**The global project: breaking down barriers to higher education pre and post-COVID-19 Podcast**

INTRO: Hi everyone, welcome to the ADCET Podcast – supporting you – supporting students. We would like to acknowledge and pay respects to the traditional custodians of the lands on which this recording is taking place and to the elder’s past, present and emerging.

Today our guest is Dr Graeme Atherton. Graeme is an internationally renowned leader & researcher in the field of access and diversity in higher education based in the UK.

Make sure you check out our show notes to find the links to many of the topics covered in this Podcast. Enjoy

MATT BRETT: G'day, I'm Matt Brett, and you're listening to another edition of a series of podcast conversations hosted by ADCET, Australian Disability Clearinghouse Education and Training, and also supported by NCSEHE, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. I'm an adjunct fellow with the National Centre, I'm on the Advisory Group for ADCET, and amongst other things, and the Director of academic Governance and Standards at Deakin University, and a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne.

It's my great privilege today to be speaking with Dr Graham Atherton, normally renowned expert on equity in higher education. He literally wrote, or at least edited the book on Global Inequality in Higher Education, established the World Access to Higher Education Day, leads both Access Higher Ed and NEON, and is currently joining us from Zoom from London Higher or his home office somewhere in England. Welcome Graham.

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Welcome Matt, joining you from my home office, or indeed actually my children's bedroom, which counts as a home office nowadays in a world of lock‑down. But yeah, very happy to be here, and thank you for inviting me to take part in the conversation today.

MATT BRETT: I think whilst everyone's working from home in one way or another, it just highlights that this is truly an unprecedented global, once in a life time, once in a century event. It's quite an amazing time to be living through.

Firstly, Graham, my introductory remarks suggest you've had a significant impact on equity in higher education within England, within the UK, within Europe, and internationally, and you've spanned research policy and practice. So before we delve more deeply into some of those local and international issues, can you first share with listeners why student equity matters to you and why it's featured so strongly throughout your career?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Thank you, Matt. I think like probably many of us that work in this field, it's obviously an intensely personal issue as much as anything else. I mean I was the first in my family to go on to higher education. I came from a part of the UK called Blackpool, which some people may or may not have heard of, it's a seaside resort, a place where you go on holiday, a place that has experienced a lot of its own socio‑economic challenges in the past 30 years or so, and I went from there to a pretty well-known university in the UK, well-known globally, and it's a big journey for me, and I think that that really had a profound impact on my life, and from then on my [0:02:33.6], very much much an adult going back to higher education, and from then on, I think my journey, if you like, professionally coincided with a really awareness of these inequalities which became much more developed in the UK in particular, and I think it resonated so much with my own experiences, my own beliefs, and I think that this is really why I ended up becoming so engaged in this field. I think it's been constantly something that has been, is a challenge for those who can't reach education, higher education, and I think throughout my career I've seen that student equity is fundamental to higher education for me, and I think also I've enjoyed being part of a community of people who also share those beliefs. So I guess it is a personal issue for me as anything else.

MATT BRETT: I'm going to ask a question about some of your academic work in a second, but just maybe following on from that, you've grown up in Blackpool, seaside resort, et cetera. When did you first form an aspiration for university yourself? Was that something that was always there, and is it something that was part of your primary education, part of your family aspiration; can you reflect on when that first became your reality?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: It wasn't something that really was an aspiration for me until I was in my mid-teens or so. It wasn't something that in my community we spoke about or something that in my community people did. It wasn't something that I looked at in that way. It was only when I was in school, in my mid‑teens or so, and I continued to do relatively well at school, teachers there, who possibly pointed me to potential directions related to university, and particularly when I got to the upper secondary part of schooling there was probably more understanding in Australia and other systems, a bit of a different way of describing it, but upper secondary is the best way of describing it. At that point teachers did encourage me to consider which universities to attend to, supporting my applications to the university I attended.

So without that kind of input to me, then I don't know, it was never something that was deep within where I came from. I guess what was was the idea that you must progress, and I think that this is an important point, it relates to our work, our [0:05:13.4] to work, in our own country we talk about aspirations and the aspirations of young people from particular backgrounds, would think really is, or where I came from we lacked aspirations, we just didn't have aspirations necessarily to go to higher education, university, we had different kinds of aspirations, and it was how you channelled those expectations, different expectations about our lives. I think that kind of change really, that understanding, I think that aspirations do exist is really important, because if we are around supporting aspirations, people do want to improve and progress in our lives, but they don't often have the support and the direction that other communities and groups have.

MATT BRETT: That in some ways was elaborate lead into the next question, and one of your most cited pieces of academic work, and the title of that I'll just read out for listeners, because I think it kind of highlights the connection and highlights the deep way in which you've thought about these things, and the title of this research is “How young people formulate their views about the future and poverty of aspiration or poverty of opportunity.” So there's apparently a bit of a connection there from your own experience, and flowing into your kind of academic research career. But can you maybe share with listeners some of the core features of that research and what made it something that really galvanised the attention of so many other sort of academics in the field?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: I think that piece of work, particularly, Matt, was one that was actually came from a project funded by the Department of Education in the UK at the time, who at the time were extending the education leaving age from ‑ the age at the time was compulsory, education finished around 16 and has been extended to 17 and to 18. So we were commissioned to do a piece of work that looked at those young people around the Year 7 point who would be the first group to be affected by this change to the school leaving age, and I think it was a very interesting piece of work to do, because as part of that piece of work we wanted explore what their views of the future were, what their knowledge was of these changes to the leaving age of school, and also how it would affect their potential future trajectories.

But what I think the biggest impression that that research made on me was that a lot of young people we spoke to across the country in England, they did have views of the future, they thought about these views. Okay, you know, this idea somehow that all those at Year 6, Year 7 want to be, in our country, soccer players, as well as in your country, all kinds of famous sports people I suppose in Australia, or wanted to be on TV or something like that. Yes, a lot of them did hold that as an aspiration, but a lot of them had more aspirations for jobs which we would recognise as jobs which people would like to aspire to; doctors, teachers, often things they've seen in their own particular lives. It was what they'd seen that they'd aspired to.

But I think the fact that the aspirations were forming at that age is really important I felt in terms of the research, and that these young people were thinking about these issues. Okay, there were different levels of how they formed their ideas, some were quite definite, and some clearly, you know, they had actually spoke to their parents, or even thought about it in a quite developed way, but it was happening, it was happening, and if you talk about when you want to offer support for young people thinking about their futures, then to think about that support just kicking in, if you like, around Year 8, Year 9, Year 10, by that point ideas about the future, ideas about hierarchy, we did some work with them, for instance, getting them to choose what they felt were more or less important jobs, and some of that work was quite interesting, how they perceived different roles. Those perceptions of different roles are already in place, and it really brought home to us that I think primary level, for instance, is a very important part in which you actually start to think about how you work with young people's expectations for their future trajectories.

MATT BRETT: One of the things that really struck me about this report in reading it and comparing it to a lot of the Australian literature in aspirations and school outreach and that kind of thing was that it really was centred on that Year 7 cohort. [0:10:06.5] sort of question around what is the time at which any interventions are best put in place, and also what do we know at various stages of that student's journey? Do you have any thoughts as to where some of our gaps, our knowledge gaps might be most pronounced in terms of that, and zero to 18 kind of journey and the cusp of then progressing to university?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: I think certainly the primary level we don't know as much as we may do about young people's expectations. I think throughout the time scale [0:10:47.3] expectations and aspirations will need further exploration as well. I think the interaction between different characteristics, background characteristics of young people, be that gender, been that socio‑economic background, those things are all I think we to explore more. As we get closer to 18, there does need to be more work I think on what young people think about their futures, but I think it's also the work itself. I mean it's not just the level of work, it's the kind of work you undertake, because I think that where we felt our work was interesting, that I [0:11:33.0] earlier on, we were trying to get behind some of the initial thoughts the children had.

It was very interesting to see, for instance, in that piece of work that the teachers who were in the room with us were more surprised than us about some of the things that the children said, because they didn't have the space in their [0:11:57.5] to actually talk about these things with these kids, and so they kind of brought their own assumptions about young people think about, and I think then they found it interesting, because they found it interesting, ‘cause they have it out to do a lesson, so [0:12:08.9]. But I guess just to hear the young people talk about this stuff was interesting to them, because they didn't think that some of the kids had thought about these things in the way that perhaps they seemed to do. So I think certainly that younger age, and it is where possibly we need to understand more. We tend to focus for a lot of reasons possibly when more on the Year 9, Year 10 level was before that, it was a lot more work I think we could do, to try and understand, in both qualitative and quantitative ways as well, I think, both types of technique are useful.

MATT BRETT: Has the dial shifted, since that report has the progress of people from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education shifted in the UK? Would you attribute any of your work and your understanding of aspirations of young people as a causative factor in terms of any of those changes?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: I think we've all I think made progress in ADCET in the UK over the last 15 to 20 years for sure. I mean the data will back that up if you look at it, we've got different matrix of socio‑economic background in the UK, and we look across those, we would see it as being progress, you have to look at both absolute and relative differences. I think, well, absolute, things we call progress, absolute numbers have increased, relative gaps between lower and higher socio‑economic groups has possibly not shifted as much as we’d like to see, but they have shifted. In terms of my work, and I think the research generally has hopefully made some contribution in terms of supporting those in the ADCET community and outside of that to think about where and when you should do particular things. I think possibly the networks that I helped found in the UK, the young, the National Education Opportunities Network has over a hundred organisations as members now, 90 education providers across the country and different types of institutions, from those more research intensive, to small more specialist institutions, and I think the work of NEON and the work of my Access HE Network in London, which is 25 universities [0:14:33.2] members, those networks I think, have certainly done a couple things, I mean they’ve kept this issue very much on the agenda. Like all policy issues, it will have its high points and have its low points.

In the 2000s in the UK it was well funded centrally through government, it was a higher point perhaps the first half of the last decade, it was a lower point, and I think the work we did then to keep these things on the agenda was really important. The latter half of the last decade, things of importance has risen again I think, and it's become a gainable prominent policy issue, as well as a policy point, I think also the opportunities and networks provide for those involved in the work to share practice, improve their work, to formulate a community, their work's really important.

I think this is an area where within higher education institutions the identity, who does this work, often people have to find themselves. You're not in a conventional academic department where you know where you are, and often you're positioned in different parts of an institution and different titles and different, slightly different roles, because we are roled in that concept for an organisation to help putting it together, because again without those who deliver us work, there won't be impact, in all other parts of education, other spaces, you see the importance of the staff to the labour force, those who deliver, and those who give support, we see it overall in teaching. If you can't support and help those who do that work, then the students we serve won't get the benefits which we [0:16:22.4].

MATT BRETT: Just through your response there, Graham, it sort of highlights just how net worked you are and how important you've been in forging those networks across the UK, bridging research policy, practised in many respects, and that is in part why the National Centre for Student Equity was set up to breach that nexus between research policy and practice. So I'm going to ask a question, how did you acquire and develop those skills and nurture those skills to be so adept at being able to move across those domains, and do you have any tips or thoughts you could share to the Australian listeners around how they might be able to sharpen their tool kit and skills and capabilities in that respect?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: I think it's important I think how you see your role in this, how do you identify your role in this. Do you see yourself as primarily in an administrative role, for instance, or do you see you're primarily in a more activist role, and it's in the latter kind of identity that I've always seen myself, and in doing that, if you see that cause, you’re working towards that cause, and shouldn't let the boundaries between whether you see this to be a policy or practice or research issue get in the way of your drive to effect that course, because the boundaries you put between those areas are often boundaries you put between those areas.

Now, of course it's easier for me to say that because I've been kind of lucky to be in positions where I've had a relative amount of freedom to pursue the cause, less encumbered by those people in an organisation telling me “You shouldn't be talking about that” or “You shouldn't be doing that” so I accept that I've been fortunate in that. In the same way, you know, I've created spaces where I can do that.

Now, in a large organisation, a large institution, it’s such that you're I guess what you need to do is create your space in that institution where you can work across boundaries, which firstly you see yourself as being able to work those boundaries, don't put boundaries yourself there so you can't do that, you can, and then create the space that enables you to do that. Once you've created that space, then working across those areas should be something you're able to do. And also, I think, it requires a sense of entrepreneurship, a sense of an acceptance that you have to connect and meet with a lot of people, and some of those meetings don't come to anything. If want to to make something you can actually create a new project like we've tried to do so many times, we might have eight, nine meetings, and over them, most of them, they're nice meetings, we meet and connect, but there's no immediate outcome from them. Or there might be a longer term outcome from them. And of those sooner or later we'll get that connection that takes us forward, so it has to be an element of that. And exceptions, all sorts of things we do don’t succeed, we make in research proposals and all these kind of things in what we do.

I've had a quite a proposal relating to COVID-19, which we put a lot of work in, unfortunately it wasn't successful relating to us, only found that out last week. You personally, I guess, you become despondent, yes, of course you do because you believe in your cause, but you've just got to get up and wait for the next one. Because you have to accept you're going to fail some of these things, well, you go on to the next one, because by law of attrition, if you like, that's the space you're in and you will eventually bring some of the project in again.

MATT BRETT: One of the biggest boundaries that exists in this space is not necessarily within the institution, and I've got to say I sometimes struggle to make sense of the places that I've worked, it's not just a system in which those institutions might be operating in and been cultivating networks in the UK Higher Ed system, but the big boundaries international, working across international systems, and that's something you've done quite a lot of. You've built those networks internationally, et cetera. I'll maybe just ask a question, is that cause of better educational opportunities in higher education shared across all the jurisdictions in which you've worked across or is each one a really specific manifestation of its own local context?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: I think broadly I would say, one can articulate that cause, broadly across the countries that I've worked and people I've worked with, there's a general understanding of the cause you're working towards, but local difference is very important, and certainly in parts of the world there's a much more developed understanding of these issues, but in some parts of the world perhaps, certainly, well, yes, generally people understand what you're trying to do, it’s the importance and relevance that differs, and there are certain parts of the world we work where it's still not really seen as something of an important priority.

There's always a fight with this I think, to get it on particular agendas, but it does differ. For me, my actual international work began with work in United States, or with colleagues in the United States, through local networks I had in the UK, and it's a well developed issue in the United States, it’s very large HE system, I think particularly, some of the [0:22:03.6] in the US begin with issues of ethnic differences, racial differences. That actually was a quite important experience for me because some of the people I worked with there really, as I said to my previous answer, came from a very strong activist background, and they have political mindset in what they did, not influence the way that I did. But looking broadly I’ve developed great international links as you do over time as you become longer in one particular career area, then yes, you do understand that in some parts of the world it's not as well developed as [0:22:39.9].

MATT BRETT: This is a podcast for ADCET, Australian Disability Clearinghouse and Education Training. So just a follow‑up question to that, and I'm trying to get a sense as to how variable the prominence is for disability across some of the systems that you've worked with; is that one of the more common threads that can be seen across all systems, or is that still something that in some places the fight to even get disability on the table and recognised as an issue is still quite a big struggle?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: I think it does differ. I think again those, of course yourselves and your colleagues work in the field of supporting students with disabilities to progress both in education overall will know that there's a spectre in terms of where countries are in appreciation of disability-related issues, of understandings of the potential ability of students who have disability, that differs quite significantly, as well as things like data collection regarding the participation progress of disabled students, they're always an issue in all parts of this space, particularly here, so there is quite a variation, I find.

I think also in terms of networking and linking, you of course will see across countries or organisations which advocate for those with disabilities, and as part of the advocacy you may have education of young people within that remit. So but then again, on the other side you have the broader wider access community, so sometimes you've got to think how do you link those who might advocate for access, if indeed they exist in the particular country, there's a lot of countries that actually don't really to be honest, with what is more common, which is some form of organisations and others working with the advocacy path for those disabilities. So you've got that kind of almost networking connecting challenge, when you try and do things like we've done before, which is try and link up a broader access agenda.

MATT BRETT: I've got to say an exemplar of a joined up access agenda is World Access to Higher Education Day, and I've had the privilege to have been an invited speaker at the last two World Access to Higher Education Days, and in both counts I've kind of led the audience in a sign language version of a “Welcome to World Access to Higher Education Day, which has been a lot of fun, and I hopefully haven't sort of cooled the pitch, so I'll get an invite for some other event in 2020, but can you maybe tell, or share with listeners, what World Access to Higher Education Day is, how it came about and what's on the agenda for that event?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Thank you, Matt. Yes, I think in terms, we'll start with how it came about. I think that in the earlier part of the 2010s I helped with colleagues organise two large global conferences, Equity and Access to Higher Education. Now, both events were very rewarding, I think those who attended, particularly I felt got a lot from them, and the second one was in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, quite a strong Australian presence at that event. However the organising of those, one key note event was challenging, primarily because in the access and equity area you don't have the departments and faculties in institutions with large amounts of travel research grant money. This is a challenge for them to get to a particular place. And a lot of people wanted to participate in the conferences and they couldn't, and they said to me, “Do you have this [0:26:39.2] available?” We didn't have the income to do that, and so we sat down and I thought a lot with colleagues about how do you engender this global conversation, this global community in this area, because bringing people together as one overall event is challenging, and I think not only ‑ and perhaps in our present environment we've all reflected I guess on the viability of such activities anyway, because we all sit in our own houses in what's happening, so anyway, we found that a challenge.

So we looked at all the things that happened in terms of advocacy awareness raising, [0:27:18.2] day being one of them and felt that there was possibly potential to have a World Access to Education Day. And so we managed to secure a little bit of funding to take the project forward and in 2018 we had our first World Access to Higher Education Day. And the goal was to get those engaged in access and equity work across the world to do things in their own particular locality primarily.

Now, there could be events, large events, and of course with linked with the community in Australia, because it coincided with the conference you've had, but it's not been as such, you know, we’ve done things especially for it, it's not one overall big thing, it's been lots of things happening across the world and the last couple of years, I think last year we had over 40 events happening in 30 different countries, as well as a social media related campaign and as well as new research launched, the idea being, well, that's [0:28:19.4] the catalyst, try and make things happen that wouldn't have happened otherwise, and if you can use that kind of brand, that community, to try and push things forward in your own local area, then that's what being part of a global community means. And I think those two events, we've certainly grown, and certainly evidence from colleagues across the world, they believe it's been valuable.

We've done two large pieces of research, the first one we did in 2018 was the first study of its size looking at the equity and access policies across different countries, so I think we surveyed around 70‑odd plus countries to look at what information was available on their equity and access policies at national level, and we will deep dive, if you like, five or six countries for 2019. And yeah, so I think it is really the drive of World Access to Higher Education is to create that global community, those committed to widening access and equity in higher education, it’s mechanism to do that, and I think that hopefully this year is, as we all know, a different and challenging year in so many ways, but I think like with many other things, we'll be looking in terms of taking WAHED forward this year to have a much stronger on‑line dimension, and I think it provides, if you like, I suppose, the situation does I guess encourage us to think again but how we will develop this community and the ways of doing that, and that's something that we're really talking to all our colleagues about at the moment.

MATT BRETT: So the core of Access to Higher Education day was inspired by inability for people to maybe travel from one part of the world to another to attend an event. We've kind of turned that into hyperdrive, haven't we, with not being able to travel with COVID‑19.

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Exactly, yes.

MATT BRETT: One of the reasons we really reached out to you for this conversation today was on the strength of an additional survey that you've run across the globe looking at how admissions practices might be changing as a result of COVID‑19. So is there any preliminary findings that you can share with listeners as to how the world is responding to this really important point of entry to higher education, i.e., admissions, practices and policies, et cetera?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Thank you, Matt. Yeah. As you said in March time we did a survey with our contact the part of the WAHED network to try and take an initial look at how higher education admissions practices and [0:31:11.1] particular reference, but it was from equity groups were being affected by COVID‑19. Now, we're going to follow this research up in probably a month or so. In March it's quite early, but already you were seeing across the world of course examinations, entry examinations, be they ones related to secondary completion or be they specialist examinations related just to higher education entry. Of course what we know is that across the world the process of education admission differs across countries, and of course time scales differ as well in some countries, a lot of countries do have a kind of autumn or fall initial entry, and many such as your own do not, and I think what we found was that there was I think a lot of apprehension about the impact on students from equity groups for sure, access to Internet and technology was a commonly framed course in terms of this on‑line being the way in which [0:32:09.5] with teaching and learning now. I think there was worries about how students can be retained when they entered, there was concerns also about of economic nature of [0:32:22.0] and concerns regarding how students would manage if they did enter. There was concerns about travel within and across countries, there was concerns in those areas, and I guess with some countries, even where students do tend to go to local institutions there was still concern about how they would manage the financial situation, of course always a challenge for the learners that we serve and [0:32:49.0] concerns there.

I think it's right for us probably to follow the research up over the next month or so, things start to become a little bit clearer than we did in March. A lot of events were, if you like, going quicker than policy could respond, I think. Many things have settled a little bit across the world now. But now it's a case of what this new normal looks like, particularly for higher education. I think you'll see in certain countries packages from the government to support HE, where in other countries that's not happening, and even of course countries that is happening in, it's not, you don't see HE necessarily being top of the list of things for governments to actually support at this time, and that will filter down to the students we serve no doubt.

MATT BRETT: Yes, there's so many unknowns over the horizon, it's very hard to see how ‑ what might happen, there’s a lot of speculation going on out there. You're currently based with London Higher, the website of which says one of its priorities is to promote London's contribution to local national and global economies, endorsing London as a pre‑eminent world city for all students, staff, researchers and enterprise. That sort of notion of these big global cities being a real sort of focal point for collaborative endeavour and international students and international researchers et cetera, is something that some cities in Australia are also striving to emulate in many respects, and COVID‑19 has put some big barriers on international travel of all kinds. So just trying to get a sense as to how you think this is going to play out for places like London, places like Sydney and Melbourne, where the hustle and bustle, what makes those places so kind of vibrant and interesting is harder to achieve without international academic communities coalescing?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Well, yes, I mean I think that, as you said before, Matt, there's a lot of uncertainty that's going to play out here. I think for the cities that you describe, actually we did some work recently in London looking at diversity in our education [0:35:14.9] where the report was called, I think “The future for hyper diversity of education in London” and we projected student numbers and student progression numbers in London, because what we see in London is the majority of students who go to higher education from London are from black and minority ethnic communities, and even in those groups of broad categories, they don't really capture the diversity ethnically, particularly in terms of [0:35:46.6] progression in London.

So global cities, if they are real global cities will remain diverse because of the nature of their own population, probably increasingly diverse, because we look at demographic patterns. For London, I know it's like this in the City of Melbourne, but obviously demographic increase often being driven by the first and second generation of the group, so you see a huge diversity, and that's part of the strength. There are a lot of things that are going to be difficult to see in terms of what's going to happen here, because that diversity is a strength. Will that diversity be threatened both, international [0:36:21.2] will they be threatened in terms of progression to HE overall? It is vital to keep those avenues clear for different groups for best higher education to create that diversity which I think is really aware that the uniqueness and strength of these cities where it comes in, dynamism in London is really now a dynamism based around this diversity, and actually those in London can see that if you go back to the issue we talked about, if you had a conversation in this country, the one word that dominates will be Brexit, of course, which we haven't mentioned, and of course those in London didn't go down that road because they knew the importance of diversity to the city.

But HE, the internationalisation question, particularly for the institutions in London, is a really deep and important one. We don't know what's going to happen, and there's some research of course showing that the fall, international students will be a short term one, or was predicted to be a longer term one. I think certainly the way institutions are at the moment is looking for creating dynamic ways to engage internationally, and I think that's where you'll see those institutions will continue to do well and will continue to survive or progress, however you want to describe it in this environment, with those who are able to be dynamic in this way and look creatively at what diversity, both within that institution of students, and also internationalisation means, which will be possibly more blended on‑line based experiences, but developing value for the student from that.

But higher education in London is a fascinating area. There's over 40 higher education providers, mainstream providers in London, as well as [0:38:11.9] large and very small ones. It's a very diverse space in terms of provision. And I think this is where you see the global cities. But there will be, the creativity and dynamism is there, but you have to harness it now, I think.

MATT BRETT: That's a wonderful kind explication of the importance of diversity to national economies et cetera, so that's one thing that I'm personally sort of hoping is retained post COVID‑19, that we don't lose that global connectivity of these big cities. On the question of international education, quite often it's portrayed as a bit of a revenue stream for higher education, particularly in western societies, England, Australia, America, some of the biggest inflows of international students in the world to those countries. Is there an equity dimension to that beyond just the revenue that they bring to countries, and do we have a sort of framework that might help us think through what those equity implications are for international education.

GRAHAM ATHERTON: There should be, Matt, for sure, and I think - I've been involved in this area of work in the past four to five years, I presented the past three or four of British councils very large conference called Going Global, where it brings together the large part of international HE community, I've been engaged with that event several times, leading panels there, as well as contributing on this very issue to publications they released three or four years ago. There should be an equity dimension for internationalisation, I think it's something that's in need of development, [0:39:53.7] some examples again of institutions where they are trying to build into internationalisation work, they do a focus on equity areas, and I think WAHED actually already has helped in a way, I think in WAHED, it’s interesting, you do see those communities being involved in events, mainly what we describe as the equity community, you see some internationalisation, international HE community is involved as well, and I think that is where some of the issues lie. And again, I said before about boundaries. You do have to create boundaries in a sense in understanding where you are and what you do in your aims and your goals, but often what we found in the UK is that for varied reasons, it's not really a criticism of the communities or the institutions, it's just where they are, is that the international HE people and the equity people don't necessarily connect [0:40:53.1], and we've tried this before with colleagues in the UK to create that dialogue and think how they can work together.

It is not I think necessarily that those working in international HE are somehow inherently not supportive that equity related issues, but we said in an early part of the conversation, you create structures and those structures prevent you from having those broader conversations, and you try to do some of that actually through WAHED and other means, and it's something I do feel actually, I have done more work in international HE in the last few years, and I'm aware and understand the area, I do think the equity should be an important part of this, and I think it’s [0:41:35.2] to advocate for it.

MATT BRETT: I look forward to seeing your future publications in that [0:41:41.3].

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Yes, it will be helpful, yeah, I hope so.

MATT BRETT: So for someone who is wasn’t really thinking about university through primary school or maybe most of secondary school, you have an amazing career in Higher Ed and had a tremendous impact not just in the UK but on a global scale, so I just take a moment to sort of pause and recognise that from little things big things can grow, and you've had an enormous impact. I've got one last question which is more of a personal one, but I just want to maybe throw to you for a second, while you've got Australian equity practitioners’ ears. Is there anything you'd like to share with them from the UK about anything at all in particular?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: I think ‑ I guess [0:42:33.4], I suppose, you know, I'm thrilled to say that here in the UK at this point in time, I suppose it's like colleagues over in Australia, we are experiencing new challenges and I know that your HE sector, as ours is, is going to take a pretty significant economic hit from COVID‑19, and it's happening here of course, and will happen here, and the government isn't providing ‑ you know, everyone wants more support, and I think lots of competing priorities at the moment and you can see perhaps where HE sits at that, but we remain here as a community in the UK and I think what we're doing is the important towards advocacy, and I would say that probably it's the same in your space as well. If the cuts come down, and they will, we have to work together, and we're trying to do that in the UK, to ensure that those cuts, if they have to affect our area of work, have to be shared, and shared equally, and not disproportionality and placed upon access equity work, which would be a danger, it can fall down the list of priorities. If anything we believe our work's more important now than it was before, than it was three months ago, so what we're seeing here in the UK and I suppose you are seeing in Australia as well, is as we close schools it's the ones that we serve who will suffer the most, because they don't, they can't have that day‑to‑day interaction, their parents and others have very economic challenges, they haven’t got space physically and mentally [0:44:10.0] to get the support others do, so our work's more important, because we know it's going to be happening for us, we see it's a sort of challenging couple of years ahead, for sure [0:44:21.7] in the UK.

We think working together's important. I've worked with colleagues in Australia before, I'd like to continue to do so. We are part of the global community, we will keep WAHED going forward, and I think it's rare, I guess, as you said before, Matt, in our lifetimes where you have something that is common across the world like this, and if it can help bring people together in some respect to understand their commonality about challenges in other areas, then some good can come out of this terrible challenging situation.

Yes. So I mean I think it's fair to say I suppose that we're probably facing similar challenges as you, but I think the community, it's really important to keep up the kind of work you do collaboratively, together, and that was the theme of our conversation, we had a conversation last Thursday, in a webinar, we had about 700 people on-line, and they were mainly UK practitioners, and I think we want there to be a community like that in the next 18 months to two years and not to dwindle, so that will be our focus, I think.

MATT BRETT: We are certainly all in this together and all globally connected. One of England's most significant exports is soccer, football, as you might call it, and I've waited 30 years for Liverpool to get a title, and they were within I think a win or two of grasping the title before the whole thing got put on hold. Am I going to have my dream shattered, or will they be awarded premier league title for the first time in a long time?

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Well, Matt, in the spirit of openness, I'm Manchester United fan. So this situation, like, you know, all clouds have silver linings as they say, so for me, what happens happens, I guess. I'm not sure what's going to happen here to be honest. I think that we're in a unique situation in Liverpool being so far ahead, and I think even if the season was not to be completed, which I think [0:46:29.0] in the balance here to say the least, then I think they will be awarded a title to them. I think where the other issues come in is on promotion relegation issues, because as you probably being a soccer fan you know promotion to the Premier League is, it can only create, if nothing else, a huge issue for clubs, and there are some clubs I think who are leading the promotion race, who are not leading to a massive extent [0:47:01.3] the Premier League and [0:47:06.3] it will be harder I think to get a consensus regarding the promotion or not. But I think Liverpool will get a title, I mean, yes, I’m a United fan, but I would acknowledge that Liverpool deserve a title this year, but as we say as United fans, it's only on loan, so we'll be getting our title back, actually when we’re playing, probably not very soon, but anyway, [0:47:30.2].

MATT BRETT: A reminder also that in the scheme of things there's nothing more important than health and safety, and ‑ ‑ ‑

GRAHAM ATHERTON: No.

MATT BRETT: ‑ ‑ ‑ and OUR education, et cetera, football is a distraction that many fall for in some respects, but it's not the most important thing. But thank you for giving me that reassurance that Liverpool may get another trophy.

GRAHAM ATHERTON: I think it will do, I think it will do. And you say I think it's in the balance there, and I think it's part of the difficulties we’re facing, we want to see football back, but there are bigger challenges at the moment, and certainly it might help the game to think about itself, because it's like inequality, that's a profoundly unequal sport financially, [0:48:24.7] wise, and I think it's the smaller clubs, there's a lot of small clubs in England that are really important parts of our community, and that's Blackpool where I come from, the club there is a really important part of the community, but it's a small club, and the other clubs, like all economic, like many businesses, they're facing challenges at the moment, so I hope that the game gets itself together and makes sure that like in Access, we don't lose our community and football loses its community in the next year or so.

MATT BRETT: Maybe some of the money that goes towards these mega salaries and what not can be going to people that really need it in some respects. Thanks so much, Graham. That's it for this podcast. So glad to have been able to find time on our respective calendars to join in from our respective homes. So thank you so much for joining us.

GRAHAM ATHERTON: Thank you, Matt. Thank you for the invitation, and thank you Darlene as well for your work in setting this up, and yeah, I think I've really enjoyed the conversation. I hope that whatever I say is of some value to your colleagues in Australia and broader and we'll continue to work together, because it's the students that we serve again who will be most affected, as I said before this time, they need us.

MATT BRETT: Absolutely. So our listeners, thanks for joining us. We hope you've enjoyed this conversation and got some insights into the global significance of the equity agenda, and how we might all adjust to COVID‑19 in the future. Don't forget to subscribe, please rate the ADCET podcast as well, and leave the rating as it will help other people find this podcast series. So thank you so much.

ENDING: We just wanted to thank you again for listening to our podcast. As Matt mentioned if you are loving our podcasts please subscribe to our channel so you can keep up to date with our latest episodes, you can head over to our socials and website for some more great content -  [www.adcet.com.au](http://www.adcet.com.au/). In our next episode we will be hearing from a panel of university students on the autism spectrum who will discuss some of the challenges they face in their studies and what has helped them succeed, we hope you can join us again!