STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS PLAN

2019 – 2021

adelaide.edu.au

Contents

1. Introduction

This document sets out the University of Adelaide's first integrated institution-level Plan for student retention and success. It seeks to foster a joined-up approach to the planning, implementation and evaluation of retention and success interventions and practices across the institution, to optimise outcomes for students and the University.

The Plan aligns with and supports a range of University Strategies and Plans which also address student retention and success outcomes. Relevant goals and actions of other Strategies and Plans (for example, the Tarrkarri Tirrka) are not reproduced in the Student Retention and Success Plan with the exception of cross-referencing to the Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment (SLTA 2016-18), the next cycle of which will be incorporated into the Education sub-plan of the University's Strategic Plan 2019-2030.

Retention in university at the University of Adelaide sits just above the mid-way point in Australian universities but at the bottom of the Go8. It has been entrenched in this position for the past decade despite multiple intervention programs.

In 2018, the University set the goal to move rapidly from bottom to mid-point in Go8 retention performance. We set an institutional target of 87.2% for (domestic) student retention which, based on the most recently published retention rates, will place us in this position. Performance against this target for the Semester 1 2018 intake into 2019 will be reported in the Department of Education and Training's undergraduate domestic retention rates provided in Q3 2020.

The Plan incorporates faculty targets aligned to the institutional target. Faculty targets confirmed in 2018 are as follows:

- Arts: 85.7% (89 additional students from the 2017 baseline)
- ECMS: 92.4% (27 additional students from the 2017 baseline)
- H&MS: 85.7% (81 additional students from the 2017 baseline)
- Professions 90.9% (37 additional students from the 2017 baseline)
- Sciences 86.5% (41 additional students from the 2017 baseline)

During the lifecycle of the Plan we will, in Q3 of each year from 2020, check progress against our goal to achieve, at a minimum, mid-point of the Go8 by 2021.The 87.2% institutional target will be adjusted upwards as appropriate in accordance with our performance

While these targets specifically focus on commencing students, the Plan also aims to increase the retention and success of continuing, Honours and PGCW students at the University.

Resourcing of Retention and Success initiatives under this Plan is provided by central units (DASE, DUO) and all faculties, through a combination of business-as-usual activity and strategic projects. Some institutional strategic funding for 2019 (through project DASE BC08.4) was awarded to the DASE (PVCSL) budget to support implementation of selected Retention and Success services and initiatives in 2019 under this Plan and further funding will be sought for 2020-21.

1.1 Scope

Student retention is defined for the purposes of the Plan as *retention within the University,* as distinct from retention within the student's initial program, faculty of enrolment, or wider sector beyond Adelaide.

Student success is taken to encompass both successful academic performance and progression, and preparedness for graduate employment or further study.

In scope, the Plan incorporates goals relating to targeted retention and success initiatives as well as to embedded best practice for retention and success throughout the student experience (curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular). It incorporates actions that already are under way as well as new actions. It adopts a student lifecycle perspective on the planning of support for student retention and success from enrolment to graduation. While pre-enrolment and post-graduation (alumni) experiences have impact on student retention and re-engagement, these aspects are out of scope of the Plan. The Plan focuses in particular on undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate coursework (PGCW) students, inclusive of domestic and international students.

1.2   Stakeholders

The Plan recognises the multi-stakeholder relevance of, and responsibility for, student retention and success across the University. Key stakeholder groups are:

- Students and their relevant bodies including the Adelaide University Union and Adelaide University Sport.
- Academic units (schools, departments) and academic staff in all five faculties.
- Professional and academic support services and staff in DASE including Student Learning, Careers, Student Life, the University Libraries and Wirltu Yarlu.
- Professional support services in all five faculties.
- Planning and Analytics in DUO.

1.3   Governance and management

The Plan is overseen by the Student Retention and Success Committee, a sub-committee of the University Learning Committee convened by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Learning).

Roles and accountabilities for student retention and success are distributed widely across the University. In DASE (Student Learning portfolio), the Student Engagement and Success team provides coordinating support at institutional level for the implementation of the Plan.

2. Student Retention and Success Plan 2019 – 2021

This section presents the Plan's Principles, Goals, Strategies and Accountabilities and provides the basis for Implementation (action) planning and associated targets. A supporting paper (Appendix 1) details the background and rationale for the Plan, along with an overview of current programs and initiatives the University has adopted, and further insights from the literature and current trends.

Principles

Informed by international scholarship and guidelines on student retention and success, the Plan upholds a number of core Principles.

1. It recognises that responsibility for and ability to improve student retention and success is widely distributed across the institution, inclusive of academic and professional areas. A whole-institution, partnership approach is required and all relevant areas are expected to establish targets and actions resulting from the Plan.
2. It adopts a 'student journey' perspective on planning of sustainable, structured support for student retention and success, with a special focus on undergraduates and the first year experience but also including continuing and PGCW students.
3. It recognises academic and social integration as key to student retention and success, and the importance of the quality of the educational experience within the academic sphere (including the relevance of academic program content and learning outcomes) as a key factor in positive retention and success outcomes.
4. It promotes student engagement and sense of belonging to academic community, and positive academic staff-student and peer-to-peer relations in discipline contexts.
5. It recognises employability development as an integral part of the academic and broader student experience, and students' expectations about employment outcomes as a factor in their motivation, engagement and retention.
6. It recognises the importance of mainstreamed advisory and support provision for all students, as well as the importance of targeted support for specific cohorts.
7. It encourages the development of tailored strategies to meet the retention and success challenges of different programs and courses, and prioritises enhancement strategies for programs and courses with lower rates of student retention and success.
8. It encourages best practice and innovation in strategies for retention and success, including through creative and innovative deployment of digital technologies for flexible and personalised support.
9. It recognises and supports students as active agents in their own and peers' engagement and success, and promotes co-creation and partnership with students in the development and delivery of retention and success initiatives.
10. It promotes an evidence-based approach, informed by sector research and evaluation, and requiring timely access by stakeholders to relevant institutional data to inform intervention and support strategies.

The key Outcomes the Plan seeks to achieve are as follows:

1. Students are enabled to make program and course choices that are optimally aligned to their interests, abilities and expectations, and to prepare effectively for study at the University;
2. Commencing students are provided with an excellent first year experience, inclusive of effective orientation and transition, during which they develop as engaged learners and gain a strong sense of belonging to their academic community;
3. Continuing students are provided with an excellent on-going experience, maintaining strong engagement and sense of belonging, and developing a clear sense of their own capabilities and direction as they progress toward graduation and graduate employment;
4. The University has strong staff capability in best educational and support practices relating to student engagement, retention and success;
5. The University has robust systems and processes in place and in active use for early identification and intervention of students at risk of failure and withdrawal, and for re-engagement of LOA or withdrawn students;
6. The University undertakes rigorous evaluation of key retention and success strategies at school, faculty and institution level and the resulting evidence base informs ongoing improvement;
7. The University has increased its rates of student retention within the institution, achieving institutional and faculty targets, and has improved its 'learner engagement' score on the QILT Student Experience Survey.

GOALS	STRATEGIES	ACCOUNTABILITIES
NESTED TARGETS		
G1: To drive a holistic approach to engagement and change through aligned target-setting and monitoring at institutional, faculty and program levels.	**S1.1** We will establish annual faculty and program retention targets, aligned to the University's overall retention performance target, and learner engagement targets (QILT SES). We will regularly monitor and report on progress to Planning and Budgeting Committee and Academic Board.	DASE (PVCSL)
STUDENT WELLBEING, PROGRESSION AND TARGETED SUPPORT		
G2: To ensure consistent and effective student referral, advice and support centrally and in faculties in relation to student wellbeing, academic progression throughout their studies and graduate outcomes, ensuring that the specific support needs of at-risk (including external) students are met.	**S2.1** We will implement a personalised student outreach scheme across the University, with referral advice as required, to all students at all levels of UG and PGCW study. This will include specific outreach support to all pre-census commencing students, to enable them to finalise program and course choices that are optimally aligned to their interests, expectations and abilities, and to access support as needed for ongoing study.	DASE (PVCSL) Faculties (EDs)
	S2.2 We will establish a consistent timetabled annual suite of targeted support interventions for identified at-risk groups and individuals across the University, including low SES students, encouraging and supporting ongoing maintenance of at least 3 units of load where appropriate. Interventions will include automatic review of the enrolment of all students who have not engaged to an agreed level by	DASE (PVCSL) Faculties (EDs)

	the census date and establishment of a consistent timetabled annual suite of re-enrolment support interventions.	
	S2.3 We will improve provision of program/course advice on entry and as required throughout students' studies, including review of the effectiveness of the existing distributed support infrastructure for student advice on program and course choices.	DASE (EDir) Faculties (EDs)
	S2.4 We will establish a consistent institution-wide Leave of Absence (LOA) policy and procedure, and implement streamlined and targeted re-engagement campaigns for deferred, inactive, approved LOA and withdrawal students.	DASE (EDir) Faculties (EDs)
	S2.5 We will investigate the benefit and feasibility of providing personalised career and employability development support including employability skills assessment (diagnostic) for all commencing UG students from pre-census S1.	DASE (PVCSL & EDir)
	S2.6 We will ensure large courses with high-fail rate and retention issues are always paired with PASS.	DASE (PVCSL)
	S2.7 To complement standard working-day services (e.g. MLC, WC and faculty services), we will extend out-of-hours online academic skills support to make this available to all students.	DASE (PVCSL)
	S2.8 We will establish an institution-wide inclusion and diversity strategy and implementation plan which covers at-risk student groups.	DASE (EDir)
	S2.9 We will establish an institution-wide mental health strategy and implementation plan.	DASE (EDir)
ACADEMIC ORIENTATION AND CURRICULUM		
G3: To embed best practice for student engagement, retention and success into institution-wide model(s), strategies and policies for academic orientation and curriculum (content, architecture, learning, teaching and assessment).	**S3.1** We will establish academic staff leads for retention and success in all schools, and specific retention and success plans for academic programs, including a priority focus on programs with high continuing student attrition.	Faculties (EDs)
	S3.2 We will implement extended UG Orientation-Transition throughout at least semester 1 for commencing students, embedding into the academic experience and providing a) enhanced interaction between students and academic staff and b) opt-out peer mentoring for the whole of the first year, as features of the program. The program will target specific cohort needs, including mid-year entry, part-time and mature age commencing students.	DASE (PVCSL) Faculties (EDs)

	S3.3 We will embed engagement, retention and success strategies into the institutional curriculum design project 2019 onward. This will include the establishment of nested programs, compliant with the AQF, to provide students with a greater range of options with meaningful qualifications and flexible exit points. We will ensure that strategy around the University academic year and timetable is strongly supportive of retention. We will ensure that student retention and success considerations inform strategic and academic decision-making relating to the discontinuation, revision and launch of academic programs.	DASE (PVCSL) Faculties (EDs)
	S3.4 We will embed retention and success initiatives into the SLTA including: low-stakes assessment task in all UG Y1 courses, with meaningful feedback, provided within the pre-census period; all commencing UG students experience a program/discipline-specific cohort learning experience in Y1; a Work Integrated Learning opportunity for all students at each level of study; prioritisation of high fail-rate and high-withdrawal programs and courses systematically for educational enhancement support; appropriate induction and continuing professional development for academic (including sessional) and professional staff, and for peer mentors, including as regards working with diverse and at-risk student groups. This will include engaging Adelaide Education Academy in peer leadership, mentoring and training/development provision.	DASE (PVCSL)
INFORMATION		
G4: To ensure that students receive timely, relevant, accurate and tailored information throughout their University journey.	**S4.1** We will establish University-wide tools for effective and targeted student communication, including the establishment of a web portal, a regular all-student newsletter, and enhancement of the mobile app UA Student.	DASE (EDir)
	S4.2 We will develop a revised service model across all faculties, Ask Adelaide and all central service areas, including delivery locations and times; service standards; CRM training and usage. We will pilot a personalised digital assistant for students.	
CO-CURRICULAR AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES		
G5: To further enhance opportunities for student engagement, including connections between peers and between students and teaching staff, in co-and extra-curricular activities.	**S5.1** We will enhance promotion and support for co-curricular activities that provide opportunities for interaction between students and academic staff.	DASE (PVCSL) Faculties (EDs)
	S5.2 We will enhance promotion and support for extra-curricular activities through the Union, clubs, societies and sports.	AUU, AUS DASE (EDir)

	DATA AND SYSTEMS	
G6: We will ensure robust student data and related systems and processes to inform our retention and success strategies.	**S6.1** We will improve institutional student data and learning analytics capability, accessibility and use, including through: creation of dashboards and improved ability to connect datasets from different sources; and, investigate a single student view interface in the CRM and associated reports to provide an integrated profile of individual student risk status, preparedness and support provided.	DUO (DirP&A) and DASE (PVCSL) DASE (EDir)
	S6.2 We will continue to run a suite of surveys collecting student data including: the *Commencing Student Survey* at the start of Semester 1 and 2 each year to monitor student risk factors and support needs, and to enable referral to program/course advice and other support services; the *Student Withdrawal Survey* enabling data-collection on reasons for withdrawal and establishment of a structured re-engagement follow-up procedure; the *Sense of Belonging Student* survey on a biannual basis to measure progress on the 'B' score.	DASE (PVCSL) DUO (DirP&A)
	STUDENT PARTNERSHIP	
G7: To ensure a strong co-creative student partnership approach to the development, improvement and delivery of retention and success initiatives.	**S7.1** We will include student partnership in the development, improvement and delivery of retention and success initiatives, including provision of student leadership opportunities and piloting of a faculty-based student partnership program that will enable student-led partnership projects focused on retention and success outcomes.	DASE (PVCSL, EDir) Faculties (EDs)
	EVALUATION	
G8: To establish a robust evidence base on the impact of our retention and success initiatives and services, and communicate services, initiatives and evaluation results effectively across the institution.	**S8.1** We will establish and implement an impact evaluation plan for retention and success initiatives and services in DASE and faculties, reporting to the Student Retention and Success Committee.	DASE (PVCSL)
	S8.2 We will **c**reate a central point of web based information for staff on services, initiatives and impact evaluation related to the implementation of this Plan.	DASE (PVCSL)

Appendix 1: Supporting paper

1. Background and rationale

The need for a Student Retention and Success Plan arises from our commitments and obligations to our students, our financial targets, and our TEQSA obligations.

1.1 Our students

The University is committed to providing higher education of the highest quality and value, and to ensuring that our students have the best chance of successfully completing the courses and programs in which they enrol. The annual University of Adelaide student intake currently continues to be dominated by young school leavers studying on our campus-based programs. This is true of both our domestic and international cohorts. The University's mature student cohort is smaller but, as the University proceeds with its strategy to expand its reach to new student cohorts, it will grow. The University is preparing for substantial expansion of its portfolio of online academic programs, so this Plan includes specific action targeted at supporting a growing cohort of future online students, initially at PGCW level.

Our students all seek engaging learning experiences and opportunities for personal and professional growth. They seek to make direct links between their studies, their personal interests and their future career aspirations. Our Millennial and Generation Z students bring different learning expectations and behaviours compared with those from previous generations.

Student engagement and sense of belonging
Student engagement has been identified as a key factor in student persistence and success, with a student's sense of belonging to their academic community being an important element (e.g., Kuh 2008; Tinto 2017). 'Learner engagement' in Australian universities as measured by the QILT Student Experience Survey is based on self-reported sense of belonging, and engagement in peer interactions (a substantially more limited conception of engagement than used in other instruments). Sector-wide, learner engagement scores consistently are relatively low at between 60% and 65%. The University of Adelaide's score on learner engagement typically is around average for the sector year-on-year and slightly above average compared with other Go8 institutions.

In 2016, the University conducted a Sense of Belonging survey of undergraduate students. Asked to rate how strongly they felt part of an academic community in their studies at the University, 36% of nearly 2000 respondents gave a score of 50 or less on a 100-point scale where 100 indicated very strong. The top 5 factors identified by respondents as contributing to feeling more strongly part of an academic community were, in descending order: interest in study area; positive experiences in class; interactions with peers outside of class; approachable academic staff; and, clear connections between degree and future career. Conversely, the top 5 factors identified as contributing to feeling less strongly part of an academic community were, in descending order: external/personal issues; negative experiences in class; lack of clear connections between degree and future career; struggling with academic study; and, lack of motivation to complete studies. Each of a wide range of factors was selected as their top positive or negative factor by at least some students, reflecting the complexity of the terrain. However, overall, the results of this survey align with other evidence across the sector which identifies a student's experience of the academic sphere as having the more significant impact on engagement and retention compared with the social sphere. While most of the students who withdraw from study at Adelaide are *not* motivated primarily by dissatisfaction with their educational experience (see below), they may not, either, feel especially strongly connected to their academic community.

First year experience at Adelaide

Over recent years, the University has begun to explore our students' circumstances and experiences in more depth to inform strategies for retention and success. We have focused especially on our first year undergraduates, starting with a First Year Experience cohort research project in 2015 which led to a number of actions relating to improved institutional reporting, data collection and analysis, and support provision. The project validated the range of demographic and behavioural indicators in use in the University to identify at-risk students but also identified that these indicators did not apply to around 50% of students who withdrew pre-census in that year.

In S1 2018, the University conducted, for the first time, a survey of all commencing undergraduates in order to gauge their motivations, confidence and advice/support needs in the pre-census period, and their personal circumstances specifically as regards paid work alongside study. While the majority of responding students were confident that they had made the right choice of program, a fairly substantial minority at 22% were less confident about this. Most expressed high levels of motivation, but 32% reported moderate or lower levels of motivation. Most had chosen their program based mainly on their interest in the subject, with only 9% reporting that they had made their program choice primarily because of graduate employment opportunities. Most indicated that their main aim at this stage was to successfully complete the program in which they were enrolled, although 12% aimed to explore the subject to see if it was right for them and 11% to use the program as a pathway to another program at the University. A relatively large minority (39%) expressed moderate confidence or less (10%) in their ability to take on university study. Most expected to take on paid work alongside their studies including 34% who expected to take on more than 11 hours per week. Some differences in commencing student profiles across faculties and programs were identified from the survey, and qualitative data from open responses provide further insights. The survey will continue to be administered in S1 and S2 in each year of this Plan.

Withdrawing from studies at Adelaide

Since 2016 the University has conducted a Withdrawal Survey of students who drop their course load to zero. Consistently, the most frequently reported reasons for withdrawal relate to students' personal circumstances (including health and stress issues, workload study/life balance, gap year and financial difficulties). A small minority of responding students report dissatisfaction with their experience of their program or other aspects of learning, teaching and the student experience at the University as the main driver for their withdrawal. While the University has limited control over some of these factors, the importance of our health and wellbeing services, and of financial support provision where appropriate, is signalled.

Student characteristics

Extensive research since the 1950s consistently has shown the drivers of student attrition in Australian universities to be both student- and institution-based. Recent analysis has illustrated that student characteristics such as a student's basis of admission, ATAR, type of attendance, mode of attendance and age explain only a relatively small proportion (22.5%) of the overall variation in student attrition across the sector (HESP 2018). Institutional factors such as the quality of the learning environment and support services, the teaching ability of academic staff, and staff/student ratios explain significantly more of this variation. Some research into retention in first year of higher education suggests that behavioural indicators are much stronger predictors of retention than demographic factors or education background (Harvey & Luckman 2014).

Notwithstanding the lesser impact on attrition of student characteristics than institutional factors at sector level, it is essential to understand the risk factors of specific cohorts. Risk factors sector-wide include low SES, first in family, part-time study, low entry ATAR, VET entry pathways and distance from university. At the University of Adelaide, institution-wide, student study load is the strongest predictor of withdrawal: the fewer courses a student is taking at any one time, the more likely that student is to

drop out completely (noting that the student may return to the University or another university at a later date). Other individual factors do not emerge as strong predictors of withdrawal at University level although timely progression to graduation is substantially less likely for our Indigenous students than for other groups.

More granular analysis at faculty and program level reveals significant student factors in specific contexts. For example, ECMS recently has undertaken a 5 year cohort analysis of the factors that influence the retention of the Faculty's students. This has allowed the Faculty to develop a risk profile to overlay on its commencing cohort to inform targeted support and intervention. The risk profile has identified that ECMS has higher attrition rates by cohort (students studying part-time, those who achieve a score of B+ or below in SACE Stage 2 Specialist Mathematics, regional or rural students, internal transfer students, and those students who commence mid-year).

1.2   Strategic context and federal government policy changes

The University makes considerable effort and financial commitment to attract student enrolments and recently has initiated an ambitious new strategy for revenue growth including recognition of the potential value over time as students embark on lifelong learning with their chosen institution. Improved student engagement and retention has a key role to play alongside increased enrolment in the achievement of revenue targets.

The MYEFO 2017 announcements from the Federal Government effectively ended the uncapped demand-driven system, making growth from Commonwealth supported domestic students challenging. Moreover, the Government announced that a new performance-based funding model is to be applied in which performance on student retention in the sector is likely to be a criterion. Poor performance in retaining 2018 commencing students into 2019 may lead to reduced Commonwealth supported places in years ahead.

1.3   Accountability and regulation

TEQSA has a mandate to oversee student attrition, retention and completion, and a number of clauses in the higher education Standards explicitly require institutions to ensure student success. Where a provider can show improved retention rates, the institution will receive a lower risk rating in TEQSA risk assessments.

The Standards expect a provider to be able to demonstrate that students are assisted in their transition into their course of study and that the arrangements for transition are sensitive to the needs of particular student cohorts. Early assessment of progress, early detection of students at risk of poor progress, and targeted support programs, are given high priority by the Standards for all courses of study. The Standards also require a provider to be able to demonstrate and internally report rates of retention, progression and completion for all cohorts of students over time. TEQSA standards also reinforce the need to take student progression and success into account in curriculum design. For example, standard 3.2 states that "teaching and learning activities [must be] arranged to foster progressive and coherent achievement of expected learning outcomes throughout each course of study."

The Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP 2018) published a number of recommendations for the improvement of retention, completion and success in higher education. Of most relevance to the scope of this Plan, and reflected within it, are the following:

- As a first priority, institutions should ensure students who have the capacity to succeed in higher education are given the best chance to complete their studies through the appropriate

provision of academic and other support services as required of them by the Higher Education Standards Framework (Rec. 1)
- 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 required throughout their studies (Rec. 3)
- Every institution should have its own comprehensive student-centred retention strategy, which is regularly evaluated. These strategies could include institutional retention benchmarks and, as appropriate, processes for entry and exit interviews, the integration of data-based risk analytics and targeted support interventions, a suite of support services and a means to re-engage with students who have withdrawn (Rec. 5)
- Institutions should automatically review the enrolment of all students who have not engaged in their studies to an agreed level by the census date (Rec. 6)
- Institutions should pay particular attention to ensuring their support services are meeting the needs of external students who are not regularly attending campus because these students are identified as at risk of not completing their studies (Rec. 7)
- Every institution should have an institution-wide mental health strategy and implementation plan (Rec. 8)
- Institutions should increasingly offer nested courses, which are appropriate and compliant with the Australian Qualifications Framework, to provide students with a greater range of exit options with meaningful qualifications (Rec. 9)

2. Current programs and initiatives at Adelaide

The SLTA (2016-18) established a number of goals and actions focusing on student engagement, retention and success, including actions relating to graduate employability, active and collaborative learning, student partnership and belonging, and learning analytics. The SLTA will be reviewed under the auspices of the University's new Strategic Plan in 2019 and goals aligned to this Plan will be set for its next cycle, informed by the themes presented to Academic Board in the 2018 discussion paper New Directions in Learning, Teaching and Assessment.

2.1 HEPPP funding

Since 2010 the University has received funding from the federal government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) to support improved access to undergraduate study, and the retention and completion rates, of people from low SES backgrounds. HEPPP funding has been used to fund both central support provision for engagement and retention, and a range of faculty initiatives. While HEPPP funding has made and continues to make a vital contribution to resourcing of engagement and retention initiatives for the University, its annual funding model and successive funding reductions do not encourage long-term sustainable models of provision.

2.2 Faculty activity

There has been considerable HEPPP funded and other faculty activity over past years. This has included extensive use of peer mentors in some faculties, social events, and drop-in academic support programs and services, organised at a faculty, school or discipline level. Students who participate provide positive feedback; however, limited impact evaluation has been undertaken beyond student participation and satisfaction measures.

2.3 Central services and initiatives

DASE coordinates a range of services and initiatives designed specifically to support student engagement, retention and success. These include Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), the Maths

Learning Centre (MLC), the Writing Centre (WC), Studiosity (a 2017-18 pilot of out-of-hours on-line academic support provided by a third-party provider) and, since 2013, Succeed@Adelaide (partnering with QS Enrolment Solutions). Core University services such as Careers, the University Libraries, Student Life and Wirltu Yarlu also contribute substantially to supporting engagement, retention and success outcomes. Wirltu Yarlu's focus on supporting resilience offers a model for other retention and success initiatives across the University.

Succeed@Adelaide provides a proactive, outbound communication service, aimed at commencing undergraduate students, to enable early identification of risk and supportive intervention. In 2017, Succeed@Adelaide was offered to over 4,500 students opted in through either behavioural indicator/s, demographic indicator/s or a combination of both. In 2018, a series of Succeed@Adelaide campaigns including several new initiatives were delivered including: accept to enrol conversion; student engagement for all commencing undergraduates; re-enrolment to second semester; and, specific targeted campaigns for students opted in by behavioural indicators including mandatory opt-in to an Assessment and Assignment campaign for all students on 1st year high fail rate courses. There has been debate about the relative merits of in-house as compared with third-party provision in this area. Succeed@Adelaide has not had strong faculty engagement since it was established and some faculties opted out of some Succeed@Adelaide campaigns in 2018 in favour of delivering these in-house using student advisors/mentors.

In 2018, a new institution-wide initiative in extended Orientation-Transition was initiated.

2.4   Adelaide University Student Union, Sports, Clubs and Societies

We know that active participation in extra-curricular activities, particularly sports, clubs and societies, is highly influential in encouraging engagement and ultimately a sense pride in belonging to the University. The role of these activities in contributing to delivering a University community is critical to achieving our retention targets. There are current over 40 sporting clubs and 130 social and faculty clubs, with a combined student membership of over 16,000. Around 40% of the student population have some involvement in a club, society or a sport.

The Adelaide University Union (AUU) is also active in delivering over 100 events a year covering large activities such as O'Week through to weekly events such as student breakfasts. These combined activities and opportunities in sport and social clubs has a significant impact on student engagement with the University.

It is important to bring these activities to the awareness of all students, and particularly first year students, to ensure their contribution to creating a community is maximised.

2.5   Analytics and evaluation

Working toward a more strongly evidence-informed approach, the University over recent years has improved its use of data and wider research evidence to understand patterns of student retention and attrition in the institution, and relevant aspects of the student experience. This work has focused on commencing students. Little investigation has been undertaken as yet into the retention and success of continuing students although we see high levels of attrition among continuing students in some parts of the University. Over the same period, enhancements have been made to consistency of definitions of retention in use across the University and to regular performance reporting and analyses by Planning and Analytics. Faculties have undertaken additional analyses of faculty-specific data.

Opportunities exist to improve access to datasets (e.g., through dashboards) and to combine data from different sources, to enable more powerful analysis and insights to be generated. Building a genuinely

evidence-informed approach to student retention and success for the University will require more sophisticated use of data, more rigorous and sustained outcomes-focused impact evaluation both of central and faculty initiatives, and more consistent follow-through action on the insights generated from analytics and surveys.

Learning analytics

Learning analytics at the University, initiated in 2016, has progressed successfully from an initial collation of student behavioural data generated by the Learning Management System toward a central data repository which can be drawn upon for insights into student learning behaviour and elements of course design. Data from other learning technologies can be merged with these data to provide additional inputs from the broader ecosystem. The 'actionability' of learning analytics is being embedded in evidence-based design and preparations before, during and after the teaching period, particularly for courses with high failure rates or low SELTs. Learning analytics data support central and faculty teams, including: course access data provided twice-weekly to Succeed@Adelaide; pre-census assessment data for adherence to University and faculty policies and initiatives; student performance and course design elements for Program Enhancement Partnership activities offered by the Learning Enhancement and Innovation team.

An LMS Analytics tool has been co-developed with academics and included in all MyUni courses for staff awareness of individual student engagement with resources, such as viewing videos before flipped classroom activities, or accessing recommended course readings. More than 30% of courses in Semester 1, 2018 demonstrated repeated use of this tool for insights into the course learning experience. The 'OnTask' tool developed through an OLT grant was piloted with 12 courses through Semester 2, 2018 to deliver personalised messages to ~2000 students about their individual progress at key times through the teaching period. Future planned activities include: progress toward student-facing analytics; development of additional in-course analytics; exploration of machine learning for predictive identification of at-risk indicators.

Evaluation

Our institutional and faculty-based retention and success services and initiatives typically garner very positive feedback from the students they engage and support. However, with some exceptions, impact evaluation of services and initiatives targeting student engagement, retention and success at the University remains patchy and under-developed. For example, reporting to HEPPP and by Succeed@Adelaide has tended to focus on inputs and satisfaction rather than retention and success outcomes.

3. Insights from the literature and current trends

Tackling retention is a multi-faceted issue complicated by a diversifying student population. However, two interlocking concepts stand out in the literature as especially important to guide efforts to support retention and success in higher education: student engagement and sense of belonging. Scholarly evidence points clearly to the essential role of active student engagement in learning, and in the life of an academic community, in the achievement of positive outcomes for students. Coates (2007:122) offers a frequently-cited definition of student engagement as: "a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience" comprising: active and collaborative learning; participation in challenging academic activities; formative communication with academic staff; involvement in enriching educational experiences; feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities. Another influential definition highlights the institution's role in nurturing student engagement, defining it as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college *and* what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (Kuh 2009:683). Strongly evidenced 'high impact' practices for student engagement in the curriculum include: 1st year seminars and experiences (small groups); learning

community approaches; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; global learning such as intercultural studies and study abroad; service and community based learning; internships and placements; capstone courses and projects (Kuh 2008).

Student engagement is strengthened by a sense of belonging and connection: "The experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers) (Strayhorn 2012:3). 'Belonging' is a core component both of seminal social theories of learning (e.g. Wenger 1998) and of influential theory of student motivation and persistence where "the impact of student college experiences on motivation can be understood as the outcome of the interaction among student goals, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceived worth or relevance of the curriculum" (Tinto 2017:255).

While student engagement and belonging arise out of a combination of academic, social and personal factors in the student experience, evidence points to the prime importance of students' experiences of the academic sphere. A large-scale, longitudinal UK study on retention and success concluded that engagement and belonging are "most effectively nurtured through mainstream activities with an overt academic purpose that all students participate in" and "effective interventions are found primarily in the academic sphere" (Thomas 2012:12). Chiming with Tinto's model, the final report of this project notes that "Engagement and belonging were found to be developed and enhanced through interventions that enabled students to develop supportive peer relations; allowed meaningful interactions between staff and students; developed students' capacity, confidence and identity as successful HE learners; offered a HE experience that was relevant to students' current interests and future (career) goals" (Thomas et al. 2017). Emphasising that institutional strategies must be multidimensional and multidirectional, and must recognise student diversity and inclusion, four key recommendations from this project, for retention and success strategies at institutional level, are:

- ✓ *Early engagement:* engagement to promote belonging must begin early and continue across the student lifecycle;
- ✓ *Engagement in the academic sphere:* engagement and belonging can be nurtured throughout the institution (academic, social and professional services) but the academic sphere is of primary importance to ensure all students benefit;
- ✓ *Developing capacity:* the capacity of students to engage and staff to offer an engaging experience must be developed; a partnership approach in which everyone is responsible for improving student belonging, retention and success is required;
- ✓ *Institutional management and coordination:* at the senior level the institution must take responsibility for nurturing a culture of belonging and creating the necessary infrastructure. This includes the use of data to underpin student retention and success.

Developments in institutional approaches to retention and success across Australia and beyond show an increased trend toward taking an integrated approach to retention and success at institutional level (e.g., Kalsbeek 2013), connecting strategies across academic advice, curriculum, learning and teaching, careers and employability, academic skills support, health and wellbeing, and communications. Institutions increasingly are leveraging student data - real-time behavioural as well as demographic and performance data, sourced and combined from a range of institutional systems - to inform interventions, and digital technologies to provide students with personalised communications and assistance. Appendix 2 highlights selected points from a review of relevant literature and trends.

4. Conclusion

This brief review of our current position and activities, and of the wider literature and trends in student retention and success, suggests a number of priorities for our first institutional strategy. It is evident that

the complex and contextual nature of attrition makes addressing retention all the more challenging with no obvious one-size-fits-all, or silver-bullet, approach available. Our Student Retention and Success Plan must be student-centred, flexible in taking local factors into account, and amenable to on-going refinement informed by evidence.

The wider evidence base and feedback from our own students suggest that, after the impact of personal circumstances such as health and wellbeing or financial pressures are taken into account, student experiences of curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment, and peer interaction in discipline cohorts, play a major role in retention and success. The support provided by professional services, personalised outreach, and peer mentors and advisors, combined with provision of plenty of opportunity for social interactions outside the classroom, are essential ingredients of an institutional culture of support for retention and success and are especially important for specific 'at-risk' student cohorts. Increasing mental health issues among students signal the vital importance of our counselling and wellbeing activities. But ultimately, the extent to which our academic programs, courses, teaching and staff engage our students actively and successfully in their learning and with their academic community, will be central to the achievement of the Plan's goals. It seems clear that the greatest impact on student engagement, retention and success that the University can make will take place in and around the classroom. Strong integration of this Plan with the University's Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment therefore is essential.

References and selected sources

Higher Education Standards Panel (2018) *Final Report: Improving retention, completion and success in higher education.* Australian Government, DET.

Higher Education Standards Panel (2017) *Improving retention, completion and success in higher education: discussion paper.* Australian Government, DET.

Kalsbeek, D. H. ed. (2013). *Framing retention for institutional improvement: a 4Ps framework reframing retention strategy for institutional improvement.* San Francisco: Wiley.

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,* OLT.

Krause, K-L. and Armitage, L. (2014). *Australian student engagement, belonging, retention and success: a synthesis of the literature.* Higher Education Academy, York.

Kuh, G.D. (2008) What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *Journal of College Student Development,* 50(6) 683-706

Strayhorn, T.L. (2012) *College students' sense of belonging: a key to educational success for all students.* NY: Routledge.

Thomas, L. et al (2017) *Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change. What works? Student retention and success program final report.* York: Higher Education Academy.

Tinto, V. (2015) Through the eyes of students. *Journal of College Student Retention Research, Theory and Practice* 19(3) 254–269.

Webb, O. et al. (2017). *Enhancing access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education. A review of the literature showing demonstrable impact.* Higher Education Academy, York.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix 2: Strategies with impact
(Selected, from review of trends and literature)

Pre-admission
- Early career advice;
- Clear and accessible academic program information to enable prospective students to make informed decisions;
- Opportunity for prospective students to experience pre-introductory aspects of an academic program;
- Academic preparation and bridging including effective range of enabling and pathway programs;
- Pre-orientation readiness resources and activities such as pre-entry webinars, training.

Orientation and beyond
- Accessible program and course advisory support;
- Discipline specific orientation programs with explicit academic purpose, designed and delivered by academic program teams, commencing early and extending for a whole semester or year;
- Diagnostic student profiling (academic preparedness) and early academic skills support;
- Proactive, compulsory 'personal tutoring' (academic mentoring, advising) extending from Orientation onward throughout degree.

Progression and re-engagement
- Pro-active outreach and early intervention to at risk students;
- Exit interview or survey of exiting students and re-engagement strategy;
- Academic year that promotes momentum and avoids lengthy summer break, e.g. trimesters, summer bridge programs;
- Sequential curriculum (students take one course at a time in intensive blocks rather than several concurrent courses);
- 'Nested' programs and micro-credentials allowing for flexibility of exit and re-entry.

Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment
- Work Integrated Learning and professional experiences in programs;
- Student centred active learning, 'high impact' educational practices with strong peer-to-peer and teacher-student interaction;
- 'Transition pedagogy' as guiding philosophy for first year curriculum design and support;
- Courses specifically designed to provide 1st year cohort identity and skills development, e.g. first year seminars programs;
- Alumni engagement from the 1st year; alumni mentoring;
- Early opportunity in courses for assessment and feedback;
- 'Authentic' and peer assessment; staggered assessment deadlines;
- Learning communities including digital communities to support belonging;
- Academic staff training and communities of practice on teaching and mentoring for retention and success.

Co-curricular activities
- Opt-out (not opt-in) academic mentoring and peer mentoring taking place in the discipline context;
- Use of learning analytics by academic mentors/advisors;
- Peer led study support programs (Peer Assisted Study Sessions);

- Dedicated success programs combining academic and social support for certain groups of at-risk students.

Governance, organisation, data
- Integrated institutional framework connecting pathways, progression, employability, learning and teaching, with retention targets;
- Academic as well as professional staff coordinators for student retention and success in faculties.
- Connected datasets and access by academic and support staff to shared data on support interactions with and progression of at-risk students e.g. 'students of interest' reports.

Place and space
- Social learning spaces for peer-to-peer and student-staff interaction.