

PAPER:

QUALITY IN EQUITY RESEARCH: THE CASE FOR LOCALITY ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

National equity policy (ANTA 1997) aims to make the training system responsive to the needs of groups under-represented in VET by developing strategies to improve the rates and outcomes of participation of 'target equity groups', arguing that improvements can be achieved by industry to linking training and employment within the existing framework rather than through government funding of specific access and equity programs.

The paper argues that this framing of equity policy misunderstands the localised basis of educational and economic inequality just as it fails to acknowledge the compound nature of social and economic disadvantage, and the regressive equity effects of the open training market. The challenge for equity policy and research is acknowledging that social and economic disadvantage is itself unequally socially distributed, or concentrated in particular localities. Hence the burden of achieving 'equity outcomes' is not evenly shared across VET systems or across provider networks or institutes. Research has as yet hardly explored these social distribution effects through locality analysis.

The paper therefore outlines work in progress using several approaches to locality analysis of equity in VET participation using AVETMISS and Cdata96 census data which map VET participation by disadvantaged groups. These approaches include: identifying differences in VET participation rates by postcode and comparing the socio-economic profiles of high and low participation postcodes; establishing the profile of VET participants in selected disadvantaged (or advantaged) postcodes compared to state and national profiles; examining VET participation by 'target equity groups' in postcodes with high concentrations of these groups; and nominal catchment analysis of TAFE institutes.

The discussion will draw out implications of this research which challenge the assumptions of current policy and recommend a reconsideration of the 'supply side' strategies currently out of favour. I conclude the paper arguing the urgent need to rethink the community dimension of equity policy.