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# Ethnic minorities and equity strategies in tertiary education

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# Ethnic minorities and equity strategies in tertiary education

## **Abstract**

This report examines the access and equity strategies in tertiary education affecting people of Non English Speaking Background (hereafter described as NESB). Our interest in this question grew out of a number of experiences — both Helen Meekosha and Andrew Jakubowicz had been involved in ethnic issues for at least ten years. We had carried out consultancy research projects for governments examining access and equity programs [see Jakubowicz and Mitchell 1982, Meekosha et al. 1987] in which we had become increasingly aware that the language of equitable access had been perfected by government while the practice was far removed from it.

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UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG, AUSTRALIA

Paper No.16

**Ethnic Minorities  
and Equity Strategies  
in Tertiary Education.**

**MEEKOSHA/JAKUBOWICZ/RICE**

Working Papers on Multiculturalism No.16

# Ethnic Minorities and Equity Strategies in Tertiary Education

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University of Technology, Sydney

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# 1. PREFACE

1.1 This report examines the access and equity strategies in tertiary education affecting people of Non English Speaking Background (hereafter described as NESB). Our interest in this question grew out of a number of experiences — both Helen Meekosha and Andrew Jakubowicz had been involved in ethnic issues for at least ten years. We had carried out consultancy research projects for governments examining access and equity programs [see Jakubowicz and Mitchell 1982, Meekosha et al. 1987] in which we had become increasingly aware that the language of equitable access had been perfected by government while the practice was far removed from it.

In more recent times we had both been actively involved in developing policies concerning equity in our own institutions — Helen as the academic staff member of the Disability Sub Committee of the Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee at the University of New South Wales, and Andrew as Chair of the Aboriginal Education Centre and the Access and Support Committee for Students with Special Needs at the University of Technology, Sydney. Esther Rice, who has been employed as the research assistant on this project, had been involved as a student activist at the University of New South Wales, contributing regularly to the student press on equity issues.

In our own professional practice we were being called on to both initiate and respond to programs of equity, especially those generated by the Commonwealth government. In this context we received support from University research grants to examine the dynamics of policy formation and implementation in Universities with regard to students of non English speaking background and students with disabilities. We then approached the Office of Multicultural Affairs for support to extend the work on students of non English speaking background. This report to the Office draws on that wider research project.

1.2 The description of immigrants and ethnic minorities as NESB is derived from the broader Social Justice strategy of the Commonwealth government. The strategy

utilises the notion of 'target groups', the members of which are said to share similar structural disadvantages. Yet the grouping encompassed by NESB is not easy to define, and commonality of the disadvantages suffered by members of the group are not at all self-evident. In opening then we wish to identify the concept of NESB as a central problem both in the conceptualisation of the dimensions of ethnic disadvantage, and in the development of effective policies to remedy the situation. As we will demonstrate, this terminological problem bedevils University attempts to articulate a clear set of programs to overcome disadvantage and ensure equity. The NESB label can imply that the sole educational issue relates to the English language capacity of the student.

1.3 Students from Non English Speaking Backgrounds do not necessarily suffer disadvantage in access to education — their social class background plays an important role as does the educational level of their parents and family aspirations in relation to education. So too, the communal values associated with gender and education may also affect their opportunities and aspirations. Within universities their participation and success in education may be affected by these factors in complex ways.

Some tertiary institutions may appear to have better representation of students from NESB, than of English speaking background (ESB). Some groups may appear over-represented (e.g. Eastern European, Asian) but this disguises the under-representation of others (e.g. Italians, Turks, Yugoslavs, Lebanese) [Anderson and Vervoorn 1983]. A number of studies demonstrate that social class factors and factors which affect some ethnic communities in significantly different ways from others may mean that some ethnic communities or parts of ethnic communities do not seem to have gained adequate access to tertiary education [see Holton and Salagaras 1988]. Aggregated information can be misleading about the issues and therefore about the appropriate responses. Gender, class and disability distinctions within ethnic communities can and do affect access and participation opportunities. Conversely, students of English Speaking Background (ESB) with working class origins may be more disadvantaged in higher education than some NESB students.

1.4 In order to address the tertiary education issues involved, it is important to distinguish six different immigrant and ethnic experiences in relation to access and success:

- i) locally resident school leavers with low socio-economic familial environments, whose parents had low educational qualifications;
- ii) locally resident newly arrived refugees, particularly Cambodians, Vietnamese, Timorese, Central and South Americans, sometimes complicated by broken educational histories;
- iii) locally resident school leavers from more affluent family backgrounds, where English may be the language of domestic communication, and whose parents may be tertiary educated;
- iv) newly arrived immigrants whose qualifications are not recognised;
- v) newly arrived immigrants with qualifications seeking retraining or further education;
- vi) full fee paying overseas students, both undergraduate and graduate.

These categories may be confused with each other (e.g. some universities claim that NESB students are over-represented in their student population, even though this may mean high numbers of category iii or vi, and very few category i or ii students. Programs geared to category vi may be claimed as responses to the needs of category i. In some disciplines tensions emerge over the educational responses to the presence of category iv or v students).

1.5 Issues of access and equity for ethnic minorities do not necessarily lead to questions of curriculum. However the government's Multiculturalism for all Australians policy with its National Agenda implies that access concerns be addressed in conjunction with curriculum and related questions of education in and for a multicultural society.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Following the release of the White Paper on Higher Education by Minister Dawkins in 1988, the sponsorship of Higher Education Equity programmes by the Commonwealth's Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), the demands by some states for Ethnic Affairs Policy statements which include student access and equity issues, and the recent equity goals circulated by the Commonwealth as *A Fair Chance for All*, an academic planning and funding environment is emerging in which equity issues have moved from the periphery of management concern towards the middle ground (if not yet the centre). In this context of rapid change a careful assessment of the dynamics of planning and implementation is of great importance.

### 2.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This research report explores the conditions under which effective equity strategies affecting Non English Speaking Background students are developed, implemented and sustained. The research examined the processes and influences through which the current Equity Profiles of a sample of Universities in relation to NESB students have emerged. These profiles, submitted for the first time in 1990 for the 1991 academic year, are an essential feature of Educational Profile applications to DEET, and reflect the current state of understanding and planning by the universities.

Social Work Departments within the tertiary sector are of particular importance for they are the primary professional training arena where equity issues should be most apparent. Thus successes in Social Work Departments may signal good practice that can be extended elsewhere, while lack of progress in these Departments provides an insight into structural problems of Access and Equity in Higher Education which would have relevance in other areas of universities.

The following variables were taken into account:

- a) high NESB/low NESB populations
- b) strong, non-existent or changing state government policies on equity for ethnic groups
- c) varying proportions of full-fee paying overseas students.

d) newly established Unified system institutions and old universities.

A typology of institutional responses was developed which enabled us to define the formal and informal processes by which universities arrive at their policies and implement them. The methodology adopted for gathering the data consisted of qualitative in-depth individual and group interviews and document examination.

We examined universities in Queensland (University of Queensland), NSW (University of NSW, Sydney University, University of Western Sydney<sup>1</sup>) and Victoria (Melbourne, La Trobe) as case studies. An examination of documentary material, interviews and round table discussions with senior academics and administrators, key service delivery staff from library, language support, counselling, study skills etc., student representatives and individual student groups provided key information. Ethnic community based service delivery agencies with links to the universities and Departments concerned were also contacted.

We interviewed state and federal government personnel involved with the policy area. An interest in the experience of people with disabilities has enabled us to make specific reference to the situation affecting some NESB people with disabilities in the higher education system.

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed analysis was not carried out on the University of Western Sydney, as its recent formation made a comprehensive analysis at this stage quite difficult.

### 3. THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

**3.1** Current university equity strategies have been the result of both initiatives within universities, and institutional responses to Federal and State government policies. The key players at Federal level are OMA and DEET; and at State level, the various ethnic affairs commissions and departments of education. The role of community-based organisations should also be considered.

Over the last decade, 'mainstreaming' has emerged as a key feature of government policies relating to access and equity for NESB people. Mainstreaming involves the incorporation of provisions for NESB groups throughout the activities and services of all departments, rather than concentrated exclusively in 'ethnic affairs' areas — although much of the time such areas retain policy co-ordination and advisory roles, while service delivery becomes a mainstream responsibility.

All Commonwealth departments are being encouraged to develop policies and practices consistent with 'mainstreaming'. As part of the government's Access and Equity Strategy, in 1986 all departments were requested by the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) — the national advisory body to the Prime Minister on multicultural issues — to produce three-year plans detailing how Access and Equity principles are to be applied at all levels of policy formation and service delivery. OMA's 1990 Revised Access and Equity Requirements include 'special emphasis on the needs of NESB women and the ethnic disabled'.

DEET's 1988-9 *Access and Equity Plan* for the three years to 1990-1 states, along with a number of aims and priorities for tertiary education linked to national economic goals and higher overall participation rates, that one of the department's general aims is to enhance opportunities for disadvantaged groups including immigrants. The plan outlines strategies in curriculum, cross-cultural training, equity grants, data collection and student assistance.

### 3.2.1 Government Bodies

*DEET - Department of Employment, Education and Training:*

DEET's current position on access and equity in the restructured higher education system is stated in the 1990 document *A Fair Chance For All* [DEET 1990]. This is an expanded version of the Access and Equity section of the 1988 Higher Education *White Paper* [DEET 1988], the blueprint for the new system. People of NESB are one of six 'disadvantaged groups' singled out for special attention. *A Fair Chance For All* embodies the key shifts in the direction of DEET's equity policy in the new system. Under the new tertiary funding arrangements, each institution is required to submit an Equity Plan as an integral part of its Educational Profile, and maintenance of funding levels depends on this.

The administration of the Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP), initiated by CTEC in 1985, is being reoriented from 1991, in tandem with moves toward increasing the onus on universities to support Equity programs from mainstream operating grants. Formerly, HEEP provided grants on the basis of specific applications for projects aimed at increasing access to, and successful participation in, higher education by disadvantaged groups including immigrants. From 1991, Equity Program funding will no longer be directed at specific projects raised within institutions on the basis of separate applications. Instead, Equity funding will be allocated to institutions according to the merits of their Equity Profiles, as a supplement to operating grants. DEET regards this as initial 'seeding' money rather than ongoing funding, which is expected in most cases to no longer be required after projects have become established. According to a DEET policy officer in the Equity area: 'Our general policy approach is that this program [HEEP] will not go on forever. Institutions should be considering equity as part of their mainstream activities.' The responsibility for distributing Equity funding among various projects will now rest with the universities rather than with DEET; except in a few areas described as 'anomalies', including resources for students with disabilities, where the high costs involved mean that some funding to universities will be specifically designated for equity provisions for a particular group or project.

### 3.2.2 New South Wales Government

In the mid-1980s all NSW tertiary institutions were invited to participate in the state government's Ethnic Affairs Policy Statements (EAPS) program, which had begun in 1983 involving government departments and statutory authorities. EAPS did not

strictly apply to universities, as the EAPS were carried out under a Ministerial directive, without legislative backing. The universities were 'invited' to participate, and all did so, at least in the beginning. The NSW EAPS program, like the Federal government's Access and Equity Strategy, is built on the mainstreaming principle.

Tertiary institutions submitted EAPS in 1986/7, with the expectation that they be followed up with annual reports. In recent years resource constraints have meant Ethnic Affairs Commission staff have been unable to monitor or develop the tertiary EAPS process, and a number of institutions have not been submitting annual reports. There is also a feeling expressed within the Commission that if the Commonwealth has an access and equity program in tertiary education there is no reason to duplicate it at state level.

The NSW Higher Education Board responded to the EAPS program in 1984 with a document called *Higher Education in A Multicultural Society* which was reissued in updated form in 1988 [Higher Education Board 1984,1988]. In June 1988 the Board was abolished, and a higher education unit in the Education Ministry was set up instead. It is now unclear where the responsibility for implementing the document is located (probably nowhere). While multiculturalism is being addressed in reviews of Equity programs in the Department of TAFE and the Department of School Education, no similar state government initiatives in universities are identifiable.

### **3.2.3 Victorian Government**

The Ethnic Affairs Commission of Victoria has not adopted any systematic structural approach to access and equity for people of NESB in higher education. Their efforts in that area have been directed ad hoc, towards problems and issues as they arise. While the Commission oversees Ethnic Policy Programs Assessments (EPPAs) in state portfolios, they do not apply to statutory bodies like universities. There is a lot of cynicism towards the effectiveness of such programs in achieving their goals. The EAC does not see itself as having much power to influence university admissions policies because universities admit 'individuals' , not 'ethnic groups'.

### **3.2.4 Queensland Government**

To date there is no history of any Queensland state departments keeping statistics on ethnicity or carrying out any systematic monitoring of ethnic affairs issues. There has been an Ethnic Affairs Bureau for six years but it has not yet been very influential.

Changes are on the agenda since the new government took office, and a Multicultural Education Unit is now being established in the Department of Education.

### 3.3 COMMUNITY GROUPS

There is a varied level of awareness of and involvement in tertiary education by community groups representing NESB people. Limited resources often mean they focus more on basic 'survival' issues for the groups they represent, unless there is ongoing contact with students or institutions to keep higher education issues among the organisation's priorities. The general trend is one of responding to issues as they arise, while lacking a systematic higher education strategy.

#### 3.3.1 New South Wales

##### *Ethnic Communities Council (ECC)*

The Ethnic Communities Council in NSW is a voluntary organisation which has an advisory, monitoring and representative role for various NESB groups and mediates between ethnic communities and government. The Council is disappointed with the ineffectiveness and slowness of EAPS implementation in tertiary institutions. The Council regards the State EAPS program and the Commonwealth Access and Equity Strategy as of equal and complementary importance, rather than as a duplication. The Council believes it may have to place more pressure on OMA to attach more stringent requirements to Commonwealth Access and Equity Plans, to monitor them more closely and to withhold funds if they fail to deliver. The Council is concerned with the dilution of specialist services in the name of mainstreaming. Infrastructural support for overseas-qualified students is one area of concern, in terms of insufficient funding for conversion courses, living allowances, study grants, bilingual counselling etc. The Council has recently held three community consultations with people affected by regulations on overseas qualifications.

The Council's youth network and youth chairperson could potentially monitor the position of NESB students. The Council would like to see more public accountability, more genuine ethnic community representation and less tokenism on the governing bodies, boards and councils of universities:

Various players in the arena should be identified and should have a say  
— we cannot monitor the effectiveness of tertiary institutions' access and

equity infrastructure without inside information. Our dilemma is we're a voluntary organisation and we're expected to monitor, come up with quick submissions, and be proactive as well as concentrating on the most immediate, glaring disadvantage. While our credibility is based on being in touch with communities, this consultation process takes time. We fight for things like access and equity, and they sometimes swing back because we're not monitoring. (ECC Spokesperson).

### **3.3.2 Queensland**

#### *Brisbane Migrant Resource Centre (MRC)/Vietnamese Students Association*

The Brisbane Migrant Resource Centre has some involvement in tertiary education: (1) The Centre's co-ordinator attends meetings of the University of Queensland Social Work faculty, in an advisory role on issues including multiculturalism in the curriculum. (2) The Centre has been working closely with the Vietnamese Community Association and the Vietnamese Students Association to facilitate the expression of Vietnamese students' concerns in higher education. An information session/conference was held by these groups in April 1990, with a number of representatives from tertiary institutions attending.

### **3.3.3 Victoria**

#### *ADEC - Action on Disability in Ethnic Communities*

ADEC's main focus in education is on secondary schools and TAFE, with activities including integration support group meetings in the school system. The lack of activity at university level is, in part, reflective of the high degree of disadvantage experienced by NESB people with disabilities in even gaining entry to tertiary education.

#### *Migrant Resource Centres*

The main form of direct contact between MRCs and universities appears to be their involvement in fieldwork placements for students. There are seven MRCs in Melbourne, including Prahran, Footscray, St Albans and Altona. Some of the employees at Prahran Migrant Resource Centre are overseas-qualified social workers, of NESB, who have had to complete further studies in Australia in order to practise. Prahran has ongoing contact with Monash University for student placements. Because of the differences in policy among Social Work departments they prefer to work with one university only.

### 3.3.4 Higher Education Round Table (HERT)/National Union of Students (NUS)

HERT, an umbrella body of national unions and student organisations, takes a close interest in university equity strategies. It views current Federal policy in this area as inadequate, and is conveying to DEET a number of concerns and criticisms about deficiencies perceived in *A Fair Chance For All*. These include failure of the AFCFA kit to provide detailed or comprehensive information about disadvantage; failure to allude more than briefly to successful access and equity practice already being undertaken; insufficient resource provision by DEET for equity programs and insufficient staffing in the DEET equity area; absence of a process for institutions to be publicly accountable for their commitment to equity; and lack of proposals for sanctions against institutions which fail in access and equity.

NUS is based in Victoria with branches in each state. Women in education, women's health, financial survival and racism are some of the issues addressed by its various campaigns that may be of relevance to people of NESB. A 'Women and Racism' campaign is underway.

### 3.4 SOME US COMPARISONS

The debate on minority access to tertiary education has been a matter of major controversy since the mid 1960s in the USA. In 1964 the Educational Opportunity Program provided government backing for pressure to open up institutions, particularly elite universities, to minority students who had been significantly under-represented in the past. While the 1970s were seen to be a period of rapid growth in minority enrolments, particularly in two-year colleges, the 1980s have seen issues of equal opportunity overtaken by concern for excellence. Indeed there is now growing tension between equal opportunity initiatives, which provide access for minority students with lower Grade Point Averages (GPA) (c.f. aggregate HSC scores etc. in Australia) while thereby raising the entry requirements for non-minorities (in California this includes whites and Asian Americans, who have the highest GPAs), and a drive to excellence reflecting the priorities of the Reagan era.

American universities have tried many of the strategies now being explored in Australia. Six common strategies have been identified. These include:

- i) outreach to schools, to strengthen educational motivation and preparation of prospective students (c.f. SUCCEED at Sydney University);
- ii) Graduate School Recruitment and Retention, especially for medicine, including summer courses, counselling, tutorial assistance;
- iii) comprehensive support services, including career planning and psychological counseling;
- iv) pre-college academic preparation programs in basic skills and subject matter preparation;
- v) financial aid and scholarships tied to working in the public education sector;
- vi) minority faculty development program, including staff development leave, and higher level education management training for minorities [Callan 1988].

In addition monitoring is carried out through a requirement for five year plans in some states, and articulation between community colleges and universities is occasionally argued as a means of minority access.

Access is argued to be important for social justice and to increase diversity, though the Supreme Court in the Bakke case prohibited discrimination in favour of someone on the basis of race. In some states, notably California, colleges such as UC Berkeley have actively sought to meet Californian state goals which argue University entry should reflect the diversity of the graduating high school class in the region. Recently Asian Americans have been arguing that they are being disadvantaged by this trend, as they are being squeezed out of elite institutions to be replaced by Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians and disadvantaged Asians such as Filipinos [Bunzel 1988].

Yet this argument between groups over equity and fairness disguises the failures of the high school system to deal with poor student preparation. It also focuses on access at the cost of persistence and achievement. Callan describes the American situation as one of a burst of program funding leading to modest improvements, which decline as institutions and governments move on to other agendas — a problem already experienced in New South Wales through the ineffective Ethnic Affairs Policy statements, and a clear danger with the Commonwealth's commitment to equity not linked to adequate, mainstream resource allocation. As Birnbaum has noted, college

presidents do not often have access on their personal agendas, so that change is most likely when external pressures to perform are present [Birnbaum 1988]. In the current American political and educational climate the pressure is increasingly about quality — one effect of this has been a decline in minority enrolments, even though college administrators perceived recruitment to be improving.

## 4. THE UNIVERSITY EQUITY STATEMENTS

4.1 The last decade has seen a sustained expansion both of University involvement in questions of equity and access, and Commonwealth government emphasis on this area. Initiatives under the former Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) for Participation and Equity in Advanced Education began to influence thinking in the university sector, though some initiatives had been well under way by universities and colleges before any Commonwealth interest in the issues. Universities first had to provide DEET with Statements of Intent on Equity for the 1989-90 triennium. By 1990 Universities were required to submit an Equity Profile with their University Profile seeking funding for the next triennium, and negotiate its parameters with the Department of Employment, Education and Training visiting teams. In this section we outline the main orientation of the profiles for the Universities, and for New South Wales universities, also include material on the earlier Ethnic Affairs Policy Statements.

### 4.2 UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

The 1988 Statement of Intent identified its priorities as:

- increasing the enrolment of women in Science, Commerce, Economics and Engineering,
- the development of an access scheme for students attending Queensland's Special Program Schools , (based on the Monash 'Link' project),
- Aborigines and Islanders,
- the expansion of services for people with disabilities.

Projects planned in relation to ethnic minorities included a special orientation program for 'non-english speaking background migrant students' a research project into the communication problems experienced by migrant students, and advanced standing for overseas professionals whose qualifications were not recognised in Australia.

In the 1991-93 Equity Plan the UQ Link scheme had been established and was to be expanded into rural areas from its Brisbane focus. Aborigines and Islanders were to be recruited into professional programs, while women were targetted for post graduate

work and engineering. A joint university scheme was proposed for DEET funding to promote liaison and access for people with disabilities from secondary schools. However the University withdrew from any specific focus on Non English Speaking Background, as it wished to 'use limited resources as effectively as possible' and argued that UQ Link would pick up socio-economically disadvantaged NESB students. The Counselling and Careers Centre would provide support for language and learning skills needs of both NESB and Overseas students.

#### 4.3 UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

The University used a general strategy in its 1988 Statement of Intent to recruit NESB students — by subsuming them under the categories of a) students suffering social and/or economic disadvantage, and b) students from western suburbs and other areas of apparent disadvantage. In addition the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry operated a Refugee admission scheme, while Counselling provided a program of cross-cultural counselling targetted at students from overseas. The Institute of Education appointed a lecturer in 1990 to cover equal opportunity curricula (including ethnic minorities, women and disabled students).

The University identified 15% of its population as 'NESB' defined as English not being the language spoken in the home, but was unable to compare this with the Victorian population. Its goal was to increase this figure by 0.2% p.a for three years. The strategies would involve increasing the awareness of Melbourne University in the community, and the advertising of its languages programs. Two specific programs, both of which would only be offered with additional Higher Education Equity Funding, included pilot schemes for trainee teachers with poor English skills, and an ESL program for aspiring tertiary students focussing on language and Australian and academic culture.

#### 4.4 LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

La Trobe presented itself as an 'outstanding...contributor' to the Government's participation and equity program. In its revised Statement of Intent for 1989, the university noted that more than 30% of undergraduates came from families in which English was not the language spoken, while 45% came from families with both parents born overseas. Furthermore it had a high proportion of students who were the first in their families to go on to higher education. Ten percent of intake comes through special

arrangements for disadvantaged students. It also provides a range of remedial language programs, and had established a Committee on Multicultural issues in Student Support Services.

The amalgamation of La Trobe with colleges across the state make it impossible to offer simple statements about the Equity plan 1991-93 . The goal to enhance NESB participation through adequate support programs and services assumes that entry is already well catered for. Special entry and conversion courses for overseas trained people in teaching are available, as are special English programs at Swinburne. Enhanced ESL support and cross cultural awareness raising programs, the counselling and study skills program, and an enhanced university Loan Fund are identified. The Vice Chancellor argued that loans funds economic support to students was crucial as an element of equity, and condemned the Commonwealth for not recognising this fact. At Phillip campus, there were also degree courses in multicultural studies which were to be expanded, curriculum development in multicultural education, while Swinburne emphasised strategies to counteract student withdrawal.

#### 4.5 UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

The University's 1985 Ethnic Affairs policy statement committed it to the promotion 'by whatever reasonable means are at its disposal' of awareness of and equity of access to its services for ethnic and racial minorities. The Policy did not deal with curriculum issues, but rather concentrated on advice to minority students.

As well as advisers for prospective students and equal opportunity advisers, the University established grievance procedures including for those experiencing racial harassment. A specific policy on racial harassment was announced in early 1985, following attacks on Asian students and harassment of Asian staff members.

The main equity strategy, the ACCESS scheme, was adopted by the University in 1985. It sets a 5% target for disadvantaged access for first year in all courses, to which prospective students have to matriculate but for which there is concessional entry. The scheme has not reached its target levels in some courses, while about half the eligible applicants enter on merit in the normal quotas. For 1990 26 % of the intake identified language problems as the basis of their disadvantage, while 62% were born overseas and did not have English as their first language. In 1989 about 25% of new entries were local NESB, while a further 8% were overseas students. Special programs for NESB

include intensive English classes prior to Uniprep week, a mini-language lab, English for specific academic purposes.

The 1991-93 Equity Plan identifies better data gathering and a review of graduate destination data as the priorities for NESB.

#### **4.6 UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY**

As a newly combined University, descriptions are necessarily tentative, based on elements of previously separate institutions. The 1989 Equity proposals established a broad strategic framework for covering all the groups identified by DEET. Priorities included special admission arrangements, specialist support programs, and close contact with secondary schools and TAFE. Goals are for 5% intake of all disadvantaged groups through the Learning Assistance Scheme and New Start.

The Ethnic Affairs policy of the Nepean college of UWS stressed the right of the community to be aware and informed of the university's services 'irrespective of their particular ethnic or cultural background'. They should have equality of access, which might require special strategies. Finally courses should reflect the multicultural nature of Australian society and be sensitive to its diversity. There was also a College Working Party on Ethnic Affairs and Multicultural Education, combining academic, student, Council and community representation, advising the Principal on policy and practices.

#### **4.7 UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

The 1985 Ethnic Affairs Policy Statement prepared for the NSW state government outlined a number of initiatives including the new admission criteria for Social Work. The Social Work Department would recognise competence in a second language or sensitivity to, or familiarity with, cultural differences, as a factor in selection. The SUCCEED program targeted a small number of year ten students with exceptional academic promise from disadvantaged backgrounds, and gave them financial and academic assistance for the HSC — an expectation was that some of those chosen would be of ethnic background. The Policy Statement proposed to document racist incidents, including graffiti, while also undertaking 'mainstreaming' of multicultural issues through staff development and training. It also intended to draw attention of Professors to the need for multicultural awareness in curricula.

The 1985 first year survey carried out for EAPS found 16.0% of students aged 15-24 were local residents born in a non English speaking country, compared with 11.8% of Sydney's population in that age group, while 28% were NESB (born in a NESC or with one or both parents born in a NESC). The highest over-representation was in Dentistry (54.2% born in NESC, 13.9% Chinese speaking) and medicine (31.2%, 12.4% Chinese speaking), made up heavily of Asian born students. Under-represented group across the university were Lebanese, Yugoslavs and Italians. Gender differences also existed, with Chinese, Vietnamese and Arabic speakers tending to be male, and Europeans (Greek, Italian, Spanish) female. As an example of the bifurcation of performance within ethnic groups, the Chinese speaking group was over-represented in the highest and lowest bands of the HSC scores.

Sydney established its Broadway scheme in 1988, as an admissions program for school leavers from disadvantaged schools — one criterion of disadvantage for the students was non-English speaking background. Entry is given to professional faculties on the basis of lower HSC scores. Nearly half the students admitted under the scheme were of non-English speaking background in 1990. The University also provides an English for Migrant and Overseas Students program including intensive courses and individual consultation.

The Equity Plan 1991-93 notes that 16.5% of students speak a language other than English in the home (where Sydney's population is 16.2% NESB). Priority is given to ensuring awareness of courses, special admission schemes and support programs, and ensuring the adequacy of support programs. The University is to introduce a transition program during January and February to include English Language Skills, and expand Broadway to all state and systemic catholic schools.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1: RESOURCES**

*The quality of research evident in many equity plans suggests the need to specify more carefully developed, flexible and detailed strategies relevant to each university and its ethnic communities. In order to enable this to occur, the Office of Multicultural Affairs should press DEET to allocate additional funding for program research and development.*

## 5. CASE STUDIES IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

5.1 The dynamics of decision making in each university differ, though all are now facing the decisions involved in planning and implementing an overall equity policy and program. The approach adopted by DEET, described by one senior academic as 'taking the high moral ground', draws on the involvement of universities in the unified national system and their subordination to DEET budgetary control. Equity remains voluntary to the extent that universities without an equity profile approved by DEET may discover their funding cut. In this section of the report we review the situation in each university, looking at the academic involvement, the perspectives and activities of administrative and library programs, student support services and then activity by students on campus. The aim is to identify what processes seem to be effective within the institutional culture, with particular attention to key decisions and loci of initiative.

### 5.2 UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

The corporate image of the University of Queensland is that of an elite institution, an institution that did not need to recruit students as its courses were over-subscribed with high performing students. "It was a real problem keeping students away from us", commented a senior administrator. The corollary of this demand was an outcome described by a student union leader as a 'very white and very right' campus.

This eliteness was compounded by the fact that all students entering the University had to have a satisfactory pass in the Tertiary Entrance Certificate (TEC) in senior English, a prerequisite for all courses. Thus entrance requirement policies effectively prevented many local non-English speaking background students from entering the University, particularly those who did not speak English in the home environment.

This resulted in little general awareness of the needs of local non-English speaking background students amongst the academic staff. Similarly there has been little interest in actively recruiting such students until recently. Senior academics who had some awareness of the issue were likely to have arrived at that awareness through personal contacts; for example one senior academic reported that his

knowledge of and interest in the area came from his wife who was involved in support work with refugee youth. Some senior academics did identify involvement with equity issues as 'good social work'— for example sitting on access committees.

The changing educational and political environment has forced the University of Queensland to look at issues which affect local non-English speaking background students. Partly as a result of the introduction of HECS, and the rising reputations of other universities (including the new Queensland University of Technology) student enrolments have declined. This has necessitated an active competitive with other Queensland universities in seeking out students. Recently the TEC was 'floated' and subsequently dropped. The TEC score is currently under review by the Queensland State Government and therefore equity measures are timely.

An important factor that differentiates the University of Queensland from Universities in other states is that while the University of Queensland Act states that 'the University shall not discriminate against any person on the grounds of that person's sex, religion or colour' the thrust of all EEO and affirmation action strategies has been towards women. This has been the result of the absence of any equity legislation at the state level in Queensland, and hence the only legislation to which the University of Queensland is a party is the Federal Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity For Women) Act 1986. While the target group of women includes both students and staff, there is no evidence at least at the formal level (e.g. EEO Annual Reports) that the category 'women' has been understood to take account of differences between women such as ethnicity, language, culture or disability.

In 1985/1986 a committee was established to examine the issues in taking NESB students — the main emphasis was on overseas students . (In fact it appears that the main push for the establishment of such a committee came from the drive to recruit overseas students — a strategy which one senior academic described as 'sordid'). The committee compiled a report, the main thrust of which focused on student support services.

The other main initiative which may affect local non-English speaking background students was the UQ link. The UQ link was described as a direct result of Federal Government concerns for equity. UQ link is a pilot project operating in 1989/90, and is funded through DEET Higher Education Equity Program. The main aim of the project is

to 'encourage academically able students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to continue their formal education ...'. The project has two phases; a school phase and a university phase. The main aim of the school phase is to raise the awareness of the benefits of tertiary level study for the student population in the participating schools and for the students selected for special entry consideration. At the university phase a 'sensitive admission procedure' is being established, a residential orientation program consisting of a week of activities to help prepare students for the transition from school to university and ongoing support activities in the first year of study. Whilst the UQ Link does not specifically target local NESB students, the implication of concentrating on students from disadvantaged backgrounds is thought likely to pick up on these students.

However the senior levels of the administration perceive that the university is specialising in and achieving progress in the area of students with disabilities. This is justified on the grounds that *A Fair Chance for All* suggests that individual universities may set themselves definable targets in particular areas, but not all areas. It is probable that the University of Queensland would continue to define its major role in equity in the area of disability, not in the area of non-English speaking background. While there may well be some students with disabilities who do come from non-English speaking backgrounds, support services and provisions are likely to be more developed to cater for the disability part of their identity rather than their other support needs.

The attitude was expressed that the university needs to be successful in its current programs without embarking on new and different areas, a sentiment that was repeated in other universities. The overriding predominance of issues to do with 'women' (undifferentiated) in the EEO area has further implications. Womens' groups have resisted their incorporation into a structure of equity management which locates them with people with disabilities and other minority groups. Having struggled for equality with men, the women feel that the new structure relegates them to 'problem status'; they want to separate the needs of women from 'welfare' and minority groups. Where such a strategy leaves women from non-English speaking background is unclear.

### 5.3 MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY

The University of Melbourne identifies itself as a selective institution, as catering for the intellectual elite. Admission policies have been based on the likelihood of academic success. Although there have been exceptions, an essential admission criteria to the University used to be communicative competence in English.

The University has always been heavily over-subscribed with one place for every five applicants. Developments at both Federal and State government level have clearly had some impact on current thinking in the University.

The University began to increase the representation of previously under-represented groups early in the 1980s. A Special Admissions Scheme was introduced in 1984 and 1200 students have been admitted to university through the scheme since 1985. Students may apply on the basis that they suffered some form of disadvantage during their schooling. Thus students can apply for entrance on the basis that their first language is not English or that in their home environment English is not spoken. Refugee status and financial difficulties would also be seen as 'appropriate disadvantage'. Some students of Non English Speaking Background come from schools with poor facilities and this form of disadvantage would also make them eligible for the scheme. The scheme operates by taking students who are within 30 marks below the normal cut-off score for a particular course. Under the special admissions scheme all faculties are entitled to take up to 10% of students on the basis of their life experience, using other admission criteria than simply straightforward academic performance in high school.

A 1988 evaluation of the Special Admissions Scheme [Schofield 1988] reinforced the argument that students from Non English Speaking Backgrounds are not necessarily underrepresented in education, but differential levels of representation between students from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds are often concealed in the false dichotomy between English speaking and non-English speaking immigrant family background.

One third of SAS students applied for admissions partly or wholly on the basis that a language other than English was spoken at home. Ten per cent of the SAS quota was filled by refugee students from Cambodia, East Timor and Vietnam compared with only one per cent of the general quota. The majority of Asian students selected under the general quota came from Malaysia and Hong Kong and many were overseas fee paying

students. Schofield also noted 'a modest but proportionally greater intake of middle eastern students under the scheme compared with the minuscule numbers under the general quota' [1988:39]. While they have some effect with some groups, SAS schemes do not necessarily raise participation much among the under-represented groups, for whom the problems occur long before students are ready to enter the tertiary system. Schofield recommended that issues of under-representation must be addressed further down the education system. The evaluation was limited by only looking to those NESB students who went through the SAS. The evaluation could not look at issues for other immigrant students on campus who came in via the general quota.

Student services available for NESB students focus mainly on language. The Horwood Language Centre addresses in part the needs of non-English speaking background students at Melbourne through various projects conducted with the aim of teaching students English for academic study. The centre is partly funded from overseas earnings but the bulk of the funding comes from University recurrent funds.

A body to co-ordinate responses to the government's equity initiatives is in the pipeline. These tasks are currently being undertaken by the Academic Board Selection Procedures Committee. The responsibility for drawing up the Equity Plan has rested with the Vice-Chancellor's consultative committee and has been the responsibility of a Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Equity issues are also being examined at the faculty and department level.

Student Services offer counselling, support and information for NESB students. However there is no special liaison officer for these students, as there is for students with disabilities

From 1990, the Counselling Centre of Melbourne University is employing a Learning Skills Development worker on a permanent, ongoing basis, with the position funded by the university. This worker has previously run an innovative learning support scheme at the Lincoln School of Health Sciences, La Trobe University. This scheme was funded by DEET (\$40,000) as a pilot project; the grant could not be renewed and hence the scheme there is no longer operative. From the start of 1991 at Melbourne University, the recently appointed Learning Skills Development Officer will be co-ordinating a study skills program for both local NESB and overseas students, with funding provided

through a combination of university recurrent funds and revenue from overseas student fees paid to the university.

In the first four months of operation in 1990, five hundred students — though not all of non-English speaking backgrounds — had been in contact with the Counselling Centre for Learning Skills assistance. It is estimated by the worker there that by 1991 ten per cent of students (total student population of 24,000) will need some learning support. An extra 4 hours tutoring per week are needed on average for students with learning difficulties.

The Melbourne scheme argues that it is important to move beyond the deficit theory that is often associated with NESB students, i.e. that they lack competence in English language. Class and gender issues are also important. The alienation factor is still very high for students from the western suburbs who may be third generation immigrants and whose English is reasonable. At the beginning of year heads of departments are being encouraged to set up learning study groups of mixed ethnicity and sex.

Overseas full fee paying students absorb considerable time and energy, and therefore one of the counsellors argued that 20-30% of the money received from overseas full fee paying students should be tagged as support money. In the Melbourne context the dominance of overseas students is both taking precedence over and acting as a suppressor on issues to do with local NESB students.

This view was also shared by student union activists who argued that overseas students have back-up structures and support but these are lacking for local NESB students. There is little systematic attention given by student organisations to issues relating to NESB students. However, in the recent past single issues concerning racism have been addressed, such as complaints against particular lecturers and discrimination against Asian students. The union has also taken up instances of sexism within ethnic organisations.

The funding of particular groups would appear to be the single most coherent and consistent role of the Student's Union with regard to students from non-English speaking background (Islamic groups etc). The Overseas Students' Association gets a large grant from the union and also has its own room in union buildings. Apart from funding there are no ongoing support mechanisms for ethnic organisations on campus.

#### 5.4 LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

La Trobe has a greater ethnic and socio-economic diversity than many other universities. This is attributable to a number of cultural and demographic factors independent of the university's efforts to promote equity. La Trobe accepts students with lower Year 12 scores than Melbourne and Monash, so students with disadvantaged educational backgrounds related to socio-economic and ethnicity/language factors are more likely to find a place. The 1988 Revised Statement of Intent on Equity claims as an indicator of the university's successful equity program that almost 50% of students come from the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne, but this is not necessarily surprising in view of the proximity of the Bundoora campus to many of these suburbs.

While La Trobe's Equity Plan claims a proud equity record for the university in attracting high numbers of NESB students, this has really occurred by default more than by design. Admissions policy has never focussed on any particular group, and Special Entry schemes provide access for qualified people without the formal education background for normal entry but do not target NESB people or any other specific group. English language difficulty is one area included in the PEEP program, operating only in the recently amalgamated Health Sciences schools at Carlton and Abbotsford. NESB students form a large proportion of those recruited, but whether they are adequately catered for on arrival is another issue.

A senior professor noted that: 'La Trobe University takes people with low VCE scores and makes something of them'—reflecting a common sentiment among senior La Trobe academics and administrators. A senior administrator felt that the university's achievements in this area had never been sufficiently recognised by government funding bodies, whether CTEC or DEET, and that the increased teaching costs associated with enhancing participation are not recognised, claiming 'it's nonsense you can do this without added resources'.

Some initiatives on issues specific to local NESB students were taken in the mid-80s, but with financial limitations and changing priorities they have lost momentum. A member of Counselling staff was employed to investigate cross-cultural issues and counselling for NESB students, and the university sponsored a week-long workshop on those issues in 1985. In the same period a Student Services staff member was appointed

to deal with all NESB students, who was then involved in starting a 'Cross Cultural Issues on Campus' group. The group never became firmly established, and the Student Services position has now been restricted to that of advisor to overseas students only, as there are no recurrent resources available to maintain the service to local NESB students.

The University has a number of language and learning assistance centres. The Assistance With English unit within the Language Centre provides general courses in written and academic English for students from all faculties. LASUs (Language and Academic Skills Units) are faculty-specific and deal with overseas and local NESB students, as well as ESB students. In the Social Sciences LASU, efforts over the years have been directed not just at improving academic language and conceptual skills, but also at other issues influencing the tertiary performance of students of NESB and working-class backgrounds. Activities like special information sessions and peer-leader schemes have attempted to ease the sense of 'dislocation' experienced by students in an 'alien academic culture'. While NESB and low socio-economic status (SES) tend to intensify these problems, it is not exclusively an NESB issue: many ESB 'Anglo' students have difficulties with academic language and culture too. Additionally, programs for staff awareness of issues affecting NESB students have been operating for a number of years.

The Social Sciences LASU was originally set up in 1979. A CTEC Equity Program grant in 1985 enabled the unit to start an introductory transition course, which runs at the beginning of each year, aiming to increase students' understanding of their reading and to teach them the appropriate mode of expressing their ideas in essays, tutorials, etc. The course was originally designed for NESB students but has since been expanded to include all social science students. Subsequently, a 1990 funding application to DEET for support of this program was refused on the grounds that the course is available to all students, not just to NESB students as a specific target group. The annual introductory course continues, now titled Research and Writing Skills for the Social Sciences.

The unit no longer has secure funding arrangements, and effectively lost one-third of its staff this year. LASU members from various faculties have formed a LASU committee, with one of their goals to secure permanent funding. It would be more effective, a member felt, if it was more centrally located through the Academic Board, with representation from outside the LASUs. Lack of communication among various student

services is also a barrier to better provision. Not all faculties have been able to maintain a LASU; Economics, for instance, has recently disbanded its unit for funding reasons, despite having the highest enrolment of Malaysian students in the whole university. This has increased the load for the LASU in Social Sciences, with a number of the economics students seeking assistance with their social science subjects from the Social Sciences LASU rather than the Economics LASU.

In 1986 issues of race, ethnicity and cultural conflict came to prominence when thirteen male students, mostly of Greek backgrounds, came before an internal university investigation by the Proctorial Board after allegations of a number of offences involving sexual harassment and academic plagiarism. There were also reported incidences of 'skip-bashing' — violence against Anglo-Celts. The students were all found guilty and penalised with suspension for five to ten years. One senior academic involved in the case believed it highlighted certain tensions within the Greek community, particularly dilemmas faced by Greek women; rather than provoking a racist backlash against Greeks. On the other hand, a senior administrator felt the case 'left some people with particular intransigent views of some groups'. Student conduct regulations have now been changed to include regulations dealing with sexual harassment.

There is currently no advisory structure specifically for raising NESB issues. The Equal Opportunity Officer intended to set up a working group to address concerns about tensions among and between various NESB student groups. While public and systematic attacks are not evident, racism is still a problem. SRC representatives report negative comments by academics about ethnic groups present in the class. Students in this situation encountered by the SRC's Education Research Officer feel 'upset and unsure of their rights' and are reluctant to be 'implicated' by taking action against the lecturer. Existing grievance procedures are seen as inadequate and the SRC is tackling this in co-operation with the EO office. Three years ago, a grievance procedure review recommended establishing an Ombudsman position at professorial level, but nothing has happened yet. 'The Chancellor is a judge and insists on doing the associated legalistic work himself' according to the SRC. A member of the Ethnic Women's Collective feels that: 'We're such an ethnic-based campus here, but there's not much to represent ethnic groups.'

## 5.5 UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Unlike most other universities, there are no senior executives directly responsible for hands on equity planning. Thus despite arguments made by middle management over the past few years that line responsibility should be carried at the senior level — pro-vice chancellor, the university has chosen to leave equity management at the Deputy Registrar level. Thus there is from the outset tension between responsibility and resources — with the areas responsible for planning and delivery of services lacking the institutional muscle necessary to co-ordinate programs and deliver resources. Senior levels with those resources and powers have stood back from any direct involvement in equity matters.

The University of New South Wales is a very large university — prior to the amalgamations under the Unified national system it was the largest in Australia. Its ACCESS scheme has been in place for five years, and has been carefully monitored during that period. It was never designed to increase NESB access, but rather to increase disadvantaged access — and particular groups of NESB fall into this category. Its typical ACCESS student has had only a few years of education in Australia, has recently acquired English and is a refugee. ACCESS students are eligible for special support in their first year at University.

The scheme made some progress on equity — through increasing the representation of disadvantaged groups, and by ensuring that their survival rate was only marginally poorer than their normal entry cohort. The more recently arrived students seemed to perform better than those who have been in Australia some time. However the question of whether equity goals are being met has to be addressed. Many applicants for ACCESS gain entry on merit, and they undertake courses where little English is required initially. It appears that the main effect of ACCESS has been to provide greater choice of tertiary study, rather than allow entry to people who would not have gained entry at all. These students are seeking high aggregate course entry, so that without the scheme they would be doing the same course somewhere else (where the aggregate required was lower) or doing another lower aggregate course. The implication may well be that to increase access and equity to groups who might otherwise not gain entry at all to university would mean allowing entry at very much lower levels, where experience demonstrates the likelihood of failure in first year courses would be very high [Magin 1987].

The University's Equal Opportunity Education Policy Statement was drafted by the EEO Unit on the prompting of the EEO Advisory Committee, and adopted in September 1988. The statement reflects legislative obligations under the Racial Discrimination Act (1975), the Sex Discrimination Act (1984) and the Anti-Discrimination Act (1977). The University operates the ACCESS Scheme and offers a Supportive English programme through its Institute of Languages. Schools and faculties are required to monitor course content 'to ensure that they are not discriminatory or offensive and that they encourage and facilitate full participation in education by disadvantaged people'. However there is no Equal Opportunity in Education Committee, no senior officer has responsibility for its oversight or review, and the policy is implemented variously through Equal Employment Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Student Services.

There is very little student activity around local NESB issues, even though there is a sizeable local NESB population. Tension exists between the Overseas Students' Association and the Students' Union, with the Overseas Student department seeking autonomy from the Students' Union. In September 1990, a Malaysian student became the first overseas student to be elected President of the UNSW Students' Union, so there may well be changes afoot.

The Union priorities mentioned in interview in July 1990 did not actively canvass issues on ethnicity, though there has been action on racism, with meetings and rallies. There is no ethnic affairs officer in the union, though the Education Research Officer has that as part of her responsibilities. She expressed a concern that NESB students are less willing to pursue grievance procedures, through which they might draw attention to themselves. This officer feels that many of these students are concerned that any action they take through grievance procedures will 'backfire' on them in the long term. In her experience, they will usually make a few tentative approaches to lecturers or course convenors but, when faced with any degree of conflict, shy away from pursuing the matter any further. They seem to feel that following up their grievance will ultimately mean they will be 'discriminated' against, resulting in future academic difficulties within the schools. The officer states that these fears are usually ungrounded, and adds that similar concerns are also shown by some ESB students, albeit to a lesser extent. On the other hand, though, in recognition of the 'vast areas of difference' between individual NESB students, she notes that there are some instances

where they wish to pursue matters until they have exhausted every avenue of appeal, even despite advice to the contrary. This sort of tenacity is more likely to occur when a number of students from the same ethnic background believe they have been similarly unjustly treated and decide to seek redress in concert.

Library services for NESB and overseas students are incorporated into general services; a number of staff are bi-lingual, and there is a register of staff language skills. The library provides foreign language newspapers, and the lecture tape service is heavily used. However key areas such as Electrical Engineering, Maths and Computing do not provide taped lectures. However some librarians suspect that many NESB students do not ask for help when they need information. With the establishment of an Australia-Asia Centre on campus as a university initiative, the library will be addressing its Asian language collection policy more centrally. However the library's paperback collection used to hold many Asian language books for recreational reading, but this is no longer maintained due to funding cuts.

The University of New South Wales does not yet seem to have addressed the wider issues of education for people of NESB in a concerted and systematic way. The Ethnic Affairs policy seems to have died. It has yet to locate equity responsibilities with a senior officer with resource control. Initiatives in the university seem to depend on a 'godfather' with power, prestige and resources — as in the case of the Asia-Australia Centre. Equity is not on the personal agenda of any senior officer, and the consequence is an unplanned and fairly haphazard array of programmes. While Academic Board has asked faculties to report on progress under Equal Opportunity, responses suggest that the issues have not necessarily been adequately addressed as yet. The survey has resulted in statements such as 'there are no problems of racist or sexist material' in curriculum (Health Services Management), while the School of Librarianship was also able to state 'there was no evidence of such practices'.

## **5.6 THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

The University of Sydney is the oldest and one of the most prestigious universities in Australia. It has recruited its students historically from private school educated middle class backgrounds. It is also a large university, with the Professoriate in very powerful positions in their own disciplinary areas. Changing structures of the University to meet equity goals has created some turbulence in the higher echelons, with significant disagreement about appropriate approaches. On the other hand the

University has been addressing issues of equity through special admission schemes over the past few years, and in 1990 adopted an Equal Opportunity in Education Policy Statement designed to address disadvantage.

The EOE policy covers:

- the appointment of a Special Services officer,
- action on students with disabilities,
- provision of child care,
- problems of accommodation,
- financial support for students (while identifying Government funding strategies as a major cause of financial difficulties),
- provide bridging and intensive language courses,
- specialist counselling.

In a major change in direction, though it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this move, the University has committed itself to encouraging changes in course content, curriculum, teaching and assessment methods so that they are not discriminatory against disadvantaged students. Staff development programs are to be developed, while staff are to be encouraged to include subject matter 'that provides positive feedback to disadvantaged students'.

Evaluation of the policy is to be carried out by the EOE Committee of Academic Board, established in 1990 and chaired by the Professor of Social Work. However, the Advisory Committee on Disabilities is chaired by one of the Pro Vice Chancellors, so that responsibility for action in that area has yet to be clarified.

The main method of entry for NESB disadvantaged students is provided by the Broadway Scheme, a proposal arising in the University Senate in the mid 1980s to address elitism in professional faculties. The Broadway Scheme was in pilot for three years, and has now been extended to all schools from the Disadvantaged Schools list originally targetted. It has had some difficulty meeting its quotas, and there is disagreement in the University on whether its objectives are being met — given that they are allowing entry to people who would have gained entry to university anyway, even if not to their preferred faculty at Sydney. As one senior academic noted, 'the problem of the scheme is the rearranging of the seating of higher learning'.

Another pilot programme, SUCCEED, was based on the idea that talented disadvantaged students who might never get to university without financial and academic support, be given that support through years 11 and 12. SUCCEED students appear to have done well, but the project folded as DEET refused continuing support.

The new Vice Chancellor has made equity an important issue, challenging what he is said to see as the more conservative elements in the University. A more planned and co-ordinated system has been put in place, generated by the imperatives of conflict on campus, and only latterly by the DEET document *A Fair Chance for All*. The initiative for change has come as much through students as from academic or administrative staff. Both academics and administrators acknowledged that student pressure for action led to the creation of the Equal Opportunity in Education Committee, on which there is student representation.

Independent student action was also necessary to move the Students' Representative Council. As overseas students grew in numbers, local NESB students expressed the need for representation of their interests. The SRC has had an ethnic affairs convener since 1988 (in 1990 two co-conveners), who have been involved in raising student awareness of issues affecting ethnic minorities — e.g a cultural awareness week in conjunction with the Union, features in the student paper *Honi Soit*. The Overseas Students Association organises political and cultural events such as International Understanding Week. The SRC welfare officer is developing a submission with the University's new Multicultural Centre on the needs and problems of NESB students for the Senate Appeals committee, documenting language, learning and presentation issues.

University administrators claimed that the DEET demand for an Equity Plan was in fact constraining of initiative. The University produced what it was prepared to put on paper rather than what it ideally wanted to do. The high entry aggregates at Sydney can lead to competing directions for equity action. Thus if 4 unit Maths were removed from the aggregate for Medicine, the proportion of women gaining access would rise. But the numbers of NESB men, local and overseas, would decline.

Academic support services for immigrants are provided primarily by the EMOS (English for Migrant and Overseas Students) Program which has been operating since 1975. The program is to be merged into the University's new Learning Assistance Centre

which will cater for all enrolled students in developing their language and learning skills. There is also a fee-charging ELICOS centre attached to the university, wholly separate from this.

With the growing number of overseas students, particularly from Asian countries, some Faculties have responded through the establishment of peer support networks in which ethnic groups are consciously mixed in order to break down the danger of ghettos and improve inter-cultural communication. Attempts by students to survive in what they see as a difficult environment have also created problems. Thus the EMOS centre reports attempts by Asian and South American students to set up collaborative work groups which have been labelled as 'cheating' by some university staff, and other students. Clearly collaborative work cultures are susceptible to criticism in a competitive and individualistic university environment.

The EMOS Centre has developed courses in essay writing, report writing, tutorial participation, lecture note taking, as well as general English language skills and strategies. It also has an individual consultation program where staff review essays prepared by students and provide feedback on organization, grammar, logic and argument. The majority of 1989 undergraduate enrolments were permanent residents (91/110) while the majority of post graduates were overseas students ((60/90). The University Library has a very good resource collection, and staff have attended the EO course on people from NESB. However with the establishment for the first time of an Overseas Students Services office, it is likely more demand will put on the library to develop orientation programs for them.

Sydney University is facing an environment that is changing both internally and externally. While 'I would hardly call what we are doing (ad hoc responses) "strategic"' noted one senior academic, a senior administrative officer saw the Equal Opportunity in Education developments as 'a powerhouse of change...it has the fibre of the place'. And yet, as a welfare officer at the SRC noted, 'the University's response to equity issues tends to be individualised and complaint-driven rather than structural and pre-planned. This results in great strain on the individuals whose experiences lead them to require a response from the University. These people tend to become sacrificial lambs.'

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2: RESOURCES**

*The massive demands placed on universities, particularly those with high working class ethnic intakes, have not been recognised by DEET in its funding of universities. In order to ensure that the educational needs of these groups can be addressed effectively, and professional and viable support programs put in place and/or maintained, OMA should press DEET to substantially increase funding under the Equity heading, and provide additional resources to universities whose programs have been shown to be effective.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION 3: INFORMATION**

*The lack of information about initiatives is seriously inhibiting development of effective equity strategies at university, faculty and department/school levels. The Office of Multicultural Affairs, in conjunction with DEET, should approach the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee with support for the AVCC to act as a clearing house for information on innovation in access and equity. The AVCC should collect and disseminate material, perhaps through a regular newsletter, or via AARNET computer mail system.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4: MONITORING**

*In view of the concerns expressed about the public accountability of universities for their performance in equity, OMA should press DEET, as part of the monitoring process of Equity Plans, to publish the Plans.*

## 6. THE SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

The Schools of Social Work offer a range of responses to issues of equitable access and survival for NESB students. However, most Schools have little planned activity aimed at recruiting students from the target groups which are under-represented amongst their student group.

For example, the Department of Social Work at the University of Queensland may benefit from UQ Link. La Trobe University would like to expand its intake of NESB students, but the reasons for this are fairly pragmatic. The welfare industry lacks qualified NESB social workers, particularly to meet the needs of older first generation immigrants. (Ethnospecific agencies can find it difficult to recruit social workers, as the agencies are often seen as the poor relations within the welfare industry.) La Trobe's Social Work school accepts mainly mature students and thus is likely to attract students who are either recent arrivals or refugees or students with overseas qualifications. Sydney University attaches weighting to a second language and familiarity with cultural difference in the assessment of applications for admission to the school, but there is no policy for recruitment.

Most Heads of School saw the central issue for curriculum development as the inclusion of multicultural content. None identified a pedagogic overhaul of the curriculum, as argued by some educationalists [e.g. Jansen 1990, Knowles 1990], which would make the course more accessible for all minority students including NESB students.

By and large the amount of attention given to curriculum and student support issues depended on the interest, expertise and enthusiasm of the relevant heads of school. For example, Professor David Cox at La Trobe is well known for his work in the area of multiculturalism and welfare. He has made a number of innovative moves in this direction, including an Intercultural Diploma in Social Work (being organised with the Australian International Development Aid Bureau (AIDAB)). He was also concerned to push for a regional role for the Department and has recently received International Labour Organisation support for work on migrant workers. He is setting up a social work

team in Sri Lanka with support from the Myer Foundation and International Social Services.

Some schools have special electives dealing with multiculturalism but most acknowledge that cross cultural issues have not been integrated into the mainstream. They remained 'on the periphery' (Sydney) and had 'not been threaded through' (Queensland). Multicultural electives often depend on lecturers with a particular interest in the area. It was usually the case that if these individuals left, there were major gaps in the overall degree. On the other hand, the University of Queensland has moved to have representatives from ethnic organisations on Faculty Board as a way of influencing the curriculum in the long term. Addressing issues in curriculum development and fieldwork education, the University of New South Wales has a Centre for Cross Cultural Social Work Education. Funded for two years under a Multicultural and Cross Cultural Supplementation Program grant, the Centre was to undertake curriculum and policy development. However as DEET funding is about to finish, the question is posed of the Centre's longer term viability. The Centre has a Cross Cultural Student Unit, operating in the west of Sydney for field placements and cross cultural practice, which will continue with funding from the NSW Department of Health.

The degree of support for students within the schools varies according to the interest and commitment of senior academic staff. At La Trobe there are weekly seminars aimed at understanding social work terminology and jargon and the concepts that lie behind them. These classes are reported to have been very well attended. Melbourne University's Counselling Service has entered discussions with Social Work for a special program geared towards demystifying the context and language of social work for NESB students from working class backgrounds. Other universities simply refer students with 'language problems' to language support centres.

The University of Queensland Department has established a mentor scheme, whereby extra tutorial sessions are offered by one member of staff whose teaching and administrative load has been adjusted accordingly. This is important as English classes within the University are provided on a fee for service basis. Students with poorer language skills, whose first language is not English, are also allowed to use an English dictionary in exams and/or have extra time to complete.

Overall student support services offered by Social Work schools were generally somewhat ad hoc or a matter of referring students to language centres. Schools have paid little attention to post-degree employment of graduates. There is an underlying assumption, however, that students with a second language will at the very least be able to get employment within ethnospecific services. As tertiary entrance scores decline for school leavers wanting to enter Social Work, there is a growing concern that these students will require more support than most teaching staff can provide.

Very few full fee paying overseas students have enrolled in schools of social work; those that have done so tend to be at the Masters level. In Victoria NESB students who have done multicultural studies in their own language at Footscray Institute then go on to find studying Social Work in academic English particularly problematic. Many refugees undertake in effect a two tier training, firstly undertaking TAFE welfare courses and then going onto university to do social work degrees.

Overseas qualified students seeking upgrading in Australian universities are likely to become an increasing feature of the system during the 1990s. The Federal government has committed itself to avoiding the wastage of skills created by the non-recognition of qualifications, and in 1989 established a new National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) [Dawkins 1989]. State governments have also established similar initiatives such as the 1989 Migrant Employment and Qualifications Board in NSW.

The social work situation is complicated by the academic role of NOOSR, and the professional role of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). In addition individual universities control their own criteria of entry and advanced credit. There are three main categories of student — those with questionable or limited overseas qualifications, who have to undertake two or more years of undergraduate work for recognition, those with four years training whose degrees are seen as missing some essential element and are required to undertake miscellaneous courses (though the requirements vary considerably) and those with three year qualifications of high standard (usually Western Europe) who had been required to undertake a further two years due to university limits on how much advanced standing would be accepted for a degree. In the latter case at UNSW for example, the AASW asked for changes, and in conjunction with the School of Social Work 18 months of negotiation with the

university took place eventually gaining agreement for one year UNSW training to get full B.S.W. and recognition. A number of schools have concerns about immigrants from Eastern Europe who are already qualified in another area who wish to retrain as social workers.

Attempts in NSW to provide Australian context courses have not been successful. A one-off overseas social workers orientation course held over 7 weeks on Saturdays depended on voluntary involvement of AASW and university staffs. There is still a tendency to demand overseas qualified social workers undertake professional practice units rather than Australian context units for their degree recognition. There is no provision for local work experience, other than in full practice placements.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5 : SOCIAL WORK**

*In view of the key role played by Social Work Departments and Schools in educating professionals for welfare practice in a multicultural society, OMA should contact the relevant Heads to discuss what contribution it can make in the development of local initiatives for student recruitment and support services in the context of Department or School Equity plans.*

## 7. MAIN THEMES

We now turn to a discussion of some of the themes which affect access and equity for NESB students.

### 7.1 USER PAYS

The shift to a user-pays approach in Federal higher education funding policy is of major significance for university equity strategies. The key features of the new funding environment are greater pressure on institutions to attract funding from independent sources, including full-fee-paying overseas students and corporate sponsorship; an increasingly corporatist style of administration; and the reintroduction of tertiary fees. While universities are being urged to increase participation rates of students from 'disadvantaged groups', including NESB people, their capacity to do so is undermined by a number of effects generated by the new funding arrangements.

At some institutions, already over-stretched language and learning support facilities are experiencing staff reductions and uncertainties about future funding [La Trobe, Melbourne]. In some cases, language support services are subsidised by revenue from overseas student fees [UNSW].

The increasing cost of higher education for the individual participant appears likely to mean that some NESB students, particularly those belonging to lower socio-economic groups, will be less inclined to consider tertiary education among their options. Power and Robertson [1988:121] found that the Higher Education Administration Charge, or HEAC (the predecessor to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, or HECS), was among the factors contributing to a shift in the social composition of students towards 'male, full-time school leavers who were dependent on their parents for support'. A study by the National Union of Students showed that the HECS significantly undermined equitable access to higher education and compromised 'the capacity of disadvantaged groups to obtain a fairer chance' [1989 :13]. DEET's 1989 evaluation of the impact of the HECS provides no information on its effects with regard to specific ethnic groups; however, among undergraduate survey respondents, people of NESB were more likely to cite HECS as a factor in their decision not to re-enrol [1990:16].

The Federal government's current stance on equity funding arrangements, in tandem with the introduction of 'user-pays' policy, represents a major shift in focus from addressing structurally-based social inequality to targeting individual disadvantage.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6 : USER PAYS**

*OMA should press DEET to maintain a regular monitoring of the impact on ethnic minorities of user pays policies such as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme and Post Graduate Fees, and publicise the results. Particular attention should be given to the impact on specific ethnic groups, especially those with a history of being under-represented in tertiary education. OMA should also press DEET to reconsider its policy in this area should any evidence of disadvantage emerge.*

#### **7.2 OVERSEAS STUDENTS**

With increasing enrolments of full-fee paying overseas students, universities are required to provide them with appropriate language support and other services. It is important to ensure, though, that this does not overshadow the needs of local NESB students. Dilemmas are emerging around questions of resource allocation and services for the two groups.

University responses to these problems have varied. On some campuses, issues of specific relevance to local NESB students are not being addressed at all. Whereas overseas students form a distinctive group identifiable at enrolment, local NESB students have a very diverse range of needs and concerns which cannot be identified or isolated unless some special effort is made. At the University of Queensland, which has a reputation for being 'strongly white middle class Anglo' [Student Union reps], there are no language or orientation programs catering specifically for local NESB students, yet some faculties are now commissioning special programs for overseas students. There is a temporary part-time Overseas Students Counsellor, and awareness classes on overseas students' needs have been held with library staff.

At the University of New South Wales, the Supportive English Unit provides services to both overseas and local NESB students, in an approximate ratio of 10:1 (OSS:NESB). The unit is funded entirely through the university's Institute of Languages, with a major source being revenue from the Institute's ELICOS program (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students).

In Student Services at La Trobe, the staff member originally appointed to deal with all NESB students is now designated to deal solely with Overseas Students. The university's Assistance With English Unit, funded by a combination of central university funds and Language Centre profits, offers a variety of free courses in academic English to both groups, with permanent residents outnumbering overseas students.

At the University of Melbourne there is a strong demand for learning support for NESB students (including overseas students) who lack familiarity with aspects of academic language, concepts and learning conventions. The Learning Skills Development Counsellor estimates that about four hours of tutoring per student per week is required, while current resources cannot approach the demand.

At the University of Sydney, the EMOS (English for Migrant and Overseas Students) Program is to be incorporated into the new Learning Assistance Centre, rather than into the existing ELICOS Centre, as had earlier been proposed. This decision was partly due to there being no incentive for the latter to offer free courses to local NESB students. One new position in the Learning Assistance Centre will be funded directly from overseas student fees.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7 : OVERSEAS STUDENTS**

*There is a growing tension on many campuses between the demands generated by overseas students, and the needs of local NESB students. We recommend that universities review their support procedures for both these groups, and ensure their separate needs are specified and addressed.*

#### **7.3 STAFF TRAINING**

There was very little evidence of sustained opportunities for staff development of academics in teaching and counselling NESB students. While a number of universities offered voluntary staff development and cross-cultural communication workshops (e.g. Sydney University as part of its EEO plan), the extent of take up of these courses has been limited. There is some evidence that current pressures on universities have led to a declining quality of educational environment — larger classes, less individual counselling and problem solving, less one-on-one tutoring. While staff development

units in some universities are aware of these problems, the performance criteria emerging for staff progression and promotion do not normally identify the development of high quality and sensitive responses to the needs of a multicultural student body, as being of consequence. In addition cross cultural communication courses do not normally address class and gender issues. Conversely, staff training which explores the elimination of sexism in teaching do not appear to have made any sustained examination of stereotypes as they apply to and affect ethnic minorities.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 8 : STAFF TRAINING**

*Academics have barely incorporated the diverse nature of the student population into their curricula and teaching methods. OMA should take the initiative with Professional Development Centres/ Centres for Teaching and Learning, in providing funding and guidance for staff training on curriculum development and change. This should go beyond the cross-cultural communication/ background facts approach currently offered in some centres, to address the issue of professional programs as a locus for the creation and transmission of racist discourses.*

#### **7.4 GENDER**

Gender relations are an integral part of the interaction of ethnicity and the tertiary education system. The three dimensions we are able to identify involve:

- a) stereotypes held by academic staff about women of ethnic minority background;
- b) ethnic community expectations and constraints operating on access and support for women in tertiary education;
- c) peer group sexism within some ethnic communities and resistance to it.

Although they are often spoken of as homogeneous, ethnic communities are not consensual in their values. In so far as a community can be identified, conflicting and opposing values and aspirations exist — most significantly around social schisms such as class and gender. There is substantial evidence that there are major structural issues affecting young women of NESB in their interaction with their ethnic and their university communities. The issues include concepts of autonomy and responsibility, the priority to be accorded study time as against domestic tasks, problems of affordable and acceptable accommodation, and career aspirations. Many of these issues are the result

of conflict across generations, with parental views fashioned by their pre-migration histories.

In curriculum terms, representations of the experience of women may be dominated by articulations of cultural values which reflect stereotypical patriarchal conceptions — for instance, in social work discussions of the role of women in families, or in legal discussions of marriage and divorce, or in sociological discussions of sex role socialisation. Thus an accurate reflection of the complexity and diversity of gender relations remains an important concern for the effective implementation of sensitive reforms.

The problem of intra-communal sexism can be overplayed. The La Trobe situation demonstrated the dynamics under which sexism can run rampant, through sexual harassment and assault, in which young women can be intimidated in totally unacceptable ways, and in which attempts are made to maintain the intimidation through the manipulation of ethnic values. It also demonstrates that strong opposition to those practices was very strong within sections of the community.

One of the long term dangers of such situations in the wake of their resolution, though, lies in their role in reinforcing ethnic stereotypes, and legitimising prejudices. Thus overt sexual harassment can be used to attack claims for equitable treatment for minorities — if they behave in this unacceptable way, what right do they have to lay claim to positive action? There is some evidence at La Trobe of such a lasting residue. In an environment of declining real resources going into universities and the refusal of the government to fund adequately its equity goals, academic and administrative opposition to equity at the cost of what are seen as 'mainstream' educational matters, can feed off such incidents.

Despite the recognition in *A Fair Chance for All* of the differences between men and women, and the care with which issues of recruitment and support should be addressed, there was little awareness within the universities of these differences and the implications for action. For instance, one senior administrator with policy and support responsibilities across all student services indicated that gender issues were not relevant, while the majority of respondents failed to respond at all to questions in this area.

## 7. 5 DISABILITY

The research project from which this report is drawn sought to examine the situation covering both people of non English speaking background and people with disabilities. There were a number of situations where a student from an ethnic minority background has disabilities. One important case, given its consequences for action by the university, concerned a mature age NESB student with significant visual impairment, undertaking a social work degree.

He had applied, successfully he believed, for a student placement with a fieldwork agency, yet prior to taking up the placement, was rejected, ostensibly due to his inability to make eye contact and his inability to lift clients needing physical support. He appealed to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission on the grounds of discrimination based on his disability. The appeal was successfully conciliated, though he did not take up the placement. The student, who had undertaken previous tertiary studies in an overseas country which had more clearly elucidated equity practices, was concerned about the absence of any effective equity strategies at the University, and the poor liaison between the social work school and the fieldwork agency. The effects of the case on the university included increasing impetus for some co-ordination of action on disability, with a 'halo' effect on other areas of disadvantage, improved organisational methods for student placement, and a clearer specification from the field of the necessary attributes for a placement position. The student's action generated a clear policy by the large fieldwork agency to encourage students with disabilities to apply for placements with it.

Other NESB students with disabilities have been noted elsewhere — for instance, the University of Queensland identified one student undergoing rehabilitation who used the Language Centre there. However there has been very little attention paid overall to the implications of 'multiple minority' students seeking to enter universities, survive and prosper within them. Support workers and service providers are either 'group specific' and therefore rarely meet with each other, or carry all 'disadvantaged' groups, and are therefore exhibiting all the signs of overload. None of the Equity Plans considers the complexity of single category planning, and indeed, the categorical distinctions made by DEET in its guidelines for Equity Plans renders such flexibility unlikely if there is not a very strong awareness and commitment within the universities.

## **RECOMMENDATION 9 : MULTIPLE MINORITIES AND DISAGGREGATED COLLECTIVITIES**

*Universities, for the most part, have not identified issues or strategies affecting specific ethnic groups, nor have they explored the implications for equity services of students who are not 'single category' We therefore recommend that OMA press DEET to ensure universities provide more comprehensive analyses of local issues, and programs designed to respond to these situations.*

### **7.6 THE IMPACT OF RACISM**

Tertiary education institutions are based on values antithetical to racism. Ironically racism — from prejudicial attitudes through to racist violence — can co-exist alongside access and equity strategies in universities. Moreover the predominant strategies supported by governments revolve around access for disadvantaged migrant groups and multicultural curriculum. Neither of these approaches need address dominant culture racism in any systematic way. The approach implicit in this policy is compensatory rather than challenging fundamental structures and assumptions. Few universities make mention of strategies to address racism. More importantly, *A Fair Chance For All* fails to mention the issue.

Racism exists within the tertiary sector both at the level of the individual and the institution, among both staff and students. At a basic level prejudice exists in the stereotyping of students — the passive 'Asian' female student, or the macho Greek 'Adonis'. There is evidence of prejudice being translated into acts of individual discrimination on the part of some academics in terms of marking, derogatory remarks etc. Student racist graffiti on desks, in toilets and on university property, can be extremely offensive to identified students and add to feelings of demoralisation. Long established practices and procedures in terms of entry requirements, acceptable classroom/presentation styles, anglocentric curricula, all contribute to a climate conducive to institutional racism. While much of the damage has been done earlier in the educational system, the tertiary sector can continue to reinforce racist practices.

Extreme forms of racist behaviour — such as racist violence and concentrated vilifying poster campaigns, surface from time to time on particular campuses — for example New South Wales — which has the highest proportion of overseas students of any

university in the country. While universities may take this form of harassment very seriously and take steps in the short term to combat it, there are often no long term strategies aimed at prevention and little is done until the next upsurge of extreme behaviour. Racism exists at a deeper level than current government strategies allow.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 10 : RACISM**

*OMA should request the AVCC to invite all universities to develop and adopt policies and implementation strategies on racial harassment. As part of these policies, universities should develop and adopt codes of practice in teaching for academic staff.*

#### **7.7 LANGUAGE AND PEDAGOGY**

The Learning Skills Development Officer at the University of Melbourne describes existing approaches to NESB learning support as a 'tyranny of language', with issues of overall teaching style and cultural factors too often overlooked in favour of a focus purely on language; and language courses on offer often too general and inappropriate in content and form to students' needs.

It is essential to offer more to students than counselling and six week bridging programs, which can only discuss ideas and skills for a curriculum with which they have yet to engage. Continual follow up throughout the course is necessary, along with language support in the context of each particular academic area. Professional dialects and jargon need to be decoded for students before their general English needs are addressed.

The perception that migrants have only a language problem neglects the whole Anglo learning ethos and conceptual framework. Improving the curriculum so that NESB students are included will also benefit the ESB students. Subjects with a practice element, such as social work, have particular difficulties for NESB students. Four themes in a learning support scheme are essential:

- 1) developing effective communication
  - 2) clarifying conceptions
  - 3) active learning
  - 4) language development
- [Hunter and Hayden 1989].

English language difficulties at university are not restricted solely to groups of NESB students; rather, they are located on a continuum that can involve a number of different

groups, including working class students of English speaking background (ESB), students with learning disabilities, hearing-impaired students, students with disrupted educational histories, and NESB students, particularly those of lower socio-economic status or refugee backgrounds. In view of the diversity contained within the NESB category, demonstrated in our breakdown of six distinct groups within 'NESB', an immigrant background in itself cannot automatically be regarded as a disadvantage; and, conversely, the interplay of other social-educational factors should be considered: class, household culture, schooling. For instance two academics from La Trobe have commented "Many of our students *are* genuinely disadvantaged, not so much because their parents are of migrant background or because they live in outer suburbs but because their schooling has failed them" [Manne and James, 1984].

University can be an alien academic culture not just for NESB students but also for many ESB students coming from non-academic working class backgrounds. A study skills co-ordinator at La Trobe has commented that 'the NESB classification may unfairly suggest their difficulties are to do with the language and culture of the home (potentially increasing the tendency to judge students by the surname) and thus fail to recognise that these difficulties may be to do with low socio-economic status and/or lack of family familiarity with tertiary education.' These are characteristics that may be attributable to ESB and NESB students alike. Class-based problems of acculturation arose at Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences, involving Western suburbs NESB students, mainly of Greek, Italian, Lebanese descent. While most of these students were the children or grand children of immigrants with a reasonable command of English, the level of alienation experienced amidst the middle-class Lincoln 'Country Road' set was sufficiently high that a number dropped out. At La Trobe these issues have become highly apparent because the university attracts a large number of students from low SES and NESB background. On the basis of her experience in teaching local NESB and overseas students, the Assistance with English advisor at La Trobe feels that low SES NESB students face cultural adaptation problems at university and are more disadvantaged than overseas students, because in terms of academic style and abstract concepts they have no solid base in either English or their first home language. In view of this, the Assistance with English unit offers 'deep acculturation into the Australian academic context'. At the University of Queensland, a TESOL staff member commented that many students suffer from lack of 'professional' English, even though their general English is fairly fluent, and this is especially the case for women.

The head of the Social Sciences Language and Academic Skills Unit at La Trobe finds that similar sets of learning problems are shared by Anglo students and NESB students of European/Middle Eastern descent; while South-East Asian NESB students have a separate set of problems.

While overt, systematic racism on campuses seems to be declining, general feelings of cultural dislocation and alienation are part of the experience of NESB students, for instance in anglo-dominated tutorials where unspoken conventions of interaction between tutors and students may be unfamiliar to a student belonging to an ethnic minority. Prayer facilities for Muslim students have not always been provided without some degree of struggle with university administration. Collaborative group-learning styles of Vietnamese and South American students have emerged as a problem in certain cases. In addition, there are reported occurrences of verbal abuse by members of academic staff towards some NESB students, particularly Asians and Africans.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 11 : LANGUAGE CENTRES**

*In view of the crucial role of language and study centres in the survival and graduation of NESB students, we recommend that OMA initiate a review of the centres. This review would seek to determine an equitable basis for the effective provision of support programs, with particular reference to the effect of fee paying courses on the quality and range of programs for local NESB students. Where fee paying overseas students draw on services provided by universities to overcome student disadvantage, the service delivery units should be able to fully recover the costs involved from fees paid.*

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Universities are funded for the most part by the public purse. They are also institutions with a charter to pursue excellence, and further knowledge and education. In the past five years universities have moved towards opening pathways to sectors of the community which, in the past, may not have seen tertiary education as an option. They have also recognised that the formal examination systems operating in many states as the certifier of capacity for tertiary education have critical flaws which may disadvantage significant portions of the student population.

Even with these changes, in the universities we have examined, the approaches adopted towards increasing access and improving equity for students from non English speaking backgrounds still only range from minimal to marginal. They can be summarised as:

- i) Special access programs taking into account individual circumstances, particularly recent arrival, poor English (as a consequence of recent arrival) and fragmented education (e.g. adolescence in refugee camps etc).
- ii) English language support programs, ranging from generalist to specific purpose, for local and/or overseas students;
- iii) Study skills and courses counselling;
- iv) Personal crisis counselling;
- v) Optional curriculum elements/subjects;
- vi) In social work, multicultural perspectives incorporated into mainstream subjects and multicultural fieldwork projects;
- vii) Special 'professional jargon' seminars in social work;
- viii) Intensive mentor schemes for students in need;
- ix) Equal Opportunity in Employment strategies (but not Affirmative Action);
- x) Spill over benefits from initiatives for full fee paying overseas students.

The Commonwealth's Equity program, *A Fair Chance for All*, is problematic in two important senses. Firstly, while it expects universities to develop means of improving access for students from minority groups, it does little to indicate how the more intensive support resources they may require in order to survive in the universities are to be found. There is an expectation that universities will be able to divert resources into this support from recurrent income from the Commonwealth. At a time when real recurrent funds to many universities are being reduced each year, and the Equity fund is being reoriented away from indefinite, ongoing provision for equity programs, this approach suggests one of two possibilities — either a desire to adopt the high moral ground as a tactic in order to intimidate universities into performing as DEET wishes, or a substantial disagreement within DEET about allocation of resources between competing and perhaps contradictory policy objectives. This having been said, there is also substantial evidence that the movement towards more coherent and integrated planning and program delivery within universities owes much to the prompting and requirements of the Commonwealth.

Secondly, the emphasis on a fairly uniform set of approaches to access and equity for all universities may be counterproductive. Given repeated research findings that intervention in secondary education could play a major role in achieving greater equity at the tertiary level, resource commitment by government to this area is necessary to allow universities to develop initiatives. If the goals of government include opening up elite institutions to capable people from minorities or poor backgrounds who might otherwise not reach any university, then those resources have to be made available. Current programs are insufficient while university recurrent funds should not have to be diverted into the secondary system. In newer institutions where a much larger proportion of the student population is of working class and NESB origin, the support programs necessary to ensure the highest quality of education is maintained may require substantially increased levels of resources — smaller classes, intensive language and learning seminars, more opportunity for tutoring in small groups or one-on-one, specifically identified counsellors, major curriculum review exercises, carefully targetted recruitment programs. There is no sign that the government has been willing to acknowledge this situation, and respond to it.

The major barriers to achieving more integrated and effective programs covering, recruitment, access, support, and survival through to graduation, can be summarised under two headings — policy and resources. Universities have really only recently

begun to develop a sensitivity to the range of issues underlying the policy tasks — these include identifying ethnic communities which are seriously under-represented in the student body, exploring the factors involved in this under-representation, and then developing strategies to remedy the situation where practicable. This is a skilled task of social research and community relations to which universities have not oriented themselves in the past. Allied with this process of identification and recruitment there exists the task of identifying and developing effective support systems.

Universities have had the least success in attempting to influence their own curricula — the most widespread model of education regards NESB students as being in need of compensatory education. There is rarely recognition of the need to address structural racism, and fully integrate non-racist practice into professional education.

While some universities have begun a review process of current provision, integrated planning has not advanced far. Existing support programs range from the haphazard, based on voluntary effort and depending on student initiative to seek aid, through to quite well developed and effective language and study support centres, a number of which are now faced with closure or diminution of services as a result of Commonwealth cuts to university funding. This nexus — increasing demand and declining resources — takes us to the next element.

As the Equity funding schemes wind down, universities are now to be expected to deliver programs from recurrent resources, or from that supposedly unending cornucopia, income from full fee paying overseas students. The DEET position appears to be that unsatisfactory performance in Equity may lead to a further cut in funds, as under mainstreaming all universities should by now have incorporated equity into normal resource allocation. This position has some strength, but it falls apart when significant expenditure is required due to the particularities of the student body. For instance neither Sydney University with an overwhelmingly upper middle class student body or La Trobe University with an overwhelmingly working class and mature age student body will receive special equity funding in the long term. The question of resources thus bedevils the achievement of effective planning and service delivery.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

### *RESOURCES*

1. The quality of research evident in many Equity Plans suggests the need to specify more carefully developed, flexible and detailed strategies relevant to each university and its ethnic communities. In order to enable this to occur, the Office of Multicultural Affairs should press DEET to allocate additional funding for program research and development.

2. The massive demands placed on universities, particularly those with high working class ethnic intakes, have not been recognised by DEET in its funding of universities. In order to ensure that the educational needs of these groups can be addressed effectively, and professional and viable support programs put in place and/or maintained, OMA should press DEET to substantially increase funding under the Equity heading, and provide additional resources to universities whose programs have been shown to be effective.

### *EQUITY INFORMATION*

3. The lack of information about initiatives is seriously inhibiting development of effective equity strategies at university, faculty and department/school levels. The Office of Multicultural Affairs, in conjunction with DEET, should approach the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee with support for the AVCC to act as a clearing house for information on innovation in access and equity. The AVCC should collect and disseminate material, perhaps through a regular newsletter, or via AARNET computer mail system.

### ***MONITORING***

4. In view of the concerns expressed about the public accountability of universities for their performance in equity, OMA should press DEET, as part of the monitoring process of Equity Plans, to publish the Plans.

### ***SOCIAL WORK***

5. In view of the key role played by Social Work Departments and Schools in educating professionals for welfare practice in a multicultural society, OMA should contact the relevant Heads to discuss what contribution it can make in the development of local initiatives for student recruitment and support services in the context of Department or School equity plans.

### ***USER PAYS***

6. OMA should press DEET to maintain a regular monitoring of the impact of user pays policies such as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme and Post Graduate Fees on ethnic minorities, and publicise the results. Particular attention should be given to the impact on specific ethnic groups, especially those with a history of being under-represented in tertiary education. OMA should also press DEET to reconsider its policy in this area should any evidence of disadvantage emerge.

### ***OVERSEAS STUDENTS***

7. There is a growing tension on many campuses between the demands generated by overseas students, and the needs of local NESB students. We recommend that universities review their support procedures for both these groups, and ensure their separate needs are specified and addressed.

### ***STAFF TRAINING***

8. Academics have barely incorporated the diverse nature of the student population into their curricula and teaching methods. OMA should take the initiative with

Professional Development Centres/Centres for Teaching and Learning, in providing funding and guidance for staff training on curriculum development and change. This should go beyond the cross-cultural communication/background facts approach currently offered in some centres, to address the issue of professional programs as a locus for the creation and transmission of racist discourses.

#### ***MULTIPLE MINORITIES AND DISAGGREGATED COLLECTIVITIES***

9. Universities, for the most part, have not identified issues or strategies affecting specific ethnic groups, nor have they explored the implications for equity services of students who are not 'single category'. We therefore recommend that OMA press DEET to ensure universities provide more comprehensive analyses of local issues, and programs designed to respond to these situations.

#### ***RACISM***

10. OMA should request the AVCC to invite all universities to develop and adopt policies and implementation strategies on racial harassment. As part of these policies, universities should develop and adopt codes of practice in teaching for academic staff.

#### ***LANGUAGE CENTRES***

11. In view of the crucial role of language and study centres in the survival and graduation of NESB students, we recommend that OMA initiate a review of the centres. This review would seek to determine an equitable basis for the effective provision of support programs, with particular reference to the effect of fee paying courses on the quality and range of programs for local NESB students. Where fee paying overseas students draw on services provided by universities to overcome student disadvantage, the service delivery units should be able to fully recover the costs involved from fees paid.

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