

2019/20 NCSEHE EQUITY FELLOW

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education



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PROJECT INFORMATION

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

“This Fellowship will investigate proactive approaches to supporting the mental wellbeing of mature-aged, regional and remote university students in Australia. Significant issues underpin this focus, including the high levels of mental ill-health, which impact on students’ capacity to participate and succeed in higher education. In the recent QILT 2018 Student Experience Survey, ‘health and stress’ was the most cited reason why undergraduate students considered withdrawing, thus impacting on the students personally, and on retention and completion rates.

Regional and remote students are in the national spotlight, but attention is often paid to school leavers. This Fellowship will focus on the experiences of mature-aged students, a significant but under-researched aspect, whilst acknowledging the diversity that exists within the regional and remote cohort. In addition to the personal benefits of university study experienced by mature-aged students, small-scale research suggests that mature-aged students can have a profound impact on their university peers and on their families and communities. Gaining further insights into this group and enhancing their success is vital due to their potential influence on family and community attitudes toward education, on the regional workforce and on building regional sustainability.

In particular, the Fellowship will focus on how mature-aged, regional and remote students manage their mental health. Momentum is gaining in Australia in regard to high-level acknowledgement of health and wellbeing in university settings with recent reports (Baik et al., 2016, 2017; Higher Education Standards Panel, 2018; Orygen, 2017) and international blueprints, such as the Okanagan Charter, which highlight the need for holistic and institution-wide approaches to wellbeing. My contribution will complement institution-wide approaches with nuanced understandings of the needs and challenges of mature-aged, regional and remote students. My project will be student-centred and collaborative at each stage of the research process. The research will take a mixed-methods approach, with quantitative and qualitative phases that will culminate in a student-staff collaboration to develop guidelines for students and staff, and recommendations for policy and practice.”

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Curtin University