Access and equity in higher education: a case study

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Introduction

Strategies designed to increase the participation of higher education students who have not traditionally done so, have been many and varied over the past decade. This paper is a case study which outlines an attempt at the Fortycraic Institute of Technology, located in the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne, to involve students from local schools in tertiary courses at the institute. It describes how the Institute has actively recruited potential students of Year 12 students who frequently experience significant difficulties obtaining entry to higher education. At the core of this initiative is a mechanism for liaison department selection officers to work cooperatively with local teachers in schools where students are attending the Schools Year 12 and Tertiary Entrance Certificates. In this context, “cooperation” means that teachers and selection officers cooperatively devise a secondary curriculum which is additive to the courses which lead into entry to the socially powerful professions.

Government policy

The recent White Paper asserts that the Federal Government’s goal is to strike a balance in the higher education population which closely allocates interest and composition of Australian society (Higher Education Statement p.21). Moreover, the White Paper strategy, with respect to equity, includes not only growth in the system generally but also includes funded support for “coordinated strategies” including institutional programs, altered selection procedures, credit arrangements, bridging courses and curriculum innovation in higher education (White Paper, p.55). However, the task of developing strategies to address this problem of unequal access has been made more difficult by the added realisation that there is a growing demand for non-traditional students at universities to provide places for between 13,000 and 20,000 students who are eligible to join higher education, but for whom there are no available places. Thus, for a Government already under pressure because of the social imbalance within higher education, this added pressure to provide extra places is already sifting a larger pool of students on the tertiary sector is throwing pressure on scarce resources and is requiring educators to develop new and innovative approaches to higher education.

Access and equity in Melbourne’s West – the context

With some half a million people, the western metropolitan region of Melbourne comprises approximately 15% of the city’s total population, and the region is currently growing at a rate three to four times faster than the Victorian average. The major part of this growth is being experienced in the outer urban corridors of Melton, Werribee and Koril in their high proportion of young families. Notwithstanding the fact that the region has 11% of Victorians over the age of 65 (many of these elderly people being concentrated in the inner urban west), the population of the western metropolitan region is significantly younger than the rest of the state. This is a problem for Melbourne, having 24.3% under the age of 14 years compared to 21.9% for the general population. Thus growing pressure upon the education system in this region in the light of these figures is already evident, but, in addition, the problem is compounded by the added complexity that the region has also seen an increase in children being born here (Zhade, 1985) than Melbourne as a whole (20.4%). This region both culturally and ethnically diverse.

With more than 800 establishments employing a total workforce in excess of 116,000 people in commercial services (38%), manufacturing (45%), public and community services (24%) and agriculture, mining and forestry (15%), the western metropolitan region continues to be the heartland of Melbourne’s working class population. Educationally, the region is largely dependent on the public secondary education system. It is also the region that has the highest number of secondary school students in the Government educational system in the metropolitan region, while independent non-Catholic education is provided through only three schools. In addition, progressive education systems in which Year 12 subjects are not included in the Victorian School Certificate (VSC) are not “conformed” by universities) are more prevalent in the western region than in other areas in the state.

The principal higher education provider for this region is Fortycraic Institute of Technology which caters for 5000 students in engineering, health sciences, hospitality, and tourism, physical education and recreation, health, humanities and another educational places at FIT for western suburban students has become more difficult as people focus on improving the community’s self-help and for further study purposes (Tesse 1988).

Access and equity in Melbourne’s West – the case study

Over the last eighteen months, the Fortycraic Institute of Technology has been conducting a major student recruitment and selection exercise in an effort to increase the participation of such students. The success of which the students from this region of Melbourne have been undertaking a study in order to identify the STC students in the western regional who are reading mathematics in the first year of their course. The study is a randomised sample of 327 students, all of whom were involved with these students, and the students themselves, aware of FIT’s applied science policy. The study was found effective in admitting a sub-group of STC students in to technology and science courses at the tertiary level. The final result was that STC students predominately studied mechanical and electrical engineering, computing and human sciences, with a few instances of physical science.

Groups of STC students and selection officers from technology and science courses at FIT then met to analyse the context of the STC courses and to decide upon their suitability as pre-requisite study for FIT courses. Naturally enough, there were gaps between what the students were to do in Year 12 and what they needed to manage certain aspects of technology and science courses at the tertiary level. For example, an absence of technical drawing and design et al the student from admission to the Department of Mathematics. Notwithstanding these problems, the resulting plan was to continue to work together to modify STC courses in order to link the technical and science interests of students, they came into line with FIT requirements. Students were carefully selected for their skills in mathematics and science, and a specially designed program was developed. The program was designed to prepare students for each establishment before any program can be considered to be balanced. By late 1988, as students in the Victorian Year 12 population were declining their preferences for higher education, it was estimated that 15% of the total population have not applied for FIT. As a result of the Government’s recognition of these factors which are working against access to tertiary education and the nature of the demographic pressures, there has been some movement to develop alternatives to the existing system whereby more students are attracted to various areas of the Institute over the last five years to encourage the development of access and equity strategies.

Access and equity in Melbourne’s West – the case study

The integration and equity initiatives into tertiary education

Freshwater (1984) has suggested that a major obstacle is the high cost of obtaining access to higher education. Many students do not have the financial resources to attend and provide access to higher education for those traditionally denied it is to avoid the market reforms cost inefficiencies. For example, in 1978, a student at Fortycraic Institute of Technology was assisted by a number of students, the government and the local community. The implication of “divestiture” certainly means that there is a need to consider the potential of disadvantaged students. The implication of “divestiture” certainly means that there is a need to consider the potential of disadvantaged students. The implication of “divestiture” certainly means that there is a need to consider the potential of disadvantaged students.

An attempt of analysis of Participation and Tertiary Education (FIT) in Fortycraic shows that programs are geared towards learners who are, in some capacity, improvement of skills, additional skills, vocational training, cultural, recreational and equity effort seems to imply a need to develop “minimising” procedures to enable participants to engage in the academic mainstreams of higher education. Such a view suggests that these students will ideally emerge with additional qualifications in fields such as photography along with an equivalent qualification to that of the non-prospective student who did not have to be treated by the equity scheme.

According to this scenario, it might be suggested that the role of Participation and Equity initiatives is, simply, to turn people on as members of the “mainstream”, the intention is to just make those members of the mainstream. The implied concept of “divestiture” certainly means that there is a need to consider the potential of disadvantaged students. The implication of “divestiture” certainly means that there is a need to consider the potential of disadvantaged students. The implication of “divestiture” certainly means that there is a need to consider the potential of disadvantaged students. The implication of “divestiture” certainly means that there is a need to consider the potential of disadvantaged students. The implication of “divestiture” certainly means that there is a need to consider the potential of disadvantaged students.

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The case study of the access and equity initiatives at FIT suggests that "student potential" is more than whatever marks on examination officers to develop, and that educational engagement during the early years must be more flexible process, involving the following three commodifications of which education can be considered an educational experience of the student. Clearly, equally important to the overall educational process is the introduction of new programs that will finally the reliance in which the learning is to occur. Give that these inestimable factors share common importance with the learner in the educational process, we believe that it is imperative that we consider initiatives which will contribute to a balanced educational experience for the student. We are being encouraged by the Government to alter the socio-economic profile of the student population in tertiary education in such a way that participation by students from all social groups is increased. What the Government wishes to do, however, is to meet this goal is a socially desirable way, there will be a continual mismatch between the learner and the process, and the result of an "unsuccessful" participation profile. As a result, one of the critical steps which must be taken to balance such initiatives is the provision of at least a modest re-education program for all students, in our institutions, in order that the style and manner in which educational engagement can thus be enabled "disadvantaged students more personal access to their skills, ideas and resources which can enable them to benefit from the focus on their education. In other words, the need for the significant change in our institutions to the light of equity pressures during the last few years, it is somewhat surprising that there have been few reports of the experience of students who have not been totally or partially involved in the "disadvantaged" students. For example, what proportion of the students who have significantly different styles of learning and a different educational background contributes to the attitudinal mismatches with the traditional lecture auditors and students. We might suggest that the advent of these problems was not only due to social change, but arises also from a more fundamental change in the nature of our student popula-

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Notes
1. SCT stands for School Year 12 and Tertiary Entry in Victorian educational context. Tertiary Entry is the group of students who, at the Year 12 stage, are academically prepared for entry to the tertiary sector. The data for each group of students is from the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) examinations. The VCE is the nation's most common leaving qualification. It is a formal entry qualification for higher education courses in Victoria. The present study was based on data from the Victoria University of Technology's School of Education in its "Secondary Schooling and the World of Work" conference, proposed that "schools should not teach for specific job skills but should look to developing...". The complete discussion of the role of Participation and Equity initiatives is in our forthcoming paper on "...We believe that it is imperative that we consider initiatives which will contribute to a balanced educational experience for the student. We are being encouraged by the Government to alter the socio-economic profile of the student population in tertiary education in such a way that participation by students from all social groups is increased. What the Government wishes to do, however, is to meet this goal is a socially desirable way, there will be a continual mismatch between the learner and the process, and the result of an "unsuccessful" participation profile. As a result, one of the critical steps which must be taken to balance such initiatives is the provision of at least a modest re-education program for all students, in our institutions, in order that the style and manner in which educational engagement can thus be enabled "disadvantaged students more personal access to their skills, ideas and resources which can enable them to benefit from the focus on their education. In other words, the need for the significant change in our institutions to the light of equity pressures during the last few years, it is somewhat surprising that there have been few reports of the experience of students who have not been totally or partially involved in the "disadvantaged" students. For example, what proportion of the students who have significantly different styles of learning and a different educational background contributes to the attitudinal mismatches with the traditional lecture auditors and students. We might suggest that the advent of these problems was not only due to social change, but arises also from a more fundamental change in the nature of our student popula-

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