



Progress Bulletin

February 2020

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2019/20 NCSEHE Equity Fellow

Enhancing student success: supporting the mental wellbeing of mature-aged students from regional and remote Australia

Project update

In this Equity Fellowship, I'm investigating proactive approaches to supporting the mental wellbeing of mature-aged undergraduate university students in, and from, regional and remote Australia. The topic is underpinned by **several significant issues in higher education**.

The research investigates two overarching questions:

1. What factors impact on the mental wellbeing of mature-aged undergraduate university students from regional and remote Australia?
2. What are proactive approaches that support the mental wellbeing of mature-aged undergraduate university students from regional and remote Australia?

The research design is explanatory, sequential mixed-methods, with the quantitative phase (student survey) occurring before, and informing, the qualitative phase (student interviews). Multiple conceptualisations of mental health and wellbeing inform the project, particularly self-determination theory. The research considers the students' settings, and this approach draws on ecological systems perspectives.

I commenced the Fellowship in July 2019. I spent the early months working on the literature review, fine-tuning the research design, preparing the ethics application, and developing the survey instrument. Once I received ethics approval, the next major task was to recruit universities across the country who were willing to administer the survey to the target group at their universities.

The support from universities and other networks has been beyond my expectations and has resulted in 2,410 mature-aged undergraduate university students from regional and remote Australia undertaking the survey; 760 of the survey participants indicated their interest in being involved in an interview. This response has been a researcher's dream. We have just finished conducting 51 in-depth one-on-one interviews.

Location of 51 interviewees



Australia-wide participants



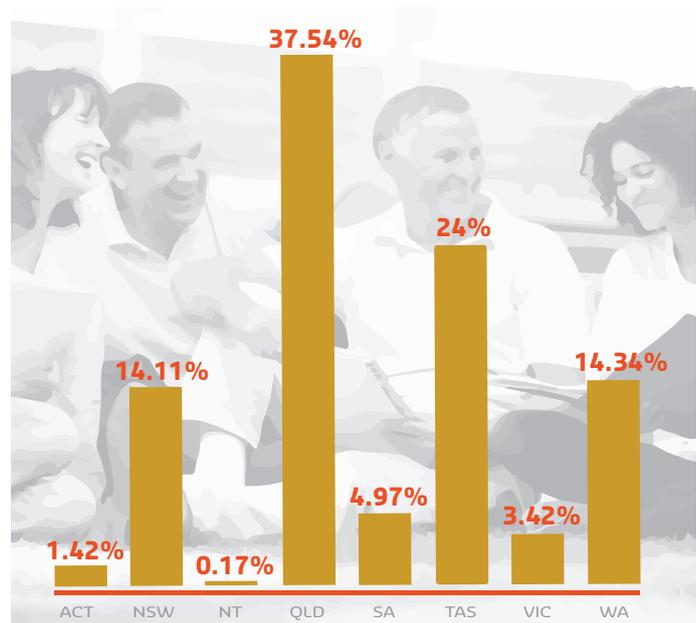
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So far, I have shared the research progress with the project Advisory Group and with a reference group of colleagues from the University of Tasmania’s Social Inclusion Community of Practice, via Zoom meetings in October. I presented at the Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) and the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) Conference, *Enabling Excellence through Equity*, in Wollongong, and the Country Universities Centre’s *Best practice in Regional Study Hubs Symposium* in Cooma/Jindabyne in November.

I want to acknowledge and thank the team of people around me, including research assistants and colleagues/critical friends who have been regular sounding boards at each stage of the research, and the project advisory group who have assisted me in multiple ways.

During the next couple of months, I’ll be occupied with data analyses, and a visit to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment in Canberra. I’m looking forward to sharing my findings and guidelines at conferences in June/July and beyond, visits to your universities, and through the project report when it is published later in the year.

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State or territory in which the survey participants are enrolled