

## The E12 experience: Students' perceptions of a widening participation scheme

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### Abstract

*Engaging students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in higher education is an ongoing issue in the tertiary education sector. Despite schemes to widen participation, low SES entry rates remain below 20% in Australia. Various factors have been posited for the low rates of success and strategies aimed at universities, high schools and individual students have been suggested. The literature on transition to university has informed a student-centred approach and the need to acknowledge dimensions of cultural capital. Resources to address difficulties in transition have been suggested. In response to this need, The University of Sydney developed a widening participation scheme where successful applicants were provided a benefits package supporting their transition into university. In this paper, we report on qualitative research exploring the perspectives of students who entered a Faculty of Health Sciences via a widening participation scheme. Our findings indicate that while transition strategies must be in place, the provision of ongoing material resources is also an integral factor in supporting students.*

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## Introduction

Engaging students from backgrounds which are underrepresented in higher education is an ongoing issue for the tertiary education sector. Programs and schemes which encourage underrepresented students, including students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, rural and remote areas and Indigenous students to attend university (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008), have been implemented in a number of countries including Australia, United Kingdom, United States of America and Canada (James et al., 2008). However, entry rates for low SES students in Australia remain below 20%, despite the increasing number of equity programs (Bradley et al.). In light of this, meeting the Australian government's target of increasing the participation rate of low SES backgrounds students to 20% by 2020 is challenging.

## Literature review

Informed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, much research has focused on the cultural knowledge that is more easily accrued by middle and upper class students than those from low SES groups. Previous research has associated cultural knowledge with the tacit expectations which higher education institutions hold that may not be understood by students from low SES backgrounds (Devlin, 2013). Thus, strategies have been devised to address this gap in knowledge, often suggesting it is a deficiency of the student. However, there is debate about whether it is the individual student or institution's responsibility to address this gap (Devlin). While building the learner identity may be viewed as placing the onus on students to adapt, more recent research has recommended a collaborative approach where students and

institutions should both be responsible for overcoming these tacit expectations (Devlin). Institutions can assist in easing transition into higher education so underrepresented groups can "see themselves" as university students (see for example, Jansen & van der Meer, 2012).

Higher education institutions are increasingly acknowledging the differing levels of cultural capital between students and attempts have been made to address this through the development of alternative entry pathways specifically for students from low SES backgrounds. However, there is increasing recognition in the literature that providing access to disadvantaged students without support does not assist in addressing differences in the level of cultural capital in students (Skene & Evamy, 2009). This can influence the transition of students into university where difficulties, including adapting to study methods and forming social networks (Kantanis, 2000), can lead to feelings of exclusion and potentially impact upon retention. Despite the argument that all students, regardless of SES background, are challenged by the transition process, these challenges could be exacerbated by the financial constraints of coming from a low SES background, in addition to those factors deemed to be associated with cultural capital.

Financial considerations have also been recognised as influencing decisions surrounding university study. These considerations not only influence attendance but also decisions about choice of university, study mode and choice of course (Long & Hayden, 2001).

The increasingly higher cost of university fees is a contributing factor to a student's decision to participate in higher education (Wilkins, Shams & Huisman, 2013). The issue of university fees is particularly

evident in the United States (Paulsen & St John, 2002) and United Kingdom (Davies & Elias, 2003; Wilkins et al.) where there has been much debate over the increase in fees and its effects on students from low SES backgrounds in recent years. The fee structure in the Australian higher education system is different to those of the United States and the United Kingdom. Most students participating in higher education in Australia will receive a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP), where the Australian Government pays for the majority of university fees. The remainder is paid through a student contribution, and CSP students have access to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS-HELP). Under this scheme, students are able to either pay the contribution upfront (partially or in full) or elect to defer payment until their taxable income is above a specific threshold. Previously, the HECS scheme offered students a discount (ranging between 10-20%, depending upon when a student commenced university) for paying fees upfront. However, this raised questions over the equity of the scheme as the option of paying a discounted fee upfront is more likely to favour students from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Birch & Miller, 2007; Marks, 2009).

Whilst most local students have access to HECS-HELP and thus the ability to pay for their education later, there are mixed views about the effects of HECS on participation of students from low SES backgrounds. A report by Birch and Miller (2007) concluded that students from low SES backgrounds defer higher amounts of fees to HECS-HELP, leading to a reduction in future income when compared to their counterparts from higher SES backgrounds. Therefore students from low SES backgrounds may continually be disadvantaged despite attaining similar qualifications. On the other hand, the ability

to either defer payment of university fees or pay upfront which is afforded by HECS suggests that the introduction of university fees in Australia has not significantly altered decisions of people from low SES to participate in higher education (Chapman & Ryan, 2005; Marks, 2009). Moreover, it is argued that the income contingent repayment system of HECS does not disadvantage students from low SES backgrounds, in areas including home ownership (Marks). Despite all of these factors, students from low SES backgrounds are underrepresented in the Australian higher education sector, highlighting that other financial factors may be at play.

The cost of material resources (including textbooks, the Student Amenities Fee, technology requirements and acquired course costs) may also contribute to the decision to participate in higher education and material disadvantage may negatively affect students prior to making this decision (Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman & Vignoles, 2008). An extension of this argument highlights how material disadvantage can affect students prior to entry into higher education, namely in the level of achievement and ability to complete secondary education (Chowdry et al.; Le & Miller; 2005). Furthermore, material disadvantage and SES can influence the type of higher education institution a student attends, such that students from low SES backgrounds are less likely to attend research intensive or "high status" universities (Chowdry et al. p. 8).

Other influences including a student's financial circumstances (for example work commitments) have been noted (Devlin, James & Grigg, 2008). The rising costs of university and living expenses places increased strain on students in general. Financial hardship is an increasingly common experience amongst students and

is often counteracted through working long hours which, in turn, interfere with the students' university experience (James, Bexley, Devlin & Marginson, 2007). Students from low SES backgrounds are more likely to be vulnerable to financial (James et al., 2007) and educational constraints (Chowdry et al., 2008). However, the provision of equity-based scholarships for attracting students from low SES backgrounds has the potential to overcome some of these constraints (Le & Miller, 2005).

### *The University of Sydney E12 Scheme and the Faculty of Health Sciences*

In light of the targets for increased engagement and an understanding of reasons for lower access rates by students from low SES backgrounds, there is a need for programs which encourage participation from students in under-represented populations. The University of Sydney's response to this growing need for engagement is the Early Offer Year 12 (E12) scheme, which is a widening participation initiative aimed at increasing participation of students from areas identified by the Australian Government as "disadvantaged," as identified by postcode (Devlin, 2013).

Students enrolled in secondary schools in areas identified as low SES are able to self-nominate themselves, with the support of their school principal, for entry via the E12 scheme. Students are then asked to complete an online questionnaire which provides the opportunity to convey qualities about themselves which are not reflected in their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), which is used as an entry criterion into all Australian universities and reflects a student's rank in relation to their peers. Depending upon the

student's preferred course, an interview process to determine suitability for the E12 entry pathway may also be conducted.

In line with previous research identifying initiatives supporting the transition from secondary education to higher education, the E12 scheme offers a number of benefits including; lowered entry cut off mark (up to a 15 point reduction in ATAR), a conditional offer prior to final high school examinations, a first year scholarship consisting of AUD\$5K, an Apple iPad, support to assist in the transition from high school to university and a University of Sydney Union Access card.

In 2012, the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) piloted the application process for entry via the E12 scheme in all professional undergraduate degrees (2013 accepted cohort), which included physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, exercise and sports science, exercise physiology and diagnostic radiography. The selection process was led by the current Deputy Dean (ML) and the Director of Student Affairs (SL). The conceptualisation of this study to examine the perceptions and experiences of the 2013 intake of E12 students was led by the Director of Social Inclusion (DS) and the Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching (KW) supported by a Project Manager (FN). In 2013 (2014 start), the program was expanded to include the foundation Bachelor of Health Sciences degree, which prepares graduates for health science related employment or entry into graduate entry professional degrees. This expansion was facilitated by DS and KW. Entry to all programs is competitive and is reflected in the high ATAR entry scores required for courses at FHS.

## *Aim*

Despite the increasing number of widening participation initiatives aimed at attracting students from low SES areas to attend university, little research has been conducted to evaluate these initiatives. Research evaluating the effectiveness of alternative entry pathways and their impact on early university experiences, from students' perspective, is required.

This study aims to understand, through the perceptions of students, whether the E12 scheme sufficiently supports a student's transition from secondary to tertiary education and gain insight into their first year experiences as an E12 student within FHS.

## *Method*

A qualitative study was designed to explore student perceptions of the E12 pathway into FHS and the impact of the pathway on their first year experiences. While quantitative indicators such as grade achievement provide partial insight into how well these students do at university, qualitative research enables in-depth understanding of student perceptions and experiences. It is important to capture student perceptions of newly developed widening participation schemes such as E12. The perceptions gained may enable modification of the scheme in order to maximise its success. A semi-structured interview study was designed to gain understanding into the experience of students. As the student experience may vary as they transition to university, we designed a study that would explore E12 students' views at two time points in their first year: mid-way through semester one (interview one), and again midway through semester two (interview two).

All students (n=22) who entered the FHS via the E12 scheme in 2013 were invited to participate in a face to face or telephone interview about their experiences. At the first interview, questions were focused on the application process for the E12 scheme, the experience of the transition to university and the E12 benefits package. At the second interview, participants were asked about their perceptions of being an E12 student, the types of academic support received from FHS and the University in general and how their experiences differed as they progressed through the academic year. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The study received ethics approval from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. We followed principles of thematic analysis, a primarily inductive technique for generating findings from interview data (Green et al., 2007) to examine recurring ideas in the data. Two researchers independently coded each transcript (tagging of text relating to each expressed idea); codes were then organised into categories by both researchers. Transcripts for interview one and interview two were initially analysed separately. The researchers then examined the coded text and categories to identify similarities and differences. Key themes about the students' experiences were identified through emerging patterns in the data.

## *Findings*

Initially nine students consented to participate and completed the first interview. However, one student withdrew from the study due to workload commitments prior to the second interview. Students were enrolled in six different degrees including: exercise physiology (n=1), exercise and sport science (n=2),

diagnostic radiography (n=1), occupational therapy (n=1), physiotherapy (n=2) and speech pathology (n=2). Their ATARs ranged from 87.55 to 97.55 and six of the nine participants had attended public high schools. The majority of students lived in Greater Western Sydney (n=7) with two students from rural New South Wales. Three of the nine were the first in their family to attend university.

A myriad of factors influenced these students' decision to apply for entry through E12 and their first year experience. Many factors that students identified suggested that they were not dissimilar to those entering via the conventional pathway. However, additional support and material resources were seen to make a difference in the decision to enrol in the FHS at the University of Sydney.

### *Reasons for applying*

It was noted from the E12 students' responses that all students had intention to attend university, including those other than the University of Sydney. The E12 scheme was conceptualised by students as influencing the choice of university to which they could apply; and enabling them to choose the University of Sydney which, otherwise may not have been an option due to the competitive entry requirements of students' desired courses. The E12 scheme was therefore viewed as 'providing an opportunity'. This was supported by the fact that only one student would have obtained entry into their desired course without the lowered entry requirements, particularly in students wanting to enter the physiotherapy course:

*It has allowed me entry into a course [physiotherapy] that I otherwise wouldn't have been able to gain entry into for starters.*

Student 5 – Interview 1

*It [E12] means that I was given an opportunity... there was another opportunity to get to something that I was really passionate about doing and really wanted to do, it was just like wow I have another avenue to get to it.*

Student 8 – Interview 1

This finding was particularly evident in the two students from rural areas. Although some students from both rural and urban areas identified E12 as a change in opportunity, rural students placed more emphasis upon this. The E12 scheme enabled them to gain entry into a university not previously considered. Lack of previous consideration was often associated with the competitive entry requirements of the University of Sydney and its urban location.

*I didn't think I would get a high enough mark to get into to get into The University of Sydney so I had really hadn't thought about going there until I had heard about the scheme, so it opened up a whole new door, new university, new experience.*

Student 4 – Interview 1

Moreover, the financial assistance received was seen to greatly assist in the relocation for university studies:

*The financial assistance has been great in allowing me to relocate to Sydney to study and so I have found it to be great.*

Student 5 – Interview 1

During interview two, the rural students reaffirmed the importance of the benefits package in assisting them to start university but also acknowledged the educational disparities rural students can experience. Discussion surrounding which universities the students would have attended if they had not received entry via E12 also highlighted this. Through this discussion, the changes in opportunity were also noted

including that the E12 scheme had provided a new lifestyle and career opportunities:

*I think maybe coming from a rural background it might make uni harder... I think the quality of education in general is a bit better in urban areas.*

Student 5 – Interview 2

*I would have never considered Sydney, I would have gone to... [a university] outside the metropolitan area. It has opened up a whole new lifestyle. I live in Sydney now, I could get a job in Sydney, there are just so much more opportunities in Sydney... it is just such a good place to live, it is a good thing.*

Student 4 – Interview 2

## Benefits Package

All students mentioned different components of the E12 benefits package as a motivating factor which influenced their decision to apply for entry via the E12 scheme. The financial assistance the scheme provided through the first year scholarship was a key reason many students cited, as it was agreed there are high costs associated with starting university.

### *Financial Assistance*

Students linked this financial assistance relief to other academic advantages which they saw they had compared to students who did not enrol through the E12 scheme. They discussed their ability to purchase textbooks, computers and undertake clinical course requirements (such as first aid) without worrying about the costs. Financial benefits of the scheme was evident in the way that students talked about the meaning of the benefits package, indicating a concern with money that may not be evident in the experience of their more well-off counterparts:

*I would have [been able to come to university] but it would have just been a lot more difficult, with the money... when I first started uni it was just a bit stress taken off my mum and even my grandparents who would have had to help if I hadn't had that money and I still have some of the money now so it is continually helping me with... like I just had a CPR course yesterday I had to do and that was 55 (dollars) and so I was very easily able to go ok I have the money all good. It is a big relief having that scholarship money.*

Student 8 – Interview 2

*I think most of all the money really helped because the fees are so expensive, I mean it really helps in terms of text books and all those resources. I was kind of able to say well, you know what I really do need it. Even though it was really expensive, I have the money to get it.*

Student 3 – Interview 1

While not downplayed, the significance of the benefits package was not viewed in the same way by all students, with some viewing E12 primarily as an opportunity to gain entry to their desired course and institution rather than a financial necessity:

*Of course the scholarship money was going to be a bonus but I think it was the opportunity to go to Sydney that was more exciting.*

Student 4 – Interview 1

During interview two, it was suggested by some students that the financial assistance of the E12 scheme needed to be of a longer duration with a recommendation of “life of degree” scholarships or two-year scholarships. Further recommendations included that the scholarship amount could remain unchanged but spread over a two-year period. One student also discussed the extension of the scheme in regards to the support and assistance received from the faculty:

*I think it would be really beneficial if it was spread over a longer period, I feel like I've just only got really into the E12 kind of aid you [the faculty] are offering and it is almost the end of the year which is a shame.*

Student 8 – Interview 2

*I would rather have a full course scholarship, so more than one year...Financial wise that would be a great help, and I would be financially able to like go through uni and pay off all your text books and your fees, just to have something to back you up.*

Student 1 – Interview 2

## Conditional offer

As stated earlier, successful applicants to the E12 scheme receive a conditional offer (made prior to students sitting their final high school exams) and this was also positively viewed by students, with many discussing the relief and motivation the offer provided. For some students, this was associated with the meaning of being an E12 scholar, where some identified that the scheme acted as a reward for their efforts during high school.

*I feel like it kind of rewarded my efforts. The E12 scheme appreciate things like extra-curricular activities and it's a way of reward your extra effort... I thought it was really good because, it shows who you are in different ways.*

Student 3 – Interview 1

## Additional Support

The E12 benefits package also offered students extra support including meetings with course directors and welcome ceremonies. Although all students can access such support, E12 students were specifically made aware of them, and encouraged to take them up. There was diversity as to whether the meetings with course directors were useful and this

appeared to depend on the students' perception about how well they had settled into university. Most students positively commented on the usefulness of the meetings and would attend another meeting, citing the reassurance that they gained.

*...I liked the support that was being given like recently I had an E12 support meeting with my year coordinator so that was nice to make sure that I was on track.*

Student 5 – Interview 1

*...it was good that he [course director] was very reassuring and that you were doing well and that the E12 students were actually standing out and that he was confident that we would do well in the exams and the practicals maybe if you had that meeting at the start of the semester it probably would have helped because it would have given you that reassurance at the start and kind of help you, well help me to not stress as much.*

Student 6 – Interview 1

## University Progress and Transition

It was evident from the students' responses that transitioning from high school to university elicited mixed responses. In interview one, students discussed their excitement at beginning their university studies, but also the difficulties they experienced surrounding their academic progress and the social aspects of university. The main difficulties students noted with their academic progress was associated with differences between high school and university in areas such as teaching style, study methods, course load and responsibility.

*...the first few weeks weren't too good, because like there was lot of work to get through and everyone seemed to know all that jargon and what the lecturers was talking to about. I specifically remember the*



*first week when we didn't have the tutorials, I was so confused and I was left with all this work and I didn't know what to do with it... the content and the workload was completely different to high school and HSC [higher school certificate] and it was a lot harder and a lot more and I was becoming overwhelmed, stressed.*

Student 6 – Interview 1

Another difficulty noted by students was associated with the unfamiliarity of assessments. Many students mentioned that they were new to the assessment styles they experienced in mid-semester exams in semester one. Many found this to be daunting and some noted that this affected their assessment scores.

*I remember my first anatomy exam was very stressful because it was a spot test and there was a prac exam. There was a lot of built up anxiety because I hadn't sat for an exam at uni yet and because it was a practical exam and didn't know what I was expecting and that added to the stress.*

Student 6 – Interview 1

Responses from students in interview one contrasted to the experiences students discussed in interview two. Many felt that they had settled into university life and were more confident with their study, as they had experienced not only the different assessment styles but also had an opportunity to reflect and refine their study techniques and habits.

*This semester I have adapted as I have realised that I needed to take on a different approach. Before I used to just print off the notes they gave us and I used to write on them but now I make my own notes, so I have them all written down and all typed up, so when it is exam time I can just print off and just study and that was a lot less stressful.*

Student 8 – Interview 2

Differences in the social experiences were also identified when comparing the experiences of students in interview one and interview two. Students noted the isolation that they experienced in the first few weeks of semester one was associated with not knowing other students within their course. Although academic achievement contributed to students' transition from high school to university, friendships and social groups played a major role in how a student evaluated how well they settled into university. In this regard, students at FHS are advantaged due to the lock step nature of the program, where all students in a specific course mostly attend the same classes; thus increasing the interaction within course groups. Students noted a more positive experience in interview two, where the development of friendships and belonging to social groups contributed to their feeling of being settled and contributing positively to the overall university experience.

*...it's started off a little bit rough, just because I didn't know a lot of people and the campus that I'm on ... is quite small. So I didn't really know a lot of people that were doing my course, yeah but once I started to make some friends, I felt a little bit more at home kind of, I felt a bit more confident...*

Student 3 – Interview 1

## Discussion

This study aimed to understand the experiences and perceptions of students who entered the FHS via the E12 scheme, to provide an understanding of whether the benefits package supported students' transition into university, and to consider the applicability of such packages in supporting the social inclusion agenda.

The majority of students applied for entry via the E12 scheme as a means of gaining entry into their desired courses and for the benefits package. Although all students achieved high ATARs, it was observed that all students except one required the lowered E12 ATAR to gain entry into their course. This demonstrates the E12 scheme was successful in widening participation at the University of Sydney to include students who would not otherwise have been able to enter their chosen course and affirms the students' view that the scheme has opened up more opportunities for them. Although students acknowledged that they entered university with lowered ATAR requirements, no student noted a discriminatory effect due to the scheme thereby suggesting that E12 students do not perceive themselves as dissimilar to the general student cohort nor are they treated differently.

The fact that E12 students are not "different" from the rest of the cohort raises the question of whether the E12 scheme is selecting students who are in most need and stimulates debate over the current system for identification of schools and students who are from areas which are considered "low SES." Currently, low SES is determined by a postcode methodology set by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (Devlin, 2013). This, however, identifies socio-economic status overall via postcode, thus variation in socio-economic status within postcode may occur. Despite the difficulties in measuring social disadvantage (see Sealey, 2011 for a critique), it is evident that the E12 scheme does provide much needed tangible assistance to students.

The demographic information obtained for the study suggests that the conventional assumptions about those who qualify under low SES schemes such as E12 need further

scrutiny. The discount in ATAR facilitated entry for most of these students, but this may indicate more about the competitive entry to specific courses than about the academic capacity of the students. More importantly, it appears that the E12 scheme at FHS attracts high achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds who possess adequate levels of cultural capital to understand the tacit expectations of university. This is supported by the finding that two-thirds of the students were not "first in family" to attend university. Another contributing factor may be associated with the course structure of degrees offered at FHS. All E12 students in this cohort enrolled into professional degrees with a fixed structure, therefore familiarity with other students within their cohort could contribute to increased peer interaction and learning, promoting tacit understanding.

On the other hand, students from low SES backgrounds may require additional material support to assist in the transition into university (Le & Miller, 2005). Although students identified financial barriers associated with attending university, these barriers were associated with the incidental costs incurred during their studies (for example; textbooks and professional development courses). However, the provision of financial assistance over one year may not be sufficient. Students from low SES backgrounds have been identified to work longer hours in order to support their living expenses during university, which has been negatively identified to impact on academic performance (Devlin et al., 2008). Despite financial assistance being provided to all E12 students, the scheme itself was not conceptualised to alleviate or subsidise university course fees. Although this may place pressure on some students, the availability of the HECS-HELP system

allows students to repay university fees on an income contingent basis. This study did not focus upon the willingness of students to take out HECS-HELP loan nor how students used the financial assistance (due to the unconditional nature of the scholarship). Although it is known that a student's decision to participate in higher education is not influenced by the HECS system (Chapman & Ryan, 2005), future investigation could take into consideration whether financial assistance provided through widening participation pathways decrease the pressure associated with paying university course fees.

Although the impact of university study on transition experiences was discussed in-depth by students in interview one, it was observed that the social integration of students played a greater role in influencing student perceptions about their transition. The difficulties associated with university study was seen to reduce as students formed social networks, and was reflected in transcripts for interview two. This is in line with previous research that has emphasised the importance of social integration as transition support and a means of retention beyond the first year of university (Kantanis, 2000; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). The importance of social integration into the university community has been recognised by FHS through the implementation of a faculty-wide mentoring program, *Belong@FHS*. Although many students acknowledge the value of a mentoring program on their transition, some students noted that they were not able to take advantage of the program due to timetabling of classes.

This study is important in order to understand the effectiveness of alternative entry pathways, however, several limitations need to be considered. The small sample size is a limitation and by having a

larger sample a wider range of views would be captured. E12 students were not in any way separated from the rest of the student population, therefore it is difficult to isolate the transition experience that is purely associated with the E12 scheme and its' students. Also, the academic progress of students was not followed in depth in this study. Greater insight into the specific grades achieved by students over the life of their degree and their perceptions on whether the E12 scheme assists in achieving these grades is required, in order to gain a robust understanding of the influence of the E12 scheme on retention rates.

A university-wide evaluation is required to further understand whether the current selection process addresses and supports the aim of the E12 scheme to bridge socio-cultural and material inequalities. A greater understanding of whether the findings from this study are shared between faculties within the University of Sydney is required. This is particularly relevant for understanding the socio-cultural expectations students' hold whilst entering the university and whether the scheme supports the reduction of this inequity. Based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that the E12 scheme be extended beyond the first year of university study in order to effectively assist in redressing the cultural capital differences and material inequality in students from low SES backgrounds. Continued financial assistance should be provided to students, through staggered support over a two year period or over the life of the degree, where the scholarship amount could remain unchanged. Further research into the socio-cultural gains and development of the E12 scheme is required to provide further tangible support to students. Moreover, further investigation into the ability of the E12 scheme to improve the rate of retention

of students from low SES backgrounds is required.

## Conclusion

If the E12 scheme is conceptualised purely as an entry and transition scheme, then for students entering FHS, the scheme was successful in enabling students from low SES backgrounds to access courses they would not otherwise have attained the ATAR to access. As the students in this study still achieved high ATARs it is likely most would have attended university anyway and as such the E12 scheme may not be reaching the students who would not have had the opportunity to attend university at all. The E12 scheme, however, has been envisioned to be an alternative entry scheme which provides the opportunity to address both the socio-cultural and material aspects of inequality for secondary school leavers who wish to attend university. Gaining access to higher education without continuous support may not allow for the success of students, moreover material inequality and socio-cultural differences are unlikely to shift completely with one year of resourcing. Future development of the E12 scheme would require greater consideration of reducing the material inequality amongst students, whereby recommendations from students within the study have identified the need for financial assistance for a longer duration.

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