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## Investigation of partnership and engagement methods to increase research capability at Edith Cowan University

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# Investigation of partnership and engagement methods

## to increase research capability at Edith Cowan University

Darren Gibson

### Background

There is an increasing interest within all areas of research to collaborate, with networks and partnerships being used to develop research ideas and enhance research outcomes. A Collaboration Research Network (CRN) is one such method that can enhance a research system. Correspondingly Edith Cowan University (ECU) has established CRN activities in four areas of national importance; health, education, ICT and environment with a view to enhancing the University's research output. However, CRN dynamics and mechanisms are complex and having a CRN per se does not guarantee enhanced research outcomes.

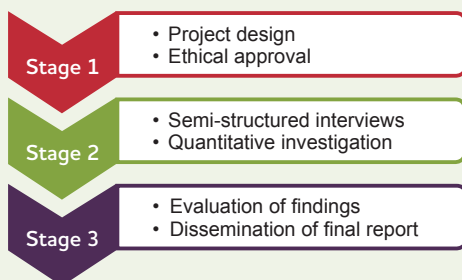
This study will use both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the complex relationships between the partner universities within the ECU CRN project. This information will be used to evaluate the viability of a University wide strategy of collaborative working to enhance research outcomes.

### Methods

In-depth semi-structure interviews were conducted with a range of collaborators ranging from Post-doctoral Fellows, research active Academics and Deputy Vice-Chancellors of Research from a selection of institutions. The semi-structured interview questions were based around the CRN but other collaborative relationships were also explored to provide insight into comparative collaborative relationships.

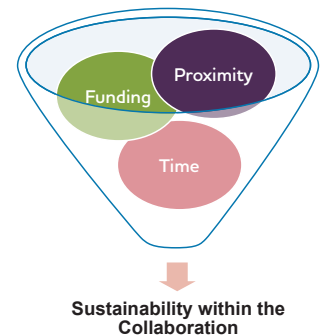
In addition to engagement and partnership relations, the investigation also examined how successful these relationships have been in developing research capability within their own and partner institution. The semi-structured interviews also explored all aspects of the collaboration including the complexity of relationships developed over the time of the CRN and methods for sustainability. This qualitative approach was selected as it provides a detailed perspective leading to clarity on the selected research collaboration mechanisms. In-depth analysis of the data will examine the values and perceived barriers of engagement in the CRN.

A quantitative investigation of the number of citations, publications and competitive funding attracted as a consequence of the CRN project was also used as a metric for evaluation.



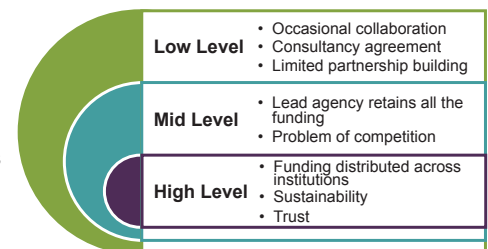
### Early Results and Conclusions

Although this project is at an early stage, there have been some interesting findings that will assist with the development of a long term collaborative strategy. Some of the initial findings include that collaboration will only be effective if there is a shared agenda of work that has been adequately funded, for example via a commonwealth funded research program. Proximity and complementarities of research knowledge and skills are also considered as important factors for success. It was noted that successful relationships take considerable time to develop but generally in an effective collaboration is worth the sacrifice with rewards outweighing the initial effort.



Relationship building is an essential but challenging skill when forming a new collaboration and every opportunity presented should be taken or at least considered.

Collaborations are separated into three levels highlighted in the following diagram. The diagram shows that with increased trust between collaborators and structured research strategies/programs, sustainability will grow.



The quantitative analysis of this project is at an early stage and consequently will not be discussed in any detail. However, the initial findings indicate that each CRN project has different profiles including number of partners and partnering institutions resulting in varied research outputs. Therefore different approaches to sustainability will have to be used.

Once this research project is complete, a full report of the findings will be made available on the ECU webpage.

### Acknowledgements and Further Information

The ECU CRN is financially supported by the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education CRN Scheme (2011-2014) and contributions from partner universities. This research project was approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee. I would like to thank Julia Gross and Gordon McIntyre for their assistance with the qualitative data collection.

For further information, visit ECU's CRN webpage at [www.research.ecu.au/ori/crn](http://www.research.ecu.au/ori/crn)

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