

Chapter 5

Diploma Pathway Programs: The Offerings of an Australian Pre-University Institute

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ABSTRACT

As a second chance for prospective students who do not meet initial Australian Higher Education (HE) entrance requirements, “pathway” providers attract (international) students early in their tertiary lifecycle to secure their destination. The pathway model that evolved in the 1980s-90s was developed to address the issue of attrition. This innovative model tailored a learning solution that enhanced student transition (i.e., cultural and social integration and academic support). Increasingly, “pathway” institutions offer valuable partnerships for the Australian HE sector, and it is beneficial to conduct research into this division to strengthen and improve the overall teaching and learning experience. There appears to be scant literature on pre-university pathway offerings within and beyond Australia; thus, the contents of this chapter explicates three diploma programs delivered at one particular institute during the period 2013-2015 in Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The Higher Education (HE) landscape is changing with the emergence of pathway colleges. In Australia, pre-university pathway programs articulate students into Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) i.e., universities, on the basis of them receiving significant units of credit upon successful completion and oftentimes equivalent to one full-year of study (Bode, 2013; Fiocco, 2006). Such movement of students from the pre-tertiary sector to HE is crucial to the success of the Australian Government’s plan to: (a) widen participation; and (b) meet its objective of raising the number of persons within the Australian population who have high-level skills.

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Focused on program and course offerings during the period 2013-2015, this descriptive chapter presents one ‘Navitas’ pathway institute in Australia that offers *three* pre-university diploma programs, including the most common in the non-university HE sector, ‘business’ (Norton, 2013, p. 27). According to Shah and Lewis (2010, p. 85), more than 70% of students who enter Navitas to undertake a diploma are international. Throughout this presentation, the term ‘international students’ or ‘students’ is specific to individuals enrolled on temporary student visas and who are almost exclusively Non-English Speaking Background (NESB).

BACKGROUND

Today, non-university HE providers (NUHEPs) play a significant role in the Australian tertiary landscape (Shah & Lewis, 2010; Shah & Sid Nair, 2013). In countries like Australia where the capacity of HE is unable to meet the demands of the wider population, private HE providers fill the gap between demand and supply in certain popular disciplines. One educational model proven to be successful in Australia is the partnership between public universities and private NUHEPs. Navitas is one of the largest private higher and vocational colleges in Australia. It currently has partnerships with eight Australian universities. The partnership includes students undertaking a one-year diploma with Navitas and a two-year undergraduate degree with the partner university. The motivation for most students who enter Navitas is the direct pathway it provides to the partner HEI upon ‘successful’ completion of a one-year diploma. A large proportion of students (more than 70%) who undertake a diploma are international.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Pre-University Pathway Model

International student recruitment is integral to the financial health of many HEIs worldwide, in addition to remaining an important means of attracting talent and expanding campus diversity. An environment of budgetary cuts and increasing competition has forced many HEIs to become strategic in their international recruitment efforts (Choudaha & Chang, 2012, p. 3). ‘Navitas’ is an Australian global education leader providing pre-university and university programs, English language courses, migrant education and settlement services, creative media education, professional development and corporate training services. There are more than 80,000 students across a network of over 100+ colleges and campuses in 25+ countries (Navitas, 2014). The origin of the Navitas ‘pathway’ model began with the establishment of the Perth Institute of Business and Technology (PIBT) in 1994. While the private sector had assumed a more significant role in international education within Australia at that time, PIBT heralded a new era of pathway colleges and extended public-private relationships beyond that previously established.

According to Shah and Lewis (2010), in Australia, ‘Navitas contributes to more than 30% of annual international student enrolments with more than AUD\$60 million turnover for two year degrees with more than 2500 students each year in each partnered university’ (p. 85). Pedagogically, the pathway model was predicated on the acceptance of students with lower academic entry requirements than for direct university entry. The model provided a ‘second chance’ (Norton, 2013; Ross & Gray, 2005; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009; Velliari & Pierce, 2017; Wheelahan, 2009a) to students who did not gain direct entry

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