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INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT EQUITY: FOCUSING *on* WHAT WORKS

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■ Abstract

The rates of higher education access, participation and completion for Indigenous students are much lower than those for non-Indigenous students in Australia. This paper argues for a research-led focus on what works in terms of Indigenous student equity in higher education. Undertaking independent evaluation of existing initiatives and leveraging the experience of hundreds of successful Indigenous graduates, it may be possible to articulate some of the ways in which success has been, and can be, achieved, despite the challenges that face Indigenous students. In other words, it may be possible to articulate some aspects of what works for some Indigenous people in relation to higher education. A focus on articulating strategies that Indigenous individuals and communities might adopt in relation to higher education should be developed alongside the management of systemic problems through a range of means. The “success-focused” approach would provide one of a suite of approaches that may be helpful in addressing Indigenous student equity.

■ Introduction

This paper argues that there is a need for a new paradigm for research in Indigenous higher education student equity in Australia. The arguments for the necessity for a new focus on Indigenous student *success*, which has equal billing with the existing focus on failure, and some suggestions for research foci and directions within this new paradigm are presented.

It is widely known that the rates of higher education access, participation and completion for Indigenous students are much lower than those for non-Indigenous students in Australia (James et al., 2008). The reasons for low rates in access and participation include non-completion of high school, low achievement in high school, low aspiration for higher education and a high proportion of Indigenous students choosing Technical and Further Education (TAFE) as a postsecondary option (James et al., 2008).

In terms of retention and completion, Indigenous students face significant obstacles including that they tend to be older and have more responsibilities and dependents than non-Indigenous students, for example. They also report higher levels of financial distress and of compromised educational quality than their non-Indigenous peers (James et al., 2007). The low completion rate is influenced by a number of factors, including a higher rate of attrition, a higher failure rate of individual subjects, prior educational disadvantage, lower levels of educational attainment on entry and cultural isolation and prejudice (James et al., 2008).

Much of our understanding of the issues, and of the level of seriousness of these issues, has come from research and investigation aimed at uncovering and documenting the problems related to Indigenous student equity. This work is critical and must retain a central place in policy research in order that we are continually informed of the relevant issues. Australia has failed Indigenous people in relation to higher education equity and we must understand why, in order to do better.

But equally, this paper argues, a focus on success must now take its place alongside the existing focus on failure. Giving prominence to a research-led focus on “what works” in terms of Indigenous student equity in higher education will provide evidence-based

guidance for policy and practice. Through investigating the efficacy of existing programs designed to facilitate Indigenous student recruitment and retention, and leveraging the experience of the many hundreds of successful Indigenous university graduates, it may be possible to articulate some of the ways in which higher education success has been, and can be, achieved, despite the challenges that face Indigenous students. In other words, it may be possible to articulate some aspects of “what works” for some Indigenous people who choose to study at university.

Given the dearth of research evidence reported in the peer-reviewed literature about “what works”, a suite of large, federally funded, robust and ethically and culturally appropriate studies by experienced Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers is needed. These investigations would include longitudinal studies of the performance of the Australian higher education sector, and individual institutions within that sector, in relation to Indigenous student success, and studies of the experiences of individual Indigenous graduates.

One major focus of the proposed research program would be rigorously investigating the efficacy of existing programs, initiatives and other activities around improving higher education equity for Indigenous students. Such activities currently include, for example: target setting; educational, aspiration-raising, academic preparation, mentoring and pathway programs; as well as scholarships and fee waivers, among others. Despite their range and reach and prevalence, however, there is no independently validated evaluation of these initiatives as a whole. Such evaluation, and reporting in the peer-reviewed literature, are necessary so that there is a strong evidence base on which to make decisions about future programs and initiatives.

In addition to independent evaluation of such activities, a large, national, qualitative study, carried out in an ethically and culturally sensitive manner that included in-depth interviews of/recent Indigenous graduates would be undertaken as part of this “success-oriented” approach to improving equity. The aim here would be to uncover aspects of Indigenous graduates’ experiences when they were students that helped them choose to attend university, stay there, succeed in their study and graduate.

All of this is not to suggest that, alongside a new focus on success, a parallel focus on obstacles and policy and other systemic challenges to Indigenous higher education student success should not continue. Rather, a focus on articulating “success strategies” that schools, TAFE and universities; and Indigenous individuals and communities might adopt in relation to higher education should be developed alongside the management of systemic problems through a range of means.

The “success-focused” approach is likely to provide one of a suite of approaches that may be helpful in addressing Indigenous student equity.

■ The challenges facing Indigenous students

While this paper is focused on the articulation of a research strategy that focuses on success, it is useful to briefly summarise some of the relevant challenges for Indigenous students to provide background for the argument for a focus on success. Indigenous participation in higher education is unacceptably low. Indigenous Australians make up around 2.4% of the population but only make up around 1.3% of the higher education population (James et al., 2008). While these figures are indicative of the problem, there are three reasons Indigenous participation is even worse than it looks. The first is a relative increase in the Indigenous population between 2001-2006 from 2.1% to 2.4%. The second is an overall increase in Indigenous school participation between 2001-2006 from 3.5% to 4.2%. Finally, there are a higher proportion of younger people, that is, of university attendance age, in the Indigenous population as compared to the non-Indigenous population (James et al., 2008). Given these three factors, Indigenous participation in higher education should be much higher than it is currently.

Those Indigenous students who do make it to university face challenges in staying at, progressing through and completing their program of study. The retention rate is markedly lower for Indigenous than for non-Indigenous students. A retention ratio of 1.0 would indicate comparable retention for Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students and the retention ratio for Indigenous students in 2005 was 0.81 (James et al., 2008). High attrition plays a part here – between 2000 and 2003, first year attrition rates for Indigenous higher education students were around 35-39%, compared to 22-23% for non-Indigenous students (James et al., 2008).

Devlin (2009b) suggests that there has been a gradual increase in awareness in the higher education sector of some of the issues related to Indigenous higher education. This rise in awareness has contributed to a policy environment where positive change is more likely to occur, although the thesis of this paper is that an articulation of problems is no longer sufficient to make necessary changes and a parallel focus on success can supplement efforts to articulate the problems by providing strategies through which the problems can be addressed.

■ The current Australian context

The Federal Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008 Chaired by Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley and the resulting Bradley Report (Bradley et al., 2008) have brought Indigenous higher education to the fore. The Bradley Report argues that

To increase the numbers participating [in higher education] we must also look to members of

groups currently under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth: Indigenous people, people with low socio-economic status, and those from regional and remote areas (Bradley et al., 2008, p. xi).

The report also makes a specific recommendation in relation to Indigenous higher education.

Recommendation 30 of the report is that, in consultation with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) "...the Australian Government regularly review the effectiveness of measures to improve higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people..." (Bradley et al., 2008, p. xxiii). The report also suggests national targets for Indigenous access, success, retention and completion as well as maintaining Indigenous scholarships.

■ The government response to Bradley

In early 2009, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, The Honourable Julia Gillard, MP, made three speeches in response to the recommendations of the Bradley Report.

In her first speech, Minister Gillard addressed the Inaugural Universities Australia conference, and made three announcements, none of which specifically mentioned Indigenous higher education but which set the general tone of where the federal government will focus some of its energies in higher education policy. The first announcement was an increase in the proportion of 25-34 year olds with bachelor level qualifications or above from the current 32% to 40% of the population over the next 15 years. The second was a student demand driven system where government spending on universities would "follow the student" rather than being allocated to individual institutions. Universities will, therefore, receive government grants based on the number of students enrolled. The present cap on enrolments that restricts this number will be lifted gradually. The third announcement was the establishment of a new national regulatory and quality agency for higher education (Gillard, 2009a).

In her second speech at the Big Skills Conference, the Minister said, "[VET] must give new skills and new opportunities to our remote, Indigenous communities". She also announced that the government would "commission the Australian Qualifications Framework Council to improve the articulation and connectivity between the university and VET sectors to enable competency-based and merit-based systems to become more student-focused". Finally, she announced a broadening of the ambit of Skills Australia to incorporate both the university and VET systems (Gillard, 2009b). These announcements have likely relevance for Indigenous students and Indigenous equity. There are a high proportion of Indigenous

students in VET compared to higher education and improvements of articulation arrangements between the two sectors may be helpful in assisting some Indigenous students to move into higher education.

In her third speech, focused on equity, Minister Gillard said,

...everyone here would recognise the most seriously under-represented groups in higher education are those from remote parts of Australia, Indigenous students, those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from regional locations (Gillard, 2009c).

She went on to note that for the past decade, equity has not been a priority in Australian higher education. She said,

...[t]he pathways of Indigenous students through school and beyond are a major focus for the Rudd Government ... It is not just a question of access however. Retention rates are lower compared to other students ... The Government recognises the distinct nature of the challenges facing Indigenous students. We will work closely with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council to improve higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous Australians (Gillard, 2009c).

The government's full response to the Bradley Report and recommendations became apparent in the May 2009 budget and the subsequent paper, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (DEEWR, 2009). The sentiments expressed in the three speeches and in this subsequent paper indicate that Indigenous higher education equity is on the government's agenda. A focus on what has worked to date in terms of Indigenous student participation, retention and completion is likely to be helpful to furthering this agenda. In addition, a paradigm that is primarily focused on documenting failure is limited in scope and one that is focused on success has potential to uncover and highlight useful strategies, initiatives and knowledge that might otherwise remain under-utilised.

■ A focus on success

The new focus on success in Indigenous research would incorporate research about what works in terms of improving Indigenous equity in, and outcomes from, higher education through two main avenues. The first avenue is evidence-based evaluation of existing programs that have been designed to address Indigenous equity. The second avenue is qualitative in-depth investigation of the experiences of successful Indigenous graduates. Research through both avenues

should be of the highest quality possible. Devlin (2008) notes that the quality of higher education research is dependent on appropriate preparatory groundwork being undertaken; the formulation and use of clear research questions; ethical research conduct; the appropriate use of conceptual and theoretical framework(s) to guide the research; the use of relevant and appropriate methods and methodology to undertake the investigation and choosing the highest quality dissemination outlets.

There is little doubt that higher education research, like many areas of research, would generally benefit from increased rigour overall. Oakley (2003, p. 1) suggests changes to the ways in which educational research is conducted and reported are necessary so that "... much more of it can enter the field of usable, robust evidence". Devlin (2007) notes that higher education research should attempt to continuously improve the quality of what Oakley (2003, p. 4) calls the "... weight of evidence ..." of its contribution to understanding in the field.

It would be important for the proposed research to be rigorous and for outcomes of both avenues of research proposed above to be carried out to the highest standards possible, including being reported in peer-reviewed literature to ensure the appropriate levels of rigour and scholarship and, therefore, the most robust evidence base. Equally important is adherence to appropriate cultural protocols in terms of design, approach and methodology.

■ Evidence-based evaluation of existing equity initiatives

There are numerous existing programs, initiatives and other activities designed to facilitate Indigenous student recruitment and retention in higher education. While some evaluation of these sorts of initiatives has occurred, it has often been carried out by those associated with the initiative being evaluated and the results of evaluations are often used to advocate for a continued program or more funding. And herein lies the rub – in advocating for an initiative, independent, objective evaluation is not guaranteed. What is needed is systematic, independently validated evaluation of these initiatives individually and as a whole. Without such evaluation, we cannot say with certainty "what works" in improving Indigenous equity. The evidence may well be available there, but it has not yet been systematically gathered, nor have the outcomes yet been considered carefully enough, nor has what is known been peer-reviewed and reported in appropriate academically rigorous outlets.

In addition to the investment in research into factors that contribute to the low levels of Indigenous student participation, retention and success in higher education in Australia, what is required is comprehensive, robust, national data on "what

works" in terms of improving the equity performance of universities in relation to Indigenous students. Because a focus limited to the higher education sector would mean a focus in some cases where it would be too late to effect some of the change of the kinds necessary for students, this paper proposes that there would need to be a focus on the other educational sectors as well – early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education. An evidence-based research approach would need to be taken.

The proposed new national research would involve tracking Indigenous students from early childhood education and primary school through secondary school and into post school choices. It would include rigorously investigating the impacts of various factors that contribute to the poor higher education participation and success of Indigenous students such as:

- the effects of personal, familial and community aspiration on Indigenous student choices;
- perceptions of the relevance and benefits of higher education and other post-compulsory education options among Indigenous students, families and communities;
- individual resilience and self-efficacy of Indigenous students;
- financial circumstances of Indigenous students; and
- labour market conditions affecting Indigenous students.

■ Asking successful Indigenous graduates what works

Leveraging the experience of the many hundreds of successful Indigenous university graduates, it is likely that high quality research would assist in articulating some of the ways in which higher education success has been, and can be, achieved for Indigenous students. The central aim of such research would be to uncover aspects of Indigenous graduates' experiences when they were students that helped them choose to attend university, stay there, succeed in their study and graduate. There are many hundreds of Indigenous graduates from Australian universities who have defied the odds and achieved success. These graduates have experience of success that may be helpful in guiding further success. Documenting their stories, advice and strategies for overcoming obstacles and thematic analyses of the data may provide a blueprint for success for future Indigenous higher education students.

Research practices that are respectful, ethical and sympathetic, as well as useful, friendly and just (Smith, 1999), would need to be employed. The need for culturally and ethically appropriate methodologies when engaging in the proposed research is crucial. This is discussed further below.

Questions that a study such as the one suggested here might address include whether there are elements of the curriculum that successful Indigenous

graduates can point to that assisted them in transition to higher education, in staying in study and/or in performing well. So too, questions as to whether there are elements of the hidden curriculum in higher education that successful Indigenous students believe they benefited from uncovering would be important to articulate (Devlin, 2009b).

In terms of designing culturally appropriate methodology, the approach proposed in this paper aligns with the description of the "Celebrating Survival" project (Smith, 1999). As Smith (1999, p. 145) notes:

... celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity ... Events and *accounts which focus on the positive are important* ... because they celebrate our resistances at an ordinary human level (emphasis added).

Smith (1999) points to an example from the work of Johnson and Budnik (1994, p. 7) where elders "... speak openly of their personal struggles to stay on the path against impossible odds".

The approach suggested in the present paper also aligns with the method of story telling outlined by Smith (1999) where what is provided is a culturally appropriate way of representing truth with control retained by the story teller rather than the researcher. The notion of reframing outlined by Smith (1999), too, aligns with the approach suggested in the current paper – reframing an issue relates to the story teller making decisions about what is foregrounded, what is in the background and how the issue is defined (Smith, 1999). Finally, the idea of sharing is also in line with the approach suggested in this paper. Smith (1999) explains that this idea is about sharing knowledge between Indigenous peoples with the underpinning assumption of knowledge being of collective benefit. As Smith (1999, p. 161) further explains:

Sharing is also related to the failure of education systems to educate Indigenous people adequately or appropriately. It is important for keeping people informed about issues and events which will impact on them.

Smith (1999, p. 161) goes further, adding that "Sharing is a responsibility of research ... sharing is about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community". This is precisely the intention of the approach outlined in the present paper.

In terms of ethical research, one of the most important aspects is respect. In Australia, research in the health fields involving humans is guided by a series of guidelines made in accordance with the National

Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Act 1992. The guidelines recognise the values inherent in the relationship between researchers and research participants. These values include respect for human beings (NHMRC, 2008).

Like health and medical researchers, higher education researchers must always show the utmost respect for the human participants in their research and in every case weigh up any risks and benefits to participants in being involved in the research. In the case of the participation of Indigenous people in research, there are particularly deep attachments to the notion of respect. As Smith (1999, p. 120) explains, "the term 'respect' is consistently used by indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity... Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct". The focus proposed in the present paper is underpinned by the assumption of a culturally and ethically appropriate approach.

■ The hidden curriculum

There are three recognised aspects of education curriculum: the intended curriculum, that is, the official texts, and so on; the enacted curriculum, that is, how the intended curriculum is delivered; and the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum includes *the values and beliefs* that are signified by what is, and is not, represented in the intended and enacted curriculum and discourse, and what is represented outside of these. Margolis (2001) explains that, "... manners, and class dispositions – the qualities once called "finishing" – and certain glib pseudo-intellectual styles are elements of ...[the] hidden curriculum" (p. 3).

Margolis (2001) further suggests that some students have a reservoir of cultural and social resources when they come to university, which give them comfort, decoding skills and particular types of knowledge, ways of speaking, styles, dispositions and worldviews. These are helpful for students in managing the hidden curriculum and the wider context of higher education. Some students, however, do not have such a reservoir and the hidden curriculum can be particularly difficult for them. Many Indigenous students come from backgrounds where they are the first in their family to attend university and this reservoir may not be available. The aim of interviewing successful Indigenous graduates would be to uncover how these students managed and negotiated the hidden curriculum.

Lawrence notes the complexity and multiple challenges of university study in this observation:

Each subject has its specific prerequisites and/or assumed entry knowledge; subject matter

(content or process orientated, text-bound, oral or computer-mediated); language; texts (study packages, lecture notes, PowerPoint notes, web CT documents, CD Rom); cultural practices (ways of dressing and showing respect – Professor, first names); attendance [mode] (lectures, tutorials, practical sessions, clinical sessions, external/internal/online); behaviours (rule-governed/flexible, compulsory/optional attendance, consultation times, electronic discussion groups); class participation (passive, interactive, experiential); rules (about extensions, participation, resubmissions, appeals); theoretical assumptions (scientific/sociological); research methodologies (positivist/interpretive/critical, quantitative/qualitative); ... ways of thinking (recall, reflective, analytical or critical, surface or deep); referencing systems (APA, Harvard, MLA); ways of writing (essays/reports/journals/orals); structure (particularly in relation to assessment); tone and style (word choice, active/passive voice, third/second/first person, sentence structure, paragraph structure); formatting (left/right justified, font, type, spacing, margins); assessment (exams, assignments, orals, formative/summative, individual/ group) (2005, p. 247).

Lawrence (2005) adds that, “to pass the subject, students need to engage, master and demonstrate the subject’s discourses” (p. 247). And so, to pass multiple subjects, students need to engage, master and demonstrate the discourses of multiple subjects. The proposed research would focus on how, faced with these requirements, Indigenous graduates have successfully navigated the intended, enacted and hidden curriculum of higher education. In particular, the research might attempt to illuminate whether there are elements of the curriculum that assisted performance, progress and completion for Indigenous students and whether there are elements of the hidden curriculum that should be articulated to similarly assist future Indigenous students.

■ Socio-cultural competence

Existing research findings can help guide this proposed new focus and work. Work by Lawrence (2005) indicates that particular socio-cultural capabilities, such as how to ask for help at university in appropriate ways, are important for success at university. The proposed new research might focus on which socio-cultural practices successful Indigenous graduates applied while in the university subculture. These might then be articulated and taught to others as appropriate (Devlin, 2009b).

The specific verbal and nonverbal means of asking for help differs from subculture to subculture.

Socio-cultural capabilities include seeking help and information in ways appropriate to a culture or subculture. Higher education students need to consider the words to use, whether to ask directly or indirectly or include explanations or reasons or not. For instance, as one Arts student in Lawrence’s research put it,

If you disagree with the marking of an assignment, it is necessary to have skill in approaching the assessor and presenting your case for disagreement with the marks. If I was too shy to approach the assessor or had no skill to express my disagreement, then my marks would have remained unchanged and my overall results would have suffered (Lawrence, 2005, p. 8).

The proposed new research would focus on determining which socio-cultural practices successful Indigenous graduates applied while in the university subculture, with the intention of articulating and teaching these to others as appropriate.

In research carried out in New Zealand, Tuuta et al. (2004) suggest that students’ outcomes will improve, when they see themselves positively reflected in a curriculum. The Australian Bradley Report suggests that in relation to Indigenous knowledge, “Higher Education providers should ensure that the institutional culture, the cultural competence of staff and the nature of the curriculum recognises and supports the participation of Indigenous students” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. xxvi). The report further suggests that Indigenous knowledge should be embedded into the higher education curriculum to ensure that all university students have some understanding of Indigenous culture.

Quoting from the IHEAC submission to the higher education review, the Bradley Report says,

Indigenous involvement in higher education is not only about student participation and the employment of Indigenous staff. It is also about what is valued as knowledge in the academy. Indigenous students and staff have unique knowledge and understandings ...[that] must be brought into the curriculum for all students and must inform research and scholarship. Indigenous people do not come empty handed to Australia’s higher education system but bring significant strengths, both in knowledge capital and human capital that enriches higher education in Australia. The recognition of Indigenous peoples’ contribution as well as needs, is critical to full Indigenous engagement in higher education (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 32).

Research in New Zealand on school students has identified that an influential key to improving Māori

students' achievement is changing the perceptions and interactions between the teacher, the student and *wbanau* (extended family) (Bishop et al., 2003). It is possible that similar findings might apply in higher education in some cases but Australian research is needed to guide thinking and directions in this domain.

■ Social-emotional competence

Research in school education indicates that academic success at school is linked to social-emotional competencies such as persistence, resilience and organisation (Bernard, 2006). The link between these competencies and academic achievement has not been investigated at university level (Devlin, 2009b). The proposed research could examine whether there are social-emotional competencies that successful Indigenous graduates have, and/or used while they were students, so that others might be helped to uncover and use or taught to develop to assist them with university study.

Bernard reports that "psychological and educational theory ... identifies distinct social-emotional capabilities associated with school students' motivation and achievement" (2006, p. 106). Focusing on school education and on the basis of extensive research evidence, he claims that it "...will not be maximally effective in helping all children reach ... (a)chievement unless the following ... are explicitly taught in the form of social-emotional education: confidence ... persistence, organization, getting along (and) emotional resilience" (p. 106). He reports research evidence "... that suggest that teaching social-emotional-motivational competencies can have beneficial effects on achievement ..." (Bernard, 2006, p. 112) of school aged children.

Devlin (2009a, 2009b) suggests that success at university *probably* requires social-emotional competence but that this is an under-researched area. One question that success-oriented research might include is: Are there socio-emotional competencies that successful Indigenous graduates have that others might be taught to develop to assist them with university study?

■ Conclusion

New Zealand may have lessons for Australia in terms of approaches to improving Indigenous equity. Traditionally the literature has identified a range of sociological explanations for persistent Māori under-representation in higher education. However, this "deficit theorising" with a focus on negative, stereotyped characteristics such as, for example, lack of family support for finance or study is now seen as unhelpful and possibly detrimental and has been largely abandoned (Gorinski & Abernethy, 2005).

Research about obstacles and policy and other

systemic challenges to Indigenous student success must continue in Australia. As argued earlier in this paper, work that continually informs us of relevant issues in relation to Indigenous equity is critical and must retain a central place in policy research. In order to improve Indigenous equity, we must understand the failures that have occurred and continue to occur in relation to Indigenous higher education equity.

But there is a need for a new, parallel paradigm for research and practice in Indigenous higher education student equity in Australia. A new focus on Australian Indigenous student success, which has equal billing with the existing focus on failure, is necessary. A focus on success must now take its place alongside the existing focus on failure, with prominence given to a research-led focus on "what works" in terms of improving Indigenous equity.

This new paradigm must incorporate culturally and ethically appropriate methodology to ensure the appropriate inclusion of Indigenous people as co-participants and to ensure the sharing and celebration of success. The focus on articulating "success strategies" that schools, TAFE and universities; and Indigenous individuals and communities might adopt should be developed concurrently with the focus on documenting failure. The adoption of the new approach does not imply that policy, structural and other issues and obstacles should be accepted nor that the responsibility for success rests solely or primarily with Indigenous people. Rather, the focus on solutions that Indigenous individuals and communities might adopt should be developed alongside the management of systemic problems through other means. The "success-focused" approach is likely to provide one of a suite of approaches that may be helpful in addressing Indigenous student equity.

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■ About the author

Professor Marcia Devlin holds the inaugural Chair in Higher Education Research at Deakin University, Victoria. Marcia's research interests and expertise span higher education policy, equity, Indigenous higher education, university teaching improvement and student engagement and learning. Current and recent national work includes contributing to federal policy development in the area of Indigenous higher education through the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council and co-authoring the Universities Australia-funded national studies of student finances and student equity. Marcia is frequently invited to deliver national and international keynote addresses, lectures, workshops and seminars to provide advice on a range of topics related to higher education policy, practice and quality. The author and co-author of a large number of reports, articles and studies, Marcia also writes regularly on equity and other higher education matters for newspapers including *The Australian* and *Campus Review* and has regular higher education columns in *The Age* and *The Warrnambool Standard*.