

## **STUDENT EQUITY AND DIVERSITY PLAN (2020-2022)**

### **ENQUIRIES**

A/Prof Andrew Harvey  
Executive Director, Student  
Equity  
La Trobe University  
Victoria 3086

[cheedr@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:cheedr@latrobe.edu.au)  
[latrobe.edu.au/cheedr](https://latrobe.edu.au/cheedr)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

La Trobe University acknowledges that our campuses are located on the lands of many traditional custodians in Victoria. We recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value their unique contribution to the University and wider Australian society. We are committed to providing opportunities for Indigenous Australians, both as individuals and communities through teaching and learning, research and community partnerships across all of our campuses. La Trobe University pays our respect to Indigenous Elders, past, present and emerging and will continue to incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems and protocols as part of our ongoing strategic and operational business.

## TERMINOLOGY

We have used the terms ‘under-represented’ and ‘marginalised’ students to reflect groups that record relatively low access and participation rates in higher education, and/or have been demonstrably underserved by institutions. These groups include the six identified equity groups in Australian higher education: Indigenous students; those from non-English speaking, regional and rural, and low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds; women in non-traditional areas such as IT and Engineering; and students with a disability. However, our definition of ‘under-represented’ also includes student groups outside or marginalised within the six categories, such as care leavers and those from a refugee background. A neurodivergent person is defined as one whose neurological development and state are atypical.

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgement of country.....	2
Terminology .....	2
About this plan.....	3
Our student equity commitment.....	4
Our values .....	4
Our equity strengths .....	4
Our equity and diversity objectives .....	5
Our programs and actions demonstrate our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion.....	6
Objective 1 - Expand access for under-represented students.....	8
Objective 2 - Increase success and retention rates for under-represented students .....	9
Objective 3 - Strengthen learning quality for all students by harnessing student diversity and equity .....	10
Objective 4 - Improve equity of graduate experiences and outcomes .....	11
Objective 5 - Foster a research culture that reflects our commitment to student equity .....	12
Consultation.....	13

## ABOUT THIS PLAN

La Trobe has a proud history of commitment to social justice and widening participation. Our founding act notes that ‘From inception, La Trobe has been particularly focussed on providing access to quality higher education to those from disadvantaged backgrounds and has become an internationally recognised leader in this field.’<sup>1</sup>

The importance of our commitment is underlined by the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has disproportionately affected people from disadvantaged backgrounds across the globe, with severe health, social, and educational impacts. For universities, the pandemic reveals the educational impacts of the digital divide, limitations of access and affordability, challenges to student success, including poverty and mental health, and an urgent need to ensure equitable employment opportunities for graduates. Promoting equity within and beyond the university has always been central to our mission, and will continue to be during these times of unprecedented challenge.

La Trobe is among the top two Victorian universities<sup>2</sup> for the enrolment of regional students and those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and we conduct globally recognised research on student equity, diversity, gender, and disability. We are committed to strengthening higher education for regional Victorian students, including through our campuses in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura, and Shepparton. The La Trobe Rural Health School is Australia’s largest rural health school and symbolises our commitment to increasing regional prosperity and opportunity.

We understand that learning quality can be strengthened through greater diversity and equity. Research highlights that students from multiple ethnic, socio-economic, cultural, age, gender and Indigenous backgrounds can enrich classroom conversations and improve the learning experience for all students. This concept of ‘inclusive excellence’ underpins our commitment to improve equity and diversity, in order to strengthen quality.

To continue our success, we must embed diversity and equity across the student lifecycle, and the whole of University. Widening participation, improving student success and retention, and ensuring strong and equitable graduate outcomes, are all critical. Equally, we must ensure that broader University strategies embody our values of inclusiveness, diversity, equity and social justice. To that end, the Student Equity and Diversity Plan is consistent with our existing plans on Learning and Teaching, Student Success and Retention, Globalisation, Research 2030, and Clever Learning.

In particular, we build here on the objectives, enablers and strategies outlined in our overarching Strategic Plan 2018-22, with new strategies to increase the participation, success and outcomes of diverse student groups, and to strengthen graduate outcomes for under-represented students. Five key objectives have been identified, and the associated actions demonstrate our commitment to a whole of institutional approach, with transparent measures for success.

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<sup>1</sup> La Trobe University Act 2009, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Education and Training Student statistics 2018.

## OUR STUDENT EQUITY COMMITMENT

To promote social justice, support under-represented groups, and harness student equity and diversity to improve learning quality for all students.

## OUR VALUES

This approach is based on our values of:

- inclusiveness, diversity, equity and social justice
- pursuing excellence and sustainability in everything we do
- championing our local communities in Melbourne's north and regional Victoria
- being willing to innovate and disrupt the traditional way of doing things.

## OUR EQUITY STRENGTHS

- La Trobe University has the highest number of undergraduate students from low socio-economic backgrounds in Victoria<sup>3</sup>.
- La Trobe University has the highest regional participation rate of non-regional headquartered universities in Australia<sup>4</sup>.
- La Trobe University has a proud history of supporting the learning of students from low socio-economic and regional backgrounds, with both groups recording retention rates that are equivalent to overall cohorts<sup>5</sup>.
- The number of students with a disability increased by 123 per cent between 2009 and 2018<sup>6</sup>.
- The number of Indigenous students has more than doubled from 140 in 2009, to 299 in 2018<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Sourced from Department of Education and Training Student statistics 2018: Section 11 – Equity groups <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/53025>. Based on the SA1 measure of low socio-economic status.

<sup>4</sup> Sourced from Department of Education and Training Student statistics 2018: Section 16 – Equity performance data <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/53030>. Based on the ASGS RA measure of regional status.

<sup>5, 6, 7</sup> Sourced from Department of Education and Training Student statistics 2018: Section 16 – Equity performance data <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/53030>

## OUR EQUITY AND DIVERSITY OBJECTIVES

The University's primary objectives and enablers are identified in the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. The Student Equity and Diversity Plan supports the Strategic Plan by outlining specific equity and diversity strategies to promote social justice and inclusive excellence amongst our student body over the next three years. This plan is also designed to complement the strategies outlined in the Student Success and Retention Plan, Staff Diversity and Inclusion Plan, our emerging Indigenous Plan, Disability Action Plan, Learning and Teaching Plan, Research Plan, Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan, and Globalisation Plan.

Five objectives underpin the Student Equity and Diversity Plan:

1. To expand access for under-represented students
2. To increase success and retention rates for under-represented students
3. To strengthen learning quality for all students by harnessing student diversity and equity
4. To improve equity of graduate experiences and outcomes
5. To foster a research culture that reflects our commitment to student equity.

## OUR MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Access: Be the top Victorian university for regional and low SES enrolments.
- Success and retention: Achieve success and retention rate parity for under-represented students.
- Postgraduate and Higher Degree by Research (HDR) participation and outcomes: Benchmark and monitor the participation and outcomes of under-represented postgraduate and HDR students.
- Employability: Achieve parity in graduate employment outcomes for under-represented students.

## OUR PROGRAMS AND ACTIONS DEMONSTRATE OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We are fortunate to have a number of sector leading support programs delivered across our Colleges and central divisions, including our Tertiary Preparation Program, comprehensive equity scholarships for under-represented students and our Destination Australia Research Scholarships.

Program/Initiative	Description
Care leaver support	<p>Since 2015, La Trobe University's award-winning Higher Education for Care Leavers Strategy has ensured that young people in out-of-home care (including foster care, residential care, kinship care, and/or wards of the State) and care leavers are provided the same opportunities as others to aspire to, access and succeed at university. Initiatives under the Strategy include outreach to flexible learning schools, changes to application and admission processes to enable care leavers to self-identify in order to receive consideration in their application for a place, and access to targeted financial, academic and personal supports once enrolled. The Strategy is underpinned by research conducted by the Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research (CHEEDR) and has been supported by a Sidney Myer Fund Large Grant and the Victorian Department of Education and Training.</p>
Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research (CHEEDR)	<p>Established in 2012, the Centre leads research, analysis and evaluation to inform the University's strategies for improving the access, achievement and outcomes of under-represented students. The Centre is a national leader in student equity research and led the first major national research projects into care leavers in higher education, and military veterans in higher education. Research conducted by the Centre has had an institutional impact as well as a broader national policy and research impact. The Centre also oversees and coordinates the University's major student equity funding, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP).</p>
Disability research centres	<p>La Trobe has two sector-leading disability research centres.</p> <p>The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) is Australia's first centre dedicated to autism research. Through high-quality scientific research, innovation and translation, OTARC aims to expand knowledge to enrich the lives of autistic people and their families.</p> <p>The Living with Disability Research Centre is one of the pre-eminent centres for social research into the lives and experiences of people living with cognitive disability in Australia. Research activities are conducted across three broad themes: effectiveness of disability services; building the evidence base for participation and inclusion; and enabling mainstream services to be more inclusive.</p>
Himilo Community Connect Somali-Australian partnership	<p>La Trobe has an Educational Activity Agreement with the Heidelberg Training and Resource Centre to support young Somali Australians in West Heidelberg to fulfil their potential in achieving higher education outcomes and improved employment outcomes. La Trobe's CHEEDR has also been commissioned to undertake a research project examining the facilitators and barriers to employment for Somali Australians who have studied at university.</p>

Indigenous knowledge and culture	La Trobe was the first Victorian University to introduce a mandatory Indigenous subject, Wominjeka, for all students. This online module is an introduction to the history of Indigenous Australians and emphasises the link between cultural knowledge and modern education. Other initiatives include the appointment of an Indigenous Practitioner in Residence in the School of Education and cultural awareness training for the Senior Executive Group. La Trobe also supports the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy.
Islamic Museum Australia partnership	La Trobe is the Islamic Museum of Australia's education partner, which includes sponsorship of the La Trobe University Australian Muslim Artists 2019 Acquisitive Art Prize, collaboration on new curricula, and work integrated learning opportunities. We are also working with the Museum on a range of research opportunities.
La Trobe Staff Giving Program	The Golden Lanyard Staff Giving Program enables La Trobe staff to make tax-deductible donations to assist students to enrol at La Trobe. Since 2013, La Trobe staff have collectively donated to support 39 full access scholarships for students who face barriers including financial hardship, caring for others, educational disadvantage, disability, or are from a non-English speaking background.
NEXUS program	The NEXUS program recruits diverse university graduates into teaching, including those with a strong commitment to low socio-economic regional communities. The employment-based Master of Teaching (Secondary) pathway focusses on preparing culturally diverse teachers and integrating them in communities with mentors and on-community and school sites. La Trobe was awarded \$6.3 million from the Department of Education and Training for this program.
Regional Pathway Programs	La Trobe is committed to increasing the university participation of students from regional areas. The Bradford Shepparton Pathway Program, and the Albury-Wodonga Year 11 Pathway to La Trobe, support Year 11 students from low SES backgrounds through the final 15 months of secondary schooling. The programs include mentoring, wellbeing workshops, literacy upskilling, academic capacity building activities and university familiarisation and preparedness workshops embedded into the school curriculum. Participating students are given a conditional early university offer at the end of Year 11. The Bradford program is funded by the Gillespie Family Foundation and La Trobe University.
School Partnerships Program (SPP)	Since 2011, La Trobe has actively engaged with secondary schools through the School Partnerships Program (SPP). The program collaborates with 35 low SES schools (including two Flexible Learning Centres) in metropolitan and regional Victoria to deliver a sequential framework of engagement activities that support the demystification of higher education and provide extra curriculum support, academic preparation, and awareness of university courses and future careers. The SPP is funded through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program.
Charles La Trobe College	Situated on land contiguous with our Melbourne campus, Charles La Trobe College (CLC) is central to our vision of the City of the Future. The University is committed to helping CLC by providing access to University facilities, dedicated outreach, teacher education placements, priority pathways, mentoring, and research collaboration.

## **OBJECTIVE 1 - EXPAND ACCESS FOR UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS**

Opportunity is central to the University's mission. By expanding our presence within schools and communities, we will attract new groups of students, including those from out-of-home care and refugee backgrounds. Our outreach programs will explicitly raise academic achievement and expectations, both motivating and preparing students for higher education. Financial support will target those in need, and we will engage parents, carers, and communities to broaden access for Indigenous, regional, and first-in-family students.

### **1.1 - Recognise diverse forms of student excellence and service.**

We will formally recognise and promote the strengths of diverse student groups. This includes acknowledging those who hold carer responsibilities, undertake community service, and possess multilingual and intercultural skills, through our Aspire program, Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS), and other admissions pathways.

### **1.2 - Expand access through pathway and bridging programs.**

We will expand student access through sub-degree diplomas and the Tertiary Preparation Program. We will also broaden outreach across regional schools and collaborate with education and community partners across northern Victoria.

### **1.3 - Extend university curriculum offerings within secondary schools.**

We will provide more opportunities for under-represented students to undertake university study in school, linked to a clear admissions offer.

### **1.4 - Broaden and deepen outreach.**

We will develop strategic partnerships with low SES schools and conduct activities across flexible learning schools, community centres and other sites. We will also deepen our outreach to low SES schools, fostering academic achievement, delivering university curriculum, and developing clear admissions pathways for participating students. We will broaden pathways from vocational to higher education, and expand collaboration with education and community partners.

### **1.5 - Embed equity and diversity in scholarships.**

We will embed the principle of equity in all centrally provided domestic scholarships, expanding the number of under-represented students who can access university.

### **1.6 - Expand support for marginalised students.**

We will expand our targeted programs with students from out-of-home care backgrounds, students seeking asylum and from refugee backgrounds, students with a disability, Indigenous students, regional students, neurodivergent students, parents, carers, military veterans, LGBTIQ+ students and other 'hidden' groups.

### **1.7 - Promote student diversity within selective courses.**

We will promote under-represented student access to the most selective courses. We will strengthen programs to attract women in non-traditional areas such as Engineering.



## **OBJECTIVE 2 - INCREASE SUCCESS AND RETENTION RATES FOR UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS**

Pathways are non-linear, and many students face academic, financial, and broader challenges during their studies. Further, rapid growth in the number of students with a disability and other challenges increase the need for tailored student resources, and support for academic and professional staff. We will increase the flexibility of our course structures, service provision, and assessment. We will deliver individualised support, and assist all students to participate in extra-curricular and employability activities. Through inclusive and accessible learning environments, we will ensure that all students can effectively participate and succeed.

### **2.1 - Embed the principle of equity in extra-curricular activities.**

We will promote and support the participation of under-represented students in extra-curricular activities. We will ensure that equity is a guiding principle in the allocation of outbound mobility bursaries, work-based learning (WBL), placements, and other extra-curricular support.

### **2.2 - Strengthen student support services.**

We will ensure robust and equitable provision of support services, including maintaining dedicated Indigenous Student Support Centres at all campuses and supporting Indigenous Students with accommodation. We will monitor and increase opportunities for uptake of accommodation, careers, financial counselling, and student support services by under-represented groups.

### **2.3 - Improve teaching and learning support for all students.**

The University will strengthen academic support through inclusive and representative peer mentoring programs, proactive academic advising, reasonable adjustments, and individual student support premised on learning analytics. We will strive to normalise the use of student support services and ensure that these services are delivered to those most in need.

### **2.4 - Create more equitable assessment practices and inclusive learning environments.**

We will address unconscious bias within learning and assessment, ensure the effective implementation of Learning Access Plans, and develop inclusive learning environments and systems. We will ensure that staff are provided with the capability and training required to provide reasonable adjustments to accommodate students' needs.

### **2.5 - Devise multiple entry and exit points.**

We will develop student-centred course structures with multiple entry and exit points, including nested undergraduate degrees, supportive leave of absence and re-recruitment processes, and collaboration with education and community partners.

## **OBJECTIVE 3 - STRENGTHEN LEARNING QUALITY FOR ALL STUDENTS BY HARNESSING STUDENT DIVERSITY AND EQUITY**

Diversity, equity and quality form an alloy. Student diversity can strengthen learning quality by broadening perspectives, deepening inquiry, and enabling pre-existing views and assumptions to be challenged. Such diversity needs to be harnessed both within and beyond the classroom to ensure respect, cultural safety, and effective learning. We will embed cross-cultural understanding and humility within our curriculum and pedagogy, and create more inclusive campus environments. We will work to decolonise the curriculum and ensure that all La Trobe graduates leave with an understanding of Indigenous history, culture and knowledge.

### **3.1 - Educate and train staff on cross-cultural issues and cultural safety, including casual staff.**

For our student body to thrive, the diversity of our students must be reflected in the actions and behaviours of our staff. In collaboration with Human Resources (HR) and the Colleges, we will support staff training around Indigenous knowledge and culture, disability awareness, and cross-cultural understanding. We will recognise and reward staff who demonstrate a commitment to La Trobe's values and cultural qualities.

### **3.2 - Embed Indigenous culture, knowledges, and history in the curriculum.**

We will embed Indigenous perspectives, Indigenous knowledge, and relevant innovative pedagogies in all curricula, in the service of developing culturally-safe graduates with a nuanced grasp of the contemporary consequences of colonisation and the strengths of Indigenous Australian cultures.

La Trobe is committed to implementing the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy, and will establish a Reconciliation Action Plan or equivalent.

### **3.3 - Better understand and harness diversity on campus.**

We will conduct research to identify perceptions of diverse students and the potential to harness diversity. We will employ diversity champions to promote learning quality through cross-cultural knowledge and understanding. Consistent with the principle of 'nothing about us without us', we will ensure that under-represented student groups are involved in developing peer mentoring, support services, and student success programs.

### **3.4 - Support development of a student-centred culture.**

We will work with University student associations to ensure students are involved in governance and management decisions related to equity, diversity and inclusion. The University will continue to support the *Respect. Now. Always.* and *Be a Better Human* campaigns.

## **OBJECTIVE 4 - IMPROVE EQUITY OF GRADUATE EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES**

Inequity does not 'wash out' after undergraduate access, and groups that have been marginalised are typically even less represented at postgraduate and higher degree levels. This inequity matters since postgraduate and Higher Degree by Research (HDR) economic outcomes are generally higher for individuals, and since research culture and excellence also rely on a diversity of student backgrounds and perspectives. Graduate outcomes also vary substantially across groups, requiring targeted interventions to improve student employability and to address employer bias.

### **4.1 - Expand postgraduate access for under-represented students.**

We will prioritise postgraduate pathways and support for under-represented undergraduate students.

### **4.2 - Develop both mainstream and targeted career services.**

We will continue to embed employability within the curriculum, alongside targeted careers services for identified groups. We will ensure that under-represented students are encouraged to participate in Career Ready Advantage, with uptake monitored and evaluated.

### **4.3 - Work with our employers to broaden career access.**

We will work with our major employers to develop opportunities for under-represented students. This could include targeted internship programs, education around conscious and unconscious bias, and training on productive diversity.

### **4.4 - Allocate employability support according to student need.**

We will embed the principle of equity when allocating placements, internships, and student employment roles at the University. Additionally, we will monitor and evaluate uptake of placements by under-represented groups.

### **4.5 - Promote inclusive employment practices at La Trobe.**

Consistent with the University's Diversity and Inclusion Plan, we will promote inclusive employment and ensure that a commitment to social justice is a key selection criterion for La Trobe roles. We will encourage employment of people facing multiple barriers to work and ensure that La Trobe students themselves are prioritised for employment on major capital projects such as City of the Future.

## **OBJECTIVE 5 - FOSTER A RESEARCH CULTURE THAT REFLECTS OUR COMMITMENT TO STUDENT EQUITY**

Many student groups remain under-represented at Higher Degree by Research (HDR) level, and students require flexibility, financial support, and the creation of postgraduate pathways. La Trobe leads research into many areas of student diversity and equity, and we will strengthen our efforts to connect that research to our own institutional practice. Our approach will be guided by *La Trobe Research 2030* and our Indigenous Research Strategy.

### **5.1 - Ensure programs and scholarships for under-represented Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students.**

We will develop collaborative programs and flexible scholarship offerings that support the participation and experience of Indigenous candidates and other under-represented groups. We will ensure a broad definition of merit in the allocation of HDR scholarships that includes adjustment for disadvantage, alongside our ongoing provision of specific equity and Indigenous scholarships.

### **5.2 - Develop HDR pathways and incentives to promote participation of under-represented groups.**

We will identify Honours and postgraduate students from under-represented groups, including Indigenous students, and create pathways and incentives for them to undertake higher degree study.

### **5.3 - Promote HDR opportunities in the regions.**

We will ensure that all La Trobe campuses are attractive to research students, and that research support and HDR outcomes are comparable. We will promote regional and multi-campus research initiatives, and position La Trobe as a research leader on regional education.

### **5.4 - Strengthen leadership of research into equity and diversity.**

We will continue and strengthen our specific research into equity and diversity, through research focus areas and groups such as the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), the Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research (CHEEDR), the Living with a Disability Research Centre, and the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC). We will position La Trobe as the leading Australian university for research into student equity and diversity, and connect this research to institutional policy and practice.

## CONSULTATION

Throughout 2019, we consulted with students, and academic and professional staff from across the University. We would like to thank all those who provided feedback, including the: Academic Board, Admissions Committee, Alumni and Advancement Office, Bendigo Student Association, Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research, College of ASSC, College of SHE, Education Committee, Equity and Diversity, Finance Office, Graduate Research School, Higher Education Policy Office, Human Resources, Indigenous Strategy and Education Office, Industry Engagement staff, La Trobe International, La Trobe Student Union, Library, Living with a Disability Research Centre, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students), Office of the Vice-President (Administration), Office of the Vice-President (Strategy & Development), Planning and Governance, Planning and Institutional Performance Unit, Regional Committee, Regional Office, Research and Industry Engagement Office, Sales and Customer Experience, Shepparton Students' Association, Student Services, and Student Success and Retention team.

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Contact: Associate Professor Andrew Harvey, Executive Director, Student Equity  
[cheedr@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:cheedr@latrobe.edu.au)