



Progress Bulletin

June 2020

Dr Katelyn Barney
2020 NCSEHE Equity Fellow

Building a stronger evidence base to support effective outreach strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: Increasing impact and university participation

Overview of the project

My NCSEHE Equity Fellowship focuses on developing evidence to demonstrate success factors and highlight areas to strengthen outreach initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students. Many universities run outreach initiatives that attempt to elevate aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to go to university. However, research-based evidence of the impact of these programs is limited and there is a relative dearth of publicly available, peer-reviewed research or evaluation on the effects of outreach initiatives. This project will fill that gap by strengthening the evidence and research base about the effectiveness of intensive camp outreach strategies targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and assist in strengthening outreach programs by identifying effective practice. Improving the evidence base for “what works” in effective outreach camps will highlight the strengths of these programs and help improve and implement stronger programs to support the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education. This will be achieved through a high-quality research project that will build the evidence base of effective outreach intensive activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The program of activities builds on my established collaborations by working closely with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group.

Specifically, this project aims to:

1. identify the range of strategies used in Indigenous-specific intensive outreach programs across Australia
2. gain knowledge about number/nature/effectiveness of students transitioning into higher education that participate in school outreach activities
3. evaluate selected Indigenous-specific intensive outreach programs
4. develop strategies to strengthen outreach programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
5. strengthen the network of influential stakeholders and heighten the awareness of importance of effective evaluation.

This mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) project utilises a case study methodology to identify, summarise, and evaluate the range of outreach strategies used to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ access to higher education across Australia. The evaluation component draws on the ‘Equity Initiatives Framework’ (Bennett et al., 2015; Zacharias, 2017) and Smith’s (2017) ‘conceptual model of potential performance parameters to strengthen Indigenous higher education monitoring and evaluation in Australia’.

Phase 1 completed (January – March 2020)

- Held the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group meeting to ensure the aims and outcomes of the Fellowship were established. Despite COVID-19, we still managed to hold the Advisory Group Meeting with some members participating online rather than face-to-face.
- Undertook ethical clearance processes at The University of Queensland.
- Held numerous discussions with potential universities to organise case studies of outreach programs and five universities are now participating as case studies in the Fellowship.
- Completed mapping of outreach programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Phase 2 current activities (April – July 2020)

- Since gaining ethical clearance, I have begun data collection and I am currently undertaking interviews (by phone/Zoom/Skype) at the five university sites with:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students who participated in outreach programs while they were at school
 - outreach staff members who work on programs focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
 - caregivers/community members suggested by participating students.
- An online survey for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students has also been circulated nationally through Indigenous Studies Units/Centres across Australia.

Next phases for the project (August – December 2020)

- Analyse the data.
- Develop strategies to strengthen and improve outreach camps.
- Hold the second Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group meeting in October.
- A National Symposium to be held at The University of Queensland on Monday 23 November to disseminate project outcomes and results to key stakeholders and the Advisory Group.
- Complete the final report.

I'm grateful to the staff, students, and caregivers of students at the five universities who are participating in the Fellowship. Many thanks also to the members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group, Professor Bronwyn Fredericks (UQ), Professor Tracey Bunda (UQ), A/Prof Graeme Gower (Curtin University), Professor Martin Nakata (JCU), Professor Maria Raciti (USC), Clair Andersen (UTAS) and the Fellowship evaluator Professor Susan Page (UTS) for their advice and feedback so far in the project. Also, thank you to Hayley Williams for her research assistance.

If you would like to find out more about the project or would like to attend the National Symposium please contact me at k.barney@uq.edu.au.

Dr Katelyn Barney

2020 NCSEHE Equity Fellow
The University of Queensland
k.barney@uq.edu.au



Professor Tracey Bunda, Dr Katelyn Barney and Hayley Williams at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group meeting



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University



**THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND**
AUSTRALIA