### Financial support & scholarships

Literature Review

Financial support offered by institutions in the form of grants, bursaries and scholarships is clearly significant in terms of expanding access to, and supporting the retention, participation and success of equity group students. Cost has been noted by several researchers as a significant barrier for students accessing and aspiring to higher education (James, 2002; Scull & Cuthill, 2010; Wilks & Wilson, 2012; Naylor, Baik & James, 2013). Le & Miller (2005) noted the proposed changes to HECS were likely to impact on low SES students more than their high SES counterparts, and therefore universities should increase their financial contributions to fund more scholarships and fee-waivers. Two studies of note included in this review have examined the impact of scholarships on the experiences of equity students. Reed & Hurd (2014) examined how the scholarships offered at Macquarie University had affected retention rates of recipients and conducted interview to collect qualitative reports of their impact. They found that scholarships offered significant benefits in the form of access to resources, incentives to apply to university, a sense of security and belonging, as well as increased motivation, engagement and self-efficacy, with one student describing their scholarship as “a value beyond money” (2014, p. 10). Reed & Hurd argue that the benefits are so profound that institutional views of scholarships need to be shifted from incentive to key institutional mechanisms. Similar findings are reported by Carson (2010), suggesting that the financial support offered in the form of scholarships at Swinburne had an overwhelmingly positive impact. She reports that two thirds (64.2%) of recipients perceived the scholarship to provide them financial security and improve their quality of life.

Findings from Zacharias et al.’s (2016) research into the impact of scholarships at Deakin University, the University of Sydney and Queensland University of Technology also echo those of Reed & Hurd (2014), as they note that at all three locations – which were chosen on the basis of their differences - equity scholarships are effective at retaining students of all groups. Participants/recipients in their study reported that receiving financial assistance in the form of a scholarship reduced stress, boosted morale and gave them more time to study (Zacharias et al., 2016). They argue, “scholarships help overcome financial disadvantage but cannot overcome the effects of very complex lives… [but they are] however, an important tool where financial hardship is seen as the greatest barrier to participation” (2016, p. 67). Having examined three schemes, Zacharias et al. (2016) conclude that the more complex the scheme, the less efficient it is, and the more difficult it is to evaluate relationship between money and outcomes. Therefore, they recommend that universities design simple scholarships, “with high volume products to generate effective student support, efficient processes and meaningful data” (2016, p. 8). However, working from the understanding that such schemes can never offer support to all students in need, they offer the reminder that the best financial support that the Commonwealth can offer is a ‘predictable and appropriate’ level of payment through Centrelink system (means-tested grants).

On the other hand, Harrison and McCaig (2017) explored the impact of financial bursaries in addressing the relative educational disadvantage experienced by financially disadvantaged students. The findings revealed a mixture of results, which suggest that in some cases, bursaries are insufficient to overcome fully overcome the impact of financial disadvantages, although they are observed to be effective or highly effective in the case of other students (Harrison & McCaig, 2017). Nevertheless, regardless of the mixed results, Harrison and McCaig (2017) conclude that bursaries should be maintained as a form of financial support for financially disadvantaged students due to the positive impacts observed in the study.

**References**

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Wilks, J. & Wilson, K. (2012). Going on to uni? Access and participation in university for students from backgrounds of disadvantage, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 34*(1), 79-90.

Zacharias, N.; Cherednichenko, B.; Ryan, J.; George, K.; Gasparini, L.; Kelly, M.; Mandre-Jackson, S.; Cairnduff, A.; & Sun, D. (2016*). Moving beyond ‘acts of faith’: effective scholarships for equity students*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education: Perth.

**Financial support/ scholarships/ impact of cost**

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| **Citation** | **Annotation** |
| Carson, T. (2010). [Overcoming student hardship at Swinburne University, Australia: an insight into the](https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/openu/jwpll/2010/00000012/00000003/art00004)  [impact of equity scholarships on financially](https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/openu/jwpll/2010/00000012/00000003/art00004)  [disadvantaged university students](https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/openu/jwpll/2010/00000012/00000003/art00004), *Widening Participation & Lifelong Learning,* 12(3), 36–59.  AUS  Annotation by Sally Baker  *Key terms: Equity; equity scholarships; financially disadvantaged students; higher education; Australia; retention; financial assistance; financial support.* | **Context:** Explores impact of scholarships on students in financial need at Swinburne University (2005 study of equity scholarships) in context of massified/ more competitive global HE systems that all seek to increase participation of ‘under-represented cohorts’. Slippage in terms used to talk about money offered: bursaries, scholarships, grants. Cites two major reviews (Long & Hayden, 2001; James et al. 2007) which both reported that students need more financial support for their studies. Swinburne = 10% low SES rate (VIC UG average = 13.52%). Government support = insufficient (also see Munro, 2012; Birrell et al. 2000). Argues = strong connection between likelihood to aspire to HE study and financial circumstances/SES background.; also discusses in terms of rurality and reliance on computers (digital divide).  **Aim:** To present evidence of the relief that financial support (from university) can bring to students in need  **Theoretical frame:** None  **Methodology:** Student Equity Unit conducted ‘client satisfaction’ survey with 2003/4 recipients of equity scholarships. Respondents outlined disadvantage they had encountered: not being able to afford food, travel (for study), heating, photocopy, study materials. Follow up research in 2005 (drawn on in paper) = impact of scholarship on financial hardship, students from rural areas and digital divide. Questionnaires posted: 38% (53/140: 42 = rural, 11 = metro; 26 = m, 27 = f; most traditional students = straight from school, 9 = 3-10+ years out of school). Financial disadvantage operationalized: computer at home? Afford books, clothing, food etc.? Considered deferring/dropping out because of money? Rural disadvantage operationalized: If from rural area, was it stressful leaving home/ moving to city/ financially? Digital divide: computer at home? How old? Internet access? Broadband?  **Findings:**  Most students (80.4%) had worked to save up prior to attending university.  All students had borrowed money – but once student received scholarship, reliance on other sources (e.g. families) contributing to costs diminished to 55.8% and did not need to work as much (49.1%).  ‘Dramatic decrease’ in students considering deferring (from 57.7% to 3.8%)  Degree of financial hardship decreased (all could afford rent and food, only 5.7% could not afford textbooks, compared with 19.2% pre-scholarship)  Two thirds considered the scholarship had given financial security and improved quality of life (64.2%)  For rural students, only 2 (5%) had not experienced strain from moving to Melbourne and all had experienced some degree of financial strain. Rural students less likely to have a computer at home. The scholarship allowed these students to purchase a computer **Core argument:** Scholarships have a positive impact: “It appears the scholarships are giving students the ability to work less, allowing them to concentrate more fully on their studies” (p.55) and also decreased students’ decisions to defer or drop out |
| Harrison, N. and McCaig, C. (2017). [Examining the epistemology of impact and success of educational interventions using a reflective case study of university bursaries](http://shura.shu.ac.uk/15151/1/McCaig%20Examining%20the%20epistemology%20of%20impact%20and%20success%20of%20educational%20interventions.pdf). *British Educational Research Journal,* 43(2), 290–309.  UK  Annotation by Anna Xavier  Keywords (Anna’s): *Financial support; university bursaries; higher education* | **Context:** A key feature of the last twenty years in educational research has been the rising emphasis placed on evidence-based practice. One particularly controversial manifestation of this has been what is often referred to as the ‘what works’ agenda, which reflects astrongly objectivist approach that emphasises quantitative data collected through rigorous sampling, robust analytical techniques and formal inference, subjecting educational activities and innovations to a sharp test of ‘impact’ and ‘success’ (p. 3). It has increasingly pervaded thinking over the last ten years, resulting in the UK government routing £125 million through the Education Endowment Foundation: a charity established to commission ‘what works’ style evaluations around educational interventions perceived to increase outcomes for disadvantaged children (Menter, 2013; Gorard, Siddiqui and See, 2015).  **Aim:** To critique the ‘what works’ approach from a post-positivist perspective. RQ: ‘Do financial bursaries for financially disadvantaged students ameliorate their educational disadvantage relative to other students?’ (p. 12)  **Theoretical framework:** Not specified in study.  **Methodology:** A qualitative approach is employed, with a case study methodology. The case study focused on means-tested bursaries introduced through the Higher Education Act 2004 and implemented from 2006 onwards (DfES, 2003). The binary logistic regression analysis was selected for this project due to the quasi-experimental nature of the data available. 15 control variables were used alongside four dichotomous measures of outcome:   1. Whether the student had been retained into their second year of study at the same university (not necessarily having progressed); 2. Whether the student completed a degree programme within five years (longer programmes such as medicine were excluded); 3. Whether the student achieved a ‘good’ degree – a first or upper second class degree; 4. Whether the student was in graduate-level employment six months after graduation, with various exceptions for travelling, parenthood etc.   **Findings:** Three different types of result were represented – there were no specific patterns by university and most had a mixture of results across the four outcome measures: a)  Result 1: Bursary students had significantly worse outcomes than the comparison group b)Result 2: Bursary students had similar outcomes to the comparison group – i.e. there was no statistically significant difference c)Result 3: Bursary students had significantly better outcomes than the comparison group.  **Discussion:** Possible inferences to be drawn about the effectiveness of bursaries: a) Result 1: Bursaries are either ineffective or insufficient to fully overcome the impacts of financial disadvantage b) Result 2: Bursaries are effective (unless the impact of financial disadvantage on educational outcomes is non-existent) c)Result 3: Bursaries are very effective (and possibly unfairly so in regards to the mid-income student group)  **Core argument:** It would be ‘morally questionable’ (p. 17) to remove a provision with positive human impacts due to epistemological challenges with proving impact against relatively crude policy-friendly measures. This tendency to ‘privilege the measurable’ always needs to be thoroughly problematised. |
| Jones, S. (2016). [Expressions of student debt aversion and tolerance among academically able young people in low-participation English schools](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/berj.3209), *British Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 277–293.  UK  Annotation by Anna Xavier  Keywords (Anna’s): *Debt aversion; debt tolerance; higher education; low SES* | **Context:** In England, although the Browne Review (2010) recommended that the cap on tuition fees be abolished and state contributions reduced, the government opted to raise the maximum annual fee that universities could charge from £3375 to £9000 in 2012. They introduced a repayment system that required graduates to contribute 9% of their income above £21,000 per year until their debt was repaid, with interest charged at up to 3% above inflation and unpaid loans forgiven after 30 years. Supplementary measures included non-repayable maintenance grants of up to £3250 per year for students with household incomes below £40,000 per year, plus a bursary entitlement for those with household incomes below £25,000.  **Aim:** To explore the decision-making processes of those for low-participation backgrounds, for whom university is not ‘a natural destination’, but who have the ability to pursue HE. The specific aims of the study are: (1) to gauge the accuracy of young people from very low-participation backgrounds’ understanding of the 2012 student fee and repayment structures; (2) to consider how young people’s responses interact with their other social, cultural and academic dispositions towards university entry; (3) to assess the extent to which those responses are reflected in wider public discourses about participation  **Theoretical frame:** Not specified in study.  **Methodology:** Data collection instrument: Questionnaire; ‘informal, interactive presentation that allowed their knowledge to be assessed’. Second half of the interactive session: provided information about 2012 fee & repayment structure & HE admissions process. Views of students were investigated pre- and post- supply of information. All interactions were via open dialogue, with questions taken throughout. Duration: One hour. Participants: year 10 & 11 pupils (n=198) who were streamed into high achieving, mixed gender classes. 3 schools located In the top 5 most deprived local authorities in England were chosen (Office for National Statistics, 2010). Data analysis: Framed in terms of ‘information asymmetry’ (281) – which describes an information transaction where one party is possesses more accurate or extensive knowledge than others (Dill & Soo, 2004).  **Findings:** 1)Knowing the price of HE: Significant variations observed in the knowledge & understanding of the 2012 fee structure – Approximately 50% of participants were aware of the £9000 fee; most students were confused about the study period covered by the fee. 2) Knowing the financial support available: Majority of students were unaware that some of them may be eligible for financial aid; no students were aware of the available support for varying levels of household incomes; only 1/198 student knew the meaning of ‘bursary’. 3)Under-consumption and the Ellsberg Paradox: ‘Wildly inappropriate’ (p. 283) estimates of typical graduate salaries were observed; many students struggled to view themselves in a professional occupation. 4)Aversion & tolerance types observed among participants: a)Headline price aversion & tolerance b)Risk price aversion & tolerance c)Religion-based price aversion d)Lifestyle cost aversion & tolerance e)Identity cost aversion & tolerance e)Failure cost aversion & tolerance e)Types of ‘non-choice’ aversion and tolerance: ‘No opt-out tolerance; ‘no alternative’ tolerance; ‘non-choice’ behaviour (aversion). Summary of aversion & tolerance types: Most participants articulate both tolerance & aversion, and even include multiple types in one statement.  **Discussion:** 1) The findings suggest that ‘price’ and ‘cost’ of participation in HE were very different considerations for such young people. 2)The lack of social capital observed in previous studies were also evident in the findings  **Core argument:** Higher fees change the terms of a participation ‘bet’ for young people of all backgrounds. However, for those from low SES, a broader spectrum of variables may be involved, together with a different (and sometimes contrary) set of social and cultural factors. This can create ‘a reality totally contrary to market theory’ (Callendar & Jackson, 2005, p. 513), in which established rational choice behaviour models are distorted by localised and highly personalised considerations. Hence, public discourse assumptions that lifestyle gains, identity gains and enhanced future earnings will outweigh the deferred price of participation may not always be accurate. |
| Reed, R. & Hurd, B. (2014). [A value beyond money? Assessing the impact of equity scholarships: from access to success](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03075079.2014.968541), *Studies in Higher Education,* 41(7), 1236–1250.  AUS  *Keywords: Scholarship; equity; financial assistance; widening participation; educational outcomes* | **Context:** Reflects on impact of scholarship program for educationally disadvantaged students at Macquarie University. Works from Universities Australia (2013) figure of 2/3 university students living under the poverty line. In 2004, federal government introduced ‘Commonwealth Learning Scholarship’ program to supplement the existing scholarship provision, which had previously been at the whim of individual organisations. HEPPP has also contributed to growth in scholarships offered (p.2) Macquarie offer a range of scholarships, which are dependent on students providing evidence of financial need according to UAC formula. Literature suggests that scholarships are often positioned as incentivises in the context of neoliberal, student-as-consumer universities. Financial circumstances have been found to be barriers for low SES students (according to literature – but offers critique by connecting to aspirations literature). Notes that researchers have called for more exploration of impact of financial aid  **Aim:**  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Examining retention data and conducting interviews with 12 scholarship recipients. At MQ, 525 students received equity scholarships between 2009-2012  **Findings:** The scholarships not only improve retention (90% of 525 recipients of equity scholarships), the qualitative data also shows other positive effects, categorised as:  *Resources* = what students were able to purchase (text books/ computers/ bills). Beyond material = intangible value of time (achieving better work-study balance; creating new opportunities for ECAs or invest in future careers), or for others the benefit “had been the security (see below) provided by the scholarship that emboldened them to take extra risks they would not otherwise have taken (such as studying abroad)”, p.6.  *Access, belonging, security* = scholarship provided incentive to apply for uni (changed perceptions of being able to afford HE) or made full-time study a possibility. Knowing money was coming = reassuring (p.6) – reduced sense of precarity. Students also reported feeling more like they belonged to MQ: “gesture of recognition” (p.7), which enhanced self-efficacy and belief in own potential.  *Motivation, engagement, self-efficacy* = increase in motivation to study, to ‘give back’ and “make sure they had ‘earned’ the opportunity through hard work, strengthening their commitment to their studies and their contribution to student life” (p.8)  “It’s a value beyond money” (p.10) **Core argument:** The view of scholarships needs to be shifted from incentive to key institutional mechanisms. Offers model for visualising impact of drivers/ influences (rather than impact) of scholarships (according to themes above) = “’best-fit’ interpretation” (p.10). Need to find better ways of assessing *potential* that are not based on past education/achievement. |
| Zacharias, N.; Cherednichenko, B.; Ryan, J.; George, K.; Gasparini, L.; Kelly, M.; Mandre-Jackson, S.; Cairnduff, A.; & Sun, D. (2016*).* [*Moving beyond ‘acts of faith’: effective scholarships for equity students*.](https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/moving-beyond-acts-of-faith-effective-scholarships-for-equity-students/) National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education: Perth.  AUS  Annotation by Sally Baker | **Context:** Examines connections between equity scholarships and retention/ success outcomes of recipients at 3 different universities: QUT, Deakin, Sydney for 2013.  **Methodology:** Examined two different kinds of scholarships: *equity* = for most disadvantaged and ‘at risk’ students, and *equity-merit* = for disadvantaged students most likely to succeed on basis of prior educational experience but with proven financial need. Three case studies presented of the three participant institutions in terms of retention rates of students with/without scholarships, responses to questionnaires about impact of receiving scholarships and success rates  **Findings:** Equity scholarships = effective at retaining students of all groups.  Participants/recipients reported receiving one reduced stress, boosted morale and gave them more time to studyEquity scholarships = worse outcomes for the recipients of highest value scholarships  Equity-merit scholarships = outcomes best for students who received most valuable scholarships  The more complex the scheme, the less efficient it is/ more difficult it is to evaluate relationship between money and outcomes  Multifactor assessment for scholarships = best  Scholarships have ‘a value beyond money’ (such as psychological boosts/ confidence and morale)  **Core argument:** Universities need to design simple scholarships, “with high volume products to generate effective student support, efficient processes and meaningful data” (p.8). Best financial support the Commonwealth can offer is a ‘predictable and appropriate’ level of payment through Centrelink system (means-tested grants). They argue that “scholarships help overcome financial disadvantage but cannot overcome the effects of very complex lives… [but they are] however, an important tool where financial hardship is seen as the greatest barrier to participation. ” (p.67) |