

# 010: Corporate to Country (Alison McIntosh)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

degree, university, research, guess, campus, community, fortunate, mentors, life, job, computer programmer, led, podcast, australia, mcintosh, people, years, geography, une, impact

## SPEAKERS

Outro, Dr Alison McIntosh, Intro, Donna Ballard

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- I** Intro 00:12  
Hey there, thank you for joining us for six degrees of study an uneducational podcast. Today we have Alison McIntosh, the chairperson of our board here at Taree University's campus. Alison has a degree in Urban and Regional Planning from UNE as well as a doctorate in Human Geography. We want to show you how it's highly likely there's only six degrees of separation between you, the career and the life you want. This is a six degrees podcast.
- D** Donna Ballard 00:37  
Welcome Dr. Alison McIntosh to our podcast table.
- D** Dr Alison McIntosh 00:41  
Thank you very much, Donna.
- D** Donna Ballard 00:43  
I guess for me, I feel like I know a little bit about your background, but I'm very keen to hear more through our podcasts we do kind of dig back into the past and bring people up to where we're at now. Of course, I have a little bit to do with Alison McIntosh, being in my position was CEO at the Taree University's campus. Alison is the CEO of our board. But I'm very keen to explore your journey through study and where that's led you in life. That's the reason for our podcasts so that people can relate to all these different ways of getting your degree. So I guess let us know a little bit about where you're at now with your life professionally, why you're here locally, a little bit about the background of you in your current point in time.
- D** Dr Alison McIntosh 01:29  
Okay, thanks Donna. Wow, where do I start? Because I've got a few years to cover, I think more than most of your other podcasters. But I often think in five year terms, I guess, and I will I find if I look back five years, I could never

have imagined I wouldn't be where I'm at five years hence. And I think five years ago, I was still living at Killabakh, with my husband on our rural property there. I was still working with QUT and we had bought our home in Wingham, but we hadn't sort of contemplated what we were going to do with that. But since then, we've left Killabakh. Unfortunately, my husband is no longer alive. But we did fully restore our heritage listed home in Wingham. So that's sort of pretty special. But I've also sort of retired from my professional, academic life. That was probably only 18 or so months ago. But I had no idea I might then be jumping into another involvement with universities.

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Donna Ballard 02:45

Yeah.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 02:46

And this is through Taree University's campus. And that's been an incredibly interesting and diverse and exciting experience for the last 18 months, I guess.

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Donna Ballard 02:56

And I think it's just important to point that out that it's actually a volunteer role. You know, it's not a big career move. It's actually a volunteer move to help out the community to bring this university to life. So it's a big commitment and a lot of time. So I just like to say thank you to you.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 03:15

Well, I think Donna to the fact that I, I've retired from paid work. And I don't know what that word retirement really means. But I'm no longer paid for a professional job that's allowed me to be able to devote time to Taree University's campus. And it's been a completely different experience for me as well. I have had an academic background for some time, but not wearing a hat as somebody trying to pull together a regional University's campus in Taree and I must say, it's been quite a ride. I've learned so much along the way too. And it's been an exceptional team to work with. The other board members are just tremendous with their talents with their professionalism but they're also very nice people. So that helps.

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Donna Ballard 04:06

It certainly does. So I guess thinking back to when you started your university journey. What's your story? Did you go straight from high school to uni? I guess what we always reveal quite often in these podcasts is it's not just I went to school, then I went to uni, did three years came out got the job. It's been very rare that that's the natural path through life. So tell us about your journey. Did you go to uni straight away?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 04:39

I didn't No, no, no, no. I actually, I went to boarding school and that was never planned by me or my family. So I had to go to boarding school in Rockhampton and the last thing I wanted when I matriculated was to be institutionalized again, so I did not want to go into university at that stage. And I'm talking now about, dare I say, the mid 60s. So there was no such thing as a gap year.

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Donna Ballard 05:12

Yeah.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 05:13

But what I, what I sort of in a way fell into I was really fortunate. But I did aptitude tests with a number of computer organizations, and I landed a job as a trainee computer programmer. And this is way back.

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Donna Ballard 05:29

This is in the 60s?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 05:30

Yeah, yeah, this isn't the ground floor, I guess, of computing in Australia. So I was just incredibly lucky to have that opportunity. And that just led and this was in in Brisbane, because I was a Queenslander. And I was just so lucky, I think to have that opportunity back then. And I just loved it.

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Donna Ballard 05:54

So back then working in computing, what what was the actual, what was your day like? Like, what was the task? I'm sure, it's different to computer programming now. I think it probably is, we used machine languages, which are really basic languages. It would take say, an hour and a half to compile a computer program. And it was, well, I guess the equipment we had, which was state of the art at the time. Now it's just so archaic. You know, I can remember, at one stage I didn't know in the maybe the early 70s, by then getting so excited when we upgraded to a 16,000 computer with 16,000 words of memory. But you learned, I mean, that was what the restrictions were. Yeah.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 06:43

And you learn to negotiate that as well. But so from being a computer programmer and moving to Sydney, then in 1968, I think I moved to Sydney and then became a systems analyst, and then a project manager. And then I was working with a company called Dalgety, which might mean a lot to regional people. But was the big company I was in the head office, there it's a company with 1000s of employees and branches throughout Australia.

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Donna Ballard 07:12

And Dalgety were like wholesalers of agricultural products, is that right? or machinery?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 07:18

Machinery was part of it. But a big part was that they were stock and station agents and wool brokers. But they also

had a wine as well in the States and South Australia. They had the shipping division, insurance, travel they had a scouring plant in Victoria. Manufactured mining equipment.

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Donna Ballard 07:41

Right.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 07:42

So it was it was very diverse. And so it was a wonderful opportunity in lots of ways to get to know a lot about different aspects of corporate Australia. And I was fortunate in the opportunities I was given with that company. Mind you, I didn't have a university degree. But in those days, you didn't have to, you know, you had a lot of on the job training, you had a lot of management courses you went to quite different than you didn't. I mean, certainly by the time I left that company, you had to produce that piece of paper. But I guess, again, I was fortunate in getting in at a time where your track record was good enough to secure you wonderful opportunities. And when I left Dalgety in 1984, I think it was I was a senior executive in their business development department and doing research work and so yeah.

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Donna Ballard 08:44

Okay, so you through to 1984. Was that when you finished your work with Dalgety?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 08:50

Yes, it was and that was when? Noel, my husband and myself decided to do what then was known as a tree change. But yes, we came to the Manning and we bought, we actually bought out property at Killabakh a couple of years prior to that. But we moved to this little rural locality of Killabakh that had a wonderful community and lots of stuff going on. And it was I think the best move we could possibly have made.

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Donna Ballard 09:19

And how did you discover that Killabakh was the place that you wanted to move to? Did you have friends already here?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 09:26

We knew nobody, but you know when you see a place, you know whether it's the right one or not, and that's how we felt about the property. It was just just what we wanted. It was further away than we'd anticipated we would be but see at that time, Taree had a really good rail service, air service. You could easily go down to Sydney and back in the day if you wanted to. So you could still stay connected with your previous life without making an absolute 100% break.

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Donna Ballard 10:01

Yeah.

D Dr Alison McIntosh 10:02

And my husband still had some work commitments in Sydney so and but we didn't know what the community would be like you never do when you move freshly into a place. But it was an absolute godsend that it turned out to be.

D Donna Ballard 10:19

And Killabakh is such a connected community.

D Dr Alison McIntosh 10:21

Yeah.

D Donna Ballard 10:21

There seem to be a lot of people perhaps moving in around that time.

D Dr Alison McIntosh 10:25

I think that was it, there were a lot of people my age and stage who were moving, you know, the old ones were filling up and the new ones were moving in. So it was a really good community to be part of.

D Donna Ballard 10:36

So you were at this stage of your life where you went, "Oh, I might get a degree". Had that happened yet or not yet?

D Dr Alison McIntosh 10:41

I waited another 10 years. I guess, I guess it was just having that complete change from having a really full on corporate life, which was, you know, it was pretty intense, a lot of long hours at times, and so on, it was just lovely chilling out for a number of years, getting the farm as we wanted it to be, and so on. And then I just felt it was time to put my brain back into work again. And so I chose a course that I, I've always loved geography always, I thought, what can I do with this a huge component of geography, and it happened to be Urban and Regional Planning. And although it was the planning degree that would give, I guess, the professional qualifications that could be you think, do a degree that would let you get a job that was never mind intention to be a planner, it was more the geography angle?

D Donna Ballard 11:07

And were you doing it out of general interest at that point? Or were you thinking I'm doing this degree because I'm going to change careers?

going to change careers:

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Dr Alison McIntosh 11:42

It was more initially out of general interest. But I thought, if I'm going to be doing this, it has to be something where it's a piece of paper that will equip me further down the track. But as I said, I've always loved geography. And that was the main emphasis I put on when it came to electives, and so on. I had some wonderful electives in geo ecology, and biogeography and coral reef ecosystems and that sort of thing.

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Donna Ballard 12:09

So did that involve lots of trips away.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 12:12

Absolutely. I'll never forget the 10 day field trip on Heron Island.

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Donna Ballard 12:19

That doesn't sound like universities hard slogging?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 12:22

Well, I was one of those weird people who really I love the study aspect. I just loved the learning. Not so much the studying, or the exams, necessarily, but I loved the learning. And I guess I partly because I did enjoy it. I did well

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Donna Ballard 12:41

Yeah. And how long did it take you to complete that degree? Did you do a series of degrees or?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 12:47

No, it was, it was a four year full time degree. And I was doing this all through distance education, of course, through UNE, and I did it in six years.

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Donna Ballard 13:00

Right.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 13:00

So yeah, it was the sort of a two thirds load.

D Donna Ballard 13:04  
Yeah.

D Dr Alison McIntosh 13:05  
And I actually ended up working at Council for part of that time, because you had to get what I call work experience. So I started there and I stayed actually with them as a strategic planner until I finished my degree.

D Donna Ballard 13:19  
Right. Yeah. Okay, that's interesting. So are we into the 90s. Where are we at?

D Dr Alison McIntosh 13:25  
1995 I started I, I finished in 2000. And I, timing can be everything sometimes. Yeah. And the I actually did an honors degree. And my, one of my supervisors was head of a department and it actually just won a large Australian Research Council grant.

D Donna Ballard 13:50  
Wow.

D Dr Alison McIntosh 13:51  
So he said, we'd like to employ you to do your PhD.

D Donna Ballard 13:55  
And you love research right?

D Dr Alison McIntosh 13:56  
I love research. I love research. I guess halfway through my degree, I was asked, where did I think this would be leading me? I said, Well, if I was anything, I'd like to be into research. And here we go.

D Donna Ballard 14:11  
Yeah, so yeah, like I said, very fortunate timing and the right time to be there and to get some funding for research. That's great.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 14:18

Yeah. Well, it paid. It paid me. What do they call it? It wasn't a salary as such, but it was, you know, it was quite substantial. It was enough to live off. Yeah.

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Donna Ballard 14:26

Yeah. Yeah. So your degree actually did lead you straight into paid employment. It really did open that door.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 14:35

Yes, it did. It certainly did open the door. Yeah. Something that I hadn't seriously considered. But again, I thought, my gosh, what an opportunity. Why don't I say yes. Again, it was doing it as distance education and that's a little bit challenging too.

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Donna Ballard 14:39

Yeah, I know.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 14:58

Especially I think, for a PhD. But but actually all my research work for this was in Sydney. I won't I won't go into that. But yeah, that was interesting, too.

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Donna Ballard 15:08

Yeah. So you actually had to be living away a bit to do lots of trips away?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 15:13

Lots of trips away for several days at a time during the fieldwork. Yeah.

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Donna Ballard 15:14

Yeah. So that the research work was with QUT.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 15:23

No, no, that was with UNE. That's still UNE. And then once I had my doctorate, again, I was very fortunate to have a couple of mentors, who, I guess found employment for me.



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Donna Ballard 15:38

This is feeling like it's ringing so true or relating to what our aims are here at Taree university's campus, you're talking about, you know, your degree led you to have work placement with Council, then you've had tutors and mentors that have led you into other paths. Like that's exactly what we're developing here.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 15:54

Look, I love this idea of finding mentors for our students. It's I think it's just tremendous plus just somebody else who you can sort of talk to about different issues or research different approaches you might be able to take to what you're doing.

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Donna Ballard 16:14

Just make you think differently. Things that don't come into your own mind. Yeah, yeah. So these mentors there.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 16:20

I guess, again, I, I did exclusively research work, not always full time, a lot of the time, it was sort of three or four days a week. But that really suited me because again, doing it from a distance. I still wanted time on the farm to do things and have another life anyhow. But it was doing a whole lot of different research projects. So again, that involve traveling to various parts of Australia. And yeah, I was really fortunate, one of the, one of the projects I was working on was again with an Australian Research Council funded project. And my, my boss changed jobs. And she moved QUT so I went with her because I was being paid under the under the ARC grant. Right. So that's what got me then working with QUT in Brisbane.

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Donna Ballard 17:17

Yeah. Fabulous. Can you give an example? Or is there privacy and confidentiality around researcher are you allowed to give us an example of, you know, some fabulous research that you're really.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 17:30

No, certainly not. And I'm an absolute advocate for open access to research, especially when it's your research outcomes, especially when it's being funded by the federal government mean, that's our money after all, that's, that's funding it. And probably the area where we did exert quite a bit of influence was we were looking at the impact on frontline communities of fly-in fly-out drive-in drive-out workers in the mining industry. Yeah. So it was really interesting. I could name federal ministers at the time, they did change in the during the, the timespan of that particular research because it was over a few years. And some were fantastic, and really wanted to know all the way through what our outcomes were as they progressed, and you could see policy changing as time went along. And then others, of course, weren't quite as receptive in that regard.

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Donna Ballard 18:27

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Yeah.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 18:27

But it was, I guess the, if you think you are actually influencing policy in good ways, that's a really good idea.

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Donna Ballard 18:35

I mean, the two things that come to me, to my mind around that researchers that you want to know, the mental health impact on the workers, but also the effect on the communities that they're going into when they're not actually based there as community members is that the kind of information that the government was after?

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Dr Alison McIntosh 18:52

Very much so and actually, it's really interesting that the, the project itself was looking at masculinity and violence in rural communities. And so it wasn't just mining communities, we went into a lot of other regional areas as well. And this was at the peak of droughts. And you can just imagine that, yeah, that some of the heartbreaking stories that we were hearing at that time, but certainly then in the especially in the mining communities, the the impact that was having on people who call that their home, because fly-in, fly-outs, drive-in, drive-outs, don't have that connectivity with those communities as people who live within them do and I think we all know that here living in the Manning in the MidCoast area that connecting to community and belonging is just so important.

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Donna Ballard 19:46

Yeah. absolutely. Yeah. Well, thank you for sharing your insights. I feel it's been a wonderful background, I guess to your career where you're currently at I'm calling it a career even though it's a fantastic volunteer capacity, and you're fulfilling it as if it was a career with, you know, fully involved. So thank you for giving us that background. And I can certainly understand a lot more now about why you are so passionate about the university development in this space and the research behind the need for that, that I know you drove a lot of that with the applications for the funding.

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Dr Alison McIntosh 19:48

Yeah.

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Donna Ballard 19:56

You're certainly the right person in the right place, I would say so. Thank you for for sharing all of that with us.


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Dr Alison McIntosh 20:29

Thank you. Thanks, Donna. And I think TUC Taree University's campus is just such an important thing for this area.




Dr Alison McIntosh 20:30

 Donna Ballard 20:38

Yeah, I think the next few years we're really going to see it come to fruition and start delivering those impacts that we are really feeling and hoping that it will.

 Dr Alison McIntosh 20:47

Yeah, exciting stuff.

 Donna Ballard 20:48

Thank you.

 Outro 20:50

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