priorities, with Minister for Education, The Hon Julia Gillard MP stating that:

> *Ensuring that every Australian, no matter how wealthy or poor, has a fair chance [to graduate from university] is one of the most important challenges. . . Our reputation as an egalitarian nation and our future prosperity rests on the outcome . . . The task now is to expand access and opportunity to everyone, regardless of the family or community they come from. (Gillard, 2008)*

On the national policy front, other key contextual factors include the Bradley et al. (2008) *Review of Higher Education*, the noteworthy developments in TAFE degree-offering options, and proposals regarding the possibility of major restructuring of the tertiary education system (e.g., the proposed development of community college equivalents in Australia). At the State level, the Queensland Government has framed its 2020 vision for Queensland around five key areas. The areas most relevant to this project are that of the 'Smart' challenge of 'delivering world-class education and training' and to ensure that 'three out of four Queenslanders will hold trade, training or tertiary qualifications' (Queensland Government, 2008). The national policy context must also be interpreted in light of what has been termed the 'global financial crisis' and its implications for the Australian labour market and rising unemployment rates (see OECD, 2009). Together, these factors play a key role in considerations of systemic strategies for enhancing the tertiary and higher education participation and success rates of students from LSES backgrounds, both nationally and at the State level.

This section of the report begins with a brief overview and rationale for focussing on the issue of access and participation of students from LSES backgrounds in tertiary education, particularly higher education. Discussion then moves to consideration of some of the State-specific issues that justify a study of this kind. This section concludes with an outline of the project purpose and scope. Next, Section 2 provides details the project approach and methodology. This is followed by a literature review and summary of key findings. The final section of the report draws together the main conclusions and recommendations of the study. Overall, the entire report highlights the imperative for establishing an ongoing program of State-level research-informed, collaborative, sustained activity in order to optimise the chances of achieving Gillard's (2008) goal of ensuring that every Queenslander has a fair chance to graduate from higher education.

1.1 THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Low socioeconomic status (LSES) has been widely acknowledged as the principal cause of disadvantage in access to higher education. Young people and others from poor families or LSES backgrounds have consistently been under-represented in the higher education system[2]. In a national study of equity group performance in higher education, James and colleagues (2004, see also Coates & Krause, 2005) demonstrated that, over a period of ten years, the higher education participation figures for LSES students remained relatively static. The national study highlighted the imperative of giving special emphasis to the LSES equity group and the consistent pattern of low higher education participation rates for this group.

Improving tertiary education opportunities, participation and success of young people from LSES backgrounds is not only an equity issue, but also an economic and social one. In Australia and internationally, there is growing research interest in the reasons for low participation rates of students from LSES backgrounds in higher education. Given that these figures have not shifted in over a decade, serious research attention should be directed toward these matters. In particular, further empirical research is required to identify potential systemic issues – including barriers, attractors and interventions – that influence participation by LSES students in tertiary, and particularly higher, education. These data are particularly important if government and

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2: The socioeconomic status (SES) of the higher education student population is measured by applying the Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Education and Occupation (ABS, 1998) to the postcodes of students' home residence. Australian postcodes in the lowest quartile of the Index of Education and Occupation are defined as low SES. Although low SES is also calculated within each state by taking the lowest quartile within postcodes ranked within the state, only national figures are used in this report.

institutional policy is to be informed by a strong evidence base.

A recent national review of the participation rates of people from LSES backgrounds in higher education demonstrates that the interrelationships and interactions between the multiple factors that underlie LSES under-representation are complex and require closer investigation (Universities Australia, 2008). This State-based investigation extends existing national studies by gathering empirical data on these factors, including enablers and inhibitors to higher education access and participation for students from LSES.

1.2 WHY A STATE-BASED STUDY OF QUEENSLAND?

Queensland has been proactive among the Australian states and territories in commissioning a State-specific study of systemic factors affecting participation and attainment in tertiary education of students from LSES backgrounds. Such an investigation is warranted in light of the unique demographic and geographic characteristics of this State. It reflects a growing awareness that State-level initiatives that are sensitive to geographical contexts and needs will play a key role in addressing the Bradley et al. recommendation (2008, see Recommendation 2) that at least 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds attain a qualification at bachelor level or above by 2020 (recently endorsed by Minister Gillard, 2009, with a revised target date of 2025, see also James, 2009).

1.2.1 QTAC applications and their link to unemployment rates over time

Despite significant growth in the Queensland population in the last decade (see Table 1), unemployment rates have declined from around 10 percent in 1992-3 to 3.7 percent in 2007-8 (see also Figure 1 below). The strong labour market has played a significant role in this trend. The decline in Queensland unemployment figures has been accompanied by a decrease in the overall QTAC applications from 67,435 in 1992-3 to 58,585 in 2007-8 (see Table 1).

Table 1. QTAC applications compared with Queensland population and unemployment over time

Data collection period	Qld unemploy-ment rate %[1]	QTAC applicants (n) including mid-year[2] [% of State pop; % of 15-24 yr olds[4]]	Acceptances (n) [% of State pop, % of 15-24 yr olds[4]]	Granted deferment (n) [% of acceptances]	Qld population (N)[3]
1992-3	10.3	67,435	33,299	3,031 [9.10]	
1993-4	9.8	61,226	36,296	1,619 [4.46]	
1994-5	8.6	58,865	37,290	1,616 [4.33]	
1995-6	8.9	59,906	39,218	1,783 [4.55]	
1996-7	9.2	60,919	40,517	1,940 [4.79]	
1997-8	8.7	59,596 [1.72; 24.38]	40,898 [1.18; 16.73]	2,040 [4.98]	3,447,725
1998-9	8.0	59,583 [1.70; 23.97]	41,431 [1.18; 16.67]	2,509 [6.05]	3,501,421
1999-2000	7.7	61,094 [1.71; 24.13]	41,746 [1.17; 16.49]	2,611 [6.25]	3,561,537
2000-1	7.9	60,264 [1.66; 23.38]	41,457 [1.14; 16.08]	2,604 [6.28]	3,628,946
2001-2	7.9	61,436 [1.65; 23.39]	41,671 [1.12; 15.86]	2,465 [5.91]	3,714,798
2002-3	7.2	61,744 [1.62; 23.19]	39,827 [1.04; 14.96]	2,711 [6.80]	3,809,214
2003-4	6.1	60,082 [1.54; 23.37]	39,844 [1.02; 14.83]	2,803 [7.03]	3,900,910
2004-5	4.9	56,838 [1.42; 20.88]	39,582 [0.99; 14.54]	3,393 [8.57]	3,994,858
2005-6	4.8	58,349 [1.42; 21.03]	40,631 [0.99; 14.64]	4,307 [10.60]	4,090,908
2006-7	4.0	58,894 [1.40; 20.77]	41,446 [0.99; 14.61]	4,671 [11.27]	4,181,431
2007-8	3.7	58,585 [1.36; 20.03]	40,991 [0.95; 14.01]	5,064 [12.35]	4,279,411

1. Source: Queensland Government Office of Economic and Statistical Research (http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/queensland-by-theme/economic-performance/labour/index.shtml)
2. Source: QTAC Statistical Reports (http://www.qtac.edu.au/Statistics/2007-2008.htm). Figures include TAFE full-time advanced diploma, diploma, associate diploma and some certificate course applicants.
3. Source: Queensland Government Office of Economic and Statistical Research (http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/queensland-by-theme/demography/population/index.shtml)
4. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2008. (http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012008?OpenDocument)

Within the scope and timing of this project, it was not possible to secure the proportion of students from LSES backgrounds as a proportion of the QTAC applicants; however, this issue should be pursued in a subsequent study as part of a coordinated approach to monitor and develop evidence-based policy based on these figures across Queensland.

Based on the trend shown in Table 1, it is reasonable to assume that applications for tertiary study will increase as the unemployment figures in Queensland increase. In late 2008, the unemployment figures for Queensland rose from 3.8 to 3.9 percent (ABS). The most recent national figures for 2009 reveal that in the 12 months from March 2008 to March 2009, the number of unemployed persons across the nation increased by 33.3 percent, now standing at 5.7 percent (seasonally adjusted) nationally. All indications are that this upward trend in unemployment rates will increase (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Unemployment rates for Queensland and Australia, 1998-2008
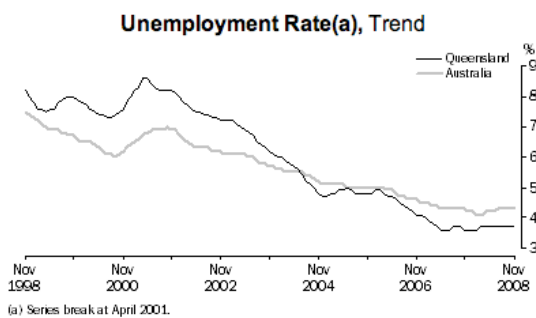
Source: ABS, 2008 (http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1318.3Main%20Features4Dec%202008)

1.2.2 Post-school destinations for people from LSES backgrounds

Given the predicted increase in demand for VET and higher education in the context of a weaker labour market and economy, it will be particularly important to monitor the participation in tertiary education of people from LSES backgrounds. National figures (see Table 2) demonstrate unequivocally

the continued under-representation of people from LSES backgrounds in higher education. Of most concern is the noteworthy decline in the proportion of LSES people in higher education from regional and remote areas of Australia. Given Queensland's geographically dispersed character and the documented regional population growth in the State (ABS, 2008), this is a challenge of the highest order for the State.

The data in Table 2 only go some way towards reflecting the complexity of the challenges inherent in interpreting tertiary participation rates of students from LSES backgrounds. Compounded disadvantage is a particularly intractable issue that needs to be acknowledged in any discussion of LSES participation in tertiary education. For instance, Indigenous participation rates remain disproportionately low (DETA, 2008, p.43). There are also marked differences in post-school educational participation between school completers from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas: broadly, completers from metropolitan backgrounds are substantially more likely to participate in University or Certificate IV VET programs, whereas those from non-metropolitan backgrounds participating in post-school education or training were more likely than their metropolitan peers to participate in employment based training, or lower levels of VET certification (Bradley et al., 2008, pp.31-34; DETA, 2008, p.36).

Post-school destinations also differ according to achievement. Teese, Polesel and Mason (2004) note that even high achieving LSES school students are less likely than their higher SES peers to participate in tertiary education [although] VET in Schools graduates have continued to use their Year 12 program to access a range of tertiary and labour market destinations' (Bradley at al., 2008, pp.31-34; Polesel & Teese, 2007, p.1).

Table 2. Access rates, national, 2001 to 2006 and national reference points (%) (DEST 2006)

Access Rate	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Population Reference Point
Total low SES	**15.86**	**15.54**	**15.36**	**15.2**	**15.23**	**15.56**	**25.0**
Low SES and urban	8.63	8.49	8.43	8.35	8.66	9.02	
Low SES and regional	6.50	6.35	6.23	6.17	5.96	5.93	
Low SES and remote	0.73	0.70	0.70	0.68	0.61	0.61	
Total medium SES	**45.62**	**45.22**	**45.24**	**45.07**	**45.86**	**46.12**	**50.0**
Medium SES and urban	32.01	32.04	32.23	32.13	33.18	33.33	
Medium SES and regional	12.92	12.52	12.36	12.30	12.02	12.19	
Medium SES and remote	0.69	0.66	0.65	0.64	0.66	0.60	
Total high SES	**37.33**	**37.31**	**38.05**	**38.53**	**37.92**	**37.46**	**25.0**
High SES and urban	36.71	36.68	37.44	37.88	37.27	36.82	
High SES and regional/remote	0.62	0.63	0.61	0.65	0.65	0.64	

Source: Universities Australia, 2008, p.23

As shown below in Table 3, State-level data reveal that young people from LSES backgrounds are more likely than their peers in medium and high SES groups to enter the labour market post-school. If the unemployment rate increases as predicted, students from the LSES demographic will be most at risk, particularly if they do not receive appropriate advice on the possibilities of tertiary study.

Table 3. Learning or earning: Proportion of Queensland youth in post-school destinations by SES quartile

	Lowest SES quartile	2nd lowest SES quartile	2nd highest SES quartile	Highest SES quartile
University (%)	23.3	29.2	36.7	48.3
TAFE and other VET, (%)	12.0	11.4	11.4	10.5
Apprentice/trainee (%)	16.7	16.1	15.0	11.9
Working (F/T;P/T) (%)	37.3	35.6	30.8	24.7

Source: DETA, 2008 p.46.

Table 4 shows the number of preliminary university applications in each state, as at the start of November 2008. It should be noted that the 2008-09 preliminary data are not directly comparable to those for the year before since a new data collection system has been introduced (see DEEWR, 2008, pp. 12-13). Nevertheless, these data provide an indication of the upward trend in 2009 applications, even at the preliminary stage of reporting. Subsequent QTAC data for 2009 reveal a modest increase (0.5%, according to QTAC source, as at 22 January, 2009) in the number of first round university applications from school-leavers in Queensland. These figures represent first round offers only and it should be noted that the closing date for first round applications was in September 2008, just prior to the significant economic downturn that occurred in late 2008. With the growing trend of late applications and the projected increase in proportion of non-school-leaver applications (Healy & Trounson, 2008), there will be merit in monitoring these figures closely. In particular, it will be important to consider a range of strategies for increasing the proportion of applicants from LSES backgrounds in order to meet the recently announced federal target (see Section 1.2 above).

Table 4. Preliminary applications as at November, 2007-08 and 2008-09

State	2007-08	2008-09	% change
NSW and ACT	68,603	72,607	5.8%
VIC	61,766	64,447	4.3%
QLD	40,030	39,784	-0.6%
WA	15,861	16,164	1.9%
SA and NT	19,546	19,941	2.0%
TAS	6,359	6,699	5.3%
TOTAL AUSTRALIA	**212,165**	**219,642**	**3.5%**

Source: DEEWR, 2009, p.3

A recently released Australian study of the role of post-school education and training (Marks, 2008) has found that in terms of earnings, attainment of a bachelor degree increases one's earnings by approximately 31 percent, whereas apprenticeships increase one's earnings by 23 percent and a TAFE diploma increases one's earnings by approximately 14 percent. Thus, while attention must be focused toward increasing the participation rates of people from LSES backgrounds in Queensland tertiary education, it is even more important to ensure that as many people as possible from this demographic group have the opportunity and support to optimise the human capital potential of the State by participating in higher education.

In light of this, the current study and the proposed further research program have significant implications for Queensland in terms of the State's economic future and the capacity of human capital to actively engage in the national and international knowledge economy.

1.3 PROJECT PURPOSE, SCOPE AND TERMINOLOGY

The purpose of this project was to conduct an empirical study that would result in findings that inform systemic policy development aimed at improving tertiary participation and attainment by students from LSES backgrounds in Queensland. The scope of the project is on systemic policy, initiatives and programs that encourage participation or attainment by individuals from LSES, rather than initiatives or programs that are institution-specific. The scope also includes reference to potential State Government initiatives to address professional skills

shortages as well as general innovations aimed at improving human and social capital.

The ultimate goal of the project is to contribute to the enhancement of Queensland's education and training system by maximising the participation and attainment of LSES students and by improving their quality of life, future life choices, and opportunities.

The research emphasis of this study is on enhancing LSES student participation in tertiary education with a view to increasing the proportion of Queenslanders who have 'a fair chance to become a university graduate' (Gillard, 2008). The report recognises the significance of a range of pathways to higher education, particularly through the VET sector. It is also mindful of the recent *Review of Higher Education* (Bradley et al., 2008) which draws attention to the fact that the Australian Government will progressively extend the tertiary entitlement to the VET sector, thus potentially resulting in a greater blurring of the boundaries between sectors than is currently the case. Further, this report is cognisant of the fact that the proposed reform of arrangements governing tertiary education in Australia will influence definitions of the notion of 'tertiary' and 'higher' education, along with structures for managing the continuum of tertiary skills provision in Australia (Bradley et al., 2008, p. xvi).

From the start of this project, the term 'tertiary' has proven somewhat problematic because the ultimate focus of the study (as agreed and negotiated with the Working Advisory Group – see next section) is on systemic strategies to enhance the participation of LSES people in higher education in Queensland. Since VET represents an important pathway into higher education in this State, the term 'tertiary' has been used throughout this report to acknowledge that, where relevant, data and implications relating to the VET sector – particularly TAFE – are considered. Nevertheless, the predominant focus is on the university participation rates of LSES people in Queensland, even though the term 'tertiary' is used throughout to acknowledge the broader pathways which students may follow as they make their way to university. The authors acknowledge that universities are by no means the only providers of

higher education in Australia, but for the purposes of this report, the term 'higher education' refers primarily to universities, while 'tertiary education' also includes higher-level VET programs (e.g., VET Diploma, Advanced Diploma or Associate Degree)[3]. Thus, the focus of the present study rests on systemic approaches for increasing LSES student participation rates in universities, regardless of the specific pathway taken.

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3. The project team recognise the increasing numbers of TAFE colleges with degree awarding powers (e.g., Associate Degrees in Aviation from Swan TAFE, WA; and Associate Degree in Engineering (Mining) from Central Queensland TAFE/CQU/Anglo Coal Australia), however while very important, detailed treatment of this subject lies beyond the scope of the current project.

2. PROJECT APPROACH

The following five research questions were stipulated in the project brief, thereby shaping the study's design, methodology, and data analyses:

1. What are the major factors that promote or inhibit participation and attainment in tertiary education by LSES students in Queensland?

2. To what extent do systemic policies or practices (systemic factors) of Queensland's tertiary education system promote or inhibit participation and attainment by LSES students? That is, what features of Queensland's tertiary education system have a significant effect on participation and attainment by LSES students?

3. What system policies or practices are found to boost participation and attainment by LSES students in other jurisdictions?

4. What evidence is there to suggest that policies or practices that have boosted participation and attainment by LSES students in other jurisdictions would be successful if implemented in Queensland?

5. What are the implications of the research findings for Queensland's tertiary education system to improve participation and attainment by LSES students?

These questions were addressed over four key project phases, as outlined in the following section.

2.1 PROJECT PHASES AND MILESTONES

A Working Advisory Group (WAG) was established early in the project, comprising the following DETA (now DET) representatives:

Dr Sharon Broughton (DETA Project Manager)
Dr John Dungan (Director, Strategic Research and Education Futures, DETA)
Greg Thurlow (Director, DETA)
Wayne Delaforce (Director TAFE Futures)
Julie Straughair (Office of Higher Education)

This group met face-to-face with project team representatives on three occasions, with additional email communication and feedback as negotiated. The project phases and timeline are outlined below, followed by details of the sampling and data collection methodology.

Project phase	Key tasks and milestones	Timeline
1: Project foundations	WAG meeting, agreement on project scope and approach, budget, timeline, contract signed, ethics approval, project officer appointed	June–Aug 2008
2: Literature scan	Preliminary draft Penultimate draft, based on WAG feedback	July 2008 Oct 2008
3: Data collection and analysis	University and TAFE surveys (paper-based and online) developed, distributed, analysed; stakeholder interviews with students, policy-makers and practitioners	Aug 2008-Jan 2009
4: Reporting and dissemination	Progress report Final draft report and workshop	Oct 2008 Feb-April 2009

2.2 SAMPLING, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The project adopted a mixed methods approach to data collection. In addition to conducting a comprehensive review of the literature to identify relevant State, national and international research literature (see Section 3), qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to gather data from a range of key stakeholders. These are described in turn below.

2.2.1 Interviews with key stakeholders

Following ethics approval, a combination of focus group meetings and individual interviews were conducted with senior policymakers, administrators and equity managers from the university, TAFE, DETA and QTAC sectors. Several national and international experts in the field of higher education were also interviewed using a combination of phone, face-to-face and online interview techniques. Expert interviewees included Professor Liz Thomas (Director, Widening Participation Research Centre, Edge Hill University Liverpool, United Kingdom) and Professor Trevor Gale (Centre Director of the National Centre for Equity, Australia). In total, 11 individual and group interviews were conducted with the key stakeholder group. A copy of the interview protocol for these stakeholders is presented in Appendix 4. During each interview, interviewees were asked to share their views, expertise and knowledge about the factors that influence the participation and attainment of LSES people in tertiary education, in addition to providing recommendations for improvement to enable distillation of the effects of systemic factors.

Four student interviews were also conducted in order to investigate student perceptions and experiences of the factors that influence participation and attainment by LSES in tertiary education. Three of these interviews were with mentors of LSES students who participated in a mentoring program operated by Griffith University Equity Services. The fourth interview was conducted with a student who had personal experience with making the transition from TAFE to university.

It was not feasible within the project timeframe to gather comprehensive data from a representative sample of stakeholders. Rather, a purposive sampling approach was used in conjunction with a snowball technique, in order to maximise the quality and range of data gathered. Future research on LSES and tertiary education in Queensland should include interviews with key stakeholder groups such as TAFE students, job network recipients, OP-eligible youth who chose not to take up university offers, school students and administrators, parents and local community members. Clearly, there is also an ongoing and urgent need to undertake similar research with students, families and community members representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout the State. This focus lay beyond the scope of the present study.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed for emergent themes (Charmaz, 2000) in accordance with the project scope and research questions.

2.2.2 Surveys of TAFE and university students

A self-report survey was designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data from university and TAFE students from LSES backgrounds in order to identify barriers and enablers of decisions to enter TAFE and higher education. A copy of each survey is included in Appendix 1 and 2.

Survey development and contents
Each survey comprised three sections. The first section gathered demographic and enrolment data from respondents (e.g., age, gender, residential location, etc.) using a combination of open-ended and forced-choice items. The second section asked about students' experiences prior to their current study at university or TAFE (e.g., sources of information used for making tertiary education decisions) using Likert rating-scale items. The third section asked about students' current experiences at TAFE or university (e.g., whether they had seriously considered discontinuing or deferring their study) using a combination of closed and Likert rating-scale items. The survey concluded with one open-ended item. University students were asked: 'Tell us one thing that would have assisted you in your transition

to university'; while TAFE respondents were asked: 'What would have made it easier for you to enrol in TAFE?'

Items were adapted for TAFE and university settings following consultation with relevant key stakeholders. Each instrument was also pilot tested for item relevance and content validity prior to administration. Online and paper-based versions of each survey were developed in order to optimise response rates.

University surveys: Sample and distribution
In August 2008, a letter was written to the Vice-Chancellors of six Queensland universities, informing them of the project and inviting them to participate. Five universities agreed to partake in the study. Participating universities nominated contact persons with whom the Project Officer discussed specific instructions on sampling and survey distribution procedures. In each university, all commencing students from LSES backgrounds (according to postcode) were invited by email to participate in the study in October 2008. This initial invitation email, sent on behalf of the participating institution, advised willing students to click on a Universal Resource Locator (URL) to access and complete the survey. Incentives for voluntary participation were advertised in the form of multiple cash prizes and MP3 players.

In addition, a representative sample of approximately one-third of all eligible students in the respective universities was also invited to participate by distributing paper-based surveys (with reply-paid envelopes) in October 2008. These paper-based surveys were administered in an attempt to increase response rates, as is now common practice with national surveys such as the Australian Survey of Student Engagement. Survey distribution was managed by institutional contacts, unless administrative assistance from the project team was requested to help with survey mail-outs.

The online and paper-based surveys were administered to a total of 5550 commencing university students. In total, 1019 responses were received for the University survey, representing a response rate of 18.4% (paper-based response rate:

9%, email response rate: 21%), which is comparable to, if not slightly higher than, the response rates for similar student surveys at the national level. Specific characteristics of the university student sample are provided in Section 2.2.4 and Table 5 and 6.

TAFE surveys: Sample and distribution
A similar sampling and survey distribution process to that for the university sector was used for the TAFE sector; however, given time restrictions and limited access to relevant postcode data, student sampling was more opportunistic in nature. Specifically, the project team relied heavily on the assistance of Wayne Delaforce (Assistant Director of Development, Queensland University of Technology), who provided the names of eight Queensland TAFE institutes who were willing to participate in the study. Data were collected from students at the participating TAFE institutes in November 2008 using a combination of online surveys, mailed surveys and class-distributed surveys. The online and paper-based surveys were administered to a total of 2200 TAFE students. In total, 247 responses were received for the TAFE survey, representing a response rate of 11 percent (paper-based response rate: 10%, email response rate: 13%). Since the research team had limited control over sampling in the TAFE sector, only one third of survey responses were from LSES students. Although disappointing, this result was not surprising given the circumstances that led to a delayed distribution of surveys late in the year. Specific characteristics of the TAFE student sample are provided in Section 2.2.4 and Table 5 and 6.

2.2.3 Data analysis

Survey data were analysed using SPSS software, following the necessary data cleaning, correction and coding procedures. SPSS software enabled production of descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. Independent t-tests were conducted to determine the statistical significance levels of relationships between nominated variables. Significance levels are reported at $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$ respectively. Open-ended survey items were coded for themes using NVIVO software. Interviews were manually analysed for themes. The data presented in this report pertain

specifically to the five research questions posed (see Section 2) and the agreed scope of this investigation. It is envisaged that further data from this study will be reported in various fora, as negotiated with the Queensland DET (formerly DETA) Working Advisory Group for this project.

2.2.4 Sample characteristics: university and TAFE survey respondents

As demonstrated in Table 5, students from LSES backgrounds (based on postcode) represented slightly more than half the total sample of respondents from university and TAFE institutions. The majority (56%) of university respondents fell into this category, with approximately one-third (32%) of the TAFE sample identified as LSES. Due to the primary focus on university students, coupled with the small sample size of LSES students in the TAFE sample, statistical reporting of TAFE data is kept to a minimum in this report. It is used for illustrative purposes where appropriate. Unless otherwise indicated, the majority of reporting beyond this section presents findings as they relate to the LSES subgroup of the university sample.

Table 5. Sample characteristics by socioeconomic group: University and TAFE students

	Enrolled TAFE n (% of total TAFE respondents)	Enrolled University n (% of total uni respondents)	N (% of total sample)
LSES	79 (32%)	571 (56%)	650 (51%)
Other SES	168 (68%)	448 (44%)	616 (49%)
N	247	1019	1266

Almost all university student respondents were enrolled in undergraduate degree programs, whereas TAFE student respondents were enrolled in programs at a range of different levels. Although group differences were not statistically significant due to the many subcategories, TAFE students from LSES backgrounds were *less* likely to be enrolled in an Advanced Diploma, Diploma, Certificate or Trade compared to university students from LSES backgrounds.

In the total sample, similar to the Queensland and national populations, Indigenous students – the majority of whom are LSES – are under-represented in post-secondary education and training (see Table 6). Only 3.2 percent of students from the total sample self-identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. Among this minority group, most students were from the TAFE sample (comprising 7.8% of the total TAFE sample). However, numbers were too small to draw meaningful comparisons between low and other SES groups among the Indigenous student sample.

A small proportion (13%) of students from the total sample reported coming from families in which English was not the main language spoken at home. These families were concentrated among the higher SES cohort in the sample, and the proportion of students in this subgroup was relatively consistent across university and TAFE institutions.

Table 6. Sample characteristics by demographic characteristics: University and TAFE students

	Enrolled TAFE n (% of total TAFE respondents)	Enrolled University LSES n (% of total LSES uni respondents)	Enrolled University Other SES n (% of other SES uni respondents)
Gender: female	153 (62%)	394 (69%)	300 (67%)
ATSI[1] background	19 (7.8%)	15 (2.6%)	8 (1.8%)
English spoken at home	215 (87%)	478 (84%)	408 (91%)
First person in family at university/TAFE	116 (47%)	295 (52%)	188 (42%)

1. ATSI: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

These background sample characteristics are important for three reasons: i) they can significantly influence young people's pathway options and choices for tertiary education; ii) they can interact with systemic factors to shape options and choices; and iii) they impose limits on the capacity of adjustments at a systemic level to affect options and choices.

Further discussion of these factors and additional information about the parental education, prior experiences and financial situation of respondents is included in Section 4 (Key Findings).

2.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Given the project timeline, scope and budget, this research was not designed to gather comprehensive, representative data from stakeholders. Rather, the project team present this study as a preliminary data gathering and scoping exercise to highlight key systemic issues and proposed future directions in relation to enhancing participation and attainment in tertiary education of Queensland students from LSES backgrounds. While the university sample size is pleasing, there was insufficient time to gather

more representative data from the TAFE sector. Moreover, it was beyond the scope of this project to gather empirical data from the school sector – this is deemed an essential component of any comprehensive treatment of the subject and forms a key part of this project's recommendations. Further, given the systemic focus of this project, interviews with students at the institution-level were necessarily limited.

The project team was also unable to gather data from key stakeholders such as job network clients who were OP-eligible at the time of the study. The project scope restricted a necessary fine-grained analysis of the different dimensions of LSES (e.g., parental education, parental income, indicators of social and cultural capital). Students who fall into this category (using the postcode definition) are not members of a homogenous group; thus, future studies of this subject in Queensland would profit by building on existing data to recognise the complexity and significance of issues arising from multiple disadvantage, including the unique challenges faced by students from remote communities or the particular needs of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander backgrounds. In particular, we recognise the special circumstances faced by Indigenous peoples and the need for targeted programs and policies, discussion of which lies beyond the scope of the present project. The data reported in this study are reliant on the postcode categorisation of SES, as used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. There is widespread acknowledgement of the limitations of this measure (see for example, Bradley et al., 2008, Recommendation 3). This limitation is recognised by the project team and is particularly problematic in the State of Queensland, as outlined in Section 4.2.4 below.

Despite these limitations, the project nevertheless represents a solid preliminary (i.e., Phase 1) scoping study to identify many significant issues and systemic factors that are worth closer analysis if Queensland is to provide national leadership in optimising the participation and attainment of students from LSES backgrounds in tertiary, and particularly higher, education.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A scan of research across Australian and selected international jurisdictions to identify: a) factors promoting or inhibiting participation in post secondary education and training, and b) initiatives to increase participation and enhance outcomes, reveals a range of complexly inter-related factors:

- broad social/cultural factors, including historical participation rates;

- short term/immediate conditions, notably the resources boom and the possibilities it generates for young people to enter the labour market directly under attractive conditions of employment; and

- systemic or institutional factors on a range of scales, including from general provisions for career guidance at school, through application procedures, and to support across the school-post-school education transition and while engaged in post-school study.

This review primarily focuses on systemic factors, but also considers other factors that may shape or impact systemic factors. It also identifies critical issues in the nature, scope and value of existing research, implications for evidence based policy making, and implications for further/future research.

3.1 LSES 'BACKGROUND' FACTORS

3.1.1 Income related factors

The research literature identifies several broad dimensions of the way LSES issues come into play in generating unequal and under-participation. A number of Australian studies and reviews (James, 2008a; Bradley et al., 2008; Lamb et al., 2004), as well UK studies (Bowl, 2001; Gorard & Smith, 2006; Sutton Trust, 2008) concluded that the primary barriers to post-school educational education were directly related to financial issues, including direct and indirect (e.g., opportunity) costs of study, fear of debt, desire to begin earning, and a sense that costs are likely to outweigh benefits (Callaghan, 2003; Moodie & Swift, 1996; Norton, 2000). For remote/

rural students, the costs of living away from home are an additional cost-barrier (Alberta Learning, 2005; Callaghan, 2003; Høj, 2008). James (2008a) noted some evidence that these financial factors have greater influence in geographical areas where there are more concentrated groups or low income earners. Research also suggests that low income and/ or living in low cost residential areas can result in higher attendance at under-resourced schools (Teese & Walstab, 2008) and the inability of students to take advantage of school choices which are theoretically available in the educational marketplace (Campbell, 2007).

3.1.2 Family educational histories

LSES is strongly associated with low educational attainment in families, inter-generationally (Teese, Polesel & Mason, 2004). Most LSES students' come from families who have never had a member attend university, and their parents frequently have a limited educational background and no post-school qualifications. Such types of family background are strongly associated with low educational attainment (McMillan, Rothman & Wernert, 2005) and subsequent under-participation in, and under completion of, post-school education and training (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Marks & McMillian, 2007). This limited family cultural capital (Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; Jardine & Krause, 2005) affects young people's education through limited parental capacity and confidence to: a) deal with schools; b) provide support with students' homework (Le & Miller, 2005; Gorard & Smith, 2006); and c) prepare students for post-school education and training (Bradley et al., 2008; Curtis, 2008; Norton, 2000; Plummer, 2000). LSES students from families with low educational attainment are less likely to achieve well at school, and low school achievement (beginning early in secondary school) is strongly associated with non-participation in post-school education and training. The importance of family educational histories is underscored by recent evidence (Boon, 2007; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Sutton Trust, 2008) that parents are the strongest influencers of LSES young people's post-school educational and occupational choices.

3.1.3 Other family characteristics

A range of common parenting practices common in LSES (including Indigenous LSES) families have been identified as posing educational risks for young people. In particular, contrary to 'authoritarian parenting' which is characterised by warmth, involvement and supervision (Boon, 2007, 2008), 'neglectful parenting' is strongly associated with educational risks such as low motivation levels, low self-esteem, and poor social adjustment. Membership of LSES blended or sole parent families has also been associated with low levels of post-school educational participation (Boon, 2007; Bowl, 2001; Gorard & Smith, 2006).

Internationally, high levels of school mobility (i.e., multiple changes of school, often during term) have been shown to be strongly associated with low educational outcomes from the earliest years of schooling upward (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Mehana & Reynolds, 2004; Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Rumberger, 2002, 2003; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). Although little research has examined relations between LSES and mobility in Australia, some recent work in north Queensland has demonstrated high levels of school mobility among LSES (Navin, in progress), including Indigenous, families (Sorin & Iloste, 2006).

3.1.4 Social networks and cultures

LSES family and school-based social networks play a critical role in shaping LSES post-school education and training participation, as both sources of information (Gorard & Smith, 2006; Heath, Fuller & Paton, 2008) and post-school education and training choices made by students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Such networks are characterised by limited educational knowledge and 'insider' knowledge of the requirements of more prestigious occupations and are often negative towards higher education (Cotterell, 1996; Rothman & Hillman, 2008; Sutton Trust, 2008). A range of classical (Connell, 1985; Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett, 1982; Walker, 1988; Willis, 1977) and more recent broad interpretive UK studies (Ball, 2003; Reay, David & Ball, 2005) have demonstrated a 'working class' cultural dynamic in social networks which generates

and reinforces a range of views of education, particularly 'academic' education and a net negative disposition towards it. In Queensland, Crombie and Delaforce (2008) have empirically documented the educational aspirations of specific local communities. While not confined to persons of LSES or to school completers, the study demonstrated that many people hold limited and highly-specific educational aspirations, tied to particular projects, circumstances and conditions rather than being formulated at the level of abstraction that would allow them to be conceptualised or represented as 'educational aspirations' more generally.

3.1.5 Subjective factors

The aforementioned contextual factors form a complex, interactive and dynamic ensemble that shapes individual LSES students' aspirations, dispositions and decision making (James 2008a; c.f., Gorard & Smith, 2006). Thus, a substantial majority of senior secondary students, including LSES students, have been shown to aspire toward reaching some form of post-school education and training, although such aspirations are less common among LSES students (Bradley at al., 2008). However, such aspirations do not necessarily translate into participation, particularly among LSES students. In part, LSES students are inhibited by lack of confidence in their financial and/or academic capacity to participate successfully (Bett, Doughney & Vu, 2008, James, 2002; c.f., Hutchings & Archer, 1998). Further, as successive studies of school completers in Queensland demonstrate, participation is also inhibited by an aversion to study. This is increasingly expressed as either a desire to take 'a break from study' (which translates, practically, into a 'gap year') or a blunt aversion to study per se. Critically, higher SES students tend more towards wanting a break, whereas lower SES students simply indicate that they are not interested in further study (DETA, 2008, p. 47; cf., DETA, 2007; Polesel, at al., 2005; Polesel & Teese, 2006).

3.1.6 Conclusion: LSES background factors – complex dynamic interactions

In attempting to explain the under-participation in post-school education and training, and the uneven distribution of participation across different post-school sectors and programs, James (2008a) concluded that:

> disadvantage with respect to higher education should not be conceptualised narrowly in terms of extrinsic barriers that confront students at or near the point of higher education, such as distance and financial cost. There are clearly broader social, educational and cultural factors involved. (4; c.f., Bradley et al., 2008; Gorard & Smith, 2006)

This complexity of factors associated with LSES and educational values and practices highlights: a) the limitations of crude measures such as those derived from postcodes; and b) the importance of research that develops and implements more sophisticated and appropriate operational definitions and procedures for researching LSES, as has been recognised and strongly argued in a number of recent reports and reviews (e.g., Bradley at al., 2008; Gorard & Smith, 2006; James, 2008a).

3.2 SCHOOLING, POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING, THE ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT

As noted above, there is a stable relationship between QTAC applications and unemployment levels in Queensland. The factors constituting this relationship are under-researched and poorly understood, but for LSES young people they primarily include direct financial costs, the desire to earn sooner rather than later, perceptions of the relationship between short-term costs and medium- to long-term payoff, and attitudes towards further study.

Such 'general' factors interact with specific labour market conditions to shape concrete decision making, although there is contradictory evidence from the international literature regarding the nature and strengths of the effects of un/employment rates and post-school education and training participation (Handa & Skolnik, 2005; DiPietro, 2006; Healy & Taylor, 2008; Healy & Trouson, 2008). What is clear, however, is that the economic resources boom and its associated labour market conditions have had a strong impact on participation rates in Queensland and Western Australia, the two states whose economies are most powerfully driven by the resources boom.

As demonstrated in Table 7 below, the impact of the resources boom in Queensland and Western Australia is highlighted by comparisons between post-school education and training participation rates in different capital cities – the resource boom capitals (Brisbane, Perth) and the capitals of the two states with more generalised economics strengths.

Table 7: Proportion of 18-20 year olds in selected capital cities not attending an education institution

Capital cities	Brisbane	Perth	Sydney	Melbourne
Non-participation rates (%)	49.6	48.2	38.2	34.3

Source: Birrell & Edwards, 2007

The percentile rates presented in Table 7 are substantially higher in regional areas. Of all 18-20 year olds, 67.3 percent of young people in regional Queensland and 77.1 percent of young people in regional Western Australia do not participate in any form of post-school education or training (Birrell & Edwards, 2007).

While the resources boom in Queensland and Western Australia appear to be depressing participation in post-school education and training, for those students who enrol in further education there is a close alignment between student choice and the specificities of the labour market in areas requiring post-school study. For example, Wells (2008) demonstrates that over the past five years, there has been considerable growth in tertiary education across the fields of management and commerce (reflecting the generally strong economic conditions), yet considerable decline in tertiary education across the field of IT services.

Given the salient relationship between strong labour market conditions and (low) post-school education and training participation, it is important to note that there is currently no research or data on the impact of the global economic crisis and the deterioration of the labour market, particularly in research boom economies such as Queensland. It will become increasingly important to track responses to these changed economic conditions – in the present, short-term, and medium-term futures – not only from a policy perspective, but also in relation to the opportunities it affords to better understand the contested but evidently complex relations between the two.

3.3 LSES UNDER-PARTICIPATION AND SYSTEMIC FACTORS

The background characteristics of LSES school completers interact in a complex manner with systemic factors to produce characteristic patterns of (under) participation in post-secondary school education and training. The relative failure of attempts to address issues of LSES participation in post-school education over the medium and long term, in Australia and elsewhere (Bradley et al., 2008; Gorard & Smith, 2006; James, 2008a), highlights the importance of systemic factors, since they are more readily addressable than background information. Systemic factors may come into play at three stages of tertiary education: pre-application, during the application process, and post application.

3.3.1 Pre-application

Systemic factors come into play prior to application (or non-application) for post-school education and training through: a) schools, including curriculum and career guidance options, information, advice and support; b) regulatory agencies, specifically the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA); c) post-school education and training institutions, including universities and TAFE; and d) the state bodies formed to manage the process of applying for post-school educational places, such as the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC).

i. Curriculum
Schools' curricular offerings directly shape students' post-school education and training options. Nationally, many lower SES and rural schools find it difficult to offer a wide range of academic subjects that continue to constitute the main pathway to university (Bradley et al., 2008). The range of VET offerings (Torpy, 2006) and participation in VET schools has grown substantially (Polesel & Teese, 2007). While this growth is commonly (and properly) seen as good in itself, when combined with the background factors discussed above it can systemically and disproportionately funnel LSES students into VET programs and, in turn, limit their post-school education and training options to the VET sector (McMillan, Rothman & Wernert, 2005). The use of a language of competency and skills and a 'vocational education perspective' in VET, in contrast to the language of knowledge and critical understanding in the more 'academic' strands, cements the differences between students who follow these two pathways through secondary school (Høj, 2008).

The range of curricula offerings interacts with background factors. While an underlying principle

of school offerings is student choice, LSES families in urban regions are less likely than others to opt for academic pathways, more likely to be in schools with strong VET options, and more financially limited in the capacity to opt for schools outside their residential locality (Campbell, 2007; for LSES families, school mobility functions as a crisis management, rather than a strategic curricular or pathway choice). A focus on VET subjects in senior secondary schooling is negatively associated with students' participation in higher education (McMillan, Rothman & Wernert, 2005). A study by Funnell (2008), alongside the Queensland Studies Authority's published data on Year 12 school outcomes (QSA, 2008b), indicates that in small rural towns, a combination of curricular range and contextual factors (e.g., lack of school choice) reduce the likelihood of students undertaking subjects that offer strong post-school education and training options. However, research on this issue remains too sparse to provide a clear and detailed picture of how uneven options are distributed, and further research in this area is therefore required in order to inform policy that aims to promote the participation of LSES students in rural and remote communities.

ii. Information, guidance and support

The three systemic factors – namely, information about post-school education and occupations and the school subjects they require; guidance in decision making about realistic, appropriate and congenial possibilities; and support to pursue the widest and most empowering options – have been shown to be critical for post-secondary school education and training, especially for LSES students. In part, this is because the only alternative information source for LSES students is parents, whose limitations in this respect are noted above (Alloway et al., 2004; Curtis, 2008, Dalley-Trim, Alloway & Walker, 2008; Dalley-Trim et al., 2007).

Guidance and support are provided principally through schools, whereas information is provided through schools and by post-school education and training enrolment agencies and post-school education and training institutions themselves (e.g., through information magazines, brochures and websites), either independently or through schools (Curtis, 2008) and, to a lesser extent, by State curriculum regulating bodies.

In large schools, information, guidance and support are provided principally by Guidance Officers, as well as informally and incidentally by teachers. However, in smaller and rural schools, whose staffing profiles may not include Guidance Officers, information, guidance and support are principally provided by classroom teachers with no expertise in career guidance. Extensive research in Australia and other western countries indicates that students from LSES backgrounds receive little and/or poor guidance, information and support regarding post-school education and training options from schools. First, it is limited in quantity. Curtis (2008) shows that very few senior secondary students receive one or more guidance activities per month over their senior years, with most receiving no more than one per year. Second, it is also limited in quality and effectiveness. Activities vary in style, ranging from individually tailored counselling sessions to class-based informational lectures; predominantly, students report finding the tailored individual sessions of most value. Proportionately, there is little attention to actively building students' decision making knowledge and skills for informed and open (rather than restricted) choice, and the most common type of career advice activity across Years 10, 11 and 12 is the distribution of written material and handouts (Curtis, 2008). This is partially attributed to perceptions of family interest and lack of requisite cultural capital to encourage their children to continue, and partially due to limited support and resources for Guidance Officers and teachers to enable students to more effectively engage in this work (Hesketh, 1998; Plummer, 2000; Venezia & Kirst, 2005; Whiteley & Neil, 2000).

The significance of guidance early in the pre-application phase is highlighted by Alloway et al.'s (2004) research showing that students form ideas and aspirations regarding appropriate and attainable post-school choices well before their senior secondary school years. The significance of the lack of such guidance is highlighted by contrasting research that demonstrates the positive effects of appropriate support and guidance. Viadero (2001) reported a US school with high levels of poverty which, through a

strongly focused educational guidance program, has secured high rates of success in sending its students to college. In a more recent US study, Venezia and Kirst (2005) also reported high numbers of poor students continuing into higher education through detailed preparation for college/university. Many studies report that there is limited support for LSES students to make curricular choices that maximise post-school education and training options or are appropriate to both aspiration and potential. This has been attributed to a widespread perception of the inevitable failure of students from LSES backgrounds, because many school leavers are either passively not encouraged or actively discouraged from going forward with higher education (Bett, Doughey & Vu, 2008; Bowl, 2001; Curtis, 2008; Hutchings & Archer, 2001; Plummer, 2000; Sutton Trust, 2008).

In Australia, information about specific post-school education and training options is generated largely by institutions themselves, and by enrolment agencies. In Queensland, most information about post-school education and training options is disseminated by the curriculum regulator, the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC), and the universities themselves. A major means of disseminating such information is through print and/or web-based resources. In many cases, print materials are simply hard copy versions of the online materials. Most of QSA's tertiary entrance publications are related to eligibility criteria (e.g., around calculation of OPs). However, QSA also publishes Exit Lines for Year 12 students (QSA, 2008a) to provide important information on senior studies and post-school options, combined with some 'advice and inspiration'. Concrete information on tertiary admissions procedures, however, is limited.

QTAC also functions as an information broker to schools, parents and students. Information is provided via a website and by publication of glossy magazine-style brochures, such as *QTAC Tertiary Courses Guide* (QTAC, 2008a). These hard copy brochures contain a mixture of factual information (e.g., course prerequisites, etc.) and encouragement, alongside emphasising the range and flexibility of students' options, possibilities for change of program after

application, acceptance or enrolment, and the social inclusiveness of tertiary education and the range of support services (often highlighted through visual and brief, catchy 'quote' style text). QTAC also issues a *QTAC Update* (QTAC, 2008b) three times a year – in April, July and October – to provide information about changes to available courses, application procedures and timelines, and other promotional and informational events such as careers expos and university open days. Both general information and *Update* brochures also direct schools, students and parents to the information available from each of the universities via their respective websites.

QTAC information is supplemented by 'infomercial' brochures from individual universities. These vary across institutions in terms of both the level of detail and format. Across the board, most universities make QSA and QTAC materials available online (commonly via a link for 'future students') and in hard copy. Many universities follow a similar approach to that of the QTAC brochures – a combination of information and 'sell'. The information provided by individual universities includes a mix of generic information about university study; specific information about the university's programs, support services and student population diversity; and specific 'plugs' to entice potential students to select them above their competitors. Such materials combine dense informational text with more 'catchy' graphics and quotes from students (e.g., aspects of university life are described as 'cool', the sociability and fun of university life is emphasised), and in some cases seek to tap means of communication central to popular culture. For example, the University of Sunshine Coast maintains a YouTube channel, with a range of video clips of student life.

A Queensland Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (now subsumed by the QSA) study published in 2000 showed that LSES students, along with rural/remote students accessed such information less than their higher SES and urban peers. While this was partially attributed to the fact that fewer LSES and rural/remote students were OP eligible compared to their counterparts and thus less motivated to seek information, the study also showed that even LSES students who were OP eligible and

intended to participate in higher education were less likely to access relevant information than higher SES students (Whiteley & Neil, 2000). However, access to and/or expertise and comfort in using online resources is growing rapidly, and Curtis (2008) reports more favourably about online materials as an important source of information for students.

Post-school education and training institutions themselves also constitute an important source of information, both through schools and independently. More than one-half of Year 10 students and three quarters of Year 12 students report having talked to a representative from the VET or higher education sectors. Post-school education and training institutions also commonly conduct open days and a range of structured programs for senior secondary students. However, several sources of research – including Bradley et al.'s (2008) review of higher education in Australia, extensive reviews in Australia (James, 2008a) and the UK (Gorard & Smith, 2006; Sutton Trust, 2008), and a detailed study on partnerships between schools and higher education to promote wider participation (Tough, 2008) – note that such information sessions tend to be conducted on a 'one-off', ad hoc basis and are often reliant on individual/personal contacts; thus, they are relatively ineffective. This body of literature provides evidence that effective relationships between the school and higher education sectors involve formalized, long term, and involve more frequent exchanges. Tough (2008) and Sutton Trust (2008) also note that such contacts are often one-sided and initiated by universities for their own benefit, and that more effective interactions involve more equal partnerships and tangible for both universities and schools. Further, an American case study (O'Neill et al., 2002) reveals the importance of effective communication between the higher education sector and students from socially disadvantaged groups, on an individual level, to secure increase enrolments by alleviating concerns regarding relationships with faculty, peers and family. In principle, these findings also apply to the VET sector; however, such close working relationships are already established through the options for senior secondary school students to undertake some study through local TAFE institutes.

3.3.2 Eligibility, application, acceptance and enrolment processes

In Queensland, eligibility to enter tertiary education in general, and specific higher education programs in particular, is regulated by the calculation of an individual student score by the Queensland Studies Authority. These scores include an Overall Position (OP) ranking and Field Positions, the latter which identify relative strengths across a range of particular domains. Individual scores are generated from a combination of performance over the final two years of secondary school in 'OP eligible' subjects and a Core Skills Test (QCS) administered statewide to all students seeking an OP, moderated by the relations between ranges of school grades and QCS ranges. In general, university entry is determined by OP. The QSA's own 'myth busting' literature about OP scores attests to the ongoing confusion among students and their parents over the calculation of OPs (c.f., Beavis, 2006). There are also credit transfer arrangements to construct pathways between the VET and higher education sectors, and there are no statutory or regulatory prohibitions on universities developing other criteria for eligibility; rather, universities themselves determine and publish OP cut offs for different courses, and at times 'force' admissions below their published cut off points. It should also be noted that the distinction between TAFE as 'the' VET sector and universities as the 'tertiary' or 'higher education' sector with pathways (existing or to be constructed) is blurred by the recent development of some TAFE degree programs within the VET sector.

A number of research studies have examined alternative ways of determining eligibility for post-school education and training. Mercer (2007) suggests that there is evidence to support using interviews as part of the process.[4] Ball (2007) reports ACER's development of a pilot Year 12 aptitude test to assist with determining entrance to higher education. Critically, for present purposes, neither study considers ways in which current procedures might facilitate or hinder the transition process from deciding to pursue post-school study and embarking on that study. McLelland and Topley (2002) examined alternative entry criteria and

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4. This is a doctoral thesis, currently embargoed, for which only an abstract is available; while Mercer's (2007) findings may have wider application to other tertiary programs in professions in which social relationships are crucial, the inability to critically review the methodology or findings of this research severely limits its present value.

procedures for students with 'non-conventional' pathways into post-school education. Birch and Miller (2007) examine alternatives to the use of the Tertiary Entrance Score (TES), but only in relation to capacity to predict success at university. In the USA, a wide range of admission procedures and criteria are used, including secondary school results, GPA, class ranking, standardised test scores and in some cases extracurricular activities, personal essays and/or interviews. The only significant study of Queensland procedures appears to be that by the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (TEPA), the statutory body regulating tertiary entrance, which studied responses to a trial telephone-based application procedure in the late 1990s– a procedure which was discontinued following trial (Whiteley & Neil, 1997). The Bradley (2008) review noted that even existing options for determining eligibility and developing bilateral pathways between the VET and higher education sectors are underutilised (c.f., Gorard & Smith, 2006; Sutton Trust, 2008).

Enrolment procedures for post-school education and training in Queensland are largely organised and conducted by QTAC. Students apply for admission using the QTAC application form, which is available and may be submitted in hard copy or online. Applicants are required to pay a registration fee in order for their application to be accepted, with additional fees applying to late applications. The online application form involves a sequence of 'cards', at least one of which involves pull down menus for coded information. The Application process allows students to apply for up to six courses, (for further information, refer to http://www.qtac.edu.au/OnlineServices/TTTApply.html).

The application process dovetails with the acceptance and enrolment process. Each October, applicants' preferences are distributed to tertiary institutions who assess them and decide on which applicants should be offered places. These decisions are referred back to QTAC who inform applicants. Successful applicants are required to respond to QTAC offers within a specified timeframe using either the letter of offer or the QTAC Current Applicant online service, in conjunction with the ID code and password they were issued during the application process. Individual

universities also notify successful applicants, who must also respond to the offering institution. There are a number of QTAC response options, including:

- accept, defer or reject your offer outright and no longer be considered for other preferences

- accept, defer or reject on the condition that you will still be considered for existing higher preferences

- accept, defer or reject on the condition that you will be considered for new higher preferences.

Applicants respond using the hard copy of their letter of offer, or the QTAC website. Institutions also inform successful applicants, offer them a place and invite them to enrol.

This process continues over an extended timeframe from July until early the following year, concluding with the issuance of a final round of offers (although the particular end point is not specified on the QTAC website). Individual universities are also included in the processing of applications, in particular where applicants have not met published OP cut off requirements. Decisions about whether to 'force' such applications, and some other decisions, are in many cases made at faculty and school levels. Given that such applications are being processed over the months of December and January when many staff with decision-making capacity may be on leave, this process can entail delays.

In addition to QTAC applications procedure, both VET and higher education institutions also maintain direct entry options. For example, students interested in TAFE Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas and part time, Advanced Diplomas, Diplomas and Certificates can apply directly to any TAFE Institute. The TAFE Queensland website provides links to each of the Queensland TAFE Institutes and their application and enrolment procedures. Many TAFE institutes make offers to all eligible applicants. Where this is not the case, part-time courses are offered in order to support a transition to full-time study after six months. Universities, in particular, use this method to address enrolment shortfalls and to secure students

who did not apply through QTAC. Importantly, Bradley et al.'s (2008) review noted that alternatives to the 'standard' tertiary entrance score (i.e., OP in Queensland) are under utilised.

The Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) (2007) notes that the tertiary education offer rate across Australia for 2007 (85%) was the same as 2006, representing a four percent increase since 2005 (81%). However, there is unevenness across disciplines, with offers for Education and Nursing below the national average. Overall, 61 percent of applicants accepted offers lower than their first preference; however, this acceptance rate was noticeably lower in Queensland (23%) compared to other Australian states. The annual increases in offers indicate that the percentage of eligible applicants receiving an offer in 2007 is marginally higher than in any year since 2001. For nearly all fields of study, the acceptance rate for offers of first preference is very high in all states. However, exceptions are noted – such as the relatively low acceptance rate of Hospitality courses in Queensland – that may be explained by institutional factors. There appears to be no recently published and no catalogued unpublished (e.g., doctoral) research documenting or analysing tertiary entrance procedures in Queensland. Two Australian studies by Binney and Martin (1997) and Bryce and Anderson (2007) discuss students' decision-making processes from school to post-school options elsewhere in Australia. However, neither study examines systemic procedures, although Bryce and Anderson (2007) offer some possible insights into the confusion surrounding options, requirements and procedures, and the limitations of the current systems in addressing this confusion (c.f. Beavis, 2006; Bradley at al., 2008).

This lack of research means that the only available published data on the procedures for securing admission and enrolment in tertiary education is from the QSA, QTAC and the universities and TAFE themselves. While the QSA claims to be responsible for developing and providing information about tertiary entrance procedures, its focus is almost exclusively on the determination of eligibility rather than the procedures for entering post-school study. Entry to tertiary institutions in Queensland is managed through QTAC, a private company

established by and representing the major tertiary providers to collectively manage applications for admission to undergraduate and some end-on professional postgraduate programs (e.g., Graduate Diplomas of Education) for public and private tertiary institutions. It also handles applications for full time enrolment in TAFE full-time diploma and advanced diploma courses but not for admission to most TAFE certificate programs, many diploma programs, or part time TAFE enrolment.

Given the limited body of Australian research, two American studies are worth noting. O'Neill et al. (2002) found that even when a college was selected as students' first or second preference, offers from other universities were accepted when the college was slow to notify students that they had been accepted. Similarly, Barrett, Gordon and Newman (2003) found that waitlists were a barrier for secondary school graduates intending to embark on tertiary studies. In the UK, more generally, Gorard and Smith (2006) noted that there was a widespread lack of awareness of admissions processes (especially among LSES students) and a direct relation between application and participation.

This literature suggests that systemic factors play a small yet significant role in shaping participation in post-school education and training, thus warranting further investigation in the future.

3.3.3 Post-acceptance

While individual universities routinely compile their own figures for the conversion of offers of places to enrolments, there appears to be no Australian research that systematically maps such conversion rates. Some US research, however, indicates that up to 30 percent of students who are accepted and indicate their intention to take up a place never actually sign on for classes (O'Neill et al., 2002). While national systemic and cultural factors are likely to be important in shaping the decision-making that underlies such rates, this research highlights the importance of examining the issue further.

A number of factors shape student decisions to accept offered places. Several factors concern financial issues,

which interact with the financial barriers identified earlier in this review. Some research also bears on specific systemic policies and practices that shape how and to what extent general financial barriers operate to either encourage or discourage acceptance of university places or persistence in higher education. While a number of studies have suggested that HECS fees are not a significant deterrent, direct costs associated with textbooks and general living expenses are considerable, especially for school completers living away from home. A crucial policy driver concerns the nature, level and conditions of financial support for students. Forms of support available to Australian students include Centrelink payments, which may include rent assistance. These payments are widely found to be insufficient and many students therefore work to support themselves, often to an extent that puts pressure on them to withdraw, reduce load or jeopardise their studies (Callaghan, 2003). National Accommodation Scholarships are also available to assist students moving interstate to study specialist courses, but these awards do not address intrastate mobility. Such financial conditions, the limited financial support available, and the terms on which support is provided, constitute major disincentives and continual barriers for many students (Bradley at al., 2008; James, 2008a). This situation is generally similar to that found in other western countries (e.g., Alberta Learning, 2005; Barrett, Gordon & Newman, 2003; Gorard & Smith, 2006). For students from regional and rural communities, relocation and social dislocation associated with university, and to a lesser extent VET, attendance constitutes a further disincentive to participate. Bradley at al. (2008) concludes that existing forms of support have failed to increase higher education participation rates, especially among students from LSES and other disadvantaged groups, and therefore require substantial and systematic overhaul.

A key non-financial factor inhibiting the conversion of offers into ongoing participation is the sense in which students from LSES backgrounds perceive university as a socially and culturally alien environment (Bett, Doughney & Vu, 2008; Crozier et al., 2008; Gorard & Smith, 2006). Such perceptions often result from lack of quality information and

close partnerships between schools and post-school education and training providers, as discussed above.

For students who do accept an offer to enrol in tertiary education, the first year experience is often 'fraught' (Gorard & Smith, 2006; Krause et al., 2005; Sutton Trust, 2008). This experience reflects, variously:

- lack of adequate prior knowledge about courses, resulting in student disappointment and disenchantment with the programs they enrolled in and/or choice of programs (although this appears to be less prevalent than previously);

- sense of isolation, 'culture shock, and social dislocation in the case of students moving away from home communities;

- institutional 'culture shock' associated with the different forms of social organisation and support available from school to VET and higher education;

- institutions' (in)ability to accommodate the needs of different learners;

- students' perceptions of limited staff interest in their learning and wellbeing;

- students' difficulties in accessing staff for feedback; and

- competing demands of work (Alberta Learning, 2005; Binney & Martin, 1997; Bradley at al., 2008; Bryce & Anderson, 2007; Crozier et al.,2008; Gorard & Smith, 2006; Krause et al., 2005).

3.4 CURRENT INITIATIVES AND DIRECTIONS

Two key elements of current funding policy for supporting post-school education and training participation are scholarships and fee reductions in selected priority areas, notably nursing and education. As AVCC (2007) figures indicate, this does not appear to have produced an increase in enrolments by LSES

students or any other group. Indeed, several studies have concluded that there is little evidence to suggest that HECS has a substantial effect on student choice, and HECS-related strategies offer little prospect for increasing LSES (or other) students' participation in emerging areas of identified need such as maths and sciences (Birch & Miller, 2006; Bradley at al., 2008; Høj, 2008; James, 2008a). Following James (2008a), Bradley et al. (2008) conclude that although scholarships are an important ingredient in an articulated suite of support mechanisms, they have proved insufficient to significantly increase post-school education and training participation by LSES and other disadvantaged groups.

The VET and higher education sectors have adopted a range of initiatives to provide both information and encouragement to school completers to enrol in post-school education. The literature, marketing materials, and other events that they produce address a number of the factors working against LSES participation. For example, independent universities and TAFE institutes offer materials in formats which are, at least in part, 'reader friendly'. Often these student materials target LSES students, providing case studies and LSES student experiences, along with information about a range of support services available to support students who may be first in their family to participate in tertiary education.

Mercer (2007) and McLelland and Topley (2002) have documented some small-scale initiatives that explore alternative procedures to select and admit students into tertiary education. While not specifically addressing LSES needs, this research has opened up possibilities for considering how new methods of selection and admission might be used to encourage LSES student participation in higher education. Teese, Polesel and Mason (2004) have urged caution, however, by noting that when instruments such as General Achievement Tests (GAT) were used as a measure of achievement, post-Year 12 high achievers were more likely to enrol in university whereas low achievers were more likely to enrol in Certificate IV or higher programs in TAFE.

Recent research and reviews identify a range of other initiatives worthy of wider consideration, including:

- Special Access Schemes for disadvantaged social groups, including LSES, to recognise merit not reflected in tertiary entrance scores (Sutton Trust, 2008);

- student equity focussed recruitment strategies, targeted to regions of LSES (and other modes of disadvantage);

- more systematic and intensive partnerships between school, VET and higher education providers, including:

  - making effective use of undergraduate student placements in areas such as Education, Human Movement and Social Work for the mutual benefit of students and communities (Høj, 2008);

  - introducing the university experience to school students through an extensive University Orientation program for Year 10 and 11 students (Høj, 2008; Sutton Trust, 2008);

  - sponsoring Year 12 mathematics, physics and chemistry classes on campus for a group of Schools that have insufficient student interest to offer these subjects on their own (Høj, 2008);

- systematic, staged orientation and transition programs for First Year students (Høj, 2008; Sutton Trust, 2008); and

- attention to admissions procedures in order to reduce wait times (O'Neill et al., 2002).

However, Bradley at al. (2008) note that initiatives such as these are resource intensive, with successful outcomes often reliant upon government support and funding.

A number of initiatives proposed under the former Howard government to address national skills shortages by promoting participation (including LSES participation) in apprenticeship and related VET sector training are focused on providing: a) income and other direct support to students; and b) employer incentives to boost participation,

supplementing existing support provisions for this sector (for additional information, see http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/robb/budget07/bud01_07.htm 2007). The cornerstone of the current Rudd government's response has been to initiate the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley et al., 2008) as a basis for systematic reconsideration of higher education. Key recommendations from this review, teamed with the implications for increased participation of LSES students, include a review of funding and accountability mechanisms to institutions, financial support arrangements for students, and greater systemic flexibility in the offering of programs, especially in the relationships and pathways between VET and higher education sectors. Other recommendations include greater flexibility in admissions requirements, and more systematic and extensive partnerships between schools and post-school education and training providers in providing early information, guidance and support for LSES school students.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Current literature demonstrates that LSES school completers are significantly under-represented in post-school education and training, and that those who decide to participate are disproportionately distributed over the lower vocational certificate end of the spectrum and away from the higher academic and professional end. These patterns are highly stable over time and have largely resisted interventions designed to change them.

To date, policy approaches have made little impact on these patterns. Research does highlight, however, several points at which change in systemic practices is likely to secure some effect, although there remains a shortage of detailed and carefully targeted research to identify or evaluate specific changes and effects. Key points established in this literature include the importance of developing:

- contextually appropriate initiatives, programs and resources in schools with relatively high LSES student enrolments in order to address issues of aspiration in LSES (and other disadvantaged) students;

- more relevant 'high end' curricula in schools with a relatively high proportion of LSES (and other disadvantaged) students in order to enhance their capacity to access and succeed in post-school education and training and, in particular, university education;

- sustained, effective communication between post-school providers and LSES school students, especially prior to the senior years of schooling, in order to reinforce the accessibility and desirability of participation in post-school education and training;

- more extensive and precisely targeted support for LSES students in order to provide effective preparation for tertiary study;

- clear and accessible sources of information regarding procedures for accessing post-school educational options.

The literature also demonstrates the importance of the following issues for students who apply to attend post school education or training institutions:

- establishing faster, more efficient, and more reliable systems for processing applications;

- creating and resourcing systems for active support once LSES students accept an offer of enrolment; and

- ensuring that LSES students receive sufficient financial support once enrolled.

Further, the literature points to a number of possibilities for further research on:

- more precise methods for identifying LSES students in order to inform research and policy;

- those students who opt against participating in post-school education and training; and

- barriers in the methods of disseminating information about tertiary education practices, including the application and acceptance process.

While some of these issues, particularly those focussed on broad policy directions and budgetary support, are firmly located within the scope of the Commonwealth government, they appear open to some degree of negotiation through existing bilateral governmental forums. Others offer scope for State level government as well as institutional initiatives.

These include:

- establishment of a State level framework to facilitate partnerships at State, regional and local levels between the school, VET and higher education sectors;

  - at all levels, such partnerships should aim to improve information about post-school education and training for students in general, and specifically target LSES and other disadvantaged or low participant groups;

- support further systematic research on gaps in existing knowledge of factors shaping LSES (and rural and Indigenous) students' participation;

  - such research should address widely identified conceptual and methodological issues in adequately identifying LSES students as a basis for any adequate knowledge of their post-school education and training participation and performance;

- support systemic programs across the VET and higher education sectors in order to improve the provision of adequate support for LSES students;

- further systemic-level support and comprehensive career education in schools, starting at least at Year 8 level; and

- support more explicit, carefully targeted preparation of, and support for, teachers in order to improve schooling outcomes and post-school participation outcomes for LSES students.

4. SYSTEMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING LSES PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT IN QUEENSLAND TERTIARY EDUCATION: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, key findings gathered during the course of the study are presented by way of addressing the five project research questions.[5] Interpretation of these findings is also provided which, in turn, underpins the recommendations. This section addresses the first two project research questions, namely:

Question 1: What are the major factors that promote or inhibit participation and attainment in tertiary education by LSES students in Queensland?

Question 2: To what extent do systemic policies or practices (systemic factors) of Queensland's tertiary education system promote or inhibit participation and attainment by LSES students?

As noted earlier, the primary focus of these questions is on systemic factors as they relate to enhancing participation in higher education, rather than in TAFE. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the important role of the broader tertiary sector, particularly TAFE institutes, in facilitating pathways to higher education.

4.1 THE BIG PICTURE ON SES DIFFERENCES

Given the scope of the current project, the focus of this report is directed more towards LSES *participation* rather than *attainment*, although the critical importance of the latter is acknowledged. Further, given the challenge of increasing participation rates of LSES people in universities, particular attention is directed toward the higher education sector. Where appropriate, data from the VET sector are used to shed further light on the agreed focus of higher education participation and attainment.

Research commissioned by Universities Australia (2008) demonstrates that after students from LSES backgrounds have entered higher education, their retention, success and completion rates are largely comparable to students from other socioeconomic groups (see also James, 2008b). Nevertheless, it should be noted that students from remote areas and/ or Indigenous backgrounds who also fall into the

LSES category are exceptions to this general pattern. Moreover, Long, Ferrier and Heagney (2006) note that lower socioeconomic background is associated with a higher probability of attrition. These findings highlight the importance of treating LSES as a heterogeneous, rather than a homogenous, category. Several dimensions of this issue warrant further empirical study. In particular, the systemic factors influencing specific demographic subgroups, such as males and/or Indigenous young people in remote areas, require more detailed analysis that respects the unique characteristics, needs and challenges of the respective subgroups.

Having acknowledged the importance of these fine-grained distinctions, data from a national study of first year students in Australia (Krause et al., 2005) reveals that commencing university students from LSES backgrounds typically demonstrate similar attitudes towards the academic aspects of the transition to higher education, with attitudes towards teaching and learning also being very similar across SES subgroups. Students from low, medium and high SES subgroups also report similar levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and express similar levels of enjoyment with their university experience. The main difference that emerged from the national first year study (Krause et al., 2005) was that lower SES students were more likely to indicate that they had difficulty understanding the material they were studying and they had difficulty adjusting to the style of university teaching. They were also more likely to report that their parents had little understanding of their university lives.

Overall, the existing empirical data highlights the value of fine-grained analysis of different dimensions of LSES. Nevertheless, the weight of evidence suggests that although institutions play a significant role in supporting student transition and progress through higher education, systemic level factors play a particularly important role in complementing and supporting federal and institution-level initiatives to enhance the participation of students from LSES backgrounds. These systemic factors are the focus of the next section.

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5. As noted earlier in this report, supplementary reporting of findings is planned beyond this project report, subject to negotiation with the project Working Advisory Group. Findings are restricted here to addressing specific research questions within the project scope.

4.2 SYSTEMIC FACTORS THAT PROMOTE OR INHIBIT PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION[6]

There are many commendable university-level initiatives underway to promote higher education access and participation among people from LSES backgrounds (see for example Devlin, 2004). While these institution-level activities represent an important dimension of existing activities, they fall beyond the scope of this report which focuses specifically on systemic, State-level factors. Clearly, however, these factors are not mutually exclusive, nor do they operate in isolation. It is not always possible to draw clear boundaries between federal (macro), state (meso) and institution-level (micro) factors. Therefore, while the focus of the following discussion rests on State-level systemic issues as they pertain to the Queensland context, we recognise that there will necessarily be overlaps between the macro, meso and micro level initiatives. Rather than separate the inhibitors and enablers to participation in higher education, we have decided to examine these factors together since inhibitors, when addressed, may become enablers, and vice versa.

It is important to recognise that no single factor operates in isolation when determining whether or not a person participates and progresses in higher education. Each factor outlined below should be viewed as part of a multidimensional and interdependent combination of factors. Moreover, while we acknowledge that these generic issues apply both nationally and internationally, Queensland-specific applications are presented where appropriate. For the most part, the presented findings address the acknowledged primary focus and larger dataset represented by the higher education sector (i.e., university student sample) rather than the VET sector (i.e., TAFE student sample). Where relevant, however, statistically significant differences between TAFE and university respondents are drawn for illustrative purposes.

4.2.1 Economic costs of participation in higher education: Barriers and enablers

Economic costs, both perceived and real, are acknowledged nationally (Birrell & Rapson, 2006) and internationally as potential barriers to student participation in higher education. In order to appreciate the influence of economic barriers, one needs to drill down into the data to consider multiple variables simultaneously. For example, a national study of the first year experience in Australia (Krause et al., 2005) found a significant difference in the proportion of urban and rural students who deferred their study the year prior to enrolment (i.e., nine percent of urban students deferred, compared with 18 percent of students from rural backgrounds). Although the reason for this difference was not immediately clear from the data, the authors concluded that it most likely resulted from the greater need for rural students (most of whom were from LSES backgrounds, according to postcode) to accumulate savings to meet their additional financial costs of attending university and living away from home (Krause et al., 2005, p.70). Also in that national study, the lower SES students were significantly more likely to indicate that money worries made it difficult for them to study.

The Smith Family notes that while the existing HECS and HECS-HELP schemes have not disadvantaged students from LSES backgrounds, neither have they significantly increased their participation in higher education (2008, p.13). Further, institution-level research at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) demonstrates the significant positive impact of holding an equity scholarship for students from LSES backgrounds (QUT Equity Section report, 2007).[7]

In the present study, one in five qualitative responses from university students emphasised the financial challenges of attending university. When asked, 'what would have assisted your transition to university?' students raised the following issues:

- Costs of living away from home

More financial support. Because my degree was only

offered in Brisbane I had to move out of home… and the transition has been very difficult

More money, cheaper accommodation

- Assistance with paying for essential study items such as computers

- Additional support in the form of scholarships

More scholarships

More assistance in times of hardship

- Eligibility for Centrelink assistance

More financial assistance from Centrelink and being able to be eligible for rent assistance, but can't as I don't live far enough from uni currently

- Support for mature aged students with family and carer needs

More support for mature age students caring for aged parents and single mortgage.

Affordable, flexible childcare.

The urgent need for further financial support for students encountering difficulties paying their bills is perhaps best illustrated by the following statements from two different first year students, one of whom has since decided to withdraw from university due to financial hardship:

I have studied at uni this year, but I have no money to pay my personal rent, bills, therefore I stopped study this year because of financial problems…

Honestly, without sounding lazy, I would have liked to have been in a better financial situation so I could afford to live week to week (expenses) and afford uni, without having to work – because every hour I work is one less I can put into learning/studying. But if I don't work I can't afford to eat, let alone drive a car.

Financial concerns for the students in this sample focus primarily on accommodation and living expenses, with some students expressing frustration with the existing eligibility requirements for financial assistance. Worrying about the cost of tertiary study was not limited to university students, with students from the VET sector also expressing concerns about the costs of essentials such as public transport. For example, TAFE respondents indicated that 'help with fees, flexible payment options and scholarships', 'free childcare' and 'part payment' options would have assisted their transition to TAFE. However comments such as these were in the minority for TAFE students, representing only 15 percent of the open-ended responses.

Respondents in the TAFE and university samples relied on a range of means for financial support. These differed between LSES and other SES respondents, and between university and TAFE respondents when controlling for the effects of SES in the analysis. Low SES groups were more likely to engage in paid work for more hours than their higher SES counterparts. Across our sample, a higher proportion of TAFE than university students relied on Austudy, whereas the reverse was true for youth allowance. In both the university and TAFE sectors, respondents relied more heavily on youth allowance than Austudy. Further, a greater proportion of university students received rent allowance than TAFE students (see Table 5). Differences suggest that across all SES groups, TAFE students tend to live at home. This is borne out by one TAFE student who commented that 'being closer to home' is a significant enabler for enrolling at TAFE.

For TAFE students, there were no significant differences in the importance of income support for those from LSES and other SES backgrounds. Differences in types of support indicate that a significantly higher proportion of University students in the sample live away from the parental home, and that this is more marked for those from other SES than LSES backgrounds. Again this points to the importance of financial factors and the ongoing influence of family based factors in shaping LSES students' study careers.

Table 8 below provides a summary of the forms of income support identified by university and TAFE respondents in this study. Overall, the findings suggest that the majority of TAFE students live at home, presumably due to the low level of rent assistance reported among this cohort. This finding reinforces the qualitative findings with respect to pressures of living away from home and managing accommodation and living expenses, not to mention study-related costs such as textbooks and study equipment.

Table 8. Income support reported: University and TAFE students

	Enrolled TAFE n (% of TAFE respondents)	Enrolled University n (% of uni respondents)
Austudy	31 (14%)	64 (7%)
Youth allowance	35 (16%)	312 (32%)
Rent assistance	19 (9%)	184 (19%)
Other income	45 (29%)	116 (13%)

Financial enablers include scholarships which several equity practitioners identified as making positive contributions to the retention of LSES students in higher education. One group of stakeholders spoke highly of the targeted scholarships that have been introduced for a selection of priority study areas, saying that 'any extension to this program would be welcome'. They warned, however, that the unintended consequences of these targeted scholarships might be that students from disadvantaged schools are excluded from contention because they may not have the subject choices to qualify them for such scholarships. The issue of subject choice is raised in the next section but is mentioned here to highlight the overlap between various inhibiting and enabling factors.

Equity practitioners from one university recommended the introduction of 'aspirational scholarships' for students at primary and secondary school. Given the recent increase in scholarship funding that has occurred at national and institutional levels across the country, there would be considerable merit in evaluating the impact of these scholarships on the Queensland higher education sector. Several individual universities have evaluated these schemes at the local level, but a system-wide evaluation of the impact and efficacy of the equity scholarship program is required to ensure that its impact is being optimised.

In order to address the potential inhibiting effect of financial costs to LSES student participation in tertiary education several enablers need to be built into the system. These are outlined in the recommendations that follow.

Recommendation 1: That the Queensland Government supplement existing federally funded scholarships for LSES students with an additional 500 'Smart State Equity Scholarships' each year to cover full higher education tuition costs, with applications restricted to OP eligible students from the most under-represented schools in Queensland universities (i.e., those in the bottom quartile for university participation rates).

Recommendation 2: That the Queensland Government encourage cross-sectoral and intra-sectoral collaboration in recruiting low SES students

to Queensland's higher education institutions by initiating a five-year action plan to evaluate, reward and annually report State-wide systemic and collaborative strategies that inform, motivate, raise aspirations, and engage primary and secondary school students from LSES backgrounds in higher education. Further, that the Government consult with the sector to develop a system of financial and 'in-kind' incentives for supporting ongoing collaborative initiatives that yield positive and sustained results. (see also Recommendation 17)

Recommendation 3: That the Queensland Government introduce a suite of financial and support strategies to assist LSES students in higher education, including: a placement service to assist non-metropolitan students to find affordable accommodation and home-stays where practical; scholarships to assist with purchase of study tools (e.g., computers); and additional rental subsidy allocated according to agreed criteria for the first year of study to assist transition to higher education.

Recommendation 4: Develop and implement indicators to evaluate the short- and medium-term impact of higher education scholarship funding for Queensland students from LSES backgrounds to inform the future configuration of scholarship programs.

4.2.2 Educational opportunity, advice and choice at school level

Empirical evidence points to the fact that the combination of educational opportunities and subject choice during the school years, along with access to reliable and supportive advice from a range of sources, represents a powerful set of enablers or inhibitors, depending on the nature of these experiences.

i. Systemic barriers and enablers
Equity practitioners and other key stakeholders in the field identified a range of systemic barriers to LSES student aspirations to participate in higher education. These barriers are well documented in the literature and are summarised briefly here. According to Griffith equity practitioners, barriers to academic

achievement include low literacy levels, deficiencies in teaching and learning support, lack of parental experience and knowledge of higher education, and limited educational resources in the home. To illustrate the latter, of the university students who were sampled, those from LSES backgrounds were more likely than other SES students to be the first family member to attend university and to have mothers and fathers whose education was up to or below secondary school. This highlights the potentially limited working knowledge that parents of LSES students might be able to share on how higher education operates and what might be expected.

Limited school-based opportunities also play a role in restricting students' post-school options, according to our expert interviewees. Limiting factors in the school context include: reduced subject choices; skilled teacher shortfalls in key areas such as ICTs, Maths and Science, particularly in rural and remote schools; limited access to information on study option, again particularly in rural and remote schools; lack of development of independent learning skills, particularly for students with disabilities who may not receive adequate support; and the impact of teachers in terms of their values, expectations, knowledge and/or skills.

Enablers identified through interview data included the importance of 'encouragers' – that is, role models, family and friends who have a tradition of education that provides positive influence, encouragement, a supportive learning environment. Targeted strategies to raise students' aspirations to participate in higher education, and moreover to aim for some of the more 'high status' courses that may appear out of reach, have been found to be successful when accompanied by appropriate resourcing and sustainable systemic commitment. Several tertiary institutions throughout Queensland have successful initiatives in place in this regard, but there would be merit in systematising, sharing and rewarding these strategies to ensure that the benefits are experienced across the Queensland education system. There is no 'quick fix'; thus, it is important to raise aspirations in tangible ways, namely through appropriate funding and incentives that are widely published and actively disseminated and promoted among LSES schools and communities.

Recommendation 5: That the Queensland Government, in its response to LSES resourcing, give high priority to addressing the problem of limited subject choices in regional, rural, remote and other disadvantaged secondary schools which subsequently limit LSES students' higher education options. This should include resourcing for: comprehensive needs analyses; a five-year State-wide evaluation and impact strategy; enhanced flexible delivery particularly in key areas such as ICTs, Maths and Science; and widespread aspiration-raising and communication strategies for students, family and community members in relevant schools and communities.

Recommendation 6: That the Queensland Government provide up to 1000 annual 'Aspirational Scholarships' as incentives for low SES primary and secondary school students and their families to consider higher education as a viable post-school option. Further, that this scholarship program include such support mechanisms as mentoring and scaffolded individual support, particularly for young people in rural, regional and remote areas of the State, and that the impact of the program be evaluated and reported annually.

Recommendation 7: That the Queensland Government, together with higher education equity practitioners, document and disseminate data on existing institutional best practice for increasing the participation rate of students from LSES backgrounds in 'high status' higher education programs, such as Law and Medicine, with a view to systematising, monitoring and evaluating these strategies so as to inform sector-wide school-level initiatives for raising LSES student aspirations to enrol in 'high status' degree programs.

ii. Vet in Schools – Uni in Schools
Of particular concern to several equity practitioners and managers is the prevalence of VET options in schools which, while offering positive vocational options, function as a 'disincentive' for students to persist with subjects that might require more academic effort and position them better for higher education choices. The equity practitioners interviewed for this study called for a balance to be achieved in Queensland schools between the focus on VET options on the one hand, and strategies for raising school students' awareness of higher education options and experiences on the other. These interviewees expressed the strong view that students' exposure to and perceptions of higher education during secondary school, along with their subject choices, were pivotal in shaping tertiary education choices, particularly in relation to 'high status' higher education programs such as Medicine or Law.

As one equity practitioner noted:

> *Students' choice of subjects and exposure to a wide range of choices is a significant issue when it comes to addressing LSES student access to high status university programs, compounded by pathway issues for some of these programs i.e. the constraints of GMAT for educationally disadvantaged students seeking admission to Medicine.*

Recommendation 8: That the Queensland Government systematise a *Uni in Schools* approach in a similar manner to the *TAFE in Schools* initiative and report annually on outcomes. This would involve cooperation among universities who would share responsibilities for regional *Uni in Schools* programs in order to raise higher education aspirations and provide accessible and timely advice to secondary school students, their schools and their communities about university options.

iii. Access to information
Data from the TAFE and university student samples highlight significant differences between the VET and higher education sectors in the level of importance that students attached to various sources of information about post-school options (see Table 9 below). For university students, institutional Open Days were considered particularly important sources of information. For LSES students who may lack the social and cultural capital and experience of tertiary education of their more affluent peers, these opportunities to experience the culture of university campuses and learning environments is essential. In Queensland, this poses a particular challenge for the large proportion of OP-eligible students who may be unable to participate in such hands-on experiences for reasons of geographical remoteness.

This is a significant systemic issue that needs to be addressed in a shared way across the sector. While it is encouraging that individual institutions make some arrangements to engage students from rural and remote areas of the State with on-campus activities during their secondary school years, a more systemic approach is required to ensure that these opportunities are available to a greater proportion of the LSES population in Queensland.

For all SES students in the TAFE and university samples, institutional websites were also rated as a particularly important source of information to guide higher education decisions, as illustrated in Table 9. This finding draws attention to the importance of ensuring that all school students, regardless of socioeconomic status or location, have access to high-speed, reliable internet access, along with supplementary support in the form of face-to-face conversations with advisors, teachers and family to assist with advice. For university students, experienced advisors and mothers were identified as important sources of advice and information.

These quantitative findings are supported by university students' responses to open-ended questions. The following quotes highlight the critical importance of adopting a systemic approach to ensure that students from LSES backgrounds are provided with accurate, timely and accessible information about higher education options, courses offered, expectations, and so forth. This is the joint responsibility of tertiary education providers, QTAC, QSA and the Queensland State Government so as to ensure that institutional competition for the student market does not hinder the provision of accurate and aspiration-raising information to students about higher education pathways, regardless of their ultimate destination.

Table 9. Importance of information source in post-school decision-making: University and TAFE students

	Enrolled TAFE Mean (1=Unimportant; 5=V Important)	Enrolled University Mean (1=Unimportant; 5=V Important)
Mother	1.99	3.06*
Father	1.73	2.77*
Other family	1.99	2.74*
Friends	1.89	2.83*
School careers advisors	1.73	2.66*
School teachers	1.92	2.69*
Institutional websites	2.86	3.65*
Institutional Open Days	1.83	3.69*
Uni/TAFE Advisor	1.88	3.05*

* statistically significant difference between group means at $p < 0.01$.

In response to an open-ended question about what might have assisted the transition to higher education, the responses from LSES university students highlighted a thirst for knowledge about: a) what to expect well ahead of time; b) informed advice from guidance officers, teachers and advisors; and c) secondary school subjects that prepare students for higher education. This is clearly illustrated below in the qualitative descriptions and comments provided by a number of university students:

More knowledge on enrolment and fees, census dates, more crucial information regarding university.

More information – being able to talk with someone about what subjects would be most relevant/helpful to me… very confusing.

More communication about how to adapt to university as opposed to a 'We are so great' seminar over orientation.

I found it difficult to navigate the uni web and didn't know what was expected of me.

Some transition subjects taught at High School in some important areas such as studying and research techniques.

More face to face contact with advisers … more pre-semester would be fantastic.

I think that people interested in going to uni should have a taste of what it is like, the expectations, the use of labs/libraries and so on. Simulated uni experience once a fortnight or something like that.

Perhaps if there were more university open days available at my school this would have made the university scene more familiar. I live a fair distance away and come from a small school. This was not available. In addition, more teacher support would have helped.

More people coming to the school and telling us all about the uni and courses offered. HECS and FEES were so confusing.

Better links between high schools and universities.

Uni reps should visit all year 11 and 12 over the last 2 years. I believe more people would go to uni if there was more info.

These findings have significant implications for the quality of information that LSES students might be accessing, given what we know about the more limited parental participation in tertiary education among the LSES students in this sample. There is an urgent need for action to be taken to redress some of these shortfalls, as outlined in the recommendations below.

Recommendation 9: That QTAC and QSA collaborate to provide accurate, low-cost and accessible information, particularly to regional, rural and remote secondary school and mature age students. Further, that an ongoing program of school visits be funded and scheduled periodically to provide free face-to-face information sessions for regional, rural, remote and other under-represented schools and communities in the higher education sector, with regular reporting of outcomes to the sector. This would also require shared investment in online technologies between QTAC, QSA and the State Government in order to facilitate more frequent face-to-face contact in virtual environments (e.g., Wimba software), especially for dispersed and remote communities and schools.

Recommendation 10: That the Queensland Government, together with all Queensland universities, develop, resource and evaluate a systemic approach for coordinating university campus visits to ensure that every secondary school student in designated LSES and under-represented schools – particularly those in rural and remote areas - has the opportunity to visit Queensland university campuses at least once during their final two years of school.

iv. Advice and support from teachers and Guidance Officers
The critical role played by teachers and support staff, particularly in under-represented LSES schools throughout Queensland, cannot be over-stated. Several student respondents identified this as a critical enabling factor, as illustrated in the following quote:

Help from teachers at school telling us about the different style of teaching and learning that occurs at university.

Not all experiences in regard to this were positive, however, as illustrated in the following student quotes:

School guidance councillors who have some background in university advice.

Being assessed at uni is completely different to school assessment. It would be good if schools used the same or similar method of assessing.

In order to prepare teachers adequately for this important task, pre-service teacher preparation needs to emphasise strategies for supporting students from diverse backgrounds, with a specific focus on LSES and sensitive treatment of the compound effects of multiple disadvantage (e.g., disability, indigeneity, remote locations, etc.). For instance, introduction to Indigenous languages, knowledge and cultures in the higher education curriculum is a critical first step in assisting pre-service teachers to understand how best to support this group of under-represented students (and their families and communities, including Elders) and to develop students' aspirations to progress from school to higher education.

There would be considerable merit in further consolidating existing State-funded school-based projects aimed at increasing tertiary participation of students from LSES backgrounds as a basis for developing a targeted suite of support resources for primary and secondary school practitioners.

In addition to effectively preparing teachers, some of whom should be provided with specialised training to work in rural and remote communities (as is often the case), students from LSES backgrounds indicate that they benefit considerably from the services of well-resourced support staff such as Guidance Officers. Several equity practitioners and expert stakeholders expressed concern about the efficacy of the existing Guidance Officer model of provision in Queensland schools. One group of respondents also questioned the efficacy of school Guidance Officers

in influencing student aspirations, 'given their split responsibilities for academic and careers guidance and personal counselling/interventions – this is a huge role, especially in disadvantaged schools where the student support need is significant.'

An interview with QTAC staff revealed that QTAC operates an annual training program for Career Development Practitioners or Guidance Officers to update them on the latest information; however, as one interviewee noted, 'we just can't get to every school throughout the state, it's too dispersed'. This interviewee elaborated further by noting that parent evenings operate in a number of different Victorian schools, but this is manageable due to the relatively small size of the State. Concern was expressed that in Queensland, distance is a prohibitive factor when it comes to scheduling meetings with staff, schools and community members, particularly in rural and remote areas. Given these circumstances, there would be merit in investing appropriate online methods of communication to ensure regular and timely updates are provided to every school across the State in relation to QTAC processes and various other policy updates (see Recommendation 9).

Questions were raised among equity practitioner interviewees about the efficacy of more funding for the existing model of Guidance Officer provision when perhaps the structure itself needs to be questioned. One suggestion made by interviewees was to review the model of career guidance (or equivalent) and, in particular, to access work in LSES schools. Consideration should be given to the possibility of embedding careers and further study advice into the curriculum. Given the already crowded nature of the curriculum, this would require considerable effort; however, a systemic response is needed to ensure that future generations of LSES students are not left behind in Queensland as a result of a failure to consider all the possibilities for enhancing LSES student participation in higher education, difficult though they may be.

One group of equity practitioners noted that some schools appoint dedicated careers teachers, whereas others invite cultural representatives and role models into the classroom who work successfully in

encouraging cohort-specific student aspirations and achievement. As there is no single solution to this challenge, it will require a multi-pronged approach that is underpinned by a thorough knowledge of the needs and characteristics of the students and the communities they represent. Importantly, longitudinal studies of Australian youth research (Marks, 2008) confirms the importance of career advice to students who are more vulnerable when making the transition from school and that such support should be maintained. Thus, it is important to retain and integrate this advice into the everyday learning experiences of LSES students as effectively as possible.

Interviewees commented on the complication caused by the fact that new initiatives, such as the introduction of School Chaplains and School Nurses, have sought to address the spiritual and health requirements of students. Interviewees were concerned that these roles were being confused with the role of providing career advice and being advocates for individual students, as illustrated in statements such as, 'This is probably creating some confusion in schools about who students should see when they require career advice.' This is an issue worthy of closer scrutiny in order to ensure that all students are receiving optimal support and advice from appropriate support staff in their schools. In light of these challenges, and the importance of the support and advising roles played by schools, the State Government would do well to consider providing additional learning support and human resources for low-income schools. These activities could be integrated into the existing *Believe Achieve Succeed* (BAS) initiative and should be based on local State-level knowledge of the culture and support requirements and needs of the known cohort of low-income schools.

Recommendation 11: That the Queensland Government review the structure of support provided to school educational Guidance Officers (GOs) and equivalent expert advisors across the State with a view to:

- assessing the efficacy and impact of the existing model of service delivery, particularly in terms of

outcomes for LSES schools. Indicators of success would include evidence of raising aspirations and self-efficacy of students from LSES backgrounds, particularly in under-represented schools in higher education;

- introducing specially trained GOs (or equivalent expert advisors) in under-represented primary schools in LSES, rural and remote schools;

- ensuring closer liaison between GOs (or equivalent expert advisors) and classroom teachers so that their work is more embedded into the curriculum.

Recommendation 12: That the Queensland Government, as part of its *Believe Achieve Succeed* (BAS) initiative, provide five-year funding to support targeted research and development in BAS schools with the goal of enhancing preparedness of pre-service and existing teachers to teach and support students from low SES backgrounds.

See also Recommendation 9 above.

4.2.3 QTAC and tertiary application and admission processes

A key step to successful higher education participation in Queensland involves stepping over the threshold to apply via the QTAC system. This crucial step in the process may either function as an enabler or an inhibitor, depending on the individual student's experience with it. Several equity practitioners and expert stakeholder interviewees commented on the considerable and expanding role of QTAC in that it now is responsible for: disseminating timely, accessible information to potential university entrants; assessing LSES status as part of their new role of processing federal equity scholarships; and providing clear messages to students about pathways to tertiary education. These responsibilities require regular monitoring and reporting back to the sector so as to ensure outcomes of QTAC processes are clearly communicated and transparent. Stakeholders identified the critical importance of ensuring close collaboration between QTAC and the sector in relation to strategies for enhancing participation rates

of students from LSES backgrounds.
In view of the long-term systemic failure to increase the participation rates of LSES students in higher education at both national and State levels (see Universities Australia, 2008), there would be merit in reviewing the State-level tertiary entrance requirements for students from disadvantaged and under-represented schools and communities in the Queensland higher education system (see Mclelland and Topley, 2002). Initiatives such as this are progressing in the United Kingdom under the widening participation agenda. One of many examples may be found at the University of Chichester (see http://www.chiuni.ac.uk/wp/index.cfm), which highlights its flexible entry routes and admissions requirements for non-traditional and first in family students. Schemes such as this certainly exist in Queensland universities; however, there would be considerable merit in reviewing the existing QTAC admissions process in all its dimensions, including timing of applications, quality and extent of information provision, and mode of engagement with school leavers, mature age students, and the schools and communities they represent. The aim would be to ensure that Queensland's tertiary application and admissions process is operating according to best practice principles for optimising access and participation of students from LSES backgrounds, regardless of whether they are school leavers or mature age entrants.

Recommendation 13: That the Queensland Government and QTAC review and report on tertiary entrance requirements and admission processes with a view to extending the existing system to include even more flexible approaches that take account of the systemic disadvantages experienced by significant proportions of the Queensland population who come from rural, regional and remote areas of the State; and further, that respect the unique needs and experiences of people from demographic subgroups such as those from Indigenous backgrounds.

4.2.4 Measurement and application of SES data in Queensland

The current postcode definition of SES has been widely recognized as an inhibitor to the successful monitoring and support for LSES participation in higher education. Recently, the Federal government has given consideration to a composite measure of SES, including parental education. Queensland is particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of postcode SES definitions, given the State's rapidly growing population which subsequently leads to rapid changes in the pockets of wealth and poverty, particularly in the fast growing areas of South East Queensland. The State of Queensland is in a strong position to provide national leadership in systemic higher education equity policy and practice by trialling improved indicators for measuring LSES status as part of a State-based focus on improved measurement and monitoring of LSES with a view to improving the quality of life and educational outcomes of this demographic group.

To achieve these improvements, it will be imperative to gather more granular and representative data that allow close monitoring of patterns of LSES students' participation in tertiary education across the State. This should include data from a range of sources, including people who were OP-eligible but who chose not to accept a university offer. Future research should also target more specific groups who experience multiple disadvantage, such as those living in rural or remote areas, with limited access to resources, low family income levels, and low parental education levels. In sum, existing empirical research is compelling with respect to the need to move beyond simple postcode measures if the State of Queensland is to develop sustainable systemic approaches for enhancing LSES student participation in higher education. More comprehensive forms of data collection and analysis – both quantitative and qualitative - are called for in order to inform systemic policy decision-making.

Recommendation 14: That the Queensland Government gather, document and disseminate data on VET and higher education participation rates using specific indicators of parental education to supplement existing postcode measures in order to maximise the validity of data collection methods and associated systemic policy-making. Further, that the relative merits of State-level composite measures be investigated including parental occupation and family income.

4.2.5 Systemic factors that promote participation in higher education

Having identified four key factors that function as both inhibitors and enablers, depending on the efficacy of their operation, discussion now turns briefly to two key systemic factors identified from the data that may potentially contribute to improved LSES participation in higher education.

i. Pathways and partnerships
The importance of pathways for students among the school, VET and higher education sectors is critical, particularly for students who may not be adequately prepared for higher education when they leave school and who may wish to use VET courses as an intermediate "stepping stone". Information on post-school education options needs to be freely available and widely disseminated. Feedback received during the course of this study suggests that the QTAC system is going some way towards achieving this goal.

One critical enabler for pathways and flexibility involves establishing viable partnerships among the sectors in such a way that each sector recognises its responsibility to contribute towards solutions for the problem of LSES under-representation in higher education. This problem emerges early in the school years, it is perpetuated through secondary school, and may be further perpetuated by systemic policies that are not sufficiently flexible or responsive.

Feedback from equity practitioners and expert stakeholders from a range of Queensland universities highlights the critical importance of cross sectoral collaboration that involves more than paying lip-service to the notion of working together. Interviewees from this sample cited the new Education Queensland initiative (BAS – Believe, Achieve, Succeed) as a good practice initiative that encourages bilateral partnerships between the school and higher education sectors. The specific focus of this initiative on evidence-based approaches, performance management and evaluation, and community partnerships was considered particularly valuable. At the time of interview, participants were unaware of any dialogue with the higher education

sector in relation to the initiative; however, it will be important to ensure that this collaboration is sustained and fostered in the future.

Interviewees also acknowledge other existing partnership arrangements, drawing specific attention to the need for an agreed framework in which key stakeholders can be brought together to develop relationships over time. Characteristics of this framework would include:

- prevailing organisational structures that support new initiatives;

- implementation of strategic projects that support the missions of the school and higher education sectors;

- appropriate resourcing; and

- collaboration with key community agencies and organisations with a focus on education, such as The Smith Family's 'Learning for Life' program.

The importance of establishing effective and sustainable cross-sectoral partnerships and community engagement was emphasised, rather than short-term and internally focussed funded projects. Interviewees also mentioned the importance of establishing consensus among partners about the particular role of each sector/institution in the broad task of building and sustaining aspiration. According to these interviewees, previous years have been marked by considerable confusion about who is responsible, thereby limiting action and outcomes. The interviewees in this study urged the State Government to identify ways to systematise collaboration between Queensland schools, universities and the VET sector in order to encourage students from LSES schools – particularly those with limited aspirations and no prior exposure to tertiary education institutions – to consider higher education as a realistic and attainable personal goal.

A State-wide forum was suggested as one potential strategy for bringing together key Queensland stakeholders to discuss and debate models for moving forward collaboratively, with the expectation that an

outcome will be reached and sustainable collaborative strategies implemented to serve the best interests of students, particularly those most at-risk of failing to navigate the system successfully. Such an initiative would require the involvement of institutional leaders at the highest levels (e.g., Directors and Vice-Chancellors/Deputy-Vice Chancellors) who would need to agree on a memorandum of understanding that recognised that despite the highly competitive nature of federal funding policies, a State-based collaborative and cross-sectoral approach to improving the aspirations and participation rates of LSES students in higher education is essential if the plateau in current participation rates is to be shifted.

There would also be merit in the State Government considering incentives to reward universities who demonstrate effective collaboration strategies for increasing the university participation rates of LSES students in a particular region, regardless of institution. This approach would require considerable change management – or a "cultural shift" in the sector, as one interviewee stated – for it runs counter to the highly competitive funding and recruiting environment that currently exists. From the perspective of the expert interviewees, however, this is an essential strategy if the seemingly impermeable boundaries between the school, VET and higher education sectors are to be traversed successfully by students and the staff who support them.

Recommendation 15: That the Queensland Government establish, maintain and monitor cross-sectoral, State-sponsored and outcomes-focussed partnerships among key stakeholders from school, VET and higher education sectors with the goal of increasing access, participation and success of students from LSES backgrounds in higher education.

See also Recommendation 2.

ii. Evidence-based approach to policy and practice
The Queensland Government already subscribes to an evidence-based approach to policy-making which is particularly important in the context of the present study. While federally gathered student statistics reveal certain trends in LSES participation rates at the macro level, there is an imperative to ensure that meso level, State-based data are gathered and used strategically. For instance, in the current global economic context, it is important for the State to adopt a proactive approach toward monitoring the patterns of LSES student unemployment among those who might otherwise have entered the workforce. Evidence-based approaches should also be implemented to ensure systemic responses to engaging with unemployed youth from LSES backgrounds with a view to raising their awareness of different post-secondary study options.

Fine-grained data are also required to ensure that the experiences of 'representative cohorts' are reported. These might include LSES people with disabilities, young people from Pacific Islander backgrounds, a distinction between Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal students, the demographic profile of specific geographic areas, and the particular experiences of mature-age people who are unemployed.

It will also be important for the Queensland Government to closely monitor the research priorities and developments of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, which aims to foster partnerships and collaborations between and across sectors. These developments may have significant implications for the ongoing research and practice in relation to LSES participation at the State level.

Recommendation 16: That the Queensland Government initiate State-based research and evaluation programs to maximise Queensland's potential to achieve *Smart Queensland* targets. These programs should be enabled by a Statewide four-year longitudinal research and evaluation study that collects empirical data to inform systemic policy and practice across educational jurisdictions in Queensland. This study would:

- track a representative cohort of school students from year 10 to post-school stage, including investigation of the impact of secondary school subject choices on post-school options;

- track a representative group of mature age people who re-enter tertiary education from the workforce;

■ facilitate close examination of 'at risk'
demographic subgroups, including unemployed
youth, young Indigenous people and males from
rural and regional areas, who are significantly
under-represented in higher education; and

■ provide a practical, outcomes-focussed vehicle to
encourage cross-sectoral cooperation based on the
sharing of a common database of empirical data.

Recommendation 17: That the Queensland
Government develop and apply, both longitudinally
and cross-sectorally, a suite of indicators of program
effectiveness in order to enhance participation and
progress of students from LSES backgrounds in
higher education. These data should be reported
annually. (see also Recommendation 2)

5. SYSTEM POLICIES OR PRACTICES THAT BOOST PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT BY LSES IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

This section addresses two of the nominated research questions that relate to how Queensland might learn from best practice elsewhere in Australia and internationally. The research questions covered here are:

Question 3: What system policies or practices are found to boost participation and attainment by LSES students in other jurisdictions?

Question 4: What evidence is there to suggest that policies or practices that have boosted participation and attainment by LSES students in other jurisdictions would be successful if implemented in Queensland?

5.1 WHAT SYSTEM POLICIES OR PRACTICES ARE FOUND TO BOOST PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT BY LSES IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS?

The under-representation of people from LSES backgrounds is an issue being addressed by parliaments, tertiary institutions and community agencies in many countries across the western world. In response, all levels of relevant agencies may be involved in collaborative activities. As noted earlier in Section 4.2.1, the factors relating to LSES participation do not operate in isolation and, in turn,it is not always possible to draw clear boundaries between federal (macro), state (meso) and institution-level (micro) factors. Nor is it necessarily desirable to impose such boundaries. For example, Federal government agencies may formulate policies and targets based on local information provided by grass-roots organisations, with action carried out by local community agencies funded by State government. Alongside inter-agency cooperation, an important consideration in the success of any response is the broadcasting of the message that the initiatives are endorsed at all levels, from government through to local communities. Angela Daly, the Widening Participation research officer from Edge Hill University in the United Kingdom, raised this point in an interview for this research, stating that positive messages about equality and diversity from government ministers and university vice-chancellors encourage prospective students to also

think positively about their educational opportunities. With the transmission of hopeful and empowering messages, a greater proportion of young people are able to begin imagining themselves as tertiary students.

5.1.1 Setting targets

The Universities Australia paper, Advancing Equity and Participation in Australian Higher Education (April, 2008), recommends setting 'equity targets and financial incentives for universities to attract, recruit, and retain low SES students'. Similarly, the UK government recently proposed a major policy target of increasing the number of 18-30 year-olds with an experience of higher education to 50 percent by 2010 (Action on Access, 2005), with a focus on the needs of LSES and other under-represented students. While specific targets are clearly essential to ensure that programs are achieving their aims and that funding is directed to the most relevant areas, Ferrier and Heagney (2000) warn that they can oversimplify a complex and dynamic situation by positioning such students as 'others' and failing to question the advantaging of privileged groups. As Daly noted in her interview, a key issue is defining the purposes of higher education – that is, whether it is for economic justice, social justice, human rights, or building capacity in the knowledge economy. While it may encompass all of these things, policy-makers must be conscious of the appropriateness of responses to the real needs of students.

Alongside identifying needs areas and setting appropriate targets, responses to the challenge of widening participation tend to fall into three general categories: provision of financial assistance, awareness-raising, and capacity building. Frequently, projects incorporate awareness-raising activities with academic skills building. These categories resonate with the literature review that also informs this report.

5.1.2 Financial support

Financial assistance is an essential element of student support and is a common LSES recruitment and support strategy offered by many universities. Direct

financial support is provided to students via a number of initiatives in western countries. The Early College Access Advocacy Project in California (see http://www.ticas.org/index.php), for example, assists with the 'extra' costs of study such as books, childcare, transport and food. This project recognises that students must have early knowledge of the financial support available so that they can make informed choices at the right time. The project is run under the auspices of the Institute for College Access and Success, an independent, nonprofit organisation whose aim is to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. As well as research and financial support, the institute advocates on behalf of LSES and other non-traditional students to improve processes and public policies that promote more equitable educational outcomes.

In Canada, each Province (State) organises its own grant program, generally to assist those students facing financial difficulties, with many targeted grants to encourage study in either a particular field (e.g., nursing) or by a particular minority group. Textbook support and tax credits are also offered by the Provinces as a form of financial support. As is the case elsewhere in the world, the poorer sector of the Canadian community is not accessing higher education to the same extent as their relatively wealthier counterparts, thereby creating 'a two-tiered culture in which the have-nots are cyclically reproduced' (Centre for the Study of Democracy, 2008). One response of the country has been to implement a single application process for financial aid through which most students make only one application for federal, provincial, and Millennium Scholarship Foundation assistance. The suite of financial support is very broad – among these levels of aid, the Millenium Foundation distributes National In-Course Awards to students who display academic excellence and active citizenship in the upper-years of their post-secondary studies. The Canada Access Grant for Students from Low-income Families is available to first-time, first-year students enrolled in a certificate, diploma or degree program of least two years duration, and covers half of all tuition costs.

Australia's Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) is part of the Australian Government's

Indigenous Australians Opportunity and Responsibility commitment, providing scholarships and leadership opportunities for young Indigenous people. The program offers up to 250 scholarships to young Indigenous Australians 12 - 25 years of age undertaking secondary or tertiary studies within Australia. The target is young Indigenous Australians from remote areas who have demonstrated potential leadership capability and want to develop their leadership skills with the support of both family and community. Tertiary scholarships offer $6000, whereas secondary scholarships offer $15,000 per student per year.

Following the introduction of variable tuition fees, one UK policy initiative that is worth noting is the establishment of the Office for Fair Access, which is responsible for negotiating access agreements with providers (Action on Access, 2005) and therefore protecting LSES students from increased financial strains.

5.1.3 Awareness-raising and academic support

It is in this area that some of the most creative programs are apparent with programs of awareness-raising often associated with academic skills development. Examples can be drawn from many countries and agencies with most demonstrating a close collaboration between government, institution and community. In the UK, a multi-tiered program incorporates initiatives at many levels. 'Action on Access' is the national co-ordinating body, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Northern Ireland's Department for Employment and Learning. The agency works with independent universities, colleges and nominated partnerships to provide advice, information and support toward widening participation activities, strategies and plans (Action on Access, 2008). A key program within this scheme is Aimhigher, which promotes the notion that higher education is open to anyone with the ability to succeed, regardless of their background. Activities supported by the program include:

- visits to university campuses;
- residential summer schools;
- master-classes and open days; and

■ mentoring schemes.

The Aimhigher portal (www.direct.gov.uk/uni) is a database of public services that is easy to navigate and provides information for people 'thinking about uni'. Along with practical advice about financial issues and university choices, it addresses broader issues and questions such as 'what can higher education do for you?' and 'what is higher education really like?' Within Australia, the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre's (SATAC) website includes a similar acknowledgment of the basic knowledge needs of non-traditional students.

An imaginative response of the Aimhigher program is the 'roadshow', designed to promote the benefits and dispel myths about higher education. This project consists of a number of high-tech mobile units equipped with a plasma screen, notebook laptops and interactive activities. The roadshow units visit schools across England with a program aimed at Year 9 and Year 12 students in communities with traditionally low levels of participation in higher education. Importantly, the roadshow takes young people out of the classroom environment and inspires them with an informative, fast-paced presentation given by a recent graduate from a similar background to them.

Another innovative UK project involves current tertiary students at the University of Reading, Thames Valley University and Randolph College (http://www.rdg.ac.uk/csv/) tutoring local schools through the 'Learning Together' program. This initiative aims to raise the aspirations of students and to encourage them to continue in education beyond mandatory education. Over 200 volunteers contribute their time to act as positive role models by visiting 30 local primary and secondary schools, two special schools and a homework club. The organisation claims widespread benefits for all who participate with school students, stating that they found lessons more stimulating, teachers valuing the help the students give in the classroom, and the volunteers gaining useful practice in communicating their knowledge and ideas.

The Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) (http://www.kwfdn.org/accessing_college/ocan/) is

also assisting students to 'imagine the possibility of higher education' by connecting them to 'the information and financial resources they need to achieve their dreams'. This collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents develops and supports community-based college access programs, including college admission advising, financial aid advising, scholarships, and tutoring.

While many alternative education programs focus on VET, the Centennial Learning Centre (CLC) in Portland, Oregon (http://www.centennial.k12.or.us/schools/clc/) is an example of an alternative school dedicated to helping students discover their passions and develop strong academic and life skills. The 160 middle and secondary school students involved with CLC acquire the academic and critical thinking skills necessary for college or a career. The Centre's Senior Transitions project is a monthly evening workshop designed to prepare graduating students for life beyond secondary school. Sessions, which include a meal donated by local restaurants, give students the opportunity to celebrate their academic accomplishments while learning new skills that assist them in the real world. Speakers from local colleges and career consultants are invited to collaborate with students to enable every individual to identify their dreams and begin making steps toward achieving what they want in life.

5.1.4 Partnerships

Many of the above projects are partnership-based. It this feature – that is, developing close relationships between students and their communities with their schools, tertiary providers and industry partners – that has helped lead to successful outcomes. Underscoring the role of relationships, a New Zealand study of decision-making by prospective tertiary students (Leach & Zepke, 2005) found that interpersonal information is far more effective than mass marketing in influencing student choice. It is most effective when students, their families, schools and tertiary providers are 'active partners in the decision-making process' (p. 9). The study also notes that subject teachers and careers guidance counsellors are a key influence on the decisions and dispositions

of non-traditional students. This finding coincides with the aforementioned interview responses of Daly, who noted that students' expectations of themselves are strongly influenced by schools, higher education institutions, and the communities of which they are part. High expectations need to be communicated to all students and their communities by senior politicians through to classroom teachers.

To support and promote partnerships, the UK Aimhigher program includes a range of awards recognising good practice and providing opportunities for publicity and information dissemination through the general media, including:

Learner Achievement Awards to recognise those individuals or groups who have had exceptionally strong personal engagement in the Aimhigher program and have seen significant learning outcomes as a result;

Partnership Practice Awards to recognise schools, colleges and other learning providers that have demonstrated strong engagement with an Aimhigher partnership in delivering an activity or program of activities;

Outstanding Individual Contribution Awards to recognise individuals who have excelled in representing the Aimhigher program, either in their local area or further afield; and

Excellence in Practice Awards to recognise those Aimhigher activities or programs that demonstrate the most inventive approach to widening participation.

Australia also has a range of innovative partnership projects aimed at widening the access and participation of LSES students in tertiary education. For example, the Access and Success project (http://www.vu.edu.au/About_VU/Making_VU/Access_and_Success/index.aspx) is a suite of strategies at Victoria University that make up a research and development initiative, 'to improve young people's access to, and successful participation in, post compulsory education and training' that also includes teacher professional development. The project builds on relationships with over 70 schools and other

learning settings in Melbourne's West. Collaborative research and action is designed to meet the needs of students and schools for mutually valued outcomes. One initiative is designed to encourage disengaged students who are routinely 'withdrawn' to alternative settings to return to, or instead remain in, regular schooling and continue on positive pathways. The 'Inspire to Aspire' initiative notes that student aspirations and their capacity to embrace tertiary education is apparent as early as Year 9. University partners work with Roxborough College to develop student knowledge about pathways and work education in the Middle Years.

The Newcastle University 'Uni Partnerships Project' (Reynolds, McCormack & Ferguson-Patrick, 2005) offers professional development to teachers to reinforce life-long learning rather than working directly with LSES students. In this project, academics act as partners to a group of schools to undertake action research to implement a model of pedagogy designed to improve teaching and learning in their schools.

For Indigenous students, often cited as a sub-category of LSES, Western Australia's *Follow the Dream* project (see http://ciak.kk.ecu.edu.au/projects/followdream/index.php) and South Australia's Dare to Lead program (see http://www.daretolead.edu.au/servlet/Web?s=169694&p=PR_AE_SA) are specifically targeted at raising aspirations and increasing university participation. South Australia has demonstrated success through its implementation of the national program which identifies three areas of importance: creating a pathway to tertiary education for secondary students; enhancing prospects of tertiary entrance for Indigenous students; and supporting Indigenous students within tertiary institutions. It also includes a Foundation Program in Humanities and Social Sciences, which prepares Indigenous students for study within the broader university, and a Foundation Year in Music at the Centre of Aboriginal Studies in Music. It provides access to the university for school leavers who do not have the necessary tertiary entrance rank (TER). Students spend an average of 18 months in the program before transitioning into the mainstream university. Year 6 and 7 students are also invited to collective gatherings to 'let the information settle into

them for a few years'. Year 10 students can participate in the Experience University program, where they can be accompanied by community members of their families. A parallel program, Yunggorendi, aims to get young Indigenous people to consider higher education as an option. While the focus is on Years 10, 11 and 12, some Year 8 students involved in the project have since entered in university. Importantly, Yunggorendi is staffed by an all-Indigenous team so that from reception to academic advice and administration, student contact will be with another Indigenous person.

5.2 WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE TO SUGGEST THAT POLICIES OR PRACTICES THAT HAVE BOOSTED PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT BY LSES IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL IF IMPLEMENTED IN QUEENSLAND?

Whilst it is acknowledged that there are some differences among the cited jurisdictions, the examples have been selected from a variety of initiatives on the basis of similarity of particular aspects. For example, the cited projects apply to social structures and tertiary education systems that are similar to those in Queensland, even though geographical features may vary considerably. In all cases, socioeconomic status is the strongest predictor of tertiary participation.

Although the high-tech Aimhigher Roadshow is aimed at a relatively high-density population in a small geographic area, it can be easily adapted to the needs of Queensland's greater population spread and more remote communities through alternative transport modes, as has been demonstrated by QUT's Smart Train initiative (http://www.train. qut.edu.au/). This innovative tertiary information strategy features similar interactive technology to the Roadshow and has, in conjunction with Queensland Rail, taken inspiring examples of university studies to rural areas across the State (e.g., Longreach, Mt Isa and Charleville) and provided wide community exposure to key areas of science and technology. Other strategies cited are already being implemented to some extent in Queensland. For example, many higher education institutions host visits to university

campuses, residential summer schools, and open days for school students. Mentoring schemes are also evident in the development of service-learning programs for tertiary students, while a number of university-based outreach programs (e.g., the SARUA Project, www.sarua.ed.qut.edu.au) have proved successful in raising the aspirations of disaffected LSES secondary school students. Coinciding with many of the cases cited above, the success of these projects depends on the strength of partnerships that have been established between the school and higher education sectors.

The range of existing systems, strategies and relationships provides a strong and highly supportive structure for introducing new LSES initiatives, particularly in Queensland's universities and cross-sectorally. For example, programs specifically aimed at increasing the representation of Indigenous students in Queensland, such as those developed through the Dare to Lead program, will have a greater probability of success through collaboration with Queensland's Indigenous Education Leadership Institute.

As noted earlier, interpersonal information is far more effective than mass marketing in influencing student choice. Nevertheless, it is essential that authoritative and current information is available to non-traditional students on which to base judgments and decisions. The existing network of careers guidance officers across the State is well-positioned to provide this information, however it also must have access to adequate resources. As major players in information provision to schools, QTAC and QSA represent key resource bases which, together, are best equipped to feature web-based information that is aimed specifically at the knowledge needs of non-traditional students. A small expansion of this site could house a database similar to the Aimhigher portal in order to make such information available across the State.

Much of the groundwork for the strong partnerships and student support strategies mentioned above has already been laid by Education Queensland's Believe, Achieve, Succeed initiative (DETA, 2008) which advocates the right of every student to be empowered 'to contribute to their communities and continue to learn throughout their lives' (p. 4).

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR QUEENSLAND'S TERTIARY EDUCATION[8] SYSTEM TO IMPROVE PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT BY LSES?

This section addresses the final research question:

Question 5: What are the implications of the research findings for Queensland's tertiary education system to improve participation and attainment by LSES?

In considering the implications of these findings for Queensland's tertiary education system, and particularly its higher education system, it is instructive to consider that this study takes place at a very significant time in the nation's history, particularly with respect to developments in the tertiary education sector. Two key reviews of Australian higher education have recently been conducted – the Review of the National Innovation System (*Venturous Australia – building strength in innovation*) and Bradley's *Review of Australian Higher Education*. The latter proposes significant changes to systemic arrangements in terms of the linkages between VET and higher education. There are rapid developments in TAFE degree-offering options and several proposals regarding the nature and purposes of Australia's higher education system. All of these factors, along with the global financial crisis and its implications for the Australian labour market, play a key role in the consideration of systemic strategies for enhancing the higher education participation rates and success of students from LSES backgrounds. There are several implications of this study and its findings for the State of Queensland, as outlined in the previous two sections. These implications are synthesised in the form of 17 recommendations arising from the data.

Recommendation 1: That the Queensland Government supplement existing federally funded scholarships for LSES students with an additional 500 'Smart State Equity Scholarships' each year to cover full higher education tuition costs, with applications restricted to OP eligible students from the most under-represented schools in Queensland universities (i.e., those in the bottom quartile for university participation rates).

Recommendation 2: That the Queensland Government encourage cross-sectoral and intra-sectoral collaboration in recruiting low SES students to Queensland's higher education institutions

by initiating a five-year action plan to evaluate, reward and annually report State-wide systemic and collaborative strategies that inform, motivate, raise aspirations, and engage primary and secondary school students from LSES backgrounds in higher education. Further, that the Government consult with the sector to develop a system of financial and 'in-kind' incentives for supporting ongoing collaborative initiatives that yield positive and sustained results.

Recommendation 3: That the Queensland Government introduce a suite of financial and support strategies to assist LSES students in higher education, including: a placement service to assist non-metropolitan students to find affordable accommodation and home-stays where practical; scholarships to assist with purchase of study tools (e.g., computers); and additional rental subsidy allocated according to agreed criteria for the first year of study to assist transition to higher education.

Recommendation 4: Develop and implement indicators to evaluate the short- and medium-term impact of higher education scholarship funding for Queensland students from LSES backgrounds in order to inform the future configuration of scholarship programs.

Recommendation 5: That the Queensland Government, in its response to LSES resourcing, give high priority to addressing the problem of limited subject choices in regional, rural, remote and other disadvantaged secondary schools which subsequently limit LSES students' higher education options. This should include resourcing for: comprehensive needs analyses; a five-year State-wide evaluation and impact strategy; enhanced flexible delivery particularly in key areas such as ICTs, Maths and Science; and widespread aspiration-raising and communication strategies for students, family and community members in relevant schools and communities.

Recommendation 6: That the Queensland Government provide up to 1000 annual 'Aspirational Scholarships' as incentives for low SES primary and secondary school students and their families to consider higher education as a viable post-school option. Further, that this scholarship program include

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8. Implications particularly focus on higher education systemic issues, but where relevant TAFE issues are acknowledged, as negotiated and agreed with the WAG.

such support mechanisms as mentoring and scaffolded individual support, particularly for young people in rural, regional and remote areas of the State, and that the impact of the program be evaluated and reported annually.

Recommendation 7: That the Queensland Government, together with higher education equity practitioners, document and disseminate data on existing institutional best practice for increasing the participation rate of students from LSES backgrounds in 'high status' higher education programs, such as Law and Medicine, with a view to systematising, monitoring and evaluating these strategies so as to inform sector-wide school-level initiatives for raising LSES student aspirations to enrol in 'high status' degree programs.

Recommendation 8: That the Queensland Government systematise a *Uni in Schools* approach in a similar manner to the *TAFE in Schools* initiative and report annually on outcomes. This would involve cooperation among universities who would share responsibilities for regional *Uni in Schools* programs in order to raise higher education aspirations and provide accessible and timely advice to secondary school students, their schools and their communities about university options.

Recommendation 9: That QTAC and QSA collaborate to provide accurate, low-cost and accessible information, particularly to regional, rural and remote secondary school and mature age students. Further, that an ongoing program of school visits be funded and scheduled periodically to provide free face-to-face information sessions for regional, rural, remote and other under-represented schools and communities in the higher education sector, with regular reporting of outcomes to the sector. This would also require shared investment in online technologies between QTAC, QSA and the State Government in order to facilitate more frequent face-to-face contact in virtual environments (e.g., Wimba software), especially for dispersed and remote communities and schools.

Recommendation 10: That the Queensland Government, together with all Queensland

universities, develop, resource and evaluate a systemic approach for coordinating university campus visits to ensure that every secondary school student in designated LSES and under-represented schools – particularly those in rural and remote areas - has the opportunity to visit Queensland university campuses at least once during their final two years of school.

Recommendation 11: That the Queensland Government review the structure of support provided to school educational Guidance Officers (GOs) and equivalent expert advisors across the State with a view to:

- assessing the efficacy and impact of the existing model of service delivery, particularly in terms of outcomes for LSES schools. Indicators of success would include evidence of raising aspirations and self-efficacy of students from LSES backgrounds, particularly in under-represented schools in higher education;

- introducing specially trained GOs (or equivalent expert advisors) in under-represented primary schools in LSES, rural and remote schools;

- ensuring closer liaison between GOs (or equivalent expert advisors) and classroom teachers so that their work is more embedded into the curriculum.

Recommendation 12: That the Queensland Government, as part of its *Believe Achieve Succeed* (BAS) initiative, provide five-year funding to support targeted research and development in BAS schools with the goal of enhancing preparedness of pre-service and existing teachers to teach and support students from low SES backgrounds.

Recommendation 13: That the Queensland Government and QTAC review and report on tertiary entrance requirements and admission processes with a view to extending the existing system to include even more flexible approaches that take account of the systemic disadvantages experienced by significant proportions of the Queensland population who come from rural, regional and remote areas of the State; and further, that respect the unique needs and

experiences of people from demographic subgroups such as those from Indigenous backgrounds. Recommendation 14: That the Queensland Government gather, document and disseminate data on VET and higher education participation rates using indicators of parental education to supplement existing postcode measures in order to maximise the validity of data collection methods and associated systemic policy-making. Further, that the relative merits of State-level composite measures be investigated including parental occupation and family income.

Recommendation 15: That the Queensland Government establish, maintain and monitor cross-sectoral, State-sponsored and outcomes-focussed partnerships among key stakeholders from school, VET and higher education sectors with the goal of increasing access, participation and success of students from LSES backgrounds in higher education.

Recommendation 16: That the Queensland Government initiate State-based research and evaluation programs to maximise Queensland's potential to achieve *Smart Queensland* targets. These programs should be enabled by a Statewide four-year longitudinal research and evaluation study that collects empirical data to inform systemic policy and practice across educational jurisdictions in Queensland. This study would:

- track a representative cohort of school students from year 10 to post-school stage, including investigation of the impact of secondary school subject choices on post-school options;

- track a representative group of mature age people who re-enter tertiary education from the workforce;

- facilitate close examination of 'at risk' demographic subgroups, including unemployed youth, young Indigenous people and males from rural and regional areas, who are significantly under-represented in higher education; and

- provide a practical, outcomes-focussed vehicle to encourage cross-sectoral cooperation based on the sharing of a common database of empirical data.

Recommendation 17: That the Queensland Government develop and apply, both longitudinally and cross-sectorally, a suite of indicators of program effectiveness in order to enhance participation and progress of students from LSES backgrounds in higher education. These data should be reported annually. (see also Recommendation 2)

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APPENDIX 1: UNIVERSITY SURVEY

Questionnaire   Semester 2, 2008

Dear Student

You do not have to complete this survey if you have already completed an online survey

We are conducting a study of factors that have helped with your successful transition to university. Your response to this questionnaire, along with the responses of students from other Queensland universities, will help us to understand how we might support more students to make the transition to university in the future. This study is being conducted by Griffith University in collaboration with James Cook University and Queensland University of Technology. The study is sponsored by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts and the Vice-Chancellor at your university has approved this survey. Your contribution is very important to us.

Participation is voluntary and the survey should take about 10 minutes of your time. The confidentiality of your response is assured. No one outside the project team will have access to the survey data. Results will be reported in general and statistical form only. Please return your completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope provided - no stamp is required.

If you would like to find about more about the study findings (planned release February 2009), please email the Project Officer at jo-anne.clark@griffith.edu.au. If you have any questions about the questionnaire or the project, please contact the Project Leader Professor Kerri-Lee Krause on (07) 3735 5985 or email k.krause@griffith.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this important study of student aspirations and enablers in transitioning to university.

Yours sincerely

Professor Kerri-Lee Krause, Griffith University
On behalf of Project Team: Associate Professor Malcolm Vick (JCU), Dr Helen Boon (JCU), Dr Derek Bland (QUT)

WIN CASH OR AN MP3 Player!
HOW? Complete the survey to be eligible for the prize draw.
Include your email or mobile contact details on the attached slip.
Your details will only be used for the prize draw; they will be detached from the survey and destroyed after prize draw.
FIRST PRIZE: ONE OF TWO $500 CASH PRIZES. SECOND PRIZE: ONE OF THREE MP3 Players

SECTION ONE: ABOUT YOU

PLEASE TICK YOUR RESPONSES BELOW.

1. Your year of birth ☐☐☐☐
2. Your home postcode ☐☐☐☐
3. Gender: Female ☐ Male ☐
4. Is this your first year of university study? Yes ☐ No ☐
5. Which of the following are you enrolled in?
   ☐ Bachelor degree
   ☐ Diploma
   ☐ Enabling/bridging or non-award course
   ☐ Not sure
   Other ....
6. What were you doing prior to starting university?
   Please tick all that apply
   ☐ School
   ☐ Studying at TAFE (VET sector)
   ☐ Working
   ☐ Deferred university enrolment
   Other ....

7. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
8. Is English the main language spoken in your family?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
9. What is the highest level of education reached by your parents (guardians)?

Mother	Father	
☐	☐	Did not attend school or only attended primary school
☐	☐	Some secondary school
☐	☐	Completed secondary school
☐	☐	Vocational qualification, diploma or associate diploma (e.g. TAFE)
☐	☐	University degree
☐	☐	Not sure

10. Are you the first person in your immediate family (brothers, sisters, mother, father) to attend university?
    Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure ☐

11. Approximately how much part time paid work do you do each week during semester?

☐ 0 hours

☐ 1-5 hours

☐ 6-10 hours

☐ 11-20 hours

☐ More than 20 hours

12. Is your father (male guardian) mainly:

☐ Employed/self-employed (please tell us what job)

....

☐ Unemployed

☐ Engaged in full-time home duties

☐ A student

☐ A pensioner/retired

☐ Other (e.g. a part-time student and part-time employee, etc - please tell us)

....

☐ (Not applicable)

13. Is your mother (female guardian) mainly:

☐ Employed/self-employed (please tell us what job)

....

☐ Unemployed

☐ Engaged in full-time home duties

☐ A student

☐ A pensioner/retired

☐ Other (e.g. a part-time student and part-time employee, etc - please tell us)

....

☐ Not applicable)

14. Do you receive any of the following income support or benefits?

	Yes	No	Not sure
i. Austudy	☐	☐	☐
ii. Abstudy	☐	☐	☐
iii. Youth Allowance	☐	☐	☐
iv. Commonwealth Rent Assistance	☐	☐	☐

v. Any other income support payment

....

SECTION TWO: YOUR EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO UNIVERSITY

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSES BELOW.

1. In deciding to go to university, how important were the views of the following people?

Please respond to each item below, even if not applicable

	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Unimportant	Not applicable
Mother	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Father	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Other family	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Friends	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
School careers advisors	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Teachers	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Other (please tell us)	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

2. In deciding to go to university, how important were these sources of information?

Please respond to each item below, even if not applicable

	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Unimportant	Not applicable
Mother	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Father	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Other family	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Friends	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
School careers advisors	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Teachers	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
University brochures	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
University websites	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Visits to university or Open Days	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
University careers advisor	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
QTAC guide	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Other source (please tell us).........................	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

SECTION THREE: YOUR CURRENT VIEWS ABOUT UNIVERSITY

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSES BELOW.

1. Please tell us how important the following factors were in your decision to attend this university.

Please respond to each item below, even if not applicable

	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Unimportant	Not applicable
The cost of university fees	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The overall cost of going to university (inc. fees, books, transport, etc)	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The particular courses or subjects being offered	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The convenience of public transport from my home to the university	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The closeness of the university to my home	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Employment was available at the university	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The university was part of a pathway program (eg. direct entry)	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Availability of online/distance education or flexible delivery options	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
My financial situation	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Commonwealth Learning scholarships and university Equity/Access scholarships	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The HECS-HELP scheme (loans for student fees)	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The FEE-HELP scheme (loans for upfront, full-fee paying university places)	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

2. Did you think seriously about discontinuing/deferring at any stage this year?

     ☐ No, please go to Question 5

     ☐ Yes, please indicate below the importance of the following factors ...

Please respond to each item below, even if not applicable

Perceptions of university	Very Important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Unimportant
Inadequate support	5	4	3	2	1
Lack of support networks	5	4	3	2	1
Emotional health	5	4	3	2	1
Physical health	5	4	3	2	1
I disliked study	5	4	3	2	1
University wasn't what I expected	5	4	3	2	1
Financial reasons	5	4	3	2	1
I thought I might fail	5	4	3	2	1
I found employment	5	4	3	2	1
Problems with daily travel	5	4	3	2	1
Family commitments	5	4	3	2	1
I wanted to change courses	5	4	3	2	1
Paid work commitments	5	4	3	2	1
Took up TAFE study	5	4	3	2	1
Other source (please tell us)..	5	4	3	2	1

3. Tell us one thing that would have assisted you in your transition to university?

....

....

....

....

....

Thanks very much for completing this questionnaire. Please seal and return it in the reply paid envelope.
Good luck with your exams!
DON'T FORGET TO ENTER THE PRIZE DRAW: PROVIDE YOUR CONTACT DETAILS.

APPENDIX 2: TAFE SURVEY

Questionnaire

Dear Student

You do not have to complete this survey if you have already completed an online survey

We are conducting a study of factors that have helped with your successful transition to TAFE. Your response to this questionnaire, along with the responses of students from other Queensland TAFEs, will help us to understand how we might support more students to make the transition to TAFE in the future. This study is being conducted by Griffith University in collaboration with James Cook University and Queensland University of Technology. The study is sponsored by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts and the Director at your TAFE has approved this survey. Your contribution is very important to us.

Participation is voluntary and the survey should take about 10 minutes of your time. The confidentiality of your response is assured. No one outside the project team will have access to the survey data. Results will be reported in general and statistical form only. Please return your completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope provided - no stamp is required.

This project has been granted ethics approval (GU Ref No: GIH/05/08/HREC). If you have any questions about this questionnaire or the project please contact the Project Leader Professor Kerri-Lee Krause on (07) 3735 5985 or email k.krause@griffith.edu.au. If you would like to find out more about the study findings (planned release February 2009), please email the Project Officer at jo-anne.clark@griffith.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this important study of student aspirations and enablers in transitioning to TAFE and University.

Yours sincerely

Professor Kerri-Lee Krause, Griffith University
On behalf of Project Team: Associate Professor Malcolm Vick (JCU), Dr Helen Boon (JCU), Dr Derek Bland (QUT)

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HOW? Complete the survey to be eligible for the prize draw.
Include your email or mobile contact details on the attached slip.
Your details will only be used for the prize draw; they will be detached from the survey and destroyed after prize draw.
FIRST PRIZE: $300 CASH PRIZE SECOND PRIZE: A Sony MP3 Player

SECTION ONE: ABOUT YOU

1. Year of birth ☐☐☐☐
2. Home postcode ☐☐☐☐

PLEASE TICK YOUR RESPONSES BELOW.

3. Gender: Female ☐ Male ☐
4. Is this your first year of TAFE? Yes ☐ No ☐
5. Which TAFE do you attend?
   - ☐ Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE
   - ☐ Brisbane North Institute of TAFE
   - ☐ Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE
   - ☐ Mount Isa Institute of TAFE
   - ☐ Tropical North Institute of TAFE
   - ☐ Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE
   - ☐ Wide Bay Institute of TAFE
   - ☐ Gold Coast Institute of TAFE
6. Which of the following are you enrolled in?
   - ☐ Vocational Graduate Diploma
   - ☐ Vocational Graduate Certificate
   - ☐ Advanced Diploma
   - ☐ Diploma
   - ☐ Certificate
   - ☐ Trade (Apprenticeship/Traineeship)
   - ☐ Dual offer (guaranteed pathway to Uni)
   - ☐ Not sure
   - Other ....

7. What were you doing before you started TAFE?
   Please tick all that apply
   - ☐ At school
   - ☐ Studying at Private college
   - ☐ Working
   - ☐ Traineeship
   - ☐ Apprenticeship
   - ☐ Deferred university enrolment
   - Other ....

8. Are you planning to go to University?
   ☐ Yes go to Question 8(a)   ☐ No go to Question 8(b)

8 (a) If you answered yes in **Question 8** above, what are you planning to study?

Course ....

What Discipline? (eg Nursing, IT, Education)

....

8 (b) If you answered no in **Question 8**, are you?

☐ Seeking full time employment

☐ Staying home to look after family

☐ Wanting to travel

☐ Further TAFE study

☐ Not sure

Other ....

9. Do you identify as having Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage?

Yes ☐ No ☐

10. Is English the main language spoken in your family?

Yes ☐ No ☐

11. What is the highest level of education reached by your parents (guardians)?

Mother	Father	
☐	☐	Did not attend school or only attended primary school
☐	☐	Some secondary school
☐	☐	Completed secondary school
☐	☐	Vocational qualification, diploma or associate diploma (e.g. TAFE)
☐	☐	University degree
☐	☐	Not sure

12. Were you the first person in your immediate family (brothers, sisters, mother, father) to attend TAFE?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure ☐

13. Approximately how much part time paid work do you do each week whilst studying at TAFE?

☐ 0 hours

☐ 1-5 hours

☐ 6-10 hours

☐ 11-20 hours

☐ More than 20 hours

14. Is your father (male guardian) mainly:

☐ Employed/self-employed (please tell us what job)

....

☐ Unemployed

☐ Engaged in full-time home duties

☐ A student

☐ A pensioner/retired

☐ Other (e.g. a part-time student and part-time employee, etc - please tell us)

....

☐ Not applicable

15. Is your mother (female guardian) mainly:

☐ Employed/self-employed (please tell us what job)

....

☐ Unemployed

☐ Engaged in full-time home duties

☐ A student

☐ A pensioner/retired

☐ Other (e.g. a part-time student and part-time employee, etc - please tell us)

....

☐ Not applicable

16. Do you receive any of the following income support or benefits?

Please tick all that apply

	Yes	No	Not sure
i. Austudy	☐	☐	☐
ii. Abstudy	☐	☐	☐
iii. Youth Allowance	☐	☐	☐
iv. Commonwealth Rent Assistance	☐	☐	☐

v. Any other income support payment

....

SECTION TWO: YOUR EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO TAFE

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSES BELOW.

1. In deciding to study at TAFE, how important to you were the views of the following people?

Please respond to each item below, even if not applicable

	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Unimportant	Not applicable
Mother	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Father	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Other family	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Friends	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
School careers advisors	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Teachers	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Other (please tell us)	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

2. In deciding to study at TAFE, how important to you were these sources of information?

Please respond to each item below, even if not applicable

	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Unimportant	Not applicable
Mother	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Father	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Other family	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Friends	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
School careers advisors	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Teachers	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
TAFE advertisements on TV/Magazines/Newspapers	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
TAFE websites	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
TAFE Open Days	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
TAFE careers advisor	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Other source (please tell us)...	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

SECTION THREE: YOUR CURRENT VIEWS ABOUT TAFE

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSES BELOW.

1. Please tell us how important the following factors were in your decision to go to TAFE.

Please respond to each item below, even if not applicable

	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Unimportant	Not applicable
The overall cost of getting to TAFE (inc. fees, books, transport, etc)	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The particular courses being offered	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
The convenience of public transport from my home to the TAFE	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

SECTION THREE: YOUR CURRENT VIEWS ABOUT TAFE ... *continued*

The closeness of the TAFE to my home	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Employment was more likely to be available from the TAFE course/program?	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Availability of online/distance education or flexible delivery options	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
My financial situation	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Availability of TAFE scholarships	5	4	3	2	1	n/a
Availability of flexible payment options (eg can pay fees off)	5	4	3	2	1	n/a

2. Did you think seriously about **dropping out** at any stage this year?

☐ No, please go to Question 3

☐ Yes, please indicate below the importance of the following factors

I wanted to drop out because of

	Very important	Important	Moderately important	Of little importance	Unimportant
Inadequate support from TAFE	5	4	3	2	1
Lack of support networks (eg family, friends)	5	4	3	2	1
My emotional health (eg stress, depression)	5	4	3	2	1
My physical health (eg a health problem that stops me studying)	5	4	3	2	1
I disliked study: it is not for me	5	4	3	2	1
TAFE wasn't what I expected	5	4	3	2	1
Financial reasons	5	4	3	2	1
I thought I might fail	5	4	3	2	1
I found employment	5	4	3	2	1
Problems with daily travel	5	4	3	2	1
Family commitments	5	4	3	2	1
I wanted to change courses	5	4	3	2	1
Paid work commitments	5	4	3	2	1
Took up an offer at university	5	4	3	2	1
Other issue (please tell us)..	5	4	3	2	1

3. What would have made it easier for you to enroll in TAFE?

....

....

....

4. Any other comments you would like to make?

....

....

....

Thanks very much for completing this questionnaire. Please seal and return it in the reply paid envelope. **DON'T FORGET TO ENTER THE PRIZE DRAW: PROVIDE YOUR CONTACT DETAILS.**

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: STUDENTS

EIDOS Project Interview Questions for Students

Student's Background

1. What area do you live in? What is the postcode?
2. Are you currently enrolled in university? Is it the first year?
3. What program are you studying?
4. Is English the main language spoken at home?
5. Tell me about your role as a student mentor? What is involved? **[If student is a mentor]**
6. What were you doing prior to university study?
7. Can you tell me about your experience at school?
8. Tell me about your pathway to University?
9. Tell me about your parents' education? What was the highest level of education they achieved?
10. Are you the first in your family to attend university?
11. How much paid work do you do per week while studying at university?
12. What do your parents do for a living? Mother? Father?

Student's views prior to university

1. Who or what influenced you the most in wanting to go to university?
2. What were the motivators?
3. What about sources of information? How did you find out about going to this University?
4. Were there any deterrents/barriers you found?
5. Did you apply for a scholarship? If so, did this help?
6. Did you think of dropping out or deferring at any stage? If so, why?
7. Is there any other comments (positive or negative) that you wish to make about what helped or hindered your transition to university?

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND POLICY MAKERS

EIDOS Project Interview Questions for Stakeholders

- Please adapt as appropriate for various groups
- Introduce the key goals of the project
- Mention that we have ethics approval
- Please ensure that interviewees sign the consent form

Context

Our focus in these interviews is on **systemic/government level initiatives**, rather than on institution-level strategies, but if people mention institution-level policies and practices, try to probe to see whether there are any implications for systemic/government level.

1. Please outline your key roles and responsibilities in relation to equity initiatives in higher education.

2. What do you think are the main factors that promote or inhibit **participation** and **attainment** of students from Low SES backgrounds in Queensland universities? (or higher education more broadly, for national/international interviewees)

3. What role do you think systemic **policies** and/or **practices help** or **hinder** university participation of students from LSES backgrounds?

4. **FOR NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWEES**: Please comment on system-level policies and strategies that seem to be **working effectively** to widen and support participation of students from LSES backgrounds in your experience.

    a. What **changes/improvements** do you think should be made to current policies and practices (in this state or in your country)? Please explain further.

5. **FOR QLD INTERVIEWEES**: In your view, is there anything **unique about Queensland** that might be playing a role in low participation rates of students from LSES backgrounds

    i. E.g. in the school sector?
    ii. In the TAFE sector?
    iii. In the University sector?
    iv. In the labour market?
    v. Any other factors?

6. In summary, what government initiatives do you think should be introduced or extended (if already in place) to increase the participation and success of young people from LSES backgrounds in higher education?

7. Any other comments?   Thank you for your time etc.

ABOUT EIDOS INSTITUTE

WHO WE ARE

Eidos is an independent research institute and think tank. its objective is to generate new ideas and dialogue on good human capital, productivity and wellbeing social public policy. We believe that engaged research collaboration and policy innovation contributes to a good society. Eidos is Greek for ideas. Our aim is to inspire, facilitate and support our members and partners to be more collaborative, effective and legitimate.

Eidos members include universities and policy leaders. Its work is conducted through a network of participating research centres and partners, through which Eidos draws the intellectual strength of the research community into an active dialogue with policy makers and practitioners. Within its universities and government agencies, there are more than 150 research and policy centres, and over 500 active senior and associate researchers and policy makers.

WHAT WE WORK ON

Practical, applied, policy relevant research. Eidos believes research is likely to have a greater impact on policy and practice through supporting coordinated bodies of work, rather than a scatter of atomised, free-standing projects. We focus on five areas:

LIFE: lifecourse learning and work transitions;

WIRED: new communications, technologies and education and social policy;

COMMUNITY: learning, labour and community;

SUSTAINABLE: sustainable education systems and education for sustainability;

SAFE: strengthening the nation's social and economic fabric.

WHO WE WORK WITH

Our partners include policy-makers, universities, companies and public service providers.

HOW WE WORK

Eidos increases the collaborative and creative capacity and impact of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. We position the partners at the forefront in creating good public policy – locally, nationally and globally. We seek to bring new voices and mentor a new generation of researchers and policy-makers, for example through an active program of internships, winter schools and emerging researchers conferences.

WHAT WE OFFER

Our research and policy teams analyse social and economic change, which we connect to innovation and learning in organisations. We help our members and clients forecast, lead, and respond to emerging challenges.

HOW WE COMMUNICATE

Eidos gives high priority to effective dissemination and works closely with the research teams to ensure that the findings are of value to policy-makers and practitioners. We use media, public events, seminars, workshops, and publications to communicate our ideas. All our reports can be downloaded free from the Eidos website.

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Eidos Institute acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which it is situated and is committed to fostering a culture of rememberance, recognition and respect for Indigenous people.

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