



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University

BUILDING LEGACY AND CAPACITY WORKSHOP 2 – CONCEPT AND OUTCOMES

Higher education participation and completion of regional and remote students

The University of Western Australia

Tuesday, 17 October 2017

Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series

Setting the Scene

The logic behind the concept:

- NCSEHE Board: strategic project to build legacy beyond the current funding period and leverage the NCSEHE funded research.
- Deepening some of the insights generated during the 10 Conversations at the NCSEHE 2016 National Forum.
- Developing a format that enables productive conversations about complex issues.

The objectives of the workshops are to:

- Define a collective knowledge base informed by research and practice.
- Engage in strategic and action planning to guide institutional practice and future research.
- Develop evidence-informed policy advice.

Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series

Structure of the Workshop

Six high-level questions frames the group discussion:

1. What are we trying to achieve? What does effective support for regional and remote students look like?
2. What do we know about the nature of the problem? Why is it difficult to deliver effective support to these students?
3. What do we know from current practice and research: What worked? What didn't work? And why?
4. What are the 'must have' elements of successful approaches? What are the common challenges and potential pitfalls?
5. How could the Australian Government, and State Governments, better support effective institutional support of regional and remote students?
6. Is there a gap in knowledge which impacts on the quality of policy and practice? If so, what kind of research is required to fill it?

Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series

Approach: Expert Workshops and Multi-Modal Dissemination

Expert Workshops:

- 10-12 subject matter experts approaching the topic from difference perspectives: researchers, equity practitioners, policy makers and community partners.
- Advance a national conversation at the intersection of equity research, practice and policy for the benefit of the sector.

Dissemination of insights generated during the workshop:

- Today's webinar.
- Publication: extended version of pre-reading document, including Good Practice Guide and recommendations for policy and research.
- Professional illustration to complement text.
- Presentation at the EPHEA Conference.

Workshop 2 Participants

Higher education participation and completion of regional and remote students

Kylie Austin	University of Wollongong
Rachel Callahan	Southern Cross University
Edward Campbell	University of New England
Buly Cardak	La Trobe University
Paul Corcoran	Department of Education and Training
Nicole Crawford	University of Tasmania
Sally Kift	JCU, La Trobe University & QUT Adjunct Professor
Steven Larkin	University of Newcastle
Karen Nelson	University of Sunshine Coast
Louise Pollard	University of Western Australia
Cathy Stone	University of Newcastle
Nadine Zacharias	Curtin University

What is the Problem?

Structural, institutional and policy challenges that impact on participation and completion outcomes of students from regional and remote areas

- Institutional and student characteristics associated with higher attrition rates reflect characteristics & demographic profile of regional universities (Higher Education Standards Panel discussion paper, 2017):
 - Higher proportions of equity and at-risk students (incl. regional and remote, Indigenous, low SES, online, part-time, mature age) at regional universities than at metropolitan ones (Nelson et al., 2017).
 - Regional institutions do the ‘heavy lifting’ in attracting students from regional and remote backgrounds to higher education and graduating them (Nelson et al., 2017).
- Flow of regional and remote students to metropolitan universities is increasing (Cardak et al., 2017) – depletion of ‘human capital’ from regions.

What is the Problem?

Structural, institutional and policy challenges that impact on participation and completion outcomes of students from regional and remote areas

- Capacity of regional universities to:
 - manage critical first encounters and expectations
 - address diverse and complex needs of students
 - create a sense of belonging

within a *massified* system with tight budgets (Nelson et al., 2017; Devlin & Mackay, 2017).
- Technology provides *opportunity* to overcome geographical limitations, creating supportive, online spaces; yet there are *constraints* of isolation, connectivity, digital literacy and learning design (Stone, 2017).
- Policy dilemma: How to offer choice, to meet diverse student needs?
- Focus on encouraging/supporting students to ‘go away’ to study on-campus, or on delivering education *locally* (e.g. online, on-campus, study hubs, blended/hybrid model)?

Challenges of Regionality

Well-established and structural

- Distance and isolation.
- Complexity of regional/remote communities.
- Benchmark for cost of delivery is urban.
- Scarcity of supporting infrastructure, including poor internet access, childcare, public transport.
- Labour markets.
- Finances, including transport costs.
- Lack of role models for HE participation.
- Intersection with school system: capacity to run co-curricular activities, including excursions and work experience; lower Year 12 completion rates.
- Intersection with under-funded VET system.

And How They Play Out in the Higher Education Context

Students and institutions

- Need to relocate/commute long distances: financial and emotional costs:
 - student and family debt implications
 - young people leaving home & community
 - loss of sense of place/belonging
 - isolation: impacts on student identity.
- Higher rates of online, part-time and mature-age students – implications for funding needs of regional institutions.
- Lack of pathways into HE, esp. for early school leavers and adults: universities need to bridge the gap left by de-funded VET sector.

Difficulties in Delivery, Especially to Online Students

Effective support strategies need to activate hearts, minds and resources

- **Quality of teaching and learning; student experience;** varies across different institutional levels and players.
- **Resourcing issues – finances & expertise;** capacity and capability of institutions to effectively address needs of their cohort; maintaining long-term commitment in face of frequent restructures.
- **Competition within and between sectors;** impacts on ability to deliver effective support structures across the tertiary education landscape.
- **Collaboration is crucial;** within and between institutions - senior managers plus academics plus professional staff.
- **A more sophisticated understanding of the cohort;** evidence rather than assumptions, including disaggregation of on-campus and online cohort.
- **Aligning expectations with reality;** of students about university AND of universities about students, esp. in terms of academic and digital literacies.
- **‘On-campus first’ mindset** increasingly unhelpful.

Defining Success

We will have achieved success when...

- There is *parity in participation and completion rates* for regional and remote students in HE.
- With higher representation of Indigenous students in regional/remote areas, *above parity* needs to be achieved for this equity group ('closing the gap' agenda).
- Students can choose from *a range of accessible university pathway options*; in the community, including on-campus, online, hybrid model of both; or moving away from home to university, with appropriate financial and emotional support.
- Students become equipped with the *capacity for a portfolio career*, i.e. equipped for a multitude of jobs, often simultaneous, over their working life.

Defining Success

Success across the student lifecycle

PRE-ACCESS

Prospective students perceive HE as an option to which they can aspire, and in which they can succeed.

ACCESS

Students are able to make informed course choices, and to have access to course of choice.

TRANSITION

School-leavers successfully make the transition to independent learning and life; career and personal transformations for mature-age students.

PARTICIPATION

Course progression, leaving well, re-engaging.

COMPLETION

Graduation, realising vocational destinations, continuing to further study as desired.

Demonstrating/Measuring Success

Possible options and open questions

- Are current metrics fit for purpose? What other data needs to be collected? What else needs to be measured?
- What benchmarking needs to be used? Against self over time; against others? Institutions vs the sector? How do we account for enrolment/progression of different cohorts across different status institutions and courses?
- Cost-benefit analyses?
- How do we capture the wider benefits of HE? Short vs. long-term outcomes?
- Do we need different signals of success at university beyond GPA, e.g. graduate learning outcomes (Lin Martin PhD)?

Good Practice Principles

Effective institutional support of regional and remote students

- Early and just-in-time.
- People-rich; collaborative; values regionality.
- Whole of curriculum, inclusive: anticipates and removes barriers; embedded.
- Universal: cohort approach; based on sophisticated understanding of cohort, including place-based solutions.
- Capacity building, including digital and academic literacies and cultural capital.
- Success focused: supported by policy and organisational structure; recognised and rewarded.
- Comprehensively evaluated, including reflective practice and continuous improvement.

Good Practice Case Studies

Diverse Approaches to supporting regional and remote students

STRATEGIC APPROACHES

University of Wollongong, James Cook University, University of Newcastle.

OPEN-ACCESS ENABLING PROGRAM

University of Tasmania.

BLENDED APPROACH TO TRANSITION OF ONLINE STUDENTS

Southern Cross University.

WRAPAROUND, TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED SERVICES FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

University of New England.

National Priorities Pool (NPP) Projects Focusing on Participation and Completion of Regional and Remote Students: 5 projects worth more than \$750k.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Possible Strategies to Enhance Current Practice

- Rethinking curriculum design, academic calendars, duration of courses, possibility of hybrid approaches to studying locally (regional campuses delivering mix of online/on-campus programs).
- Do not assume that students can be or are always on campus: design support for learning approaches and services for when learners need to access and use them, e.g.:
 - extending peer-mentoring to the online environment, including PASS
 - out of hours or extended support provision, esp. IT and academic skills.
- Offer targeted scholarships and bursaries, including for WIL placements, intensives, international mobility.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Possible Strategies to Enhance Current Practice

- Access to co-curricular opportunities, preferably specific to the student's local community; employability opportunities for credit available locally.
- Making regional and remote cohort 'visible' (incl. online cohort) e.g. by developing personas, providing graphic depictions of cohort, identifying a 'cloud/online' campus in institutional structure, thinking and vernacular.
- Students as co-creators with resources and capability.
- Explore the creation of study hubs (e.g. in libraries, community centres or local TAFEs) as places of connection and supported transition for online students (see policy recommendations).

Recommendations for Policy

Scenario 1: Current reform bill is passed by the Senate

Performance-Based Funding (7.5%): will influence institutional policy

- Best Case: Reward positive teaching and learning outcomes for regional and remote (and other equity) students.
- KPI: Retention rates for equity students – Improvement over time should be reported by course of study; issue: time lag and correlation of retention outcomes with regional institutions and diverse student cohorts.
- KPI: Success rates and ratios for equity students
- Possible new KPIs:
 - Performance against Higher Education Standards framework
 - Admission Transparency
 - Value add / distance travelled.

Recommendations for Policy

Scenario 1: Current reform bill is passed by the Senate

Study hubs: set them up as places of connection

- Use existing spaces, e.g. small regional campuses, libraries, schools , etcetera.
- Offer what's not already in community.
- Provide great connectivity: fast internet, no quota limits.
- Deliver student services on site, e.g. orientation, peer support.
- Generate engagement opportunities with parents, adult prospective students and the wider community.

Recommendations for Policy

Scenario 2: Alternatives to current reform bill

1. Utilise institutional funding agreements between DET and institutions to negotiate additional funding for regional and remote students, incl. sub-bachelor load and scholarships.
2. Improve income support for regional/remote students – Centrelink.
3. Funding of entry level qualifications HE and seamless financial support/loan schemes for transition between VET and HE.
4. Re-instate Teaching and Learning performance funding; linked to QILT.
5. Central platform for developing and sharing effective practice in teaching and learning and the student experience.
6. Re-invent Educational Investment Fund (EIF) to invest in connectivity/ bandwidth and capacity building, i.e. technology and people, as a national investment into the regions.
7. Encourage cross-sector collaboration - tailored to regions.
8. Address structural challenges associated with infrastructure, e.g. connectivity, public transport, secondary and vocational education, in regional/remote areas.

Gaps in Knowledge?

Need to know our students better!

- Identify sub-groups to illustrate their diversity following the lead of Louise Pollard for Regional and Remote cohorts.
- Link student data to relevant Centrelink data.
- Could the production of personas help to visualise the diversity of the student cohort?

Attribute credit for success:

- Dynamic tracking of students over time and across sectors/institutions at course level.
- CHESSN is the tool.



Questions & Comments



Thank You

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