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Education Direct: An Alternative Entry Pathway to Pre-service Teacher Education

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Abstract: Universities in Australia are offering alternative entrance pathways to attract students from a range of backgrounds. These alternative pathways will undoubtedly be reviewed due to the recommendation in the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) concerning increasing the diversity of university entrants. This paper discusses an alternative entry pathway, Education Direct (ED), offered by the School of Education at Edith Cowan University, and commences with a review of the literature about such pathways. The next section explores the development and nature of the ED pathway, before outlining the research design and identifying the research questions, which concentrate on retention, academic achievement, and progression rates of ED students. The findings indicate that students who have entered pre-service teacher education via ED are enjoying academic success at comparable levels to students who enrolled through more traditional pathways. Furthermore, their retention and progression rates are not notably different to those of other students.

Introduction

Institutions of higher education have been dominated by the privileged of society for centuries. Competition for a position, either as a student or an academic, within a recognised institution increases with the level of standing the particular institution enjoys within the social culture in which it is situated. Recognition of the under-representation of particular social, cultural and ethnic groups within higher education has been identified as an issue by in two recent Australian reports: *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) and the *Top of the Class Report* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007). In the latter report it is suggested (4.3, p. 36) that universities develop alternative pathways of entry to teacher education in order to increase the diversity of entrants.

Strategies to encourage members of these groups to participate in higher education have been developed and trialled in Australian universities. Indeed, the University Admission Centre's website demonstrates the large number of programs made available by Australian universities (http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/admission/alternative-entry.shtml), but despite these attempts percentages of total student population from identified target groups remains largely unchanged (Bradley et al, 2008, p. 28). Although increased attention is being given to the issue of increasing university access for students from diverse backgrounds, as

evidenced by the initiation of The Social Inclusion in Education conferences, which first commenced in 2009 (http://www.informa.com.au/conferences/education/the-2nd-annual-social-inclusion-in-education), higher education appears to still be accessed largely by the franchised even though it is promoted as the right of every individual to be able to meet their potential.

This paper explores the progress of students who entered pre-service teacher education through an alternative entrance pathway that addresses social inclusion in higher education. The pathway is known as Education Direct and operates in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University (ECU).

Literature Review

While there is a wealth of information on alternative university entrance pathways (for example, http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/admission/alternative-entry.shtml), there appears to be a dearth of research that tracks issues such as retention, academic achievement and progression rates of students who enter pre-service teacher education through such pathways. Consequently, this literature review will concentrate on international examples of increasing access to university education for disadvantaged groups, information contained in *The Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al, 2008) that relates to diversifying university student populations, the work of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), before discussing research associated with two universities, which offer alternative entrance pathways.

At the international level there are numerous examples of government policies to increase access to universities and higher education for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. As discussed by Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley (2009) there has been a global trend towards a state of massification of higher education, with a 53% increase in students in higher education in the period 2000 to 2009 (p. iv). The authors cite a number of examples from around the globe including policies designed to increase access to university for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Mexico, India), women (Ghana, Kenya and Uganda), the disabled (Brazil) and loan schemes (Chile, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa). However, inequalities persist, particularly in rural and remote areas, with sub-Saharan Africa having the lowest participation rate of five per cent (Altbach et al, 2009, p. iv).

The final report of the 'Review of Australian Higher Education' (Bradley et al., 2008) and the subsequent Commonwealth Government response, *Universities, Innovation and Education Revolution* (Commonwealth Government, 2009), foreshadow significant reforms in the higher education sector, which will impact on all Australian universities. In particular the recommendations related to funding being based on student load in a competitive environment; and targets to increase university participation and graduation rates, and increased participation rate for students from a low socio-economic background will probably impact on strategic thinking regarding entrance pathways and provision of support for an increasingly diverse student population among Australian university leaders. Specific to teacher education the issue of (university) student diversity had previously been raised in 2007 in the report released by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into Teacher Education. Essentially, regarding this issue, the *Top of the Class Report* recognised the importance of increasing the diversity of the teacher education student population in Australia, while emphasising that students need to be provided with the support necessary to succeed. As Garnett (2010) discusses, these initiatives have important implications for the ECU School of Education's entry pathways and strategies for dealing with student diversity

(p. 4).

Historically, a number of groups have been significantly under-represented in higher education in Australia, with little change over the last decade. The *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al, 2008) comments that the most under-represented groups are students from remote parts of Australia, Indigenous students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. In 2007, only 1.1 per cent of people from remote areas participated in higher education, while the proportion of people from remote areas in the general population was 2.5 per cent. This review also revealed that participation of Indigenous people was 1.3 per cent (compared with representation in the population of 2.2 per cent); participation of people from a low socio-economic background was 15 per cent (compared with 25 per cent) and participation of rural and regional students was 18.1 per cent (compared with 25.4 per cent).

Given the projected shortfall in the number of suitably qualified people to meet Australia's workforce needs over the medium to long term, the failure to capitalise on the abilities of all Australians is a significant economic issue for the nation. It is also a matter of serious concern that individuals are discouraged from participating in, or denied access to, the economic and social opportunities which a higher education provides. Some comparable countries have also become concerned about this issue and have recently improved their performance in this area (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 10).

Australia continues to perform poorly against international measures in gaining access to higher education for certain social groups. Over the last 10 years there has been an increase of 60,000 enrolments in the number of students from under-represented groups. These increases are not evenly spread across the groups and some groups remain seriously under-represented, with the most seriously under-represented group continuing to be students from low socio economic backgrounds, students from regional and remote areas and Indigenous students (Bradley et al., 2008, 3.2.1 pp.27- 29).

The development of an increasingly diverse student population creates considerable challenges regarding the curriculum and pedagogies employed in Teacher Education courses. As Garnett (2010, p. 10) observes, the student population has variable levels of prior educational achievement, different life experiences (e.g. age, career stage, cultural background, first language, facility with modern technologies), different learning styles and different expectations regarding the flexibility of courses.

At a national level, the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) established the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) at the University of South Australia. Launched in 2009 and located within the University of South Australia, this research centre "informs student equity policy and practice in Australian higher education" (http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/ncsehe/default.asp). The Centre's research program is guided by three themes: aspiration, mobility and voice (http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/ncsehe/default.asp), within which access to universities and higher education for students from previously under-represented groups: for example, those from low socio-economic backgrounds), is located. One of the key activities of the Centre has been the development of a site "supporting dynamic collegial networks and providing opportunities to better locate information and scholarship …" (www.equity101.info). With the stated aim of better facilitating "…collaboration and research for those from around the world with interests in widening participation, student equity and social inclusion in education, while also raising the profile of those who work in the field as practitioners and managers" (www.equity101.info), the site contains a plethora of articles relating to equity issues in universities and higher education.

There is evidence of Australian universities implementing alternative entrance

pathways and attempting to improve access to higher education. Eckersley, Davies, Edwards, Vernuccio and Williams (2009) discuss the impact of Victoria' University's 'Access and Success' project, implemented in Melbourne schools with large numbers of recent arrivals, students whose first language is not English and where few family members are participating in higher education. Their preliminary findings show that "… school-university partnerships that develop school-based professional learning teams of teachers, preservice teachers and university staff can plan, implement and evaluate innovative projects that can both enhance school student learning and expose them to higher education/vocational learning and career pathways upon graduation" (p. 10).

The University of Sydney has its long running 'Compass' aspirant program (Hayes & Bloomfield, 2009) conducted with four low SES high schools, together with their feeder primary schools. The program has an overall aim of encouraging students from low socio-economic backgrounds to participate in higher education. Research associated with the program shows that students from the low socio-economic status urban areas have similar levels of retention and success in higher education, as those from other backgrounds. It is these aspects (student retention and success) of the ECU School of Education ED program that are discussed in detail in this paper.

What is Education Direct?

The stated aim of the Education Direct project in 2006 was to recruit school leavers into undergraduate Teacher Education courses who would normally not be considering university as an option due to course selection, home circumstance or adversity. In its first year, to be eligible to apply students needed to have excelled in a non-Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) course and not be eligible for a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER), that is have completed 3 or less TEE subjects and a range of Wholly School Assessed (WSA) subjects. The latter, as the name suggests, are subjects, approved by the year 11 and 12 curriculum authority, the Western Australian Curriculum Council, which are not subject to external examinations set by the Council (as is the case with TEE subjects). As discussed further in this paper, in 2009 changes to the years 11 and 12 curriculum resulted in alterations to university entrance requirements, with consequent changes to Education Direct entrance pathway criteria.

In 2008 the eligibility requirements for Education Direct were brought into line with the stated minimum entry requirements for ECU Portfolio Entry. Candidates had to attain a minimum points score from 4 subjects completed in year 12, which could be Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) level or identified Wholly School Assessed (WSA) subjects; passing English was mandatory.

Identification of likely candidates is undertaken at the school level by the Principal or his/her nominated representative. This component is essential in attracting high quality pre-service teachers from a pool of students who may never have considered that university was a possibility for them. The candidates are required to complete an application form, write a letter of application and attend the University for an interview with the Partnership Director or a course representative. The interview closely follows that of the Portfolio Pathway to maintain parity and standards. An indication of success or rejection is given at the end of the interview, but no formal offer of a place is made until January the next year, once the Curriculum Council has confirmed results.

The first year of the program in 2007 encountered a number of problems. The initiative was launched too late in the school year to effectively promote the program and attract candidates. Most schools responded saying the year 12s had finished or that it was too

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late to be effective. Sixty four government and independents schools, in an extensive geographic area bounded by Mandurah to the south, Armadale to the east and Bullsbrook to the north were contacted by mail. They did not necessarily have a strong partnership with ECU. Nevertheless, thirty-six candidates did apply and went through the interview process.

The 2007 intake commenced in the same manner as all other first years even though they had not had the same academic preparation as their counterparts. Without any special induction or mentoring this group of students was likely to have more than the 'normal share' of difficulties in adapting to university life. The students were not identified in the courses for any special induction or attention. Consequently, the attrition rate was higher than for other entry pathways such as TER or Portfolio, with relevant data being discussed in the research section of this paper.

In July 2007 the position of Partnership Director for the School of Education was created, with a component of this portfolio to coordinate Education Direct. The initial tasks of this position included establishing clear guidelines of selection, identifying social equity in access to university as the focus and working with a small group of close partnership schools that ECU strategically wanted to build relationships with.

The number of schools included in Education Direct in 2007 (for student entrance in 2008) was restricted to 20 across all three systems of education. Each school already had a strong partnership with ECU in terms of the number of students that come to ECU as undergraduates, involvement in research projects, having ECU pre service teachers on practicum placement, provision of sessional staff, proximity to Mt Lawley (5 kilometres from Perth) or Joondalup (approximately 30 kilometres north of Perth) campuses and importantly located in a low socio economic area or draw students from low SES areas. ECU's regional campus at Bunbury (approximately 170 kilometres south of Perth) was not included in Education Direct. Keeping the number to 20 meant ECU was able to offer a special relationship and enabled personal visits by the Partnership Director to every school to promote Education Direct and establish bonds with staff and students.

Schools were asked to nominate students with one or more of the following attributes: low socio economic background; had experienced adversity or hardship on their way through high school; first generation of their family to attend university; male; Indigenous; may have a disability; and, preferably, but not necessarily, studying a non TEE course and achieving outstanding results in their course.

Working with the small number of schools produced excellent results. Schools were very supportive of the program and well informed about the type of student ECU was encouraging to apply for entrance. Numbers of applications increased markedly as the data presented in the research analysis section shows, rising to 51 applicants in 2007.

The 2008 intake was the first group to receive special support. Prior to commencing university they were invited to attend a specifically prepared induction, over three days, which covered academic writing skills, academic research, referencing, introduction to ECU ICT software programs, library orientation and campus orientation. A side benefit was that the students were able to meet fellow students starting in the same course who came via the same pathway as themselves. Students who took advantage of this induction course were very confirming of its benefits. A peer support program was also introduced in 2008 for Education Direct students. In order for the Education Direct entry students not to feel especially identified the School of Education held several small functions for all first year pre-service teachers in all courses to commence the support program and link up mentors and students.

Development

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During the next two years, 2009 and 2010, the number of schools involved has been increased to 33. Successful promotion of the program has resulted in an overall number of 273 students now having commenced studying for their undergraduate degree.

A change to the Western Australian curriculum structure and assessment in 2009 from Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) and Wholly School Assessed (WSA) subjects to Courses of Study (CoS) and compulsory examinations for courses studied at stage 2 or 3 resulted in the universities changing the method of calculation of the 2009 ATAR. This has had a consequent impact on how the minimum standards for ECU Portfolio Entry are calculated.

The universities collectively determined, through the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC), that an ATAR may be calculated on the results from a minimum of four (4) CoS at level 2 or better. ECU Portfolio Entry also set the minimum of four (4) CoS at level 2 in year 12, one of which must be a pass in English at level 2 or better. As Education Direct is linked to Portfolio Entry it was feared that the minimum requirements might now be so high that the target group of students would not qualify for admission. Whilst the number of applicants for Education Direct decreased and some schools lodged their dissatisfaction with the university, it has now become evident that the issue was more related to school based counselling than university entry requirements. Many schools had opted to counsel Vocational Education Training (VET) type students into level 1 CoS for both years 11 and 12 and offer only level 2 CoS to those wishing to gain an ATAR, resulting in very few students completing the more rigorous and academically demanding level 3 CoS. Schools commented that they did not need Education Direct for the ATAR students as they expected to gain admission based on their ATAR. Most of Education Direct's previously targeted students had been counselled into level 1 CoS for both years 11 and 12, thus not meeting 2010 minimum entry requirements, even though many were capable of completing level 2 courses of study. Minimum academic admission requirements for Education Direct and Portfolio entry for 2011 have been adjusted to accommodate students not completing a CoS aimed at an ATAR. Students now must complete at least three CoS at stage 2 or better and at least one stage 1 CoS. English must be passed in a pair of units at a minimum of stage 2.

Education Direct and Portfolio entry are viewed as viable alternative entry pathways because admission can be calculated on the student's final school result as opposed to their final moderated results, an element that is attractive to both students and schools. Students completing year 12 studying the courses described above often do well in school based assessment, but when moderated against all students in the state completing stage 2 and 3 courses then their results are often negatively affected.

Research Design

The research is designed as a comparative case study from 2007-2009, with entrance figures only provided for 2010. The cases comprise of comparing the experiences of the Education Direct students and their counterparts who entered undergraduate teacher education through either Portfolio or TISC (TEE ranking) pathways 2007-2009. The design enables the monitoring of academic success, engagement and retention rates.

Ethics clearance attached to this research does not allow the identification of individual students so all data is anonymous. ECU records made available do not allow the identification of the students' previous high school. The correlation between success at university and careful identification at high school for nomination to be included in the Education Direct program would be a useful piece of information in supporting schools in selection of future students.

Research Questions

1: What is the retention rate of Education Direct entry students in total? How does this compare with Portfolio and TISC entry students?
2: What is the level of academic success of Education Direct Entry students as compared to portfolio and TISC entry students? How does this compare with Portfolio and TISC entry students?
3: What is the rate of progression of the Education Direct students in their courses? How does this compare with Portfolio and TISC entry students?

Findings

The data in Table 1 show the chronological development of Education Direct 2007-2010. The number of offers made in total to students applying for entry via Education Direct, the number accepted and the number enrolled as at May 2010. Based upon this initial set of data it can be concluded that of the 293 students who were offered places over the 4 years, 273 accepted and commenced a course, with 50 of those having discontinued. With 223 students still engaged in their course, Education Direct has an average of 81.7% retention rate over the four intakes 2007-2010, a statistic that points to the overall success of the program in terms of student retention.

DESTINATION		YEAR OFFERED PLACE				Total
		2007	2008	2009	2010	
Enrolled/Intermit/Deferred	N	15	31	83	77	206
	%	42	61	75	80	70
Unconfirmed/Inactive	N			4		4
(not currently enrolled in units)	%			4		1
Enrolled in different course at ECU	N	3	2	5	3	13
(e.g. University Preparation, Nursing, Commerce)	%	8	4	5	3	4
Discontinued	N	16	13	16	5	50
	%	44	25	15	5	17
Offer rejected or lapsed	N	2	5	2	11	20
	%	6	10	2	11	7
Total	N	36	51	110	96	293
	%	100	100	100	100	100

Table 1: Education Direct Offers by Year of Intake and Destination (at May 2010)

Table 2 presents a more detailed account of student destinations and provides details of the timing of when students have withdrawn from their course. It can clearly be seen that the first intake in 2007 has suffered the highest attrition rate with only 15 or 42% of the cohort continuing through to the final year of their education course in 2010. Three students (8%) of the 2007 cohort continue in other faculties within ECU.

DESTINATION		YEAR OFFERED PLACE				Total
		2007	2008	2009	2010	
Enrolled in Teacher Education	n	15	28	76	71	190
	%	42	55	69	74	65
Intermit	n		2	5		7
	%		4	5		2
Deferred	n		1	2	6	9
	%		2	2	6	3
Unconfirmed/Inactive	n			4		4
(not currently enrolled in units)	%			4		1
Enrolled in different course at ECU	n	3	2	5	3	13
(e.g. University Preparation, Nursing, Commerce)	%	8	4	5	3	5
Discontinued within 1st Semester	n	5	3	5	5	18
	%	14	6	5	5	6
Discontinued after 1st Semester	n	8	9	9		26
	%	22	18	8		9
Discontinued after changing course	n	3	1	2		6
(e.g. Psychology, Creative Industries, Forestry, Commerce)	%	8	2	2		2
Rejected offer	n		3		6	9
	%		6		6	3
Offer lapsed	n	2	2	2	5	11
	%	6	4	2	5	4
Total	n	36	51	110	96	293
	%	100	100	100	100	100

Table 2: Education Direct Offers by Year of Intake and (detailed) Destination (at May 2010)

Table 3 provides evidence of the program improving over time in the retention of students who have enrolled by the Education Direct pathway. Since 2007 schools have been briefed more thoroughly by the Partnership Director on the selection process, subsequently becoming more selective in the students they have recommended for consideration for Education Direct. As the numbers of each cohort have increased the number of students withdrawing has decreased. The introduction of the student induction and support programs in 2008 has in some measure played a part in the retention and academic success of the Education Direct students, although this is not measurable by these data. The overall retention figure of 81.7% compares favourably with other forms of entry pathway to the same courses as shown in the comparative data presented in Table 4 below.

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CURRENT ENROLMENT STATUS		YEAR OF INTAKE				Total
		2007	2008	2009	2010	
Enrolled/Intermit/Deferred	n	15	31	83	77	206
	%	44	67	77	91	75
Unconfirmed/Inactive	n			4		4
(not currently enrolled in units)	%			4		1
Enrolled in different course at ECU	n	3	2	5	3	13
(e.g. University Preparation, Nursing,	%	9	4	5	4	5
Commerce)						
Discontinued	n	16	13	16	5	50
	%	47	28	15	6	18
Total	n	34	46	108	85	273
	%	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3: Education Direct Enrolments by Year of Intake and Current Status (at May 2010)

Comparative Data
Weighted Average Marks

In addition to comparing the retention rates by entry pathway, statistical analyses were undertaken to compare students' weighted average marks based on entry pathway. Table 4 presents the data on which these analyses were undertaken.

		Weighted Average Mark			
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Education Direct	158	57.7	11.4	6.3	78.3
TEE	492	62.4	11.7	2.2	84.3
Other Entry Pathways	427	59.2	10.6	10.3	80.0
Total	1077	60.5	11.4	2.2	84.3

Table 4: Comparison of Weighted Average Mark by Basis of Admission into Teacher Education Courses 2007-2009

Students mean Weighted Average Marks were compared using one way analysis of variance. For the entire 2007-2009 cohort, the basis of admission into Teacher Education courses was found to have a significant effect on students' Weighted Average Marks (WAMs). Employing the Bonferroni post-hoc test, significant differences were found between TEE and Education Direct ($p<0.001$), and TEE and Other Entry Pathways ($p<0.001$). The observed differences between Education Direct and Other Entry Pathways were *not* statistically significant.

However, it should be noted that with large samples such as this (>1000), statistical significance can be obtained even when the differences are quite small and of no real practical significance or importance. Since the largest difference between mean WAMs is only 4.7, and all are greater than 55, it is reasonable to infer that Education Direct students are performing quite well in relation to other Teacher Education students.

Tests of statistical significance were also undertaken by basis of admission by year of entry, with Table 5 showing the data on which these tests were performed.

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			Weighted Average Mark			
		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
2007	Education Direct	28	57.6	8.3	30.2	68.3
	TEE	192	61.7	12.0	2.2	84.3
	Other Entry Pathways	122	59.8	10.8	10.3	76.8
	Total	342	60.7	11.4	2.2	84.3
2008	Education Direct	38	56.3	14.5	12.8	78.3
	TEE	151	63.3	11.5	2.2	80.5
	Other Entry Pathways	138	58.6	11.0	12.3	76.3
	Total	327	60.5	11.9	2.2	80.5
2009	Education Direct	92	58.4	10.8	6.3	76.7
	TEE	149	62.3	11.5	13.0	82.1
	Other Entry Pathways	167	59.4	10.1	22.0	80.0
	Total	408	60.2	10.9	6.3	82.1

Table 5: Comparison of Weighted Average Mark by Basis of Admission into Teacher Education Courses and Year of Entry

One way analysis of variance was again used to determine whether the basis of admission has a significant effect on students' weighted average marks (WAMs). For the 2007 cohort, the observed differences were not statistically significant ($F_{(2, 339)}$ = 2.197, p=0.113). However, significant differences were found for the 2008 ($F_{(2,324)}$ = 8.807, p<0.001) and 2009 cohorts ($F_{(2, 405)}$=4.763, df=2, p=0.009). In particular, significant differences were found between TEE and Education Direct (2008 p<0.001; 2009 (p=0.017), and TEE and Other Entry Pathways (2008 p=0.002; 2009 p=0.045). The observed differences between Education Direct and Other Entry Pathways were *not* statistically significant for any year of admission. However, as noted earlier, with large samples statistical significance can be obtained even when the differences are quite small and of no real practical significance – as seems to be the case here. Overall, the Education Direct students are performing reasonably well when compared to TEE and Other Entry Pathway students.

Retention Rates

Tables 6 and 7 show, respectively, comparative data of retention rates by year offered place and by basis of admission.

Basis of Admission	Year Offered Place					
	2007		2008		2009	
	Final Destination		Final Destination		Final Destination	
	Still enrolled at ECU	Discontinued	Still enrolled at ECU	Discontinued	Still enrolled at ECU	Discontinued
	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
Education Direct	18	16	33	13	92	16
TEE	153	50	126	34	134	32
Other Entry Pathways	90	45	118	34	151	34

Table 6: Comparison of retention rates by year offered place (across all three pathways)

Table 6 shows the comparison of retention rates for the years 2007-2009 for each entrance pathway. Chi-square analysis revealed that the only statistically significant difference (p=0.05) was for Education Direct students in 2007 whose retention rate was lower than both other entrance pathways. This may be partially explained by the absence of induction and mentoring programs specifically designed for such students.

		Basis of Admission					
		Education Direct		TEE		Other Entry Pathways	
		Final Destination		Final Destination		Final Destination	
		Still enrolled at ECU	Discontinued	Still enrolled at ECU	Discontinued	Still enrolled at ECU	Discontinued
		Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
Year Offered Place	2007	18	16	153	50	90	45
	2008	33	13	126	34	118	34
	2009	92	16	134	32	151	34

Table 7: Comparison of retention rates by basis of admission (across 2007, 2008, 2009)

In table 7 the retention rates by basis of admission across all three are shown. Chi-square analysis revealed that the retention rates for Education Direct and Other Entry Pathways were statistically significantly different (p=0.05) when compared to students admitted based on their TEE results. Essentially, this shows that the SoE is improving at managing and retaining its alternative pathways students.

Progression Rates

Progress Rate (PR) refers to the proportion of student's load passed over the total load. According to data supplied by the University the PR of Education Direct (ED) entry students in comparison to TEE (ATAR) entry and Other (Portfolio) entry pathways has steadily improved from 2007 to 2009.

When compared to the TEE (ATAR) entry students across the suite of undergraduate Education courses ED students PR exceeded TEE in 2 courses and was under in 5 in 2007, exceeded in 2 and under in 3 in 2008 and exceeded in 2 and was under in 6 in 2009. Clearly the TEE (ATAR) entry students are achieving better progression rates than the ED. When compared to Other (Portfolio) entry pathways the PR has become more equitable as the program has progressed.

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In 2007 ED exceeded Other (Portfolio) in 2 courses and was under for 5. In 2008 ED exceeded Other (Portfolio) in 3 courses and was under in 3 and by 2009 exceeded in 4 courses and was under in four courses. ED students are progressing in their courses at similar rates to Other (Portfolio) entry pathways, but achieve significantly different progression rates to TEE (ATAR) students.

Conclusions

The conclusions to be drawn from an examination of the data gathered and presented here are that students entering undergraduate teacher education via this alternative entry pathway are enjoying success in their course at a comparable level to their TISC and portfolio counterparts. The retention rate of 81.7 % in conjunction with the weighted average course mark is indicative of most students achieving academic success in their courses at a level marginally below portfolio entry and only 3 or 4 marks below students who have gained an ATAR (TEE). The Education Direct students are progressing at acceptable rates in their respective courses given that the acceptable university level is 80% and Ed students are progressing close to or above that level. There is variance with this figure between different cohorts which points to selection processes being improved over time.

The strengths and success determinates of this alternative entry pathway lay in its design and attention to supporting the carefully selected students. The appointment of a Partnership Director who has responsibility for developing and overseeing the conduct of the program is a key strategy of ECU. The close partnering between the schools and the university and the trust placed in the principals to select only students for nomination that they would be happy to have back in their school upon graduation ensures that the quality of student entering university is high and likely to have academic success. Programs of induction and support, especially in semester one, first year have paid dividends. The Education Direct students enjoy comparable success to their counterparts, particularly if given focussed support in transitioning to university life. The diversity of students who have taken up undergraduate teacher education courses as a result of this alternative pathway of entry has boosted the potential of the future teaching workforce.

Further Research

Building upon the data collected in this project, further research to obtain more longitudinal data will be beneficial in assessing the long term success of Education Direct. There have been a significant number of students leave their courses (50; 19.3%) who have not had an exit interview. Information gained from exiting students may well be of benefit in reviewing student selection processes, transition programs and course content and delivery.

Ethics approval for this research did not extend into tracking individual student results. Associated with this tracking could be the opportunity to interview academic staff members with whom these alternative entry students are working. Such research, which includes following the academic pathways of individual students, would contribute to knowledge about alternative university entrance pathways.

Future research, similar to that discussed in this paper, should provide information that will contribute to the existing media debate that often ridicules, in an anecdotal way, alternative entry pathways as being somewhat below par, a lowering of standards. It is only by close examination and publication of results that the critics can be muted and/or the pathway selection processes improved. Everybody deserves the right to be given the

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opportunity to reach their potential, and future research may well provide the data that demonstrates that alternative university entrance pathways do not reduce academic standards.

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