

A whole of institution pathway program: Challenges and promises of collaborative design

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In 1990, the discussion paper *A fair chance for all* (DEET 1990) stated Australia's national equity objective for higher education was: 'to ensure that all Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education'. Aligning with that objective the *Bradley Review* (2008) required that institutions establish the educational conditions that promote the success of all, not just some students. Challenges are raised for academics and institutions with the 'massification agenda.' As Pitman et al note "[i]n the pursuit of mass higher education, fears are often expressed that the quality of higher education suffers as access is increased" (2015, p. 609). Enacting the widening participation agenda in an unstable policy environment is also challenging, requiring institutions to grapple with questions around priorities, standards and resourcing to meet the demands of successful participation. This presentation will provide a case study of a regional university attempting to centre a new pathways program within a whole of institution approach and evaluate the impacts of this approach on student outcomes.

In 2015, James Cook University (JCU) embarked on the delivery of a new open access pathways program – the Diploma of Higher Education in Townsville, Cairns, Singapore and Brisbane. The program has aspirations to support the widening participation agenda and provide a quality alternate pathway for students from diverse educational backgrounds. The program's whole of institution approach seeks to develop collaboration across the institution, including support services, diverse academic groups and service divisions. In this program 'intentional, structured, and proactive set of strategies' are being trialled to enhance engagement and success of students. This showcase presents experiences within the first year of the pathways program, that also explores the challenges of drawing together and collaborating within a range of institutional 'microenvironments' (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005) within the institution to enact a collaborative approach to pathway programs. The presentation highlights the tensions that surfaced in progressing such an approach, including traditional notions of academic and discipline identities, questions of institutional reputation and quality and competing notions of student preparedness for academic study. Evaluation data used to evaluate the program's first year, including retention information, student experience and success will also be presented.