

## Submission from Professor Julia Horne\*, University of Sydney

My short submission is to bring to the Committee's attention a recent policy roundtable held in Sydney Friday 25 November 2022, *Transforming Higher Education—Equity, Access and Social Inclusion*, which I co-organised with colleagues Professor Gaby Ramia and Dr Matthew Thomas.

The twenty participants included students and young people with unique perspectives on equity; economists and political economists; higher education policy experts; political sociologists; educational philosophers and authors. A statement of principles on equity, access and social inclusion in higher education will be published early in 2023. Below are the key questions we addressed which may help the committee to frame its discussion around equity and social access.

- What do we mean by educational disadvantage? How does it manifest (differently or similarly) across cohorts? How does inequity in early schooling translate into long-term educational disadvantage?
- How does student disadvantage affect educational futures?
- Equity as social investment: how much and what sort of investment in higher education will support substantive equitable access? How can university funding models support student equity? What is the place for a universal student income?
- Defining equity: What do we mean by 'equity' and what are the collective goals? Are the Bradley Review's equity categories still fit for purpose 14 years on, or do they need refinement? What is the place of student assistance?
- What do social access and social inclusion policies aim to achieve? What mechanisms or strategies do they employ? What does success look like? What should change?

Many important points emerged from the discussion which will form the basis of the report. These included:

- Educational disadvantage starts early in a child's education. Systemic disadvantage often limits equality of educational opportunity from primary school, notwithstanding a child's native talents. Such disadvantage affects people from across the social spectrum, but most particularly, **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disabilities, children who live in regional, rural and remote communities.**
- Disadvantage increases the gap as children progress through the years and limits educational choices in secondary and tertiary education. Sometimes disadvantage is simply not having a place to study (eg a school library), or spending hours each day travelling to and from school, or not having the educational 'tools of trade'. If we are to achieve **equity in higher education**, as a nation, we need to recognise and act on inequities of schooling in these communities compared to the broader community. The Smith Family's 'learning for life' program supports 60,000 young people from primary schools through schooling and tertiary education, and is an example of how to provide secure educational futures for Australians living in precarity.
- Some of the barriers that **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students** face in finishing school and being admitted to universities include racism. Many are told as school children they are not good enough to go to university. Rarely is there an expectation of a university education, especially if no family members are graduates. Once at university, fear of economic insecurity and lack of institutional cultural understanding and awareness create further barriers to completion.

Julia Horne is professor of History and writes on the history and politics of higher education.

