



Australian Government

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Good Practice Note: *Improving retention and completion of students in Australian higher education*

February 2020



TEQSA

Good Practice Note: Improving retention and completion of students in Australian higher education – February 2020

With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, TEQSA's logo, any material protected by a trade mark, material sourced from third parties and where otherwise noted, all material presented in this document is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/>. Information about the use of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms is available at <https://www.pmc.gov.au/government/commonwealth-coat-arms>. Enquiries about the use of material protected by a trade mark or which has been sourced from a third party should be directed to the source of the relevant material.



The document must be attributed: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, **Good Practice Note: Improving retention and completion of students in Australian higher education – February 2020.**

Contacts

More information about the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, including electronic versions of this report, is available at teqsa.gov.au

Comments and enquiries about this report may be directed to:

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Level 14/530 Collins Street

MELBOURNE VIC 3001

T: 1300 739 585

F: 1300 739 586

E: comms@teqsa.gov.au

Provider resources

TEQSA's role is to safeguard the interests of all students, current and future, studying within Australia's higher education system. We do this by regulating and assuring the quality of Australia's higher education providers.

In carrying out this work, we produce a number of resources aimed at supporting higher education providers understand their responsibilities under the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework).

HES Framework

The HES Framework is a legislative instrument that is structured to align with the student experience or 'student life cycle'. It sets out the requirements for provider entry to, and continued operations within, Australia's higher education sector. The Standards for Higher Education within the HES Framework apply to all providers offering courses leading to a regulated higher education award, irrespective of where and how a course is delivered. All providers are required to demonstrate their adherence to the HES Framework.

Guidance notes

Guidance notes are intended to provide advice and greater clarity when interpreting and applying selected areas of the HES Framework. They are not intended to be 'how to' documents, instead they outline what TEQSA will typically expect to see when assessing providers' compliance.

Good practice notes

Good practice notes offer practical advice and examples of good practice to guide operations in regard to specific, higher education issues. The good practice notes are intended to support and promote the quality assurance approaches of providers.

More information and guidance on the HES Framework and our regulatory approach can be found at teqsa.gov.au

Foreword



This Good Practice Note is the third in a series of resources produced by TEQSA. It is part of TEQSA's approach to improving retention of students in Australian higher education by building on the quality assurance approaches taken by individual providers in the sector. The document uses examples of innovative practice reported by them in a data collection initiated by the Hon Dan Tehan, the Minister for Education.

Attrition, the inverse of retention, has been the subject of many studies internationally and locally about the causes of students' withdrawal from higher education and how to improve their learning outcomes. It is one of eleven risk indicators included in TEQSA's Risk Assessment Framework that underpins our risk-reflective approach to regulation and quality assurance in the sector. Good retention is a characteristic of a healthy higher education system and a major component of measures of student success in their higher education studies.

Following previous work done by the Higher Education Standards Panel, which suggested that a retention strategy should be developed by each registered higher education provider in Australia, the Minister asked that these strategies be collated and reviewed by the Department of Education and Training and that TEQSA develop a Good Practice Note on how to improve retention.

The project that resulted in this report was steered by the following Committee within TEQSA:

- Dr Lin Martin, Commissioner
- Dr Karen Treloar, Director, Engagement Group
- Mr Greg Simmons, Director, Policy and Analysis Group
- Mr Gary Brook, Director, Assessment and Investigations Group.

The work on the project was undertaken by Dr Carolyn Malkin (Senior Project Manager) under the guidance of this Steering Committee.

TEQSA gratefully acknowledges the analysis of the retention strategies undertaken by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and the information on selected retention programs provided by institutions interviewed about their good student outcomes; these formed the basis, along with TEQSA's own risk assessment data and analysis, of the selection of examples of good practice which are included in this report. Where possible, evidence of success of the strategies identified as good practice is included, as well as references to more detailed information about the various initiatives.

I commend this Retention Good Practice Note, as a companion volume to the *Good Practice Note on Admissions Transparency*, for the consideration of all providers in the sector.

Anthony McClaran
Chief Executive Officer
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Contents

Purpose	1
Context	1
Background	2
TEQSA attrition study	3
HESP analysis	3
International comparisons	4
Relationship to the Higher Education Standards Framework	5
Identifying good performance in retention and completion	5
Examples of good practice	7
Student preparation and admissions	7
Good practice example 1: Pre-enrolment preparation	8
Good practice example 2: Early familiarisation with tertiary education	8
Orientation and transition to higher education study	9
Good practice example 3: Student strengths self-assessment	9
Good practice example 4: Orientation and transition in the first year of study	10
Good practice example 5: Early determination of student needs	11
Good practice example 6: English language proficiency	11
Clear and user-friendly enrolment processes	12
Good practice example 7: Chatbot and online enquiry systems	12
Good practice example 8: Easy to understand business processes	13
Good practice example 9: Pre-enrolment information and study planning sessions	14
Early identification of students at risk of discontinuing their studies	15
Good practice example 10: Anticipating student guidance needs across the lifecycle	16
Good practice example 11: The use of predictive learning analytics to identify students at risk of difficulty or disengagement	16
Good practice example 12: Re-engagement with students on leave of absence	17

Course and career advice	18
Good practice example 13: Provide guidance to support timely course redirection	18
Good practice example 14: Promote early and routine career planning	19
Good practice example 15: Foster ongoing, post-graduation success and connection through promoting career planning as 'life preparation'	19
Good practice example 16: Support students to adapt to variations in the employment market and industry fluctuations	20
Academic support	21
Good practice example 17: Appropriate educational support mechanisms	21
Good practice example 18: Constructive and student-centred approach to academic progress	22
Good practice example 19: Study skills workshops	23
A sense of connectedness to the institution	23
Good practice example 20: Joining student organisations	23
Good practice example 21: Intervening in and supporting student decision-making through social events	24
Good practice example 22: Foster a sense of belonging for non-traditional students	25
Good practice example 23: Respond to student feedback	26
Catering for different student backgrounds	26
Good practice example 24: Recognise the diversity of the student population and support all students' success: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	28
Good practice example 25: Recognise the diversity of the student population and support all students' success: Students with English as an Additional Language	28
Good practice example 26: Recognise the diversity of the student population and support all students' success: International students	29
Good practice example 27: Provide customised welfare services that are relevant to different student circumstances	29
Good practice example 28: Promote the engagement and success of students who have spent time in out-of-home care	30
Good practice example 29: Promote the engagement and success of regional and rural students	30
Appendix A – Standards from the Higher Education Standards Framework (2015) relevant to student retention	32
References	34

Purpose

This Good Practice Note identifies examples of good practice in Australian higher education providers in relation to increasing the retention and completion of students in their courses of study.

Work undertaken by the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) in 2017, which included a long time-series analysis of retention in the Australian higher education system, showed that while national retention rates fell between 2011 and 2014, the 2014 rate was similar to the sector rate in 2005. Despite this relatively stable long-term situation for the sector as a whole, there is significant variation between the retention rates of individual higher education providers over this period, with some increasing or maintaining the retention rates for their students and others showing decreasing retention. Poor retention has an impact at both the institutional and individual student levels in terms of waste of resources and effort. Students who discontinue undergraduate studies frequently incur student debt. These students often consider that they have gained little benefit from their investment before dropping out.

Research has been done on the factors influencing retention of students and it is important for each institution to investigate the impact of these factors on their retention profile. The Australian Government is keen to improve retention and success of higher education students and is interested in the reasons for the difference in retention rates between institutions. Consequently, the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan, asked TEQSA to develop this Good Practice Note, which identifies innovative and effective approaches used by those providers showing strong and/or improving retention and completion rates.

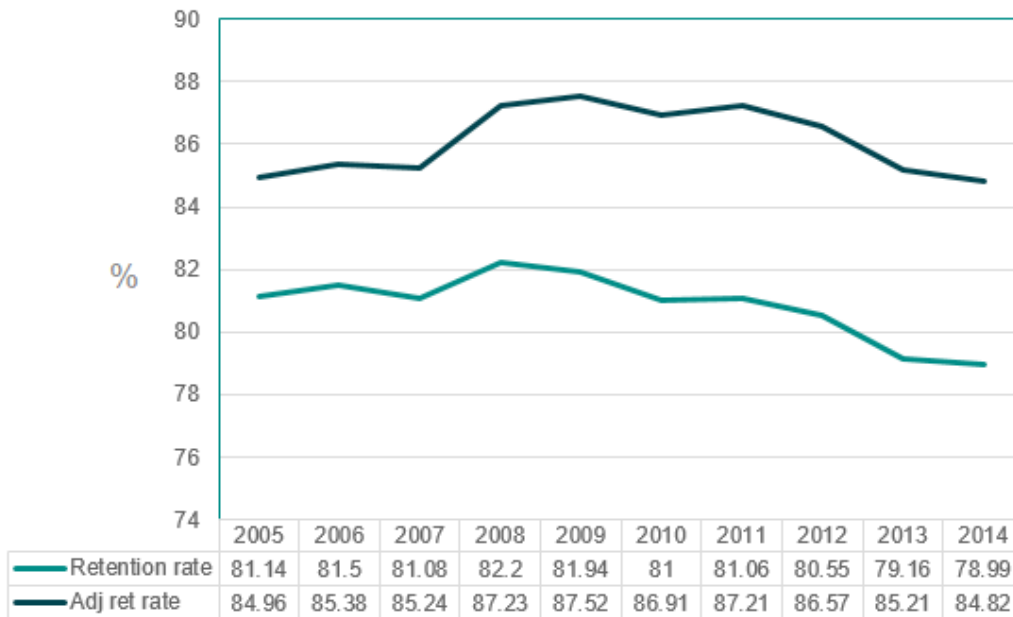
This Note provides exemplars, which have been identified through an analysis of providers' retention strategies submitted in response to a request from the Minister. An in-depth investigation of the specific strategies used by providers identified through TEQSA's annual risk assessment process as showing improved or high retention over the last five years yielded further exemplars of good practice. The latter have been explored through a structured interview process with the identified providers.

Context

In June 2017, the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) released a Discussion Paper on improving retention, completion and success in higher education (2017a).

At the time, there were a number of media reports claiming that attrition rates were rising due to a reduction in the quality of students entering higher education as a result of the freeing-up of admissions requirements associated with the demand driven funding system (2012-2017). The time-series analysis of retention undertaken by the Department of Education (HESP Discussion Paper, 2017a), shown in Figure 1 on the following page, does not support these assertions. While adjusted retention has been declining since 2012, the 2014 rate (latest data available in 2017) is similar to the rate seen in 2005.

Figure 1: Retention and adjusted retention rates, universities, 2005–2014



The other side of retention is attrition, being the percentage of students lost to the institution. For example, a retention rate of 78.99 percent means that 21.01 per cent of students admitted in that year have not completed the course in which they are enrolled. Rates of attrition and adjusted attrition in the sector are still relatively high and are not uniform across providers. These rates are a concern for students because of unsatisfactory learning outcomes and accrued tuition debt, and for higher education providers and government in terms of reduced productivity. Hence, retention and completion remain a persistent issue despite there being no evidence of crisis.

At the end of 2017, the HESP released its Final Report, *Improving retention, completion and success in higher education* (2017b). The report concluded that it would be possible to improve completion rates if providers improved the level of support for students, as required by the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework). In early 2019, the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan, responded to the report’s recommendations, concluding that every higher education institution should have its own comprehensive student-centred retention strategy, which it regularly evaluates. The Minister expected that these institutional retention strategies would have a positive impact on student completion.

In addition, TEQSA was asked to implement the recommendations from the report that relate to its role (Recommendations 1, 3 and 10) and, in particular, to develop a Good Practice Note on student retention based on an analysis of institutional retention strategies to lift sector performance in this area. This Good Practice Note is based on that work.

Background

In recent years, there has been increased interest in attrition rates internationally. Much of the research in the sector has related to developing an increasingly differentiated understanding of what higher education providers can do to retain or redirect students at risk of withdrawal through the timely provision of appropriate guidance and other interventions. Each institution’s approach to student retention should be informed by

an in-depth understanding of the profile and experience of their enrolled students and data on student engagement and success. One of the challenges is identifying the key factors affecting retention rates in each particular institution to assist in the design of appropriate responses.

TEQSA attrition study

In 2017, TEQSA undertook a detailed analysis of student attrition data collected as part of its annual risk assessment for each higher education provider. The study focused on institutional characteristics and used cluster analysis to categorise all providers into four groups using attrition rates. Multi-variate regression models were constructed for the sector as a whole and for each cluster.

TEQSA found that lower retention rates for each cluster and for the sector occurred when the provider had a:

- larger proportion of external enrolments
- larger proportion of part-time enrolments
- smaller overall size
- higher proportion of students admitted on the basis of VET qualifications
- relatively low proportions of senior academic staff.

Hence, management decisions regarding admissions requirements, preferred student profile, staffing levels and the mode and type of study the provider engages in have an impact on the level of retention achieved by the providers. This confirms the importance of institutional strategies in improving retention in the Australian higher education sector.

HESP analysis

The HESP's Discussion Paper (2017a) presented statistical modelling of adjusted attrition rates in universities using characteristics of the student profile. It found that type and mode of attendance, age group, field of education and various equity characteristics were significant in explaining variation in attrition rates for domestic bachelor degree students. However, this regression analysis showed that student characteristics explained only a small part of the overall variation in student attrition between providers, while institutions played a much larger role (see Table 10 of the Discussion Paper, p. 39). In particular, the HESP analysis showed that basis of admission or ATAR was less important than the institution attended, type or mode of attendance and age in explaining attrition.

Thus, both the TEQSA and HESP analyses identified type and mode of attendance as critical factors influencing the level of retention seen in higher education providers.

Some examination of how providers assist students enrolled on either a part-time or an external basis to remain engaged and successful in their studies appears to be needed. The data suggests that there may be structural factors associated with how part-time and external students are taught and supported which reduce their likelihood of

success and persistence. Often these students are also employed, sometimes full-time, and so have less time to focus on their studies. In addition to support initiatives directed at individual students, such factors need to be considered in the formulation of retention strategies.

The HESP's Discussion Paper also identified the following strategies and interventions that it believed might have a positive impact on improving retention and completion in higher education:

- provision of transparent, comparable admissions information
- publication of detailed statistics on attrition, completion and success
- quality and availability of career and outreach services
- identification of students at risk of non-completion
- strong provider culture and high levels of student engagement
- innovation in teaching and learning and sharing of good practice
- a range of academic and personal support services
- support for disadvantaged students including scholarships and living allowances
- clarity of enrolment options for students
- the availability of nested qualifications.

These types of initiatives have been considered by providers in devising their own retention strategies, as requested by the Minister, and by TEQSA in determining a conceptual framework for the presentation of good practice examples later in this note.

International comparisons

While differences in definitions and the structure of higher education occur, and international retention and completion rates must be compared with caution, it appears that Australia's completion rates for undergraduate students are similar to the OECD average (*OECD Education at a Glance* 2016). As in Australia, other countries are now focused on trying to improve student retention by encouraging practices that have been shown to work in particular higher education providers. For example, a comprehensive report, *Strategies for improving student retention* (Hanover Research 2014) presents the results of a scan of retention practices in the United States and Canada, including strategies for all students as well as targeted initiatives for Indigenous and First Nations people. There is considerable overlap between the strategies identified in the Hanover report and the above list of strategies from the HESP Discussion Paper.

The Hanover report summarises trends and strategies in place in higher education institutions with illustrative examples from successful institutions, taking a similar approach to this Good Practice Note for the Australian sector. The report identifies a number of factors that influence student retention – academic advising, social connectedness, student involvement, approachability of teaching and other staff, curriculum reform, and student support services. It includes data on outcomes, which allows for an evaluation of the effectiveness of particular strategies on improving retention. Attempts have been made in this Good Practice Note to obtain evaluation data for the various initiatives identified in this Note, in order to provide evidence of

retention improvement. This is an area that requires further attention by Australian higher education providers as currently many providers have difficulty demonstrating whether particular initiatives have worked.

Relationship to the Higher Education Standards Framework

Every registered Australian higher education provider is required to satisfy the standards in the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework). The HES Framework is aligned with the student life cycle and covers areas related to the above groups of factors, which have been identified through the Department of Education's (2019) and TEQSA's studies on attrition (2017). The examples of Good Practice outlined in this note, which mainly relate to undergraduate course retention, exceed the relevant threshold standards documented in the HES Framework.

The main HES Framework standards relating to retention improvement are Standards 1.3.5 and 5.3.4, which require providers to monitor trends in rates of retention, progression and completion of student cohorts with a view to reviewing teaching and administrative processes to enable improvement in student outcomes.

Standard 1.3.5 requires that trends in rates of retention, progression and completion of cohorts of students through courses of study be monitored by providers to enable review and improvement. Standard 5.3.4 states that, at a minimum, registered providers must undertake 'review and improvement activities, [which] include regular external referencing of the success of student cohorts against comparable courses of study, including:

- a. analyses of progression rates, attrition rates, completion times and rates and, where applicable, comparing different locations of delivery
- b. the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units of study within courses of study.'

These standards align with a number of the key performance indicators used in TEQSA's annual Risk Assessment Framework of providers and benchmarking activities in the sector, as well as providing a rationale for the current Good Practice Note.

Many other standards in the HESF domains relate to the types of activities listed in the HESP's Discussion Paper, which are central to aspects of student support and management and their potential to improve retention. These are listed in Appendix A.

Identifying good performance in retention and completion

The first step in identifying good practice is to establish which providers have good outcomes in student retention and to discover which targeted support strategies they have in place that are likely to lead to reduced attrition. There are many providers who have excellent results in this area including providers who have a track record of sustained excellence in retention. This good practice note highlights a range

of examples that represent the diversity of the sector and where providers have demonstrated measurable improvement in their student retention in a range of different contexts.

TEQSA used two primary sources of information to determine the themes and examples of good practice highlighted in this report.

Firstly, the information on retention strategies that all higher education providers were required to submit by 31 October 2019 (Recommendation 18 of the Government response to the HESP Final Report) allows for the identification of strategies and common approaches which could be linked to the levels of retention achieved.

Secondly, TEQSA collects attrition and progress rate data for all higher education providers annually as part of its Risk Assessment Framework. TEQSA has a four year time-series of this data which it has used to identify those providers with attrition rates in the lowest quartile in 2016 (the latest year of data available) for their category of provider and/or which show an improving situation over time.

This two-pronged approach to identifying good practice in increasing retention has resulted in a number of examples of good or innovative practices for inclusion in the Good Practice Note. These are detailed in the next section.

Examples of good practice

The good practice examples identified broadly reflect the approaches identified in the HESP's Final Report and the Threshold Standards:

- the appropriateness of students' preparation for higher education and how they are selected for admission
- comprehensiveness of orientation and transition to higher education study
- clear and user-friendly enrolment processes
- design of the curriculum
- the importance of early identification of students at risk of discontinuing their studies
- academic student learning support
- student welfare support
- a sense of connectedness to the institution at which they are studying
- how well different student backgrounds are catered for.

Student preparation and admissions

Retention rates are affected by how well students are prepared for the courses they attempt and how well the selection criteria for admission identify the background knowledge and skills required to successfully complete each course offered.

If students are selected and admitted to courses without adequate academic preparation or English language skills (particularly students with English as an Additional Language), the probability of them succeeding in those courses is diminished and the likelihood of withdrawing from their studies is increased. The clarity of admissions requirements and the fair and rigorous application of these policies are important aspects of good practice in demonstrating high levels of retention and success in students' studies.

TEQSA's recently issued *Good Practice Note: Making higher education admissions transparent for prospective students* (2019) highlighted the 'complexity of choice' (p. 2) that has arisen over the past twenty years in the tertiary education sector. While providing welcome opportunities, this complexity of choice has often made it difficult for students to understand and compare admissions requirements in order to make the most suitable choice about a course of study. 'Without the right admissions information, prospective students may not even apply for a course, or they may make decisions that result in them dropping out, leading to poor student retention and reduced learning outcomes' (p. iv).

All registered higher education providers must satisfy the threshold standards associated with admission of students in the HES Framework (see Appendix A).

Examples of good practice identified in this domain include:

Good practice example 1: Pre-enrolment preparation

Marcus Oldham College – ‘*Marcus Minds*’ – pre-enrolment weekend residential



Investing in the applicant early and selecting the right applicants is felt to ensure that the rest (engagement, success, retention) works out favourably.

Principal, Dr Simon Livingstone

The college attributes the age of commencing students (average 21 years old) as central to their ability to succeed in their study. The selection criteria include a requirement not only to have completed year 12 (with an ATAR of 65 and above) but also to have worked for at least 12 months. A pre-enrolment weekend residential, known as *Marcus Minds*, ensures that when students enrol they understand what their course will offer them and what is required of them. This, combined with an interview in which students articulate the experiences of their year of work and their longer-term goals, are all felt to have a strong bearing on students’ ability to see a purpose to their study, and that forgoing salary and applying discipline in their studies is worth the persistence required. Other factors that increase the likelihood of retention are that students have sector experience and are demonstrably interested in the area of study.

Evidence of success

Marcus Oldham has a relatively low attrition rate (10 per cent) compared with other higher education providers.

marcusoldham.vic.edu.au/marcus-minds-2019

Good practice example 2: Early familiarisation with tertiary education

The University of Queensland (UQ) – ‘*Test-driving*’ university with the *Enhanced Studies Program and Subject Incentive Scheme*

The UQ Enhanced Studies Program (ESP) provides the opportunity for secondary school students to complete one university subject during year 12. This provides students with an early experience of tertiary study, building knowledge, skills, and enjoying campus life. The university can have confidence that students who succeed in the program are more likely to continue this positive trajectory into their undergraduate study. The university recognises this and provides an adjustment of one point towards their entrance rank through its Subject Incentive Scheme as well as credit for the completed course should the student enrol with UQ.

esp.uq.edu.au/benefits-esp

future-students.uq.edu.au/node/20

Orientation and transition to higher education study

Orientation and transition programs are central to the success of students admitted to courses. Good practice in the design and delivery of such programs recognises the diversity of the commencing student profile and addresses the English language proficiency and the academic and welfare aspects of student participation in the early years of study.

In 2015, Kift revisited the implementation and success of the philosophy and framework of transition pedagogy and the first year curriculum principles that she devised in 2009. Kift found that transition pedagogy, 'harnessed strategically and holistically across a whole institution, provides some longer-term answers for student learning, success and retention' (p. 51). Transition pedagogy 'focuses on what students have in common—their learning experiences mediated through curriculum—rather than problematising their diversity and difference' (p. 51). It achieves this through:

- a. an intentional and foundational curriculum focus to mediate the coherence and quality of the student experience cumulatively over the student lifecycle
- b. a whole-of-institution and whole of-student emphasis that delivers a coordinated and integrated engagement and proactively intervenes to assure just-in-time, just-for-me support and a sense of belonging
- c. the enabling capacity of academic and professional staff working together in cross-institutional partnerships (p. 51).

The first year of higher education study has been identified as a particularly crucial period of academic and social adjustment during which students must rapidly adapt to a more flexible adult learning environment while simultaneously acquiring a series of academic competencies. It is widely acknowledged that attrition is typically at its highest in the first year of university (Kift 2009, 2015; Tinto 2012; McCluskey, Weldon & Smallridge 2019; Wilson & Devereux 2018).

The benefits of programs to ease transition to higher education are extensively reported in the literature (Devlin et al. 2012; Naylor & Mifsud 2019). Such initiatives enable the gradual acquisition of skills and ability, while fostering confidence and a sense of belonging along with a commitment to persist through academic and personal challenge. Zacharias and Brett's (2019) vision for systemic student equity for Australians in the year 2030 exhorts that 'the goal should be to create smooth transitions and better outcomes for students across a diversifying system' (p. 13).

Good practice example 3: Student strengths self-assessment

Swinburne University of Technology, Swinburne Online – *Student Success Profile*

To increase their self-efficacy, Swinburne Online students are given the opportunity to complete a self-report questionnaire during orientation and receive feedback on up to three of their strengths and up to three areas of improvement for studying online. Utilising a strengths-based approach, feedback is phrased in terms of recognising

strengths and identifying opportunities for growth and development. The questionnaire is based on a literature review that identified the best predictors of success in online study.

Evidence of success

Feedback on the initial pilot survey on the usefulness of the instrument (n=97)

- 92 per cent found the feedback very to extremely accurate
- 91 per cent found the feedback very to extremely useful
- 85 per cent found the feedback very to extremely helpful in identifying support
- 81 per cent of students who talked to coaches about the questionnaire noted that the emailed feedback was useful (n = 47). None noted that it was not useful

Impact

- early modelling suggests the success profiling is able to increase Swinburne's predictive modelling of a student remaining to census by 6 per cent. The next phase is to overlay other predictive variables
- the self-service aspect of the model enables students to address key areas linked to success
- additional support is provided via student coaches who can provide targeted support in the areas identified for development.

swinburneonline.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Ready-for-Success-Survey.pdf

Good practice example 4: Orientation and transition in the first year of study

University of Technology Sydney - *Embedding first year supports in the curriculum and student experience*

As transition pedagogy practices and key supports are embedded in all UTS courses, every commencing student experiences a range of supports to aid their transition to higher education study. These include the First Year Now strategy, led by the Student Transition Achievement Retention Success (STARS) group, which comprises academic and professional staff.

There are a number of projects that make up this strategy, one of which is *Outreach to first years*, where support staff telephone all first year students within their first three weeks of study. As well as anecdotal evidence that the students were pleased to be contacted, the results of an evaluation conducted in autumn 2014 were so encouraging that the program was continued.

Evidence of success

After controlling for risk, the autumn outreach program significantly reduced the number of subjects failed and the number of subjects withdrawn after the census date. These results were true for the entire cohort as well as for most subpopulations for which it was possible to develop a stable statistical model. The one exception to this

was the cohort of domestic fee-paying students. For this cohort, the autumn outreach program did not significantly reduce the likelihood of withdrawing from a subject after the census date.

uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/learning-and-teaching/enhancing/first-year-experience-project

Good practice example 5: Early determination of student needs

Central Queensland University (CQU) – *Pre-enrolment interviews designed to communicate course requirements*

Commencing students at CQU participate in a discussion with staff to ‘discuss students’ needs in relation to inherent program requirements’ (Nelson et al. 2018, p. 12). This ensures students have a clear understanding of what studying at tertiary level will require of them and in particular, the specific requirements of their course of study. This conversation helps to ensure clarity for the student as well as identifying where they might benefit from academic and other assistance. This approach was highlighted as an example of good practice in promoting student engagement in the report *Shaping the 21st century student experience at regional universities Central Queensland University* (Nelson et al. 2018).

Evidence of success

Nelson et al. (2018) described these pre-enrolment interviews as an example of how ‘early people-rich intervention improves transition and first year retention’ (p. 12).

cqu.edu.au/student-life/new-students

Good practice example 6: English language proficiency

University of Technology Sydney (UTS) – *Online Post-Enrolment Language Assessment (OPELA)*

All commencing undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students complete a post-enrolment task (OPELA) to determine their academic English language skills. Students who receive a basic grade in the OPELA task are required to attend follow up language development tutorials, which are aligned with a core discipline subject in the students’ first semester. Students’ language development is monitored throughout the degree via *milestone* (pre-existing assessments) tasks embedded into discipline subjects. Students who do not achieve the threshold level required in the milestone tasks must attend ongoing language development activities. In addition, students can attend free language workshops at UTS HELPS to further enhance English language development.

Evidence of success

Student feedback on the language development tutorials has been positive, with 96 per cent of students reporting that they were satisfied. A major theme emerging from student focus groups indicates improvement in: listening, speaking, academic

writing, and preparation for and completion of subject assessments. A second major theme indicates an increase in: confidence, motivation, participation in learning activities, and knowledge of academic support services (HELPS, Library). Ongoing analysis includes a longitudinal evaluation of the Embedding English Language project, which includes tracking of academic outcomes (Weighted Average Mark/Grade Point Average, retention, progression) in relation to OPELA.

uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/learning-and-teaching/enhancing/language-and-learning/about-opela-students

Clear and user-friendly enrolment processes

Aljohani's (2016) review of the international literature on student retention in higher education found that the central factors in increasing the likelihood of retention were the nature and quality of a student's interaction with their academic institution. These factors relate to students' experiences with both the academic and administrative systems of their provider, including the admission, enrolment, and disciplinary rules and policies, and the availability and quality of student services and facilities. Aljohani's analysis is a reminder of the complexity of higher education providers and that a student interacts with their institution at many levels.

The HESP Discussion Paper (2017a) considered how the presentation of unclear enrolment information and enrolment options for both prospective and current students could lead to ill-informed decision-making and unnecessary abandonment of study. 'This has prompted the Panel to ask whether students need to be more aware of options relating to their enrolment, such as their capacity to take leave, defer, obtain credit from former higher education study and recognition of prior learning' (p. 59).

The following examples show greater use of technology assisted enrolment and responding to questions from students.

Good practice example 7: Chatbot and online enquiry systems

Chatbots

By allowing routine questions to be answered efficiently and directing enquires to the right functional area, human interaction is freed-up to be invested where it is most useful to potential students, such as advising individual prospective students on how they can prepare themselves for successful study.

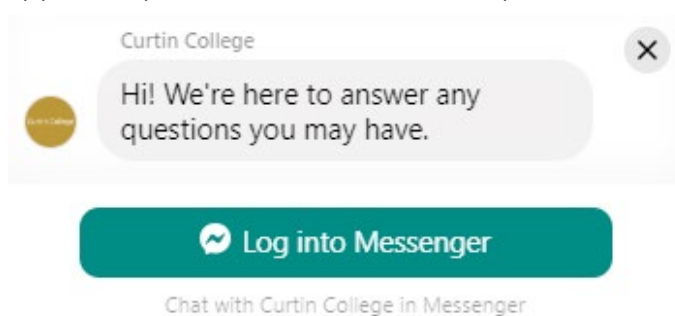
Curtin College – Use of Messenger for student enquiries

Deployed strategically as part of a wider user-friendly application-offer-acceptance-enrolment system, these pop-up interactive enquiry tools can be useful and allow for efficient information gathering. Curtin College has deployed Messenger (a personal messaging application) to provide prospective students with the option of sending a quick enquiry to the institution.

Direct student feedback received through chatbots and other feedback mechanisms (website, email, face-face, student surveys) is used as part of Curtin College's ongoing review and improvement of its student retention and success policies, processes and systems.

Evidence of success

The College has consistently high satisfaction rates, with 86 per cent of new students who responded to the 2019 Orientation Survey indicating that they felt that they had the information and support required to enrol in their units prior to Orientation.



curtincollege.edu.au

Good practice example 8: Easy to understand business processes

Federation University Australia - *Enrolment enhancement program*

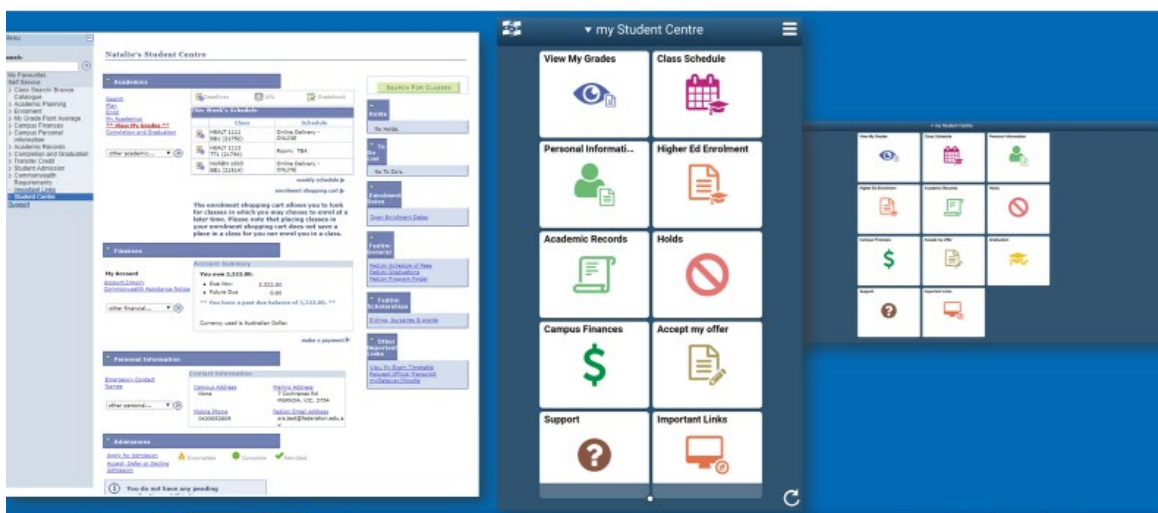
As part of its strategy to develop appropriate methods for simplifying the enrolment process, Federation University Australia has continued to invest in its systems and processes. Progress to date has seen the introduction of a simplified and user-friendly mobile-enabled online enrolment process for all students. This is intended to result in fewer abandoned processes and increased student satisfaction. An enrolment survey for commencing and continuing students is also conducted to help identify 'pain points' in the enrolment process, to assist in continuing to enhance the experience of enrolling students. Future work will focus on further streamlining and integration of course/unit enrolment guidance and systems-based alerts to further empower students to self-enrol online, whilst the University continues to provide a range of flexible and responsive enrolment support options.

Evidence of success

Students reported a 5 per cent improvement in overall satisfaction with the enrolment experience following the introduction of these systems enhancements. This was determined through an independently administered benchmarking survey on their experience with student administrative services, in which the university has opted to participate to capture and monitor the realisation of benefits.

Student homepage (pre-2017)

Student homepage (current/fluid design)



federation.edu.au/starting-at-federation/ready-to-enrol/new-student

Good practice example 9: Pre-enrolment information and study planning sessions

Mayfield Education – *Study planning and the Student Learning Journey Tool*

This provider of vocational and higher education courses in nursing and health services requires all applicants to attend a face-to-face information session as part of the enrolment process. These two-hour sessions include a course overview and a pre-course assessment, the results of which determine admission to the course as well as identifying any areas of knowledge and academic skills requiring development.

Mayfield believes in ensuring that applicants are equipped with the skills and capacity to complete their course. This is assessed as part of the application process in the demonstration of verbal expression skills and in a short written submission stating the reasons for applying for the course. The investment associated with undertaking these sessions is viewed by the institution as very worthwhile, for it is better to have applicants decide the course is not for them before they enrol, rather than them becoming disenchanted, disengaged and not completing the course. Those that enrol know what they need to do to succeed, what supports they are likely to need, and how to access them. Their learning is guided by the 'student learning journey tool', which is a detailed study planner provided for each course and intake. This prescribed plan assists students in working out how to ensure that they stay on track.



mayfield.edu.au

Early identification of students at risk of discontinuing their studies

The early identification of students at risk of failure and dropping out is an important aspect of improving retention and good practice. In recent years, the academic literature has called for greater differentiation in understanding what can be done to support and retain (or redirect) those students whose attrition can be averted with the timely provision of appropriate support. In this context, the challenge to identify students in need of guidance in a timely way and respond with an appropriate intervention has become one of increasing refinement, customisation, and precision. Responses should be informed by each institution's deep knowledge of local student experience, data on student engagement and achievement, and powered by the latest technological innovations.

This is reflected in the HES Framework Domain 1 threshold standards on orientation and progression. Standard 1.3.4 requires providers to ensure that processes that identify students at risk of unsatisfactory progress and provide specific support are implemented across all courses of study.

Naylor et al. (2018) discuss a shift in thinking and practice in recent years, from imprecise observance of common group attributes based on mode of study and sociodemographic features to identifying and responding to individual 'at risk' students in a precise and timely manner. Led by a growing understanding of student success teamed with sophisticated technology, many institutions 'are at least preparing to move towards a coherent, analytics-led 'third generation' (i.e., comprehensive, integrated, whole-of-institution) transition pedagogy (Coates, Kelly, & Naylor, 2016; Kift, 2009)' (Naylor et al. 2018, p. 329).

The findings of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded project entitled 'Learning analytics: Assisting universities with student retention' revealed that learning analytics has a critical role in predicting and responding to factors that place students at greater risk of prematurely withdrawing (Colvin et al. 2016).

Use of predictive learner analytics can reduce the risk of attrition in that it targets students with information of direct relevance to them and does not rely on the student in crisis asking for specific help. Instead, predictive analytics works 'behind the scenes' using individual student's data and pre-identified times and stages of known difficulty or known behaviours that indicate the student is having difficulties. For example, detecting a lack of engagement in the Learning Management System at a certain point in time with a subsequent 'pushing out' of content to this student along with prompts about available services. This might be preceded or followed up by telephone contact by a student mentor or an email from a tutor.

Good practice example 10: Anticipating student guidance needs across the lifecycle

Griffith College – *Student At-Risk Support (SAR) Framework*

Griffith College supports and guides students to build academic competencies for future university study. The 'Griffith College Student At-Risk Support (SAR) Framework' is a detailed week-by-week practical outline of the sequence of initiatives or activities in place, along with staff and teams responsible. Events such as enrolment, high workload or pressure, and decision-making milestones across the academic calendar, from O-Week to Results Week, are considered. Strategies across a trimester include the 'student welfare registry' to flag students with indications of lower engagement gained from data on student attendance, submitted assessments, known pressure or 'touch points' such as week 7 and week 9.

Evidence of success

These strategies are said to be very effective by the provider in identifying students at risk of disengagement. The College's response is proactive, including contacts by student learning advisors, which students tend to appreciate and welcome. The proactivity continues across the student lifecycle with support initiatives built into the academic program. For example, in week 2 welfare and student advisors call all new students, registering welfare issues and triaging support needs and interventions.

griffith.edu.au/college/student-services

Good practice example 11: The use of predictive learning analytics to identify students at risk of difficulty or disengagement

Swinburne University of Technology, Swinburne Online – *Analytics-driven intervention strategy*

In order to provide more targeted and relevant support to students, Swinburne Online developed predictive modelling using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to determine students who are most at risk of disengaging.

Predictors of disengagement included how frequently a student accessed their learning materials, time spent per session and changes in behaviour over time. The challenge was how to provide the most appropriate assistance to students. Learning from initial pilots suggested it was important to identify who is the best person to initiate contact, and what are the best times to contact students, i.e. when or *before* they feel disempowered or make the decision that it is too difficult to continue.

The predictive modelling was used to inform tailored communications from student support teams so students could take preventative actions in a timely manner. Swinburne University used a 'test and learn' approach to continuously improve the targeting, timing and messaging of interventions.

Evidence of success

Improvements in student outcomes following the Intervention pilots run over Teaching Periods 2, 2018 to 1, 2019 include the following:

- for students who enrolled late (up to end of week 1) into a course (n=395), there was a 4 per cent improvement in the retention of new students from enrolment until the first census date, which continued with a 3 per cent improvement to the subsequent teaching period
- for new students completing their first major assessment (n=283), there was a 4 per cent improvement in pass rates in the current teaching period
- for students who were sitting their first exam (n=283), a 3 per cent improvement was recorded in pass rates in the current teaching period
- for students exhibiting the highest risk factors for disengagement (n=219), there was an improvement of 1.7 per cent in progression to the subsequent teaching period.

Good practice example 12: Re-engagement with students on leave of absence

Central Queensland University – *Re-engagement with students on leave*

Academic Liaison staff keep in contact with students who are on leave from study by telephone and email, in order to keep a 'live' connection with students to increase the likelihood of them returning to study.

Evidence of success

Through the program's proactive outreach, the university increased the number of students returning from a year of study leave. CQU reports that 'in 2018, there was a 77 per cent increase in re-enrolment of low SES students from 1 year of study leave compared to 2016. Students regularly report that the contact is 'just at the right time' to support them with challenges they are experiencing' (CQU's response to Minister, p. 6).

cqu.edu.au/student-life/new-students/student-support/learning-support

Course and career advice

Recommendation 3 of the HESP's Final Report states that 'Career advice cannot be left to schools. Every higher education institution should ensure that their students are given the opportunity for career planning and course advice on entry to the institution and as they require it throughout their studies' (HESP 2017b, p. 9). While currently weighted more towards primary and secondary school students, the Government has indicated that The National Career Education Strategy 2018 (NCES) 'should be closely monitored to identify improvements in the area of student career advice, including study options and pathways, and information about the post-school learning environment. This strategy should also be expanded to include mature-age students, or a separate strategy should be initiated for this cohort' (Government response to HESP Recommendation 2).

Krause indicates that career advice is already seen to play a role of 'pivotal importance' (ABC Radio National 2018) in student course selection and decision-making in the higher education sector, but this role could be expanded or at least more strategically employed.

Given Harvey, Szalkowicz and Luckman's (2017) finding that many students who withdraw return to the same institution to study within eight years, the role of career advisers in helping students chart their longer-term goals and where study fits in this plan may be underutilised.

Good practice example 13: Provide guidance to support timely course redirection

La Trobe University – *Succeed at La Trobe program*

Succeed@LaTrobe provides proactive telephone outreach to all incoming students and those identified as at risk to assist with early course and career planning, including information on course transfers and access to support services (Cox and Naylor 2018). In 2019, this team made over 20,000 calls and connected students with an intensive advising program that provides course level and developmental advice to improve student success and facilitate case management on an individual basis.

Evidence of success

Currently, students who are contacted by the program are more successful in their studies (higher Weighted Average Mark) and are more likely to be retained when compared to a matched cohort.

latrobe.edu.au/learning-and-teaching/student-success/succeed-at-la-trobe-program

Good practice example 14: Promote early and routine career planning

The International College of Management, Sydney (ICMS) – *Embedded career planning*

Retention is articulated as a strategic priority at ICMS and the success of recent initiatives is largely due to the close alignment of all elements that have a bearing on student success. The origin of ICMS was in preparing students for careers in the hospitality industry and this has established a tradition of providing ‘career-focused higher education’ (homepage). Career discussions start early and continue throughout a student’s course progression, along with development of practical skills in job interviews and networking. A key principle of learning and teaching at ICMS is establishing clear links between theory and practice. Academics explain the career purpose of what they are teaching, thus making practical links with future graduate employability.

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is central to ICMS courses with two blocks of industry training supported by a dedicated WIL team. The industry training program drives student engagement by allowing students to see and experience their future and is found to encourage students to strive academically.

There is not a distinct careers service at ICMS; instead, career preparation is embedded in the curriculum and assessment. As part of the cornerstone subject ‘Pathway to Success’, an employability toolkit forms one of the assessments. Whilst this is embedded as an assessment task in an academic, credit-bearing subject, the products (interviews, resumes) are accessible by the WIL team to support them in further developing the students’ skills before they go out on placement. For example, a central repository of *MyInterview* recordings is accessible as well as resumes.

Evidence of success

Students are frequently offered work through their work placements and a graduation day survey has revealed that 90 per cent of graduands have work in the careers to which they aspire.

icms.edu.au

Good practice example 15: Foster ongoing, post-graduation success and connection through promoting career planning as ‘life preparation’

Bond University – *Beyond Bond*

Beyond Bond is a mandatory subject that provides an intentionally designed, explicit and personalised employability learning pathway for all undergraduate students. Facilitated by the Career Development Centre, it is focused on enhancing the student experience and graduate outcomes. This subject is student-centric in design and

delivery, spanning the duration of the whole degree. It provides students with over 220 employability activities across 43 units including industry, curriculum, community and careers-based components. Beyond Bond captures all experience beyond the curriculum, transforming them into employability learning opportunities via constructively aligned reflective practice assignments. These assignments emphasise skills, are integrated with academic learning, and enhance students' capabilities in the articulation of this learning.

Beyond Bond supports student retention and progression through the provision of career development support early in their educational journey, creating an 'apprenticeship' in active career management, building skills and belonging as they complete it. Previously unexplored employability insights are integrated into the broader educational experience, and learners can draw on these to build employability capacity and confidence. Bond considers that active career development early in a degree journey maintains an active connection to the purpose of education, in addition to the process.

Evidence of success

Since implementation, engagement in career services has increased by 33 per cent and industry placements by 15 per cent. Over 18,000 student learning experiences have been captured and supported with personalised feedback. Beyond Bond has a 100 per cent completion rate, employer satisfaction with students undertaking industry placements has increased to 90 per cent and achieved a graduate conversion rate of 38 per cent. Thematic analysis of student reflections reveals an upward cycle of employability capacity and confidence over the course of the subject. Upon completion of Beyond Bond, students are able to recognise the benefit of the program to support their transition to graduate outcomes. Career support is further extended to all students post-graduation and they are able to access lifetime career guidance from the Career Development Centre.

bond.edu.au/current-students/opportunities/career-development-centre/beyond-bond

Good practice example 16: Support students to adapt to variations in the employment market and industry fluctuations

University of Technology Sydney (UTS) – *Career Management for Scientists*

UTS has observed that careers in laboratories have reduced in recent years. In response, UTS offered a seminar series program *Career Management for Scientists*, in which students consider less obvious career options and ways to maximise their short and longer term employability. While initial results are not statistically significant, student feedback is encouraging.

Evidence of success

The *Career Management for Scientists* 2018 program attracted the highest number of enrolments since its 2012 inception. During the 2017 course, 95 per cent of the undergraduate students answering the course's Student Feedback Survey stated they felt confident they were employable upon completing the course. This was an 81 per cent increase from a survey conducted at the beginning of the course.

228 students from the Science faculty answered the 2018 Course Experience Questionnaire. In this part of the Graduate Outcomes Survey, 85.5 per cent of students said that they found Course learnings valuable for the future whilst the overall course satisfaction rating was 82.5 per cent.

Academic support

Australian higher education providers must demonstrate that they provide an extensive range of support services related to student welfare in order to satisfy the HES Framework (including counselling and academic support). However, identifying and connecting students with the right support at the right time can be difficult. This is largely due to the wide range of assistance on offer, combined with the need for students to initiate this support by actively asking, seeking out, and often, registering for assistance. For many students, the task of having to connect this 'problem' to the right support to find a 'solution' can prove too much of a challenge. Even if the student knows precisely what support would be helpful, many students find it difficult to ask for assistance or are concerned that doing so might raise doubts about their competence. McKay and Devlin (2015) identified the importance of fostering help-seeking behaviours through normalising access to support services. Stone and O'Shea (2019) recommend that 'timely, proactive, embedded support' (p. 63) is key to improving retention and the ongoing participation of students aged over 25, studying for the first time, and studying online.

The provision of appropriate educational support services is necessary to optimise chances of student success and the likelihood of them remaining enrolled and completing qualifications. Good practice will involve these services being targeted at different groups of students and addressing identified needs for additional help.

These issues are covered in the HES Framework Domain 3 threshold standards.

Good practice example 17: Appropriate educational support mechanisms

The International College of Management, Sydney (ICMS) – 'Student Success Pilot' – Success from Failure

An evidence-based approach has been successful in improving student success rates through the 'Student Success Pilot', with five subjects chosen on the basis of their traditionally low pass rates and their positioning as typically in the first period of study. The College's progression data has identified a link between students with poor performance within their first two study periods and the likelihood of eventual withdrawal.

The project involved a current state analysis, with 42 data sources and a mix of qualitative and quantitative data used to develop and implement a set of interventions. Presentations on the project include at the 2018 TEQSA Conference and the Assessment in Higher Education Conference in Manchester, United Kingdom, June 2019.


Evidence of success

The results of the pilot were positive e.g. an increase of up to 12 per cent in pass rates, increased engagement from students and positive learning experiences for academics. The lessons learned have already been used to inform policy development including the new Learning and Teaching Principles and assessment policy to embed developmental approaches and constructive feedback.

icms.edu.au/student-success-pilot

Good practice example 18: Constructive and student-centred approach to academic progress

The Cairnmillar Institute – *Student centred approach to academic progress*

 *There are 'moments that matter' during a student's journey, which, depending on how handled, can 'make or break' that student's educational experience.*
Professor Kathryn von Treuer, Executive Director

'Moments that matter' can include how student progress is managed. Even when difficult situations happen, it does not mean all is lost for the student or the relationship with the college. The Cairnmillar Institute (CMI) takes an educative approach to discipline, with the goal of sending students 'out into the world with integrity'. CMI believes that open communication with the unit coordinator and head of school is crucial. Some students are seen to start to shine after progressing through difficult experiences that are handled well by the College. In identifying and responding to student needs with timely and personalised support, CMI is not only building student wellbeing and success, but also modelling professional conduct and values that are essential for future career success.

Evidence of success

The adjusted attrition rate released by the Department of Education for Cairnmillar in 2016–2017 was 0.9 per cent.

cairnmillar.edu.au/postgraduate-courses

Good practice example 19: Study skills workshops

The University of Adelaide – *Maths Learning Centre*

In recognition that difficulty with mathematics can impede a student in their coursework and future career aspirations, the University's Maths Learning Centre offers a dedicated physical space where students are provided with the resources and support to gain skills and confidence with mathematics. The Centre offers a drop-in service, a bridging course, resources for teaching staff, and a series of activities on Mathematical Art and Play, such as *One Hundred Factorial* – 'a gathering of staff, students and friends to solve puzzles and play mathematical games together, both online and face-to-face'.

Occasionally, the MLC lecturers give seminars on maths or maths-related topics, where the focus is on the fun or interest of the maths. Find out more about the past seminars here.

The Maths Learning Centre occasionally provide seminars and workshops about the joyful and playful aspects of maths, both at university and elsewhere.

- ▶ [Playful and Joyful Maths \(keynote at MAVCON 2017\)](#)
- ▶ [One Hundred Factorial: Playful and Joyful Maths](#)
- ▶ [The Queen of Hearts Plays Noughts and Crosses](#)
- ▶ [\[\$n!/e\$ \]](#)
- ▶ [Eigenvalue Magic Tricks](#)
- ▶ [Secrets of Alice in Wonderland](#)

adelaide.edu.au/mathlearning

A sense of connectedness to the institution

Depending on a student's background, preparedness, and personality, higher education study can be especially stressful and alienating. Strayhorn (2018) emphasises that a 'sense of belonging' or connectedness, with its reliance on reciprocal relationships, is a basic human need which is central to success in higher education and can be both protective and motivating.

Good practice example 20: Joining student organisations

The Australian College of Physical Education (ACPE) – *'Down time' with social and sporting activities*

By its nature, higher education study is a challenging experience for students. For some students, their background, circumstances, and other life commitments can make adjustment and success more of a challenge. ACPE recommends that students blend their studies with 'down time' in the form of social and sporting activities. They also have a common hour once a week where no classes are scheduled, and use this time to hold events so that all students can participate.

The student lounge has a ping pong table and a TV with sports on all day. ACPE holds staff vs students tournaments of five games over the year and currently the students hold the title. Being able to connect with academics and staff on a social, albeit competitive, level allows students to feel more comfortable to approach staff when they need to.

Evidence of success

Anecdotally, students have said that breaking up the day with sports and activities has made them feel more connected to the college and its staff members. Students have

said that staff vs students events are one of their favourite things to be a part of as they get to be on an 'even playing field' with some of their lecturers and tutors. Some students have told the Director that there have been times when they have been on the verge of leaving due to personal reasons, and that being able to come in and have a game of ping pong with staff and chat through their issues has meant that they could work together to come up with a plan.



acpe.edu.au/future-students/student-life/sport-at-acpe

Good practice example 21: Intervening in and supporting student decision-making through social events

University of Technology Sydney - *Don't drop out, drop in!*

The *Don't drop out, drop in!* program runs at the start of each semester and is a peer networking café that aims to foster students' 'sense of belonging' through social activities, such as a 'buddy' program and 'speed friending' nights. During these social events, UTS also offers guidance to students who may be having doubts about their course selections. Under the *Thinking of leaving university?* heading on the Health and Wellbeing webpage, a student might be prompted to seek advice first.

'Having doubts about staying on at university is something that affects a surprising number of students. Before you make any decisions, it's a good idea to have a chat with someone who might be able to help you deal with your concerns. Feel free to come to us, or consult with your lecturer, tutor, academic advisor, academic liaison officer or course coordinator to be fully informed of your options. If you are thinking of pursuing an alternative course or career pathway, you may also be interested in consulting the UTS Careers Service'.

uts.edu.au/current-students/support/health-and-wellbeing/counselling-service-and-self-help/how-we-can-help

Good practice example 22: Foster a sense of belonging for non-traditional students

Swinburne University of Technology, Swinburne Online – ‘Someone like Me’ videos

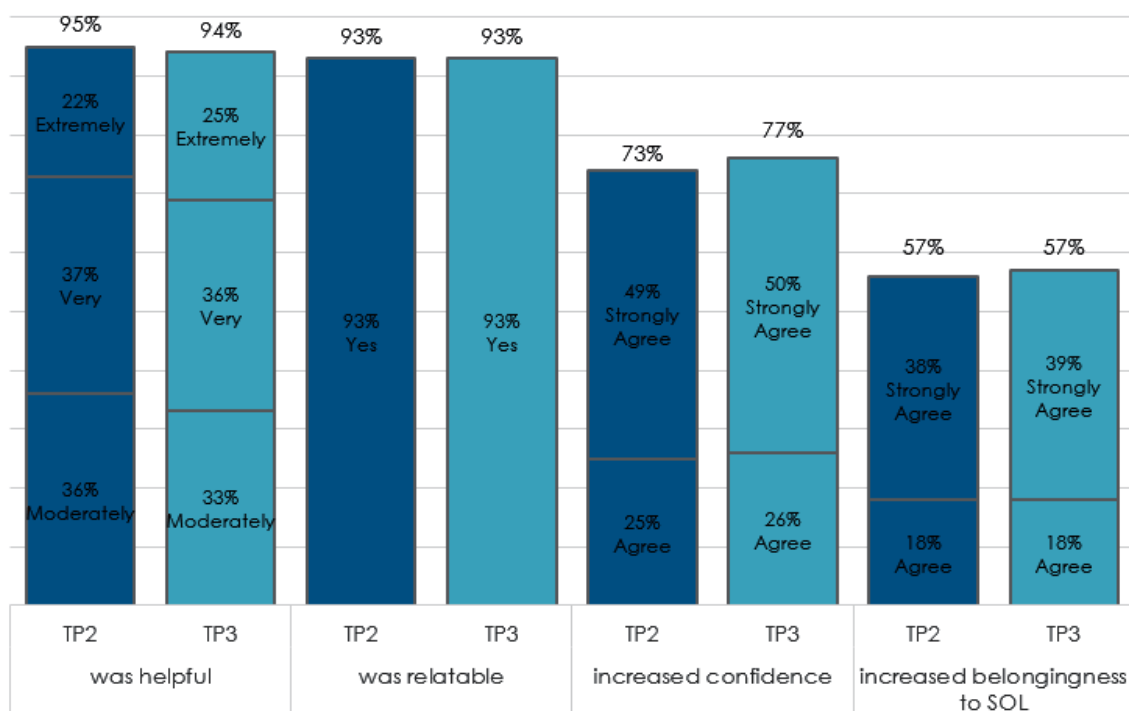
Based on research that indicated non-traditional students (part-time, first-in-family, low-SES) often lack cultural capital in regards to university processes and expectations, Swinburne Online introduced videos of non-traditional, regional and remote online graduates from a range of disciplines. The graduates talk about the challenges of online study and how they overcame them to be successful. The intent is to demonstrate that *someone like me* can undertake study and achieve their goals.

Nine videos were put into 19 first stage units across Business, Education and Social Science disciplines. Number of video plays:

- Teaching Period 2, 2018: 1,697 plays
- Teaching Period 3, 2018: 1,116 plays
- Teaching Period 1, 2019: 2,991 plays

Evidence of success

Students rated the videos:



TP3 n = 1104; TP2 n = 984

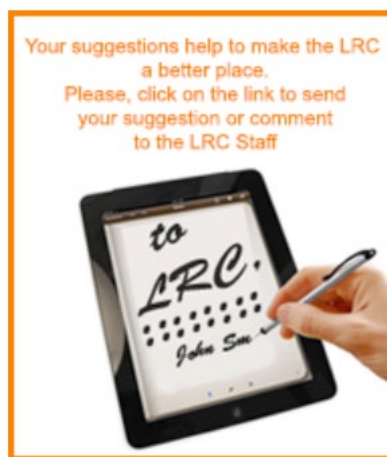
vimeo.com/278259713/359bc21fd5

Good practice example 23: Respond to student feedback

William Angliss Institute (WAI) of TAFE – *Feedback portal at the Library Resource Centre (LRC)*

The Disability Liaison Officers at the Learning Resource Centre coordinate services to ensure students with disabilities can have equal access to educational opportunities at William Angliss Institute of TAFE (WAI). Each person with a disability has different preferences and requirements and will have valuable insights into inclusive practices that work for them, and this opportunity to provide feedback to improve service provision is a way to tap into this knowledge. Providing feedback to improve the institution can give students a stronger sense of belonging especially when there is evidence that the institution has acted on the feedback.

MAKE a SUGGESTION



 e-mail: lrc@angliss.edu.au

 phone: (03) 96062237

library.angliss.edu.au/services-for-students/dissability-support

Catering for different student backgrounds

Analysis of Commonwealth Higher Education Student Collection (HESC) data of the Commonwealth Department of Education (Edwards & McMillan 2015), found that completion rates were lower for Indigenous students, part-time students, external students, students over 25 years of age, remote students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The analysis concluded that 'the differences between the outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are substantial' (p. 8).

The research also found that students' 'dropout' rate was increased by being members of multiple risk groups. Compounding factors such as non-metropolitan residence and studying part-time further increased the probability of attrition. For example: a rural/regional student entering higher education has an attrition risk of 35.5 per cent and, when combined with studying part-time (risk of 50.9 per cent), this raises the overall risk to 54.7 per cent. Similarly, a low-SES student with a risk of 31.1 per cent studying part-time (50.9 per cent) has an increased attrition risk of 54.4 per cent.

Demographic risk factors for attrition have been identified and extensively discussed in the literature. This section considers first-in family (FiF) students and regional and remote students.

First-in-family

Research has identified that first-in-family students have poorer educational outcomes in higher education study than students from families that have studied at a higher education level (Norton, Cherastidtham and Mackey 2018; Productivity Commission 2019). O'Shea (2016, 2019) explains that without a family tradition of university attendance and access to networks comprised of people who have attended university, FiF students can find the transition to higher education difficult and be unprepared for the expectations of study at this level. Barriers to success include the absence of informed encouragement by family and unfamiliarity with terminology and procedures used by higher education providers.

Regional and remote

Pollard (2018) found that remote students in Australia have lower rates of both participation and completion in higher education than their regional and metropolitan peers. Regional and remote students have shown 'little to no improvement' (p. 11) in access to higher education compared with increased rates for other equity groups.

In 2019, the Australian Government Department of Education reported that 'the current completion rate for domestic bachelor-level university students, six years after commencing in 2012, is around 66 per cent for metropolitan students, compared to 61 per cent for regional students and 53 per cent for remote students', which translates to lower educational achievement in their communities (DoE 2019, p. 1). This disparity is said to be due to a range of factors including higher rates of financial stress, social dislocation, as well as participation in off-campus and part-time study.

Threshold standards related to diversity and equity and student wellbeing are located in Domain 2 of the HES Framework on the Learning Environment. There is an expectation that the learning environment provided for students must recognise the diversity of the student population and be conducive to all students' success, irrespective of their academic and cultural backgrounds. Good practice in these areas should include flexibility in course structures and presentation to recognise the different backgrounds of the student profile, as well as a comprehensive range of customised welfare services that are relevant to different students' circumstances.

Good practice example 24: Recognise the diversity of the student population and support all students' success: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

University of South Australia (UniSA) – *Wurringka Student Services*

UniSA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are supported by its Aboriginal Student Engagement Officers (ASEO) in Wurringka Student Services. When an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student enrolls, an ASEO contacts them to let them know about Wurringka and the supports available to them. If the student chooses to engage, the ASEO will work with them to determine how best they can support them in their studies.

This can include:

- matching them with a tutor as part of the Aboriginal Tutorial Program
- providing information and support about scholarships
- advising them about mentoring and work opportunities for high achieving students, or offering pastoral care.

i.unisa.edu.au/students/student-support-services/wurringka-student-services

Good practice example 25: Recognise the diversity of the student population and support all students' success: Students with English as an Additional Language

Swinburne University of Technology – *'Migrant to Migrant' (M2M) Support Program*

M2M occurs in week 3 of each semester, which is known as 'Reflection Week'. A team of student peers are trained to make calls to all new students for whom English is not their first language, to check-in on how they are settling in to their studies and to discuss available supports. A follow-up email is sent with links to all services upon request. Swinburne has identified that many migrant students fall into the 'at risk' cohort in terms of academic progress, with students from refugee backgrounds facing barriers to success even before enrolling.

Evidence of success

'The evaluation of this program shows that migrant students who receive the M2M calls are more likely to access help. Over time, the program is expected to contribute to improved educational outcomes and higher retention of this cohort'.

knowing.swinburne.edu.au/post/161766275679/how-john-gulzari-and-swinburne-are-supporting

Good practice example 26: Recognise the diversity of the student population and support all students' success: International students

Excelsia College – A 'buddy' program for international students

This is both a social and educational program that fosters connection between students and provides a way for international students to develop English language skills where needed.

To ensure new international students transition smoothly into study life at Excelsia College and living in Australia, the Student Support Centre is trialling a new College Buddy Program. This program is a 'buddy' system designed to utilise domestic student knowledge of Sydney and the College to enhance the student experience of international students and help them to develop interpersonal skills.

Led by a second year student, the two-session program covers a campus tour and in-depth overview of facilities, services, and getting around Sydney, including things all newcomers need to know: shops, transport, entertainment, and useful local apps to download. English language support programs are aligned with the buddy program either through a 5-week general or advanced option, in addition to academic skills consultations.

Though the program is only for two sessions, the intention is that the students participating (both domestic and international) would continue a warm relationship following the program, perhaps being a buddy to future new students. There are no mandatory requirements after participating in the program, but it is hoped that positive regard and some friendships develop and enhance the community of Excelsia College. The ambition is that this project fosters growth and understanding between domestic and international students and enhances the experience of all students.

excelsia.edu.au/current-students/student-support

Good practice example 27: Provide customised welfare services that are relevant to different student circumstances

Western Sydney University (WSU) – Support and retention strategies catering specifically to external/online students

While WSU's 1000 fully external/online students are included in the university's overall student retention strategy, WSU has a range of additional measures in place to meet the specific needs of these students. Student advisors are available during and after hours, 7 days per week. In addition, a retention team focusing just on this cohort monitors engagement and progress, stepping in with retention interventions and support activities where it would be timely and helpful. Online unit coordinators and learning advisors convene web-conferencing discussion groups and there are weekly email communications on matters of particular relevance to this cohort of students.

online.westernsydney.edu.au/current-students

Good practice example 28: Promote the engagement and success of students who have spent time in out-of-home care

'Raising Expectations' – Federation University Australia, La Trobe University, and Swinburne University of Technology

Raising Expectations is a partnership between the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Federation University Australia, La Trobe University and Swinburne University of Technology. The team recognises that people who have spent time in out-of-home care may have limited support and can face challenges accessing and completing vocational and higher education. The overall aim of the project is to raise transition rates to tertiary education for those with a care experience and to improve the educational achievement of care leavers. Innovative initiatives include: training for foster carers and social workers; education resources for people in care; and new university programs for care leavers, including targeted bursaries and scholarships, 'wraparound' services and outreach.

In recognition of its success, the Raising Expectations project won the Education Initiative Award at the 2018 Victorian Protecting Children Awards. At the time of writing, there are more than 300 care leaver students enrolled at the three partner institutions. Originally funded through a Sidney Myer Fund large grant, the Victorian Department of Education and Training has committed to a substantial investment in Raising Expectations until December 2022.

cfecfw.asn.au/raisingexpectations

Good practice example 29: Promote the engagement and success of regional and rural students

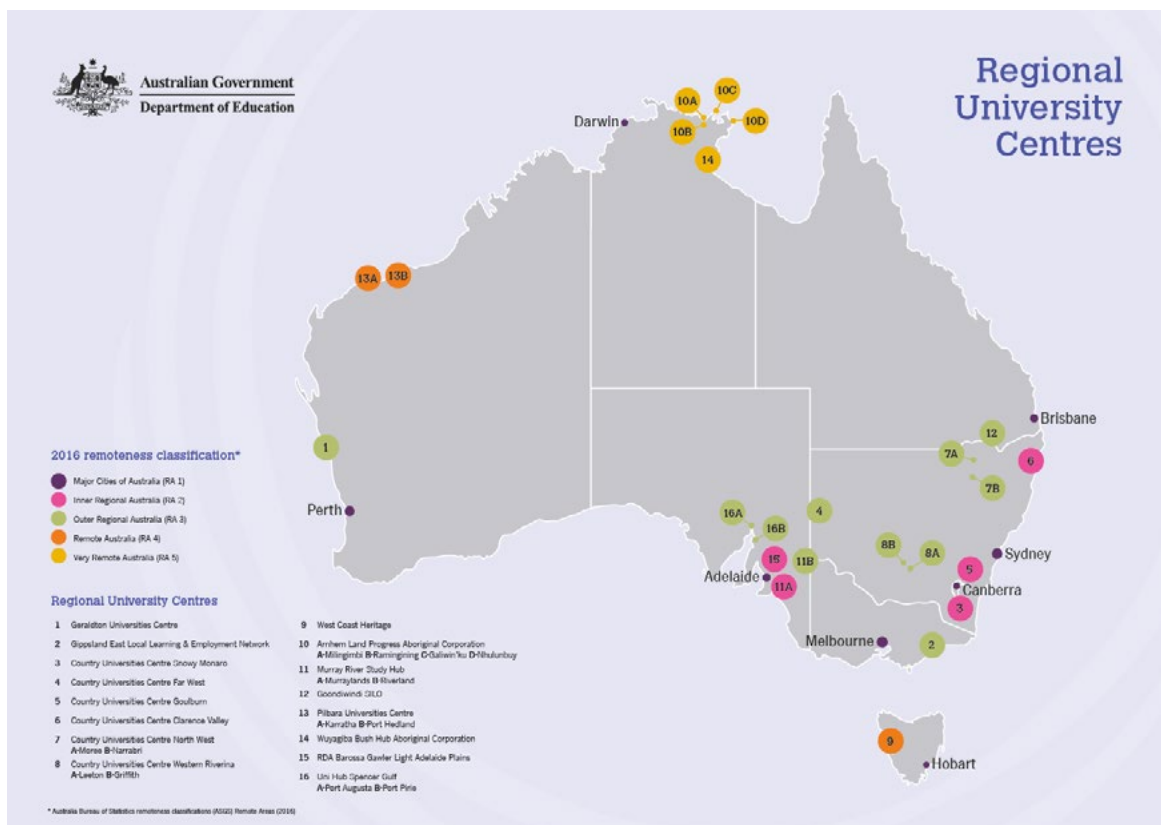
Regional University Centres – Various providers

Regional University Centres (formerly known as Regional Study Hubs) are community-owned organisations that provide study spaces, high-speed internet and academic and student support services across regional, rural and remote Australia. There are currently 16 Centres across Australia in all states and the Northern Territory, including Pilbara University Centre in Western Australia, the Country University Centres in New South Wales, Wuyagiba Bush Hub in the Northern Territory, Goondiwindi in Queensland and Study Hub West Coast in Zeehan, Tasmania. An additional five Centres will be established in 2020-21 following a competitive grants process, bringing the total number of Centres to 21.

Partnering with Australian universities, Centres increase access to and participation in higher education and support retention for regional and remote students who are unable or unwilling to move away from their community. Students already studying or aspiring to a higher education qualification can register with a Centre and undertake their study by distance with any Australian institution, receiving support services and facilities at the Centre that are similar to those available at a university campus.

Information on the Regional University Centres program is available on the Department of Education website: education.gov.au/regional-university-centres-formerly-known-regional-study-hubs

Map of Regional University Centres



Appendix A – Standards from the Higher Education Standards Framework (2015) relevant to student retention

Domain 1: Student Participation and Attainment

Section 1.1 – Admission

Standard 1.1.1

Admission policies, requirements and procedures are documented, are applied fairly and consistently, and are designed to ensure that admitted students have the academic proficiency in English needed to participate in their intended study, and no known limitations that would be expected to impede their progression and completion.

Section 1.3 – Orientation and Progression

The relevant HESF standards are as follows:

Standard 1.3.1

Successful transition into courses of study is achieved through orientation programs that are tailored to the needs of student cohorts and include specific consideration for international students adjusting to living and studying in Australia.

Standard 1.3.2

Specific strategies support transition, including:

- a. assessing the preparedness of individual students and cohorts
- b. undertaking early assessment or review that provides formative feedback on academic progress and is able to identify needs for additional support, and
- c. providing access to informed advice and timely referral to academic or other support.

Domain 2: Learning Environment

Section 2.2 – Diversity and Equity

Standard 2.2.1

Institutional policies, practices and approaches to teaching and learning are designed to accommodate student diversity, including the under-representation and/or disadvantage experienced by identified groups, and create equivalent opportunities for academic success regardless of students' backgrounds.

Standard 2.2.2

Specific consideration is given to the recruitment, admission, participation and completion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Standard 2.2.3

Participation, progress and completion by identified student subgroups are monitored and the findings are used to inform admission policies and improvement of teaching, learning and support strategies for those subgroups.

Section 2.3 – Wellbeing and Safety

This section identifies the need for and imposes requirements in respect of a safe environment and the availability of appropriate support services to promote student wellbeing. In particular the following standards are relevant to retention.

Standard 2.3.2

Timely accurate advice on access to personal support services is available, including for access to emergency services, health services, counselling, legal advice, advocacy, and accommodation and welfare services.

Standard 2.3.3

The nature and extent of support services that are available for students are informed by the needs of student cohorts, including mental health, disability and wellbeing needs.

Domain 3: Teaching

Section 3.3 – Learning Resources and Educational Support

Standard 3.3.4

Students have access to learning support services that are consistent with the requirements of their course of study, their mode of study and the learning needs of student cohorts, including arrangements for supporting and maintaining contact with students who are off campus.

References

- ABC Radio National, 2018, 'Dropping out of university' *Big Ideas* radio program, ABC Radio National, 27 June, downloaded 17 July 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/dropping-out-of-university/9906686>.
- Aljohani, O 2016, 'A Review of the Contemporary International Literature on Student Retention in Higher Education', *International Journal of Education & Literary Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 40–52.
- Colvin, C, Rogers, T, Wade, A, Dawson, S, Gasevic, D, Buckingham Shum, S, Nelson, K, Alexander, S, Lockyer, L, Kennedy, G, Corrin, L & Fisher, J 2016, *Student retention and learning analytics: A snapshot of Australian practices and a framework for advancement* (Report). Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching, retrieved 30 May 2019, <http://hdl.handle.net/10453/>.
- Cox, S & Naylor, R 2018, 'Intra-university partnerships improve student success in a first-year success and retention outreach initiative' *Student Success*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 51–64.
- Department of Education 2019, *Retention and attainment of regional, rural and remote learners in tertiary education*, Issues Paper No. 3, Department of Education, Canberra, retrieved 18 July, <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/52546>.
- Devlin, M, Kift, S, Nelson, K, Smith, L & McKay, J 2012, *Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Resources for Australian higher education*, Final Report, Office for Learning & Teaching, Sydney, retrieved 15 May 2019, <http://lowses.edu.au/assets/ALTC%20LSES%20Final%20Report%202012.pdf>.
- Edwards, D & McMillan, J, 2015, *Completing university in a growing sector: Is equity an issue?* Report submitted to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Australia. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Melbourne, retrieved 25 June 2019, <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/completing-university-in-a-growing-sector-is-equity-an-issue/>.
- Hanover Research 2014, *Strategies for Improving Student Retention*, Washington, DC, retrieved 18 July 2019, <https://www.hanoverresearch.com/media/Strategies-for-Improving-Student-Retention.pdf>.
- Harvey, A, Szalkowicz, G & Luckman, M, 2017, *The re-recruitment of students who have withdrawn from Australian higher education*. Report for the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research, La Trobe University, Melbourne, retrieved 13 June 2019, https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/784028/La-Trobe-NPP-Re-recruitment-Research-Report-24-February-2017.pdf.
- Higher Education Standards Panel 2017a, *Discussion Paper – Improving retention, completion and success in higher education*, retrieved 13 June 2019, <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/44121>.
- Higher Education Standards Panel 2017b, *Final Report – Improving retention, completion and success in higher education*, retrieved 13 June 2019, https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_report_for_publishing.pdf.

Ithaca Group 2019. *Future Ready: Research on incorporating career education in the Australian Curriculum*, Australian Government Department of Education and Training, retrieved 13 June, https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/future_ready_-_research_on_incorporating_career_education_in_the_australian_curriculum.pdf.

Kift, S 2015, 'A decade of Transition Pedagogy: A quantum leap in conceptualising the first year experience', *HERDSA Review of Higher Education*, vol. 2, pp. 51–86.

Kift, S, 2009, *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education: Final report for ALTC Senior Fellowship Program*. Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Strawberry Hills, NSW, retrieved 20 December 2019, http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/709749/Kift_09.pdf.

Kift, S, Nelson, K, & Clarke, J 2010, 'Transition pedagogy: A third generation approach to FYE—A case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector', *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–20.

Li, I, Carroll, D, 2019, *Employment and Study Outcomes after Graduation: An Australian Higher Education Equity Perspective*, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth, retrieved 10 December, <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/postgraduate-study-graduate-employment-equity-groups/>.

McCluskey, T, Weldon, J & Smallridge, A 2019, 'Rebuilding the first year experience, one block at a time', *Student Success*, Feature Practice Report 10, pp.1-15, retrieved 13 June, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Rebuilding+the+first+year+experience%2c+one+block+at+a+time.-a0581622971>.

McKay, J, Devlin, M, 2015, 'Widening participation in Australia: Lessons on Equity, Standards, and Institutional Leadership', in M Shah, A Bennett & E Southgate (eds), *Widening Higher Education Participation A Global Perspective*, Chandos Publishing, pp. 161-179.

Naylor, R, Baik, C & Arkoudis, S 2018, 'Identifying attrition risk based on the first year experience', *Higher Education Research & Development*, vol. 37, pp. 328–342.

Naylor, R, Mifsud, N 2019, *Structural inequality in higher education: Creating institutional cultures that enable all students*, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth, retrieved 12 November, <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/structural-inequality-retention-equity-students/>.

Nelson, K, Readman, K, & Stoodley, I 2018, *Shaping the 21st century student experience at regional universities* (Final report). Canberra. Retrieved 16 July 2019, <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A80149>.

Norton, A, Cherastidham, I & Mackey, W 2018, *Dropping out: the benefits and costs of trying university*. Grattan Institute (No. 2018– 07), retrieved 13 June 2019, <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/904-dropping-out-the-benefits-and-costs-of-trying-university.pdf>.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2016, *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

O'Shea, S 2016, 'Supporting and engaging students who are the first in their families to attend university: A Practise Paper' (AISHE-J): *The All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, vol. 8, no. 2 pp. 289–1-289-15.

O'Shea, S 2019, *Mind the Gap!* Exploring the post-graduation outcomes and employment mobility of individuals who are first in their family to complete a university degree, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth, retrieved 1 July 2019, <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/sarah-oshea-research-fellowship-literature-review/>.

Pollard, L 2018, *Remote Student University Success: An Analysis of Policy and Practice*, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth, retrieved 1 July 2019, <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/remote-student-university-success-analysis-policy-practice/>.

Productivity Commission 2019, *The Demand Driven University System: A Mixed Report Card*, Commission Research Paper, Canberra, retrieved 15 July, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/university-report-card/university-report-card.pdf>.

Stone, C, & O'Shea, S 2019, 'Older, online and first: recommendations for retention and success', *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 57–69.

Strayhorn, TL 2018, *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*, 2nd edn, Routledge, New York.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency 2019, *Good Practice Note: Making higher education admissions transparent for prospective students*, July 2019, TEQSA, Melbourne.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency 2017, *Characteristics of Australian higher education providers and their relation to first-year student attrition*, June 2017, TEQSA, Melbourne.

Tinto, V 2012, *Completing College*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Wilson, K & Devereux, L 2018, 'Funded, fed and fit, and academically disadvantaged: First in Family students and cultural mismatch in higher education', *Students, Transition, Achievement, Retention and Success (STARS) Conference, Auckland, New Zealand*, 8–11 July 2018, viewed 22 May, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326427164_Funded_fed_and_fit_and_academically_disadvantaged_First_in_Family_students_and_cultural_mismatch_in_higher_education22.

Zacharias, N, & Brett, M 2019, 'The Best Chance for All: Student Equity 2030 – A long-term strategic vision for student equity in higher education', Final Report, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth retrieved 10 December, https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Equity2030_FINAL_ACCESSIBLE.pdf.

TEQSA

teqsa.gov.au