On Monday 28 November, the NCSEHE held an invitation-only research forum at the National Press Club in Canberra to seek a cross-sectoral consensus on immediate and emerging student equity research priorities and public policy considerations.

Facilitating an Innovative Future Through Equity (#FIFTE16) (13Mb) enabled constructive discussions between a diverse group of over 80 participants, focused on ten core conversations and research emerging from the National Priority Pool-funded Equity Fellows Programme.

I'd like to thank Dr Andrew Harvey, Mr Andrew Norton, Professor Marcia Devlin, Mr David Fintan, Mr Craig Ritchie, Professor Peter Noonan, Ms Mary Kelly, Dr Ann Stewart, Ms Belinda Robinson and Dr Lin Martin for their leadership and assistance in facilitating the "pop-up panel" portion of the day's proceedings, as well as the NCSEHE's three 2016 Equity Fellows, Dr Nadine Zacharias, Dr Erica Southgate and Dr Cathy Stone for showcasing their research; Fellows Programme Chair, Emeritus Professor Lesley Parker, for providing attendees with an overview of the Fellows Programme; and NCSEHE Program Leader Professor John Phillimore for discussing the Centre’s Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program. Professor Simon Marginson and Professor Bruce Chapman provided us with a global perspective Q&A opportunity to round off the Forum.

A highlight of our forum was the opportunity to welcome Federal Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Simon Birmingham, to our event. Minister Birmingham spoke briefly on the impressive work being undertaken within the sector, noting the improving numbers of disadvantaged students attending university, before he formally announced the NCSEHE's 2017 Equity Fellows: Associate Professor James Smith from Charles Darwin University, Ms Louise Pollard from The University of Western Australia and Mr Matt Brett from La Trobe University.

The NCSEHE’s Advisory Board met for its final meeting of the year on Tuesday 29 November in Canberra and that same evening outgoing NCSEHE Advisory Board member Professor Bruce Chapman gave an engaging presentation on the history of the Higher Education Contributions Scheme.
(HECS) at ANU. I'm pleased to advise that Bruce’s presentation was filmed and will shortly be made available via the ANU College of Business & Economics website.

On Wednesday 30 November, I had the pleasure of co-presenting a keynote at the Pathways13 Conference with NCSEHE Research Assistant, Mr Ian Cunninghame. Our presentation focused on a review of six disability research projects the NCSEHE funded through its Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants program.

A strong theme that emerged throughout the various keynote presentations delivered at Pathways13 was the importance of asking people with disability what they need to succeed. 2015 Young Australian of the Year, Ms Drisana Levitzke-Gray, and award-winning Australian author, Ms Jackie French, emphasised that disability is not "one-size-fits-all" and as such, not every "solution" will suit every person.

There was also much discussion on the reasons behind the lack of disclosure of disability by higher education students (and staff), a theme that was also discussed at the AARE Conference by The University of Newcastle Australia’s Ms Susan Grimes, Mr David Fintan, NCSEHE Advisory Board member and Manager of the Australian Government Department of Education and Training’s Governance, Quality and Access branch advised non-disclosure was a topic of interest for the Department, with a commissioned National Priorities Pool project in train, being led by colleagues at UNSW Australia. Enabled Employment CEO, Ms Jessica May, and ABC journalist and mental health and lifestyle advocate, Mr Craig Hamilton, discussed their experiences with mental illness, explaining some of their reasons behind non-disclosure, and the stigma associated with mental illness that still exists today.

Overall, the Pathways13 Conference was a great success and I commend the organising committee, ADCET, ATEND and the various conference sponsors for their good work.

On Thursday 1 December, I had the pleasure to Chair the Featured Symposium ‘Transforming Student Equity Research into Policy and Practice’ with Discussant and Centre for Excellence in Equity in Higher Education Co-Director, Professor Geoff Whitty, at the 2016 AARE Conference in Melbourne. The symposium featured the work of our inaugural Equity Fellows, whose projects span the topics of online learning, fair access to professional careers and the institutional utilisation of the HEPPP.

On behalf of the NCSEHE team, I’d like to extend a warm congratulations to 2016 Equity Fellow, Dr Cathy Stone, who has been shortlisted for a Universities Association for Lifelong Learning Award for her Fellowship project. Cathy has spent 2016 focused on improving student retention and success in online learning. Her final report will be available via the NCSEHE website in early 2017.
The commencement of the NCSEHE’s 2017 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program round has been postponed as we await the outcome of the ongoing ACIL Allen HEPPP Evaluation, the external review of the NCSEHE itself, and work with our Advisory Board to confirm priority areas of research for 2017 and 2018. Further announcements will be made in early 2017.

Associate Professor Sarah O’Shea has issued the final newsletter for her Office for Teaching & Learning Fellowship, focused on first-in-family students. Sarah has been awarded an ARC Discovery Project grant, beginning in 2017, and will explore the role of mentoring within Indigenous higher education.

Finally, the NCSEHE office closes Monday 19 December 2016 returning Monday 16 January 2017. I’d like to take this opportunity to thank the NCSEHE’s Advisory Board and Advisory Committee members for their time and guidance this year, my wonderful team for their dedication, and you, our valued readers and contributors, for your ongoing support.

Wishing you all a happy and safe festive season,
Professor Sue Trinidad
Director
National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

Research reveals ways to help students succeed

National research led by the University of the Sunshine Coast has lifted the lid on the types of university experiences that encourage students to stick with their degrees and enjoy their studies, despite disadvantages or difficult circumstances. USC Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students) Professor Karen Nelson said the findings revealed new information about how institutions could positively influence their students’ experiences to strengthen their learning outcomes and combat the reasons causing students to leave.

Higher Education and the Common Good

In his new book, Professor Simon Marginson argues that higher education has a key role in rebuilding social solidarity and mobility in fractured societies.

Season’s Greetings
The NCSEHE team wishes you a happy and safe festive season, and a wonderful 2017.