| CASE STUDY

COLLABORATING IN A TIME OF CRISIS: THE AUSTRALIAN PILOT OF THE CARNEGIE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CLASSIFICATION

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COVID-19 has touched all aspects of our society. The broad reach of the pandemic means that in years to come, every person, from every corner of the globe, will have a story to tell about the moment that we all now share.

The extraordinary nature of our current times exaggerates and brings into sharp focus, fundamental aspects of our society. Despite the shared experience, the ebbs and flows of our progress reveal

the differences in our world. We are all impacted – but not in the same way.

Today, those at the margin carry the weight of this pandemic. Whether or not they continue to do so into the future will in part depend on the role that various actors in society take up at this time. We all have a role to play. The age-old question that we are asking is: what does this look like for the higher education sector and how do we hold ourselves to account?

Indeed, we have asked this of ourselves before; a constant question as old as universities themselves; a question that peaks in volume at times of crisis – with COVID-19 being the current instigator. In an increasingly complex world, the present-day pandemic is only one example of such a crisis moment. In an Australian context, it was the bushfires before, and it will no doubt present in a new form into the future.

As we shape our answer to the question that we are holding, therefore, it is wise to consider what is needed alongside an immediate response, to help us retain the learnings and share knowledge across the sector. Doing so will enable us to progress higher education's contribution to public good across time.

The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification offers a framework for undertaking this enquiry and the tracking of progress. First established in the United States of America (USA) in 2006, the classification offers universities the opportunity to demonstrate community partnered and collaborative contribution to society, and to share effective practice.

Inspired by the promise of this framework,

nine Australian universities have been working together as part of a national pilot that seeks to explore the potential that this classification system offers our sector and its relevance to an Australian context. Led by University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and Charles Sturt University (CSU), the pilot brings together Australian Catholic University, Central Queensland University, Flinders University, La Trobe University, Southern Cross University, University of the Sunshine Coast and Western Sydney University. With the intention of learning through action, the institutions have undertaken a mock trial of the US classification process and will use this experience to shape a potential Australian framework.

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Participating institutions have submitted their trial application and are awaiting feedback from the USA review team. This pause has offered us an opportunity to take a moment to reflect. In so doing, we have identified some of the emerging benefits that come with the adoption of a locally contextualised Carnegie Community Engagement Classification as a framework, three of which are shared here.

The first is that the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification is not only trialled and tested, but we adopt the learning lessons gained from iterations of its implementation and development. Currently, 359 institutions carry the classification in the United States. Some have earned the badge for the first time, while others have journeyed down the path of continuous self-improvement and gained periodic reclassifications. The experience of the collective has contributed to the ongoing development of the system itself. An openness to learning, underpinned by continuous research, has enabled the classification system to be responsive to emerging effective practice. As a result, the framework had developed with each iterative round. This history and rigour has positioned the classification as a leading framework for the assessment of engaged scholarship and practice. The cycling of learning and regeneration ensures that the classification system retains relevancy. The deep connection with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification team has connected us to this history and brought great learning, amongst other benefits.

Though founded in the United States, the

classification began broadening its reach through a process of internationalisation. In 2018, a series of pilots set to test the applicability of the classification crossed several regions including Ireland, Canada and, of course, Australia. This internationalisation brings with it the second benefit. The Canadian and Australian pilots commenced simultaneously. The side-by-side experiences have allowed us to benchmark where relevant and to enhance learning through shared reflection. Though separated geographically, we have much in common with our Canadian counterparts and can engage in deep learning through our similarities – and indeed, our differences. As the internationalisation grows, so will our capacity to deeply engage with a broader international network.

The process of internationalisation is asking each nation to create a contextualised framework. The emphasis on contextualisation ensures that what we gain from our international colleagues is filtered through local experience and knowledge. For the Australian pilot, we have facilitated extensive involvement from the sector. In addition to the nine institutions participating in the pilot, several universities are engaging with the process as observers. These include Curtin University, Deakin University, Federation University, James Cook University, Swinburne University, University of Canberra, University of Sydney, University of Tasmania, University of Western Australia and University of Wollongong. Our approach means that close to half the sector are involved from the onset. With a willingness and desire to involve

others, we are setting out to shape what an Australian framework might look like. For the sector to take a leading role in this process is critical. At a time when we are pulled in a multitude of directions and have to respond to as many pressures, it is essential for us to determine what success looks like and how we track our progress towards our public purpose mission.

A final, and possibly most significant benefit has resulted from the collegial and genuinely collaborative process that has underpinned the Australian pilot. The nine participating institutions have met regularly to share knowledge and approach. The fact that the classification sets a bar in terms of the standard we want to see means that, with each other's support, all of us can achieve this standard. We can then raise the bar and aspire to do better. This is what enhancing the higher education sector's contribution to public good should look like.

The pilot process we are engaged in is set to culminate in the shaping of the Australian version of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. The Australian framework will build on the historic knowledge of the existing classification, and it will be informed by local knowledge and expertise. Following the assessment of our trial applications to the Carnegie review team, a convening of the Australian higher education sector will begin the process of these deliberations. This undertaking is set to take place in September 2020. A successful pilot will result in the launch of the framework in Australia in 2021 under the auspice of Engagement Australia.

We all have a responsibility to shape how this story unfolds. By weaving our

experiences together and investing in a system that will share our learning across the sector for generations to come, we might be able to formulate a response to that age-old question. What does our contribution to public good look like and how do we hold ourselves to account?