



**The University of Newcastle**  
**English Language and Foundation Studies Centre**

**Strengthening Research Capacity**  
**Research Plan for 2013-2014**

**1. Introduction**

The English Language and Foundation Studies Centre (ELFSC) has been offering enabling programs for the last four decades. ELFSC has provided a stepping stone for many domestic and international students to access tertiary education. The Centre has truly provided an alternative choice for many diverse groups of students to achieve their tertiary education aspirations. The Centre has undoubtedly grown and it currently has more than 2500 students who are undertaking the Open Foundation Program (face to face and online), Newstep program, and Yapug program. Today, the Centre provides access to tertiary education for many disadvantaged students including students from low socio economic backgrounds (LSES), students who are first in the immediate family to access tertiary education, and Indigenous students.

ELFSC has played a key role in providing access and opportunity for all groups of students with particular emphasis on disadvantaged students who may not have had direct access to study at undergraduate level into a University due to many circumstances. The Centre recognises that the student cohort in enabling programs require additional academic and non-academic support, personalised counselling and learning support, additional tutorials, and different learning and teaching pedagogies. The range of different academic and non-academic support is aimed to improve the student transition, retention, and engagement in learning.

**2. Access and Equity Imperatives**

The Australian Government has announced its ambition that by 2025, 40 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds attain a qualification at bachelor level or above; and, by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be people from low socio economic backgrounds.

A range of strategies are implemented to achieve government's ambition. They include mission-based compacts funding which involves Commonwealth government negotiation with individual Universities to set targets, performance based funding using access and participation measures, and the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) which provides funding to assist universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access, retention and success to undergraduate courses for people from LSES backgrounds.

The financial incentives and rewards provided by the government to increase the access and participation of disadvantaged students resulted in universities opening brand new pathway colleges, or partnerships with vocational providers to offer programs at diploma and associate degree levels for students to articulate into undergraduate program. Trend data on commencing students in enabling programs across Australia shows the growth. Table 1 below outlines the trend between 2005-2010 which shows consistent growth and demand for enabling programs in Australia. It is envisaged that the access and participation of students in the enabling programs will continue to grow in universities and non-university providers. Indeed in the non-university sector there has already been significant growth: there were 703 commencing students undertaking enabling programs in private higher education in 2010 compared to 98 students in 2006.

It is worth to note here, that the University of Newcastle has been providing access and opportunity for many disadvantaged students including low socio economic, Indigenous, and first in the immediate family to access tertiary education well before the introduction of the current government policy in 2009. The University has recognised that many young and mature aged people in Newcastle and its footprint regions are unable to fulfil their aspirations to undertake tertiary study due to various circumstances.

**Table 1: Commencing Students in Enabling Programs**

2005	2006	% inc	2007	2008	% inc	2009	2010	% inc
5295	6570	24.1%	7796	9708	2.3%	12663	15181	3.1%

Source: Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education: Selected higher education statistics 2005-2010

### 3. Strategic Imperative of Strengthening Research on Enabling Education

The ELFSC is the largest provider of enabling education in Australia. The Centre is well known for its education programs in Australia among academics and practitioners who work in the area of enabling education. The Centre is also known by students, parents, and high schools mostly within the Newcastle and central coast region. The Commonwealth government is also aware of the access and opportunity provided by the Centre to the disadvantaged students. *While we are proud of our strengths in providing enabling education to the disadvantaged students, there is a lot of effort required to strengthen the research capacity within the Centre to make us renown for both teaching and contemporary research in enabling education.*

The new strategic plan of the University “NeW DIRECTIONS STRATEGIC PLAN 2013-2025”, aspires the University to be a leader in access, participation and success for students. The University is committed to establish a *Centre of Excellence in Equity for Higher Education*. Related to access and participation priorities, the University is also committed to improve the retention, success, and student experience with all cohorts of students. The new strategic plan also outlines a number of strategies to improve research output across the University.

The Vice Chancellor’s commitment to establish a Centre of Excellence in Equity for Higher Education; to improve the access and participation of students; to position the University as a national and international leader in equity and enabling education, and to increase research output; are some of the internal drivers of change which requires us to strengthen the research capacity within the Centre. Externally, across Australia and in many other developed countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America, universities are using research output as a measure of academic staff productivity along with educational outcome measures. Such measures are used in annual academic staff performance reviews. Some universities in Australian have clearly outlined the expectations of academic staff at various levels with numbers of published outputs required at academic level A, B, C, D and E.

### 4. Building on our proud History and Success

As outlined earlier, ELFSC is renowned for the range of enabling programs offered to disadvantaged students. The Centre has been an innovator in delivering programs in both traditional face to face mode and more recently taking advantage of technology with online delivery. The Centre has on an ongoing basis renewed the curriculum content, teaching methods, assessments, and range of academic and non-academic support to align with the changing needs and expectations of students. The Centre has also worked very closely with faculties and schools to ensure that the enabling programs provide a smooth transition for students into the first year undergraduate program.

While we are in the forefront of providing access and opportunity for many domestic and international students to access and succeed in higher education, we need to lead research to increase our research profile in enabling education. Our history of providing access and opportunity for many students through our enabling programs uniquely positions us to undertake contemporary research in the area. The Centre has identified the need to build research capacity in previous years, and made some progress, however resource constraints have hampered further development. The vision of the Centre to establish research capacity, amplified by the recent appointment of an Associate Professor with explicit focus on research, coincides with the Vice Chancellor's commitment to enabling education: both provide the lever for change within the Centre and will strengthen our capacity for research. Research on enabling education and the issues surrounding enabling education is limited in Australia. The University of Newcastle, through the ELFSC could lead research on enabling education in Australia and beyond.

There is no doubt that our staff are committed to providing high quality education and student support. Staff are proud of the fact that the Centre provides an alternative pathway for many disadvantaged students to access University education. Consultation with staff strongly suggests a goodwill and willingness to contribute to strengthen the research profile of the Centre. Some staff are engaged in publishing papers in their disciplinary areas and few in enabling education, some have presented papers in conferences, some staff are undertaking PhD, and some staff are planning to undertake HDR studies relevant to enabling education.

#### **5. Planned initiatives to Strengthen Research Capacity**

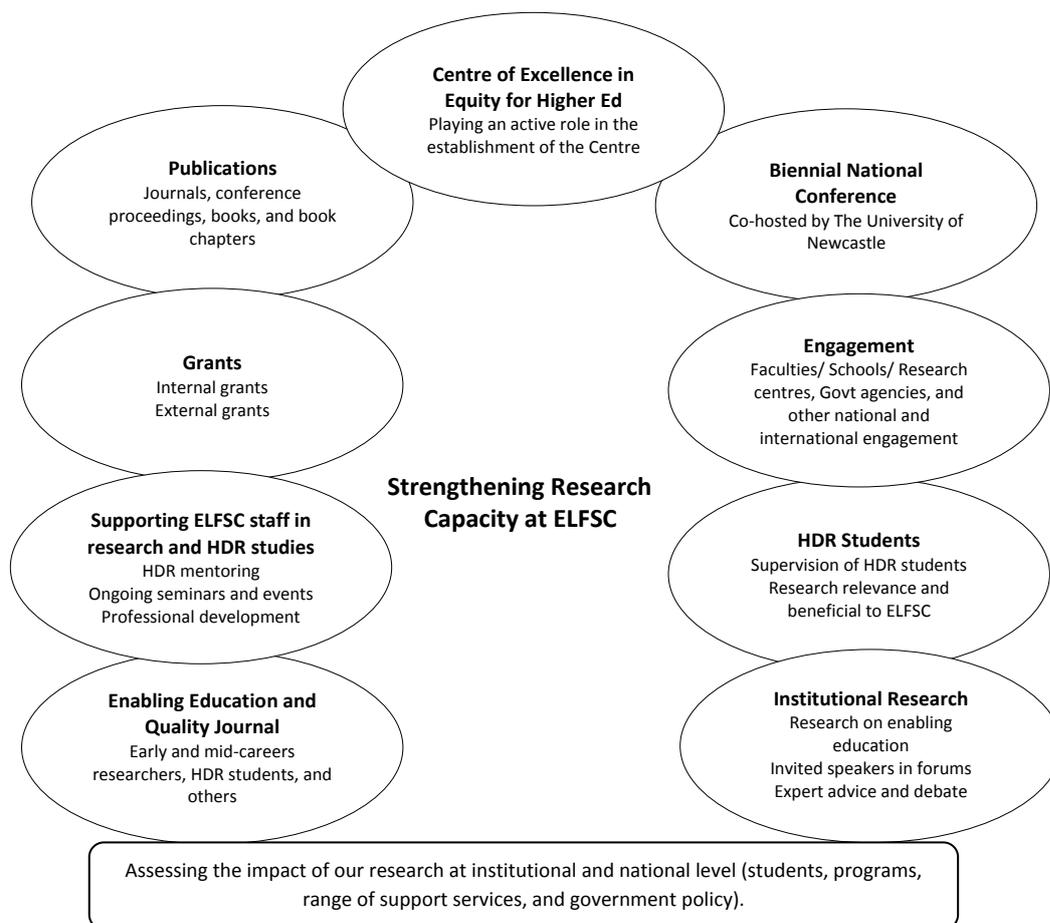
In March 2013, ELFSC appointed a full time senior academic to lead and strengthen capacity. Between March/April 2013, permanent academic staff were engaged in consultation on ways to strengthen research capacity. Interested teachers and professional staff who are keen to be part of research were also involved in the consultation. In total 20 ELFSC staff including academics, teachers, and professional staff were engaged in the consultation. The individual discussion was focussed on the following areas:

- areas of research interest;
- type of support needed by staff;
- identification of a research paper that could be written in 2013/14;
- possible areas of attracting external or internal grants;
- expertise in qualitative and quantitative research;
- previous success in writing papers in journals or conference proceedings;
- preference of writing papers in a conference proceeding or journal;
- preference of writing papers with peers within ELFSC or staff from schools and research centres within the University; or peer from other institutions; and
- types of capacity building initiatives such as research seminars and professional development which could be implemented and the frequency of such events.

Some academic staff and teachers who are planning to undertake course with a research component were also engaged to assess the level of support they needed in areas such as: identification of the research topic, supervision, development of research proposal, literature search, publishing papers, and methodology of data collections, designing questionnaires, and ongoing support.

Figure 1 outlines the key priorities that will be implemented to strengthen the research profile of the Centre. Some of the priorities outlined in figure 1 are recurring themes that came out of the consultation. It is envisaged that these priorities will be fully implemented between May 2013 - Dec 2014. What follows after figure 1 is the detail of key priorities, initiatives, timelines, and performance measures for the implementation of this plan.

**Figure 1: Key Priorities to Strengthen Research Capacity at ELFSC**



**Table 2 Key Priorities, Initiatives and Timelines 2013-2014**

<b>Priority 1: Centre of Excellence in Equity for Higher Ed</b>			
<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
1.1 Playing an active role in the establishment of the Centre of Excellence in Equity for Higher Education with the University	2013/14	ELFSC Executive	Advice and support to establish the Centre
1.2 Working collaboratively with the new National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education at Curtin University	2013/2014	ELFSC Executive	Establishing contact and working on a number of research projects
<b>Priority 2: Publications</b>			
<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
2.1 Individual discussions with academic staff at Callaghan and Ourimbah campus to identify at least one publication related to enabling education per staff member in a journal or peer reviewed conference	April-May 2013	Mahsood Shah, and individual academic staff member in ELFSC	Agreed discussion to publish at least one research paper related to enabling education between May 2013-Dec 2014
2.2 Development of a register which outlines the details of the publication and the staff member(s) involved in writing the paper(s)	April-May 2013	Mahsood Shah	Register is developed and regularly updated which outlines the agreed paper, staff involved and timelines for completion
2.3 Regular discussions with individual academics at Callaghan and Ourimbah campus and other staff members to monitor progress on the publication	Ongoing (six weekly basis)	Mahsood Shah, Research Manager, and individual staff members (or team of staff)	Individual staff meetings are scheduled to discuss the progress on the agreed research paper
2.4 Reviewing papers written by staff as part of internal peer review process before submission	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah and other academics	Papers are reviewed and feedback provided for further enhancement before submission. This is only for staff who prefer the paper to be reviewed internally

2.5 Review of the professional development policy of ELFSC which provides opportunity for staff to present papers in conferences	April-May 2013	ELFSC Executive	Professional development policy is reviewed, updated and implemented in May-June 2013
2.6 Publication of an edited book with an international publisher on social and economic impact of widening participation with international scholars	2013-2014	Mahsood Shah, and Research Manager	Engagement of scholars in 10-12 countries to write a chapter in the planned book
2.7 Senior staff of ELFSC are invited to present a paper on enabling education in Australian and international conference to increase the profile of the Centre	2013-2014	ELFSC staff	At least one senior ELFSC staff is invited to present a paper in national and international conferences
2.8 Development and ongoing update of a list of national and international journals and conferences where staff from ELFSC can publish papers related to enabling education	April 2013	Mahsood Shah, and Research Manager	List of journals and 2013 conferences made available for all staff to consider while publishing papers. The journal list will include low, medium and high tier journals
<b>Priority 3: Grants</b>			
<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
3.1 Application of an internal grant with TLC in Aug-Sept 2013 on enabling education	Aug 2013	Mahsood Shah, Research Manager, and interested academic staff	Draft application for grant is ready in August 2013 for review before submission in Oct.
3.2 Two expressions of interest (EOI) prepared for Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) grant related to enabling education	September 2013	Mahsood Shah, Research Manager, and interested academic staff. It may also include partner institutions	Two draft EOI ready in Sept 2013 for review before submission in Nov to OLT
3.3 Identification of other national and international sources of grant related to enabling education other than OLT and ARC	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah and Research Manager	Other external sources of grants identified with potential of submitting application
<b>Priority 4: Supporting ELFSC staff in research and HDR studies</b>			
<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
4.1 Identification of staff in ELFSC who are undertaking research study and assisting them in identification of potential topics, research questions, research proposal and other support	Identification of staff: April-May 2013 Support: ongoing	Mahsood Shah, Research Manager, and relevant staff	List is prepared and maintained on staff who are undertaking research studies
4.2 Regular meetings with individual staff who are undertaking research study to identify potential help and support needed (at both Callaghan and Ourimbah campus)	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah, and Research Manager	Positive feedback from staff on the support provided in their study
4.3 Liaising with faculties and research centres to supervise ELFSC staff undertaking research degrees on enabling education, and other areas of supervision strength	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah	Register as HDR supervisor and meeting with relevant Deputy HOS Research or equivalent for co-supervision of ELFSC staff undertaking research
4.4 Organising 3 research seminars per year which engages ELFSC staff on research issues e.g. research update, papers published, conferences, feedback from participants who attended conferences, update from staff who are undertaking HDR, grants, partnerships etc	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah, Research Manager, and other staff	3 ELFSC research seminars organised per year with positive attendance
4.5 Including a tab on ELFSC website which will promote our research. The website will include: newsletters, our research plan, full list of research papers published by staff x year, successful grants, institutional research findings/reports, HDR students undertaking research related to enabling education, list of forthcoming conferences on enabling education, and other relevant information	April-June 2013 and ongoing update	Mahsood Shah, and Research Manager	Inclusion of research tab on ELFSC website and using the site to promote our research success
4.6 Internal Blackboard site for ELFSC Researchers. Create a 'one stop shop' of ideas, models, seminar research presentations, research bibliographies, processes and forms, lists of suitable journals, lists of conferences and discussion board	June-July 2013 and ongoing update	Mahsood Shah, and Research Manager, miscellaneous staff contributors	BB Usage by staff; vibrancy of resources sharing and discussion board; number of applications, conferences attended and papers submitted.
<b>Priority 5: Enabling Education and Quality Journal</b>			
<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
5.1 Liaise with international publishers to identify the potential of a new journal which is dedicated on equity, excellence, enabling	May-September 2013	ELFSC Executive	Success in the identification of an international publisher to publish a new journal which is led by ELFSC or the new

education, and quality. The journal will attract early and mid-careers researchers, HDR students, and other scholars across the world			Centre of Excellence in Equity for Higher Education at The University of Newcastle, Australia
<b>Priority 6: Institutional Research</b>			
<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
6.1 Identification of a number of areas of institutional research to position ELFSC as a leader in research in enabling education. Some of the areas may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The social and economic impact of enabling education;</li> <li>Unleashing the dreams and aspirations of disadvantaged students;</li> <li>Improving the life chances of enabling students: causes of attrition and successful retention strategies;</li> <li>Are students engaged in learning? A study with enabling students;</li> <li>Workplace productivity: Does the employment of disadvantaged students improve workplace productivity?</li> </ul>	At least 2 studies between 2013-2014	Mahsood Shah, and Research Manager	Leading research in enabling education which has impact at national level, with the possibility to influence government policy directions.
6.2 Further development of the Potential Enabling Program Participant Research (PEPPR) register and identification of research with former students	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah, Research Manager, and the Research Assistant administering the register	Increasing the number of former students to register for potential future research
6.3 Relevant approval is obtained from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) on any research which involves the use of University data from Planning, Quality and Reporting (PQR)	As required	ELFSC Executive	Successful approval by the DVC (A) on the use of University data for research and publication
6.4 Presenting the findings of the institutional research in national and international forums/conferences	Ongoing	Interested staff	Successfully disseminating the findings of the research in various forums and conferences in Australia and beyond
<b>Priority 7: HDR Students</b>			
<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
7.1 Liaison with faculties and research centres to identify potential HDR students (local/International) who may be interested to undertake research related to enabling education	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah, and Research Manager	Success in working closely with current and prospective HDR students who are undertaking or planning to undertake research in enabling education.
<b>Priority 8: Engagement</b>			
<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
8.1 Ongoing liaison between ELFSC and faculties, schools, research centres, Equity and Education Unit, Research office, and other external institutions on research issues.	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah, and Research Manager	Positive working relationship with relevant stakeholders
8.2 Establishing network with leading international universities and research centres that are renown for enabling education and research with the view to co-author papers, and undertaking collaborative research	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah	A minimum of three contacts are established between 2013-2014
8.3 Actively engaged in public debate on enabling education in media and other forums	Ongoing	ELFSC Executive	ELFSC become a key source to seek advice and opinion by the media on enabling education
<b>Priority 9: Biennial National Conference</b>			
<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>
9.1 Leading the dissemination of research in enabling education by co-hosting biennial conference on Equity, Quality and Excellence in Tertiary Education. This could be either University of Newcastle hosting the conference every second year or playing a leading role in organising the conference	Ongoing	Mahsood Shah, Research Manager	ELFSC playing a leading role in the overall coordination of the conference on biennial basis
<b>Additional Priority: Rewarding Excellence</b>			
<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Performance measure</b>

10.1 Annual ELFSC award for research excellence to an individual or team based on research output directly related to enabling education. The award will be based on a number of criteria.	Criteria of the award to be finalised by June 2013	Mahsood Shah	Staff are rewarded for their research effort
--	--	--------------	--

## 6. Review of the Plan

This research plan covers 2013 and 2014. It is envisaged that the plan will be reviewed in six months in end November 2013 to monitor progress on each priority and initiatives. At the end of 12 months in May 2014, another review will be undertaken to monitor progress. At the end 2014, another iteration of the plan will be developed to cover the period 2015-2016.

## 7. Communication and Staff Engagement

A range of mechanisms will be used to communicate and engage staff in research activities. Some of the means of communication is already outlined in this plan. They include: research seminars 3 times a year; biennial research update newsletter; a tab on ELFSC website with update to date information about research activities; internal BB site for staff; engagement of staff in writing papers, being part of institutional research projects, and grants, and support for staff undertaking research studies. The research staff will be available at any time for any discussion or 'drop in' on research questions, issues, and clarifications.

May, 2013