

Rethinking equity in tertiary education – why we need to think as one sector & not two

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VET research: leading & responding in turbulent times
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Argument & overview

1. Australia needs a *tertiary* education equity policy, not separate VET & HE policies
 2. The diploma is the key qualification for equity in Australia – we need to get disadvantaged students *into* diplomas – this the main 'transition' qualification
- Can pathways be an equity mechanism? Meritocracy & social reproduction arguments
 - Why the diploma is the key
 - Participation of equity groups in VET
 - Outcomes from VET pathways
 - Challenges
 - Implications for equity policy

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Can pathways be an equity mechanism? Meritocracy & social reproduction arguments

- Assumed pathways support equity & that problem is need more of same
- Pathways rarely problematised – supported by opposing theoretical premises – liberal & social reproduction theorists – both think education about socialisation & social selection
 - Liberal theorists – human capital, civic values, social mobility, meritocracy – pathways redress imbalance
 - Social reproduction – education reproduces power, reinforces privilege & dominance
- Pathways help solve tension between meritocratic & social justice discourses
 - Liberals '2nd chance', overcome disadvantage, ensure education is meritocratic
 - Reproduction theorists – challenge unfair & hegemonic power – focus on elitism of universities & reluctance take more pathway students
- Pathways *may* contribute to equity, but can't guarantee they *will*
 - Clark – cooling out; Grubb – heating up
 - Students' aspirations – we don't know

Why the diploma is the key

- Australian government equity, participation & expansion targets – each sector will rely on the other, pathways at the centre not the margins
- Diploma the 'transition' qualification
 - VET students who apply for HE usually get a place – up till now anyway
- Social & economic benefits from diplomas cf. lower level qualifications
- Stanwick's work – young people using diplomas to access HE – over 50% in some FoE; older HE commencers with diplomas
- Problem – % with diplomas in HE declined since 2003 from 14 – 10%
 - Static or declining diploma enrolments
- If students from disadvantaged groups not accessing diplomas, VET contributes to entrenching social disadvantage
- Liberal & social reproduction theorists need to focus on what happens in VET as well as HE

Participation of equity groups in VET & HE

Equity	2007 % HE	2008 % VET	% population
NESB	3.8	14.6	3.7 HE/15.6 VET
Students with disabilities	4.1	5.9	8.0 HE/20.0 VET
Rural/Regional	18.1	38.3	25.4
Remote	1.1	4.6	2.5
Low SES	15.0	28.8 in 2001	25.0
Indigenous	1.3	4.3	2.2

Share of qualification level by VET equity groups in 2008

	Dip or higher	Cert IV	Cert III	Certs I & II	Other
Low SES in 2001	6.8	9.2	19.5	31.8	32.6
NESB	16.8	11.5	24.6	24.3	22.8
Rural/Remote	4.6	9.4	32.6	27.4	25.9
Students with disabilities	8.3	9.5	22.2	30.7	29.3
Indigenous students	3.6	7.2	26	39.6	23.5
All VET students	10.1	11.2	30.6	22.3	25.9

Pathways: outcomes VET graduates in TAFE

	2003 %	2004 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %	2008 %	2009 %	2009-2003
Employed or further study	92.3	85.7	87.8	86.7	88.3	88.5	86.4	-5.9
Employed	73.9	74.6	76.5	77.4	78.8	78.2	74.7	+ 0.8
Further study	43.3	32.4	35.1	32.8	32.8	35.4	35.4	-7.9%

Outcomes TAFE graduates 2001-2008 aged between 15-19 years

	Employed %	Employed or further study %
2001	73	90
2002	71	89
2003	68.7	92.1
2004	68.3	83.6
2005	70.8	86.8
2006	71.5	85.1
2007	69.9	84.3
2008	70.2	84.9
2008-2001	-2.8	-5.1

Challenges

- Labour market played a role, but this is variable
- Outcomes from low level VET certificates appalling
 - % older people with certificate III & above – welfare-to-work churn?
- Must do something about young people's outcomes
- VET pathways act as educational ladder of opportunity to HE, less so social ladder
- Rethink design & purpose of lower level VET qualifications
- Challenge for *both* sectors – increase pathways *to* diplomas (& maybe associate degrees in future) & *from* diplomas to HE
- HE – support transitions, work with partners

Implications for equity policy

- Need tertiary education equity policy, not separate VET & HE
- If targets can't be met by isolated sectors, neither can equity
- Equity policy must focus on pathways *to* diplomas & *from* diplomas – this is why over-concentration of disadvantaged students in lower level VET qualifications a HE problem
- Need consistent tertiary education equity policy & equity definitions
 - Low SES needs to be a VET equity target
 - The sectors will have different targets using same definitions
- Need consistent equity advice & tertiary education equity research – focus on transitions to FE
- VET curriculum an equity issue – needs to emphasise educational progression & not just work outcomes & knowledge & skills to work at next level
- Must increase nos. on pathways, or government targets won't be met
- Important –for human capital *and* for social justice reasons