QUT

Response to Higher Education Standards Panel Discussion Paper

Improving retention, completion and success in higher education
(*June 2017*)

QUT welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Discussion Paper. Our response is in three parts: first, some general observations about the report; the second part is structured around the questions posed in the report; and the third part provides some information about examples of QUT good practice in this area.

PART 1

Attrition, progression, and completion (APC)

The Paper rightly notes that the factors underlying student retention are complex and not always within the scope of institutional control. It also notes that there has been long-standing concern about issues such as attrition but there is no evidence of a "crisis", indeed attrition levels have remained fairly stable despite a massive increase in student enrolments under the demand-driven system. While of course it is important to ensure that we do all that we can to assist students to persist with their studies, it is less clear to what extent we should cast as a problem the fact that students both need and demand greater flexibility in university offerings, and that they do not always engage in lockstep with fixed timeframes and structures.

If we were to look at what students can achieve in, say, the five-ten years from when they enter post-secondary education we might get a very different picture of APC. Students might leave school, have a gap year or undertake some bridging studies, complete part of a bachelor degree, have a part-time job, swap courses, and become a very successful graduate by the time they are 25. It might well be the case that such a student is better prepared to succeed in the workforce than one who took the traditional full-time study route directly from school.

Feedback from a program of systematic reform of QUT's postgraduate education courses suggested that flexibility should be much more learner-centred providing them with greater flexibility in relation to timing of enrolment, assessment, and completion. We also learned that completion of a whole qualification may not be necessary for many learners, many of whom would be satisfied with a micro-credential endorsed by a university. Whilst this was focused on postgraduates, there is reason to believe that at least some of these ideas of flexibility would also be relevant to undergraduate students. Greater flexibility in course structures could be of considerable benefit to students, but it could also run counter to traditional measures of APC.

Key aspects of student retention and success are missing from the report:

The importance of a **sense of belonging** in student retention is not covered in the Paper. A sense of belonging can be achieved, for example, through:

- orientation, student clubs, and extra curricula and co-curricular activities;

- creating a sense of belonging in the classroom (identification within a community of learners) facilitated through student interaction, collaboration and peer feedback,and identification as a member of a future profession (through applied, problem based and work integrated learning);

- students who are employed in QUT's widening participation **student ambassadors program** have been systematically surveyed and report that it has many positive benefits, including fostering a sense of belonging, the development of graduate capabilities and enhancing graduate employability. They also report that being an ambassador assists them with their studies and encourages them to persist and complete their studies. This is reinforced by retention and success data. Statistics for the 2016 year indicate that both the student ambassador retention (94.4 per cent) and success (94.6 per cent) rates were higher than the corresponding all QUT student rates (87.3 per cent and 88.9 per cent respectively), even though such Ambassadors were intentionally recruited from high-risk groups. See report at https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/widening-tertiary-participation-queensland-student-ambassador-investigations/

- QUT is also implementing culturally-appropriate support strategies. For example, QUT employs a Maori and Pasifika Project Officer who coordinates a Pasifika student Peer Mentoring Program to align with the University's overall Peer Program Strategy. He also sets up seminars which involve community members who share their success stories and act as visible role models as guest speakers and panel members.

While the teaching ability of lecturers is mentioned as a contributing factor to student retention and success (with a statement that many lecturers are not adequately trained in teaching, resulting in reduced student engagement), there are notable exceptions. Examples of academic development offered to staff to enhance the teaching ability of both lecturers and sessional staff would be useful. An example is provided later in this response under the QUT "vignettes".

Also not mentioned is the substantial impact that sessional teachers have on learning engagement and student success. The majority of face-to-face teaching in Australian universities is conducted by sessional academics. Moreover, sessional teachers often conduct large first year classes, and it is here, in first year, that attrition is most likely. The capacity of sessional teachers to engage students and support learning is therefore crucial to student engagement, support, and graduate success. In 2012, TEQSA identified the "significant reliance on academic staff employed under casual work contracts" as a risk to students, and the Red Report (2008) noted that, "the quality of the student learning environment is jeopardised by a lack of attention to the professional development of sessional teachers." The statement within the HESP Discussion Paper that many lecturers are not adequately trained in teaching might be extrapolated to sessional teachers because support and development of sessional teachers is patchy, and at some higher education institutions is non-existent. It is imperative to build the learning and teaching capability of sessional teachers, support them as they adapt to their new contexts, and inspire them to realise the best possible learning experiences for their students

Student Grievance and Complaints

The Panel might consider the impact fair and effective practice in responding to student complaints has on retention, completion and success.

Student complaints give voice to student expectations and experiences of provider culture and environment at all levels, stages and modes of study.

Learning Analytics applied to this context would assist with understanding how transparent processes; early intervention; informal resolution; and independent advocacy impacts on retention, completion and success.

PART 2

Responses to Questions

1.   What should be the sector's expectations of completion rates (or speed of completion)?

The idea of fixed completion rates is increasingly unrealistic given the great diversity of the student cohort, volatile external conditions and expectations of institutional flexibility.

QUT's average student course consumption rate of load (EFTSL) is 74 per cent, indicating that a three-year degree will be completed by the average student in closer to four years. The average for an Undergraduate student is 80 per cent, while for a Postgraduate student it is 55 per cent, with HDR higher than Coursework (around 66 per cent HDR compared to 50 per cent Coursework on average from 2005 to 2017). Higher consumption rates are also seen in younger students (aged under 20 years old) - 89 per cent, and those who entered on the basis of secondary education only (90 per cent).

We can anticipate that downward pressure on wages and removal of penalty rates may slow completion rates. Students over 25, low SES and Indigenous students, in particular, already report financial hardship as one of the major reasons they consider departure. Low SES students are already more likely to study externally. mixed mode and part-time, and students over 25 are three times more likely to defer for financial reasons. Students report that work commitments impact their studies and reduction in income may exacerbate this. Increasing the student share of study costs and replacing start-up and relocation grants with loans may be a disincentive to debt averse low-SES students. It is unknown whether this will impact the attrition rates of students who struggle in the first year or who are unhappy with their course.

2.   What changes to data collection are necessary to enhance transparency and accountability in relation to student retention, completion and success?

Reporting and definitions around attrition could be clearer. For instance, TEQSA and the Department of Education and Training (DET) define attrition in different ways, both of which are quite narrow descriptions. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the media recently appeared to misrepresent attrition data. There are instances of insufficient clarity on the DET definitions, instances of unnecessary over-reporting and other instances where further reporting could be incorporated within the concepts of attrition, retention and success.

Attrition is currently categorised by DET as normal attrition (which QUT would define as course attrition) and adjusted attrition (which makes allowances for course and university transfers). Given that a common interpretation of the term attrition is based on a student *dropping-out*, the normal attrition implies an outcome that is misleading. Many of these students are not dropping out, but merely taking positive steps to align their course with career or learning intentions. It would be less confusing to report simply on course and or university transfers and leave this cohort out of attrition reporting altogether. In this way, adjusted attrition could be the standard reporting approach. However, it is also important to be explicit about this form of attrition being commencing attrition. DET should

release two figures: overall attrition and commencing attrition (both adjusted).

The DET definition of success is also very narrow. While various achievements might potentially characterise student success, DET uses the term to describe units of study passed by commencing students. Publishing data on overall university progression, together with commencing progression would provide more clarity.

DET currently defines retention as "conceptually the opposite of attrition." Given this close correlation, it seems meaningless to report on both aspects. Retention should be left out of the reporting structure.

At the moment there is only one course completion file per year, even though many universities run two main graduation rounds (plus other special graduation ceremonies interstate and overseas). If there were a shorter time lag between course completion datasets, then attrition/retention could be calculated more readily, although that would increase workloads for staff, and mean that attrition/retention data still could not be finalised until enrolments for the whole year were complete in the following year, so the gain would be relatively small.

However, this may also provide opportunities to finalise outcomes for students who currently are categorised as attrition, even though that is not always the final outcome. For example, HDR students who are under examination at the point of reporting completions each year, or students who have late assessment items and are therefore not enrolled or completed at the point of reporting, but are subsequently completed.

If additional measures (such as tracking semester to semester student enrolments) were introduced, then that would reduce the time lag involved in determining whether a student has dropped out or not, but it would also increase the workload for staff, so a cost-benefit analysis would need to be done to ensure value-add.

Sharing inter-institutional data on students transferring (via CHESSN) would allow greater understanding of overall student attrition decisions, but would also increase the complexity of reporting.

While a formalised Course Exit Survey (such as QUT had prior to 2011) would provide valuable information on reasons that students drop out of courses. It would require a formal course exit/withdrawal decision to be made in order to trigger the survey. Currently, most attrition occurs when students simply do not re-enrol, so there would be no opportunity to request that they complete a Course Exit Survey and whilst QUT now surveys all students that exit units of study, the very low response rates make the data of limited use.

One way to make data more accessible to students could involve reporting on the strategies used by various universities to support particular student challenges. If support strategies were classified, evaluated and reported within consistent categories, students may have the ability to seek out the type of support which best suits their circumstances. For example, a student experiencing a personal crisis could go to the DET website to discover that across various universities, including their own, one-on-one counselling services tends to have the best results for other students with that issue. QUT has begun the process of systematising its evaluation strategy to create greater consistency and comparability across various support services.

3. **How could Government websites, such as QILT and Study Assist, be improved to assist students to make the right choices? For instance, how could student success, completions, retention, and attrition data be made more accessible? Would a predictor for prospective students, such as a completions calculator, be useful and where would it best be situated?**

Any information that is provided needs to be clearly explained, as most students will not understand what "attrition", "retention" and "completion over time period" mean. While it is important to provide prospective students with as much data as is feasible and relevant, a "completions calculator" could be highly misleading. Average outcomes for populations of students should not mask the fact that there is a very high level of variation[1].

Advertising what support is in place at each institution would be useful – for example, there could be a list of the projects and activities that are supported by HEPPP funding at each institution each year. This could be done via the annual reporting required by the HEPPP-funded programs, either publishing reports in their entirety or summarising their outcomes in tabular form. Institutional data on support programs, staff qualifications and other relevant material could also be developed over time, although the difficulties with consistency and scope are acknowledged.

These sites should be promoted to students through all channels, especially advertising via social media.

4. **Can we enhance the tracking of students in tertiary education including movements between higher and vocational education (perhaps by linking the CHESSN and the VET sector USI)?**

This would be useful provided there is report-back functionality, so that institutions can learn where their students who drop out have gone, and thereby verify the "adjusted attrition" rates that are published.

5. **What strategies would further strengthen outreach and careers advice to assist students making decisions about higher education?**

As noted in the Discussion Paper, high quality, unbiased careers advice assists students to choose the courses most appropriate to their skills, interests and abilities and subsequently increases their chances of course completion. We note also that this is especially important for students from low-SES backgrounds.

QUT embeds careers advice in all its HEPPP-funded widening participation activities. This includes discipline-connected career-related activities as part of in-school visits and on-campus days; in-school career sessions conducted by QUT career counsellors; QTAC and career-information talks to Year 12 students; discipline-related career pathways panels; and professional development sessions for school staff and community workers. Adult community members are offered careers advice via one-to-one counselling sessions; career development and job seeking workshops at local libraries; and careers information sessions for TAFE students. Indigenous-specific career-based services are

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[1] The report notes that student characteristics explain very little of the variation in institutional attrition rates. In fact a far larger part of that variation can be "explained" by each university's research block grant income, which suggests that considerable care needs to be taken when adopting such adjustments and interpreting the residuals as "performance".

provided by QUT's Indigenous careers counsellor through community-based activities which are often undertaken in collaboration with QUT's Oodgeroo Unit.

We note that, for adults, the lack of public provision of impartial careers counselling and pathways advice is a major barrier. University outreach programs lack scale and reach, and cannot meet the demand for individual assistance from the non-school-leaver cohort. It is possible that poorly informed initial study and career choices may be a factor in the particularly high attrition rates for mature age students that were noted in the Discussion Paper. Accordingly we suggest that attention be paid to the provision of careers advice for this adult cohort.

Development of more targeted online learning strategies to support career development of high school and first year students would also be of value. Career development needs to become a key focus of the transition- in experience and courses need to develop explicit strategies to support students to start building their professional profiles within first year. In 2016, QUT released a MOOC "Kick Start your Career" designed to help students to conceptualize their career development journey from their transition into university (see "vignettes"). For Indigenous students, QUT has worked with DET to develop the Think Your Way web portal, and such an approach should be extended for all prospective applicants.

6. What identification, intervention and support strategies are most effective in improving student completion?

In order to better identify and intervene with appropriate support strategies, a core priority should be for universities to expand the data sets that they use in order to predict student attrition. At QUT, this has been a key priority, especially over the last two years as our data analytics strategy has matured. Core data sets that are key to supporting student success include:

Data analytics:
- Pre-existing characteristics (e.g. Low SES, disability, Indigenous, first in family, rural and regional)
- Behaviour (e.g. class attendance, LMS visitation, time on campus, orientation participation)
- Assessment (e.g. submission, extension applications)
- Academic achievement (e.g. grades, GPA)
- Academic progression (e.g. repeated failure in unit, probation / show cause, overloading units, returning from leave of absence)
- Enrolment status (e.g. enrolled in high-risk unit, part-time, external)

Staff identification:
- Behaviour (e.g. unusual behaviour / apparent stress, conversations with student)

Student self-identification:
- Student seeks help

While there is little evidence that particular strategies and interventions have a universally positive impact, there is a growing body of empirical data on engagement and learning analytics showing what matters:

- Context is everything: Understand the specific retention and success challenges in each discipline, program or module in relation to student characteristics. For example, what were

the pedagogical design intentions, what did the students do, what do they say about it?

- Where success and achievement is uneven, focus on courses and units persistently "to achieve parity".
- Focus engagement strategies on those students who drop out at much higher rates, such as part-time, external and post-graduate students. Ensure that as we transition to strategies such as "flipped classroom", personalised pathways and online access, we embed engagement strategies that connect these students to their discipline, their teachers, their peers and their learning resources.
- Develop a coordinated strategy involving statisticians, academics, researchers and technical staff.
- Facilitate analytics for course redesign and teaching teams.
- Provide support and tools to develop strategies and to evaluate "what works". Use "data wranglers" to interpret data and dashboards.
- Turn data into information that can be acted upon: dashboards, visualisations, charts.
- Develop student and staff skills and digital literacy to read dashboards and interpret data. Students can compare patterns of behaviour and reflect on their achievement.
- Provide technical solutions to facilitate communications with students
- Send data back to teachers so they know when their students are struggling.
- Take a more granular view of student behaviour and activity at the unit and assessment level to facilitate improvements to the learning design. For example, how students interact with the online systems; how and when do they use the learning materials; are they meeting the learning goals.
- Capture good practice, evaluate, provide evidence and share what works
- There is a lot of research around why students consider departing but not so much on what those in difficulty did to overcome troubles when they encountered them. Focussing on the reasons students leave doesn't help in evaluating the strategies designed to engage and support students in their learning.
- Develop better understanding of the churn and where students go after changing course. Are there patterns to the churn?

In order to support learning (as suggested on p. 46 of the Discussion Paper), QUT uses its Learning Management System (Blackboard) data to provide students and academics with information on the successful habits of prior cohorts of students, and how the individual student's interactions with the LMS each week differ from the class average.

QUT also provides data on student withdrawals (and enrolments) on a weekly basis in the Individual Unit Report, which is available for each unit offered at the University, and is accessible by any staff member. This enables staff to track "at risk" students, and monitor enrolments and withdrawals from key units which may be an early indicator of quality issues in both the unit and the course.

QUT has a user-friendly dashboard of data reports which allows 16 support services (such as counselling, learning support and the like) to track the demographics of their client groups, and the success and retention rates of their clients post-service. From this process, QUT can see that low-SES, rural and Indigenous students are users of mainstream services at about the rate expected from their representation. In terms of consequent success and retention, the data needs interpreting contextually. For example, in 5 of the 16 services, the clients of those services had retention rates worse than the university average. However, this is likely to be a function of the high-risk cohorts which use those services, rather than an indication of service quality. Overall, it is important for universities to have monitoring systems for their support services, and to engage in a 'community of

practice' approach to interpreting the data and taking steps to improve the supports provided.

We have highlighted in Part 1 the importance of strategies designed to foster a sense of belonging on the part of students. In addition to some of the approaches mentioned there, we can provide examples for particular groups of students, for example for Indigenous students internships/cadetships have proven important whilst undertaking their studies, especially within their first few years. These internships provide a great incentive for students to want to complete their degree by providing them with an end goal in regard to employment. Programs such as CareerTrackers, Indigenous Internship Program and Government-run cadetships provide our students with opportunities to gain real world experience and give them a job to aspire to at the completion of their degree. These programs also give the students more motivation to stay in university to complete their degree and to do so within a reasonable timeframe.

7. What more could be done to encourage institutions to offer intermediate qualifications? Should universities or NUHEPs recognise partial completion of a degree through the award of a diploma, perhaps by using 'nested' degree courses? How much impact would there be on institutions who chose to offer such courses?

QUT already uses "nested" courses, particularly between Graduate Certificate / Graduate Diploma / Masters. We also have an articulation agreement for our International College pathway, from Diploma to Bachelors courses. The introduction of exit-only diploma awards will cause little disruption to our normal business practices.

8. What new and innovative approaches do evaluations suggest are improving student completion at individual HEPs?

In addition to the information provided elsewhere in this response, the implementation of the Keystones of Success: Supporting our Future Leaders Program (Keystones Program) has seen an improvement of student completion for **Indigenous students**. The program allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to receive supplementary tuition support for units in which they are struggling. The program also provides numerous workshops for students throughout the year to assist with academic skills development and career mentoring.

Importance of <u>financial support</u> for retention

QUT has an award winning Equity Scholarships Scheme [2] providing approximately $5m in scholarships each year, allocated purely on a needs basis taking into account students' income, expenditure and complex life circumstances. In colloquial terms, it is those who are both cash-poor and time-poor who are at highest risk of attrition, and who are intentionally targeted in the scholarship scheme.

There is considerable evidence demonstrating that this program has a retention effect. In 2016 scholarship holders had a retention rate of 88.4 per cent which compares favourably with the all QUT student retention rate of 87.1 per cent. In addition, within each equity group, scholarship-holders had better attrition than those without scholarships. For example, for low-SES students with scholarships, the rate was 90.5 per cent compared with the all low-SES rate of 86.6 per cent.

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[2] QUT Equity Scholarships Scheme, 2009 winner of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council program Award. Available at: https://cms.qut.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/28658/Equity-ALTC-LPF-booklet.pdf

Over nearly a decade of annual surveys, recipients consistently report that the scholarship reduces stress, boosts morale, and allows the students to devote more time to their studies. Some 50 per cent of recipients use the money to reduce their paid work hours, that is, to 'buy time'.

We note that while institutional equity scholarship schemes are important support mechanisms, particularly for students with complicated lives, it is important to recognise that they are only one aspect of student financial support. Students' main sources of income include Centrelink income support payments, (including Student Start-up Loans and Relocation Scholarships), and paid work. Consequently, current policy settings which see the Government withdrawing from Commonwealth Scholarships by reducing their scope and/or converting scholarships to loans are to be discouraged.

For those QUT recipients who have the highest scores for financial hardship as well as for complex life circumstances, the retention effect of the scholarships is muted. This indicates that scholarships alone cannot address all of the challenges of complex lives, but must be one of a suite of support strategies. For further information see the 2015 report at
https://cms.qut.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/522303/equity-scholarship-scheme-report.pdf

9. What can we learn about enhancing student success from the international experience?

One lesson to be learned from the international experience is the importance of stable reporting of data to enable effective assessment and institutional evaluation. The first year and more of QILT data has been perturbed by multiple re-issues of the data, which may just be teething problems as the data collation, analysis, and reporting is finalised. It would also be useful to receive the data after each survey round (for the GOS), as was done for the AGS for many years, so as to have as short a delay as possible in obtaining data. This enabled internal reporting to be updated more regularly than once per year, and allowed more ongoing interactions with the data.

Another international lesson to be learned is the importance of involving staff beyond the Marketing & Communication department in the development of the university's mission, vision, and marketing. Ng and Forbes (2009), in their article *Education as service*: *The understanding of university experience through the service logic* (Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 19(1), 38-64), argue that student satisfaction (and therefore retention / completion) will come when there is alignment between the institution's ideology, its values, and its marketing (internal and external)..

Australia can also learn from the UK about the importance of creating a single professional standards framework of 'success' that applies to all categories of staff by clearly identifying Activities, Values and Knowledges central to student success. This has already had widespread traction in Australia and with Government support for deeper engagement could become a key international benchmark and success indicator. Overall the report downplays the growth of Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowships in Australia and the importance of benchmarking ourselves using a global indicator rather than a domestic one.

10. What are the most effective ways for providers to share best practice?

A single centralised repository for sharing data and outcomes of projects could be useful, possibly hosted by Universities Australia as part of their data responsibilities. Such centralised warehousing of practice has a mixed history of success, and lessons would need to be learned from past efforts.

We note that the HEA in the UK is a good example of a centralised institution leading community

collaboration across the sector. It leads best practice development, identifying key priorities each year in consultation with the sector and widely disseminating outcomes. It has broad support because stakeholders have a voice through their engagement in awards, grants and fellowship activities.

11. What strategies should TEQSA employ to ensure compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework which requires HEPs to offer the level of support necessary to ensure student success? Does TEQSA require further powers in this regard?

In line with its mandate to pursue a proportionate and risk-based approach to standards and quality, TEQSA should focus its attention primarily on the evidence provided in the registration process and then on instances where there is evidence of exceptionally high attrition or of major worsening in attrition. In line with the evidence provided by the Discussion Paper, this does not warrant a significant expansion of TEQSA's monitoring of compliance by the great majority of existing institutions. It is not clear that TEQSA requires further powers to fulfil such a function.

PART 3

QUT Good Practice Vignettes*
***further information regarding any of the programs/initiatives below available on request**

1. <u>Learner Profiles</u>: Emerging from a program of research, QUT has developed seven distinct Learner Profiles. The seven Learner Profiles segment the student population according to different sets of core characteristics. This segmentation allows for a better understanding of what motivates students to study, what factors may contribute to their success and what services they may need access to during their time at university. An understanding of the characteristics of Learner Profiles enhances QUT's ability to design support services that meet students' varied needs.

2. <u>Student as Partner</u>- A core QUT priority to improve student success over the last two years has been forging active partnerships between students and academic staff to improve the learning and engagement of QUT students. QUT students have been actively involved in the co-design of courses at QUT and are also working with the university to transform student engagement with our academic governance structures.

3. <u>Kickstart your career</u> - This MOOC was co-designed with career development professionals and academic staff to support the transition in to university of high school students. The goal of the MOOC is to ensure that all students conceptualize career development as a core component of their university experience and have the skills and mindsets to set themselves up for future success.

4. <u>STIMulate</u> - This award winning program supports students by providing assistance with skills in maths, science and IT. The program is designed and delivered in partnership with students and academic staff and works closely with course leaders to ensure that support is timely, accessible and tailored to meet the unique needs to learners.

5. <u>Peer Programs</u> - The Peer Programs strategy is a university wide initiative to enhance peer to peer engagement and learning in the curriculum. The strategy focuses on building the capability of staff and students to facilitate and lead peer to peer learning, and on developing a QUT wide culture of peer engagement. With centralised training, a core priority of the strategy is to ensure

that all peer led initiatives on campus are quality assured, sustainable and attentive to the needs of students. Many hundreds of QUT students are now trained annually by the program.

6. <u>Student Success Program</u> (SSP) - The SSP is a well-established University-wide student engagement and retention initiative that focuses on the early identification of students who may be at-risk of disengaging from their studies providing support before they lose confidence, stop participating, fail assessment, or leave. The SSP provides proactive, purposeful advice and referrals to these students. The overall purpose of SSP is to increase student engagement and mitigate the issues related to failure and therefore prevent unnecessary attrition. The SSP monitors all students in a cohort, however, it is particularly focused on the experiences of students from under-represented social groups and those students for whom completion of a university course presents more challenges.

7. At QUT, a **Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice** (GCAP) – an AQF Level 8 qualification – has been undertaken by all early career academics since 2011 (with early career academics appointed through a special recruitment process (ECARD), including workload allocation for this study in their appointment package). In 2015, GCAP was opened up to include sessional academics and professional staff who support student learning. Over 200 staff have completed the graduate certificate to date, with a further 56 currently enrolled. Upon completion, staff attain both a postgraduate qualification and (since accreditation in 2015) an HEA Fellowship.

   GCAP employs evidence-based strategies to improve teaching quality. Subjects build the capacity of academics to design learning experiences that engage students in learning, promote a sense of belonging (through enhanced student/student and student/teacher interaction), and ensure student success and retention. It ensures academics take a scholarly and analytical approach to curriculum design to meet student expectations, enabling student success through constructively aligned curriculum and assessment, promoting a sense professional belonging and employability through authentic assessment and real world learning, with embedded support for learning (particularly for first year experience, equity groups, international and indigenous students) to ensure retention and success.

   This postgraduate qualification has had a clear impact on teaching quality evidenced by enhancing staff capabilities in ensuring student engagement, success and retention. Over 90 per cent of participants agree/strongly agree that the GCAP course has enabled them to: improve the quality of students' educational experiences (94 per cent); optimise learning engagement in physical and online learning environments (96 per cent); foster a sense of belonging (in the class/at the university/in their future careers) (87 per cent); enable student success (94 per cent); design subjects and courses that integrate support for learning (98 per cent); and help students to stay at university (93 per cent). 80 per cent are more aware of, and better able to refer students to the support they may need (information and services such as Student Services, counselling, careers etc) (2017 survey data).

8. At QUT, a comprehensive <u>Sessional Success Program</u> (SSP) is recognized as sector leading (AAUT Program Award, three BLASST Institutional Awards). Its framework is based on the three requisites of student success identified by Tinto (2009) – engaging students; timely access to support; and a sense of belonging – and adds a fourth – recognition. A holistic approach includes a sequence of 10 x 3 hour workshops (and a set of accompanying blended learning resources), a peer support program, and opportunities to share and be recognized for good practice. Academic development focuses on engaging students in learning, student success and retention, and

support within and beyond the classroom for diverse learners (first year experience, equity groups, and international and indigenous students). It includes growth mindset, overviews of QUT's student support information and services, and warm handovers. The program attracts over 300 attendees per year, with nearly 100 per cent of new sessional undertaking some or all of the program. Completion of the course and related assessment leads to professional recognition through attainment of a subject in GCAP: Principles and Practices of University Learning and Teaching and Associate Fellowship (HEA). Sessional staff can then apply to undertake the remainder of GCAP.

To complement this centrally delivered formal, professional development, <u>Sessional Academic Success Advisors</u> are embedded within schools. Through a distributed leadership approach, these experienced sessional academics provide less experienced peers with needs based, peer- led, contextually local and focal development opportunities; and one-on-one advice on optimizing student learning and strategies for success. (http://blasst.edu.au/awards_2013.html#ham) (http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol10/iss3/9/)

QUT also enables sharing good practices, both within GCAP assessment presentations, a range of staff showcases (both face-to-face and online) and, for sessional teachers, the annual <u>Sessional Teaching and Reflection Showcase</u> (ST★RS) which promotes, recognises and celebrates good practices in engaging students in learning, fostering a sense of belonging, and support for learning within their teaching context. (http://blasst.edu.au/awards_2015.html)

SSP's impact on student learning and student experience is evidenced in longitudinal program surveys (up to 3 years post completion of this professional development). 96 per cent of respondents report more highly engaged students, 98 per cent report being better able to help students continue (i.e. to not drop out), 93 per cent are better able to develop an inclusive learning environment by modelling respectful attitudes and inclusive approaches, 87 per cent are better able to develop connections and belonging in the class, discipline and university community, and 93 per cent are more aware of QUT Services and being better able to refer students to support with a 'warm handover'.

7 July 2017