

University of Southern Queensland



**Institutional Assessment Framework (IAF)
Information Collection
2005**

Equity Update 2005

Endorsement by USQ CEO:

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USQ Equity Update 2005

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FOREWORD

- This statement has been prepared in accordance with the published guidelines, *Institutional Assessment Framework Information Collection 2005: Instructions.* (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005).
- Note is made of the Higher Education Support Program (ESP) and Higher Education Disability Support Program (DSP) Guidelines published as part of the Higher Education Support Act 2003, accessible from: http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/guidelines/esp_dsp_guide.htm
- The *USQ Indigenous Education Statement 2005* describing the full scope of USQ's indigenous education program is available separately. (<http://www.usq.edu.au/planstats/Planning/>)

1. INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY FOCUS

The Higher Education Equity Support Program provides funding to eligible higher education providers to undertake activities that assist in removing barriers to access for disadvantaged students and promote equality of opportunity in higher education. (Paragraphs 1.40.1 of the Higher Education Equity Support Program Guidelines)

In particular, the Higher Education Equity Support Program aims to increase the access and participation in higher education of students from low socio-economic/low income backgrounds, students from rural and isolated areas, students with a disability and students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Higher Education Equity Support Program also aims to assist in overcoming educational disadvantage associated with gender. (Paragraphs 1.40.5 of the Higher Education Equity Support Program Guidelines)

The initiatives should target equity groups consistent with the aims of the Higher Education Equity Support Program, as outlined in paragraph 1.40.5 of these guidelines, and consistent with the higher education provider's equity objectives. (Paragraphs 1.60.1 of the Higher Education Equity Support Program Guidelines)

1.1 Equity Principles

Support for educational equity at USQ is embedded in its Mission, Vision and Values Statements as follows:

"The University serves its multicultural community by preparing global citizens for lifelong learning in a diverse and changing world." (Extract from USQ Mission: <http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/1-1.pdf>)

"The University of Southern Queensland is a learner-focussed and community-oriented university It will continue to improve learning and increase access through innovative pedagogy and the creative use of technology." (Extract from USQ Vision: <http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/1-1.1.pdf>)

“In pursuit of its Mission, the USQ commits to the following values:

- *Ensuring participatory and inclusive decision-making; ...*
- *Supporting social justice and multiculturalism and appreciating the value of difference and diversity;*
- *Caring for the individual through approaches that are fair, inclusive and equitable; ...”*

(Extract from USQ Values: <http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/1-2.pdf>)

USQ’s Equity & Multiculturalism Goal is: *“To have a student body that closely reflects the make-up of the broader society, to build an environment which fosters successful participation by people from diverse backgrounds, and to develop graduates who are culturally sensitive in order to contribute to creating a society that values diversity and difference”* noting that *“A particular emphasis is given to supporting the aspirations of Indigenous Australians.”* (Extract from USQ Strategic Plan 2005-2009, p. 14: <http://www.usq.edu.au/planstats/Planning/>)

1.2 Equity Focus

Throughout its history USQ has provided educational opportunities for students from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances. As such, the University has been recognised as making a major contribution to the pursuit of equity in Australian higher education. USQ seeks to support educational participation with success for members of each of the six equity target groups recognised by the Commonwealth since *A Fair Chance For All* (1990).

- USQ is over-represented for students from low SES/low income backgrounds and from rural and geographically isolated areas. Students in this group present in a variety of ways – as financially disadvantaged, as ‘first generation’ students (that is, the first in their family to attend higher education), as ‘second chance learners’ (that is, students returning to education as adults after missing educational opportunities in their youth) or as educationally disadvantaged. Low SES/Low income is also the most common factor in multiple disadvantages.
- USQ’s Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) includes a large Correctional Centre’s Program that provides pathways into higher education for offenders in custody through distance and flexible education.¹
- USQ has a relatively small proportion of domestic students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), which is typical for a regional university. However, USQ has emerged as a strong and effective advocate of multiculturalism; being the first university to put in place a *Policy on Multiculturalism* in the mid-1990s, winning numerous multicultural services awards and proactively promoting multiculturalism in its regions. The USQ Multicultural Centre has been established to further support this important area. USQ is a signatory to the Queensland Government’s ‘Affirmation of Diversity’ and supports the USQ Multilingual and Multicultural Student Association as a support network for NESB students.

¹ USQ’s leadership position in distance and flexible education and its drive toward quality access to higher education has been widely recognised, most recently by the Commonwealth of Learning (<http://www.col.org>). 2004 Award of Excellence for Institutional Achievement: <http://www.usq.edu.au/aboutusq/awards/colaward.htm>

- An emerging issue in Toowoomba is the provision of educational opportunities for the large and growing Sudanese community in the region.
- USQ recognises South Sea Islander peoples in the Queensland context as a group with special needs. Staff at USQ Wide Bay consult with this group to ensure that any special needs are identified and addressed.
- A restructure of the equity committee framework underway in 2005 will include a strengthening of subcommittees in the key areas of gender equity, disabilities advice and indigenous affairs; each of which will take responsibility for overseeing both student and staff equity concerns in these specialist areas.
- *The USQ Strategic Plan 2005-2009 states: “a particular emphasis to supporting the aspirations of indigenous Australians.”*

2. EQUITY PERFORMANCE

Equity performance data for 2004 is available on the DEST website at: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/special_needs_disadvantage/default.htm#Equity%20Statistics

2.1 USQ’s Equity Performance

USQ’s equity performance data is published by DEST and available at: http://dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/statistics/student_equity_in_higher_education.htm#5. The University’s recent equity performance is characterised by the following:

- USQ remains one of the few Australian universities to be over-represented in its student body by low SES / low Income individuals and people from rural and geographically isolated areas. The performance of these students at USQ is generally well above the national averages with Retention and Success Ratios above 1.0.
- The Access Rate, and Participation and Retention Ratios for Students with Disabilities at USQ remain above national averages.
- People from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) make up a relatively small proportion of USQ’s student body, consistent with the trend in other regional and flexible delivery universities. This group at USQ exhibits relatively poor retention (although with some signs of improvement over recent years) but success rates have improved considerably since 1997 with success ratios now around 1.0. A number of strategies have been put in place through the Office of Preparatory and Academic Support (OPACS) to address the special needs that have emerged for this group (<http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/aboutopacs/specprogs/default.htm>). In addition, USQ supports the Multilingual & Multicultural Student Association as a peer support network for NESB students, has an active Multicultural Staff Network (<http://www.usq.edu.au/msn/>) that is active in promoting the interests of NESB students, and has established the USQ Multicultural Centre (<http://www.usq.edu.au/newsevents/news/multicentre.htm>) as a basis for promoting multiculturalism.

- USQ maintains a proportion of women in engineering well below the national average. This is due largely to two factors: (1) As USQ offers the only fully-distance engineering programs it recruits heavily from the existing engineering and related professions, which are themselves highly biased towards males; and (2) USQ is not a major provider of engineering programs that have been found to be attractive to female applicants – having no environmental engineering program and only a small chemical engineering program. Female students in engineering at USQ tend to outperform male students on virtually all indicators and their transfer rate into postgraduate study greatly exceeds that for males. The ‘marketing map’ developed between the Faculty of Engineering & Surveying and USQ Marketing & Public Relations has identified women as a priority target group for recruitment.
- Over recent years USQ has appeared to experience a gradual decline in the proportion of female students in information technology (IT), with a participation ratio that now sits below the national average. Female participation in Information Systems is being monitored in particular. This apparent trend has been identified as a priority area for consideration by the new Gender Equity Committee. One of the faculties concerned with IT course offerings, the Faculty of Sciences, is pursuing the introduction of a Faculty Equity Committee, with a proposal to this effect being presented to the June 2005 meeting of the Faculty Board.
- USQ has made some progress in improving its participation ratio for women in Higher Degree Research (HDR) programs since 1997, with significant success in female recruitment into these programs during the period 2001-2003 in particular. However the current participation percentage remains below the national average.
- The ‘marketing map’ developed between USQ Marketing & Public Relations and the Faculties of Sciences and of Education has identified males as a priority target group for Nursing and for Education, respectively.

2.2 Strategies to Improve Performance

2.2.1 Learning & Teaching Enhancement Committee (LTEC) Activities.

LTEC (<http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/enhancement/default.htm>), established in 2004 as a major strategic initiative from *USQ Directions* (<http://www.usq.edu.au/vc/directpp/default.htm>), has been charged with enhancing the learning & teaching practices across the University. It has established a number of project groups (<http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/enhancement/projects.htm>), including one to improve the University’s performance in terms of student retention and progression. Major activities being conducted include:

- extensive data analysis on student performance and mitigating factors;
- the conduct of a First Year Experience Forum (<http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/enhancement/fye.htm>); and
- the conduct of a survey of first year students’ experiences.

This project group will report to the LTEC on its findings and will be recommending broad strategies for improving performance during 2005.

2.2.2 Other Initiatives to Improve Equity Performance

Refer to section 3 for services to Students with Disabilities; section 4 for a discussion of new initiatives; and to Section 5 for the full range of support services and special programs provided to disadvantaged students at USQ.

3. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Institutions should list initiatives to be implemented under the Disability Support Program (DSP).

3.1 Review of Disability Action Plan

The USQ Disability Action Plan (DAP), ratified by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) in 2000, can be accessed from: <http://www.usq.edu.au/equalopp/CONTENTS.html>. The DAP implementation was comprehensively reviewed in 2003 and USQ maintains a 0.2 position within the Equal Opportunity Office specifically devoted to driving and monitoring DAP implementation, with reporting through the Disabilities Advisory Committee.

An action strategy arising from the review is to invite stakeholder comments in an ongoing rolling review process. As part of this process a major survey of USQ students with disabilities was conducted in 2004; the outcomes of which have reflected very favourably on USQ's progress in implementing its DAP to date as well as identifying priorities for future action. (The report of this survey is available upon request.) The Disabilities Advisory Committee has scheduled two special meetings per year through to 2008 to be devoted to these rolling reviews.

3.2 Audit and Review of Disability Resources

A review of Disability Support Services, recently completed by the Manager, (Workforce Practices), Human Resources has clarified the duties and responsibilities of the respective positions providing support and services for students with disabilities, and has resulted in a restructured Disabilities Resources section within Student Services.

One of the outcomes of the review has been a renaming from Disabilities Services to Disability Resources. This name change reflects a philosophical shift from a service delivery model to a facilitative model promoting greater inclusion of the wider University community in supporting students with disabilities.

The Disability Resources team consists of one professional supervisor and two specialist administrative staff. The Team coordinates 'reasonable adjustments' for students with disabilities and resources to assist learning and also serves as a resource for academic and general staff to gain professional advice on issues relating to students with disabilities achieving their academic goals at USQ.

The website for the Disability Resources section can be accessed at: <http://www.usq.edu.au/studentsservices/disabilityservices/default.htm>

3.3 Assistive Technology Facility

USQ has upgraded its Assistive Technology facilities in the main Library at Toowoomba with a dedicated space housing assistive software and equipment for students with disabilities. In addition, the Library and Disability Resources have established a specialist learning facility for students with a disability, particularly sensory disabilities, within the main resources section of the Library. This facility contains state of the art technology that will address many of the information barriers for students using the Library. This space will also function as an alternative formatting production room and training area for students.

Improved accommodation is also being planned for the joint University-community Library facility at USQ Wide Bay.

3.4 Disability Resources Technical Support

USQ has set aside special funding for technical support of Disability Resources. This includes a technical workshop for the production and purchase of equipment for students with a disability.

3.5 Collaboration with Regional Disability Liaison Officer (RDLO)

USQ has hosted the position of Regional Disability Liaison Officer (RDLO) for the Southern Queensland region since 1997. As reflected in the annual reports provided to DEST, this position has proven particularly effective in networking educational institutions and promoting a more coordinated and collaborative approach to disabilities support in the region.

USQ and the other regional institutions serviced by this position greatly value the RDLO concept and urge the Commonwealth to continue funding this important strategy for regional areas.

The effectiveness of the collaboration between the RDLO and USQ staff is reflected in the following activities conducted over the past year:

- *Global and future developments in Disability Reform*. Facilitated by Mark Bagshaw, Chair of The Ability Australia Foundation and IBM Australia executive,
- *Universal Design – A Framework for Best Practice in Flexible and Inclusive teaching*, USQ Academic Professional Development Program, Wide Bay and Toowoomba.
- *Post School Options for Students with a Disability* for Education Qld professional development days
- *Design for Difference* workshop for USQ Faculty of Engineering & Surveying.
- *What is Mental Health?* Presentation for high school students.
- *Working with Families*. Presentation on post-school options for students with disabilities for the Stanthorpe Community Forum.
- *Disability Awareness Workshops (2)* for USQ Mentor training program.

General information on the Southern Queensland RDLO can be obtained from: <http://www.usq.edu.au/studentsservices/disabilityservices/rdlo/default.htm>.

3.6 Disability and Employment

A community forum was conducted by Student Services in 2004 that brought together students and employer representatives to discuss the issues of students with disability and their ultimate post-study transition into employment. The evaluation of this forum was published as: McIlveen, P., Cameron, M., McLachlan, D., & Gunn, J. 2005, 'The study-to-work transition of university students with a disability', *Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counselling*, vol. 10, pp. 46-55. In addition, the RDLO submitted to the HREOC forum on employment of people with disabilities.

USQ has subscribed as a 'Pathways to Charter' member of Employers Making A Difference (EMAD) (<http://www.emad.asn.au/>) and is working, with EMAD's assistance, towards the development of a Disabilities Employment Strategy for USQ. Two of the projects that will support this development over 2005-6 will involve (1) an improved partnership between USQ and local disability employment agencies in placing USQ graduates with a disability into employment; and (2) the development of a more proactive approach to harvesting USQ graduates with disability onto USQ staff.

4. EQUITY MANAGEMENT & PLANNING, AND NEW INITIATIVES

Institutions should provide a statement summarising processes in place to monitor and manage equity issues, and include any new broad approaches being planned.

4.1 Reforms to Institutional Planning

USQ Council approved the high level planning document *USQ Directions* in June 2004 (<http://www.usq.edu.au/vc/directpp/default.htm>). This document described institutional actions under 16 Key Strategic Areas (KSAs). KSA12 concerned the development and roll-out of a comprehensive Planning, Quality & Review Framework for the University. Important developments in this area have included: (1) The establishment of the new position of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Planning & Quality); (2) The revamping of the Planning, Quality & Review Committee (<http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/3-5-11.pdf>); (3) the approval by USQ Council at its meeting of February 2005 of *The USQ Strategic Plan 2005-2009* (<http://www.usq.edu.au/planstats/Planning/>); (4) the introduction of a comprehensive organisational review process that will see all faculties and organisational sections reviewed on a five year rolling timetable (<http://www.usq.edu.au/planstats/Review/>); (5) the fast tracking of the development of the Strategic Management Information System as a central comprehensive information management portal (<http://www.usq.edu.au/planstats/Statistics/Smis.htm>); and (6) the development of quantitative and qualitative institutional targets to inform the next round of faculty and organisational section planning due in the second half of 2005.

The following is an extract from the working draft of the *USQ Targets* document (scheduled for release by the end of June 2005) concerning the USQ Strategic Plan's EQUITY & MULTICULTURALISM GOAL: *To have a student body that closely reflects the make-up of the broader society, to build an environment which fosters successful participation by people from diverse backgrounds, and to develop graduates who are culturally sensitive in order to contribute to creating a society that values diversity and difference.*

Objective 1. Demonstrable improvements to be secured in diversity management and equity services over the next five years.

Targets:

- 1. Growing evidence supporting the furthering of the development of an institutional culture that fully values equity and diversity.*
- 2. Maintaining USQ's proportion of students from LSES, R&I and Indigenous groups above national sector means.*
- 3. Promoting programs encouraging participation by people from all identified disadvantaged groups.*
- 4. Improving Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) and Indigenous Higher Education Preparatory Program (IHEPP) progression rates and transfer rates into award programs.*

Objective 4. USQ's research output to be increased on the themes of equity and multiculturalism.

Target: Increase in research income, publications and number of projects on the themes of equity & multiculturalism by at least 50 per cent between 2005-2009.

These processes will guide the development of an updated *USQ Equity Plan* which is timetabled for completion by mid-2006 (informed by the Equity & Diversity Audit currently underway – refer to 4.3 below), and ensure the regular monitoring and review of the implementation of this plan and the University's suite of equity programs.

4.2 The New Social Justice Portfolio and Committee Structure

A number of management committees have been responsible for different aspects of equity at USQ, including the VCC Standing Committee on Student Support & Equity, the Disabilities Advisory Committee (DAC), the Equal Opportunity (EO) Committee, and the Status of Women in Employment (SWE) Sub-Committee (<http://www.usq.edu.au/corporateservices/mancom.htm>).

A restructure of executive management in 2004 saw the establishment of the new position of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Regional Engagement & Social Justice). This development is being accompanied by a restructure of the committee framework for equity at USQ that will be completed by the end of 2005. A new high level Social Justice Committee is being established as one of the portfolio committees for the new Pro Vice-Chancellor position and there will be four subcommittees: Gender Equity Committee, Disabilities Advisory Committee, Indigenous Affairs Committee and the Student Equity Network.

4.3 Equity and Diversity Audit

USQ had planned to conduct a review of its equity and diversity programs during the first half of 2005 as a basis for making decisions concerning the establishment of the new Social Justice executive portfolio. When the University received a significant increase in its Equity Support Program (ESP) allocation for 2005, the terms of reference for the Equity & Diversity Audit were extended to include a brief to inform decisions concerning the appropriate allocation of USQ's ESP grant. The University appointed a Project Officer (HEW 8) on a fixed term contract (3 months) to comprehensively review the University's equity and diversity policies, structures and programs. The project is due to report to the Vice-Chancellor's Committee (VCC) at its meeting of July 2005.

4.4 New Equity Initiatives for 2005

4.4.1 USQ Student Equity Officer

USQ has established the position of Student Equity Officer (HEW8) based on funding from its ESP grant. This position will have institutional responsibility for driving, reviewing, evaluating and developing University policy in relation to matters of student equity. An incumbent for this position has recently been appointed.

4.4.2 USQ Equity Incentives Scheme

USQ has established a funding pool of \$100,000 from its ESP grant to be made available on a competitive grants basis for the funding of equity initiatives at the University. This fund will be managed under the aegis of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Regional Engagement & Social Justice) with the grants round conducted during the second half of 2005.

4.4.3 USQ Multicultural Centre

In 2005, the University established the USQ Multicultural Centre using some support from ESP funds. The Centre aims to reinforce USQ's leadership in multiculturalism within the Australian higher education system and overseas; to contribute to the unique identity of USQ by developing innovative programs on multiculturalism; to develop closer cooperation between the governments and non-government organisations at local, state and national level in the area of multiculturalism; and to promote the concept of multiculturalism and its benefits in practice.. The Centre is responsible for coordinating the University's response to major cultural events such as Harmony Day and the National Day of Healing, and will play a significant role in regional engagement and equity research.

4.4.4 Boys in Maths, Technology and Science Summer School (BMTSSS)

USQ has offered an annual Girls in Maths, Technology and Science Summer School (GMTSSS) since 1990. The Boys in Maths, Technology and Science Summer School (BMTSSS) is a new equity initiative offered for the first time in January 2005 which has been based on the successful program for girls. The new program targets Year 10 boys with ability in science and mathematics who may not receive support or encouragement to continue their studies in these areas, and so effectively targets many boys in disadvantaged circumstances.

The BMTSSS program aims to influence the subject selection of boys in Year 11 and 12, so that they continue their studies in science and mathematics. The BMTSSS program helps boys:

- identify careers available in engineering, science, mathematics and technology;
- provide interesting and stimulating experiences for participants in the fields of engineering, science, mathematics and technology;
- raise the confidence of individual participants in their existing skills;
- provide access to and familiarisation with the expectations of University level study;
- provide role models in the fields of engineering, science, mathematics and technology.
- generally raise awareness of mathematics, science and technology-based careers for young people.

The program is managed by the BMTSSS Committee with membership from many sections of the University including OPACS and the Faculties of Engineering and Surveying, Sciences, Business and Education. Information is available at: <http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/aboutopacs/specprogs/boysummerschool.htm>

4.4.5 Refugee Support

The Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) is proving a popular pathway for members of the large and growing Sudanese community on the Darling Downs to enter higher education. To manage the special needs of this group, the TPP Program has put the following strategies into place:

- an identified tutor with responsibility for all Sudanese students;
- a 'Sudanese Group' set up on the course discussion group available only to the Sudanese students for discussion of course matters;
- the establishment of a peer network through the encouragement of Sudanese students to share contact details; and
- the conduct of special information visits to local schools with high Sudanese enrolments.

In addition, a community forum is to be organised during the second half of 2005 through the Toowoomba Education Coalition (see 4.4.10) and under the sponsorship of USQ specifically to discuss the special educational needs of this group.

4.4.6 Orientation Website

A revitalised Orientation website (<http://www.usq.edu.au/orientation/default.htm>) was launched on 1 December 2004 for students new to the University who are unable to attend the on-campus orientation activities or the regional orientation meetings held throughout Eastern Australia at the beginning of each first semester. The website provides students with information on getting ready for USQ, starting at USQ, getting support and USQ terminology. Total page visits for the five week period leading up to and during Orientation week were 6,770, with 617 visits recorded on Monday 21 February alone.

4.4.7 First Year Experience Forum

The LTEC project group for Student Retention and Progression (refer to 2.2.1) conducted a First Year Experience Forum to canvass University staff views, experiences, and initiatives aimed at enhancing student performance. The LTEC project group responsible for the forum is currently formulating its report and recommendations; and has launched a First Year Experience website: <http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/enhancement/fye.htm>.

4.4.8 Financial Education: Collaborative Partnership

The University's career service has engaged with Lifeline's Financial Counsellor to provide on-campus education services in financial management, including advice on how to best use Centrelink allowances or earnings and preparing for the expense of purchasing education materials and living requirements. This is an important service because it links directly with the loans scheme and scholarships managed by Careers Employment & Welfare and targets students from low SES backgrounds.

4.4.9 Mainstreaming Equity Initiatives

In addition to strengthening the social justice committee structure (refer to 4.2), the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Regional Engagement & Social Justice) is encouraging the mainstreaming of equity issues across the institution. This is occurring through equity and social justice issues becoming more prominent on the agendas of Academic Board (<http://www.usq.edu.au/corporateservices/acboard/default.htm>) and LTEC (<http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/enhancement/default.htm>), and in the consideration being given to the establishment of faculty equity committees. With regard to the latter point, a proposal is going to the Sciences Faculty Board in June 2005 for the establishment of a Faculty of Sciences Equity Committee. In addition, Careers, Employment & Welfare has established a specialist career counselling position for the purposes of supporting students from targeted disadvantaged groups.

4.4.10 Cross-Sectoral Collaboration / Toowoomba as an Educational Region

The Toowoomba Education Coalition is an initiative that brings together USQ, the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE (SQIT), local high schools and educational agencies into a new form of strategic alliance that is unique in Australia. It is intended in particular to create new opportunities for students to move between the various post-compulsory educational institutions in the local region. The Coalition is developing new opportunities for talented high school students to study at USQ part-time on-campus, easing the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer between the University and VET sector and creating a forum for dialogue on issues such as meeting the special educational needs of the local Sudanese community. The Coalition is seen as a vehicle to consolidate Toowoomba as a regional centre of educational excellence.

5. STATEMENT OF ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to receive Higher Education Equity Support Program funds in any one year, eligible providers must provide a statement demonstrating to the satisfaction of DEST that they are undertaking activities which assist disadvantaged students, consistent with the aims of the program as set out in paragraph 1.40.5 ... and meet all of the following criteria:

(a) providers run outreach programs to attract disadvantaged students to higher education;

(b) providers offer specialised support for disadvantaged students to assist their progression through higher education;

(c) providers administer application and selection processes for the Commonwealth Learning Scholarships Program; and

(d) providers establish an institutional equity scholarship program to complement the Commonwealth Learning Scholarships Program.

(Paragraphs 1.45.1 of the Higher Education Equity Support Program Guidelines)

The University of Southern Queensland is compliant with the conditions of the ESP Guidelines 1.45.1, as per the following citations of evidence.

5.1 CRITERIA 1: OUTREACH PROGRAMS

In its review of USQ in 2002, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) afforded USQ the following commendation: *8. AUQA commends USQ for its highly successful engagement with its communities through an extensive array of mechanisms.* This reflects on USQ as a community-focussed regional university.

USQ's activities include a broad suite of programs designed to inform, inspire, encourage and empower disadvantaged individuals to consider pathways to higher education. Many of these programs are incorporated into the University's annual 'Schools Events' Calendar (<http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/05-020+planner+fin.pdf>), while others involve work with the VET sector or community outreach. Relevant programs include the following:

5.1.1 Outreach Involving School Links

School Liaison Program involves regular visits to schools throughout south-east and south-west Queensland; as well as low SES metropolitan areas (<http://www.usq.edu.au/futurestudents/teachers/school/default.htm>). Visits include general information sessions on pathways to university and careers information.

Special Schools Liaison occurs as a result of specific faculty initiatives or responses to special needs. For example:

- The Faculty of Engineering & Surveying Marketing Strategy Map includes an action plan to form a schools liaison team to provide information and marketing material to all girls schools in the region
- Faculty of Education conduct a number of programs that increase the profile of USQ in rural & isolated areas, including PCAP, Professional Experience Practicums, Isolated Schools Project and Isolated Children's Project
- Creative Arts Music and Theatre staff regularly visit local schools
- Special visits to schools with high Sudanese enrolments have been conducted by TPP staff during 2005 in response to a particular need
- Collaborative school programs are undertaken with the RDLO (see 3.5).

5.1.2 Outreach Programs Making the University Campuses Accessible

University Community Open Days are held annually in Toowoomba and Wide Bay (<http://www.usq.edu.au/openday/default.htm>) to inform and engage the community, and demystify the university environment and culture.

Tertiary Taster Program operated in collaboration with the Southern Queensland RDLO (<http://www.usq.edu.au/newsevents/news/ttp180503.htm>) involves a residential program at USQ for school children with a disability who are considering higher education as a post-school option. This program assists with post-school career options in higher education.

Rural Residential Program has been offered for children who would not ordinarily consider higher education as a post-school option due to locational and financial disadvantage. This program has been formally evaluated and published as McIlveen, Ford, and Everton 2005, 'Facilitating transition from rural schools to university', *Australian Journal of Career Development*. Vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 11-17.

USQ Wide Bay Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) Funny Business is a business enterprise competition that attracts local school students to campus and promotes post-school and career options in business. This is an important initiative for the Wide Bay area because of its high level of socio-economic disadvantage.

Other Competitions conducted by USQ as a basis for opening the university culture to school children include Banking & Finance Trading Room Competition and USQ German Verse-Speaking Competition (<http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/05-020+planner+fin.pdf>).

Voices on the Range (<http://www.usq.edu.au/newsevents/news/voices.htm>) has been hosted by USQ for the past two years. It is a youth cultural festival that attracts more than 1,500 Year 5 through to Year 12 students from schools across southern Queensland. The event provides opportunities for students to participate in a range of workshops and share the talents and enthusiasm of professional presenters in a variety of areas including writing for various genres, poetry performance, cartooning, theatre direction, film-making and voice.

5.1.3 Outreach Programs Involving Careers Information and Advice

Guidance Officer Days provide professional development opportunities for Guidance Officers and brings their schools in closer contact with the higher education sector. Important information is provided in relation to equity services, such as administrative and admissions changes, fees, scholarships, academic program changes, initiatives for equity target groups. The 2005 day focused upon the transition into university and highlighted issues of particular relevance to students from rural and geographically isolated areas, and from low SES backgrounds (<http://www.usq.edu.au/futurestudents/teachers/profdev/guideoffday.htm>).

Rural Family Information involves USQ Careers, Employment & Welfare staff visiting rural schools to talk directly with students and parents, particularly those who have lacked much exposure to higher education. This program led to the development of a family advice booklet entitled *Family Guide to USQ* (<http://www.usq.edu.au/studentsservices/careers/parentinfo.htm>), which was produced with advice from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA)

Advice to LBOTE Community is provided at USQ Wide Bay career service, in particular to the Philippine Tagalog community, providing information on careers and access to higher education.

Indigenous Career Education centres on career education seminars offered by USQ Careers, Employment & Welfare in collaboration with Kumbari/Ngurpai Lag to indigenous school children from the region. The seminars assist students to consider post-school options and careers associated with higher education. Regular school visits are also conducted across the region by Kumbari/Ngurpai Lag and Buallum Jarl-Bah staff speaking about tertiary options and strategies for access.

Working Together for Indigenous Youth involves Faculty of Education staff identifying barriers for students completing Years 11 and 12 and continuing onto higher education or employment.

USQ also has a representative on the **Toowoomba Career Educators Network**. This network provides professional support for local careers professionals. The University career counselling representative assists school guidance professionals with providing accurate and effective advice on higher education.

5.1.4 Outreach Initiatives in Maths, Science and Technology

The Girls in Mathematics, Technology and Science Summer School (GMTSSS) (<http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/aboutopacs/specprogs/summerschool.htm>) is an equity program directed at Year 10 girls with ability in science and mathematics who may not receive support or encouragement to continue their studies in these non-traditional areas. The program, which has been offered annually by USQ since 1990, aims to influence the subject selection of girls in Years 11 and 12.

The program has been used as the basis for the development of a program to support boys – see **BMTSSS** in 4.4.4.

Science and Engineering Challenge conducted by the Faculty of Engineering & Surveying involves school teams competing to complete set challenges in science and technology. The event involves some 700 students from 24 schools from across Queensland (<http://www.usq.edu.au/newsevents/news/sciengchallenge.htm>).

Robot Bilby Challenge conducted by the Faculty of Engineering & Surveying involves senior high school students and teachers from all over Queensland.

Scientific Minds Creating Connections offered by the Faculty of Sciences is an extension program for female students at St Saviours High School in Toowoomba. This program is designed to encourage females to consider careers in science.

Queensland Statistics Poster Competition is conducted by the Faculty of Sciences involving Year 8 and 9 students from schools across Queensland (<http://www.usq.edu.au/newsevents/news/statscomp.htm>).

The **Calendar of Community Activities** to celebrate events such as National Science Week and National Chemistry Week are also important in opening USQ to the community (<http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/05-020+planner+fin.pdf>).

5.1.5 Outreach Programs Concerned with Pathways and Empowerment

'Future Students' Homepage is accessed directly from the USQ homepage by prospective students surfing for information on pathways, access, scholarships, course fees, study options, support and university life. Information is grouped for mature students, school students, TAFE students, and teachers and career advisors.

A wide range of Expos, Forums, Information Days and Workshops are conducted which involve and engage school students and teachers. These include the Careers Expos, Education Mini Expo, Engineering Expo, APS Psychology Expo, Transition Forum, Grade 11/12 Day, Future Options Day, Marketing & Tourism Day, Information Systems Day, GIS & GPS Day, Day with USQ Music and QUE Fest Workshops (<http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/05-020+planner+fin.pdf>).

School Information Centre Project involves USQ working as part of Education Hervey Bay - a collaborative working group of all education providers and interested organisations in the region - to co-locate a variety of organisations at Urangun High School as a central location for prospective students to gather information on education institutions in the region.

TAFE to University options are encouraged through a range of mechanisms (<http://www.usq.edu.au/futurestudents/tafe/default.htm>). For example, USQ has promoted broad access to university through particular arrangements with VET institutions such as the clear pathways course developed between the Faculty of Business and Southern Queensland, Barrier Reef and Wide Bay Institutes of TAFE (<http://www.usq.edu.au/business/future/tafe/default.htm>). USQ also provides specific information on its 'Future Students' website for TAFE students and graduates (and their advisers) seeking advice on entering higher education (<http://www.usq.edu.au/futurestudents/tafe/default.htm>).

Work Experience Counts (<http://www.usq.edu.au/business/future/go.htm>) is a program commenced by the Faculty of Business, Graduate School of Management which involves direct, special entry to postgraduate certificates in business studies for persons who have not followed the traditional route of undergraduate study, but who possess the necessary attributes for postgraduate study through their work and industry experiences.

5.1.6 Community Outreach that Inspires and Opens Possibilities

The USQ Performance Centre within the Faculty of Arts (<http://www.usq.edu.au/performancecentre/default.htm>) is a major local institution that has brought live theatre and music to prominence on the Darling Downs. Its calendar of events serves important roles in the University serving and engaging the community, in opening the University to the public and in inspiring the community to embrace higher education in general and the creative and performing arts in particular. Major events include:

- Theatre and Music for Young Audiences (<http://www.usq.edu.au/performancecentre/education/default.htm>)
- Shakespeare in the Park (<http://www.usq.edu.au/performancecentre/2005season/february/shakespeare.htm>)
- The QUE Able Theatre (<http://www.usq.edu.au/newsevents/news/queable.htm>)
- Junior Academy of Music (JAM) (<http://www.usq.edu.au/faculty/arts/music/Academy.htm>)

On-campus activities celebrating major cultural events such as Harmony Day and National Day of Healing (<http://www.usq.edu.au/equalopp/HarmonyDay04.htm>)

Education Hervey Bay collaborates with the **Reconnect** program which supports children at-risk of homelessness and provides them with tertiary education options.

5.2 CRITERIA 2: SPECIALISED SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

USQ has a well-earned reputation as a university that maintains a caring and supportive learning environment for its students. It is significant that in its review of USQ in 2002, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) afforded USQ the following commendations:

9. *AUQA commends USQ for its high level responsiveness to student inquiries through a wide range of accessible points of contact.*

11. *AUQA commends USQ for the professional manner in which its student services have developed a rich, well coordinated, supportive and creative learning environment for students seeking opportunities to enhance their learning.*

5.2.1 A wide suite of programs are offered to provide specialised support for disadvantaged students. In addition to the outreach and scholarships programs described under 5.1 and 5.4, the services for students with disabilities described under section 3, and the new initiatives described under section 4 of this Update, USQ provides the following specialised services for disadvantaged students

- Tertiary Preparation (Enabling) Program (TPP) including the Correctional Services Program (<http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/tpp/default.htm>)
- General Studies as a graded multi-award study option for students (<http://www.usq.edu.au/handbook/2005/genstudies.html>)
- Disability Resources (<http://www.usq.edu.au/student-services/disabilityservices/default.htm>)
- Student Services particularly appropriate for disadvantaged students - including Accommodation Advice; Employment; Counselling; Equity Focused Career Development; Financial Assistance; Welfare; and Health (<http://www.usq.edu.au/student-services/default.htm>)
- Special programs offered by the Office of Preparatory and Academic Support (OPACS) – including Communication for Academic Purposes (CAP), Foundation Maths Program and Course-based Support Programs (<http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/learningsupport/studlearnsupport/default.htm>).
- Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS)² (<http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/learningsupport/studlearnsupport/undergradcoursesupp/pals.htm>)
- Intensive TESOL program is a non-award professional development program (<http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/cllt/CLLTProg/specprogs/tesol/default.htm>)

² In its review of USQ in 2002, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) identified PALS as a best practice exemplar, and afforded USQ the following commendation: *10. AUQA commends USQ for the Peer-Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) service, which is an example of innovative and good practice in supporting students with their academic endeavours.*

- Library services including Express Post services for loans, extended borrowing times for people in rural and geographically isolated areas, and free scanning and photocopying services.
- University-owned and -managed Residential Colleges (<http://www.usq.edu.au/accommodation/default.htm>)
- Staff Development in equity, anti-discrimination and inclusive practice (<http://www.usq.edu.au/dec/staff/staffdev/default.htm>)
- Kumbari/Ngurpai Lag and Bualum Jarl-Bah Indigenous Higher Education Centres (<http://www.usq.edu.au/kumbari/default.htm>)
- USQ Wide Bay campus – as a branch campus in a region with a high proportion of disadvantage and traditionally low education rates (<http://www.usq.edu.au/widebay/>)

5.2.2 Use of Mainstream Support. The high number of members of identified disadvantaged groups at USQ tend to be heavy users of mainstream support services provided by:

- Office of Preparatory and Academic Support (OPACS; in particular academic learning support through the Learning Centre and online learning support (ALSONline) (<http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/learningsupport/studlearnsupport/default.htm>),
- Student Services (<http://www.usq.edu.au/student-services/default.htm>),
- Student Administration (<http://www.usq.edu.au/student-admin/default.htm>),
- Student Guild (<http://www.studentguild.com.au/>),
- Outreach Services / Regional Liaison Officer Network (in the Distance and e-Learning Centre, DeC) (<http://www.usq.edu.au/dec/sections/outreach/default.htm>),
- Information Technology Services (ITS) (<http://www.usq.edu.au/its/default.htm>),
- Library (<http://www.usq.edu.au/library/>) and
- the five USQ Faculties (<http://www.usq.edu.au/facdept/default.htm>);

and these service providers are all geared to address the special needs of disadvantaged students.

5.2.3 Professional Development of Staff. USQ offers its staff professional development opportunities to enable them to support the learning needs of diverse student groups (<http://www.usq.edu.au/learn-teach/profdev/default.htm>). Current programs are in the areas of:

- Addressing Indigenous Learning Styles: Implications for Teaching Practice
- Voice and verbal Effectiveness for International Academic Staff
- Working with the Indigenous Community at Wide Bay
- Developing Strategies for the Global Learning and Teaching Context at USQ
- Students with Learning Challenges: Strategies for Inclusive Learning and Teaching
- Universal Design: A Framework for Flexible and Inclusive Learning and Teaching
- Cultural Awareness Training

5.2.4 Policies and Practice in the Areas of Equity and Student Support. USQ has strong suite of policies governing equity and social justice (<http://www.usq.edu.au/equalopp/POLICIES.HTM>) and a strong policy on Student Advice, Student Welfare, and Pastoral Support (<http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/6-7.pdf>). A strong student-focussed learning & teaching culture, maintaining sound processes for recognition of prior learning and credit transfer, ensuring user-friendly academic regulations, offering extended examination times for students with special needs, and maintaining effective grievance procedures are also essential elements of USQ's equity provision.

5.3 CRITERIA 3: ADMINISTRATION OF COMMONWEALTH LEARNING SCHOLARSHIPS (CLS)

A range of equity scholarships have been made available to the sector by the Commonwealth under the Commonwealth Learning Scholarships (CLS) Scheme: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/scholarships_awards_prizes/commonwealth_learning_scholarships_programme.htm. Universities are required to administer the CLS scholarships allocated to them by the Commonwealth.

At USQ, CLS have been administered by the Careers Employment & Welfare section of Student Services.

- The application and allocation process accounts for the Commonwealth's selection criteria and allocates scholarships through a process of written application and review by a select panel of experts who have a working knowledge of the issues of student hardship (eg, counsellors, indigenous educator). The application information and documentation are available at <http://www.usq.edu.au/Studentservices/finassist/cls/default.htm>.
- The Section has developed an electronic database for the maintenance of applicants' details, ongoing eligibility and, payment tracking.
- USQ has established an appeals process for unsuccessful applicants.
- USQ is currently recruiting a new specialist position of Scholarships Officer to manage equity-related scholarships and this position will function within the framework of the Careers Employment & Welfare section.
- The scholarships are monitored by a Finance Officer who ensures correct tracking and payments are made, and acquittal processes are in place.
- All of the 2004 scholarships were allocated. The majority of the 2005 CLS have been allocated. To ensure that there is no disadvantage to students who commence in semester two, twenty (20) of the 2005 CECS and two (2) CAS have been reserved for students commencing in semester 2, 2005.

5.4 CRITERIA 4: INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS PROGRAM

Information on USQ's full range of scholarships programs can be accessed at: <http://www.usq.edu.au/futurestudents/scholarships/firstdegree/default.htm>

5.4.1 USQ Equity Scholarships Program. USQ has initiated an annual specialist Equity Scholarships program involving a pool of \$150,000 which meets the Commonwealth's requirement for an institution-based equity scholarships program that complements the Commonwealth's CLS allocation. This scheme is administered by the Careers Employment & Welfare section of Student Services and targets students experiencing financial disadvantage as members of identified disadvantaged groups. The scheme allows for fifty \$3,000 scholarships - \$2,000 provided on commencement to cover start-up costs and \$1,000 provided at the commencement of second year to promote student persistence.

5.4.2 Additional Scholarships Programs with Strong Equity Elements. In addition to USQ's annual Equity Scholarships Program, which complements the Commonwealth's CLS allocation, the University offers a range of scholarships that include strong equity elements in their eligibility criteria. These include the following scholarships available in 2005:

- **Residential Scholarships.** USQ offers up to six Residential Scholarships to Year 12 students. These scholarships provide accommodation and meals in any of the three Residential Colleges owned and operated by the University. The Rural Residential Scholarships are designed to assist rural Queenslanders who have the ability to succeed in tertiary education but whose financial situation creates barriers to them moving away from home in order to study. Scholarships are available for students from rural areas intending to study full-time at the Toowoomba campus with an approximate value of \$3,000 to \$3,500 per year - representing approximately 50% of residential fees (excluding vacation periods). The scholarships are awarded annually for the duration of the recipient's initial undergraduate degree.
- **Regional Scholarships.** USQ offers Regional Scholarships to Year 12 students to encourage the best of the local students to study and remain in the region. The scholarships rewards students for their academic achievements, personal characteristics and contribution to society. There is one scholarship of \$6,000 per year, and up to eight scholarships of \$3,000 per year awarded under this program. These scholarships are available for a maximum of three years, subject to satisfactory academic achievement.
- **Women in Engineering or Surveying Scholarship.** The Faculty of Engineering & Surveying offers one scholarship with a value of \$8,000 to a full-time on-campus female student enrolling in any degree program offered by the Faculty. The scholarship provides \$4,000 in the first year and the remainder in second year subject to satisfactory academic performance.
- **Peter Rorke Music Scholarship.** The Scholarship is named in memory of Peter Rorke OAM (1928-1998) a former Head of Music at USQ, and distinguished teacher, conductor and composer. The scholarship is worth \$1,000 and is awarded for one year to assist a Bachelor of Music applicant whose financial circumstances could be an impediment to continuing study.

- **Faculty of Engineering and Surveying Indigenous Student Scholarship.** The Faculty of Engineering & Surveying offers one scholarship to a full-time on-campus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolling in any undergraduate degree program offered by the Faculty. The scholarship provides \$4,000 in the first year and the remainder in second year subject to satisfactory academic performance.
- **Year 12 Student Scholarships.** USQ offers 20 scholarships for school-leavers commencing full-time on-campus study at USQ - 15 awarded to students studying at the Toowoomba campus and five to students studying at USQ Wide Bay. A specific proportion were set aside for disadvantaged students. Each scholarship has a value of \$2,000 per year for the duration of the recipient's academic program; paid in a stipend of \$250 per study course (to a maximum \$1,000 per semester). All short-listed applicants who do not receive a scholarship receive a \$500 bursary.
- **Non-School Leaver Scholarships.** This represents an equivalent program to the above for non-school-leaver students commencing full-time on-campus study at USQ.
- **Distance Education Study Support Scholarships.** USQ offers 16 scholarships for students studying by Distance Education - eight awarded to students commencing Distance Education students and eight to continuing Distance Education Students. A specific proportion has been set aside for disadvantaged students. Each scholarship has a value of \$1,000 paid in a stipend of \$250 per course of study. All short-listed applicants who do not receive a scholarship will receive a \$500 bursary.
- **Indigenous Student Scholarship.** USQ offers three scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students commencing full-time on-campus study at USQ - two awarded to students studying at the Toowoomba campus and one to students studying at USQ Wide Bay. Each scholarship has a value of \$2,000 per year for the duration of the recipient's academic program; paid in a stipend of \$250 per course of study. All short-listed applicants who do not receive a scholarship will receive a \$500 bursary.
- **Pure Land Learning Scholarship.** Generous annual grants are provided by the Pure Land Learning College for scholarships to very needy students to enable them to complete high school. USQ supports pathways for these students into higher education should they wish to proceed.

5.4.3 Scholarships Office. USQ is in the process of establishing a Scholarships Office within Student Services involving a dedicated part-time Scholarships Officer, to manage the full range of the University's scholarships offerings and ensure that equity principles are appropriately considered.

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