‘THE ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT RESEARCH UNIT (AARU) SUPPORTS COLLEGES, DIVISIONS AND THE WIDER UNIVERSITY BY UNDERTAKING RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS TO IMPROVE THE ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS OF UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS.’


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Introducing the AARU

The Access and Achievement Research Unit (AARU) informs University strategies for improving the access and achievement levels of under-represented students. The AARU has a particular focus on students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and has responsibility for the oversight and reporting of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP).

Objectives of the AARU in 2015:

- Support La Trobe University’s strategy to increase the access and recruitment of under-represented students by working with National Recruitment, the Regional Office and other stakeholders
- Support the University’s strategy to increase achievement levels of under-represented students by conducting targeted research, analysis and evaluation
- Support the University’s strategy to increase student retention by conducting analysis of institutional and national data, evaluating University programs, and working with staff within La Trobe Learning and Teaching, Student Engagement, and the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) to develop and support student retention strategies
- Increase the public profile and reputation of the University by producing, publishing and circulating research and evaluation findings
- Support the operations of the Colleges through the provision of specific analysis and reports as required, and respond to requests that relate to the objective of attracting and retaining outstanding students
- Build research capacity, communication, and collaboration within the University in the areas of access and achievement
- Seek external funding for strategic projects that assist the University to attract and retain outstanding students, particularly those from under-represented cohorts.

‘The Unit informs University strategies for improving the access and achievement levels of under-represented students.’
Staff 2015

Dr Andrew Harvey, Director
BA (Hons) Melb., PhD Melb.

Dr Andrew Harvey is Director of the Access and Achievement Research Unit. Andrew has published widely in areas of higher education policy, including issues of access, student retention, regionality, and teacher education. Other research interests include nationalism, identity, and Latin American culture. Andrew’s previous roles include Director of Regional Operations at La Trobe, Deputy Director (Academic) of the Bendigo Campus of La Trobe, and Executive Officer of the Australian Council of Deans of Education.

Lisa Andrewartha, Senior Coordinator and Research Officer
BAppSc (Hons) RMIT

Lisa has worked across a broad range of research projects designed to improve equity in higher education. Lisa’s recent research publications have focussed on: students from low socio-economic status backgrounds; care leavers in higher education; outcomes of tertiary enabling programs; and postgraduate student equity.

Michael Luckman, Senior Data Analyst
BSocSc (Hons) La Trobe

Michael has extensive experience working on higher education data analysis projects. Michael’s recent research publications have focussed on: equity within student globalization activities; equity and academic achievement within a Common First Year curriculum model; care leavers in higher education; predictors of student attrition; and regional student relocation.

Giovanna Szalkowicz, Research Support Officer
BA (Hons) University of San Andrés, MA (Hons) La Trobe

Giovanna has worked across a broad range of research projects designed to improve the access and achievement levels of students who are under-represented in higher education. Giovanna’s recent research publications have focussed on: student equity; attrition; the re-recruitment of students who have discontinued; and nested courses.

Dr Kemran Mestan, Senior Research Officer
BA (Hons) Melb., MA Melb, PhD Swinburne

Kemran’s expertise is within social policy and equity. His research interests relate to understanding barriers to social and economic participation and developing policies to overcome them. His recent publications have been related to retention in higher education, equity related to students from Non-English-Speaking Backgrounds, curriculum, and welfare.
**Staff funded through competitive external grants in 2015:**

**Rachael Spicer, Senior Research Officer**  
BSc Monash, MBA Deakin

Rachael has consulted to a range of government, not-for-profit, and commercial organisations. Since joining La Trobe, Rachael’s research activities have focussed on the inherent requirements of courses and tertiary admission practices.

**Dr Tebeje Molla (Mekonnen), Senior Research Officer**  
BEd Bahir Dar, MA Aarhus, PhD Monash

Tebeje Molla has degrees in education policy and sociology. His research focuses on social justice in and through education, transnational educational policy processes, and the dynamics of power, knowledge and policy. He has recently been commissioned to author a monograph on structural inequalities in Ethiopian higher education.

**Naomi Tootell, Senior Research Officer**  
BSc (Hons) / BA (Hons) Melb.

Naomi Tootell is currently a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of South Australia. Her research focuses on the decolonising potential of creative collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in contemporary Australia. Naomi was employed (2010-2014) to work on the ARC Linkage Grant ‘Indigenous Placemaking in Melbourne: Representations, Practices and Creative Research’.

**Dr James Stratford, Senior Research Officer**  
BA (Hons) Melb., MSA ANU, MA Melb., PhD. Melb

James Stratford has taught extensively across the Classics and Archaeology program at the University of Melbourne. He has published on a range of policy areas including democratic governance, nuclear diplomacy, regional interventions, and the influence of cultural factors on strategic decision-making.

**Jenna Tellefson, Research Assistant**  
B.Envs (Hons) Melb., GradDipEc La Trobe

Jenna Tellefson completed a Bachelor of Environments (Honours) degree at the University of Melbourne, where she completed her honours thesis investigating water policy in the Murray Darling Basin. Jenna has also completed a Graduate Diploma in Economics at La Trobe University, during which she researched higher education policy. Prior to her position at AARU, Jenna worked as a project support officer at Atkinson Consulting Group.

**Beni Caikitaki, Research Assistant**  
BPPE (in progress) La Trobe

Beni Caikitaki is currently completing a Bachelor of Politics, Philosophy and Economics at La Trobe University. Prior to his position at AARU, Beni worked as a research assistant on higher education policy at the Grattan Institute under Andrew Norton, and contributed to a number of Grattan reports. His research focus includes Australian higher education, labour markets, Australian economic history and government budgets.
Richard McAllister, Research Assistant
BEC (Hons) La Trobe

Richard McAllister completed a Bachelor of Economics with Honours at La Trobe in 2014. Richard has since worked as a research assistant in the School of Economics at La Trobe. Richard has a particular interest in research on why people do not make economically rational choices.

Adam Wood, Assistant Data Analyst
BSc (Hons) La Trobe

Adam completed a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Statistics (Honours) at La Trobe University. While working in the Access and Achievement Research Unit, Adam’s research activities have focussed on: the inherent requirements of courses; and regional education standards. Adam has commenced a PhD in the field of differential geometry at Melbourne University.

Ada Castle, Administration Officer
DipLang (Indonesian) Monash, BA (Hons) Monash/La Trobe

Ada Castle completed a Bachelor of Arts at Monash University, moving to La Trobe to complete an honours thesis on LGBTI youth health promotion. Prior to her time at AARU, Ada worked at the North Yarra Community Health and the La Trobe University Student Union.
Linking research to policy and practice is critical. In 2015 the AARU expanded our capacity to undertake several external research projects, including major work on the adaptation of tertiary admissions, and the impact of university ‘globalization’ initiatives on student equity. The research grants enabled us to employ talented new staff members including Beni Cakitaki, Ada Castle, Richard McAllister, Tebeje Molla, Rachael Spicer, James Stratford, Jenna Tellefson, Naomi Tootell, and Adam Wood. Our research on globalization and employability has led to the establishment of new bursaries at La Trobe for low socio-economic status students to undertake outbound mobility and employability experiences. Our report on tertiary admissions resulted in a recent presentation before the Higher Education Standards Panel and has already been widely cited by peak bodies and mainstream media outlets as debate about the relevance of Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) continues.

Other externally funded research involved helping to increase the number of care leavers – i.e. those who have spent time in foster, kinship or residential care – in higher education; and analysis of the role of ‘inherent requirements’, particularly for students with a disability who may be unsure of their capacity to undertake and complete particular courses.

In 2015 the AARU also oversaw the University’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) funds on behalf of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor. These funds must be spent to raise access and achievement of low socio-economic status students, and the University ran several major programs including: the School Partnerships Program; a collaborative Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) project with secondary schools (UniBridges); College outreach programs; and scholarships. All major HEPPP projects are rigorously evaluated, and have contributed to the University already meeting its Future Ready target of 20% of the undergraduate cohort being from low socio-economic status backgrounds.

Within the University, the AARU continued to provide analysis, evaluation and research services, and major projects are outlined within this report. One notable piece of work was the construction of an ‘inclusive excellence’ university ranking table. By using publicly available data that drew on traditional measures of research and teaching excellence, but also incorporated student diversity and equity, we were able to provide a more extensive understanding of university quality. Particularly in teaching and learning, research suggests that quality is informed by diversity and equity, and the best learning experiences occur when different viewpoints are harnessed. In 2015, La Trobe was the equal second highest ranked university by these national metrics. This position reflects the historic mission and ongoing commitment of the University to promote diversity, equity and quality across all campuses.

Thanks in particular to the Unit staff and our University colleagues who continue to support the cause of student equity.
AARU Strategic Plan 2015

The AARU developed a Strategic Plan at the beginning of 2015, created along with specific measures of success. Key strategies within the 2015 plan include:

1) CONDUCT RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION TO SUPPORT UNIVERSITY MEASURES TO INCREASE THE ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS OF UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS

Research and analysis will include projects examining the efficacy of alternative selection pathways, the profile of the University cohort, the retention and achievement levels of under-represented students by course and level, and the factors influencing the decisions of prospective students in areas of disadvantage. Members of the Unit will work closely with the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, staff from the Planning and Institutional Performance Unit (PIPU), the PVC (Teaching and Learning), the Learning Focus Area (LFA) Hub, the School Partnership Advisor, the Manager of Educational Partnerships, and the PVC (Graduate Coursework).

2) INCREASE THE PUBLIC PROFILE AND REPUTATION OF THE UNIVERSITY NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

Members of the AARU will increase the University’s profile by: publishing their work in recognised journals, academic books, and other fora; developing a media profile and presence; engaging in public policy; and presenting findings at conferences and other public events. Collaboration will be sought with industry, community and educational partners, and external funding will be sought as required. The website will be used to showcase research reports and findings.

3) SUPPORT THE OPERATIONS OF THE COLLEGES AND DIVISIONS

The AARU will support the Colleges and divisions by providing analysis for members as required, responding to specific research requests, and contributing to corporate documents and institutional reports and proposals as needed. Specific requests for analysis and research will also be incorporated into the Unit’s project schedule, in consultation and in line with resource capacity.

4) BUILD RESEARCH CAPACITY, COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY IN THE AREAS OF ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Moves to increase collaboration will include the hosting of regular internal events such as seminars and symposia, the use of a research clearinghouse and a communication platform for the exchange of information and discussion, and the inclusion of members, affiliates and students into the AARU circle. Findings will be regularly circulated and select staff and students will be invited to contribute to the Unit in a formal capacity.

5) DEMONSTRATE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH SECURING EXTERNAL COMPETITIVE RESEARCH GRANTS AND INFLUENCING PUBLIC POLICY

The Unit will seek external funding through the Department of Education, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), the Australian Research Council (ARC), and other fora, and engage with policy makers at a national level.
## Competitive External Grants

Table 1: Competitive external grants valued at over $1.7 million for work undertaken in 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT TITLE</th>
<th>FUNDING</th>
<th>YEAR AWARDED</th>
<th>FUNDING SOURCE</th>
<th>LA TROBE’S ROLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ The adaptation of tertiary admissions equity practices to growth and diversity</td>
<td>$351,804</td>
<td>(December) 2014</td>
<td>Department of Education National Priorities Pool 2014</td>
<td>LEAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Globalization opportunities for low socio-economic and regional students</td>
<td>$245,000</td>
<td>(December) 2014</td>
<td>Department of Education National Priorities Pool 2014</td>
<td>LEAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Enabling programmes for disadvantaged student groups</td>
<td>$155,785</td>
<td>(December) 2014</td>
<td>Department of Education National Priorities Pool 2014</td>
<td>PARTNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Development of an international student equity admissions framework</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Margin Buster Micro Grant University of Pennsylvania</td>
<td>PARTNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Assessing descriptors of academic program inherent requirements</td>
<td>$20,553</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)</td>
<td>LEAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Improving education outcomes for young people in out-of-home care</td>
<td>$724,000</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Sidney Myer Fund</td>
<td>PARTNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ TOTAL</td>
<td>$1,708,404</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National Priorities Pool – 2015 Projects

In December 2014 La Trobe received over $950,000 from a total of $9.5 million competitive funding awarded by the Australian Government through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) National Priorities Pool. La Trobe was the lead institution on two projects and a participating institution on two additional projects. All projects were funded to be undertaken in 2015.

Adaptation of tertiary admissions equity practices to growth and diversity

This research project examined tertiary admissions equity practices in response to changes in participation, institutional diversity and competition. The $351,804 project was led by La Trobe University and included Dr Andrew Harvey, Associate Professor Buly Cardak and Matt Brett. The University of New England was the partner institution on the project. The final report was submitted to the Department of Education and Training.

Our research highlighted several major findings. Internationally, the growth of contextual admissions is substantial. This is being driven partly by a desire to increase student equity by reducing reliance on admissions tests that are known to correlate with socio-economic status and ethnicity. We also found that changes in the sector and increased competition among tertiary education providers have necessitated the development of new admissions criteria and processes.

Our analysis identified significant changes to the operations of tertiary admissions centres, which are adapting in the face of contextual change. Our research also highlighted that the admissions system remains confusing to many senior secondary students, and particularly to those from low socio-economic status and regional backgrounds.

The report’s proposals included: that increasing the evidence base is necessary to develop direct and early offer schemes that are effective and well targeted; the need to develop greater consistency across state-based tertiary admissions centres; and the need for better resourcing of careers advisers in schools to help inform school students of their potential options.

Globalization opportunities for low socio-economic status students

This project mapped the geo-demographics of outbound mobility and foreign language student cohorts, identified barriers to participation for low socio-economic status and regional students, and identified institutional programs that facilitate global experiences for these students. The $245,000 grant was led by La Trobe University and included Dr Andrew Harvey and Matt Brett. The University of Queensland was the partner institution on the project. The final report was submitted to the Department of Education and Training.

The research found that outbound mobility programs and foreign language study in Australian universities are marked by unequal participation. Furthermore we found that many university leaders are aware of this inequity, including the under-representation of particular groups. In this report we identified a range of barriers and enablers to participation in outbound mobility and foreign language study for students from low socio-economic status backgrounds and regional and remote areas. We also identified particular institutional strategies and programs that are designed to increase participation among these groups.

The report provided recommendations to governments and institutions for policies and strategies that may increase and widen participation among students from low socio-economic status backgrounds and regional and remote communities.

Following our research, the AARU worked with La Trobe International and the Office of the Senior DVC to implement a Student Mobility Assistance Scholarship Program to assist students from low socio-economic status backgrounds with the costs associated with full-semester overseas exchange programs.

This project extended the Critical Interventions Framework for Advancing Equity in Australian Higher Education by Ryan Naylor, Chi Baik and Richard James (2013). The $205,262.34 project was led by The University of Newcastle. La Trobe University, represented by Dr Andrew Harvey and Matt Brett, and The University of Melbourne were the partner institutions on the project. The final report was submitted to the Department of Education and Training.

The report provided an overview of equity initiatives in Australian higher education that have demonstrated their effectiveness through published impact studies or participation in our national survey. The report identified key themes about effective equity initiatives from a literature review and empirical evidence. It developed a quick reference ‘Equity Initiatives Framework’ (EIF) and the ‘Featured Initiatives’ supplement to assist practitioners, managers and policy makers in ensuring that equity initiatives across Australia’s higher education system continue to provide effective practice. The project also provided a comprehensive range of interventions to university providers in order to engage and enable students from disadvantaged backgrounds to successfully complete their courses and to prepare for graduate employment.

Enabling programmes for disadvantaged groups

This project investigated enabling pathways to university. The $155,785 project was led by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE). The partner institutions were Curtin University, Federation University Australia and La Trobe University, represented by Dr Andrew Harvey and Matt Brett. The final report was submitted to the Department of Education and Training.

Enabling programs allow students - who lack the necessary qualifications and are often from non-traditional backgrounds - to gain access to university and the necessary skills to succeed once they are at university. The project involved a detailed taxonomy of enabling pathways into higher education, followed by a trend analysis to determine which higher education pathways are most commonly used by students, and if some pathways are preferred by certain higher education institutions and/or equity student groups. Further analysis was then undertaken to determine which higher education pathways appear to be the most effective in terms of articulation to undergraduate level, alongside subsequent first-year student success and retention. Finally, both enabling programs and other sub-bachelor programs (e.g. diplomas) were studied to gain an understanding of the reasons students enrol in enabling programs over other programs.

The research showed that enabling programs attract a traditionally disadvantaged cohort when compared to other programs, complicating comparisons of student success and attrition rates between enabling programs and other more traditional education settings.
Assessing descriptors of academic program inherent requirements

The project provided the first ever national analysis of academic program inherent requirements, with recommendations for the Australian Government, higher education institutions and related stakeholders. This $22,553 project was funded by National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), and was led by La Trobe University. The project included Dr Andrew Harvey, Matt Brett and Dr Andrew Funston.

The audit of academic program inherent requirement statements in Australia revealed a significant variation in the use and application of such statements. Our analysis revealed relatively limited use of inherent requirements, and substantial variation among universities. Research also highlighted there were substantial institutional differences in the terminology adopted, and these differences created information limitations that were likely to affect both prospective and enrolled students.

The final report included recommendations to develop consistency of practice around descriptions of inherent requirements to facilitate improved participation and outcomes for students with disability, and to assist institutions to provide reasonable adjustments consistent with anti-discrimination legislation.

Improving education outcomes for young people in out-of-home care

La Trobe University is a joint recipient of a Sidney Myer Fund grant to develop, implement, and evaluate a suite of interventions to improve education for young Victorians in out-of-home care. Led by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (CFECFW), the $724,000 grant will be used to raise transition rates to tertiary education and to improve the educational achievement of care leavers. La Trobe University is represented by Dr Andrew Harvey, Dr Patricia McNamara and Professor Pamela Snow. Federation University Australia is the third member of the consortium. Additional project participants include Anglicare, Mackillop Family Services and TAFE institutions associated with the participating universities.

The project includes training for foster carers and social workers; education resources for people in care; and new university programs for care leavers. The three year project, includes funding for La Trobe University to raise educational awareness and aspirations among young people living in out-of-home care through outreach programs. It also provides funding for La Trobe University to coordinate support for care leavers attending La Trobe University.

The project is collaborative, systemic, and state-wide. The work supports La Trobe University’s broader strategy to increase access and achievement for care leavers – including the completed ‘Out of care, into university: Raising University access and achievement of people from out-of-home care backgrounds’ project, the current ‘Attracting and supporting care leavers from low socio-economic status backgrounds’ project, and La Trobe University driven initiatives such as the introduction of care leaver bursaries.

International student equity admissions framework

This project will develop stage one of the two-stage project assessing the design and effectiveness of international higher education access equity policies. La Trobe University, represented by Dr Andrew Harvey, and the University of Pennsylvania were joint recipients of the US$2,500 Margin Buster Micro Grant, University of Pennsylvania.

This project aims to develop an empirical framework for international comparative evaluation of higher education admissions policies, specifically in relation to students who are defined as minorities, disadvantaged, underserved or under-represented. The nations of focus are Australia, South Africa, Brazil, and the United States.

The project will develop a 'student equity admissions framework' that will provide the background and context for stage two, an international seminar on college access interventions to be held at Vanderbilt University in 2017 called 'Experiments in International College Access'.
La Trobe’s success in the Department of Education’s National Priorities Pool funding round – 2016 Projects

In December 2015, the Department of Education announced new projects to be funded through the National Priorities Pool. La Trobe received over $393,000 from a total of $2.4 million under the country’s key equity program. La Trobe is the lead institution on three exciting new projects and a participating institution on an additional project. The successful projects are funded through 2016 with final reports to be submitted to the Department of Education and Training in early 2017.

Attracting and supporting care leavers from low socio-economic status backgrounds
This project will develop resources to help universities attract and support care leavers - people who have spent time in foster care, kinship care, and other types of out-of-home care. The $127,000 project is led by La Trobe University, and includes Dr Andrew Harvey and Lisa Andrewartha. Federation University Australia, Western Sydney University and the Queensland University of Technology are the partner institutions on the project.

Improving the employability of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds
This project will investigate how institutions can ensure their employability strategies are accessible and relevant to diverse student cohorts, particularly students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The $76,000 project is led by La Trobe University and includes Dr Andrew Harvey. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom, and the University of Michigan, United States are the partner institutions on the project.

Re-engaging low socio-economic status students who have withdrawn from university
This project will analyse factors that encourage low socio-economic status students to return to higher education, having previously withdrawn from a Bachelor degree. This $34,000 project is led by La Trobe University and includes Dr Andrew Harvey, Michael Luckman and Giovanna Szalkowicz.

A comparative evaluation of the efficacy of the equity strategies employed by Australian universities
This project will examine the efficacy of equity strategies employed at Australian universities which are aimed at improving opportunities and the success in higher education by people from low socio-economic status backgrounds. This $156,686 project is led by Central Queensland University in partnership with Federation University of Australia, University of the Sunshine Coast, University of Newcastle, La Trobe University and James Cook University. La Trobe University is represented by Dr Andrew Harvey.
Higher Education Participation & Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) - 2015

What is HEPPP at La Trobe University?
The AARU oversees HEPPP on behalf of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor. On 12 December 2014, the Department of Education confirmed La Trobe University’s 2015 allocation under the Access and Participation Fund. This funding was used to support major equity initiatives across the University, including school partnerships, outreach activities, mentoring, and scholarships. HEPPP projects run across both the College of SHE and ASSC, as well as in areas such as Learning and Teaching, the Office of the PVC (Educational Partnerships and Quality) and the Equality and Diversity Centre.

Table 2: Description and objectives of some of the major HEPPP initiatives in 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIATIVES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science, Health and Engineering (SHE) Outreach programs</td>
<td>Stimulate interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) disciplines, particularly for students from low socio-economic status and regional schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce (ASSC) Outreach programs</td>
<td>Development and pilot of new outreach opportunities for students from low socio-economic and regional schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Partnerships Program</td>
<td>Collaborate with 32 low socio-economic status schools to deliver activities that provide extra curriculum support, academic preparation, and awareness of university courses and future careers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Early Warning System (Success@La Trobe)</td>
<td>University-wide communication and referral strategy designed to identify and engage students at risk of disengagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and academic advising programs</td>
<td>Support enrolled students with a focus on those from disadvantaged backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity Support Scholarships</td>
<td>Awarded on the basis of educational disadvantage to support students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Mobility Assistance Scholarship</td>
<td>Awarded on the basis of financial disadvantage to assist low socio-economic status students participating in an overseas exchange.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability Bursaries</td>
<td>Awarded on the basis of financial disadvantage to assist low socio-economic status students with placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and Achievement Research Unit (AARU)</td>
<td>Supports Colleges, divisions, and the wider University by undertaking research, analysis and program evaluation to improve the access and achievement levels of under-represented students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Strategies</td>
<td>Development of strategies to increase access, participation, retention and success of Indigenous Australians at La Trobe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>Redesign of subjects and courses with large numbers of low socio-economic status and low ATAR students enrolled.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is HEPPP?
The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) involves federal funding that assists universities to improve access, participation and completion rates of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds.

HEPPP has two components:

1. The Access and Participation Fund for programs that assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter and succeed at higher education; and

2. The National Priorities Pool for national level investments focussing on national priorities.
Institutional Strategies

La Trobe University’s care leaver strategy

Supported by the Office of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the AARU worked to develop a holistic strategy to attract and support care leavers at the University. The strategy aims to:

- raise the higher education aspirations for young people in out-of-home care and care leavers;
- increase enrolments of care leavers at La Trobe University;
- increase support for care leavers attending La Trobe University to encourage their success in higher education; and
- continue leading the national research agenda and influencing national policy.

Table 3: La Trobe University care leaver initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIATIVES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>Successfully advocating for a change to the VTAC Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS) application via the Academic Services Management Office to enable care leavers to be captured as a difficult circumstance as part of the admissions process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support</td>
<td>All commencing, domestic undergraduate students at La Trobe University who are care leavers will be offered a $500 bursary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach programs</td>
<td>Developing outreach programs which will inform young people in out-of-home care and care leavers of the variety of pathways into university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>While not yet a standard practice within Australian universities, La Trobe University has commenced attempts to identify care leavers enrolled at La Trobe University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured Support services</td>
<td>La Trobe University is introducing structured support services for care leavers, including personalised academic support and centralised referral to other support services. This structured support is partially funded by a grant from the Sidney Myer Fund.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>The AARU has conducted internationally leading research on care leavers accessing higher education through its report 'Out of care into university: Raising higher education access and achievement of care leavers'. La Trobe University is currently leading an Australian Government National Priorities Pool project which will propose standard methods for collecting and monitoring care leaver data, and will involve interviewing care leavers about their pathways into and experiences at university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Influence</td>
<td>Dr Andrew Harvey (Director of the AARU) is an active policy influencer. His appearance before the Senate Committee investigation into Out of Home Care informed the majority of the 'Higher education and training opportunities' section of the Senate Committee’s subsequent report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

La Trobe University has received funding as part of two externally funded projects to undertake specific activities.

- A $724,000 grant from the Sidney Myer Fund to the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (CECFW) for which La Trobe University is a consortium member. This project has allocated funding until June 2018 for wrap-around and outreach services for care leavers so there is managed provision of services for this cohort that are embedded into both new and existing initiatives within the university that can support care leavers.

- A National Priorities Pool grant, where La Trobe University is the lead partner with three other universities. This project includes: consistently capturing and tracking data on care leavers at each university; in depth interviews with care leaver students to improve understanding of their needs; a university handbook for care leavers; and guidelines for university staff delivering outreach and support to care leavers.
Enrolments of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds

The AARU contributed to an increase of the proportion of enrolments from students with low socio-economic status backgrounds at the University in 2014. In 2014, La Trobe University reported an undergraduate low socio-economic status participation rate of 20.2% based on the postcode measure of socio-economic status, which was an increase from 19.6% in 2013. This ensured La Trobe University’s Future Ready target of enrolling 20% of domestic undergraduate students from low socio-economic status backgrounds by 2017 has already been achieved. La Trobe University has the highest number of undergraduate low socio-economic status enrolments of all universities in Victoria and is ranked 8th for undergraduate low socio-economic status enrolments nationally.

In mid-year 2015, La Trobe University reported an undergraduate low socio-economic status participation rate of 20.7%, based on the postcode measure of socio-economic status. This places us on track to meet the goal set in La Trobe University’s HEPPP Access and Participation Plan 2015 – 2017 provided to the Commonwealth Government, of 21% low socio-economic status participation in 2017.

AARU research has contributed to this rise in enrolments by informing: the target groups and schools for College and other outreach; recruitment campaigns such as the ‘summer melt’ and re-recruitment contacts; the level and type of equity group bonus points; Academic Early Warning System target cohorts; and a range of retention initiatives.
Internal Research

Access and Recruitment

Evaluation of the School Partnerships Program

In 2015 the AARU completed an evaluation project on the La Trobe School Partnership Program (SPP). The SPP involves the collaboration between La Trobe University and local schools, whereby year 7 to 10 students are given access to a range of engaging activities designed to raise awareness of higher education and inform career aspiration. Activities are closely linked to curriculum, aiming to aid motivation and learning confidence.

The survey measured the university aspirations of approximately 4,000 students from thirty two schools, both prior to and after students had experienced the SPP. In addition to students, approximately 700 school staff were surveyed. The project also measured other elements of student and teacher experiences related to aspirations, including the analysis of the influences that might inform individual ambitions.

The survey results highlighted a progressive shift towards students considering ‘future career options’ as the biggest influence when making decisions about post-school options. Furthermore our research found that there has been an increase in the proportion of teachers who agree that they play a role in supporting and promoting university pathways. Overall, the program evaluation highlighted a measurable increase in student aspiration since the start of the SPP.

College of Science, Health and Engineering (SHE) Outreach Program Evaluation

This project analysed the participation and experience of La Trobe University’s science, health and engineering students who participated in secondary-school science Outreach Programs. The purpose of this project was to ensure the Outreach programs continue to be appropriately targeted by the University and to examine any potential impact the program might have on school enrolment patterns.

The Outreach Program Evaluation was completed in collaboration with the College of Science, Health and Engineering (SHE) and involved the distribution of an online survey to 600 current La Trobe University students. The AARU also used data from the University’s RightNow database to examine patterns within university enrolments compared to the number of Outreach sessions by school.

Results from this project supported previous research suggesting that science-based Outreach Programs are very well received by students, with both quantitative and qualitative survey data indicating high satisfaction with the program. The survey highlighted the positive influence of the Outreach program on student recruitment decisions, and the need for further breadth of outreach among major feeder schools. As the Outreach Program has only recently been introduced, the number of secondary school students recruited to La Trobe University has been limited. However, the recent rapid expansion of the program means that this figure is expected to improve in the future.

Recruitment strategy for new migrants

The AARU began working with the Office of National Recruitment to develop a new recruitment strategy for new migrants, including students from refugee backgrounds.
Retention and Success

International student equity and finances

Conducted in collaboration with La Trobe International (LTI), this project involved an online survey distributed to La Trobe University’s undergraduate and postgraduate international students to investigate their experiences. The survey findings showed that many international students are facing financial hardship stemming from making tuition payments, finding employment and the high cost of living. In some cases this financial strain has severely impacted the academic achievement, mental health and well-being of students.

Recommendations to improve the international student experience were made in the report, which was presented to La Trobe International (LTI) and the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President.

Retention targets

The AARU has continued to work with La Trobe Learning and Teaching (LTLT), the Planning and Institutional Performance Unit (PIPU) and other stakeholders to evaluate student success and retention. In 2015 this involved the evaluation of national student retention and success data, which was released by the Department of Education and Training in July 2014.

The AARU has also sought to improve University retention through several others means, including creating College level retention targets and analysing success and retention among international, postgraduate and other student cohorts. The AARU has also developed a process for identifying and responding to risk indicators of student attrition in collaboration with the Office of the DVC (Academic) and La Trobe Learning and Teaching (LTLT).

Postgraduate coursework retention

The AARU collected and analysed data on postgraduate coursework (PGCW) retention and success. The project revealed that La Trobe University’s PGCW success rate exceeds the national success rate and compares favourably with Innovative Research Universities (IRU) benchmarks.

The report benchmarked La Trobe postgraduate retention within the sector and highlighted the need to address issues such as the impact of non-standard completion dates (e.g. summer placements) on our reported retention levels. The data showed that the enrolment conversion rate - the rate at which initial enrolments are retained to the census date - has been improving over the last three years and is similar to the enrolment conversion rates of undergraduate students.

The final report was presented to the Pro Vice Chancellor (Employability and PGCW) and findings presented to the Postgraduate Coursework Central Team Committee.

Ranking universities on inclusive excellence

This project devised a methodology for ranking universities on inclusive excellence, using metrics of quality, equity and diversity (QED). Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, Professor Jane Long and Dr Andrew Harvey sought to conceptualise a ranking system that truly reflected the character and aspirations of a modern Australian university. This involved examining universities by their teaching quality, research quality, institutional diversity and student equity. The proposed ranking table aims to broaden measures of institutional success and redefine quality to incorporate inclusivity beyond the current narrow research metrics. Professor Long and Dr Harvey published an opinion piece in The Australian (2015, July 15) which argued that that the ‘QED provides a transparent mechanism to bring equity and diversity out of the margins and recognise their centrality to universities’ legislative and strategic missions’. Media coverage of the project also included an article in The Australian.
Analysis of the Bendigo Tertiary Education Plan through the Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund (RPFF)

The Bendigo Tertiary Education Partnership (BTEP) is an initiative funded through the Victorian Government’s Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund (RPFF), and involves La Trobe University, Bendigo TAFE and Bendigo Senior Secondary School. BTEP aims to raise aspirations and participation in higher education for young people in the region.

As a part of this project, the AARU provided an environmental scan of educational outcomes and achievement within the Bendigo region, compared with regional and metropolitan Victoria. The report contained data provided by the Victorian Department of Education and Training and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER); and detailed data from existing sources such as the 2011 Australian Census of Population and Housing, the MySchools website and the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) master file.

Overall, the AARU found that the Bendigo RPFF region performed similarly to the regional benchmarking cohort used throughout the report. This equivalence included all secondary school measures such as: National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results; year 12 completion rates; achievement with VCE and average ATARs. However the research revealed that year 12 completion and higher education attainment is relatively low in the Bendigo region and highly variable within the region. The final report suggested several areas for further research, analysis and policy priority.

LTU Blended Learning: the early views of students and academics

This project sought to analyse the access, achievement and retention issues within La Trobe University’s online and blended (a mix of face-to-face and online) learning. La Trobe University’s Future Ready strategic plan includes a target to increase the proportion of aggregate subject enrolments in blended or online mode by at least 60% by 2017. This project offered an analysis of blended learning to inform and assist the University to meet its blended learning target and to assist in improving pedagogy.

Initially, high enrolment subjects were identified and prioritised for analysis by La Trobe Learning and Teaching (LTLT). This led to relevant unit coordinators being interviewed about the process of developing blended subjects and their perception of student engagement and learning outcomes. Concurrently, students enrolled in these units were surveyed about their experiences within these subjects.

The AARU worked in collaboration with the Director of Digital Learning throughout the project. Data analysis of survey data showed that students were, on average, satisfied with online learning; and it appeared to enhance student engagement, learning, preparedness for class and learning outcomes. However, both students and academics identified aspects of online learning that could be enhanced.

The final report was presented to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) and the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.
Employability Bursaries

As part of the AARU’s research into the Essentials at La Trobe University, we identified an under-representation of low socio-economic status students engaging in employability activities, such as clinical and industry placements. The AARU subsequently worked with the Colleges, Student Services, and the Academic Services Management Office to develop an employability bursary scheme for low socio-economic status students. In July 2015, there were over 260 applicants for the employability bursary, and 150 bursaries were awarded to financially disadvantaged students.

Mobility Assistance Scholarship

‘Global Citizenship’ is identified by the La Trobe University Essentials as a vital area of learning, and includes the development of cultural literacy and skills to interact effectively with a diverse range of people. Central to global citizenship is the provision of foreign language studies and outbound mobility opportunities. AARU research highlighted that both low socio-economic status and regional students are less likely to enrol in a language unit and less likely to travel internationally for study or internships. The AARU worked with Student Services, the Academic Services Management Office and La Trobe International (LTI) to develop the Mobility Assistance Scholarship to assist low socio-economic students to participate in overseas study programs.

Care Leaver Bursary

The AARU conducted research on care leavers – i.e. people who have spent time in foster, residential, or kinship care – accessing higher education, through our report: ‘Out of care into university: Raising higher education access and achievement of care leavers’. The research found that people who have spent time in out-of-home care rarely transition to higher education and frequently face the ‘soft bigotry of low expectations.’ The AARU proposed the development of a bursary to assist care leavers starting university. In 2016, all commencing, domestic undergraduate students at La Trobe University who are care leavers will be offered a $500 bursary.
Competitive External Grants 2015

- Improving education outcomes for young people in out-of-home care (Sidney Myer Fund: $724,000)
- The adaptation of tertiary admissions equity practices to growth and diversity (NPP: $351,804)
- Globalization opportunities for low socio-economic and regional students (NPP: $245,000)
- The Critical Interventions Framework Part 2 (NPP: $205,262)
- Enabling programmes for disadvantaged student groups (NPP: $155,785)
- Assessing descriptors of academic program inherent requirements (NCSEHE: $20,553)
- Development of an international student equity admissions framework (UoP: $6,000)
Events

Inclusive Excellence Forum
The AARU hosted the ‘Inclusive Excellence Forum’ in October 2015 as part of a commitment to disseminating research and facilitating student equity conversations across disciplines and units. The forum was held at La Trobe University, Bundoora campus. The event focussed on how diversity can be harnessed to improve the quality of student learning, outcomes and experiences at La Trobe University.

The forum was launched by Professor Jane Long, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice President. Dr Andrew Harvey, Director of the AARU, was one of the five La Trobe University representatives who spoke to over 50 attendees. The diverse audience was comprised of department heads, staff, researchers and students. The forum aimed to encourage discussion on diversity and inclusivity at La Trobe University and the speakers covered a variety of topics, including inclusive excellence, learning about Indigenous culture and history, student perspectives on harnessing diversity and the role of staff diversity in improving institutional quality.

Out-of-home care and higher education symposium
The AARU hosted the ‘Out-of-home care and higher education symposium’ on the 12th March 2015 at La Trobe University’s Melbourne campus. The symposium focussed on raising the higher education access and achievement of care leavers and included: the launch of the new AARU research report ‘Out of care, into university: raising the higher education access and achievement of care leavers’; and a focussed discussion among leading stakeholders on future policy work in this area. The symposium was attended by over twenty senior representatives from community service organisations, higher education institutions, Indigenous education peak bodies and the media.

The AARU ‘Out of care, into University’ report attracted national publicity, including news articles in The Australian, The Age, The Courier-Mail, Eureka Street, La Trobe University News and a nationally syndicated radio interview on ABC PM. The Director of the AARU also presented before the Senate Committee Inquiry into Out-of Home Care in Melbourne on the 20th March 2015.
Publications

Book


Book Chapters


Peer-refereed journal articles


National Reports


Conference Presentations


National Media

Opinion Pieces

Brett, M., Sheridan, A., Harvey, A. & Cardak, B. (2015, October 28). Four barriers to higher education regional students face – and how to overcome them. The Conversation.


AARU in the media

Inclusive excellence

Hare, J. (2015, July 15). Equity and diversity integral to new university rankings. The Australian.

Student re-engagement


Out-of-home care

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2015, March 11). Out-of-home care: Interview with Chief Investigator, Dr Andrew Harvey. ABC PM.

Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare. (2015, August 5). Improving Educational Outcomes for Young People Leaving Care [media release].


Hare, J. (2015, August 5). $724k grant to boost tertiary study for abused youth. The Australian.

La Trobe University. (2015, August 10). La Trobe wins Myer Large Grant. UniNews. 27(27).


Website

## Acronym list

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AARE</td>
<td>Australia Association for Research in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>AARU</td>
<td>Access and Achievement Research Unit</td>
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<td>ACER</td>
<td>Australian Council for Educational Research</td>
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<td>ARC</td>
<td>Australian Research Council</td>
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<td>ASSC</td>
<td>College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce (La Trobe University)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATAR</td>
<td>Australian Tertiary Admission Rank</td>
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<td>BTEP</td>
<td>Bendigo Tertiary Education Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFECFW</td>
<td>Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare</td>
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<td>DVC</td>
<td>Deputy Vice Chancellor (La Trobe University)</td>
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<td>EIF</td>
<td>Equity Initiatives Framework</td>
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<td>EPHEA</td>
<td>Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia</td>
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<td>HEPPP</td>
<td>Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme</td>
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<td>HERDSA</td>
<td>Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia</td>
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<td>LFA</td>
<td>Learning Focus Area (La Trobe University)</td>
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<td>LTI</td>
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<td>LTLT</td>
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<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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<td>NCSEHE</td>
<td>National centre for Student Equity in Higher Education</td>
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<td>NCVER</td>
<td>National Centre for Vocational Education Research</td>
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<td>NPP</td>
<td>National Priorities Pool</td>
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<td>PIPU</td>
<td>Planning and Institutional Performance Unit (La Trobe University)</td>
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<td>QED</td>
<td>Quality, equity and diversity</td>
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<td>RPFF</td>
<td>Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund</td>
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<td>PGCW</td>
<td>Postgraduate Coursework</td>
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<td>SEAS</td>
<td>Special Entry Access Scheme</td>
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<td>Socio-economic status</td>
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<td>SHE</td>
<td>College of Science, Health and Engineering (La Trobe University)</td>
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<td>SNAIC</td>
<td>Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care</td>
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<td>School Partnership Program (La Trobe University)</td>
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<td>Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths</td>
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<td>UoP</td>
<td>University of Pennsylvania</td>
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<td>VTAC</td>
<td>Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre</td>
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ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT
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