

Systemic Factors Affecting Participation and Attainment in Tertiary Education by Queensland Students from Low Socio-Economic Status Backgrounds

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Project summary

Improving tertiary education opportunities, participation and success of young people from Low Socio-Economic Status (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 university participation rates of students from LSES backgrounds. Given that these figures have not shifted in over a decade, serious research attention needs to be given to these matters. This project seeks to identify potential systemic issues, including barriers, attractors and interventions that influence participation by LSES students in tertiary, and particularly higher, education.

A focussed study of the Queensland context is justified, given the unique challenges and characteristics of this state. Despite a rapid growth in the population of Queensland in recent years, data indicate that unemployment rates have declined from around 9 percent in 1986 to 4 percent in 2006. In the context of a strong labour market the overall QTAC applications have declined considerably in the last 10 years. These figures have serious implications for the state of Queensland in terms of the future of the state and the capacity of human capital to participate effectively in the national and international knowledge economy.

Findings from this project will inform policy development aimed at improving participation and attainment by students from LSES backgrounds, particularly through Government initiatives aimed at addressing professional skills shortages. Consequently, these findings could enhance Queensland's education and training system by maximising participation and attainment by LSES and improve their quality of life and future life choices and opportunities