
Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low socio-economic status (LSES) backgrounds



ETHICS APPROVAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study investigated the extent to which the receipt in 2015 of a UTS equity scholarship and financial assistance is perceived to impact on LSES students' performance, engagement with university life, and general wellbeing. Its purpose was to make recommendations for ways to improve the provision of equity scholarships and financial assistance at UTS. The project outputs include this research report and a video of the forum held at UTS on 29 February 2016.

KEY FINDINGS

The key finding of this study is that the receipt of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, regardless of the amount received, has a significant impact on LSES recipients' engagement in university life, academic performance and participation in the UTS social life, and is seen as helping during their transition to university and their decision to stay on and continue their studies.

Academic, material, personal and emotional direct benefits are perceived as ensuing from the receipt of equity scholarships and financial assistance, in particular, the reduction of the 'stigma' of disadvantage. Benefits also extend beyond to indirectly benefit their families, communities and future generations. A clear institutional benefit to UTS is the perception among recipients is that 'UTS cares', which in turn contributes to students' aspirations to succeed and to 'give back'.

Emerging from this investigation is clear evidence that personal interaction between individuals (staff, family, friends, students), information, material artefacts, environments and processes, makes university study a possibility for LSES students (aspiration) while supporting them to help make it a reality (access and success).

Key findings in relation to the promotion and awareness, application, and perceived impacts of and benefits to LSES students once at university are framed in relation to personal interactions.

Promotion and awareness (personal interactions and contacts)

1. The existing UTS engagement in relational strategies represented by outreach programs and the establishment and maintenance of personal relationships between UTS staff and advisors of potential students in partner institutions is highly effective in helping students access information about equity scholarships and financial assistance. Once aware of their existence, most students report few problems accessing information about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance on the UTS and UAC websites.
2. There are discontinuities in information about institutional equity scholarships and financial assistance programs and access schemes, who is eligible for these, and the timing of application periods across UTS staff and advisors in the LSES schools and TAFEs with which they are partnered. These discontinuities presumably extend to students, who often rely on their advisors for information, advice, referral and support.

Application (face-to-face support)

1. Access to equity scholarships and financial assistance in LSES students' decisions to apply for university is complexly linked to access to affordable transport enabling them to travel between work, study and home, and cultural barriers related to perceptions of UTS as an alien place in the city, far removed from their local neighbourhoods. This represents a complex combination of factors that influences students' decisions to apply for university.
2. Upon deciding LSES students decide to apply for university and after they find out about the existence of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, the existing strategy of opening applications throughout the academic year is effective in enabling students to apply when they are most in need, particularly if they receive personal support from UTS staff.

Perceived impacts and benefits once at university (holistic wrap around support)

1. The existing strategy of providing a mix of equity scholarship and financial assistance products represents an effective holistic, wrap-around program that supports LSES students in significant and diverse ways beyond the financial. This includes personally and academically enabling LSES students to stay at university, succeed in their studies, engage in formal academic peer networks and informal peer social networks that help them feel 'normal', and access work and career opportunities that they would otherwise not have had.
2. Regardless of the amount of financial assistance received, LSES students report the impacts as significantly reducing stress, decreasing hours in paid work, enabling more time for studying, thereby increasing grades, confidence, motivation and desire to 'give back'.

Contemporary issues for equity practitioners

There is diverse and keen interest in institutional equity scholarships for LSES students as well for rural and remote students. The UTS forum was timely given the recent policy change in Commonwealth Startup funding. Given the focus on the local context at UTS, it is particularly relevant to note the wide range of participants attending from across Australia, moving the discussions beyond what is relevant to institutions in NSW, such as universities, UAC and schools. Moreover, there was unanimous recognition that the equity scholarships area is a complex and shifting space, which requires further investigation at institutional, sectoral and policy levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UTS increases the ways in which potential students can personally interact with staff to find out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance; and that UTS build personal contacts with student advisors in partner schools and institutions. The second is that UTS use a consistent communication strategy that facilitates personal contact with UTS staff in order to: promote equity scholarships and financial assistance to potential students and their advisors; provide consistent information about the 'ecology of services' at UTS; specify differences between equity scholarships and financial assistance and access schemes; describe who is eligible; and present clear application and notification timelines.
2. UTS develops a strategic, coordinated response to the complexity of factors that influence LSES students' decisions to apply for university in the promotion of equity scholarships and financial assistance. The second is that UTS retain the strategy of opening applications for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance throughout the year, while increasing the provision of face-to-face support when LSES students decide to apply.
3. UTS retains the five-tier, multi-factor selection criteria strategy that diversifies LSES students' eligibility for equity scholarships and financial assistance beyond financial hardship alone.
4. UTS initiates an internal communication strategy across administrative and academic staff in faculties and units about the range of equity scholarships and financial assistance, eligibility, selection process, possible amounts available, application timelines and processes, and who to contact for more information.
5. In its external and internal promotional strategies UTS directly references the range of benefits students reported as the result of having received equity scholarships and financial assistance.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The research reported here was funded by the National Priorities Pool (NPP) of the Australian Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) to contribute to building the national evidence base on which future policy can be developed (2014). This project sought to identify the impact and perceived benefits of the receipt of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance on students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (LSES) as they make decisions about, apply for and commence university study. The findings described in this report arise from the empirical investigation of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance in the form of grants or loans. The project represents a snapshot in time of the LSES student recipients of this support who participated in the research during 2015.

NAVIGATING THIS REPORT

The report is structured into six main sections:

1. Introduction: background and context.
2. Research design: data collection methods, data analysis and limitations.
3. Research findings: student survey, stakeholder interviews and UTS Equity Scholarships Forum 2016.
4. Putting it in context: discussion of key findings.
5. Conclusions and recommendations.
6. Appendices.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Like many other universities, UTS invests significant financial and human resources into the provision of equity scholarships and financial assistance as a strategy for increasing the participation and success of people from LSES backgrounds in higher education. However, national and international research indicates equity scholarships have mixed results in improving LSES students' participation and success. Given the current investment in equity scholarships in higher education, it is timely to identify what types of equity scholarships and financial assistance make a difference, and what kind of difference they make, to LSES students' access, participation and success at UTS. The importance of investigating the impact of equity scholarship and financial assistance is emphasised by the Australian Government's higher education reforms proposed in 2014, the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme, which would require universities to commit 20% of additional revenue raised through fee deregulation to a scheme to support student access, participation and success.

The project is contextualised within the UTS Widening Participation Strategy (WPS), which provides a whole-of-university approach to increasing the number of students from low socio-economic (low SES) and Indigenous backgrounds successfully completing university study (University of Technology Sydney 2015). The WPS recognises that raising aspiration and enrolling students from disadvantaged backgrounds into university is just the first step, and that students must also be supported in their transition to university study to equip them for success. The strategy represents a holistic wrap-around approach to building educational aspiration and attainment for disadvantaged students, widening access through expanded admission pathways into UTS, supporting transition, retention and success once students commence university and building an inclusive community. The purpose of the project was to better understand how the provision of equity scholarship and

financial assistance impacts on LSES student access to, participation and success in higher education within a local context, which itself is contextualised within a broader socio-economic environment.

UTS has a long history with Widening Participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with the inception in 1986 of Aboriginal programs, enrolments and the establishment of Jumbunna, the Indigenous House of Learning; people with disabilities, with the provision of strategies to increase participation and success in undergraduate and higher degrees in all faculties; women in non-traditional areas of study and postgraduate study, particularly architecture, engineering, building studies, science, computing sciences and adult vocational education, as well as traditional areas, including nursing, education and social sciences; students from non-English speaking backgrounds, through building an environment of cultural diversity; and people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds within the UTS catchment area, to create awareness of opportunities for and increase participation and success in tertiary study (University of Technology Sydney 1996).

On 19 April 2004 the UTS Council approved a proposal by the Deputy Vice Chancellor for the establishment of the Equity initiative fund to:

...assist students from equity groups who may otherwise be adversely affected by the increased student contribution levels, be endorsed, with the amount of the fund and its allocation towards particular equity initiatives to be determined annually in conjunction with the UTS budget, but to be an amount of the order of 15% of the funds from the additional student contribution each year in the first three years of its operation (University of Technology Sydney 2004).

The Diversity Access Scholarship (DAS) was one of the initiatives established by the fund. The UTS equity scholarship and financial assistance fund has grown from \$110,000 in 2005 to be valued at a little over one million dollars in 2015, with additional contributions from UTS staff, alumni and HEPPP

funding. The research project reported here was designed to investigate whether these funds were being targeted as effectively as possible to achieve the most impact in supporting LSES students' participation in higher education at UTS. The study triangulated findings generated through a mixed methods research approach that produced quantitative and qualitative data from six different sources: a survey of UTS student recipients of equity scholarships and financial assistance; interviews with students, UTS staff and key stakeholders; UTS institutional data on the retention and success of LSES student recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance; and buzz group discussions at the UTS Equity scholarships forum 2016: current issues and future directions in February 2016. The findings will inform future directions and strategic policy for the effective provision of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, as well as contribute to building the national evidence base.

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION AGENDA

Australian Commonwealth government support for broad social participation in higher education has a long history. In 1940 the Curtin government increased the number of scholarships offered to enter university, and in the 1960s the Menzies government introduced national scholarships for higher education. During the 1970s, the Whitlam government abolished tertiary education fees, and although fees were reintroduced in the late 1980s, the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) was introduced to subsidise some undergraduate places. In 2004 the Howard government legislated to allow universities to substantially increase tuition fees and also reintroduced institutionally administered Commonwealth scholarships. In 2010 administration of these scholarships was transferred to Centrelink as an integral part of the Commonwealth government income support system, which includes Austudy, Youth Allowance and Abstudy.

Since then, the idea that higher education is an investment in human capital leading to higher earnings has been well established (Department of Innovation Universities and Skills 2008; Harmon, Oosterbeek & Walker 2003; Prince & Jenkins 2005). So too is the notion that ensuing from this investment are long-term individual cognitive, social and economic benefits that are passed on to future generations, enhancing quality of life for families, communities and society more broadly (Clarke & Leigh 2011; Kuh et al. 2006, p. 105). Similarly, the relationship between education and better labour market outcomes, health and improved life satisfaction, and raised levels of civic, social and political engagement is clear (McLaughlan, Gilfillan & Gordon 2013).

In Australia, the landmark Bradley Review (Bradley et al. 2008) made the case that widening participation to include disadvantaged students in higher education is essential for Australia's future economic and social wellbeing and its international standing in terms of economic progress and social justice (Beckley 2014, p. 2), with Gale et al. (2010) arguing it is also an 'economic necessity' (p. 22). Therefore in 2009, the Australian Commonwealth government set a target that by 2025, 40% of young people aged between 25 and 34 will hold a qualification at a bachelor level or above (Australian Government 2009, p. 12). A similar goal was set around the same time in the United Kingdom (Office for Fair Access 2009).

Since 2008, a number of policy-driven factors have impacted the higher education sector, including: the uncapping or deregulation of undergraduate university places, otherwise known as the demand-driven system, which has influenced patterns of recruitment, selection and admissions; the establishment of a national target for LSES participation and allocation of performance-based funding; the provision of HEPPP funding for institutional equity initiatives; changes in wider community beliefs about the value of higher education; and changing assumptions about entry requirements and eligibility (Naylor, Baik & James 2013, p. 5).

Between 2009 and 2012 there was an increase of 21.3% of all undergraduate student enrollments in higher education in Australia, yet there are suggestions that this has not resulted in higher percentages of LSES students being recruited to and participating in higher education (Beckley 2014; Cardak, Bowden & Bahtsevanoglou 2015a; Cardak & Ryan 2006, 2007). However, Naylor et al. (2013) suggest that there has been considerable growth in the numbers of LSES students that have:

... outstripped those of domestic onshore students as a whole. Against an increase in total onshore domestic student numbers of 16.4% since 2007, the number of ... students from low SES backgrounds has increased by 21.2%. These patterns are particularly notable given the proportion of students from these equity groups remained little changed in the decade before the Bradley Review (p. 6).

Furthermore, data from the NSW Department of Education and Training showing that between 2007 and 2014 the national growth in student enrolment was 31.6%, while for LSES students, national growth for over the same period was 46%. This means that in this three-year period, 'Australia has seen 35,000 more students from low socio-economic backgrounds attend university' (Brungs 2016). At UTS, enrolments by LSES students increased from 515 in 2010 to 803 in 2015 (University of Technology Sydney 2016, p. 68).

Irrespective of these discrepancies, in 2013, a further goal was established by the Commonwealth government, that by 2020, 20% of domestic higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level would be students from LSES backgrounds (Australian Government 2013). The significant investment in higher education scholarships in Australia drives the need for institutional strategies and policies, which are to be a function of a model of shared responsibility between students and institutions (NASFAA 2013; Naylor, Baik & James 2013). Yet, despite calls for good practices, policies and procedures to achieve government targets (Beckley 2014), a national review of equity

scholarships practice (Whiteford & Trinidad 2015) reported there was little evidence of good practice to direct future scholarship expenditure (Zacharias et al. 2016), specifically evidence based on 'rigorous methodologies' (Naylor, Bail & James 2013, p. 7). The development of a Critical Interventions Framework (Naylor, Bail & James 2013) provides a framework for categorising, targeting and monitoring institutional equity focused interventions. The authors recommend that institutions use the Framework as a guide for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of their equity programs for their specific context.

The need for rigorous evidence is pertinent at this particular historical moment, since the Commonwealth policy change in late December 2015 that converted the higher education Start up scholarship from a grant to a loan and reduced the scope of the Relocation scholarship for rural and Indigenous students. According to Kelly (2016), this change sets a dangerous precedent for the Widening Participation agenda by blurring the line between income support and tuition fees, which will result in low-income students acquiring more debt, or having to work longer hours.

INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

It is well documented that LSES students are less likely to aspire to a university education than their higher SES category counterparts (Hillman 2005; James 2002; James et al. 2008; Teese 2007), although assumptions about the relationship between SES and aspiration have recently been challenged (Gore et al. 2015). For example, according to Bok (2010), aspiration is often framed as an individual trait and in deficit terms rather than a cultural category. Using a Bourdieuan schema of cultural, economic and social capital, Bok argues that while such students may have substantial aspirations for higher education, they have a less developed capacity to realise these aspirations.

Similarly, Reed and Hurd (2014) argue that LSES students have diminished 'opportunity structures' and 'navigational capacity', resulting in what Bowden and Doughney (2010) refer to as an 'aspirations gap' in which enrolments fall considerably short of aspirations for these groups. This is why institutional widening participation and access and equity schemes need to address disadvantage across its multiple manifestations (Reed & Hurd 2014, p. 3). Although less likely than students from high SES backgrounds to participate in higher education, once there, with the exception of remote and Indigenous students, LSES students' outcomes are similar to medium SES students in terms of retention, success and completion (Centre for the Study of Higher Education 2008; Edwards & McMillan 2015).

In the last decade, most Australian universities have introduced a range of equity scholarships for undergraduate LSES students, partially funded by HEPPP, with the recognition that student success is a function of shared responsibility between institutions and students and (Reed & Hurd 2014). Attracting LSES students to higher education however, is not the only hurdle. Financial hardship impacts negatively on university students, many of whom live below the poverty line (ABC 2013), requiring them to work in order to stay at university (Bessant 2003; Universities Australia 2013). In addition to study-related expenses, such as textbooks, uniforms and materials, the high cost of accommodation and general living expenses in Sydney, and the cost of childcare for students with young families, means they are often forced out of necessity to live in outer suburbs and/or with their families. This significantly increases travel time and distance between home, work and university, which in turn, negatively impacts on time available for study, increasing stress, not only for students, but also for their families. The situation is exacerbated for LSES students, negatively impacting their aspiration and participation in higher education in Australia (Callender & Jackson 2005; Reed & Hurd 2014).

Over the last decade there has been increased interest in enhancing the student experience once at university in order to influence retention and success rates (Carney, McNeish & McColl 2005), with the recognition that students face multiple challenges beyond academic challenges once deciding to enter and continue in higher education, the most significant being finance and debt (p. 308). A small number of recent studies suggest there is a link between institutional financial assistance schemes and improved first-year retention rates (Bettinger 2004; Pluhta & Penny 2013), higher degree outcomes (Aitken, Schapper & Skuja 2004; Alon 2004; Bettinger 2004; Pluhta & Penny 2013) and completion rates (Glocker 2011), self-efficacy (Reed & Hurd 2014), and even early labour market outcomes (Li et al. 2016; Yang 2011).

Despite Chester's (2013) view that it is too early to evaluate the most recent policy changes that support widening participation targets in higher education, a small number of recent Australian studies provide some evidence about LSES students' awareness of and access to institutional equity scholarships. To investigate the retention rates of LSES students at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Karimshah et al. (2013) analysed student responses to an online survey in 2010. The authors found that while most students experienced stress from a combination of mental, financial, relationship and physical health issues, LSES students experienced more stressors as well as higher levels of stress than non-LSES students, making them more likely to drop out (p. 12). Furthermore, although the majority of LSES students were unaware of formal student support services and programs, and the overall rate of access to these programs was low, they did not appear to be a major factor in their decision to stay at university (p. 5). Rather, self-agency and social integration into university life through informal peer networks were found to be important factors influencing retention (p. 10). Factors increasing the academic disadvantage of LSES students' performance and retention include loss of confidence, isolation, withdrawal of emotional

support by family and peers, lack of positive role models, and poor resources and study environment (citing Ramsay in Grebennikov & Skaines 2009, p. 67).

A number of recently published reports document case studies evaluating equity-based programs and initiatives at Australian universities. Reporting on a small study of equity scholarship recipients at Swinburne University in 2005 (n = 53), Carson (2010) argues that the receipt of financial support provides relief to students and their families in the forms of retention and standard of living. She identifies a number of indicators that stem from financial disadvantage, including social and family factors; lack of access to a computer and/or the internet at home (which is increasingly relevant with the trend towards online learning approaches); lack of access to networks supporting students in applying for and transitioning to university; and transitional factors for mature-age students transitioning to university in managing study, family and work commitments (p. 39). The study reported that after the receipt of a scholarships, there was a reduction in financial hardship, specifically evidenced by a reduction in families' contributions to students' living costs, the amount of time worked, allowing them to concentrate on their studies, and deferral and drop-out rates for financial reasons (pp. 47–48). Survey respondents reported the greatest benefit was having financial security and improved quality of life (p. 51), with some reporting that while the amount they received might not seem like a lot of money, but it 'goes a long way' (p. 52). Furthermore, the benefits of an equity scholarship extended beyond reduced financial hardship with some students reporting improved academic outcomes as a result of having to work less and having access to a computer and/or the internet, which also reduced the likelihood of them discontinuing their studies (p. 56). Flow-on effects of the psychological 'lift' (Aitken, Schapper & Skuja 2004, p. 24) afforded through financial assistance include positive influence on self-esteem and affirmation of past and present academic efforts.

Reed and Hurd (2014) investigated the impact of equity scholarships on LSES students at Macquarie University and they suggest that the correlation between increased costs and decreased enrolments and the associated picture of financial assistance as purely a recruitment aid is too simplistic. These authors cite previous studies (Carney, McNeish & McColl 2005; Moreau & Leathwood 2006) to argue that LSES students tend to be more vulnerable to mental health issues and higher attrition rates (2014, p. 3), yet suggest that the provision of financial aid can also have powerful psychological effects, such as decreasing anxiety, acknowledging students' inclusion at university that increases emotional bonds with the institution, increasing motivation and engagement as a way of 'giving back' (2014, p. 3). Consistent with other studies, Reed and Hurd found a relationship between equity scholarships and the successful participation and retention of LSES students, which represents a more expansive perspective than that of scholarships as solely a recruitment aid.

In the United Kingdom, a recent review of evidence about the impact of financial assistance on recruitment and students' academic success (Harrison & Hatt 2012) suggests that local and socially comfortable provision is a more important factor in the decision-making process than the potential receipt of a bursary (p. 695). Deardon et al. (2014) found that one-thousand pound (non-repayable) maintenance grants resulted in an increase of 3.95 percentage points in undergraduate LSES student participation in higher education (p. 67), which is line with similar studies in the US (see for example Dynarski 2000).

This report supplements recent studies contributing to building the national evidence base (Reed & Hurd 2014; Zacharias et al. 2016) by triangulating qualitative and quantitative data from six sources. The study represents a rigorous investigation of the local context at UTS, and the measurable impacts and perceived benefits to LSES students of institutional equity scholarships and financial assistance in relation to two of Naylor et al.'s (2013) five indicators of equity

performance. The first is access in terms of how LSES students' knowledge and experiences of applying for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance influences their decision to attend university; and the second is the impact and perceived benefits of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance on LSES students' academic success and participation in university life upon commencement.

HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY PROGRAMS

Although the number of applications for undergraduate places in Australian higher education institutions has increased by 10.3% nationally since 2009 (Cardak, Bowden & Bahtsevanoglou 2015b, p. 7), the lowest 25% of SES bands remain under-represented. This has been attributed to LSES students' lack of knowledge about application processes for university as well as equity scholarships.

Gale et al. (2010) distinguish between 'cold' and 'hot' information, the former being that accessed from a careers or university open day or dedicated website, and the latter being a type of 'street savvy' that enables students to investigate alternative routes to desired outcomes (cited in Cardak, Bowden & Bahtsevanoglou 2015a, p. 11). A significant number of Australian and international studies report that LSES students have little or poor access to information, counselling, guidance and support for post-secondary school education and training from schools and/or parents who had not participated in higher education (Atweh et al. 2006; Avery 2010; Bedson & Perkins 2006; Brennan & Marriott 1996; Bryce & Anderson 2008; Ceja 2006; Chesters & Watson 2013; Davies, Qiu & Davies 2014; Kerr et al. 2014; Krause et al. 2009; MacAllum et al. 2007; McKillip, Rawls & Barry 2012; Venezia & Kirst 2005). Based on this evidence, it can be assumed that the same students would have little or poor access to information, counselling, guidance and support from schools or parents who had not participated in higher education to assist them in applying for equity

scholarships and financial assistance programs to support them at university.

Notwithstanding LSES students' lack of access to information and support in applying for both university and equity scholarships, a recent survey of full-time undergraduate students in the UK reported that most survey respondents (76%) believe their decision to attend university was not affected by the possible receipt of institutional financial assistance or bursaries (Callender & Wilkinson 2013). However, the authors concluded that students' capacity to make a decision about where or whether to attend university is dependent on their knowledge of the existence of bursaries. The study found that almost a quarter of students about to enter higher education said they had not heard of bursaries (p. 290), most students do not think they are well informed about bursaries, about one in six said they had heard of them but did not know what they are, and most looked for information about bursaries too late in the university application process for them to inform their decision (p. 300). Perceptions of lack of awareness, knowledge and understanding were particularly pronounced for low-income students.

Recent research supports the case that equity scholarships are a way to mitigate costs of university and to get LSES students there (Harrison & Hatt 2012; Jiyun, DesJardins & McCall 2009). Recent research in the UK has found that LSES students are more debt averse (Callender & Jackson 2005), and in Australia, the level of financial distress for students is higher for those from Indigenous and LSES backgrounds (Reed & Hurd 2014, p. 1). As a result, 50% of Australian students tend to live at home and are reliant on family support to keep studying, placing more stress on students as well as their families. Furthermore, one in five students reported occasionally going without a meal (ABC 2013).

Equity scholarships and financial assistance are often conceptualised as a recruitment incentive for LSES students to apply for university (Lee Hansen; Leslie

& Fife, cited in Reed & Hurd 2014, p. 2), evidence suggests (Reed & Hurd 2014) that the potential receipt of a scholarship does not result in raising their aspirations, and that students are not as price-sensitive as economic rationalist models of higher education imply (Alon 2004). Instead, the picture of financial disadvantage and thus the impact of financial assistance is seen as too simplistic, and that the relatively lower aspirations of LSES students can be found in their diminished opportunity structures and navigational capacity (Bok 2010; Bowden & Doughney 2010; Gale et al. 2013). Therefore, financial assistance should be considered more a support to improve retention and success once students are at university. Furthermore, a number of commentators (James et al. 2008; Whiteford & Trinidad 2015) have argued that scholarships represent just one aspect of a holistic and coordinated multidimensional program of embedded institutional support underpinning learning experiences, retention, success and completion, increase their impact on the participation of LSES students in higher education. The project represented in this report contributes to the evidence base by investigating the impact UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance have on LSES students' participation in higher education after commencing.

On the basis of equity scholarships not being well understood or advertised, Reed and Hurd (2014) conducted an exploratory study evaluating the success of equity scholarships at Macquarie University by analysing quantitative survey responses of 83 students and qualitative small group and individual interview data with 12 students from the 2013 cohort of scholarship recipients. The outcome is a three-tier model illustrating connections between drivers and influences, rather than a causal network, of six measurable impacts of the Macquarie equity scholarships program in its entirety, not the individual level. The authors claim the model predicts relationships between areas and different levels of impact to illustrate how scholarships support the full range of student experience from access to successful

completion and beyond, speaking positively of the program's capacity for facilitating student success, which includes positive educational outcomes, as well as personal growth and development. The overall findings are that equity scholarship recipients are more likely to stay at university than non-scholarship students (91% to 84%), non-scholarship LSES students (90% to 78%) and non-scholarship mid- to high-SES students (91% to 85%).

Zacharias et al. (2016) evaluated the provision in 2013 of equity-based programs at three universities – Deakin University, Queensland University of Technology and The University of Sydney. The project investigated which types of equity scholarships have a positive influence on the success and retention of students from three equity groups: Indigenous and regional and remote, LSES and disabilities. Focusing on equity and merit scholarships, 2013 institutional data were triangulated with online survey responses by student recipients of equity scholarships. Despite institutional differences, the findings were very consistent across all three. The study found that equity scholarships are effective in retaining students across demographic groups and equity products, and that the retention effect held across multiple factors, although success rates, defined as unit completion, were more variable across universities. Similarly to Reed and Hurd (2014), equity scholarships were found to reduce stress and boost recipients' morale and sense of belonging, with students reporting more time to focus on their studies, and a reduction in the level of part time work. It also found that scholarships based on value (amount of money), duration (a year, per degree), and how people are selected all have an impact. In short, while selection criteria really matter, money can help overcome financial disadvantage but not complicated lives.

The key finding is that the correlation between scholarship type (product) and student outcomes is the most important variable, especially when adding in ATAR or prior achievement. In other words, recipient type is more important than scholarship

type. Furthermore, the value of scholarships goes beyond financial support, including increased time to focus on study resulting in the psychological realisation of previously latent potential, by supporting people who would not have gone to university had it not been for the scholarship. The authors argue that institutional equity scholarships should be considered a top-up to consistent, predictable and appropriate Commonwealth means-tested income support, which should be grant based rather than loan based. This last point is supported by Kelly (2016), who provides a useful calculation of income support for LSES students at Queensland University of Technology (Table 1).

Table 1. Source and value of QUT equity students' income

SOURCE OF INCOME	ANNUAL VALUE
1a. Income support: YA/AuStudy	\$11,000 (approx.)
1b. Income support: Start-up scholarship	\$2,050
1c. Income support: Relocation scholarship, rent assistance	Variable: \$1,500 – \$6,500
2. Paid work	Variable: \$11,000 (approx.)
3. Family support or institutional scholarship	Variable: equity scholarships typically \$3,000 – \$5,000

SUMMARY

In summary, the widening participation agenda in Australia and internationally continues to drive the provision of institutional equity scholarship programs to support equity groups' access to, and participation and success in higher education. The UTS WPS provides a framework for investigating the institutional provision of equity scholarships and financial assistance for LSES students on which this study reports, focusing on these students' experiences in finding out about, applying for and studying at university.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH DESIGN: METHODS, ANALYSIS AND LIMITATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The research design took a mixed methods approach to triangulate data from a range of different sources. The purpose was to build the local evidence base at UTS to inform current institutional practice at the local level and to inform future policy, as well as to contribute more broadly to the evidence base at the national level.

A literature review of institutional equity scholarship provision in Australia was undertaken to identify issues and the qualities of effective scholarship schemes, followed by a review of institutional documents reporting the eligibility criteria by which UTS selects LSES students for equity scholarships and financial assistance and the range of equity scholarships and financial assistance provided.

The study employed the following primary data collection methods:

- Online survey of student recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance exploring the impact and perceived benefits of the scholarship on their experience of university;
- Student interviews providing deeper understanding of issues identified in the student survey;
- Interviews with UTS staff members involved in scholarship provision and student support including staff in Student Services, Student Admissions, Equity and Diversity and faculty-based First Year Transition Coordinators;
- Key external stakeholder interviews (school, TAFE and UAC), identifying impact of scholarship receipt upon students' decision making around university attendance; and
- Buzz group discussions at the UTS Equity scholarships forum 2016: current issues and future directions to contextualise the local provision at UTS within a broader socio-economic environment.

The research questions framing the study target three key areas to understand more about the experiences of LSES student recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. These areas are: the extent of their knowledge and awareness of the existence of UTS equity scholarships and/or financial assistance prior to applying for university and the factors that impact on the decision-making process; their experiences during the application process; and the impact and perceived benefits of receiving a UTS equity scholarship and financial assistance on their experiences after commencing university. The research questions are:

Knowledge, awareness and influence of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance on LSES students' decision to attend university:

- How did students find out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- What are the factors influencing LSES students' decision to apply for university, and how much does the potential receipt of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance influence their decision?
- What problems do students have accessing information about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- How can the promotion of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance be improved?

Students' experiences during the application process:

- How and when did LSES students apply for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- What are the problems students experience in applying for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- How can application processes for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance be improved?

Perceived impact of and benefits to LSES students of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance during study:

- What types of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance did students receive?
- What are the impacts of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- What are the perceived benefits to students of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- What are the challenges for LSES students during their study?
- How can the impact of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance be improved and the benefits to LSES students increased?

Putting it in context:

- How can equity scholarship administration and provision be improved?
- What are the recommendations for institutional policy?
- What are the key contemporary issues for equity scholarship practitioners?

It is important to note that all interviewees have been given pseudonyms in this report. As well, the survey represents students' self-reported perceptions, the outcomes of which cannot be externally validated by institutional data.

INSTITUTIONAL DATA

Each year UTS supports hundreds of students requiring financial assistance to start or stay at university. Assistance is provided in a number of ways, outlined in Table 2 (see Appendix 2 for more detail).

Table 2. UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance

NAME OF SCHOLARSHIP OR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	FORM IN WHICH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IS RECEIVED
Diversity Access Scholarship (DAS)	Money paid directly into student account
Equity Grant (EG)	Money paid directly into student account; or provision of Visa card with funds embedded
Special Needs Access Grant (SNAG) [also referred to as Disability Access Grant (DAG)]	Money paid directly into student account
UTS Housing Assistance Scholarship (HAS)	Subsidised rental accommodation at UTS Housing
Computer Access Scheme (CAS)	A computer, software and/or internet access at home
Textbook Voucher (TV)	A UTS Co-op bookshop voucher
Food Voucher (FV)	A Woolworths voucher

The UTS institutional equity scholarship is known as the Diversity Access Scholarship (DAS). DAS is available to assist students from LSES backgrounds who may also be experiencing other forms of educational disadvantage that make it difficult to achieve their educational goals. Receipt of the DAS does not exclude eligible students from receiving a combination of other financial assistance, including CAS, TV and FV, as circumstances require.

Eligibility for the DAS includes three criteria: students must be enrolled in at least 18 credit points per semester unless they have medical conditions or sole parenting responsibilities; students must be an Australian Citizen or holder of Australian Permanent Resident visa or Permanent Humanitarian visa; and students must be able to demonstrate financial hardship providing evidence of a means-tested Commonwealth income support payment, or comprehensive information demonstrating exceptional financial hardship.

The DAS is valued between \$600 and \$5,000, and ranges in duration from one semester to one year. The selection process has five tiers, prioritising applicants where there is both financial hardship in combination with other educational disadvantages. In 2015, 790 DAS scholarships were offered to students (see Table 3). Of these, 75 were declined or lapsed and therefore no payment was made.

Table 3. UTS DAS awards for Autumn and Spring semesters in 2015

TIER	ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	SCHOLARSHIP AMOUNT PER SEMESTER	RECIPIENTS
Tier 0	Financial disadvantage only	\$500	403
Tier 1	Financial plus one other disadvantage	\$600	87
Tier 2	Financial score 200 and below and two other disadvantages	\$1000	10
Tier 3	Financial score above 200 and one other disadvantage or financial score 200 and below and three other disadvantages	\$1500	132
Tier 4	Financial score above 200 and two other disadvantages	\$2000	36
Tier 5	Financial score above 200 and three other disadvantages	\$2500	1

These figures are contextualised within the broader undergraduate student cohort at UTS in relation to access, participation and success (for detailed information see University of Technology Sydney 2016).

ONLINE STUDENT SURVEY

The findings of this report are based entirely on the analysis of responses from recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, which includes those in receipt of the DAS, computers, textbook vouchers, etc. However, the findings do not include LSES students receiving faculty scholarships awarded for merit alone or for merit and equity.

Participants gained entry to UTS through various pathways and access schemes, including high school, TAFE, inpUTS, SRS, InSearch and Indigenous direct entry programs.

UTS students who were identified as past or current recipients of equity scholarships and/or financial assistance were emailed an invitation to participate in an online survey in August 2015. The survey consisted of 32 questions (see Appendix 4 for the survey instrument). The survey was administrated using Survey Monkey software.

Of 1366 students who were invited to participate, 311 completed surveys, representing a participation rate of 22.8%. Of these students, eight were LSES students receiving a combination of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance and faculty-based merit scholarships, bringing the total of respondents reported in the findings to 303 students (see Appendix 4 for the survey instrument).

Survey responses were self-reported anonymously, which means the survey and institutional data cannot be directly correlated.

The survey invited respondents to further participate in qualitative interviews. Of 119 students who registered their interest, eight respondents were interviewed (see Table 4). Two more students who did not participate in the survey because they were enrolled in the UTS Direct Entry program in 2015, rather than a degree course, were interviewed in January 2016. One student participating in both the survey and interviews received

a faculty merit-based scholarship in addition to a UTS equity scholarship and financial assistance, and as a result, survey responses relating to this student are omitted.

Table 4. Survey respondents agreeing to an interview

STUDENTS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE	1,366
Survey respondents	311
Respondents agreeing to an interview	119
Respondents interviewed	8
Survey respondent demographics	

The mean average age of respondents was 25.5 and the median age was 21, with 85% aged between 15 and 34 years (see Table 5).

Table 5. Age of survey respondents (n=303)

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
15–24	194	64
25–34	64	21.1
35–44	30	9.9
45–54	12	4
55–64	2	0.7
65 and over	1	0.3
Total	303	100

More than half of the survey respondents (55% of n=303) were in their first or second years of their degrees at the time of the survey (see Table 6), followed by 23% in year 3, and 13% in years 4 or 5. 6% of students had graduated, and 1% were enrolled in postgraduate or honours degrees.

Table 6. Degree year enrolled in October 2015 (n=303)

YEAR ENROLLED IN 2015	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
First year	41	13.5
Second year	125	41.3
Third year	71	23.4
Fourth year	25	8.3
Fifth year	11	3.6
Sixth year	1	0.3
Completed	17	5.6
No response or cannot be categorised	12	4
Total	303	100

15 respondents (5%) identified as being ATSI (see Table 7). We are unable to account for the gender ratio of respondents, as this factor was not included in the survey.

Table 7. Survey respondents identifying as ATSI status (n=303)

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Of Aboriginal origin or Torres Strait Islander origin	15	5
None of the above	288	95
Total	303	100

Of the 303 respondents, 39% were first in family to attend university, while an equal number had one or more parent previously attending university and 40% had one or more siblings previously attending university (see Table 8; note, not calculated as total, because some students are categorised as having both parent/s and sibling/s as having previously attended university).

Table 8. Immediate family who have been to university (n=303)

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Yes, one parent	76	25.1
Yes, both parents	42	13.9
Yes, one sibling	80	26.4
Yes, more than 1 sibling	43	14.2
No family members	118	38.9

90% of respondents reported receiving some form of financial support from the Commonwealth government and 93% reporting receiving financial support from UTS. 49.5% reported receiving more than one type of financial assistance, 52% were receiving Youth Allowance, 14.5% Austudy, 3% Abstudy and 6% were receiving the Disability Support Pension (see Tables 9 and 10).

Table 9. Students receiving Centrelink benefits (n=303)

CENTRELINK BENEFIT	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Youth Allowance	158	52.1
Austudy	44	14.5
Start-up Relocation Allowance	10	3.3
Abstudy	10	3.3
Disability Support Pension	18	5.9
Carers Allowance	13	4.3
Age Pension	1	0.3
Newstart or Jobseeker	14	4.6
Mobility Allowance	2	0.7
Rent Assistance	3	1
Family Assistance	15	5
None	34	11.2

Table 10. Sources of financial support (n=303)

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
UTS support	281	92.7
Commonwealth Support	274	90.4
Multiple sources of support	150	49.5

Overall, 77% of students were either engaged in or looking for paid work at the time of the survey. The majority was working part-time (45%). A small number (8%) stated they were working full-time, while 24% were looking for paid work and 23% were not working (see Table 11).

Table 11. Employment status (n=303)

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Working full-time in paid employment	24	7.9
Working part-time in paid employment	135	44.6
Looking for paid work	75	24.8
Not working	69	22.8
Total	303	100

The mean working week for respondents was 18.71 hours, with the median being 16 hours worked per week, with 17% working fewer than 10 hours and 19% working between 11 and 20 hours per week. Equal numbers were working between 21 and 30 hours and 31 and 40 hours per week (7% each). A small number (1%) reported working more than 40 hours per week (see Table 12).

Table 12. Number of hours worked each week (n=303)

NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Fewer than 10 hours	51	16.8
11–20 hours	57	18.8
21–30 hours	21	6.9
31–40 hours	23	7.6
Over 40 hours	4	1.3
Not working	144	47.5
No response/cannot be categorised	3	1
Total	303	100

Respondents were studying a wide range of degree programs across all UTS faculties (see Table 13).

Table 13. Number of respondents by UTS faculty (n=303)

FACULTY	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
FASS	55
Health	54
More than 1 faculty (Double Degree)	54
FEIT	45
Science	37
DAB	25
Business	21
Law	8
Invalid Entry	4
Total	303

It is important to note that the terms impact and benefit appear in the survey, but here, impact is understood as a self-reported perception by respondents, rather than a higher level measureable impact, as could be potentially provided through analysis of institutional data reporting on access, retention and success.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

The research design included semi-structured qualitative interviews with representatives from three groups of stakeholders. The overall purpose of the interviews was to triangulate data to deepen understanding of the experiences of student recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, as told through their personal stories, the experiences of UTS academic and administrative staff who interact with them, and the experiences of members of three external institutions supporting LSES students' participation in higher education.

The three key stakeholder groups were:

- Ten current student recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance in 2015;
- Eight UTS staff members involved in scholarship provision and/or student support including: UTS Student Services Unit, Scholarships Administration Unit, Equity and Diversity Unit, Jumbunna, Indigenous House of Learning, and four faculty-based First Year Experience Coordinators; and
- Representatives from three external organisations (a secondary school, the University Admissions Centre UAC, and TAFE) to identify the influence of potential scholarship receipt upon students' decisions to apply for and participate in higher education.

In total, 25 interviews were conducted between August 2015 and January 2016, and they were located in the UTS Equity and Diversity Unit or faculties. Each interview ranged from between 18 to 58 minutes. Interviews were transcribed within a week, with transcripts ranging from between 2,450 to 9,265 words (see Appendix 4 interview protocols).

Students

Of the ten students interviewed, seven were female and three male, ranging from 19 to 52 years old, with two identifying as ATSI. Eight students were enrolled in either the first or second year of their undergraduate

degrees in 2015, while two were enrolled in their final year. Pathways to university varied, with four entering from year 12, four from TAFE, one from the UTS InSearch program and one through the UTS direct entry program

Students were enrolled in undergraduate degrees in the Faculties of Arts and Social Science, Engineering and Information Technology, Health, and Science. Degree courses included Communications, Communication Laws, Midwifery, Medical Science, Sports Exercise and Science, Teacher Education and Mechanical Engineering. Each student was categorised as LSES recipients of UTS DAS and Commonwealth allowances, including Austudy, Abstudy, Youth Allowance, Relocation Allowance, Single Parent payment, Disability Support Pension and Housing Allowance (see Table 14).

Cash support from UTS ranged from Tier 0 one-off \$500 grant, to Tier 5, the maximum \$2,500 per semester. Additionally, students received non-monetary support, such as CAS, which includes the provision of a laptop and/or software, and textbook and food vouchers. Students receiving Abstudy also received non-financial support from UTS through the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS).

Table 14. Profile of UTS students interviewed, type of equity scholarship and financial assistance and amount received

NAME	M/F	AGE	YEAR ENROLLED	UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIP AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	COMMONWEALTH INCOME SUPPORT	SELF-REPORTED TOTAL CASH AMOUNT RECEIVED*
Pauline	F	22	5	EG, TV, FV	SU	\$6,500
Ali	M	40	5	DAS, EG, CAS, TV	AU, SU	\$5,900
Sue	F	18	1	EG	YA, RA, SU	\$6,550
Jane	F	30	2	EG, SNAG, TV	DSP, SU	\$5,000
Mandy	F	22	2	DAS, TV	SP, DSP, SU	\$7,000
Bonnie	F	52	2	DAS	SP, DSP, SU	\$6,000
Ahn	M	19	2	DAS, EG	YA, SU	\$500
Jack	M	25	1	CAS, TV	AB, HA, SU	Not disclosed
Donna	F	20	1	CAS, TV	AB, HA, SU	Not disclosed
Jo	F	29	2	Faculty-based merit scholarship, DAS, CAS, DSP	\$15,000 pa	

KEY TO UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIP AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

DAS: Diversity Access Scholarship
 EG: Equity Grant
 SNAG: Special Needs Access Grant
 CAS: Computer Access Scheme
 TV: Textbook Voucher
 FV: Food voucher

* Note: period of time in which money was received not indicated

KEY TO COMMONWEALTH INCOME SUPPORT

AU: Austudy
 AB: Abstudy
 SP: Single Parenting payment
 DSP: Disability Support Pension
 SU: Start-up Scholarship
 YA: Youth Allowance
 RA: Rent Assistance
 HA: Housing allowance

UTS staff and external representatives

Twelve UTS staff members were interviewed – four academic staff (First Year Transition Experience coordinators from different faculties) and eight administrative staff (financial support, student support, scholarships office). Three external representatives were interviewed (see Table 15).

Table 15. Profile of UTS staff and external representatives interviewed

UTS FACULTY FYTE COORDINATORS	Tess
	Michelle
	Peter
	Ruby
UTS ADMIN STAFF SSU, SAU, EDU, JUMBUNNA	Marie
	Luke
	Steve
	Nikki
	Carol
	Stephanie
	Derek
UAC	Bob
TAFE	Maurice
CENTRAL WEST HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING AND SUPPORT UNIT	Elise

UTS Equity Scholarships Forum 2016

The forum took place between on Monday 29 February 2016 at UTS, with 85 people from 36 institutions participating. These included departments in the Commonwealth and State governments, universities in NSW, ACT, Queensland, Victoria and the Northern Territory, high schools in the Sydney metropolitan area and remote parts of NSW, and representatives from the Universities Admissions Centre, TAFE, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), and The Smith Family (see Appendix 5 for details).

The forum was formatted into four sessions: an introduction and student story; the presentation of outcomes from three recent Australian research projects into equity scholarships; buzz group discussions organised around six themes emerging from preliminary data analysis; and a facilitated panel discussion. The discussions were guided by a quote derived from the interviews, and a series of prompt questions (see Appendix 5). Each buzz group comprised between eight to ten self-selected participants, who recorded discussion notes on iPads, the outcomes of which were collated and displayed during lunch for forum participants to peruse. Reg Lynch, a well-known political cartoonist, was invited to capture key forum themes in a series of illustrations. These illustrations are reproduced in this report, with thanks to Mr Lynch.

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative survey data were analysed using SPSS, with open-ended responses coded independently by both researchers. Interview data were then thematically analysed framed by the research questions and organised into three broad categories: factors influencing LSES students' decisions to apply for university, students' experiences during transition to university and factors impacting on their

experiences and influencing their decisions to continue to study. Preliminary analysis of the survey and interview analysis produced six themes that formed the focus of the forum buzz group discussions (see Appendix 5 for themes). The discussion in Chapter 4 is based on triangulation of data from all sources.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings represent a snapshot in time, capturing data from LSES student recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance during 2015.

Institutional data are extracted from the UTS Social justice report 2015 (University of Technology Sydney 2016), which measures a range of equity groups' access, participation, attrition and success at UTS. One of the limitations of comparing these data with the survey and interview data reported here is that student recipients of UTSESFA are often members of multiple groups, such as LSES and Indigenous students, and/or students with disabilities.

Survey data are not representative of the broader LSES student cohort of recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. This is because participation in the survey was on the condition of anonymity, which means survey responses represent students' self-reported perceptions of impact, which are not linked to the institutional data. This means it was not possible to correlate survey responses with completion, success or graduate destination data, or validate self-reports. Therefore the data is not generalizable and simply describe patterns in the responses used to identify themes that could be elaborated in the interview data.

It is important to note that the terms impact and benefit appear interchangeably in the survey instrument, but in the findings, impact is understood as respondents' self-reported perceptions, rather

than a higher level measureable impact, as could be provided through the analysis of institutional data reporting on access, retention and success.

Gender was not included as a category in the survey, so a gender breakdown of responses does not appear in the analysis.

In summary, the methodological approach to the research was designed to enable the collection of a range of quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources in order to triangulate findings and contribute new and meaningful knowledge about UTS equity scholarship and financial assistance products and programs to the national evidence base.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings in this chapter were generated from analysis and triangulation of the following quantitative and qualitative data sets: online student survey; interviews with students, UTS staff and external representatives; and UTS Equity scholarships forum buzz group discussions. Note: all graphs and quantitative data represent survey results only. Qualitative data excerpts are drawn from the interviews, but where noted, open-ended survey responses are also referred to in the findings.

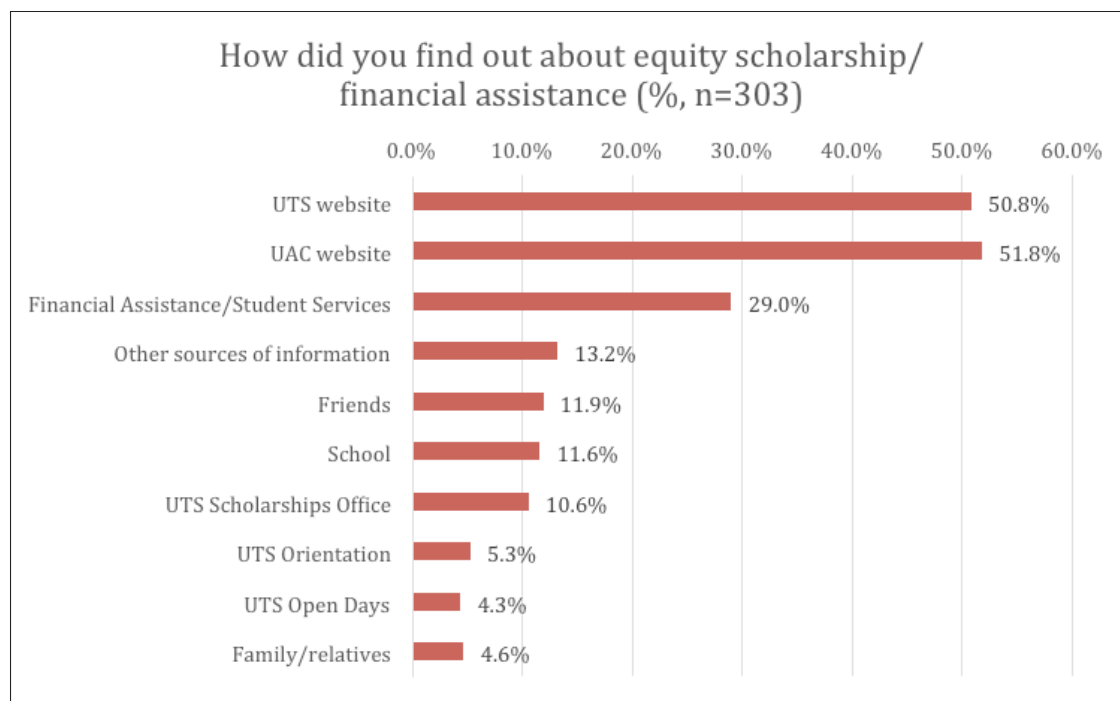
The findings are organised into three sections according to the framework of the research questions: knowledge, awareness and influence of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance on LSES students' decisions to attend university; students' experiences during the application process; and the impact and perceived benefits of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance.

Knowledge, awareness and influence of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance on LSES students' decision to attend university

FINDING OUT ABOUT UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

72.9% of all survey respondents reported that they found out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance through the UTS (50.8%) or UAC websites (51.8%), with 29% reporting they found out by speaking to a UTS Financial Support member. Only a small percentage (4.5%) reported finding out through friends or relatives (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. How did you find out about equity scholarship/financial assistance?
Multiple responses allowed (Question 10).



The interview data support this finding, showing that the UTS and UAC websites are a crucial source of information for students:

I research by myself, it was through UAC because I was looking around at the ATAR course cut-offs for the degrees and I must have seen the diversity and equity scholarship and I noted to myself 'Yeah, probably go back to that when I'm in uni' (Anh).

The website had a link about scholarships and the different categories you could apply for, and so I just clicked on the ones that might apply to me and found it that way. It was pretty clear from the information there (Jane).

I did some Googling because I was trying to find a loan, and worked out that UTS does a loan. So I came in and talked to them (Pauline).

While the survey responses provide evidence of the importance of online information to students, they obscure the possibility that students access this information after first being alerted to the existence of equity scholarships and financial assistance by friends, relatives or institutional staff. For example, most respondents (52.4%) reported having received information from multiple sources, with some students directed to the website after speaking to staff in a UTS student service, such as counselling, or at open days or during orientation programs. This finding is supported by student and stakeholder interviewee data:

The scholarship would have come through the special needs department to begin with, so as soon as I had the accident they let me know about it (Jo).

I knew that scholarships were available in general, because you hear about stuff, but I didn't know what would be available for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds or mental health issues or any real disadvantage. I asked my biology teacher, and she said, 'this is how you do it, and this is what you can expect to get if you do this work'. She knew what scholarships were available and that every uni would have an equity

diversity unit for people like me, because she'd been to uni (Sue).

The conversation can go to, well you're finishing that course this year, you're thinking of going to university. If the person discloses they've got a disability or if their background has been complex and difficult and disadvantaged, it can lead into, there may be scholarships available for you (Maurice, TAFE).

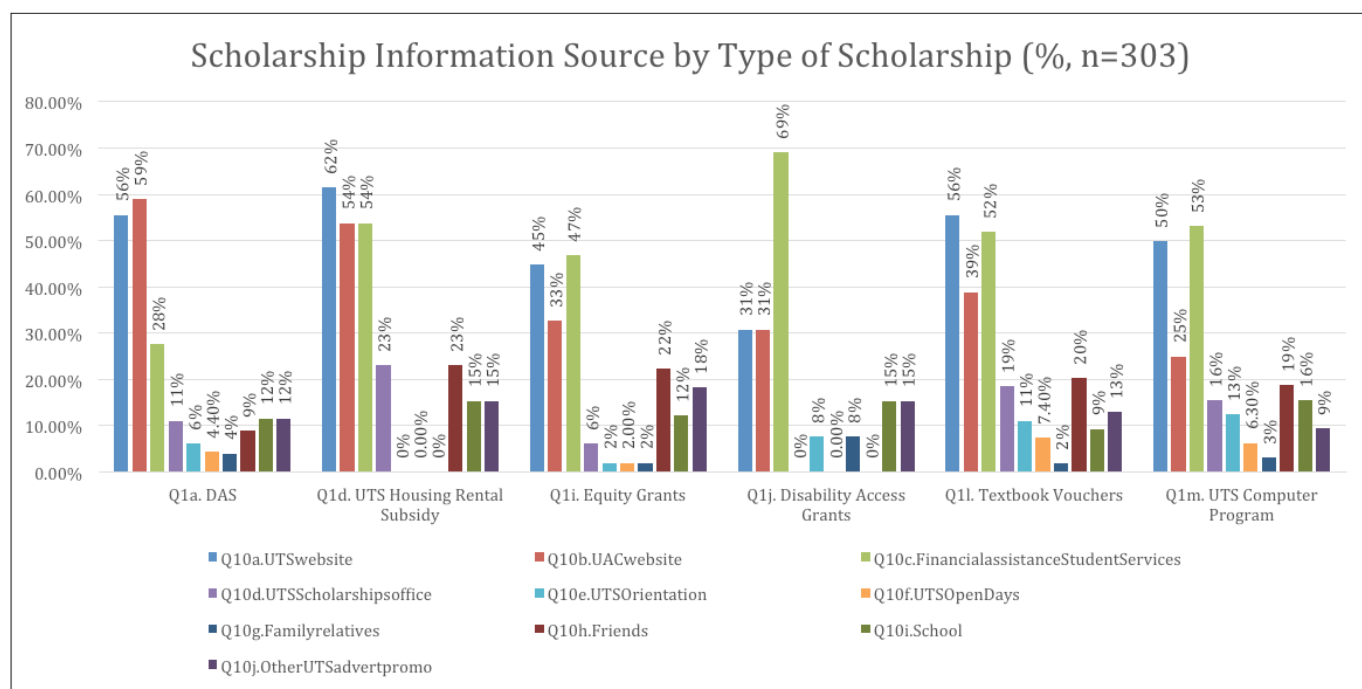
This suggests that while online sources of information are crucial, personal interactions with institutional staff often guides potential students to the website. Other sources of information for students included institutional emails, social media such as the UTS Careers Facebook page, on-campus posters and screens, lectures, and the library. In a few instances, students reported finding out through Centrelink or its website, or through TAFE teachers or staff.

Having a printed booklet in addition to online information was important for some students:

The website isn't the only place to go, sitting down and doing the planning with the UAC book is still important. I saw someone this week, like everyone, she knows how to do all that, but going through that website is not something she can do easily, so being able to open the page and go to the index was important for her (Maurice, TAFE).

There is little difference between sources of information between those who receive Commonwealth income support and those who receive financial assistance from UTS, however, there are some major differences in how those with different types of scholarships reported how they found out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. For example, those on Disability Access Grants most commonly reported finding out from Financial Assistance/Student Services (69.2%), while only 46.2% reported finding out from the UTS website (31%) or the UAC website (31%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Scholarship Information Source by Type of Scholarship (Question 1 x Question 10).



One small but interesting finding is an idea articulated by Elise that there are three different kinds of ‘scholarship’ available to LSES school leavers:

This is what we call an access scholarship, lowering the result required to get into university. Then there are scholarships based on financial assistance. The third kind is the full academic scholarship, money, access, everything. That’s what students see in the movies. They think it’s based purely on academic ability, and a lot of our students would get it on academic ability, but there’s a lot who are struggling because they come from refugee status, they’ve walked in the door into year 11 and they haven’t been to school for four years.

Here, Elise describes UTS inPUTS (EAS) and SRS as ‘access scholarships’. While these schemes do not include financial assistance, they do offer a place to LSES students at UTS to ameliorate their acknowledged disadvantage. The idea of access as a scholarship is an important finding in that it points to misconceptions about equity scholarships that could be addressed.

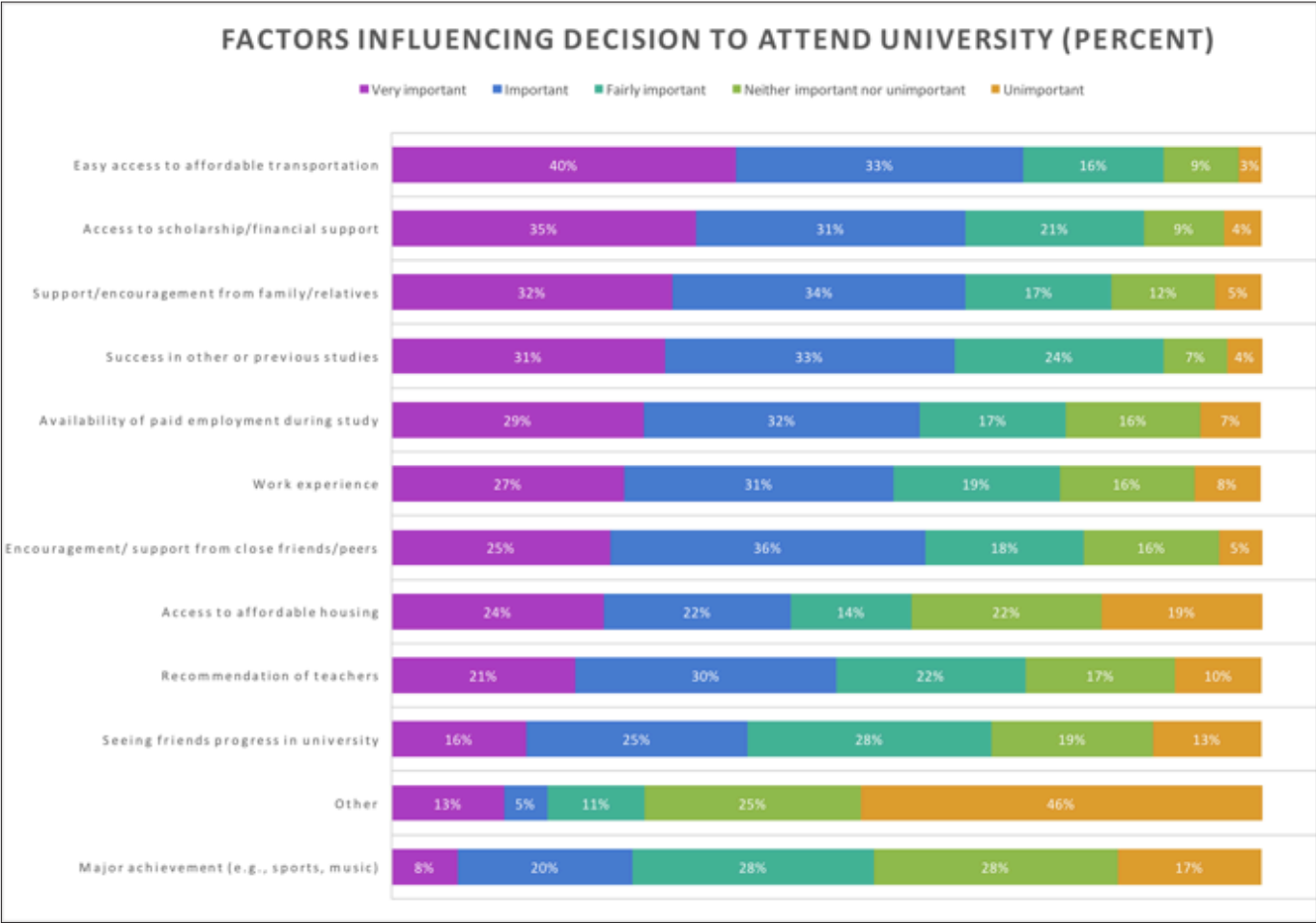
FACTORS INFLUENCING LSES STUDENTS’ DECISION TO APPLY FOR UNIVESRITY, INCLUDING UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The most influential factor for students deciding to apply for a degree at UTS was easy access to affordable transportation, with 73% of students citing this factor as very important or important (see Figure 3). The focus on transportation however, is a little misleading. Stakeholder interviewees described students’ access to transport as a complex mix of factors, which linked affordable accommodation in close proximity to both university and paid employment with balancing what could be earned before Centrelink benefits were reduced, and the impact of travel on

time available for study. In other words, the high cost of housing in the city means that many students live with their families in the outer suburbs. This means spending time commuting to university and work, which reduces the time they have to study, and increases stress, particularly if they are balancing Centrelink payments with paid work. The following extracts illustrate this concern:

When I moved out of home, that was when it was difficult, because the travel time between my house and uni was so hard. I didn’t have a car, I lived a bit of a walk from the train station and it was probably about 3½ – 4 hours I was spending on a train (Jane).

Figure 3. Factors influencing decision to attend university (Question 19).



Housing in the city is expensive, but the scholarship covers my housing and I don't have to worry about bills. I work now, and because it's an equity scholarship, \$7000 is exempt for Centrelink, which is amazing because it means that they understand. Sometimes Centrelink goes down because I'm working too much in the holidays, but it's manageable (Pauline).

In addition to cost and time, the idea of travelling to university in the city was seen as a cultural barrier for students. Elise (school) said that while most families were supportive of a university opportunity for her students, 'if we talked about going to regional universities or travelling down to Melbourne or up to Queensland, a lot of our students would say no straight way'. This was affirmed by Maurice (TAFE):

I used to work in Western Sydney and the idea of coming into the city was just too much for some students. In terms of their life and how they think about moving around and how they identify, it was a real barrier, even if that uni course was the best course for them.

Linked to travel and accommodation, access to scholarship and financial assistance was reported by survey respondents as the second most important factor influencing their decision to attend university (see Figure 3). 67% ranked this factor as very important or important, which is supported by interviewees:

It's a financial thing for them, the costs of living away from home are huge and it just wouldn't happen, it just wouldn't be possible (Elise, school).

Are they going to have any money or not? And how much? And for how long? Particularly because some universities provide their own institutional scholarships for the first year only, so what do I do in year two? If mum and dad are poor, or there's only a dad or only a mum and they're on the dole, for real LSES people that can be a show stopping type issue (Bob, UAC).

I don't have the money and I don't have the family support. I didn't want to be at my grandparents' place because feeling like a burden exacerbates mental health issues, so that wasn't an option for me. Getting that scholarship on the day I got my ATAR was like 10 tonnes of bricks being lifted off my shoulders. I had a summer job and was trying to save up as much money as I could, and I burst into tears when I got the email because it was like I could just do it (Sue, student).

If I didn't receive the financial support, plain and simple, I would not be able to survive here. I'd have to work a full-time job, I'd have to live in the western suburbs, I'd have to travel in all the time, it'd be so stressful. It allows me to get the best out of my studies (Jack).

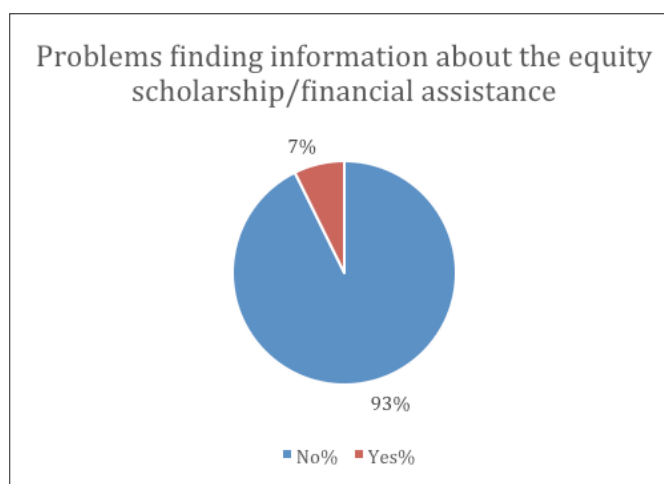
Bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to test if there was any relationship between these factors and the type of equity scholarship or financial assistance a student received. While a number of statistically significant correlations were found, they were on the whole, very small.

The key finding here is that access to equity scholarships and financial assistance are complexly linked to students' access to affordable transport and proximity between work, study and home, which together represent a complex combination of factors influencing their decision to attend UTS.

Problems accessing information about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance

Few survey respondents (7%) reported problems finding information about the equity scholarship/financial assistance, in comparison to those who did not (93%) (see Figure 4). However, these responses are from students who have successfully applied and received this support, so no conclusions can be drawn about those who did not.

Figure 4. Problems finding information about the equity scholarship/financial assistance (Question 12).



From the survey respondents who reported problems finding out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, a range of issues were raised: information was not available early enough, or they did not find out about their availability until later in their degrees; they were unaware applications could go through UTS or they found online information confusing; and they found it difficult to find information about the range of scholarships, how they were awarded, their eligibility, and application dates. Some students only found out about equity scholarships and financial assistance when accessing another UTS service, as previously reported.

Analysis of the interview data supports these findings, in that students experience problems finding information, including: the timing of applications; lack of knowledge due to family or friends not having previously attended university; alternative pathways that make it difficult to come in contact with information; cultural barriers and misconceptions about equity scholarships and financial assistance. Each is addressed separately.

- Timing of applications:

The challenges are that they don't know about it early enough (Ruby, UTS staff).

The biggest criticism I have is when they open the applications, right when we're doing our trial exams. Students are trying to study or submit assessments, and it's the first time they can actually look at the application, and they're under a huge amount of pressure. So some will say, it's too much, I've got to study, I'm just not going to try (Elise, school).

- Lack of knowledge about the existence of scholarships and/or when to apply:

I had no clue it was there. I'm sure it would've been said at some point, but it just went over my head. I knew there was a counselling service, I didn't know there was a financial service, and I didn't really understand what it was for because I've paid everything out of my pocket the whole time. That was tough, so it would have been nice to know early on (Pauline, student).

I didn't know you could apply for it beforehand, I thought you had to do it when you were in uni. My cousin was doing year 12 and I was looking through the UAC website with her, and I found it as a little link on the side. The application process itself was fine, all you had to do was enter the details. It was just that finding the opportunity was the difficult bit (Anh, student).

- Communication modes and personal contacts:

A lot of people who work in a university haven't worked for a school, so they don't understand how it goes. Most universities will send information to the principal, but they get bombarded. The key to getting students who are going to be great because of scholarships is getting the scholarship information to the right person. Great to keep the principal informed, but they're not the guy or the girl who's going to do it (Elise, school).

Scholarship guides are printed every year, there's a database available through our website for students to search, so I think the information is accessible, but it's not necessarily accessible for students if they don't have the knowhow or support in external environments (Derek, UTS).

The problem with our websites is we think they're better than they are, there's lot of clicks before you get to a page where you can find the information you want. It's an equity issue, isn't it? I mean, they're often savvy but are under a massive amount of time pressure. They've got multiple responsibilities, whether they be home and work, or study and work and home, so they'll lose interest faffing around for too long (Luke, UTS).

I think it's hard for career advisors because they try to know all the degrees, but sometimes they're not fully informed on each one. I remember going in and talking about medicine, and they're like 'Just do UMAP', which is the admissions test, but they couldn't give me any information past that (Anh, student).

- Reaching non-school leavers:

We see it at UTS, after first semester enrolment there is a spike in applications from non-year twelve students who arrive on campus and hear about equity scholarships for the first time. Most of our communication channels are through TAFEs, schools, careers advisors, but these people aren't in those places. We provide them to Centrelink, but you don't go to Centrelink if you're an established client, so the real challenge is contacting them (Bob, UAC).

A lot of the time our focus is on students transitioning from school rather than taking into account the 35% of students who are starting through a different pathway. Many students we see within the DAS who are older, returning to study, have caring responsibilities, may not be necessarily the best and the brightest, but have a strong background and varied life experience, different strengths that they're bringing to uni (Steve, UTS).

- Cultural barriers or misconceptions about equity scholarships and financial assistance:

There are many cultures where they don't have that familiarity with asking for something, particularly if you're asking for something on an equity basis, rather than on an 'I'm good and therefore I'm going for a merit-based scholarship' (Maurice, TAFE).

I had parents who cared for me, gave me dinner, a place to stay, but the equity scholarships are not targeting students who have all of that. So the way that information is disseminated, it will never get to those students without somebody in between who says, hey look at this, you can do this, it's got your name on it. I know where to call and what to do, but if you leave that for a student to do, they would say, I can't do that, they won't talk to me, I don't go to university. I won't waste my time. Then we have to go through the process of, there's different types of scholarships, what they're for, application requirements and criteria (Elise, school).

A number of students however, thought the existing promotion of equity scholarships and financial assistance was adequate, and that nothing further was required, as 'people should still have to do some research for themselves'.

Suggestions to improve the promotion of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance to LSES students

The survey generated a number of suggestions about how to better promote scholarship and financial assistance to LSES students. Many of these include existing UTS promotional strategies with a few extra suggestions being:

- Disability networks
- Low SES western suburbs, rural and regional schools/areas
- Sporting clubs
- Uni expos/brochures
- UAC enrolments/website and UTS website and scholarships page
- Email newsletter to students listing UTS as preference
- Email EAS/inPuts students and advise during orientation
- Centrelink recipients
- VET courses

In sum, suggestions for improving the promotion of equity scholarships and financial assistance focused primarily on increasing existing off- and on-campus avenues, such as the UAC and UTS websites and social media, posters and on-screen promotions around campus, in student centres and at the library, announcements in lectures and during orientation week. Many responses indicated direct email or social media sites, such as Facebook, would better promote scholarships and/or financial assistance. Some suggested direct email to students from Financial Services, or those with HECs loans, and/or on placement, as well as Insider, the UTS digital newsletter. Examples of print and online promotional modes on-campus promotion include student housing, the library and the UTS Careers Hub website.

Examples of direct, face-to-face promotion on-campus are social networks, societies and particular faculties, including university societies and going to lectures at the beginning of semester.

Interviewees' suggestions for improving promotion varied according to the institutional location. Elise suggested increased personal contact with UTS staff or an inter-university forum where school careers advisors could shop around for information:

Day one, term one, hello, this is UTS, who am I going to speak to this year. I love it when I get on the phone to somebody at a university and they say, oh it's so lovely to hear from you. We talk to students about where do they get information, and we organise for universities to come out, it's very, very powerful.

Elise also saw it important that institutional information about the kinds of students being targeted for equity scholarships and financial assistance would be helpful, to help her support students in accessing the relevant information:

In my head, I have a little table, this one's good for this, it includes this, it doesn't include that. It is hard because you're selling opportunities, but the purpose of these scholarships is to increase the number of low socio-economic students who are attending.

Some interviewees suggested alternative strategies, such as SMS alerts and online communication:

A site where students could tag the scholarships they were interested in, that sent them an SMS alert saying this is due in two weeks (Elise, school).

The texting of students, and some sort of notification or alert around that time to counsellors about equity scholarships, and coming here and talking to students. An email often isn't enough because it comes and goes, so having it at key times is good prior to the university applications (Maurice, TAFE).

Less clicks to get to the page, and make the scholarships more accessible. People in management would say it's accessible to everyone because it's on the website, but I don't think it's that accessible if you're vulnerable and you're embarrassed and you don't know what to look for (Luke).

Interviewees reported a number of UTS communication strategies that effectively promote equity scholarships and financial assistance through personal interaction, including the UTS outreach and HSC tuition programs:

They issued postcards to the school, how to apply for SRS and it just had five or six points and dates. This needs to be done by then, you'll find out by this, you'll get this by this. And students went, oh! So a timeline is brilliant (Elise, school).

We're seeing some of our students who have been tutored by UTS attending UTS and coming back and tutoring our students. And that is gold, because they are not only successful at university, but they are coming back because they saw the value in it. And they're from this area, but I also like it when they're not, because then the students say, you're nothing like me, you sound nothing like me, you look nothing like me, yet you like me, that's important (Elise, school).

UTS coming into the Tertiary Preparation Courses, talking to students directly, starting conversations between TAFE faculties with the corresponding UTS faculty about articulation credit arrangements. Trying to smooth the pathway for TAFE students including access, making sure the enrolment, admissions, scholarship processes at the UTS end was not onerous and that students found out about scholarships (Maurice, TAFE).

The Equity Unit ran a project about four years ago, pathways to UTS called Bridges. One of the helpful things about being involved is that we have connections with the Equity Unit now, so the counselors are contacting the Equity Unit directly, there's information we've gotten that we weren't getting before that just helps us around entrance scores and how different TAFE qualifications are viewed. That comes from building a relationship with the unit (Maurice, TAFE).

These findings suggest that strategies involving personal interactions between institutional advocates for equity scholarships and financial assistance and potential applicants appear to work best in supporting students' access to information about and application for equity scholarships and financial assistance.

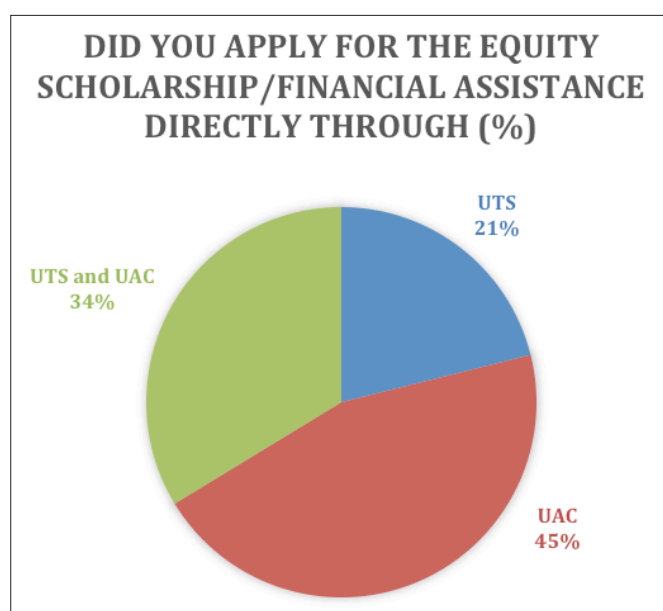
In summary, while the potential receipt of financial assistance is seen as important by students, multiple complex factors influence their decision-making processes: proximity of university to home and work; amount of financial assistance and possibility for paid work once at university; and family and cultural factors that inhibit students feeling that they can go to university, that higher education is a place for them.

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES DURING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

How and when did LSES students apply for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?

21% of survey respondents reported applying for the equity scholarship/financial assistance directly through UTS only, with 79% reported applying through UAC or UTS and UAC (see Figure 5). This is possibly because the scholarships are initially assessed by "UAC, before being forwarded to UTS to determine the level of assistance.

Figure 5. Did you apply for the equity scholarship/financial assistance directly through UTS, UAC or both? (Question 11).



Problems applying for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance

Comparatively few survey respondents (9.3%) had problems applying for the equity scholarship/financial assistance, with 90.7% reporting no problems (see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6. Did you encounter any problem when applying for an equity scholarship/financial assistance? (Question 14).

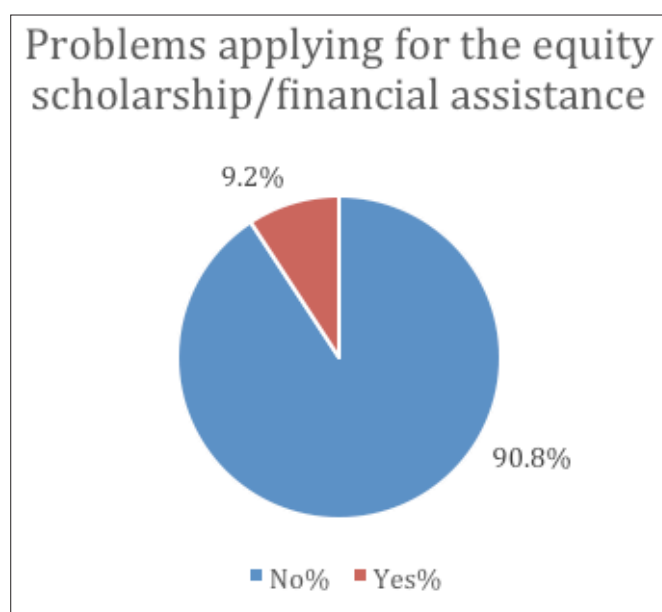
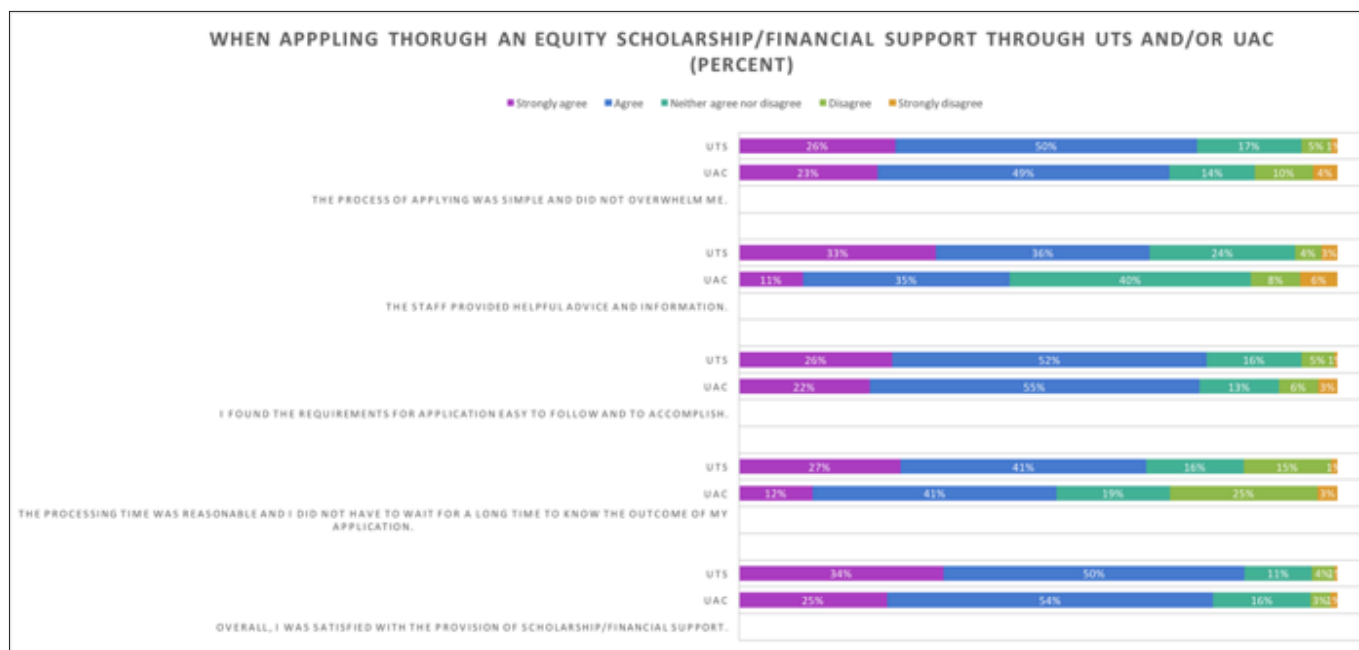


Figure 7. Experience applying for an equity scholarship/financial assistance through UTS and/or UAC (Question 15).



Of the less than 10% of survey respondents who reported having problems, a quarter found the application process complex and time consuming, particularly when collecting, getting signatures, assembling and uploading documentation (see Figure 7). Other issues were not knowing about the range of equity and other scholarships, which scholarships to apply for, how they are awarded, whether they were eligible, or why they were unsuccessful in their applications.

Upon learning about the scholarships, one student found no difficulty accessing information and applying in subsequent years, even receiving a group email from the UTS scholarships office, although they were unsuccessful in their application for a faculty scholarship and expressed disappointment they were not advised of the outcome. For one student, there

was a belief that only a certain demographic of people received scholarships, which meant people 'on the edges' missed out.

Interview data show that personal interactions with staff is important to assist students in successfully navigating the application, although it is time consuming:

Spending time and having someone to spend time is the issue, because often that doesn't happen, particularly with the digital world. Scholarships are an information-heavy issue to talk about, because there's so many different options (Maurice, TAFE).

The boss of the TPC course knew all our stories, she provided a lot of care and support and helped us with our uni applications. She went through the UAC system and how to apply for the scholarships, because she knew my position and my 'I don't know how I'm going to do this'. We actually did them in class (Bonnie, student).

We give these scholarships to six or seven hundred students at UTS alone, but across NSW it's a huge scholarship and there's tension between having a systematic process that works, along with a personalised approach for students in need. They won't get that at UAC because it's guided over the telephone or through Youtube tutorials or through their website. So if you're digitally challenged, that makes the process a bit more difficult (Derek, UTS).

Furthermore, this kind of personal interaction often involved a degree of professional responsibility in providing advice:

Some of our refugee status students aren't going to make it if we throw them into university. So we've then got to say ok, where am I guiding you? You've got to give equal access, but you've got to give that guiding point, I know student A is going to make it with extra help. Student B needs to go to a college and study English for a year and a half, and then maybe they can get in. So yeah, that's a hard thing (Elise, school).

One of the key themes emerging from the interview data was the issue of identity in regard to having to 'document your disadvantage':

They'd have to identify themselves as someone who's eligible for an equity scholarship and what does that mean? Some people don't want to be identified in that way but are quite happy to do it once it's explained to them. Sometimes there's counselling around that, because that's about identity (Maurice, TAFE).

I'm always aware how hard it is for people to put things down on paper about their vulnerabilities, and that can come back to bite them (Claire, UTS).

Many interviewees saw problems with students not being able to understand the language or having difficulty navigating the sheer volume and complexity of the application process, particularly if it involves downloading, completing, signing off and uploading multiple documents:

The language of some questions is really confusing, and the government's complicated it in recent history by changing the family tax benefit so the student really needs to apply for a Youth Allowance (Luke, UTS).

If they're applying for an EAS on a disability or medical condition they have to fill it out by hand because of the signatures. If it's a learning disability we can sometimes fill that part out, but I'm not sure whether they apply in the end because it is involved, and depending on the nature of the disadvantage they're seeking a scholarship for, it might be too much (Maurice, TAFE).

I think you get to a certain stage of fatigue researching which university, which courses, which ATARs, where am I likely to go, which preferences am I going to put down, how do I apply. Then comes something about an equity scholarship, so either we're going to get a lot of students throwing in the application saying 'I'm exhausted; I'm not going any further' (Marie, UTS).

Survey respondents made a number of suggestions, including better promotion and early reminders to all students (including single parents and previous recipients), as well as increasing the visibility of the equity section on the UTS website.

The UTS strategy of opening applications for equity scholarships and financial assistance throughout the year, rather than a one-off provision at the beginning of their study, was seen as 'fair', according to Bob (UAC):

I like the way UTS tries to spread the scholarship load across the year in ways that make sense. Other universities just do it all main round and that's literally all they do. I don't think that's fair.

In summary, students report few problems in applying for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, but they often need personal interaction with staff to become aware that equity scholarships and financial assistance exists, to be able to acknowledge and document their disadvantage, and to help them negotiating the language of applications.

PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF AND BENEFITS TO LSES STUDENTS OF UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE DURING STUDY

The findings reported here are organised into five sections, identifying: first, the types of scholarships and financial assistance survey respondents reported receiving; second, students' perceptions of the impact of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance during their transition to university and their decision to continue studying, and the amount of money received and correlation between amount and type of scholarship; third, students' perceptions of the benefits that ensue from receiving UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance; fourth, problems experienced by participants in relation to the provision of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, such as timing, duration and eligibility; and finally, suggestions for improvement.

It is important to note that the terms impact and benefit appear interchangeably in the survey instrument, but in the findings reported in this section, impact is understood as respondents' self-reported perceptions of the effect of having received UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, rather than a higher level measureable impact, as could be provided through the analysis of institutional data reporting on access, retention and success. Benefit here is understood as the advantages respondents saw being afforded them through the receipt of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance.

Types of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance

Here, the findings distinguish between Commonwealth benefits and UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. Overall, 74% of respondents received the UTS DAS. The graph in Figure 8 shows however, that there were other types of financial help that students received, including: Text book vouchers (18%), Equity grants (16%), Disability Access Grant (4%) and the UTS Housing Rental Subsidy Scholarship (4%) (see Figure 8).

Some students reported receiving support from multiple sources and for different reasons, such as funding psychiatrist appointments or visual aids to improve study, or providing a laptop.

A few survey respondents reported in the open-ended comments that they also received non-monetary support such as quiet spaces to study and access to a locker, providing respite from home. Students also reported receiving support through UTS access schemes, orientation and transition programs and other support programs, such as the following:

- Student services centre/liaison officer
- Diversity/Disability Access/Equity scholarship/ Special needs support
- Counselling/medical services
- Jumbunna, UTS Indigenous House of Learning for advice, scholarship, tutoring, coaching, support
- Access to technology/equipment/lab/computer/ software and IT support
- HELPS/English language program/maths study centre/library
- UPASS/orientation/first year advisor
- Study skills: lectures/workshops/peer tutoring/ discounted tutoring
- UTS Careers
- Note-taker
- Extra time for assignments.

Figure 8. Type of Equity Scholarship or Financial Assistance received from UTS (Question 1).

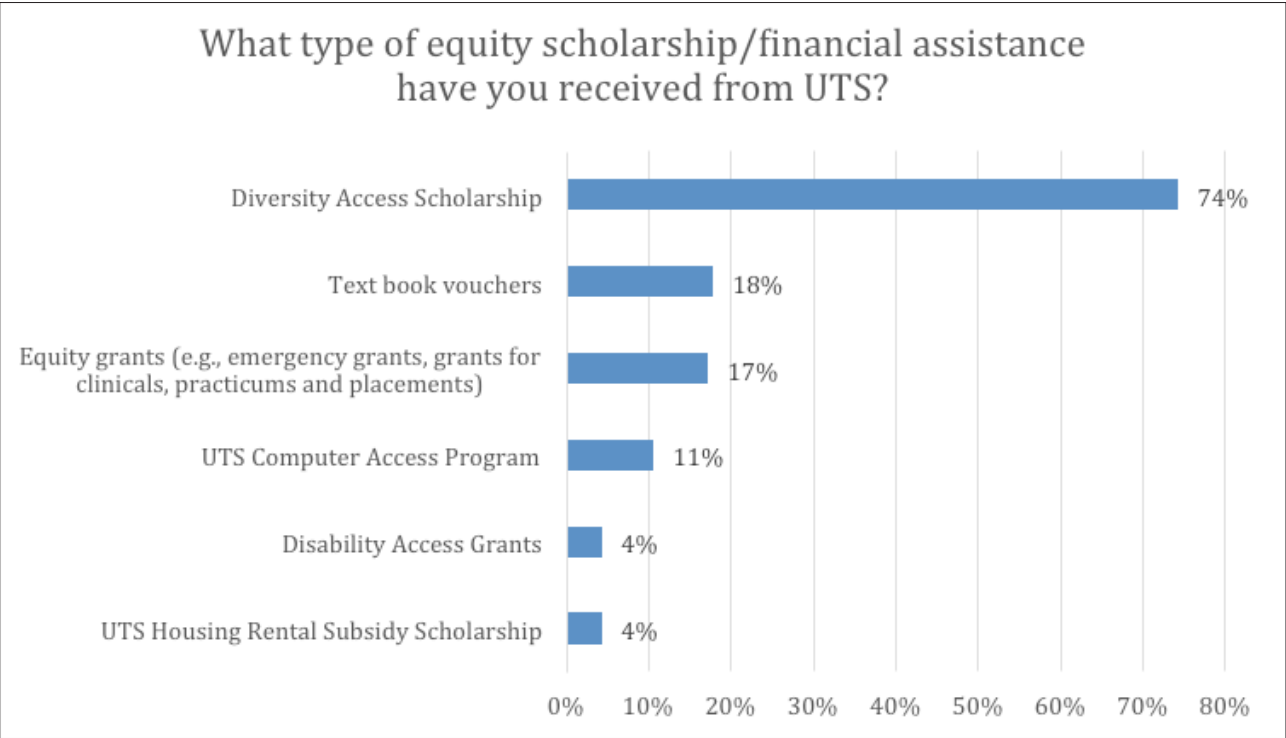
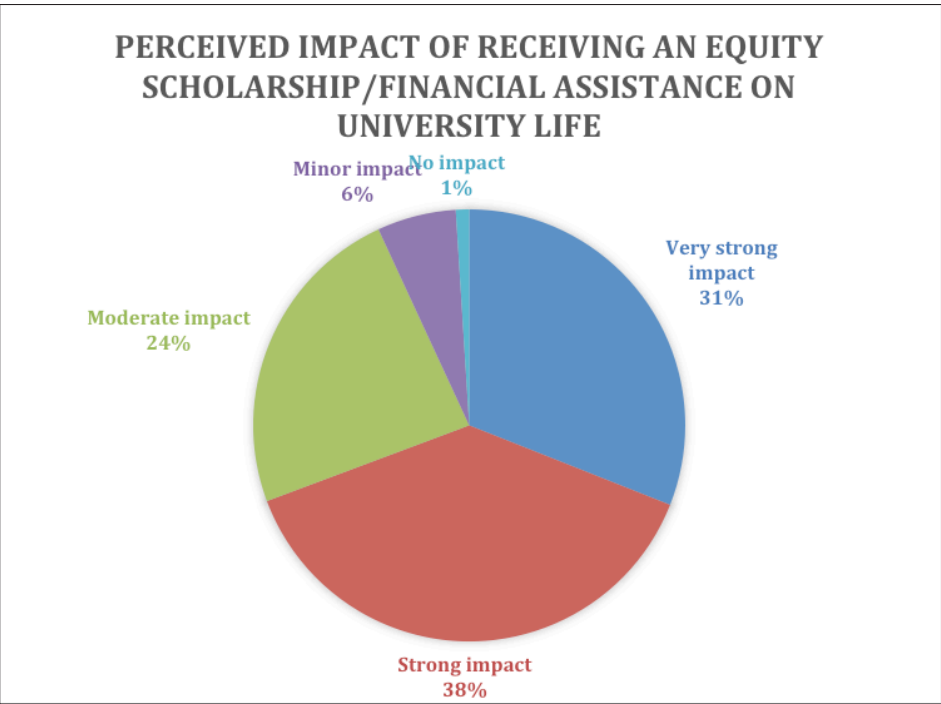


Figure 9. Perceived Impact of receiving an equity scholarship/financial assistance on university life (Question 6).



Perceived impact of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance

Here, impact is defined as UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance as having had a marked effect on students. Most (99%) of the survey respondents reported receiving an equity scholarship and financial assistance as having some impact on their university life, with 69% reporting that the impact was strong or very strong, 24% identifying the impact as moderate and 6% as minor (see Figure 9).

The most common ways that recipients reported the equity scholarship or financial assistance helping them with expenses was for study-related expenses (89.4%), living expenses (62.0%) and computer-related expenses (51.5%) (see Figure 10).

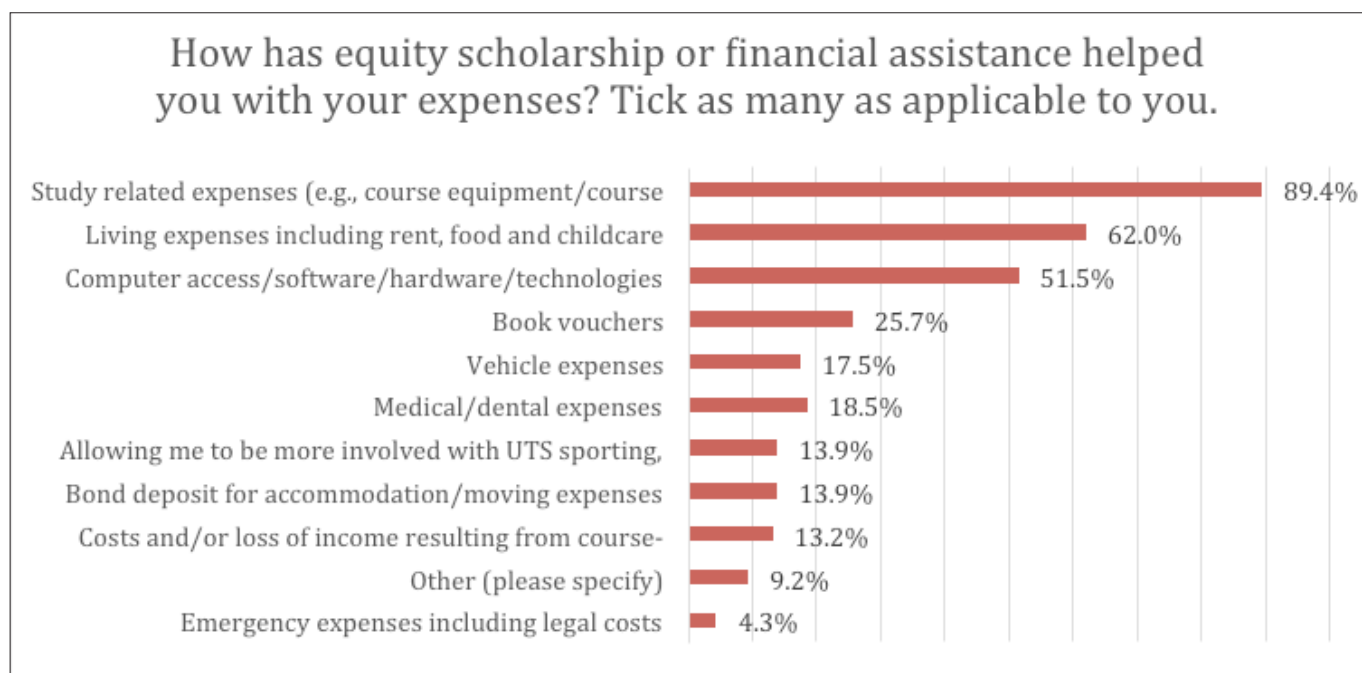
In the open-ended responses, many students reported that financial assistance helped significantly in their study or degree, simply saying that without it they would not have been able to continue studying. Some students were able to join the UTS gym, which they reported increased physical and emotional wellbeing,

while others were able to purchase laptops, textbooks, ergonomic chairs for back injuries, etc.

Many students were required to complete mandatory course internships or placements, for which they often needed professional clothing, and which they saw as restricting their capacity for part-time work and reduced funds for living. Equity scholarships and financial assistance helped to finance living and travel expenses while undertaking internships, buy textbooks and clothes for interviews, and pay for childcare while completing internships. A small number (4.3%) reported using equity funding as 'emergency money' for medical emergencies and procedures, or that it enabled them to work less and study more, while spending more time with their families, especially those who were parents.

For many, the institutional recognition afforded through receipt of a scholarship helped build confidence and increase a sense of self-value, for example, 'as a single parent living below the poverty line' or 'struggling with homelessness, family abuse and mental health issues'.

Figure 10. How have equity scholarship/financial assistance helped with your expenses? (Question 8).



Many reported emotional responses upon notification of receiving scholarships: 'I actually cried with sheer relief because it made everything I had been through worth it.'

Upon starting out and adjusting to university life, 76% of survey respondents rate access to financial assistance as an important or very important factor (see Figure 11).

In terms of motivation to continue studying and complete their degrees, many survey respondents saw personal determination and passion about their chosen degree as well as their commitment to get a job as key factors positively impacting on their transition to university. Figure 12 suggests that recipients are most strongly motivated by personal aspirations (94%) and career goals (90%). While this shows that comparatively fewer respondents – though not an insignificant number – agree or strongly agree that without the financial aid they would not have decided to attend or continue university (31%), 61%

agree or strongly agree that the support helped them stay at UTS instead of not continuing with their studies. In addition, 71% (see Figure 12), rate continuing access to scholarship/financial assistance as being either an important or very important factor in deciding to stay on and continue their UTS studies.

A larger proportion of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that the equity scholarship/financial assistance meant that they were better equipped to meet course requirements (91%). It also allowed them more time and focus to study (80%), led to an improvement in their academic achievement/results (75%) and provided them with opportunities that they would not have had otherwise, like joining in other activities (70%) (see Figure 13).

Figure 11. Factors that helped when starting out and adjusting to University life (Question 21).

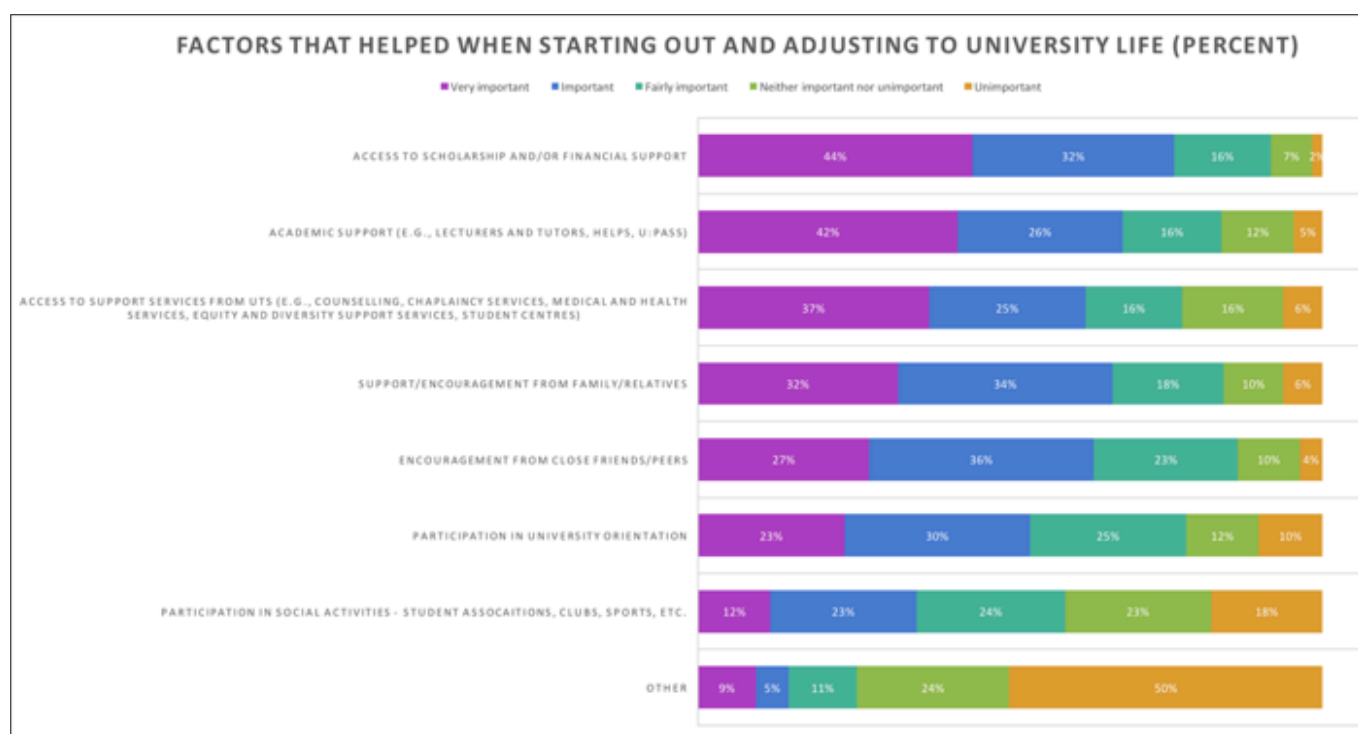


Figure 12. Impact of factors in deciding to stay on and continue studies at UTS (Question 22).

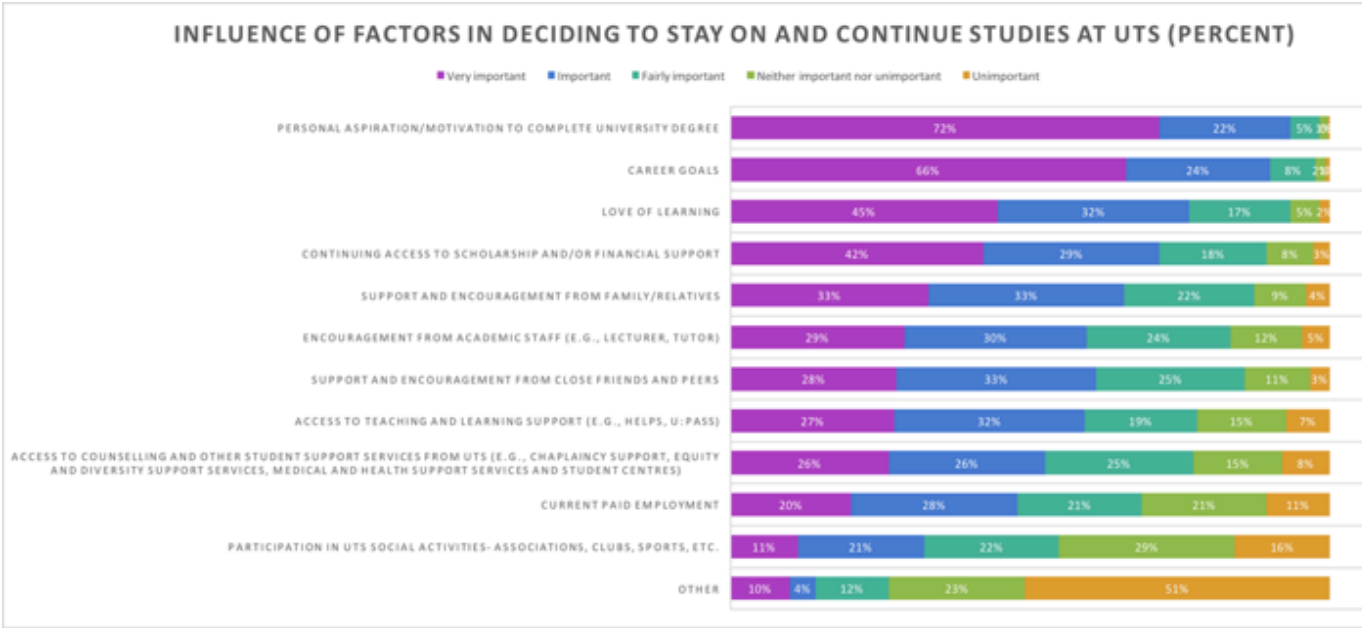
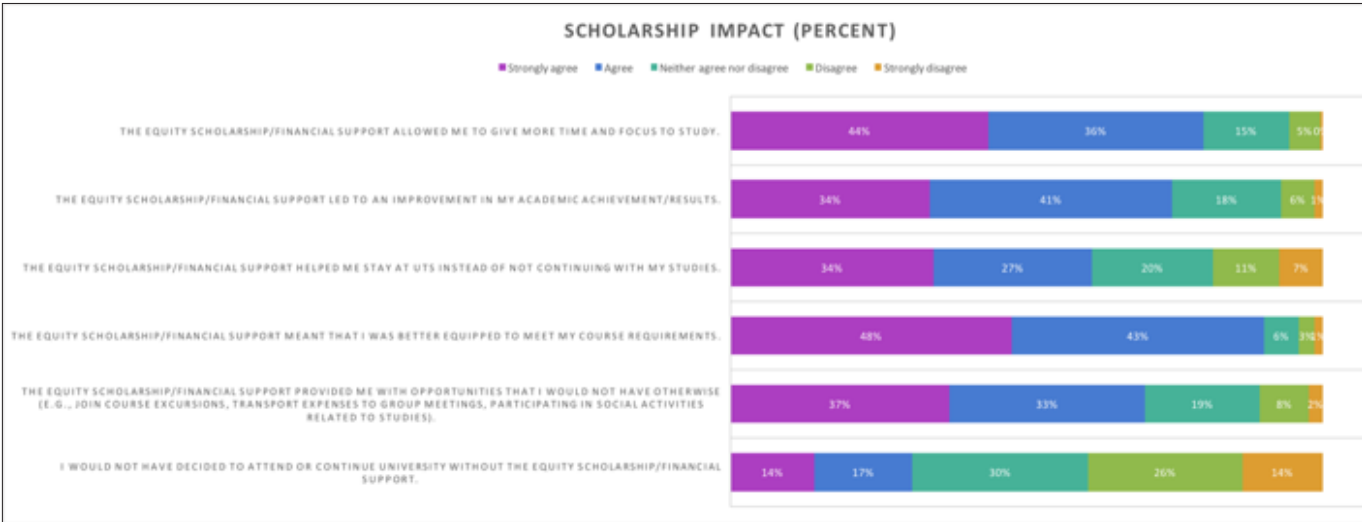


Figure 13. Impact of Equity Scholarship/Financial Assistance (Question 5).



In the very small number of open-ended responses describing the impact of other factors on their decisions to stay on and continue studies at UTS, students reported receiving support from peers and social contacts, including 'friendly' academic and support staff who helped university feel 'like home'.

Particular staff members were mentioned as providing invaluable support 'during tough times', which had an impact on their personal wellbeing and helped them focus on study and do well academically. Some students acknowledged the quality of the course or environment, as well as friendships and access to

social networks. And some suggested that without the financial and staff support, they would not have been able to attend university at all. These impacts were elaborated by the interviewees:

It funded me to stay at uni and keep my head above water, so UTS has really enabled me to live (Jane).

Basic things like underwear and socks, and it sounds really stupid, but it's the sort of thing you wouldn't normally have the spare money to go and buy, and you do get to a point where you need to buy more (Bonnie).

Receipt of the scholarship engendered a sense of belonging and increasing feelings of normality:

I feel I've been a part of a society that looks after the needy. I feel the sense of belonging as a student, as a person in the university, and if I feel isolated, Ali, you're back at UTS. Sometimes you just receive an email saying 'Apply for this, you're eligible for this' which I don't know it's even available, and then getting assistance. So you can feel that there is someone there who is actually looking after me, who try to know this guy needs help (Ali).

It helped me feel more normal when I came to uni. I could have a laptop that wasn't 15 years old and as big as a briefcase. I didn't feel any different to anybody else. So nobody would've known that I was a single mum on a pension. And that felt nice, that I could have that stuff, and to not have to worry about those things (Bonnie).

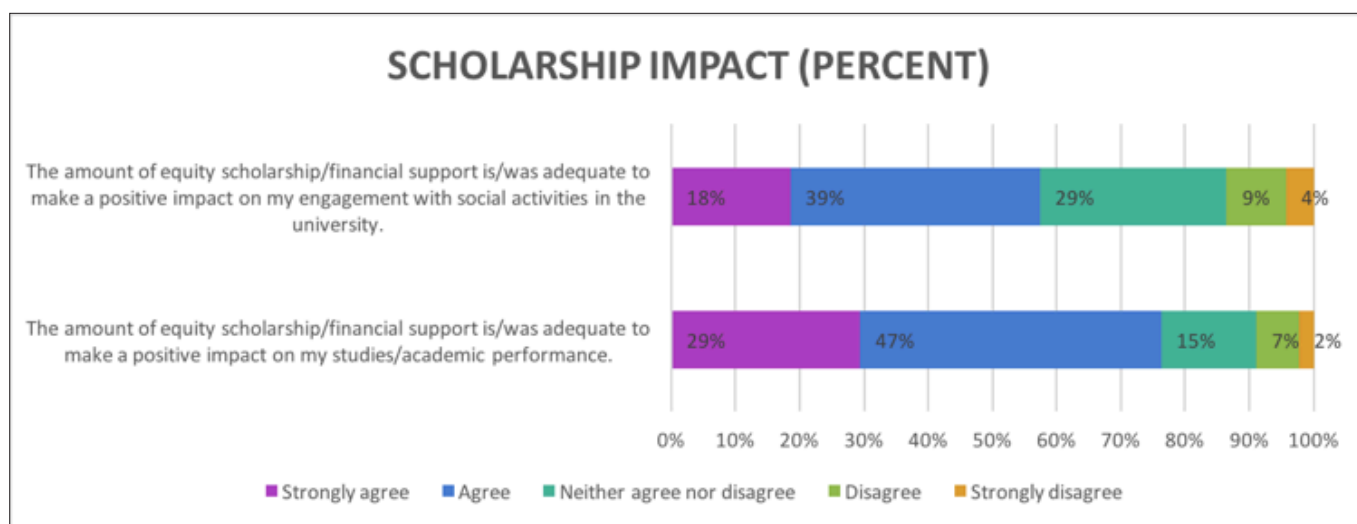
A small number of respondents reported feeling lonely and that there was not enough support for disadvantaged students, while others wondered why the amount they received varied each year, even though their 'level of disadvantage remained the same'.

Perceived impact of amount received

76% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the amount they received was adequate in making a positive impact on their studies/academic performance, with 8% disagreeing.

Fewer (57%) survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the amount they received was adequate to make a positive impact on their engagement with social activities in the university, with 13% disagreeing (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Amount is adequate to have a positive impact on studies/academic performance and social life at university (Question 5).



The responses reflecting the overall impact of receiving a scholarship/financial assistance were analysed according to the reported amount of financial assistance received. The more a student reported a higher amount of financial assistance received, the more likely they were to report the amount received had a very strong or strong impact on their university lives. However, what is notable is that even among those who reported receiving \$1,000 or less, 83.6% said it had a moderate or larger impact, with 56.1% reporting a strong or very strong impact. Of those who reported receiving between \$1,001 and \$5,000, 96.5% said it had a moderate or larger impact, with 67.6% reporting a strong or very strong impact (see Figure 15).

The more a student reported a higher amount of financial assistance received, the more likely they were to report the amount received had a very strong or strong impact on their academic studies. However, again what is notable is that even those who reported receiving \$1000 or less, 89% said it had a moderate or larger impact, with 70.3% reporting a strong or

very strong impact. Of those who reported receiving between \$1,001 and \$5,000, 90.2% said it had a moderate or larger impact, with 72.6% reporting a strong or very strong impact.

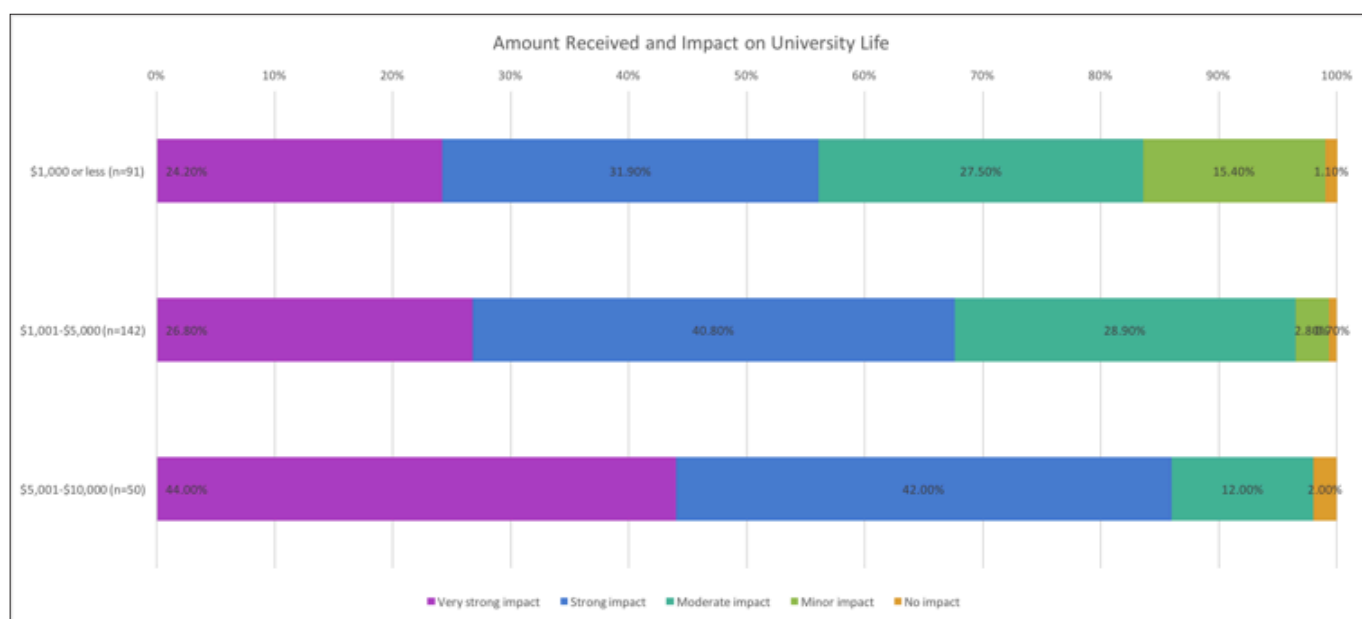
Similarly, the more a student reported a higher amount of financial assistance received, the more likely they were to report the amount received had a strong or very strong impact on their social activities at university.

Staff interviewees wondered whether smaller amounts help students at all, or whether it would be better to 'give one person a really decent scholarship':

We issue scholarships of \$500 a semester, does that help students? Does it support them and retain them? The barriers are just having enough money, trying to figure out how you can stretch that money at the beginning of the year (Luke, UTS).

With the DAS or equity-based scholarships, some people might have a gas bill; I know it doesn't sound like a lot, but sometimes it can be the difference between having to leave university and staying in and doing well (Michelle, UTS).

Figure 15. Amount of Financial Assistance Received by Overall perceived impact of receiving an equity scholarship/financial assistance on university life (Question 3 x Question 6).



Student interviewees responses however, support the survey findings, showing that they are grateful for the financial assistance provided, irrespective of the amount. They felt they were assessed according to their needs, and that the amount received met those needs:

The \$500 was pretty much for everyday stuff, travelling, sometimes I needed to buy a textbook for the beginning of semester, so that's where it would go (Anh).

I came in again and said 'I definitely don't want a grant this time', and the staff said, 'Let's set up a \$500 loan and start paying back in March? \$100 a month, no interest?' It was easy to pay it back, because it was periodic. Even though I paid it on time, I felt if I couldn't, I could come back and extend it another month or two. I felt that was an option, so that was fantastic (Pauline).

Last year I got \$1500 both semesters. It enabled me to have this major dental operation, that's why I had chronic fatigue, it's not just the brain injury (Jane).

If I get it again, it'll allow me to study and do my clinical without trying to work as well, it's made a really big difference (Bonnie).

The following findings report on the amount of financial assistance that had a positive impact on studies and social life at university.

Those who have reported receiving \$1000 or less, 81.4% said it had a moderate or larger impact, with 48.4% reporting a strong or very strong impact. Of those who reported receiving between \$1,001 and \$5,000, 86.6% reported it as having a moderate or larger impact, with 54.9% reporting a strong or very strong impact (see Figures 16 and 17).

Figure 16. Amount of Financial Assistance Received by Agreement that amount is adequate to have positive impact on studies/academic performance (Question 3 x Question 5).

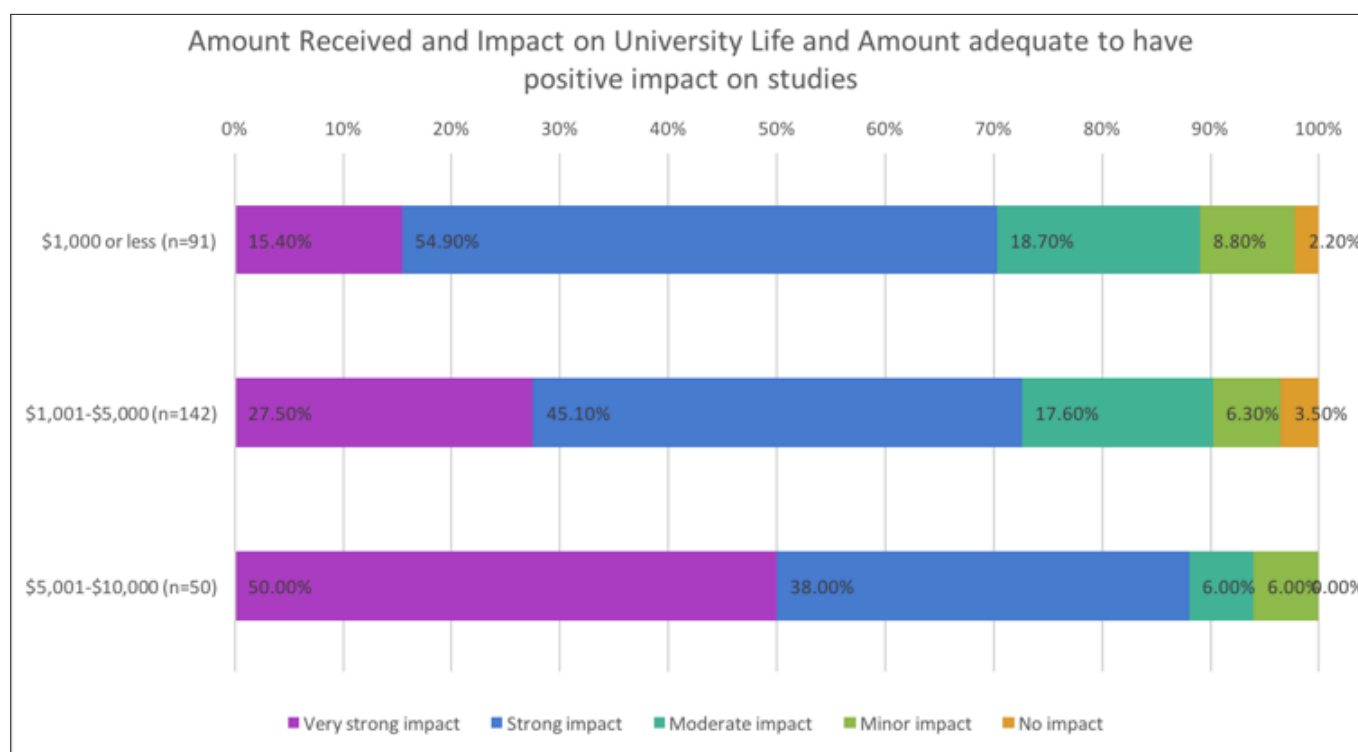
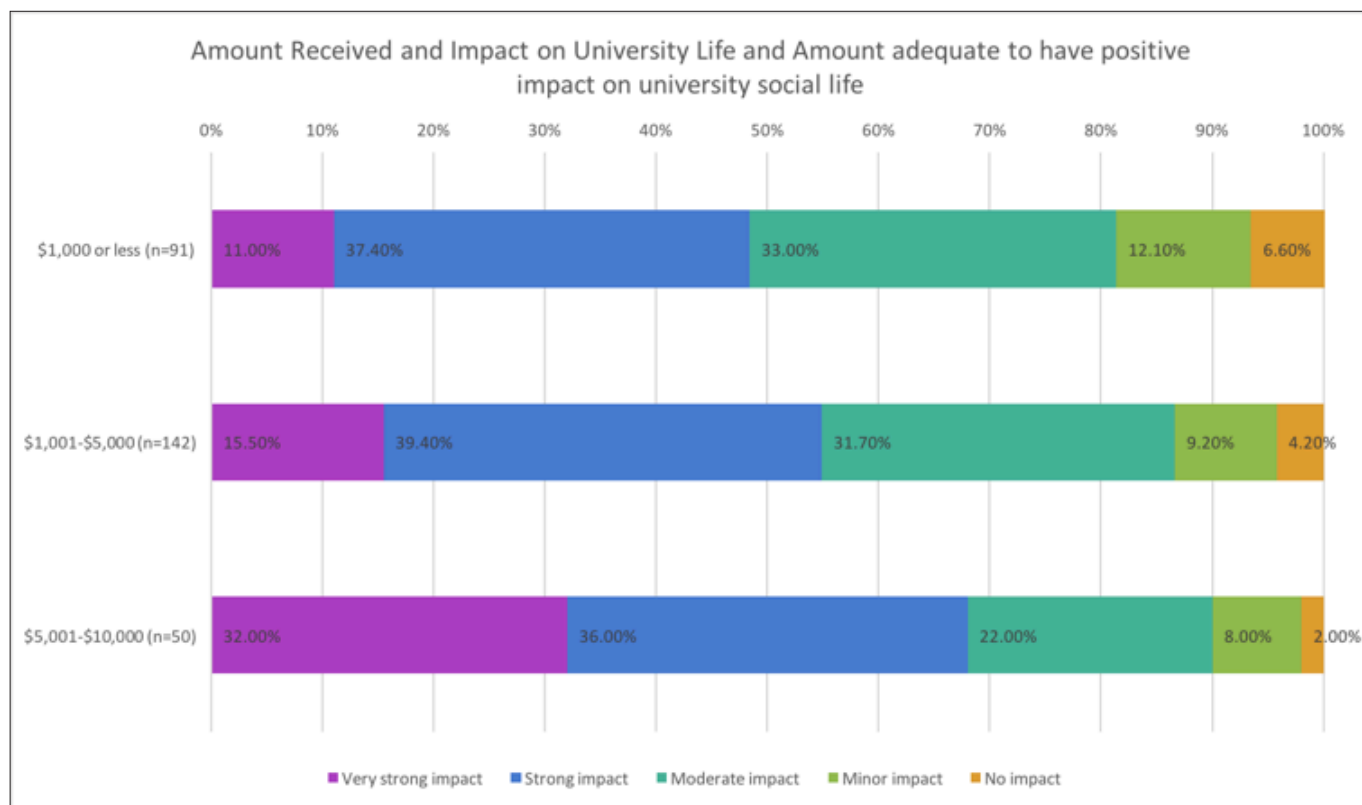


Figure 17. Amount of Financial Assistance Received by Agreement that amount is adequate to have positive impact on social activities at university (Question 3 x Question 5).

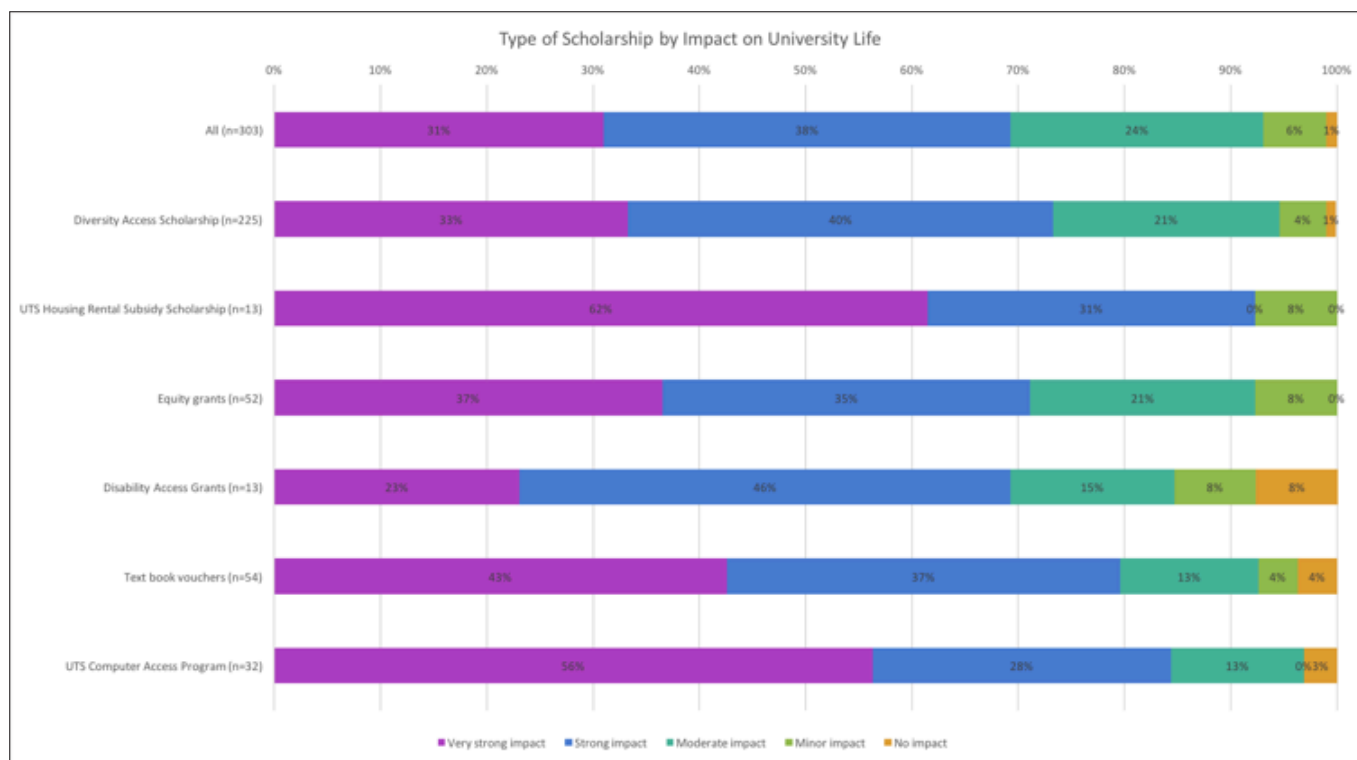


When the overall impact of an equity scholarship/ financial assistance on university life is broken down by type of scholarship, 61.5% of those who reported receiving the UTS Housing Rental Subsidy Scholarship and 56.30% of those receiving the UTS Computer Access Program reported the support had a very strong impact on their university lives (see Figure 18).

Correlation analyses were conducted to investigate if there was any relationship with the type or source of financial assistance received and positive impact. While a number of statistically significant results were found, the relationship was small. For example,

receiving a diversity access scholarship, $r=.142$, $p < .01$, a UTS housing rental subsidy scholarship, $r=.136$, $p < .01$, textbook vouchers, $r=.120$, $p < .05$, being part of the UTS Computer Access Program, $r=.174$, $p < .001$, or receiving multiple sources of financial support, $r=.187$, $p < .001$, was significantly correlated with reporting stronger overall impact from the equity scholarship/ financial assistance (Question 6), though these relationships are all very small.

Figure 18. Type of Scholarship/Financial Assistance by Overall perceived impact of receiving an equity scholarship/financial assistance on university life (Question 1 x Question 6).



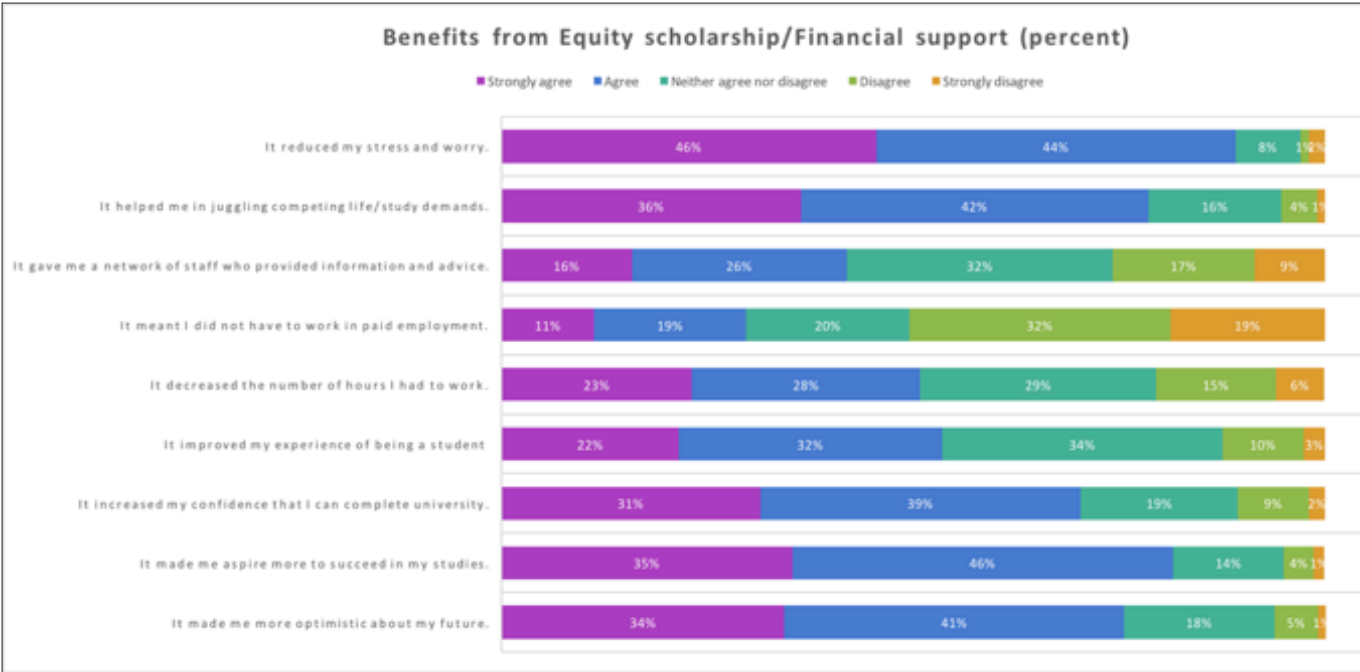
Perceived benefits to students of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance

Here, perceived benefit is defined as perceived advantages students reported having gained as a result of receiving UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. The distinction between impact and perceived benefit will be elaborated in the discussion in Chapter 4 of this report.

Reduction in stress and worry was the benefit most reported by survey respondents, with 90% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Other commonly reported benefits were that it helped them to: aspire more to succeed in their studies (81% agreeing or strongly agreeing); juggle competing life/study demands (78% agreeing

or strongly agreeing); be more optimistic about their future (75%); and increase their confidence that they can compete at university (70% agreeing or strongly agreeing). 51% agreed or strongly agreed that the support helped them to decrease the number of hours they had to work in paid employment. In comparison, fewer respondents (30%) agreed or strongly agreed that the support meant that they did not have to work. 42% agreed or strongly agreed that it gave them a network of staff who provided information and advice (see Figure 19).

Figure 19. Reported benefits of receiving an equity scholarship/financial assistance (Question 8).



Some students saw the money as facilitating their professional development in broader social contexts, such as engagement in co-curricular and social activities at university, successful completion of internships, voluntary work opportunities, and paid employment opportunities. Increased social contact through attendance at UTS events was an important outcome for some students, allowing them to more fully immerse themselves in their studies, attend U:Pass sessions, make friends and develop professional and academic connections, which they saw as helping to reinforce their learning.

Open-ended response comments raised a range of benefits such as stating there was less time spent thinking about money, bills, less anxiety and stress, which enabled them to juggle competing personal and family requirements and stresses. This was supported by the interview data, which identifies a number of competing concerns for students in addition to

studying, including generational concern about lack of money, the need to balance childcare, study, work and Centrelink payments, and the capacity to buy textbooks when needed:

My whole life I've worried about money because my mum has always worried about money. She had no education, she wasn't employed in a stable environment, no one offering support, it was always stress. So to not have to worry about that, it's just been incredible (Sue).

The equity scholarship took the edge off the stress in terms of childcare, which is one of the biggest things (Mandy).

Even though I'm still going to have the same amount of workload and responsibilities, it's peace of mind that really helps me focus. It's like 'Oh, I have that extra bit of cash' if I need it to buy a textbook (Anh).

For Bonnie, reduced stress equated to improved mental health that she anticipates will extend beyond the degree:

It's helped a lot with my state of mind and depression and anxiety. It's been a bit of a lifesaver really. I envisage that when I get through this degree I'm not going to need to be on disability, I'll be able to work and support my family (Bonnie).

For one student, the perception was that the scholarship value was greater than the value of money earned through part-time employment. Others saw the scholarships and/or financial assistance as evidence that they were valued as members of the UTS and external community by virtue of the assistance offered when it was needed, that 'UTS cares' about their studies, financial situations and personal development.

It was a lifetime dream to do midwifery, so being given an opportunity gives me goose bumps. It feels so privileged. That feeling, going into the building, 'This is my uni!' I'm so proud to show my daughter (Bonnie).

Many students specifically commented on caring, supportive and helpful UTS staff, reporting that their actions and words showed their willingness to listen non-judgmentally and treat their concerns with respect but without trivializing them, and showing understanding and empathy for their particular situation.

I told my whole story to one of the staff and he was so understanding, 'Let's have a look at your circumstances. I see your parents have both lost their jobs recently so they can't really help you out.' Then he suggested the grant, rather than the loan, 'Look, you're in a bit of a pickle, and you definitely satisfy the requirements so let's try and make this a grant'. So he put it all through and that \$500 literally just saved my whole semester (Pauline).

Some students reported being inspired to 'give back' by mentoring other students, or expressed a desire upon graduation to support students in similar situations.

I've been afforded so many opportunities from UTS that I can help other people that are like me or that have different struggles (Sue).

I've been studying teaching and that's what my heart is really in, to use all the experiences I've had to help other people, and that actually enables a career pathway for me as well (Jack).

If I have to go back to my country, there will be differences between what I've been doing there and what I've acquired here, not only in terms of finding I can get money but in academic terms (Ali).

In some cases, receiving a scholarship increased students' positive view of UTS, while others saw the support as addressing expectations that being a 'student' assumes a level of equality between all people, disregarding variable access to support, funding, housing and positive family environment.

When the scholarship came through it was just such a weight lifted off my shoulders. They make a difference. They allow people that aren't children at home with mum and dad supporting to get an education and a career (Bonnie).

Students reported achieving –

- higher grades:

The textbook vouchers were the best effect on my academic performance. Last semester I got three distinctions and a 74. I was crazy happy. I could see the direct effect because I didn't have to pay for most of my books (Pauline).

In the exams you're not allowed to take in library books, but you can take in your own textbooks. So that's a huge thing, if you've got a multiple-choice question, you quickly look in the index and you'll be able to find it. Last semester, because I had a book voucher and I managed to save up some money as well, I was able to have them (Bonnie).

- access to new opportunities:

I applied for a scholarship to go to a conference and I got money to buy my ticket and accommodation, which

allowed me to fully indulge in that experience. It was very exciting, it was wonderful to be together with all those professionals, and being a first-year student, to get together with the second and third-years (Bonnie).

- access to internship or paid work, with one student reporting having gained an interview for an internship opportunity and another whose experience as a UTS HSC tutor led to a job:

By getting that position I was able to get a teaching assistant position at one of the big schools in the city. I do that part-time, and I do the tutoring part-time as well (Anh).

- a life changing sense of independence:

It allows me to have independence. At home I buy all the food, I look after my brother, but I also want him to get tutoring, so I put that on myself (Anh).

- increased social and academic networks:

Socially it was tough to start with, because I was struggling, I didn't really have spare time to do anything else but study, but as time went on, it got easier to socialise more and get involved in more activities and meet new people (Jack).

Having financial security means I can make friends and I can just engage, go down to the uni pub or to someone's house, or stay after uni and not have to work 24/7. It makes a huge difference (Sue).

Students who spend all week in the computer labs working together have a different experience of university than students who are away working in every spare minute. They miss out on those critical conversations that help them develop their work (Michelle, UTS).

In sum, the receipt of an equity scholarship and financial assistance in itself, while perhaps not significant in terms of the amount of money, enables students to engage in university life and participate in social networks.

Challenges students experience in relation to the provision and administration of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance during study

Open-ended survey responses raised the issue of the timing of scholarship payments, which were perceived to be later than what was needed to cover costs at the start of semester, e.g. text books, which sometimes ran to hundreds of dollars, and housing.

For some students, not knowing if they will receive support each year is problematic:

When one year finishes and another year's about to start, I'm stressing about how am I going to manage if I don't get that money (Bonnie).

Administrative challenges include subject requirements that impact on students' eligibility:

One of my subjects was recorded as a fail, but because of the extension it didn't record the distinction, and the scholarships people emailed me, 'your scholarship has been suspended!' I had to get the subject coordinator, and she responded, 'Sue got a distinction and we're changing it online' and they were really good about it (Sue).

It says in my conditions I need 24 units every semester, but sometimes on the subject outline, you don't have 24; you have 20, or 18, which is technically a full study load. I emailed them, but they said, 'We'll let you know when we know, we have to have a discussion about it, because we've been asked a few times.' They should change it too, follow the outline and then have changes approved. That would make more sense (Mandy).

One student found the use of Visa cards problematic:

You have to sign, but they've phased out signing, so it's really embarrassing to go into a shop and they're 'You have to put in a pin' and you have to explain to them 'This is different, this is a pre-paid card'. It's a horrible feeling to try and explain. I've had to walk out of shops because they wouldn't let me process it. If they had a PIN number it would make life so much easier (Mandy).

Overwhelmingly, the biggest challenge identified by staff administering equity scholarships and financial assistance to support LSES students at UTS was the fragmentation of information, knowledge and communication across faculties and administrative units. This is a complex interaction involving a lack of different kinds of knowledge, information and time that limits individual students' chances of getting the right information, getting any information at all, or being overwhelmed by the volume of information. Faculty staff reported different levels of knowledge in relation to scholarship amounts, when and how often applications were open, and the intricacies of students' experiences navigating the fragmentation, along with the sheer volume of information students come into contact with:

UTS sees itself as a 'one-stop service' but there is an uneven distribution of knowledge about support services and/or equity scholarships or grants. There's no one person in each faculty that has the same job title, and every faculty is different (Luke, UTS).

The scholarships office is the front door, but where's the hallway leading to? We need to build up that hallway with different options and different doors. The students who complete the application and don't receive any scholarship funding, because that door's been shut in their face, are they less likely to seek out the other doors? We don't know what the effect is (Carol).

We've got a massively casualised teaching workforce, they're the touchstone for students in terms of 'I'm in strife – what do I do?' and if they don't know, some people don't say 'I'll find out' (Michelle).

I went to the orientation week discussion, and they went through everything and I thought, 'In a million years, I would never be across all of that.' There's just so much to be across. And you could see that they could be overwhelmed and have so much information that they could disengage (Peter, UTS).

Faculty staff also reported difficulties in balancing a student's right to privacy with knowing which students

to contact in relation to the perceived stigmatizing effect of identifying as disadvantaged:

Unless they have special needs or disadvantage that they need to interact with us about, I wouldn't know who has received a scholarship or not (Tess).

One of the things about financial hardship is you don't necessarily want to say directly, there's still stigma around receiving benefits; and so sometimes you'll have conversations with people and say 'Look, the reason you're getting this benefit is to get an education, like this is something – by investing in you we're investing in the future of our country' (Luke).

Students often come and talk to me as a teacher, and what do you put down on paper? For something like mental health, disclosing can be stigmatising but it also can have a bearing. So it'd be interesting to hear from students, is that a scary process? Are they having to disclose a lot, who has access to that, and is that made clear to them that it's not going to follow them all the way through the course (Claire).

We encourage students to go to the first year orientation camp, but what do you wear to camp? What do you bring? And how do you fit in? You have to start with where I do feel comfortable, rather than I'm here and I'm able to bounce into the system immediately. But what if the solution is much harder for the simple reason that if you organise something which said LSES students, do I really want to come to that? The clothes I wear, the way I walk, someone puts a stamp on my forehead already (Michelle).

Students' desire to feel 'normal' is supported by Sue:

I didn't want to be abnormal. It was important to me that people didn't see that. I wanted people to know about my life on my terms (Sue).

This is particularly difficult for staff to identify students who may drop out of university:

The ones that drop out don't make contact, that's the problem (Tess, faculty).

Attrition is almost silent for a scholarship student. The fact they have been selected as a scholarship student is likely to mean they're going to be more alienated at university, and as a scholarship student they probably carry two levels of disappointment. One is giving up the scholarship and the second giving up university study. Because they are scholarship students, they're going to feel it's their own fault (Luke).

This has implications for the effectiveness of scholarships to support students' success, as Derek suggests, 'The problem with degrees is they're not useful unless you finish them.'

Balancing the availability of support programs and resources with student needs is a common challenge for staff, along with the provision and staffing of U:Pass tutorials, and identifying students who would benefit from attending, which links into the idea of students' right to privacy:

We offer it to all students because of the things we're trying not to do is say 'You've been targeted because you're an inpUTS student or you're a student with financial disadvantage.' We just say 'Hey, we wanted to know if you know about U:Pass.' We don't tell them why they're getting the email (Marie).

Suggestions for improving the impact and increasing the benefits to students of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance

Comments from survey respondents confirmed their support for new scholarships and/or increased amounts for scholarships. By far the most common concern for students was the increased duration of scholarships received in first year, and extended to the second and third years of their degree. Some thought there should be rent assistance for single

parents and mature-aged students, or those living in social housing. Additional grants for students with less visible disabilities were proposed, along with childcare assistance and increased support for rural and remote students, as well as for those relocating from another city. One suggestion was for an internship grant, that enabled LSES students to complete mandatory course requirements without having to find part-time work to replace the sometimes 200 hours specified. A small number of students requested equity scholarship provision for post-graduate students and/or students studying in part-time mode due to financial, social or health conditions.

General suggestions from students include:

- Earlier notification, better promotion, more information on the website;
- Eligibility and transparency – it's an inequitable process, those who work don't get assistance, while those who have family support do; increase the amount each year; want to know how much others get;
- Reintroduce rent scholarship;
- Increase number of scholarships and amount;
- Payment timing: start payments earlier in semester; pay second half if payment is split into two semesters;
- Increase contact from staff to check if all is OK;
- Establish a student profile on MyStudentAdmin to link previous recipients to their information so they don't have to reapply each year;
- Single student licences to access e-textbooks from library.

As may be expected, many students thought more money would be useful, while some students stated they would also like to access existing faculty-specific scholarships.

Some students said that while there may be a large number of scholarships available, they did not fit the eligibility criteria, suggesting there were some grey areas around eligibility that excluded them. These

included the relocation scholarship, for which they were ineligible because of a change in legislation that allowed rural and remote students to receive it, but not those relocating from another major city. Some felt that being older put them at a disadvantage in terms of their chances of being awarded a scholarship, while others suggested that 'people living in social housing' and students studying in a part-time mode should be eligible.

During their study, many students requested extra financial support for course materials, computers and mandatory placements, particularly as these were unpaid yet impacted on their availability for part-time work. Specific degrees, such as Architecture, Construction and Nursing, carried heavy associated costs for equipment, clothing and materials for projects.

Some students made simple statements that had huge emotional resonance, such as the scholarship helps them develop their professional and interpersonal skills, gives them 'lots of courage' to succeed in their studies and 'follow my dream', feel that their financial concerns are treated seriously, and that they have 'a little less disadvantage', which helps to 'narrow the gap' between them and their peers.

PUTTING IT IN CONTEXT: FINDINGS FROM THE UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIP FORUM 2016

The six themes selected for the forum buzz group discussions struck a chord with participants. They also support the findings previously reported. The buzz group discussions are summarised, and this section concludes with a brief comment on the key findings from the forum.

Information and application processes were widely considered to be confusing and time consuming for students, and were exacerbated by the lack of a standardised process across universities, although it was noted that standardization would risk institutions' abilities to target specific groups. Similarly to the survey findings, suggestions were made to streamline the administration and application processes for equity scholarships, for example, the development of a single online portal for students to access information on scholarships at all universities (make your mark website) with standardised questions linked to a database that automatically feeds information into applications.

Multi-factor internal assessment was seen to be more appropriate for scholarship recipient selection by institutions than was a single factor, particularly given concerns about eligible students who do not receive Commonwealth support, and students receiving this support who did not apply for equity scholarships, either due to a lack of awareness or the perceived complexity of application processes. This raised a question about whether equity practice should focus on recipient type or scholarship type, given the diversity of eligible students, including LSES. Suggestions to address this question included a holistic 'ecology of services' that delivers multi-layered targeted institutional support programs to address the diversity of students and circumstances.

The impact of equity scholarships on student success was widely considered to include both academic and emotional, for example, a sense of belonging and recognition. Even so, there were suggestions to expand the institutional impact through the provision of 'pre-departure' guides for rural and LSES students, such as those international students receive; personal contact with recipients during their first year to 'check up'; and provision of 'a reality check in Year 11–12 so parents can be involved'.

Additionally, there was an awareness of institutional barriers to the positive impact of equity scholarships, including mandatory course requirements such as unpaid internships, placements, and international trips that might amount to a 'tipping point' for students who are juggling study with paid work, the equity scholarship and Centrelink allowances. Suggestions to address this included the provision of institutional paid work and local/campus business employment partnership opportunities, which would also contribute to improving students' employability skills. The cost of accommodation was raised as an important issue, with participants making suggestions related to increasing the provision of internally owned and managed on-campus accommodation; and offering 'bundled' scholarships that provide financial assistance and housing. On-campus accommodation further enables proximity to other university support programs and services, such as health, medical and educational support, as well as peer networks.

Two issues raised directly relate to the focus of this study. The first was the need to shift the language of equity scholarships from that of deficit to that of creating opportunity in order to de-stigmatise LSES students when they apply for university and access information about scholarships. The other was the acknowledgement that while studies such as that reported here document the impact of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance on those who receive them, little is known about those who do

not apply or are unsuccessful in their applications. Some participants saw this as an area for further research, targeting students who decline or do not apply for equity scholarships. A possible solution was to ask students for permission to contact them in relation to support services, using, for example, a questionnaire that asks all commencing students to identify their needs, then send emails to them with targeted information about various supports and engagement opportunities.

CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter the discussion of the findings is organised into three sections, each framed by a set of research questions and their analysis of the findings. The purpose is to identify the implications of this investigation in the context of trends and narratives from the literature that impact on the provision of scholarships to students from LSES backgrounds. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings the final three research questions, including key findings and recommendations for UTS institutional policy.



KNOWLEDGE, AWARENESS AND INFLUENCE OF UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ON LSES STUDENTS' DECISIONS TO ATTEND UNIVERSITY

This section addresses the first four research questions:

- How did students find out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- What are the factors influencing LSES students' decision to apply for university, and how much does the potential receipt of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance influence their decision?
- What problems do students have accessing information about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- How can the promotion of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance be improved?

In response to the first question, the findings show that most student recipients (73% of survey respondents) found out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance from the UTS or UAC websites. While it is encouraging to know that these websites are useful as points of entry to relevant information for students, analysis of open-ended survey responses and interview data show that students are often referred to the websites by either an external advisor from school or TAFE, or a UTS support staff member from another service, such as Special Needs, Counselling, Student Services (29% in all three services) or the Scholarships office (11%). Relatively small numbers of survey respondents found out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance through school (11%), friends (12%), UTS orientation (5%), UTS open days (4%) and family (4%). There is a major difference however, in how students receiving Special Needs Access Grants (SNAGs) found out about equity scholarships and financial assistance. Most (62%) reported finding out from Financial Assistance or Student Services staff, with less than a third (31%) reporting they found out from either the UTS or UAC websites. Reasons for this

are speculative, but it may have something to do with practical difficulties in accessing information online, or personal issues about identifying and 'documenting your disadvantage'. It may also be because students with special needs are targeted separately to school and TAFE leavers. These findings suggest that having personal contact with institutional representatives increases the likelihood of students finding information about equity scholarships and financial assistance on the UTS and UAC websites.

A common theme emerging from the findings is that students often did not find out about the existence of equity scholarships and financial assistance until after they had commenced study, and sometimes up to two years into their courses. Reasons given for this include: despite possibly being told about these services during orientation, the information did not 'stick'; and the information on the website is small 'off to the side' and difficult to find unless specifically looking for it, or requires 'too many clicks' to get there. Once at UTS however, most students reported that the provision of on-campus promotional information about equity scholarships and financial assistance through media such as posters, computer screens, and lectures was 'adequate'. It is important to note that UTS staff members and external representatives consistently stated that students entering university from non-traditional pathways were difficult to reach prior to commencing university study.

Among the important factors impacting on how and even whether students access information before deciding to attend university are misconceptions about equity scholarships that are linked to students identifying as disadvantaged and, to a lesser extent, confusion between scholarships and access schemes. In relation to the first point about identity, interviewees roundly agreed that the problem of 'documenting your disadvantage' in order to apply for equity scholarships was exacerbated by students being unwilling or unable to identify as having a disadvantage. Being unwilling points to how the language surrounding equity scholarships and financial assistance is framed in

terms of deficit and need, rather than opportunity and advantage. Being unable points to the complexity and diversity of scholarships, access schemes and support programs that may contribute to students' capacity to navigate the information that is available. Supporting the former, interviewees noted that not having had family members previously attend university contributed to a kind of cultural barrier and reluctance to 'ask for something on an equity basis' (Maurice). Evidencing the latter, Elise described the UTS EAS scheme in UTS as an 'access scholarship' rather than an access scheme. Albeit a small difference for Elise, this suggests that there are discontinuities in information about equity scholarships between UTS and advisors in the LSES schools with which they are partnered. It is presumed therefore that these discontinuities extend beyond advisors to the students, who often rely on them for information, advice, referral and support. What this discussion clearly highlights is the tension between the need to problematise the potentially stigmatising language of equity scholarships and financial assistance while still enabling the identification of and support for those most in need.

Overall, these findings suggest that the awareness of existing promotional programs needs to be improved in relation to: their existence among potential applicants prior to their applying for university; who is eligible to receive equity scholarships and financial assistance; how they can be promoted through the language of opportunity rather than of deficit; and how equity scholarships are positioned within an holistic institutional 'ecology of services' provided by UTS. The influence of having had someone direct LSES students to the website for information or explain the application process appears to be significant, and will be considered in the conclusion of this report.

In addressing the second question, the analysis shows that scholarship type and amount have little to do with attracting LSES students to apply for university, similarly to Zacharias et al. (2016). The potential receipt of financial assistance influences LSES students' decision to attend UTS to some extent, but it is but

one of a complex of interrelated factors. While most survey respondents (73%) rated access to affordable transport as a very important or important factor influencing their decision to attend UTS, on its own this finding is misleading. Affordable transport is important because 'accommodation in the city is expensive', which means students choose to live at home or in the outer suburbs to reduce the cost of attending university and to be in closer proximity to paid work. This increases the travel time between home, work and university, which then impacts on the time available to attend classes, access support programs such as U:Pass, study and to interact with their peers in formal academic networks and informal social networks. The flow-on effect is the perception that attending university will increase stress, diminish their perceived capacity to succeed academically and reduce their participation in university life and sense of belonging. These complex interrelated factors are addressed later in the discussion in the section on the impact of equity scholarships and financial assistance on LSES students' engagement with study and participation in university life.

In response to the third question, the findings show that only a small number of survey respondents (7%) reported difficulties in accessing information about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. However, as previously noted survey respondents were successful in their applications for scholarships. Of those who did report problems, the biggest challenge was learning about the existence of scholarships early enough to be able to apply before making the decision to attend university. This is a particularly the case for high school students, whose HSC exams coincide with the application periods for university as well as equity scholarships.

Timing of application periods is complicated by the reported lack of direct communication channels or personal contact between universities and suitable support staff and advisors in schools and TAFEs, where positions are often temporary and therefore personal contacts difficult to maintain. The most

significant group of students that were reported as being difficult to reach prior to deciding to attend university were those entering university from non-traditional alternative pathways, many of whom were reported as outside the scope and reach of UTS and UAC promotional networks by interviewees and UTS forum participants.

Beyond the existing promotional strategies used by UTS, suggestions for ways to improve the promotion of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance to LSES students before they consider applying for university involved reaching new networks, for example: disability support networks; sporting and social networks in Western Sydney, and rural and regional areas; university open days and newsletters; existing networks in schools and TAFEs; and through Centrelink contacts, although there were no concrete suggestions for how the latter might be achieved.

On the whole, strategies linking individuals at UTS with individuals in schools and TAFEs were reported as working best. An example would be making personal contact at the beginning of each year to identify the person in the school advisor position for that year, although it was also acknowledged that transience in these positions reduced the likelihood of maintaining the relationship beyond the school year. Concrete artefacts, such as the UTS 'postcard' that identified application processes and timelines simply were welcomed, along with sms alerts sent to those who would support students in their applications at school and TAFE. One of the more exciting ideas is what can be seen as an iterative relational pedagogical practice represented by the HSC tutoring program linking students previously receiving tutoring from UTS students, who, upon entering university and themselves becoming UTS tutors, in turn tutoring students in their old high schools. Such iterative relational pedagogies operationalise a number of important and practical communicative and de-stigmatising functions, while potentially representing an area for expansion in promotion, which will be elaborated in the conclusion.

APPLYING FOR UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

This section addresses the following three research questions:

- How and when did LSES students apply for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- What are the problems students experience in applying for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- How can application processes for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance be improved?



Survey respondents applied for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance through UAC (45%), UAC and UTS (34%) and UTS directly (21%), with only a small number reporting having had problems with the application process (9%). This suggests that application processes are, on the whole, running smoothly. However, this does not account for the experiences of interviewees' who consistently stated that they had had support from friends, high school or TAFE teachers, advisors or counsellors as well as UTS support and faculty staff members. The main problem was that the application process is complex and time consuming, particularly in relation to gathering documents, organising signatures and assembling and uploading documentation.

As will become evident in the next section, the problems experienced by students applying for equity scholarships and financial assistance coincide with those reported about finding information prior to applying for university as well as negotiating university administrative processes. That is, students with the most disadvantage seem to struggle the most in finding out about the existence of, eligibility criteria for and documentation requirements for equity scholarships and financial assistance as they navigate administrative processes when applying for university entry. Students reiterated that finding out information often happened only by chance, or only after having been directed to the UAC or UTS websites by someone they had spoken to. As previously reported, this reflects the interrelated issues of knowing they exist and knowing how to navigate the application process, as well as knowing how to 'document your disadvantage'. As suggested above, it would be helpful for LSES students to have personal interactions with someone who could reduce their administrative hurdles, while enabling them to recognise and respond to the possibility that equity scholarships and financial assistance represent an opportunity for them to access and succeed in higher education.

Students reported receiving hands-on and face-to-face support from a range of people when applying for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, yet this places a burden on their time and also represents an enormous responsibility, as Elise suggests:

Some of our refugee status students aren't going to make it if we throw them into university. So we've then got to say OK, where am I guiding you? You've got to give equal access, but you've got to give that guiding point, I know student A is going to make it with extra help. Student B needs to go to a college and study English for a year and a half, and then maybe they can get in. So yeah, that's a hard thing.

The responsibility for guiding such students often falls on empathetic and supportive staff in the various institutions that offer pathways to university for LSES students. This can be seen as an issue of equity, because whether students receive this support depends on who can help them, what resources are available to these helpers, how well informed they are about application processes, and how well they are able to understand the level of disadvantage particular students have and how this will affect their chances of succeeding at university. As Maurice (TAFE) suggests, this is a function of counselling, rather than careers advice:

They'd have to identify themselves as someone who's eligible for an equity scholarship and what does that mean? Some people don't want to be identified in that way but are quite happy to do it once it's explained to them. Sometimes there's counselling around that, because that's about identity (Maurice, TAFE).

This suggests that whether students apply for equity scholarships and financial assistance is dependent on having someone they trust being sufficiently informed to personally help them with the application process. Linked to this is the issue of the language, complexity and sheer length of the application, and the requirement to download and make appointments

with specialists to document disadvantage, particularly medical issues, which deters some students from even trying:

Depending on the nature of the disadvantage they're seeking a scholarship for, it might be too much (Maurice, TAFE).

I think you get to a certain stage of fatigue researching which university, which courses, which ATARs, where am I likely to go, which preferences am I going to put down, how do I apply. Then comes something about an equity scholarship, so either we're going to get a lot of students throwing in the application saying 'I'm exhausted; I'm not going any further' (Marie, UTS).

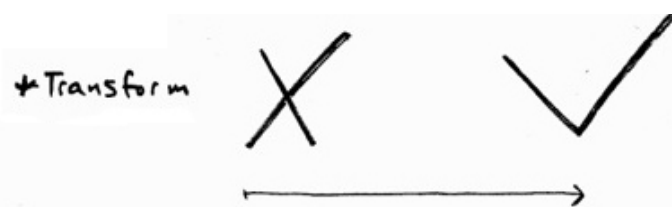
This supports the belief that only a certain demographic of people receive scholarships, and that people 'on the edges' miss out. Therefore, focusing on the attributes of the student during the application process is more important for UTS than focusing on the type of scholarship, mirroring the findings of Zacharias et al. (2016).

Suggestions to address these interrelated problems include better promotion and earlier reminders to potential applicants, including those who list UTS as their first preference, and a more visible presence for equity scholarships and financial assistance on the UTS website. Suggestions were made for better coordination between UAC and UTS, with online and/or smart phone apps to track application progress and notification of offers and acceptance. A concrete suggestion was to provide application exemplars, to model possible ways of documenting disadvantage, which could help to de-stigmatise the process as well as reach students who otherwise might not identify as being eligible for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. Further concrete suggestions included involving UTS Financial Assistance staff in outreach programs to high schools and TAFEs, as Ruby stated:

What it means to take up a debt for HECS, what it means to be living off a Centrelink income, and what sort of expenses you can expect to have if you're not going to live with your parents, or if all your Centrelink money goes to your parents – how much money do you need for you books?

To conclude this section on a positive note, the UTS strategy of opening applications for equity scholarships and financial assistance throughout the year, rather than a one-off provision, was seen as 'fair'.

I like the way UTS tries to spread the scholarship load across the year in ways that make sense. Other universities just do it all main round and that's literally all they do. I don't think that's fair (Bob UAC).



PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF AND BENEFITS TO LSES STUDENT RECIPIENTS OF UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ON ENGAGEMENT WITH STUDY AND PARTICIPATION IN UNIVERSITY LIFE

This section addresses the following five research questions:

- What types of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance did students receive?
- What are the impacts of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- What are the perceived benefits to students of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance?
- What are the challenges for LSES students during their study?
- How can the impact of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance be improved and the benefits to LSES students increased?

To preface the discussion in this section, impact and benefit were used interchangeably in the survey, yet it is important to make a distinction between the terms in order to understand how students perceived the value of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. For the purposes of this discussion, impact refers to a marked (measurable) impact, such as more time to study, less time doing paid work. Benefit refers to a (perceived) advantage ensuing from having to work less and being able to study more, affording students opportunities they otherwise would not have had, such as improved academic skills and grades, increased confidence independence and self-efficacy, and paid employment opportunities during study and upon graduation.

To begin, 74% of survey respondents reported receiving the DAS, with a significant percentage receiving textbook vouchers (18%) or equity grants (17%), and a smaller percentage the Computer Access program (11%), Special Needs Access Grant (4%) and the UTS Housing Rental Subsidy Scholarship (4%). Students also reported using mainstream support services, including Student Services, Special Needs, Counselling and medical services, technology and computers, HELPS and English language programs as well as academic support programs in maths and the library, U:Pass peer programs, study skills programs, UTS Careers. The key finding here is that respondents also access a range of mainstream institutional support services and programs, which supports the effectiveness of the UTS strategy of offering a mix of equity products embedded in wrap-around holistic access and support for LSES students once they are at the university.



Perceived impact as having a marked effect

Most students (99%) reported the receipt of a UTS equity scholarship and financial assistance as having an impact on their lives, with 69% reporting the impact as strong, 24% as moderate, and only 6% as minor. Furthermore, 76% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the amount received was adequate in making a positive impact on their academic performance (8% disagreed), while 57% said it was adequate in making a positive impact on their engagement with social activities at UTS. It is important to note that many respondents are single parents or lived further away from UTS, which reduced their capacity to participate socially.

Unsurprisingly, the more money received, the more likely students were to rate the impact as strong or very strong. Notably however, of the students receiving \$1000 or less, 84% reported this as having a moderate to strong impact, with 97% of students receiving between \$1000 and \$5000 reporting a strong or very strong impact. What is significant here is that regardless of the amount received, students say that equity scholarships and financial assistance have a significant overall impact on university life, academic performance and participation in the UTS social life.

Another significant finding is that 76% of survey respondents rate access to financial assistance as an important or very important factor upon starting out and adjusting to university life. While the findings suggest that 31% of students retrospectively rated the receipt of an equity scholarship and financial assistance as an important factor influencing their decision to attend university, the receipt of an equity scholarship and financial assistance is seen by most students as helping during the transition to university (61%) and their decision to stay on and continue their studies (71%). This was attributed to being better equipped to meet course requirements (91%) and being allowed more time to study (80%), which led to improvement in academic results (75%). Overall, students reported that the receipt of equity

scholarships and financial assistance helped with study related expenses (89%), living expenses (62%), computer-related expenses (52%), and the completion of mandatory course placements or clinicals (13%), while personal impacts included engendering a sense of belonging and increasing feelings of normality.



Benefit as (perceived) advantage

Respondents reported a diverse range of benefits ensuing from the receipt of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. These benefits contribute to offsetting the assumption of a level of equality between all people in a higher education context by disregarding variable access to support, funding, housing and a positive family environment. They include reduced stress and worry (90% agreed/strongly agreed), increased aspirations to succeed in their studies and careers (81% agreed/strongly agreed), increased capacity to juggle work, study and family demands (78% agreed/strongly agreed), more optimism about their futures (75% agreed/strongly agreed), and belief they could compete at university (70% agreed/strongly agreed).

The receipt of an equity scholarship gave Mandy the opportunity to improve her academic skills, which increased her confidence in being able to effectively navigate her course requirements.

For Sue and Ali, it meant achieving distinction grades instead of pass grades from one semester to the next. Financial assistance provided Bonnie with opportunities to fulfill her lifelong dream of studying nursing, attending an academic conference, traveling overseas and observing alternative practices, and improving her mental health to the point where she could work to support her family instead of being on disability benefits. For Anh, paid tutoring work at a city school resulted from an opportunity to participate as a tutor in the UTS HSC tutoring scheme, which he reported 'allows me to have independence'. Other students reported a desire to repay the opportunity they were afforded and 'give back' by supporting students in a similar position. Clearly, the receipt a UTS equity scholarship and financial assistance benefits the student, but benefits also extend beyond individuals to their families, communities and future generations. There is also an institutional benefit, with the perception that 'UTS cares'.



The scholarship and financial assistance provided students with opportunities they would otherwise not have had, for example, joining in other activities, meeting new people, and being able to participate in peer social networks, which had the knock-on effect of both providing access to 'those critical conversations that help them develop their work', and increasing students' sense of belonging and feelings of normality, which Sue described as not wanting 'to be abnormal and being able to go down to the uni pub instead of working 24/7'. This helped them feel that their financial concerns were being treated seriously, and that they have 'a little less disadvantage', thereby 'narrowing the gap' between them and their peers. The reduction of the 'stigma' of disadvantage is a significant benefit to LSES students ensuing from the receipt of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance.

These perceived benefits however, do not entirely outweigh the primarily administrative challenges students reported experiencing, such as not knowing if they will be eligible or how much they will receive from year to year, managing study-related expenses at the beginning of semester because payments do not occur until after the Census date, and difficulties with varying subject requirements or student records, which threaten to disrupt scholarship conditions. These problems negatively impact students by making

it difficult for them to plan ahead, which increases stress. A further, seemingly small point, was made by Mandy, who reported that the Visa card issued as a grant required a signature, rather than a pin, which produced anxiety and embarrassment when faced with presenting it to shop assistants: 'I've had to walk out of shops because they wouldn't let me process it'.

Self-identified challenges for UTS staff overwhelmingly focused on the perceived fragmentation of knowledge, information and communication across the universities faculties and units, which they saw as hindering students' capacity to find out about and apply for equity scholarships and financial assistance and mainstream support programs and schemes. This was complicated by the varying administrative and support processes of each faculty, the small number of support staff in the Financial Assistance and Scholarships Units, and the large casual teaching workforce who were seen as the 'touchstone' for students 'in strife'. Adding to this was the problem of trying to balance students' need for privacy with being able to identify those most in need of support. To illustrate, for Tess the problem is that 'the ones that drop out don't make contact', while for Claire, knowing what to 'put down on paper' for students with for example, mental health issues, which 'can be stigmatizing but it can also have a bearing. Is it going to follow them all the way through the course?'

Further complicating this is the issue of balancing the promotion of equity scholarships and financial assistance to potential students with fluctuating annual funds, aptly expressed by Claire: 'You don't want to be over-advertising for something you can't actually come up with.' The UTS strategy of offering academic support programs for all UTS students was seen as going some way towards dealing with the need for privacy, as Marie explains in relation to the U:Pass program:

We offer it to all students because of the things we're trying not to do is say 'You've been targeted because you're an indUTS student or you're a student with financial disadvantage.' We just say 'Hey, we wanted to know if you know about U:Pass'. We don't tell them why they're getting the email.

As Michelle explains, even the everyday activities of university life can be seen to contribute to 'outing' LSES students:

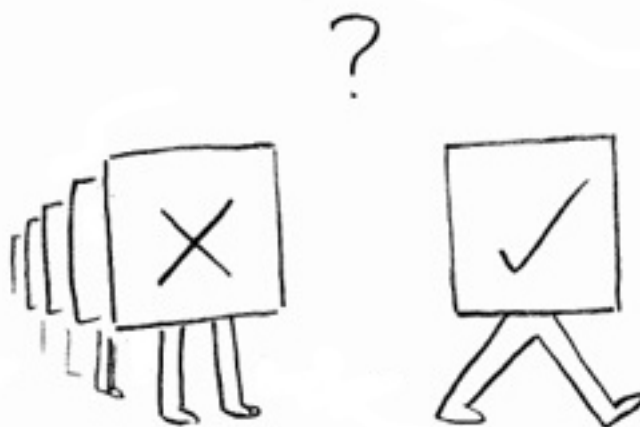
We encourage students to go to the first year orientation camp, but what do you wear to camp? What do you bring? And how do you fit in? What if the solution is much harder for the simple reason that if you organise something which said LSES students, do I really want to come to that? The clothes I wear, the way I walk, someone puts a stamp on my forehead already.

* Architecture of Support



While there is no simple solution, there were some practical suggestions for improving the impact of and increasing benefits to recipients of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance. By far the most common request by students was to extend the receipt of scholarships and financial assistance from first year to subsequent years of their degrees, without having to reapply each year. Concrete suggestions for how to achieve this include the addition of an equity profile on students' MyStudentAdmin page, with links to supporting documents and the issuing of single student licences to access e-textbooks from the library, rather than purchasing hard copies. As may be expected, students also thought increasing the amount received would be useful, as well as earlier notification of receipt, more information provided on the UTS website, and extra financial support to help with mandatory placements, which impact on their availability for part-time work and subsequently reduced income. Further useful suggestions included providing degree-specific checklists for each year's study-related expenses to help students plan better, particularly as some courses require, for example, uniforms or protective clothing.

* Plenty
applicants,
few
scholarships.



UTS staff wanted to see 'more information flow' at the inter-organisational and sectoral levels, as well as between UTS staff and students: 'We need the eyes and ears to refer things to us.' Other suggestions included: academic and casual staff being more aware of available support; providing good transition support to all students to offset the stigma experienced by equity groups; preparing students for casual jobs; providing housing support for rural students; introducing e-books to replace hard copy textbooks; instigating a self-reporting online mechanism to flag potential students in need; and enabling students to authorise financial support staff to access Centrelink documentation and act on their behalf. One impediment is the lack of knowledge about unsuccessful applicants:

If the student has received funding, they're going to do it again because there's an incentive. If they haven't received any funding, and their situation has deteriorated, I don't think there's much incentive there for them to complete it. This is one of the big negatives of UAC, is that if a student's situation changes and they change their answers to certain questions, we don't get any notification that something's changed in the system. So unless a student actually emails us and says 'I've resubmitted and I think you didn't look at my application', we won't actually do anything about it. It's a large quantity of students, and there's no way of us knowing how often a student changes or resubmits something (Luke, UTS).

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section addresses the final set of three research questions, including recommendations for UTS institutional policy:

- What are the key contemporary issues for equity scholarship practitioners?
- How can equity scholarship administration and provision be improved?
- What are the recommendations for institutional policy?



This study confirms previous research which found that equity scholarships and financial assistance have positive impacts on the participation and success of LSES student recipients in higher education. Overall, the receipt of equity scholarships and financial assistance, regardless of the amount received, has a significant impact on students' engagement in university life, academic performance and participation in the UTS social life, and is seen as helping during their transition to university and their decision to stay on and continue their studies.

Academic, material, personal and emotional direct benefits ensue from receipt of equity scholarships and financial assistance to the student, in particular, the reduction of the 'stigma' of disadvantage, but also extend beyond to indirectly benefit their families, communities and future generations. A clear institutional benefit to UTS is the perception among recipients is that 'UTS cares', which in turn contributes to students' aspirations to succeed and to 'give back'.

Emerging from this investigation is the idea that personal interaction between individuals (staff, family, friends, students), information, material artefacts, environments and processes, makes university study a possibility for LSES students (aspiration) while supporting them to help make it a reality (access and success). The next sections outline the key findings and subsequent recommendations in each of the three areas on which the research questions focused: promotion and awareness, application, and impact and benefit of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance.

PROMOTION AND AWARENESS (PERSONAL INTERACTIONS AND CONTACTS)

There are two key findings. The first is that the existing UTS engagement in relational strategies represented by outreach programs and the establishment and maintenance of personal relationships between UTS staff and advisors of potential students in partner institutions is highly effective in helping students access information about equity scholarships and financial assistance. Once aware of their existence, most students report few problems accessing information about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance on the UTS and UAC websites.

The second finding is that there are discontinuities in information about institutional equity scholarships and financial assistance programs and access schemes, who is eligible for these, and the timing of application periods across UTS staff and advisors in the LSES schools and TAFEs with which they are partnered. These discontinuities presumably extend to students, who often rely on their advisors for information, advice, referral and support.

There are two recommendations associated with these findings. The first is that UTS increase the ways in which potential students can personally interact with staff to find out about UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance; and that UTS build personal contacts with student advisors in partner schools and institutions. The second is that UTS use a consistent communication strategy that facilitates personal contact with UTS staff in order to: promote equity scholarships and financial assistance to potential students and their advisors; provide consistent information about the 'ecology of services' at UTS; specify differences between equity scholarships and financial assistance and access schemes; describe who is eligible; and present clear application and notification timelines.

APPLICATION (FACE-TO-FACE SUPPORT)

There are two key findings. The first is that access to equity scholarships and financial assistance in LSES students' decisions to apply for university is complexly linked to access to affordable transport enabling them to travel between work, study and home, and cultural barriers related to perceptions of UTS as an alien place in the city, far removed from their local neighbourhoods. This represents a complex combination of factors that influences students' decisions to apply for university.

The second finding is that once they decide to apply for university and find out about the existence of UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance, the existing strategy of opening applications throughout the academic year is effective in enabling LSES students to apply when they are most in need, particularly if they receive personal support from UTS staff.

The recommendations associated with these findings are twofold. The first is that UTS develops a strategic, coordinated response to the complexity of factors that influence LSES students' decisions to apply for university in the promotion of equity scholarships and financial assistance. The second is that UTS retain the strategy of opening applications for UTS equity scholarships and financial assistance throughout the year, while increasing the provision of face-to-face support when LSES students decide to apply.

PERCEIVED IMPACTS AND BENEFITS ONCE AT UNIVERSITY (HOLISTIC WRAP AROUND SUPPORT)

There are two key findings. The existing strategy of providing a mix of equity scholarship and financial assistance products represents an effective holistic, wrap-around program that supports LSES students in significant and diverse ways beyond the financial. This includes personally and academically enabling LSES students to stay at university, succeed in their studies, engage in formal academic peer networks and informal peer social networks that help them feel 'normal', and access work and career opportunities that they would otherwise not have had.

The second finding is that regardless of the amount of financial assistance received, LSES students report the impacts as significantly reducing stress, decreasing hours in paid work, enabling more time for studying, thereby increasing grades, confidence, motivation and desire to 'give back'.

There are three associated recommendations. The first is that UTS retains the five-tier, multi-factor selection criteria strategy that diversifies LSES students' eligibility for equity scholarships and financial assistance beyond financial hardship alone.

The second is that UTS initiates an internal communication strategy across administrative and academic staff in faculties and units about the range of equity scholarships and financial assistance, eligibility, selection process, possible amounts available, application timelines and processes, and who to contact for more information.

The third is that in its external and internal promotional strategies UTS directly references the range of benefits students reported as the result of having received equity scholarships and financial assistance.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FOR EQUITY PRACTITIONERS

The key finding from the UTS forum is that there is diverse and intense interest in institutional equity scholarships, particularly for LSES students and as well for rural and remote students, and that the forum was timely given the recent policy change to Commonwealth Startup Scholarships. Given the focus on the local context at UTS, it is particularly relevant to note the wide range of participants attending from across Australia, moving the discussions beyond what is relevant to institutions in NSW, such as universities, UAC and schools. Participants were uniformly appreciative of the time and space the forum provided for networking and discussion of issues related to the promotion and administration of equity scholarships across the sector and their impact on LSES students' access to, and participation and success in, higher education in Australia. Moreover, there was unanimous recognition that the equity scholarships area is a complex and shifting space, which requires further investigation at institutional, sectoral and policy levels.

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APPENDIX 1. GLOSSARY AND DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The following terms and abbreviations are used in the commentary:

Access: The headcount of students in their commencing year, expressed as a percentage of the total number of domestic undergraduate students.

All UTS – no Equity Scholarship: All UTS domestic undergraduate students, excluding those in receipt of an Equity Scholarship.

Attrition: The headcount of students who do not return to study after being enrolled in the previous year, expressed as a percentage of total headcount in the previous year.

Coverage: data provided in this report relates to domestic undergraduate students unless otherwise specified.

Disability: Students with a disability [self identified].

Domestic undergraduate student: All domestic students with a permanent home address in Australia enrolled in an undergraduate course [including Honours, Diploma, Advanced Diploma and other award courses] in an institution. Each student is counted only once even if they have a combined degree.

Source: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [2011]. Performance Funding: Technical Guidelines. Issued by Higher Education Group, September 2011.

EFTSL: Equivalent Full Time Student Load is a measure of the study load of a student expressed as a proportion of the study load of a full-time student in an award course.

Eligibility: three criteria, including 2011 SEIFA to calculate LSES; Commonwealth means tested Centrelink payments; individual personal income and financial assessment.

Equity Scholarship: Recipients of Commonwealth, Start-Up and Relocation Scholarships, as well as UTS combined merit and equity-based scholarships and the UTS Diversity Access Scholarships (aka Institutional Equity Scholarship). Equity scholarships are based on

income assessment and not LSES indicator.

Financial support or assistance: refers to Commonwealth government and Centrelink administered assistance and/or assistance from UTS equity-based scholarships and UTS Financial Assistance programs. It can take the form of Centrelink income support and assistance, Commonwealth and Centrelink equity-based scholarships, UTS equity-based scholarships, as well as UTS Student Services Financial Assistance Service programs including: LSES assistance in computer hardware & software; coupon/vouchers for text books and food; grants supporting costs and loss of income during practicums/clinicals/professional experience; grants to support essential living expenses including childcare/emergency health costs/essential living cost debt assistance and UTS Residence rental subsidies.

Indigenous: Undergraduate and postgraduate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students [self-identified]

Ineligibility: May include: Leave of Absence and/or Withdrawal from award course; inability to meet Conditions of Award for scholarships; inability to meet Centrelink income and/or means test requirements; inability to satisfy Centrelink Concessional Study Load requirements as provided in the Guide to Social Security Law and the Commonwealth Acts, Legislative Instruments and Policy Guidelines that provide for Commonwealth student assistance; inability to satisfy UTS Financial Assistance guidelines and assessment of low income.

InpUTS: Students entering UTS through the inpUTS Educational Access Scheme and requiring the ATAR concession.

LSES: Students from low socio-economic status [LSES] backgrounds, based on three criteria at UTS: the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Index of Education and Occupation [IEO] calculated from the 2011 Census data; receipt of Commonwealth allowance/scheme; multiple hardship, such as disability, family circumstances, mental health, etc.

APPENDIX 2. UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, ACCESS AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Participation: The headcount of all students enrolled, expressed as a percentage of the total number of domestic undergraduate students.

Success: The Equivalent Full Time Student Load [EFTSL] passed by students in a given year, calculated as a proportion of all EFTSLs attempted.

The average growth rate (%) is a commonly used measure for growth over multiple periods of time and is calculated using the formula

$$\left[\frac{\text{Final Value}}{\text{Starting Value}} \right]^{\left(\frac{1}{\# \text{ of years}} \right)} - 1$$

Please note: information accurate at the time of writing.

	ALTERNATIVE OR SPECIFIC NAME	WHO/PURPOSE	USE/CONDITIONS	\$ AMOUNT	ELIGIBILITY
Equity scholarship or financial assistance					
Diversity Access Scholarship (DAS)	Institution Equity Scholarship	Assist students from lower socio-economic backgrounds; students with disabilities or other forms of educational disadvantage which make it difficult to achieve their educational goals. UG and PG students recognising diversity, leadership and merit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All courses areas Processed through UAC Opens 5 Aug 15, closes 12 July 16 Unspecified use 	\$500 – \$2,500 per semester Maximum duration 2 semesters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate financial hardship through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Means-tested Commonwealth income support payment Documents demonstrating exceptional financial hardship Australian citizenship/permanent residency and Enrolment/intended enrolment in min. 18cp per semester unless they have medical conditions or sole parenting responsibilities Combined with other educational disadvantage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sole parent Carer Rural/regional disadvantage Long-term medical condition/disability Indigenous Refugee background
Equity grant	For emergencies and essential living expenses	Assist students from lower socio-economic backgrounds; students with disabilities or other forms of educational disadvantage which make it difficult to achieve their educational goals. UG and PG students recognising diversity, leadership and merit. Local students experiencing sustained/temporary financial hardship	Course-related and/or short-term living costs. Not for fee payment	Up to \$500	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Centrelink income or Assessed Low income Current enrolment as a domestic student
	For clinicals, practicums, placements	Local students on low incomes affected by loss of earnings and/or additional costs from unpaid requisite course-related work activities	Rent, transport, childcare, related living expenses		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Currently enrolled in award UG/PG UTS course, and undertaking unpaid practicum/clinicals/project work Not on leave of absence or facing exclusion Australian citizen/permanent resident, or holder of Australian permanent resident humanitarian visa/temporary protection visa International, non-award and In-Search students not eligible
Disability access grant	SNAGS (Special Needs Access Grant)	Students with a temporary/ongoing disability who require financial support for study-related costs	For use on disability-related assistive hardware or software; study tools; mobility costs and medical expenses	Up to \$500	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> For students registered with UTS Special Needs Unit With low income or medically-related high expenses

	ALTERNATIVE OR SPECIFIC NAME	WHO/PURPOSE	USE/CONDITIONS	\$ AMOUNT	ELIGIBILITY
Financial assistance	Equity scholarship or financial assistance				
	Enhancing computer access program (through Student Services Unit)	Aims to improve academic success of local students on low incomes by providing computers, internet access and/or course-specific software requirements.	<p>Conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technologies will be used to support studies at UTS Advise FAS if withdrawing/taking leave Participate in follow-up Student Service surveys Apply once Lost items cannot be replaced. 	New model laptop or desktop computers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Australian citizen/permanent resident Receiving Centrelink benefit or Demonstrate a lower income (bank statements of transaction/savings account for 3 months; payslips with record of hours worked and/or recent tax assessment)
	Book vouchers	Local students seeking assistance with cost of core text books	Core text books		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Students on Centrelink income or Students who provide documentation of financial hardship/proof of continuing low income
	No-interest student loan (soft loan)	Short-term cash flow problems for current students demonstrating genuine need for assistance with university fees or study-related expenses; loan extensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living expenses, bills, rent, medical bills No interest Negotiated repayment details Loans are legally binding <p>Loans can be extended in the case of unforeseen circumstances.</p> <p>Loan default: UTS can block access to computers, withhold results, refuse re-enrolment, or disallow graduation</p>	Up to \$500	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Students currently enrolled at UTS, not on leave or facing exclusion Non-award course students not eligible Provide documents confirming income (statement/payslip)
	UTS housing subsidies	Weekly subsidy for on-campus rent for local students living in UTS housing			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Australian citizen/permanent resident Currently enrolled at UTS Receipt of means and assets-tested Centrelink benefit and/or Financial hardship (provide payslips with hours worked, tax assessment notices) Exceptional circumstances may be considered (unexpected medical costs or personal challenges)

	ALTERNATIVE OR SPECIFIC NAME	WHO/PURPOSE	USE/CONDITIONS	\$ AMOUNT	ELIGIBILITY
UTS Access Schemes					
Educational access scheme (EAS)	inpUTS (scheme coordinated by E&DU, SSU, SAU; applications assessed by UAC)	Assist in gaining access to preferred UTS course if education is disrupted for longer than 6 months or educational achievement has been seriously affected by circumstances beyond their control may be eligible for entry concession of 10 points. Support through financial, personal and academic programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All courses areas Processed through UAC UAC designated dates 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Australian citizens/permanent residents 2. Domestic students on school and non-school pathways 3. Considers family, personal and financial circumstances 4. Automatic consideration for high school students attending an equity funded school listed within UAC EAS school disadvantage list (S01C or S01E) 5. Minimum ATAR of 69 or equivalent 6. UTS listed as first preference 7. Application by designated closing dates 8. Applicants with a previous record of tertiary study 9. Only open to UG degrees
Schools recommendation scheme (SRS)		Considers ATAR, school recommendation, and makes 300 places available for students with minimum 69 ATAR or 80 for law. Support through financial, personal and academic programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All courses areas Processed through UAC UAC designated dates 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Australian year 12 students 2. Attending school nominated within UAC EAS school list (S01C or S01E) or 3. Can demonstrate financial hardship through an EAS application
UTS Special Admissions Scheme – Refugee		Applications can access support through E&DU to apply through standard UAC UG admissions process	<p>Applicants may meet admission requirements by successfully completing external alternative entry assessments (eg. STAT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applications through UAC (processing charges increase after 30 September) 3 day assessment with Jumbunna and faculty, and an interview with faculty and Jumbunna staff. Unsuccessful applications may apply for a scholarship to study through an InSearch pathway or TAFE course 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Australian citizens/permanent residents granted refugee status 2. Meet English language proficiency requirements and academic entry requirements for chosen course <p>Indigenous students. Selection based on previous life, education and work experience, performance in specific testing instruments designed to identify readiness to undertake study, prescribed English language and an interview</p>
Jumbunna Direct Entry Testing and Assessment program		For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who do not complete the HSC or equivalent of schooling with results enabling them to enter degree study. Aims to identify applicants who would have the capacity for degree study given appropriate learning opportunities to supplement the core tuition provided by the degree programs they seek to enrol in. Applicants join Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning for a pre-testing event the day before assessment process begins in July and September in school holidays			

	ALTERNATIVE OR SPECIFIC NAME	WHO/PURPOSE	USE/CONDITIONS	\$ AMOUNT	ELIGIBILITY
UTS Access Schemes					
UNISTART	Jumbunna Indigenous House of Knowledge	For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students wishing to gain entry into a university degree, preparing students with academic literacy and numeracy knowledge to succeed in studies. A no cost student-centred program, UNISTART offers holistic development – culturally, personally and academically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty-based elective subjects that gain you credit towards your degree Can access all UTS support services and benefits Individually supported by Indigenous student peers and Jumbunna staff Individual, group and class tutoring 		Indigenous students 1. Mature aged students with a wealth of life and work experience looking for new opportunities 2. Have completed TAFE or vocational qualifications looking for further study opportunities 3. Have not completed year 12 4. Have completed year 12 but do not have a university entrance score
Jumbunna ASSIST Program		Strengths-based supplementary tuition program for Indigenous students accessing UG study via Jumbunna Direct Entry Program throughout their degree. Based on two key principles: the relational aspect of learning and a personal strengths and attributes (rather than deficit model). Seeks to foster a learning community within Jumbunna Student Services unit, relying on peer-to-peer learning as well as research-active Learning Assistance Lecturers			Indigenous students
Jumbunna	Start up Scholarships	For all Indigenous students completing their first UG degree			
	Tuition free scholarships	For Indigenous students enrolling from Direct Entry program or InSearch programs	InSearch applicants do not need to apply through UAC		
Jumbunna Learning Development Program		Individual or small group tuition provided by Learning Assistance Tutors specialising in Academic Communication or Academic Mathematics			
Year 12 bonus scheme		Awards bonus points to students taking selected HSC subjects relevant to particular courses	Bonus points automatically apply for applicants with a UTS course with award bonus points in UAC preferences; maximum 5 points		1. Applied for a UTS course that awards bonus points 2. ATAR derived in the year of application 3. Completed HSC or IB equivalent

	ALTERNATIVE OR SPECIFIC NAME	WHO/PURPOSE	USE/CONDITIONS	\$ AMOUNT	ELIGIBILITY
UTS Access Schemes					
Guaranteed entry scheme		Entry to specific courses for students meeting guaranteed ATAR cut-off			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Achieves a guaranteed ATAR listing for that course 2. Has the course listed as one of their preferences 3. Doesn't receive an offer to a higher preference
Special consideration	Special admissions – elite athletes and performers scheme	Considers impact of national/state level competition/performance commitments on recent academic performance, providing 5 bonus points to ATAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University application processed through UAC • Must apply through UTS for this scheme • Must satisfy additional application requirements in course descriptions 		1. Minimum 69 ATAR
Merit-based scholarships	Various names		Various conditions	Various	Various
Pathways to university					
UTS:Insearch		Pathway to UTS offering broad choice of HE diploma programs that fast-track students into second year of many degrees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee-Help for eligible students • 16mth, 12mth, 8mth diploma programs for UG degrees for students without required ATAR • Guaranteed entry [successful completion with required GPA] to degrees in business, communication, design and architecture, engineering, IT or science 		
	InSearch Indigenous Scholarship Program	Enables Indigenous students' access to InSearch diploma programs			Indigenous students
Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT)		Students older than 20 on 1 March 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All faculties except law 		
Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC)		Consideration of admission on basis of Tertiary Entrance Score or grades achieved on completion of TAFE Advanced Diploma or Diploma courses			

APPENDIX 3. ONLINE STUDENT SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

STUDENT INVITATION/CONSENT FOR ONLINE SURVEY

How does receiving an equity scholarship and/or financial support impact on your university experience? How can UTS improve its equity scholarship and financial support provision and administration?

My name is Dr. Chris Abbu and I am part of the team in the UTS Equity and Diversity Unit undertaking an evaluation of scholarships and financial support at UTS. The purpose of the evaluation is to improve the experiences of future students by designing better services and better allocation of resources.

As a previous or current scholarship recipient, we are asking you to share your own experience by completing an online survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. You can change your mind at any time and stop completing the survey without consequences. Please note that your answers will remain confidential and you will not be personally identified in any way. Your answers will be de-identified and only be used in an aggregated way. If you agree to be part of this evaluation, please continue with answering the survey questions.

To thank you for your participation in this survey, all respondents will be entered in a draw to win an Apple iPad or one of 10 \$50 Coles/Myers vouchers.

If you have concerns about this evaluation, please feel free to contact me on (02) 9514 1081, or email chris.abbu@uts.edu.au.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with this evaluation, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772 or Research.ethics@uts.edu.au and quote this number: UTS/HREC 2015000437.

Equity scholarship includes Diversity Access Scholarship, any Faculty Equity Scholarship, Centrelink Equity-based Scholarship (e.g., Start-up and Relocation Scholarship), Indigenous Access Scholarship, Indigenous Commonwealth Scholarship, Indigenous Commonwealth Education Cost Scholarship, and Indigenous Enabling Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship.

Financial support includes equity grants such as emergency grants and grants for clinicals, practicums and placements, book vouchers, financial help for acquiring computers, software and equipment, rental subsidy, short-term student loans, financial help in moving/board and living expenses including rent and food and cost of child care, medical and dental expenses.

***1. 1. What type of equity scholarship or financial support have you received from UTS/Centrelink? Please tick all those you have received.**

- ☐ Diversity Access Scholarship
- ☐ Start-up Scholarship
- ☐ Relocation Scholarship
- ☐ UTS Housing Rental Subsidy Scholarship
- ☐ Indigenous Access Scholarship
- ☐ Indigenous Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship
- ☐ Indigenous Commonwealth Education Cost Scholarship
- ☐ Indigenous Enabling Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship
- ☐ Equity grants (e.g., emergency grants, grants for clinicals, practicums and placements)
- ☐ Disability Access Grants
- ☐ Grants for Practicums and Clinicals
- ☐ Text book vouchers
- ☐ UTS Computer Access Program

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

☐ Other type of scholarship or financial support (please specify)

***2. How have the equity scholarship and/or financial support helped you with your expenses? Tick as many as applicable to you.**

- ☐ Study related expenses (e.g., course equipment/course excursions)
- ☐ Computer access/software/hardware/technologies
- ☐ Book vouchers
- ☐ Living expenses including rent, food and childcare
- ☐ Bond deposit for accommodation/moving expenses (e.g., furniture/household equipment, Telco and utilities)
- ☐ Vehicle expenses
- ☐ Medical/dental expenses
- ☐ Costs and/or loss of income resulting from course-related clinicals/practicals
- ☐ Emergency expenses including legal costs
- ☐ Allowing me to be more involved with UTS sporting, social and community activities
- ☐ Other (please specify)

***3. Approximately, how much in total have you received from the equity scholarship/financial support program over the course of your study? Please estimate total amount.**

\$

***4. How many years have you been receiving equity scholarship and/or financial support?**

Number of years:

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

*5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The equity scholarship/financial support allowed me to give more time and focus to study.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The equity scholarship/financial support led to an improvement in my academic achievement/skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The equity scholarship/financial support helped me stay at UTS instead of not continuing with my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The equity scholarship/financial support have meant that I was better equipped to meet my course requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The equity scholarship/financial support have provided me with opportunities that otherwise I would not have had (e.g., join course excursions, transport expenses to group meetings, participating in social activities related to studies).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The amount of equity scholarship/financial support I/was allocate to make a positive impact on my studies/academic performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The amount of equity scholarship/financial support I/was adequate to make a positive impact on my engagement with social activities in the university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would not have decided to attend or continue university without the equity scholarship/financial support.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

***6. Thinking about your university experience, to what extent do you feel that receiving an equity scholarship/financial support has impacted on your university life?**

Please choose one below.

- ☐ Very strong impact
- ☐ Strong impact
- ☐ Moderate impact
- ☐ Minor impact
- ☐ No impact

7. Please tell us more how the equity scholarship/financial support impacted on you.

***8. Thinking of the benefits you've gained from the equity scholarship and/or financial support, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly agree
It reduced my stress and worry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It helped me in juggling competing life/study demands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It gave me a network of staff who provided information and advice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not have to work in paid employment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It decreased the number of hours I had to work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It improved my experience of being a student (e.g., time to join clubs, social activities, sports).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It increased self-confidence that I can complete university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It made me aspire more to succeed in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It made me more optimistic about my future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Are there other benefits that you would like to add? Please specify.

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

***10. How did you find out about the equity scholarship and/or financial support?**

Please tick all that are applicable to you.

- ☐ UTS website
- ☐ UAC website
- ☐ Financial Assistance/Student Services
- ☐ UTS Scholarships Office
- ☐ UTS Orientation
- ☐ UTS Open Days
- ☐ Family/relatives
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ School
- ☐ Other UTS advertising and promotion (please specify)

***11. Did you apply for the equity scholarship/financial support directly through (please tick choice)**

- ☐ UTS
- ☐ UAC
- ☐ UTS and UAC

***12. Did you encounter problems in finding information about the equity scholarship/financial support?**

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (please specify)

***13. In your opinion, where else should UTS be promoting the information about equity scholarships and financial support?**

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

***14. Did you encounter any problem when you applied for the equity scholarship/financial support?**

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (please specify)

***15. Please specify as to whether you agree or disagree with the statements below when applying for an equity scholarship/financial support.**

	Applying through UTS	Applying through UAC
The process of applying was simple and did not overwhelm me.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
The staff provided helpful advice and information.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
I found the requirements for application easy to follow and to accomplish.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
The processing time was reasonable and I did not have to wait for a long time to know the outcome of my application.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Overall, I was satisfied with the provision of scholarship/financial support.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

***16. Are there other types of scholarships or financial support programs that would have helped you with your studies?**

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (please specify)

17. Do you have any suggestion on how UTS can improve the application process for scholarships/financial support? Please specify.

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

18. Do you have other comments regarding accessing UTS Equity Scholarship/financial support? Please specify.

***19. Looking back when you were deciding to attend university, which factors influenced your decision?**

	Very important	Important	Fairly important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant
Encouragement/support from close friends/peers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support/encouragement from family/relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeing friends progress in university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Success in other or previous studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recommendation of teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Major achievement (e.g., sports, music)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of paid employment during study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Easy access to affordable transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to affordable housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to scholarship/financial support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify factor and its degree of importance to you)

***20. When you first attended university (i.e., in your first semester), did you seek assistance or support services from UTS?**

☐ No

☐ Yes (please specify type of assistance sought)

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

***21. Looking back, which factors helped you when you were starting out and adjusting to university life?**

	Very important	Important	Fairly important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant
Encouragement from close friends/peers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support/encouragement from family/relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to support services from UTS (e.g., counselling, chaplaincy services, medical and health services, equity and diversity support services, student centres)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participation in social activities - student associations, clubs, sports, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participation in university orientation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic support (e.g., lecturers and tutors, HELPS, U-PASS)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to scholarship and/or financial support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify factor and its degree of importance to you)

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

*22. Looking back, what has influenced you most in deciding to stay on and continue your studies at UTS?

	Very important	Important	Fairly important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant
Support and encouragement from close friends and peers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support and encouragement from family/relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participation in UTS social activities: associations, clubs, sports, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to counselling and other student support services from UTS (e.g., Chaplaincy support, equity and diversity support services, medical and health support services and student centres)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to teaching and learning support (e.g., HELPS, U-PASS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouragement from academic staff (e.g., lecturer, tutor)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continuing access to scholarship and/or financial support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Current paid employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal aspiration/motivation to complete university degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Love of learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify and its degree of importance to you)

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

***23. Before we finish, we have a few quick questions about you. This is just used to make sure we have a good cross section of students who are recipients of an equity scholarship and/or financial support. Your answers will not be used to identify you in any way.**

Are you currently

- ☐ Working full-time in paid employment
- ☐ Working part-time in paid employment
- ☐ Looking for paid work
- ☐ Not working

***24. If working, how many hours do you work each week? Please specify number of hours per week.**

***25. Please indicate if you are receiving one or more of the following Centrelink benefits:**

- ☐ Aestudy
- ☐ Abstudy
- ☐ Youth Allowance
- ☐ Start-up /Relocation Allowance
- ☐ Other (please specify)

***26. Has anyone in your immediate family been to university? Please select all that apply.**

- ☐ Yes, one parent
- ☐ Yes, both parents
- ☐ Yes, one sibling
- ☐ Yes, more than 1 sibling
- ☐ None

***27. What was your age last birthday?**

Equity scholarship survey: Maximising the capacity for equity

***28. Are you**

- ☐ Of Aboriginal origin or of Torres Strait Islander origin
- ☐ None of the above

***29. What is your course?**

***30. What is your year level?**

***31. What is your post code?**

32. Close: Please tell us your story!

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience as a student at UTS and a recipient of an equity scholarship and/or financial support?

***33. Is it alright to contact you for a face to face interview to tell us more of your story?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If YES, please provide us with your contact details(email address):

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

You are eligible for a draw to win 1 Apple IPAD and 10 \$50 Coles/Myers Vouchers!

APPENDIX 4. QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Information sheet for key informants



Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low socio-economic backgrounds and success (UTS approval number)

INFORMATION SHEET

WHO ARE DOING THE RESEARCH?

We, Dr. Tracy Barber and Dr. Teena Clarke, staff members in the Equity and Diversity Unit at UTS are undertaking this research.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

We are conducting an evaluation of the experience of students who are in receipt of a scholarship. The purpose of this evaluation is to improve our understanding of the impact of scholarship on the student university experience so that we can improve this experience for future students by designing better support and resources, and better administration of scholarships.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

We will ask you to participate in a confidential interview which will be audio recorded. Your participation in the interview will not affect your job or role in any way.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

The interview will take up approximately 30 minutes of your time.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

We are interested in your experience because you are a key informant who is involved with scholarship provision and administration.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

You don't have to say yes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

Nothing. We will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this evaluation again.

IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind at any time and you don't have to say why. We will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this evaluation again.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the evaluation that you think we can help you with, please feel free to contact us on (02) 9514 1081, or email teena.clarke@uts.edu.au or tracy.barber@uts.edu.au.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with this evaluation, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772, and quote this number (UTS HREC REF NO. 2015000437).



Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low SES backgrounds (UTS approval number)

KEY INFORMANT CONSENT FORM

I _____ (participant's name) agree to participate in the evaluation project 'Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low SES backgrounds' (UTS approval number) being conducted by Dr. Tracy Barber and Dr. Teena Clarke, Equity and Diversity Unit, UTS, with contact details tracy.barber@uts.edu.au and teena.clarke@uts.edu.au, (02) 9514 1081.

I understand that the purpose of this evaluation is to improve the evaluation team's understanding of the experience of students who are scholarship recipients in order to improve scholarship provision and administration and to enhance the student experience.

I understand that I have been asked to participate in this evaluation because I am a key informant with a role in supporting students who are recipients of a scholarship and that my participation will include a 30-minute interview, which will be audio recorded.

I am aware that I can contact Dr. Tracy Barber or Dr. Teena Clarke if I have any concerns about the evaluation. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this evaluation at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that the data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

Signature (participant)

____/____/____

Signature (Dr. Tracy Barber/Dr. Teena Clarke)

____/____/____

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: +61 2 9514 9772 Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.



Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low socio-economic backgrounds and success UTS HREC REF NO. 2015000437

INFORMATION SHEET

WHO ARE DOING THE RESEARCH?

We, Dr. Tracy Barber and Dr. Teena Clarke, staff members in the Equity and Diversity Unit at UTS are undertaking this research.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

We are conducting an evaluation of the experience of students who are in receipt of a scholarship. The purpose of this evaluation is to improve our understanding of the impact of scholarship on the student university experience so that we can improve this experience for future students by designing better support and resources, and better administration of scholarships.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

We will ask you to participate in a confidential interview which will be audio recorded. Your participation in this interview will not affect your academic progress in any way.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

The interview will take up approximately 30 – 45 minutes of your time.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

We are interested in your experience because you are a student who is a recipient of a scholarship.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

You don't have to say yes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

Nothing. We will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this evaluation again.

IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind at any time and you don't have to say why. We will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this evaluation again.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the evaluation that you think we can help you with, please feel free to contact us on (02) 9514 1081, or email teena.clarke@uts.edu.au or tracy.barber@uts.edu.au.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with this evaluation, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on (02) 9514 9772, and quote this number UTS HREC REF NO. 2015000437).



Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low SES backgrounds

UTS HREC REF NO. 20LS000437

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

I _____ (participant's name) agree to participate in the evaluation project 'Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low SES backgrounds' (UTS approval number) being conducted by Dr. Tracy Barber and Dr. Teena Clarke of the Equity and Diversity Unit, UTS, with contact details: tracy.barber@uts.edu.au and teena.clarke@uts.edu.au, [02] 9514 1081.

I understand that the purpose of this evaluation is to improve the evaluation team's understanding of the experience of students who are scholarship recipients in order to improve scholarship provision and administration and to enhance the student experience.

I understand that I have been asked to participate in this evaluation because I am a student who is a recipient of a scholarship and that my participation will include a 30-minute interview, which will be audio recorded.

I am aware that I can contact Dr. Tracy Barber or Dr. Teena Clarke if I have any concerns about the evaluation. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this evaluation at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason. I understand that participation will also not affect my academic progress in any way or affect any other academic work I carry out at UTS.

I agree that the data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

Signature (participant) _____

Signature (Dr. Tracy Barber/Dr. Teena Clarke) _____

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: +61 2 9514 9772 Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.



Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low socio-economic backgrounds and success (UTS approval number)

INFORMATION SHEET

WHO ARE DOING THE RESEARCH?

We, Dr. Tracy Barber and Dr. Teena Clerke, staff members in the Equity and Diversity Unit at UTS are undertaking this research.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

We are conducting an evaluation of the experience of students who are in receipt of a scholarship. The purpose of this evaluation is to improve our understanding of the impact of scholarship on the student university experience so that we can improve this experience for future students by designing better support and resources, and better administration of scholarships.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

We will ask you to participate in a confidential interview which will be audio recorded. Your participation in the interview will not affect your job or role in any way.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

The interview will take up approximately 30 – 50 minutes of your time.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

We are interested in your experience because you are a staff member who is involved with scholarship provision and administration.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

You don't have to say yes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

Nothing. We will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this evaluation again.

IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind at any time and you don't have to say why. We will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this evaluation again.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the evaluation that you think we can help you with, please feel free to contact us on [02] 9514 1081, or email teena.clerke@uts.edu.au or tracy.barber@uts.edu.au.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with this evaluation, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772, and quote UTS HREC REF NO. 20L5000437.

STAFF CONSENT FORM

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: +61 2 9514 9772 Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

equity scholarships

FORUM 2016

CURRENT ISSUES

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The forum took place between 9am and 3pm at the Aerial Function Centre at UTS on Monday 29 February 2016. Attendance was no-cost, with invitations distributed to members of the university and school networks of the UTS Equity and Diversity Unit, with more than one hundred registrations. On the day, 85 people from 36 institutions participated, including departments in the Commonwealth and State governments, universities in NSW, ACT, Queensland, Victoria and the Northern Territory, high schools in the Sydney metropolitan area and remote parts of NSW, and representatives from the Universities Admissions Centre, TAFE, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), and The Smith Family.

Table 16: 36 institutions:

25	Universities from NSW, ACT, Queensland, Victoria and Northern Territory
5	NSW high schools
2	Government departments
1	UAC
1	NCSEHE
1	NSW TAFE college
1	The Smith Family

APPENDIX 5. UTS EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS FORUM 2016: CURRENT ISSUES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Table 17: 85 Participants

	INSTITUTION	NO
1	UTS: 21 staff, 5 students	27
2	Macquarie University	3
3	University of Newcastle	4
4	University of NSW	4
5	Monash University	3
6	Western Sydney University	3
7	Charles Darwin University	2
8	Deakin University	2
9	Federation University	2
10	Queensland University of Technology	2
11	Swinburne University of Technology	2
12	University of Sydney	2
13	Australian Catholic University	1
14	Central Queensland University	1
15	Charles Sturt University	1
16	James Cook University	1
17	RMIT	1
18	Southern Cross University	1
19	University of Canberra	1
20	University of Melbourne	1
21	University of Queensland	1
22	University of Southern Queensland	1
23	University of the Sunshine Coast	1
24	University of Wollongong	1
25	Victoria University	1
26	TAFE	2
27	Smith Family	2
28	UAC	2
29	NCSEHE	1
30	NSW Department of Education	1
31	Commonwealth Department of Education and training	1
32	Strathfield High	1
33	Barham High	1
34	Canley Vale High	1
35	Lurnea High	1
36	Fairvale High	1
	Facilitator and presenter	2

UTS FORUM FORMAT

The forum was opened by the Director of the UTS Equity and Diversity Unit, Tracie Conroy, followed by acknowledgement of country by Aunty Joan Tranter, and a research endorsement from UTS Vice Chancellor, Attila Brungs. Mikasa Donald, a first year sport medicine student, told her story.

The forum was organised into three sessions: first, outcomes from three recent Australian research studies were presented, followed by a presentation on the impact of changes in Commonwealth start up scholarships. Ten buzz groups discussed six key themes emerging from preliminary analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from the UTS Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low socio-economic status (LSES) backgrounds research project. After lunch, a seven-member panel discussion facilitated by Monica Attard discussed future directions for equity scholarship provision in Australian universities. A brief overview of each session follows.

Research presentations

Presentations of recent research in Australian universities were conducted by four groups.

Moving beyond 'acts of faith': effective scholarships for equity students

Dr Nadine Zacharias and Dr Juliana Ryan presented a summary of the research reported in on behalf of representatives from Deakin University, the University of Sydney and Queensland University of Technology (Zacharias et al. 2016). The purpose of the research was to inform the future design of equity scholarship programs at institutional and sectoral levels in response to the lack of evidence on effectiveness and good practice in equity scholarships and contextualised within proposed higher education reform, including fee deregulation, the Commonwealth scholarships program and the recent change in the

status of the Commonwealth start up scholarship to a loan. Institutional case studies were generated by the three participating universities, comprising the triangulation of quantitative data snapshots of 2013 institutional data on equity scholarship recipients' retention and success, and qualitative data collected from a 2013 impact survey of selected scholarship recipients.

The overall research findings are that equity scholarships are effective in retaining students across universities, groups and products; while success rates vary, scholarships reduce stress and boost morale; differences in scholarship value, duration and selection criteria matter; selection criteria, especially ATAR/prior academic achievement, are an important variable in the relationship between scholarship type and student outcomes; scholarships help overcome financial disadvantage but not life complexity; scholarship value goes beyond financial, and increases time for study, psychological lift, realisation of potential; and targeted scholarships are strategic support mechanisms, not 'acts of faith'.

Recommendations for practitioners were to design simple scholarship programs with high volume products for effective support, process and efficiency, and multi-factor assessment for eligibility is better than single-factor. Recommendations for policy-makers are that institutional support should be part of a holistic system to attract, retain and graduate equity students; consistent, predictable and appropriate Commonwealth income support is required; and financial support should be grant-based, not loans. Zacharias and Ryan identified further research in longitudinal trends, statistical modelling of relationships between scholarships and retention and success, relationship between recipient characteristics and student outcomes, and the recruitment effect of equity scholarships.

A value beyond money? Assessing the impact of equity scholarships: from access to success.

Brian Hurd presented a summary of findings from Reed and Hurd's (2014) evaluation of a scholarship program for students from disadvantaged backgrounds at Macquarie University. Analysis of qualitative interview data and retention rates highlight the substantial contribution the program has made to positive student outcomes. Key themes of resources, belonging, security, independence, motivation, engagement and confidence, which collectively describe a broad, rich notion of student success to enhanced academic outcomes and personal growth. The overall findings suggest that financial support schemes can be understood as key institutional mechanisms for encouraging and supporting the successful participation of disadvantaged students in higher education, rather than merely tools for incentivising enrolment. Hurd identified future plans to survey and interview Indigenous scholarship recipients, establish a scholarship reference group design and develop future programs, and survey graduate equity scholarship recipients.

Maximising the capacity for equity scholarships to improve participation and success in higher education by people from low socio-economic status (LSES) backgrounds

Dr Teena Clerke and Catherine Raffaele presented preliminary analysis of quantitative survey and qualitative interview research data from the project, about the administration, provision and impact of equity scholarships and financial assistance on LSES students as they make decisions about, apply for and progress through university, which is elaborated in this report.

Equity scholarships and public policy

Mary Kelly outlined the case for continued federal government support of Commonwealth scholarships, arguing they are an integral part of student income support with institutional equity scholarships a small top-up. She claims that the recent conversion of the start up scholarship to a loan and reduced scope for relocation scholarships will result in low-income students acquiring more debt or having to work longer hours. Kelly claimed such policy changes blur the line between what should be called a grant (income support) and what should be called a loan (tuition fees), and called for the sector to influence government policy so that remaining Commonwealth scholarships are retained.

Buzz group discussions

Each buzz group comprised between eight to ten self-selected participants, who recorded discussion notes on iPads, the outcomes of which were collated and displayed during lunch for forum participants to peruse. The discussions were guided by a quote from the student interviews, and a series of relevant questions, as follows:

1. 'It's a challenge sometimes to document your disadvantage': targeting, application and selection: scholarship program administration. How to make it easy for students to apply? What is the best way to encourage applications in the pre-tertiary space? What selection criteria, or combination of criteria, lead to the best targeting? How are students prioritised?
2. 'It doesn't take much to disqualify you': eligibility for equity scholarships and financial support. Who gets equity/equity-merit scholarships and financial support, and who doesn't? Who is targeted and why? Who misses out and why? Where are the grey areas? Outcomes? How to improve students' access to support? 'We have to be tricky fish all the time': navigating rules to provide financial support to non-Centrelink students

3. 'It's hard to know whether all students who need support are getting it': flows and gaps in information and support. Integration of scholarships with other supports? Building information and communication resources: linking staff in faculties and administrative unit; reaching students who need support when you don't know who they are
4. 'I rarely meet a student who doesn't work': a juggling act – student performance and balancing study, work and financial support. Centrelink income, paid work and scholarship/financial support and how this impacts on university study/personal life and future career
5. '\$500 a semester. Does that help students?' Timing and distribution of institutional equity funding. Should funding be spread wide or larger amounts invested in fewer students? Annual or monthly funding rounds? What is the impact on students' experiences at university and outcomes?
6. 'Housing in the city is expensive': how does housing impact on for rural, remote and LSES background students' experience of university? What are the impacts on student outcomes of housing and accommodation issues? Which programs address housing/accommodation while studying in the city?

Panel discussion

The discussion was facilitated by Monica Attard, with panel members in alphabetical order: Nick Cooper (UTS Financial Support Services), Roger Deutscher (University of Melbourne), Verity Firth (UTS Social Justice, Director), Maree Graham (Jumbunna, UTS Indigenous House of Learning), Brian Hurd (Macquarie University) and Mary Kelly (QUT). This was a lively discussion, informed by the previous research presentations and the collective knowledge and expertise on the panel and in the audience.

Illustrations and forum video

Reg Lynch, a well-known political cartoonist, was invited to capture key forum themes in a series of illustrations. These illustrations both support and illustrate the analysis in this report. A video of the research presentations at the forum and this report is available on the UTS Equity and Diversity Unit website.

Participant evaluation and feedback

23 of the 85 participants (28%) completed the evaluation form. The results are as follows.

Table 18. What were the highlights of the forum for you?

Research presentations	Calibre and range of research presentations particularly informative, integrating qualitative and quantitative data and institutional methodology	13
Networking	Learning from knowledgeable and experienced people in the field, different perspectives and institutions, understanding how others do their business	9
Buzz group discussions	Great format, very exciting, good opportunity for brainstorming	5
Student stories	Hearing student stories and hearing impact of scholarships on their lives	4
Panel discussions	Informative discussion, expert panel and facilitator	4
Content	First opportunity to benchmark access scholarships; global issues context invaluable, raised a lot of issues and good reflection on our work practice, insights on applicant categories	4

In terms of the presentation of research outcomes and contextual information, participants commented that it was the first opportunity they had to benchmark access scholarships. They found the presentation of research data informative, and particularly welcomed the opportunity for networking, hearing a range of views, and being able to understand how other institutions and people do their business. Participants also stated that they felt the presentation of issues relevant in a global context were invaluable, that many important issues were raised, and that the forum was a good reflection on the work practices of equity professionals.

Many participants commented that it was important to listen to students' stories and hear the impact of scholarships and support programs on their lives in terms of increased confidence and the easing of hardship. They also found the buzz group discussions exciting, the panel session informative, and gained insights into applicant categories, institutional methodologies and different perspectives.

Table 19. Is there anything you would have liked included discussed but felt was missing from the forum?

No	Well structured, well done, excellent	12
Policy	No Commonwealth government response	3
Application/selection	More information on selection of recipients and systems; it would have been good to have an application form at the forum; cost-benefits of processing small/large grants	3
Student perspective	Reasons for unsuccessful LSES students, outcomes and success rate; more student interaction and stories; focus on rural, disability and Indigenous	3
Buzz group outcomes	More time to reflect, group feedback and discussion	2
Panel	Discussion was flat	1
Outcomes	Where to from here?	1

Overall, the forum format was considered to be excellent, covering student perspectives, historical background, current research and audience participation and involvement. Many participants said they felt 'nothing was missing'. One commented that it would have been good to have an equity scholarship application form at the forum to assist with discussions, and some commented that they would have liked more time to reflect on other buzz group discussion outcomes and present their feedback to the whole group.

A small number of participants would have liked to have more information on equity scholarship and financial assistance recipients, the institutional selection processes and systems, and a cost-benefit evaluation of the administration and processing of a large number of small scholarships versus a small number of larger scholarships. Some participants wanted to institutions to follow up on students who were unsuccessful in their applications, and what their outcome or success rate was nonetheless. One participant wanted to hear more student stories, and specifically, those from rural and remote communities, students with disabilities and Indigenous students.

Finally, there was an overwhelming call from participants to hear the Commonwealth government response to the changed policy agenda.

