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Equity and Access to High Skills through Higher Vocational Education

Edited by
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Ann-Marie Bathmaker
Gavin Moodie
Kevin Orr
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Dedication to Emeritus Professor Jim Gallacher, Professor of Lifelong Learning at Glasgow Caledonian University

This book is dedicated to Jim Gallacher, who died while this book was being compiled in October 2020. Jim was a key figure in our field internationally, and in his home country of Scotland he was a driving force in the widening of access to higher education. In particular he was concerned with the links between colleges and universities and the changing roles of colleges and vocational education and training, in order to increase people's opportunities for lifelong learning.

In the 1990s he established the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, a joint centre between Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Stirling. As co-director (1999–2008), Jim ensured this centre had extensive international reach through establishing a biennial conference series at which some of the editors of this book first met. Much of his research was policy focused and aimed to make a difference to people's lives. Alongside this research activity, he was committed to engaging with policymakers and seeking to influence policy decisions. Recognition of his important contribution to the field led to his appointment to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) where he was chair of the Access and Inclusion Committee and he was Vice-Chair of the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL). He was also a member of the Scottish Executive's Lifelong Learning Forum and an adviser to the Scottish Parliament's Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee for their Inquiry into Lifelong Learning.

*Following his so-called retirement from Glasgow Caledonian University in 2008, Jim continued to be exceptionally active. As well as holding an Emeritus Chair at Glasgow Caledonian University, he held honorary chairs at the University of Stirling and the University of the Highlands and Islands and was a Distinguished Visiting Professor in Capital Normal University, Beijing. In retirement he remained committed to supporting the further education sector through being a member of the Board of Management of the City of Glasgow College. He carried on being a highly productive researcher too, including being co-editor and author with Fiona Reeve of the publication *New Frontiers for College Education: International Perspectives* (Routledge 2019).*

His achievements were substantial and he touched many people, but it is his humanity and decency that will be remembered most. We are pleased that his chapter (co-authored with Fiona Reeve) forms part of this collection. It is a sadness not to be able to share this publication with Jim, a prolific and passionate researcher. Those of us who also knew him as a friend and colleague with whom we have enjoyed a walk in the Scottish hills or sipped a dram while being shown the steps of some fiendishly complicated Scottish country dance, will sorely miss him, as not least of all will Pauline and his sons Tom and Aidan.

Thanks also to Mike Osborne, friend and colleague, for sharing his thoughts of Jim 'the best of men'.
Sue Webb

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PART I

Framing Equity and Access to High Skills



Introduction

*Elizabeth Knight, Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Gavin Moodie,
Kevin Orr, Susan Webb, and Leesa Wheelahan*

The edited book comprises 14 chapters, including this introduction. The book begins with one substantive chapter that explores the concepts of equity and access and contextualises the localised specific experiences of the growth of higher vocational education presented in the country and province analyses that follow. The nine country- and province-specific chapters are based on empirical work and are drawn together by three

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reflective chapters that conceptualise higher vocational education in three distinct but complementary ways.

The book opens with a chapter framing equity and access that draws together the contributions of the country and province chapters. Webb (2022) theorises the space for higher education outside the university sector. By conceptualising the tension between equity and excellence in these forms of education, she draws out the opportunities for expansion of higher vocational education and offers arguments to inform future policy and practice.

The country and province chapters of the book have been written to provide glimpses into the practices in these nine different jurisdictions. It is hoped that they illuminate the practices they describe and enable a greater understanding of the range and diversity of higher vocational education arrangements in different systems. These touchdowns (Rizvi and Lingard 2010) of global practices that are considered in each of the chapters provide a comprehensive overview of the contribution of higher vocational education in five continents across the globe.

The chapter on Chile considers the interplay between human capital and human rights. Lincovil Belmar (2022) outlines the marketisation of the education system in Chile and the issues that are posed for social justice.

Bathmaker and Orr (2022) consider the complex and complicated tertiary landscape in England, with its multiple shifting policies, and determine whether higher vocational education makes a central or marginal contribution to enabling social mobility.

The nature of a differentiated post-school system in South Africa is explored in Papier and Needham's (2022) chapter, which considers the impact of a post-colonial education system.

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Skolnik (2022) outlines the provision of higher vocational education in Canada and the development of the short-cycle tertiary education programmes which support particular occupations.

In the German context, Graf and Powell (2022) explore how the national system of advanced skill formation interacts with higher education science and industry.

Gallacher and Reeve (2022) trace the United Kingdom's approach to meeting skill needs and how this differs between England and the rest of the United Kingdom. They draw on the history and development of higher vocational qualifications to illustrate the approach.

Floyd et al.'s (2022) chapter on the United States of America presents case studies to show how institutions have responded to workforce needs and how American community colleges have become a key part of developing a diverse workforce.

Hodge et al. (2022) look at the opportunities for broadening participation through higher vocational education and the barriers caused by Australian arrangements. This chapter accentuates the differences between higher education in traditional and vocational education providers.

Quebec's unique institutional type, the *collèges d'enseignement général et professionnels (cégep)*, is explored in the chapter from Beaupré-Lavallée and Bégin-Caouette (2022). Their contribution shows the opportunities of thinking creatively about the offer of higher vocational education.

The final part of the book reflects on systems and higher vocational education. This final section leads with a chapter by Moodie (2022), which presents a typology of higher vocational education based on conceptualisations of contrasting tertiary education systems. Two core concepts form the structure of the typology—the object of education and level of education. Moodie further characterises the object of education using three dimensions: knowledge acquisition; preparation for an occupation and, scope, horizon and duration of training. Through this framework that provides an understanding of the arrangement of vocational and higher education sectors which coalesce to form higher vocational education, the country chapters in the book can be reflectively revisited. This contribution enables the conceptual classification of different types of postsecondary education systems. It also, Moodie (2022) suggests, identifies other possible configurations of these systems and potential re-imaginings of higher vocational education.

In the second substantive chapter of the final section, Wheelahan (2022) takes a contrasting approach and maps the emergence of higher vocational education and the disappointments of those engaged with the sector. The chapter presents a theoretical reflection upon the unforeseen barriers to

growth that have been presented to higher vocational systems. This includes the hierarchical nature of higher education structures that keep college-based higher education systems ‘in their place’. She reflects on higher vocational education across the Anglophone world, drawing on her position as a global authority in this form of tertiary education to explore how and why entrenched systemic inequalities have ensured higher vocational education has remained a lower status route for disadvantaged students.

In providing the final chapter as an epilogue to the book, Gale (2022) engages with higher vocational education’s struggle between the form and function of their offerings. In working through the varied country and province chapters’ contradictions, he problematises the imagining of these higher vocational education systems and draws the book to a conclusion by asking readers to reflect on the core aims of education, higher, vocational or otherwise.

Higher vocational education has been presented as a panacea to the needs of high skills and other economies. The book also considered the role of higher vocational education more broadly in contributing to tolerant, inclusive, sustainable and socially just societies. In this series of contributions, authors have traced how this plays out in different contexts and how close, or how far, systems are from realising equity, high skills and productivity through higher vocational education.

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Higher Vocational Education and the Matter of Equity

Susan Webb

INTRODUCTION

Higher vocational education is variously defined, located in different types of institutions and governed by different arrangements in each of the countries considered in this book collection. The phenomenon ranges from the European model of two-year ‘short-cycle’ higher education sub-bachelor-level qualifications provided by universities or colleges (HNC/Ds and Foundation degrees being examples in the UK) to applied bachelor’s degrees in Sweden and Australia, applied baccalaureates at community colleges in the USA and other combinations of higher level vocational and academic programmes including degree apprenticeships (Bathmaker 2017; Webb et al. 2017; Hippach-Schneider et al. 2017; Köpsén 2020). Despite such diversity in offerings, there are commonalities across these settings. Higher vocational education is usually a response to two distinct policy concerns: on the one hand, policies to increase economic

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competitiveness and productivity and, on the other hand, policies to promote social justice and equity. In relation to the first of these policy concerns, higher vocational education develops when the credential levels of vocational programmes typically associated with technical vocational education and training (TVET), also known as further or vocational education and training (VET), are raised to higher education levels. In these circumstances, the development of higher vocational education is presented as a necessary means for countries (and individuals) to achieve greater economic competitiveness and raise productivity through increasing human capital (OECD 2019). In relation to the second concern of social justice and equity, social inequalities are thought to be exacerbated for those deemed underqualified for work in knowledge-driven economies; therefore, new opportunities are needed to widen participation in higher education (OECD 2019). Consequently, in those countries where the expansion of higher vocational education qualifications takes place in institutions that have distinctive traditions of serving their local communities and employers, the expansion of higher vocational qualifications is viewed as an equity strategy to widen access to higher education (Gallacher 2009).

Notwithstanding these premises, this chapter explores how the concept of equity has been understood in research on widening access to higher education through developments that connect vocational or further education with higher education. The aim is to contextualise the country-specific experiences of the growth of higher vocational education presented in this book collection. The chapter builds on the idea that policies and practices contain historical traces and that different assemblages of policies for vocational or further and higher education lead to different spaces for opportunities for different students (Detourbe and Goastellec 2018). Arguably, these traces and assemblages are important to elicit because different understandings of equity will have different outcomes for widening access to higher education. Moreover, the reason that equity is the focus here is that system change through expansion has been one of the main approaches countries have adopted to widen access to higher education for those who traditionally have not participated (Pitman 2017).

The chapter explores literature that considers how vocational education and higher education as systems or as institutions have connected in order to expand opportunities to higher education qualifications for those who have not traditionally participated at this level. The chapter is organised in two parts. The first part considers how system expansion, which is often

accompanied by increased institutional and vocational and higher education sector differentiation, is understood to affect equity in higher education. Three conceptualisations of equity developed by McCowan (2016) are outlined and discussed in order to set up a frame for reviewing the effects of expansion in more detail in the second part of the chapter. The second part of the chapter then uses McCowan's (2016) conceptual frame to present and discuss the findings of a recent systematic literature review on widening access to higher education conducted by the author with others (Burke et al. 2021). The studies that will be considered in this chapter are those that highlight policies and practices to enable progression to higher education from vocational education.

HIGHER EDUCATION EXPANSION, DIFFERENTIATION AND CONCEPTS OF EQUITY

Increasing the number of higher education providers or the range of higher education-level offerings and thereby changing the institutional boundaries and remits of post-school educational providers has been the major way mass and universal systems of higher education have been created in many countries (Pitman 2017). Indeed, as Teichler (1998) explained more than 20 years ago, since the 1970s there has been a widely held belief that industrial societies have needed to expand their higher education provision. In doing so, increased diversification and differentiation across the system are to be expected since new types of students with different motivations and academic preparation need different forms of teaching and learning.

Trow's (1974) model of system expansion highlighted the likelihood of increased differentiation and diversification accompanying the shift from elite to mass and universal higher education. Currently, as the proportion of young adults (under 25 years of age) with a tertiary education qualification has reached 44% across the OECD and the qualifications they have achieved have widened to include higher vocational education qualifications, as well as bachelors or masters (OECD 2019), Trow's (1974) model seems prescient. The model is just that though. Country-specific higher education systems are more nuanced with elements of the elite model being present in both mass and universal systems or even operating together within the same institution, as Trow (2006) has acknowledged. Segmentation within a system occurs when there are differences in the

structural support and rewards between, for example, research and teaching with the result that institutional diversity becomes hierarchically organised. Although the expansion of higher education over the past three decades has resulted in institutional differentiation, including new forms of higher education teaching, learning, qualifications and institutions (Gellert 1993), expansion alone is unlikely to ensure greater equity in higher education. Who goes where is a key issue as suggested below:

Halsey (1992) perspicaciously predicted that, despite the widening of participation, the relative gains of the under-represented might be limited, as elite institutions preserve their traditional boundaries. There may be merits, but also dangers that in many HE systems, whether they be dual, binary, stratified or unified, one part of the system only takes on the bulk of the widening participation remit. (Osborne 2003: 17)

In Australia, Marginson (2018) argues that while there are system imperatives and cultural norms that militate against formal differentiation in the unified university system, the historical traces of the earlier binary system are still discernible. Marginson (2018) contends that the unified system in Australia comprises a steep hierarchy between the more research-focused and the more teaching-focused institutions that reflects their different performance in research, teaching and in who they teach. Furthermore, as the state-owned colleges (TAFEs) and other private providers have been offering bachelor and other higher vocational education programmes in Australia since 2002, but under a recognition and quality system that privileges the universities in developing and awarding qualifications, the non-university providers are offering the same qualifications as universities but under circumstances over which they have very little influence (see Wheelahan this volume; Hodge et al. this volume). Moreover, the tendency of higher vocational education offerings to be located in the segments of post-school education that have developed distinctive vocational pathways with employers and market forces shaping the curricula offerings has tended to reinforce the role of these programmes in reproducing existing labour market segmentations and inequalities rather than promoting equity and social mobility (Avis 2012; Bathmaker et al. 2018; Köpsén 2020). As Avis has noted:

If VET is to address the 'needs' of employers in its immediate environment it will reflect the classed structure of regionally and locally based employment.
(Avis 2012: 5–6)

It is in this context that the chapter explores conceptualisations of equity which Marginson (2016) regards as the problem of high participation systems when he asks who has access to what?

To understand how these expanded and differentiated higher education systems have sought to widen access, the chapter draws on McCowan's (2016) three principles for understanding equity of access in expanding systems of higher education. Using the examples of England, Brazil and Kenya, McCowan (2016) argued that expansion has been associated with increased levels of institutional differentiation and stratification in the three systems so that equity of access is understood variously as (1) expanding the *availability* of places so that more people from all backgrounds can access higher education, with the effect that inequalities between social groups tend to continue; (2) increasing the *accessibility* of places, to redistribute the proportions of people accessing higher education in line with society as a whole, though often this approach has the effect that those from the underrepresented and marginalised backgrounds find access to lower status forms of higher education is made easier than access to the more selective and elite forms; and (3) increasing the *horizontal*ity of the system with the effect that entry to all institutions is more diverse and the benefits and outcomes are less dependent on individuals' socio-economic backgrounds and the status of the institutions at which they have studied.

EQUITY UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF *AVAILABILITY*

Australian higher education is a clear example of a high participation universal system (Marginson 2016; Trow 2006) with more than 50% of adults aged 25–34 achieving a tertiary qualification in 2018 (OECD 2019), well above the OECD average of 39%. Arguably, this high level of participation has been achieved through system expansion. Initially this involved increasing the number of bachelor's degree awarding institutions following the Dawkins Review in 1988 (Croucher et al. 2013) rather than specific access initiatives led by institutions (Pitman 2017). Since 2012 participation has increased through the introduction of demand-led funding. Both of these strategies can be understood as examples of creating

greater equity through increasing *availability*. One consequence however, in a system such as Australia that is formally status averse, at least with respect to differences between universities, is that ‘since 1973 the policy approach to equity has been ... extending higher education to under-represented social groups at the margins of participation rather than redistributing social access to elite universities’ (Marginson 2018: 29). Similarly, the bifurcated tertiary system that separates vocational education, including the higher vocational education provided in TAFEs from universities in relation to governance, funding and federal/state policy variations, confers lower status to the vocational sector. The perception that higher education in the vocational sector is of lower status to that in universities is reinforced by the poor transfer rates between vocational education and university-based higher education (OECD 2019; Wheelahan 2009). Viewing strategies to increase equity through this lens of expanding *availability* within the system, these accounts of Australia highlight the continuance of inequalities in spite of increased participation in higher vocational and university-based higher education.

EQUITY UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF *ACCESSIBILITY*

Moreover, following on from the above, once a system becomes universal, exclusion from the benefits and opportunities that higher education affords when there are rapid social, technological and economic changes confers greater disadvantages than it does under an elite or mass system. In Australia, the Productivity Commission’s report (2019) on expansion of access through the demand-led system gives the initiative a ‘mixed report card’ because although access has increased, the distribution of students in higher education has still not achieved the equity targets set. The participation of equity groups varies between institutions and participation gaps and outcomes have widened for some equity groups. As Marginson (2016) has argued:

As systems grow, the question about equity begins to shift from access? to access to what? In “elite” systems in Trow’s (1974) sense, every place carries a reward, and equity turns on inclusion/exclusion. In HPS [high participation systems], with a continuing elite subsector, the binary structure becomes ternary: (1) high value inclusion, (2) low value inclusion, (3) exclusion. There are continuing issues at the boundary of inclusion and also in relation to social mobility,

especially for low socioeconomic status and migrant families, rural students, students from underrepresented ethnic and culturally-defined social groups, students with disabilities, and others. (Marginson 2016: 264–265)

Teichler (2008) commenting on the way that many researchers have used the framework developed by Trow explains that rather than representing historical phases of development of higher education systems where one system supersedes the other, Trow's framework best describes different sectors of higher education systems that emerge at different times and can co-exist. For example, Australia exemplifies a stratified system of higher education comprising universities and other non-university higher education providers including publicly owned TAFEs traditionally associated with the vocational education and training sector. The extent to which institutional expansion within a stratified system has increased the availability of higher education to new groups of students in Australia is a mixed picture and somewhat different to the experiences of some other countries (Brett et al. 2019; Koshy et al. 2020; Webb et al. 2019; Shreeve 2020). In Europe and North America, and increasingly in other parts of the world as our systematic review has revealed (Burke et al. 2021), where binary systems exist, the responsibility for increasing the participation of non-traditional groups of students normally falls on non-university providers (Teichler 2008). Indeed, although these developments have followed different trajectories in English- and German-speaking systems (Kuhlee and Laczik 2015), there is growing recognition of the part played by the post-school college sector, either with the university sector or alone, to increase access to higher education and qualifications for high skill formation (Gallacher and Reeve 2019; Powell et al. 2012).

The evidence from England is that over the past 30 years, between 10% and 15% of all higher education students in England have attended further education colleges (Parry 2015). Across the UK as a whole, the vocational education and training sector has been promoted as the preferred pathway to higher education qualifications for certain types of people, that is, those traditionally not participating in higher education, who are deemed to need a fast accessible route to high-level qualifications and employment (Bathmaker 2016). Yet, steep status hierarchies have cut across policy attempts to expand higher vocational education in England because the 'system architecture [is] designed to reserve one sector for higher education and a further education sector for lower-level programmes and qualifications' (Parry 2015, 493). Whether this approach to increasing

accessibility for previously excluded groups is promoted as a separate technical route with a reputation for quality equivalent to the university sector, as some argue is the case with the universities of applied sciences in Germany, or whether this form of higher vocational education benefits individuals' life chances, but does little for social mobility (Avis and Orr 2016) is one of the conundrums of approaching equity through *accessibility*. Nevertheless, expansion through higher vocational education often ensures that the post-compulsory education sector becomes more interconnected. In Australia, King and James (2014) have observed that one of the consequences of the introduction of a demand-led system has been increased diversity as universities reach down to vocational education and training colleges to develop pathways to boost their recruitment of students and these colleges reach up and become new providers of undergraduate degrees. Equity viewed through this lens of increasing accessibility to higher education reveals that system expansion through closer interconnection between vocational and higher education leads to increased differentiation in opportunities for students, rather than greater equality if the hierarchy of differences between vocational and higher education is not also addressed.

EQUITY UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF *HORIZONTALITY*

As argued in the previous section, the continued positioning of vocational institutions offering higher vocational education as the 'bottom of the hierarchy' (Wheelahan 2016: 45) weakens the potential for this form of access and employment to provide social justice and social mobility (Avis and Orr 2016), at least in many Anglophone countries (Moodie and Wheelahan 2009). For example, although expansion of higher vocational education through the degree offerings of TAFEs in Australia highlights the job readiness of graduates since the majority of these bachelor offerings also carry industry accredited licenses to practice, their distinctiveness may not alter existing inequalities. This is because for the most part these qualifications provide entry to highly gendered and low- to middle-income-level labour markets in health, early years and education, business and finance (Webb et al. 2019). In contrast, there is emerging evidence that in some German-speaking countries, higher vocational education and universities are increasingly forming a hybrid higher education system, at