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## #324 - The Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework: transforming evaluative practice in Australia

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### Objectives/aims

The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) provides funds to eligible Australian universities to undertake strategies that improve equity in higher education access and outcomes, with a particular focus on students from low socio-economic status (low SES) backgrounds, those from regional and remote areas, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The aim of this project was to develop a robust and sector-informed Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework (SEHEEF) to guide the evaluation of the overall HEPPP and of individual HEPPP-funded university programs and activities.

### Methods

Development of the SEHEEF was informed by evidence and insights obtained through a range of activities, including: a structured, rapid review of literature related to equity interventions in higher education; an analysis of university HEPPP plans and annual reports; an audit of relevant datasets in Australia to determine how existing data sources could be used to evaluate HEPPP-funded projects; three 2-hour interactive workshops with 61 members of the wider Australian HE sector; 18 in-depth consultations with 25 data experts and custodians from 13 organisations;

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socialisation of a preliminary framework with the sector through an online webinar, with an accompanying online survey and consultation drop-in sessions.

### **Main findings**

A sector-informed SEHEEF, with accompanying guidance manual and implementation tools, has been designed and published, with implementation underway. Its design is built on key foundations, including a typology of HEPPP-funded activities, a student pathway map, and a HEPPP Program Logic. These foundations give structure to the SEHEEF, helping to provide clear and consistent concepts, definitions, and guidance for those involved in the implementation and evaluation of HE equity programs. The SEHEEF delineates evaluation activities to be delivered at the university level and those to be considered at the level of the Australian Government. University level activities are segmented into Continuous Quality Improvement and Impact Evaluation, with the latter encompassing both Quantitative Impact Evaluation and Theory-Based Impact Evaluation. National level activities involve routine reporting of equity data, reporting and analysis of sector level data on HEPPP-funded projects, and the synthesis of Impact Evaluations conducted at the university level. The framework shows how a comprehensive evaluation of the HEPPP requires linkage and triangulation between university and national level activities dependent on reciprocal knowledge exchange. The SEHEEF has been well received by the sector, recognising that its implementation will enhance the consistency and robustness of routine measurement and reporting, while supporting the increased use of in-depth impact evaluation to strengthen understanding of what works, for whom, in what circumstances, how and why. In doing so, the SEHEEF will support building an evidence base to inform and improve equity policy and practice in higher education in Australia, and to deliver better outcomes for underrepresented students.