

Operation Student Success: Griffith's Student Retention Strategy 2012 – 2014

Why It is Important to Retain Students

Griffith University has a strong commitment to providing students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds with an excellent university experience to promote student success. However, inevitably some students will commence a program of study and discover that, for them, they have made an incorrect choice and will want to move elsewhere either within Griffith or to a different university. Such a move in some cases may be in their best interests. For the majority of students however, attrition is disadvantageous, meaning that they fail to succeed in an effort that would have brought them considerable social and economic benefits down the track if they had completed their degree.

In addition to the adverse impact upon the students, attrition also creates a major financial problem for the University. For every student who is not retained, there is a loss of associated income to the university and we are required to replace those students to fill load in future admissions rounds. Not only does the university suffer financially but attrition produces a downward pressure on student admission standards as we are required to recruit even more students into first year in order to fill places than would otherwise have been the case. There are also external drivers that make it important for us to retain students. The Commonwealth Government and quality agency carefully tracks the retention rates of students, and in future our performance in this area is likely to affect our funding.

Griffith's Targets and Current Performance in Retention

In 2005, Griffith noted that it was lying second from the bottom of rankings of universities in terms of retention (*Succeeding @ Griffith: A new approach to enhancing the First Year Experience at Griffith*, 2006). After a period of poor retention rates from 2005 to 2008, Griffith improved its retention rate in 2009 and 2010 to 80.8% and 80.9% respectively, moving up to around the 40th percentile for university retention rankings. The Griffith University Strategic Plan (2011-2013) set targets for a retention rate of 81.6% for 2011 and 82.3% for 2012. The aim is for Griffith to exceed the national average for retention by 2013. The actual figure for retention for 2011 (for students who should have continued from 2010) was 78.8%, well below target and returning to 2006 levels. Clearly, there is a need for significant initiatives to re-ignite Griffith's efforts to boost retention rates in a very challenging, competitive environment.

The History of Retention Initiatives at Griffith

Griffith has invested significant effort in attempts to improve its retention rates over the past 10 years, commencing with the Griffith Student Retention Project in 2003. This was followed by a series of projects, workshops, forums, research studies, initiatives, position papers and guidelines leading to the development in 2006 of *Succeeding @ Griffith*, a framework for student success, particularly in first year. Clear performance targets for improvements were set at University, group and school levels, and the need to achieve improvements in retention were highlighted in the University's Strategic Plan (2009-2013). Retention was also included as the major outcome measure in learning and teaching performance funding to groups and schools. More recently, *operation student success* has been introduced across several schools to focus on improving retention in programs that have large enrolments and poor retention rates.

Previous and current Academic Plans (Implementing our vision 2011-2013) specified a series of strategies that aimed at improving Griffith's student retention rates, building on those outlined in *Succeeding @ Griffith*. These actions included:-

- Attempts to increase the quality of the student cohort
- Increased preparation of prospective and commencing students
- Proactive academic advising, including the appointment of first year advisers
- Enabling transition in early learning environments
- Effective program and course design
- Enabling early academic success
- Enhancing strategic communication with students
- Facilitating self-managed learning and problem-solving , including early detection and early intervention of students at risk
- Providing a staff-enabling culture, through leadership development, and staff capacity building.

The strategies and framework outlined in *Succeeding @ Griffith* remain just as relevant today as they did in 2006. However, what is in question is the degree to which Griffith has succeeded in gaining traction in the delivery of the strategies, and in communicating to staff across the University their role in the implementation process.

Griffith's Student Retention Strategy 2012–2014 retains many of the strategies outlined in *Succeeding @ Griffith* (2006) but increases the focus on the extent and quality of implementation. ***It makes it clear that implementation is not a choice, but a necessity.*** It also recognizes that in order to achieve results, significant financial investment in the strategy is required from all levels and areas of the University.

Reasons for Attrition from the University

Research at Griffith indicates that attrition occurs for a wide range of reasons, and it is usually a combination of factors that triggers the decision to leave the university before successful completion (ref to old Griffith study, and Michelle's recent paper). Indeed the Griffith data is highly consistent with evidence from other universities nationally and internationally (Griffith Quality, Planning and Statistics Unit, 2008; Long, Ferrier, & Heagney, 2006; National Audit Office, 2007), indicating the following reasons for student attrition:-

- Personal difficulties – the most commonly given explanation for attrition, relating to health, finances, family, work, and difficulty fitting in or making friends
- Academic difficulties – lack of academic preparedness, weak academic knowledge or specific study skills required to tackle the demands of the program; weak academic entry scores and low GPAs in first semester are all associated with greater attrition
- Full time vs part-time status – part-time students are significantly less likely to continue into second year compared to full-time students;
- Making an uncertain or the wrong subject/program/university choice is linked to attrition. In some cases, this may reflect poor information provided prior to enrolment, or inadequate consideration of educational and career goals
- Not being the university of first choice – a proportion of students leave one university to take up a more attractive opportunity at another institution if they are able to
- Loss of interest in the program or subject area
- Inability to manage time and workload demands and in consequence falling behind
- Dissatisfaction with the university experience, quality of curriculum or teaching.

There are some general characteristics of institutions and their student cohorts that also predict higher rates of attrition. In the UK for example, attrition is shown to be higher in institutions established from 1990 onwards, compared to the older, traditional, well established universities. Attrition is also higher for institutions that recruit students from neighbourhoods with lower rates of participation in higher education, admit students with lower pre-entry academic records,

and have a larger population of their intake aged 21 and over. Certain academic programs also tend to have higher rates of attrition, such as IT, Engineering, Business and Communication in comparison to programs such as Medicine, Dentistry and Education. Although Griffith University is characterized by several institution-level risk factors, benchmarked data against universities of similar institutional demographics indicate that we are still falling below the level of retention that should be expected.

Metric	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
% Retained Actual	78.7%	79.8%	78.7%	80.8%	80.9%	78.5%	
% Retained National	80.1%	80.8%	80.7%	81.0%	<i>tba</i>		

Figure 1. The retention rates for Griffith University and the adjusted national retention rate (Adjusted to reflect Griffith's own Field of Education distribution)

At Griffith, we need to recognize that we have a diverse student body, and many of the risk factors for attrition outlined above are present in our student cohort. Although there are many risk factors for attrition that we are not able to change, there are many actions that can be implemented to increase the chance of student success. We need to offer a university experience that provides the type of support that our students need in order to optimize their success.

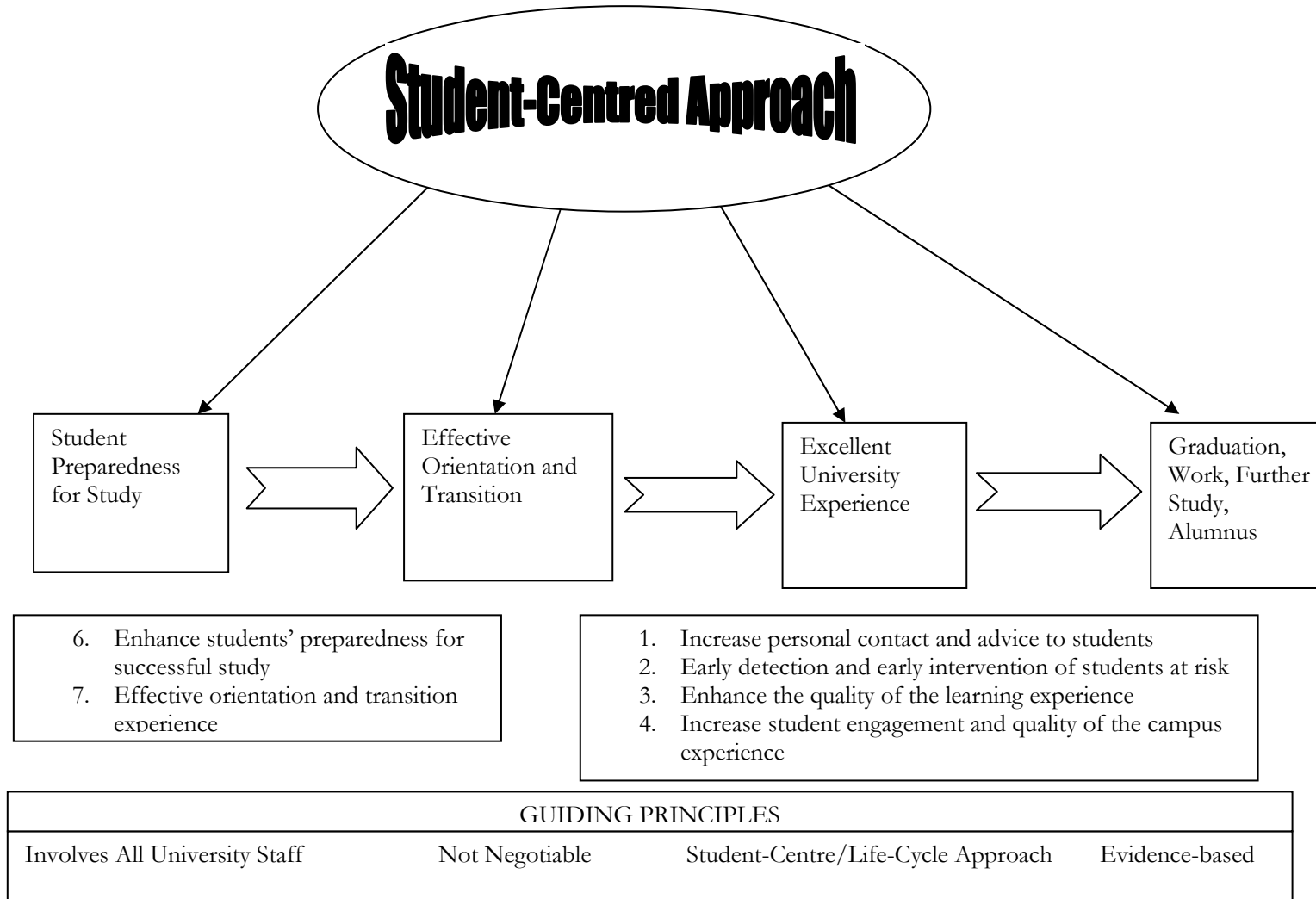
Clearly, Griffith needs a proactive retention strategy that outlines the actions required to tackle this complex issue, and that clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of all those who need to be involved in order to achieve student success.

The Strategy

There has been a good deal of research conducted internationally and indeed at Griffith to determine the impact of different approaches to improving student retention. Given the methodological difficulties in evaluating institutional change strategies, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the impact of different interventions. Generally, improvements in retention have been found following interventions that enhance students preparedness to study, create an effective orientation experience, increase personal communication with and advice to students, provide early detection and intervention for students at risk, enhance the quality of the learning experience, and increase student engagement and quality of the campus experience (Scott et al., 2008; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). A trial involving many of these strategies, involving embedded student advisors in first year, has recently been conducted at Griffith, with early signs of positive outcomes (Wilson, 2009). Scott et al., (2008) emphasize the importance of embedding retention enhancing strategies within an organizational change approach, involving data-driven improvement plans, engaging all institutional staff in the agenda, and performance-based incentives for implementation and results.

Griffith's student retention strategy draws on the existing literatures regarding determinants of student retention and evidence-based interventions. It emphasizes four principles that underpin the Griffith strategy and specifies seven elements that form its framework as outlined in Figure 2. Details regarding the implementation plan are outlined in Appendix 1.

Figure 2. A Student-centred, Lifecycle Approach to Student Retention and Success



Principles Underpinning the Strategy

The strategy is underpinned by **four key principles**:-

1. **A Student-Centered, Life-Cycle Approach**

Retention strategies should reflect a student lifecycle approach, that recognizes and supports diversity and social inclusion. It places students at the centre of interventions from the point of initial contact with the University and the early stages of orientation and transition to university study, succeeding in their academic studies, through to the point of graduation.

2. **Retention is the Business of All University Staff**

Retention initiatives are the responsibility of all areas of the University, and each area needs to have a clear implementation plan, identified timescale, and specified responsibilities for delivery. All University staff contribute to student success and, to be effective, the strategy requires a strong partnership between academic and professional staff. The respective roles and responsibilities relating to retention need to be clarified and we need to **build staff capacity** through professional development. We also need to **develop leadership capabilities** at multiple levels to support implementation of retention strategies across the University, with clear accountabilities for delivery.

3. **An Evidence-Based Approach**

Interventions should be informed by Griffith data relating to student withdrawal and failure, and by the national and international literature in the area. The quality of implementation of initiatives and their outcomes should be monitored and evaluated. Good practice should be shared within the University in relation to initiatives that produce significant improvements in retention rates.

4. **Implementation is Not Negotiable**

Clear goals and performance indicators should be set for improvement in retention at program, school, group and University levels, with implications for funding based on improvements and performance in retention.

Key Elements of the Framework

There are seven key elements that form the framework for the strategy. These are to:-

1. **Enhance students' preparedness for successful study**

The strategy recognises that students are more likely to complete their studies if they select a degree program in which they have a genuine motivation to succeed, and for which they can anticipate personal or career benefits resulting from completion. It is also important that students have a realistic picture of what university study, and the chosen program, will actually involve, and that they enter university equipped with the pre-requisite academic skills and knowledge and the capacity to learn and study at the standard required to succeed. Griffith's student retention strategy specifies a range of actions that the University can implement in order to tackle these issues.

2. **Create an effective orientation and transition experience**

Students commence university study from a range of backgrounds. At Griffith, around half the students arrive directly from high school, and the remainder have had some form of life experience, such as a gap year, successful completion of a TAFE or college qualification, or many years of work and/or family participation. Some students may be the first in their family to study at university, and may be unfamiliar with the campus and expectations for university-level study. They may also find the challenges of

meeting new people extremely daunting. The strategy proposes a range of interventions designed to facilitate this transition, to assist students to feel included and to develop a sense of belonging to their new university and a sense of self efficacy regarding their capacity to succeed in completing the work required.

3. Increase personal contact and communication with, and advice to students

One of the key elements of the strategy is investment in efforts to provide ongoing personal contact, communication and advice for students. Students feel much more connected to their university if they have positive interactions with staff and peers, and if they know who to go to for advice and help. The strategy creates a new area within Academic Administration that brings together a range of central administrative functions into a Student Success Unit. This unit would be responsible for coordinating orientation activities, scholarships, tracking students at risk, coordinating communications with students through the CRM system and student help lines, providing a call centre for specific advice about their enrolment, supporting the Colleges of Excellence, providing careers and employment services to students, and coordinating the University's social inclusion strategies through the HEPPP program.

Significantly, the strategy also introduces a network of Personal Advisers, so that all students are assigned a single point of contact to provide academic and pastoral support, and increase students' engagement and connectedness with their university. Ideally, students will retain the same Personal Adviser throughout their degree program. These staff represent an important contact point for students in their interactions with the University. They will work in partnership with many areas of the University and will play a fundamental role in enhancing student retention. The Personal Advisers will form part of school-based teams, working in partnership with the First Year Advisers, and key school academic and administrative staff, to develop and implement school-based retention plans. This student liaison will also require a senior academic champion who will assist in the coordination of retention strategies. Having said that, *the development of a student-centred service culture and establishment of positive, respectful and supportive relationships between staff and students is the business of all areas of the University.*

4. Implement systems for early detection and early intervention of students at risk

Unfortunately many students only come to the attention of University staff at the point at which they have failed one or more courses and are at serious risk of dropping out or exclusion. There are many reasons why students begin to struggle with their work and in many instances additional academic preparation, learning skills support, or advice in relation to personal difficulties could assist students towards successful completion of their academic work. This aspect of the strategy requires that all academic programs work in partnership with Personal Advisers and the central Student Success Unit to implement an early detection and early intervention approach designed to support students towards successful study.

5. Enhance the quality of the learning experience

This aspect of the strategy emphasizes the importance of optimal program and course design and delivery. Students come to university to study with expectations about the outcomes that they will achieve, usually in terms of the skills and knowledge that they will acquire, and the career opportunities that will open up to them as a consequence of completing their degree. They also have expectations about the quality of the teaching they will receive and the learning outcomes they will achieve. It is important therefore that Griffith is able to deliver a top-quality learning experience that facilitates students' successful achievement of learning outcomes. The strategy outlines key elements of

program and course design and delivery that are required in order to achieve this goal. We also need to recognize that the considerable diversity of the student body at Griffith. Some students will undoubtedly require more academic support than others, and the strategy includes a significant emphasis on tutorial and PASS support for students in key courses. It also notes that many Griffith students are required to work in order to support themselves and benefit from flexible delivery of teaching, particularly in terms of lecture capture and online learning resources. Increasingly students are needing to study some elements of their program through fully online modes. The increasing shift towards online study will mean that Griffith needs to reconceptualise the way in which we teach, and this will require many staff to learn new skills relating to online teaching.

6. Increase student engagement and quality of the campus experience

Despite the increasing shift to online study, the majority of Griffith's students still attend campus for lectures, tutorials and to access the library and learning spaces. The campus, however, is not just a place for study but also a centre for social interaction, and venue in which students engage with their university. This element of the strategy specifies a range of strategies designed to create a positive campus experience, and to enhance student engagement through co-curricular activities.

7. A data-driven approach to planning, implementation, review and improvement of retention activities at all levels and areas of the University

This action recognises that a great deal of research exists about university student retention, its predictors, and effectiveness of interventions. We do not want to reinvent things, and need to draw on existing literature to inform our strategies. We do, however, need to ensure that we establish clear targets for performance at multiple levels of the university, with very clear responsibilities for delivery of the strategy. This will require a regular schedule of review of the quality of implementation of the strategy, and the outcomes achieved. In order to do this, *all academic and professional areas of the university will need to develop clear, but simple, action plans* that outline the local strategies that need to be implemented in order to enhance student retention. There will also need to be minimum standards for delivery of the various aspects of the strategy in order to assure the quality of implementation. Schools need to establish a school retention team, the role of which is to review local data relating to retention, and to engage school staff in the implementation of key actions to enhance retention.

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Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)
April 2012

Appendix 1: Griffith University Student Retention Implementation Plan 2012-2014

Code:

	Ongoing activity to be continued and enhanced
	New activity

KEY AREA	STRATEGY	WHO
<i>Enhance Students' Preparedness for Successful Study</i>		
Enhance compatibility between students' expectation of programme/institution and their actual experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students will receive/have access to accurate information concerning campuses, financial considerations programmes and courses ▪ Internet social networking employed to enable intending students to make contact with existing 'ambassador' students or to obtain useful information from peers ▪ Increase information re program content and program experience 	Academic Registrar Heads of School Program Director
Prepare all students with core learning skills to increase chance of student success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University to provide a range of pre-entry workshops prior to commencement of studies; widely publicised ▪ Identify prior to entry those students most likely to need additional literacy, numeracy or other study skills support, and provide access to such services prior to semester start ▪ Introduce a compulsory first semester learning skills online course (not for credit but for testamur) as per Wollongong 	PVC (INS)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide learning skills support on all campuses targeted at students in greatest need, and to first year students ▪ Increase student awareness of learning skills support 	PVC (INS)
Enhance English language skills for international students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement English language entry criteria at level required for successful study ▪ Implement Griffith English language Enhancement Strategy, including English HELP and English Language Enhancement Course 	PVC (International) DVC (A)

KEY AREA	STRATEGY	WHO
<i>Create Effective Orientation and Transition Experience</i>		
Streamline and create a positive enrolment experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop user-friendly enrolment procedures 	Academic Registrar
Provide an effective orientation and induction process for all students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All students (including late arrivals) will receive an adequate induction to promote inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Familiarise with campus, resources, support services, and key academic staff ○ Promote interaction between staff and students ○ Clarify expectations re attendance and study behaviour ▪ Central coordination of orientation programmes and disseminate good practice, with significant input from Schools and support areas ▪ All induction programmes will include an opportunity for personal advisors to meet their students individually or within a group. ▪ Introduction to peer mentors; GI Mates 	PVC (INS) Heads of Schools
<i>Increase Personal Support and Communication with, and Advice to, Students</i>		
Establish a central Student Success Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a Student Success Unit to develop and coordinate activities supporting student success 	Academic Registrar
Establish a network of Personal Advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All students will be assigned a personal advisor to provide academic and pastoral support, and increase engagement and connectedness with their university (See below) 	DVC (A) Group PVCs
Enhance formal communication with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social media, online chat ▪ Outbound telephone calling for students at risk ▪ Enhanced website for co-curricular activities ▪ Student Help-Line; Ask Us ▪ Clear information about contact officers, how and where to seek help 	Academic Registrar
Enhance quality of informal and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure a student-centered culture in 	All academic and

Attachment for Item 4a - EG 7-2012

KEY AREA	STRATEGY	WHO
formal communication with students	all interactions between staff and students	professional Unit managers
Clear and coherent policies and rules that are designed to support student success, and communicated clearly to students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarify and increase accessibility to information: University rules and policies, such as student withdrawal, program change, exclusion, etc ▪ Develop a best practice approach to student withdrawal, program change and exclusion that encourages successful student outcomes (See Manchester Met) 	Academic Registrar
Clarify and simplify program rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rationalise, simplify and clarify program rules and study plans 	Deans (L & T) Heads of School Program Directors
Counselling, student support, and health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase student awareness of support, counseling and health services ▪ Reduce wait list times ▪ Effective referrals between Griffith and external services ▪ Increase staff and student awareness of mental health issues and help seeking skills ▪ Increase use of online information and interventions to support students 	Director, Student Support Services
Peer mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expand mentoring schemes using student volunteers as mentors/buddies ▪ All students to have opportunity to have a peer mentor 	Student Success Unit and Student Advisors Heads of Schools
Scholarship schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scholarships to provide support based on equity needs and merit 	Academic Registrar
<i>Implement Systems for Early Detection and Early Intervention of Students at Risk</i>		
Early detection and early intervention of students at risk Identify students early on who are at risk of failure or drop out and intervene via advising, problem solving, referral for assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and implement system for tracking of- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attendance at key learning events ○ Submission and successful completion of specific assessment tasks ○ Activity in Learning @ Griffith ○ Library usage (on-site or remote) ▪ Provision of information to personal advisors -> triggers specific contact/advice and appropriate 	Academic Registrar Director, GIHE Student Success Director Personal Advisors

KEY AREA	STRATEGY	WHO
	referrals	
Learning and Academic Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide learning and academic advice for students at risk 	PVC (INS)
<i>Enhance the Quality of the Learning Experience</i>		
Ensure that we have relevant programs that students want to study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure input from industry advisory board, market research, student feedback, external relations in program planning and review processes 	ER Heads of School Program Directors
Increase applied content and facilitate students career outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All undergraduate programs to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The opportunity for all students to participate in a full work integrated learning or service learning course, or research placement ○ Career-related content in first year ○ Professionals, industry experts as guest lecturers ○ A focus on application of theory and knowledge to practice ○ A capstone subject ▪ Increase work experience opportunities through jobs on campus 	Heads of School Program Directors Director, GIHE Student Success Unit
Building a sense of cohort and opportunities for collaborative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students will be provided with opportunities for collaborative learning in a small group setting within each programme in at least one subject at each level. ▪ Ensure opportunities for interactive learning and small group work in first year 	Heads of School Program Directors
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure an appropriate balance in the use of experienced and casual staff in first year 	Heads of School
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Each programme to ensure that every student has at least one formative assessment within the first six weeks of the start of the programme ▪ Provide rapid diagnostic feedback on early formative assessment that identifies any study skills needs and 	Heads of School Program Directors

Attachment for Item 4a - EG 7-2012

KEY AREA	STRATEGY	WHO
	refers to student support officer or other additional support	
Small class teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that all on-campus courses include significant amount of tutorial, small class or lab experiences 	
Increase students' engagement with their learning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase use of reflective learning diaries and Personal Development Plans/Progress by students 	Heads of School Program Directors Students
Quality of teaching and staff interactions with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase quality of teaching and learning and staff interactions with students in line with Griffith's <i>Learning and Teaching Principles</i> ▪ Professional development of academic and professional staff aligned to providing the student-centered experience ▪ Recruit, select, and develop staff who provide top quality academic and professional experiences for students 	All academic staff Director, GIHE Director, OHRM Heads of Elements Heads of Elements and Supervisors
Program-level tutorial and PASS support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All programs to provide opportunity for students to receive PASS tutoring (8 sessions) in at least one threshold subject in Sem 1 and Sem 2 of Year 1 ▪ Central coordination, support, training of local PASS coordinators 	Student Success Unit Deans (L & T) Heads of School Program Directors
Support exceptional students and build their leadership capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Honours College ▪ Griffith Sports College ▪ Leadership program – for transcript ▪ Support Golden Key ▪ Encourage overseas experiences 	Student Success Unit
Increase flexible delivery of programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expand blended learning, classroom capture/flexible delivery 	Director, GIHE Director, INS L & T Program Convenors Academic staff Heads of school
Enhance the quality of the physical and virtual learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase wireless access on campus ▪ Increase access to computers for students on campus ▪ Optimize IT, library services and lecture theatre technology 	PVC (INS)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop learning spaces that are student-friendly and that support effective learning 	Director, Campus Life

Attachment for Item 4a - EG 7-2012

KEY AREA	STRATEGY	WHO
Increase and promote co-curricular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ So-curricular transcript eg. for participation in committees etc. ▪ Website for co-curricular activities ▪ Increase school-based co-curricular activities, social events and opportunities for student interaction with staff and peers 	Academic Registrar Heads of School
Enhance quality of the campus experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve options for affordable, healthy food on campus ▪ Improve sporting facilities ▪ Support clubs and societies 	PVC (Administration)
Increase interaction between domestic and international students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support for Student Linx 	PVC (International)
Facilitate ease for students to access the campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance transport to campus and ease of parking 	PVC (Administration)
<p><i>Implement a Data-driven Approach to Planning, Implementation, Review and Improvement of Retention Activities at All Levels and in Areas of the University</i></p>		
Timely and detailed analytics, analysis and reporting of retention data in a timely and user-friendly way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Production of retention data in a user-friendly way via Staircase reports at University, Group, School and Program levels ▪ Rapid, preliminary data re: failure to return in next semester (by school, program) 	Director, PFS
Rapid and detailed information about reasons for drop out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Surveying/phone calls for non-enrolling students to identify reasons for drop-out ▪ Analysis of cohorts and predictors of drop-out 	Academic Registrar Director, PFS Director, GIHE
Cascade clear operational plans and strategies to all levels of the University, tracking quality of implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Each academic and professional element of the university to develop local implementation plan and threshold standards for implementation of retention strategy ▪ All schools to establish a Retention Team to assess local data, develop retention strategies, monitor implementation, and track outcomes at school and program levels – reporting back to School committee and Group (see Manchester Met) 	All academic and professional element leaders
Increase leadership resources to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appoint a senior academic fellow to 	DVC (A)

Attachment for Item 4a - EG 7-2012

KEY AREA	STRATEGY	WHO
facilitate implementation of the strategy	advise on and lead implementation of retention strategies across the University	
Increase staff engagement with the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Each School Committee to discuss analysis of student retention indicators as part of annual monitoring 	Heads of School
Specify staff responsibilities for implementation of the strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure position descriptions for academic and professional staff clearly identify responsibilities for contributing to retention ▪ Develop minimum standards for delivery for all aspects of the strategy, and monitor quality of implementation 	All academic and professional element leaders
Establish KPIs, targets and provide budget incentives for improvements and performance in retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include retention as a significant element of reward funding to Groups and Schools, in a transparent way in budget model ▪ KPIs and targets for retention for University, Group, Schools and Academic Managers performance appraisal 	Director, PFS Group PVCs
Enhance the annual and 5-yearly program review process to include improvement plans with a focus on retention where required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development and implementation of program-level retention plans and strategies 	Program Directors
Listen and respond to student feedback about their experience at program and course level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collect and monitor student feedback at subject and program level, and develop/implement improvement plans as appropriate. ▪ Closing the loop – provide feedback to students about improvements taken – website 	Director, PFS Heads of School Program Directors Course Convenors Program Directors DVC (A)

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT: NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION**PROPOSAL FOR DISCUSSION****ENABLING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH EMBEDDED ADVISING***A Student Centred Strategy for Enhancing Engagement and Retention at Griffith*

This paper briefly outlines a proposal for increasing the capacity of schools and programs to better support the success and retention of Griffith students. This proposal should be understood within the context of the wider Griffith Retention Strategy (2012-2014) which incorporates both curricular and co-curricular strategies. The paper proposes the creation of a new role (Student Success Advisor), and the repositioning of current roles, in particular the First Year Advisor role, in relation to student engagement and retention.

What is our context?

Griffith has been a national leader in the provision of support services to commencing students. The institutional Succeeding@Griffith strategy was recognised nationally with an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Program Award and aspects of the strategy have been adopted by several Australian universities. A key element in this strategy has been the principle of 'locating help as close as possible to student need'. This has primarily been operationalised through the First Year Advisor role, typically undertaken by an academic member of staff within each school or program. However, recent converging evidence from a range of sources (reduction in university student retention figures, student feedback regarding the level of unmet support needs and feedback from First Year Advisors (FYAs) about the limited capacity of their role) strongly indicates that the university's purposes would be well-served by a re-conceptualization and rejuvenation of our strategy.

What is the unmet need?*Commencing Students' Challenges*

The 2012 Starting@Griffith survey provides a clear indication of the type of challenges experienced, and level of need for support expressed, by our commencing students. A cross-discipline sample of Griffith commencing students (n = 1546; population n = 3776; response rate = 46%), between weeks 4 to 7 of their first semester of university study, were presented with a list of potential challenges and asked to estimate the likelihood of each challenge 'negatively affecting their study in the next few months' (See Table 1). This cohort profile reveals that approximately one-third of Griffith commencing students report a very likely negative impact on their chances of academic success from competing work-family demands and challenges, and relatedly, with managing their time; one-fifth report very likely negative impact from poor academic self-regulation (such as lack of persistence and motivation); and one-fifth report a range of life complexities (personal and family issues) to also be very likely to negatively impact on their success. Importantly, a significant proportion of commencing students reported difficulties finding (40%) or asking for (60%) needed help. While some aspects of the 'challenge profile' of our students may be characterised as 'beyond our control' or 'outside our responsibility', supporting and enhancing our students' capacities to manage these challenges is more clearly within our control and part of our responsibility. To this

end, it can be argued that a key element of a strategic response to these issues is an increased emphasis on student-centred and program-based preparation, advising and support.

Table 1. Summary of Griffith commencing students (n =1546) self-reported challenges affecting their academic success

	YES LIKELY	SOMEWHAT LIKELY	NOT LIKELY
Challenges balancing my life-work-study commitments			
1. Work commitments	30.5%	38.3%	31.2%
2. Family, home or carer commitments	29.2%	39.8%	31.0%
3. Social, sporting or recreational activities	13.7%	40.4%	45.9%
4. Challenges with my finances and money	33.9%	37.2%	28.9%
Challenges with my personal functioning, family or physical health			
5. Personal problems or challenges	22.0%	40.8%	37.2%
6. Family problems or challenges	17.4%	33.2%	49.3%
7. Physical health problems	8.5%	18.9%	72.6%
Challenges with my home study environment			
8. Lack of family support for study	8.7%	18.8%	72.5%
9. Poor home study environment	11.2%	23.9%	64.9%
10. Challenges with my mastery of English	4.3%	6.5%	89.2%
Challenges with my study strategies and motivation			
11. Time management	30.5%	49.2%	20.2%
12. Lack of persistence with study and assessment tasks	20.4%	43.9%	35.7%
13. Ineffective study skills and strategies	18.0%	41.3%	40.7%
14. Not attending enough classes	6.7%	17.2%	76.1%
15. Level of academic challenge/difficulty of my courses	14.1%	42.7%	43.2%
16. Low academic self-confidence	18.4%	34.5%	47.1%
17. Feeling un-motivated	20.9%	40.8%	38.3%
Challenges finding or asking for the help I need			
18. Not knowing where to get help	10.0%	29.3%	60.7%

19. Not asking for help when I might need it **20.8%** 41.6% 37.6%

Commencing Students' Expressed Need for Assistance

This proposition is further reinforced by our commencing students' reported current level of efficacy and needs for assistance (Table 2). Our commencing students' indicated, via the 2012 Starting@Griffith survey, that current advising capacity and resources are not meeting their needs. While one-third of our commencing students reported that they were 'doing well and not in need of assistance' (32%), or were 'already receiving the help they needed' (3%), the remaining two-thirds (65%) of our 2012 commencing cohort reported some level of unmet need. Importantly one-fifth (20%) of the cohort reported major unmet need for assistance, either wanting help but not receiving it (11%), or not willing or able to ask for it (9%). While we should be cautious in making direct causal links between students' expressed need for assistance and potential academic failure or attrition, this pattern of data does suggest a significant level of under-servicing. Moreover, any response to this situation requires a co-ordinated whole-of-program response. Such a strategy needs to address the combined difficulties of low levels of student help-seeking (not asking for the help I need) and the high levels of unmet need for assistance. Systematically embedding personal and academic advising within the core business of degree programs may address this dual challenge.

Table 2. Summary of a sample of Griffith commencing students self-reported needs for assistance

	N	1432
No Need		
I'm doing well and don't need to talk to anyone	32%	
Un-met Minor Need		
I'm doing okay but it would probably be useful to talk to someone about one or two things	45%	
Un-met Major Need		
I'm not doing as well as I hoped and I think it might be useful to <i>talk with someone</i> about ways to get back on track	11%	
Currently Met Need		
I'm not doing as well as I hoped and I am <i>already getting the help</i> I need	3%	
Undeclared Need		
I'm not doing as well as I hoped but I <i>don't want to talk to anyone</i> at the moment.	9%	

Commencing Students' Enrolment Intentions

In addition, commencing students' reported enrolment intentions (Table 3) also indicate that more focused local engagement may potentially positively impact on retention. In the 2012 Starting@Griffith survey a small, but significant in the context of institutional retention, proportion of Griffith commencing students (6%) reported that their current intention was to transfer to another institution. The sub-set of these students whose intention is to 'transfer to a similar degree at another university' (4%) may be most fruitfully targeted to continue at Griffith. Enhancing our

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institutional capacity, through coordinated program-level engagement, to 'individually respond' to this group of 'early departers' may well pay dividends in terms of transforming their intentions.

Table 3. Summary of a sample of Griffith commencing students self-reported enrolment intentions

	N	1433
Continuing at Griffith		93%
I intend to continue with my current degree program		84.9%
I intend to transfer to another degree program at Griffith		8.4%
Transferring within the Sector		6%
I intend to transfer to a similar degree at another university		4.0%
I intend to transfer to a different degree at another university		1.7%
I intend to transfer to another training program at an institution other than a university		0.3%
Leaving the Sector		1%
I will most likely not complete my program as I am only intending to complete a few courses		0.3%
I will most likely not complete my program for other reasons		0.3%

Reaching At-Risk Students

Finally, our capacity to identify at-risk students currently far exceeds our capacity to provide relevant and timely assistance. The current Operational Student Success trial uses a series of markers of potential risk to guide targeted responding through email or phone contact. The range of potential risk markers covers the first semester: non-attendance at orientation, not accessing Learning@Griffith in the first two weeks, not attending tutorials/labs in the first three weeks, non-submission of first/early assessment, failure on early assessment, failure on two or more courses. The proportion of students triggering the first three early engagement markers is presented in Table 4. It is evident that a large proportion of commencing students (up to 25% in some cohorts) demonstrate early ambivalence or disengagement with their studies. Active, timely and task-focused outreach is required to get students on-task. The nature of this intervention necessitates that it often be delivered on an individual one-to-one basis, a task well beyond current capacity. Systematically linking this at-risk process to embedded advising would significantly enhance its reach and effectiveness.

Table 4. Proportion of Griffith commencing students activating early risk markers across three degree programs

Risk Markers	Nursing		Humanities		Health Foundation	
	N	% of Cohort	N	% of Cohort	N	% of Cohort
Not attending Orientation	160	23%	114	24%	130	15%
Not accessing L@G in first 2 weeks	51	7%	65	13.5%	200	22%
Not attending tutorials or lab in first 3 weeks	148	21%	110	23.5%	36	4%

The Role of First Year Advisors

Griffith currently has a network of academic staff undertaking the First Year Advisor (FYA) role. First Year Advisors were surveyed in 2011 as part of a general review of the effectiveness and sustainability of the role. Feedback from our FYAs to a large extent reinforces the level of unmet need for assistance indicated by our commencing students. While not withstanding that 70% of our FYAs considered that they are effective in the role, only one fifth (20%) agreed that they were realising the full potential of the FYA role; over half (55%) of FYAs considered that they did not have sufficient time to do the role justice, and three-quarters considered that the volume and complexity of the role was not able to be sufficiently recognised in academic workload formulas (75%), and half (49%) felt that undertaking the role was disadvantaging their academic career. Qualitative feedback from FYAs describe difficulty within the competing priorities of an academic role (teaching, research and service) to dedicate sufficient time and energy to the complex profile of needs inherent in an increasingly diverse student cohort. In summary, many FYAs lack the capacity or ability to meet the level and complexity of perceived student needs. There would appear to be a shortfall in focused student support within our current strategy, and a related need to reconsider the focus of the FYA role within a broader strategy. Given the recent decline in Griffith retention rates we must also question our assumptions regarding the effectiveness of the FYA strategy.

Current Griffith Trial

A test-of-concept trial of an embedding learning advising function is currently being conducted at Griffith (Semester 1 2012). The trial, part of Professor Keithia Wilson's ALTC National Fellowship, is jointly funded by GIHE and Deans (L&T) through HEPPP funds and is being conducted in four Griffith contexts (Health Foundation Year, Human Services, Nursing (Logan and Nathan) and Bachelor of Business (GBS). The role (Study Assessment Support Advisor (SASA) (HEW 7)) is located within degree programs on a part-time basis and undertakes the core functions of providing embedded academic enabling workshops and individual and small-group consultations, proactive outreach to at-risk students using demographic and engagement risk markers and referral to services. Preliminary data indicate a very strong positive student response with attendance at enabling workshops ranging from 20 to 50% of the cohort. SASAs have been able to make contact with at least 50% of our high at-risk students (low OP, degree preference). Importantly, effective working partnerships have been established between SASAs and FYAs and INS (Learning Advisors), indicating the value add for students from joined-up advising strategies. Most critically, FYAs have been able to function as academic leaders in this role relationship.

The Issues that have to be Managed

The case is being made to better engage and support our students at the local school and program level with focused advising. However, this is not simply a case of providing more resources, but rather one of capacity building. We need to consider our overall strategy in the light of our institutional experience and research.

Success Focus A recent Griffith study of the factors that facilitate and inhibit student help-seeking demonstrates that students are much more likely to seek or access needed help when they feel they are in a supportive and relationally engaged program culture and there is a clearly identified and formally sanctioned source of help. This is even more the case for under-functioning students and

students from non-traditional backgrounds. Local and ongoing relationships particularly matter for these students. However, relational support is a necessary but not sufficient condition for retention. The longitudinal analysis of the Griffith 2006 commencing cohort (2006-2009) demonstrates that student retention is most strongly predicted by academic success (GPA) and a sense of purpose. Task-focused co-curricular advising that purposefully targets academic success by enabling more effective student help-seeking, time management, planning, study skills, and life problem solving is more likely to positively influence retention.

Student-Centred Advising Experience and research at Griffith on the identification and engagement of at-risk students consistently demonstrates that this population is difficult to access with traditional approaches to advising. A significant constraint in meeting student needs and effectively engaging at-risk students is the well-documented 'paradox of support', namely, those students who most commonly access academic advising have less need for it, and those who typically have the greater need for it are less likely to access it. This phenomenon is more likely to be accentuated in a mass higher education context. This presents significant challenges for our current primarily central and self-referral developmental models of academic advising, vocational education and pastoral support. Further consideration needs to be given to how we may strategically position and partner our services in relation to student need and our retention agenda. To their credit, our central services are responding creatively to the challenge of meeting the needs of a diverse student population within resource constraints. Beyond current settings, a student-centred conception of advising leads us to consider the possibilities of an embedded 'third space' between traditional academic and professional roles to evolve more locally-engaged advising and focused timely support of our students. Most critically, embedded staff are more likely to possess the social capital and personal knowledge of our students to enable more intrusive or assertive forms of advising and support.

Leadership and Strategy Re-positioning the Griffith strategy to enhance student engagement and retention will require more than just the simple addition of resources or new roles. Adjustments to our policies, practice models and governance frameworks are also necessary. A particular priority is the development of joined-up school-based approaches to improving retention. For example, nearly half of First Year Advisors report that they feel they are performing the FYA role without their school having an integrated first-year strategy (40%) and that there aren't effective mechanisms for coordinating first-year courses and the learning experiences of commencing students in their degree programs (52%). This suggests that there is a leadership and strategy gap that requires attention as a crucial aspect of any re-positioning. Importantly, we need to shift from a delegated role strategy (viz., overreliance on the FYA role) to a shared sustainable whole-of-school/program strategy.

Role Differentiation The previous discussion has focused on identifying the contribution that embedded professional roles can make to student success. Beyond this, such roles will also free up academic staff for academic advising, coordination and leadership and program/curriculum development functions. In particular, academic staff may have greater capacity to focus on advancing the curriculum renewal necessary to underpin a student-centred success culture. The First Year Advisor role, in particular, would be freed-up to more actively engage in coordination and leadership of the first-year experience within their schools and programs, and provision of academic

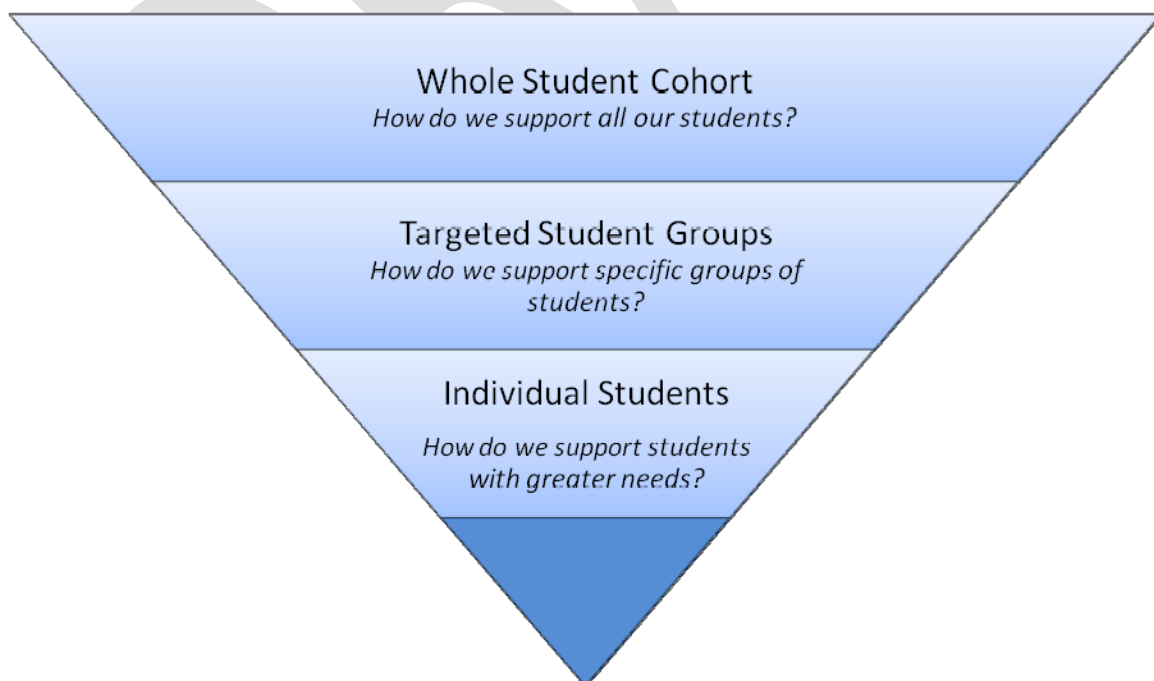
advice relating to the first-year program. Such a new role would also include planning and coordination of assessment across first-year, and monitoring and advising on curriculum design to enhance the first-year experience. Such an academic leadership focus would not only make the FYA role more sustainable, but also, provide the additional local leadership status for FYAs to better advance the Griffith strategy. That this is an appropriate evolutionary step in the Griffith strategy is evidenced by the fact that exemplary FYAs are already migrating the role to one of academic leadership and coordination.

In contrast, the Student Success Advisor (SSA) would focus on building a student-centred and resourceful community within which students are more likely to succeed in their studies. Consistent with a triage approach to meeting community need, SSAs would work at multiple levels to provide variable student support depending on the depth of need (See Figure 1).

The vast majority of students need only minimal support and communication. A smaller group of students may participate in group and targeted activities. A much smaller proportion of students, are likely to seek or be invited for individual consultations or to require referral for assistance. This latter group will include the “students at risk” who will be involved in early detection and early intervention initiatives. Feedback from students suggests that it is not necessarily having regular contact with an advisor that is important to them, but knowing that there is someone available if required, and knowing who that person is.

There is a wide range of online communication strategies that can be used to reach large numbers of students. Our current student body is accustomed to communicating through these channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, SMS, Blogs, and email. The university now has an operational CRM system that can also be used for universal and targeted communication with students.

Figure 1. Hierarchical approach to student advising



Lifecycle focus It is evident that student success and retention, while necessarily front-loaded in emphasis, is a whole of lifecycle agenda. Students 'get lost' or 'drop out' at all stages across their degrees and needs for support and advising are clearly apparent at points of 'mini-transition' (e.g., from first to second year) or 'predictable crises' (e.g., degree variations) across the degree lifecycle. Given that continuing, as well as commencing, students are vulnerable to non-continuation, effective embedded student support will need to be lifecycle informed. The SSA role would aim, as far as possible, to provide continuity of contact and advice for students as they proceed through their studies.

Creating a stronger demand for services One of the likely consequences of a network of embedded staff in student support and advising roles is an increased capacity to identify students with needs for more specialist intervention beyond what can be provided by staff in generalist front-line roles. Thus consideration should be given to better articulating referral processes and identifying 'capacity gaps' in current specialist services (e.g., counselling, welfare).

What is proposed?

It is proposed that the above constellation of needs and issues can be, in part, progressed through the following complementary strategies:

Creation of New Roles and Changes to Existing Roles

1. *Professional capacity* Given the shortfall in identified student support needs, it is proposed that a number of *dedicated professional positions* (HEW7) (nominally termed *Student Success Advisors*) be established and embedded in school/program contexts across the university with an exclusive focus on undergraduate student engagement and retention across the student lifecycle. These dedicated professional staff positions would work in partnership with staff in school/program academic leadership roles and central services and be members of school/program leadership teams.

2. *Transforming First Year Advisor to First Year Leaders* Given the need for clearer and more sustainable academic engagement, it is proposed that, where appropriate, the *First Year Advisor* (FYA) role be repositioned as a primarily *academic leadership role* with responsibility for coordinating the first year experience. This would facilitate the evolution of this role from advising to coordination, program-level curriculum and assessment monitoring and advice and quality enhancement functions. It is recommended that this change of focus be reflected in a change of nomenclature to *First-Year Leader (FYL)*. This role transformation process will need to be supported by a tailored professional development program.

3. *Lifecycle academic leadership* Given the recognition that student engagement and retention, while perhaps most challenging in the first year, requires focused attention across the student lifecycle (e.g., first to second year transition), it is proposed that Griffith degree programs, where appropriate, establish *Year Leader roles* (First Year Leader/Coordinator, Second Year Leader/Coordinator, etc). This will provide the 'continuity of care' necessary to support a student-centre culture across the lifecycle from entry to graduation.

Figure 2. Notional organisation of academic leadership and coordination roles

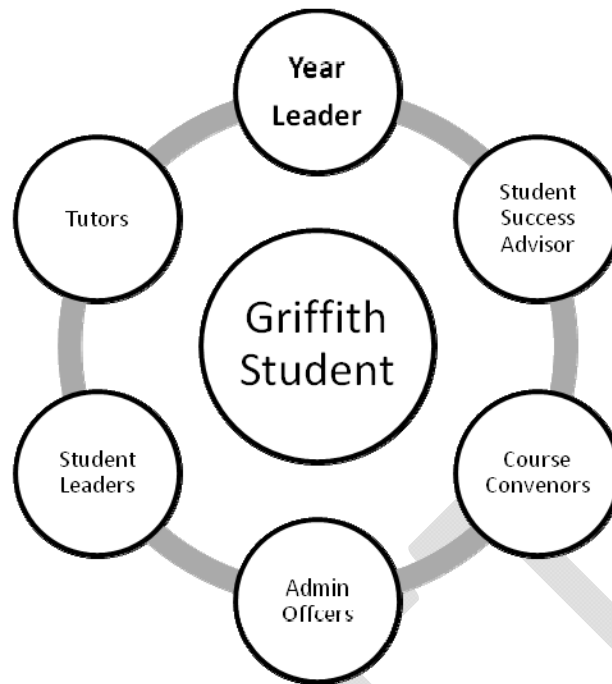


Development of Program Coordination Mechanisms

4. *Vertical Program Integration* Given the need for stronger program-level coordination of student retention strategies, it is proposed that Year Leader/Coordinators would collectively work as a *Program Leadership Team* under the coordination of the Program Leader/Convenor (See Figure 2). A Program Leadership Team would have primary responsibility for initiating, coordinating, managing and evaluating a programmatic approach to supporting student engagement and retention across the degree lifecycle (*vertical integration*). Importantly, such teams would provide the program-level shared governance mechanisms to support effective, coordinated and sustainable enhancement of the student experience. These teams may be auspiced by, or accountable to, School Learning and Teaching committees.

5. *Horizontal Program Integration* Given the need for stronger *year-level coordination* of student retention strategies, it is proposed that a coordination mechanism be established for each year of a degree program (beginning with the first-year), comprising relevant year course convenors under the co-leadership of the Year Leader/Coordinator and Program Leader. A *Year Enhancement Team* would ensure a coordinated student learning experience at each year level (*horizontal integration*). These would become key vehicles for ensuring a joined-up and student-centred approach to student success with consistent messages and practices.

Figure 3. Notional composition of a year leadership team



University Management of the Network

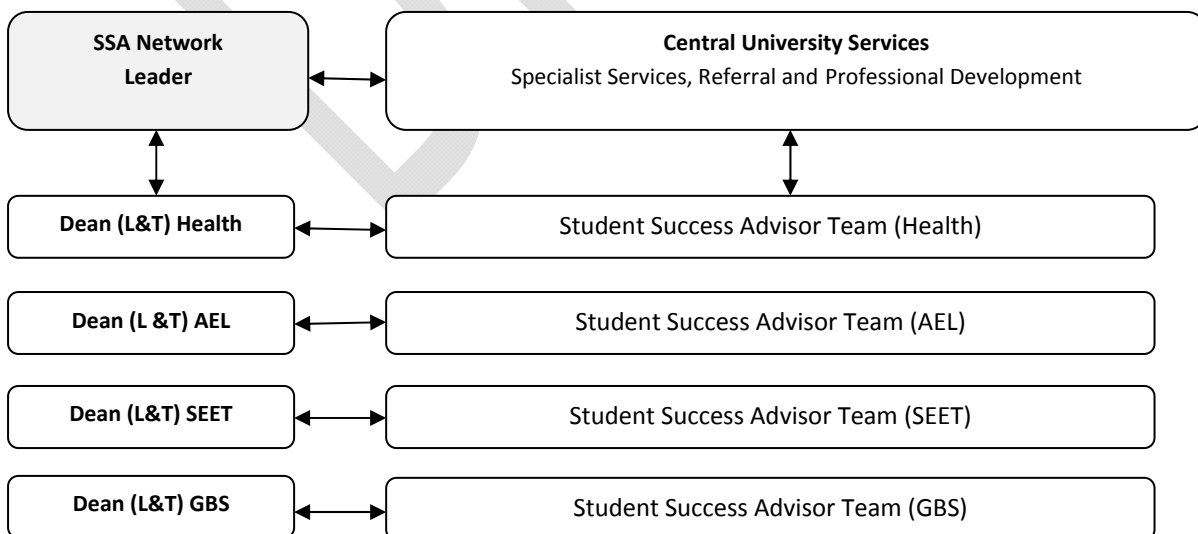
6. *Partnerships with Current Support and Advising Roles* Given the shortfall in identified student support and learning needs and the criticality of active outreach, it is proposed that *central university services align their practice models* to optimally support this embedded advising strategy. There is an opportunity to name and develop a new set of student-centred *working partnerships* organised around locating resourcefulness close to the action. The values of student centred practice would inform these working partnerships which would focus on the strategic just-in-time engagement with identified needs and utilizing the professional expertise of central staff to optimally support staff in embedded roles. These roles should complement, not compete with, current services. There are also existing precedents with the university with the shared/matrix management of Curriculum Consultants and Blended Learning Advisors.

The SSA role has the potential to provide a ‘missing link’ in our current advising and support system. Initial and ongoing attention will need to be given to clarifying the ways in which the newly introduced SSA roles will interface and collaborate with existing advising roles and systems. This will be important for reasons both of staff efficiencies and student clarity. The proposed SSA roles will provide both unique and complementary functions to current roles. Within a school or program the SSA role will serve as a point of contact for students and enable referral to appropriate staff for administrative or academic advising from either school staff (SAO/PSO or FYA or PC) or central staff (Student Administration Advisors, International Student Advisors). The SSA role will also facilitate student referrals or invite the provision of specialist services (e.g., workshops) for learning support (Learning/Information Literacy Advisors), student well-being (Counsellors) and vocational planning (Careers Advisors).

7. *Senior Leadership of Network* Given the importance of positioning this strategy as core business and optimally aligning it with academic activity, it is proposed that the network of embedded professionals (Student Success Advisors) be overseen and coordinated at the university-level by a senior academic position.

8. *Responsive Organisation* Given the variability of student need across degree programs, it is proposed that teams of Student Success Advisors be established in each Group in accord with student load, and their *line management* and accountability be located with the Office of the relevant Dean (Learning and Teaching) (See Figure 4). In order for all students to have access to an advisor and ideally for there to be continuity as students progress through their studies, it is proposed that SSAs be campus-based, and located in close proximity to the students with whom they will work. Each advisor may work across one or more schools and programs, with the focus of their work being determined by the size of the program and the needs profile of student cohorts. Their work would be on a 'strategic needs' basis rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. Responding to identified need will facilitate maximal impact on retention.

Figure 4. Notional Organisation of Working Partnerships



Shared Practice Frameworks

9. *Consistent Frameworks* There is a need for a shared evidence-based practice model that is explicitly designed in accord with the following principles:

- Lifecycle and just-in-time and just-for-me help
- Triaged contact with students based on identified need
- Targeted assertive outreach within an agreed psychological contract with our students about “what it means to study and succeed at Griffith”.
- Cross-silo/whole of university integration and coherence of systems and resources
- Joined up narrative and internal marketing across our services communicating consistent student-centred messages and values

10. *Management Information Systems* There is a need to better coordinate our management information systems to enable timely and targeted intervention by embedded staff across the student lifecycle. The capacity of these embedded roles to provide data-based engagement and to effectively address student need and risk will depend on our institutional capacity to deliver a streamlined range of data from front-end/pre-arrival cohort profiling on demographic markers, to early engagement, through to academic performance (See Table 5).

Table 5. Exemplars of types of markers available to inform data-driven intervention with at-risk students

Risk Marker Category	Examples
Demographic proxy markers	Low SES, First-in-family, ESL, alternative entry pathways
Context markers	financial stress, low family support for study
Appraisal markers	misconceptions/expectations of required time-on-task, approaches to study, help-seeking climate
Early behavioural engagement markers	orientation non-attendance, not accessing Learning@Griffith, not attending small class teaching, not submitting early assessment, low time-on-task
Academic performance markers	low OP, underperformance on entry academic readiness tests, failure or under-performance on early assessment
Self-report experiential markers	self-reported adjustment, efficacy and motivation, sense of connection, sense of purpose

11. *Alignment of the Online Environment* The investment in joined-up capacity building will be optimised by better aligning our online environments to facilitate students' help-seeking strategies and providing consistent and streamlined navigation and consistent student-centred cultural messages between all our platforms from pre-arrival, preparation, enrolment, orientation and ongoing support. Current proliferating systems are resource rich but navigation poor.

Analysis of Potential return on Investment

The establishment of new roles to advance student retention will require significant investment of funds. Such an investment is justified on a number of grounds:

- *Social Costs:* A genuine commitment to the national Widening Participation agenda goes beyond strategies to increase aspiration and access to higher education, to the provision of support sufficient to enable the success and completion of students from diverse backgrounds.
- *Economic Costs:* The economic costs of student attrition, whatever the cause, are significant. Not only is revenue lost from exiting students, but replacement costs are significant.
- *Academic costs:* Exiting students are usually replaced by students of lesser academic ability or prior academic achievement, which simply serves to exacerbate the retention problem.
- *Reputational Costs:* The university's goal of becoming a student centred research university, necessitates a higher priority being placed on student success. A reputation for comparatively higher attrition rates is not consistent with our aspirations.
- *Morale Costs:* Staff pride in the university is impacted by a reputation for under-performance in a key area.

The economic cost to the University for a student who drops out after their first semester of study is, on average, around \$8000 per semester thereafter; or around \$40,000 per student over what would have been the duration of a 3 year degree, or around \$16,000 per year. The projected salary plus on costs for a HEW 7 Student Success Advisor would be around \$100,000 per annum. Therefore, the cost of each appointment would be recouped with the retention of 7 students per year who would otherwise have dropped out.

Describing the Student Success Advisor Role

The SSA role visibly and actively models the ethos of a *student centred* research university through the quality of their relationships with students, their active advocacy for student needs, their pastoral support, and their active enabling of students' learning capabilities. Student Success Advisors have as their guiding rationale to educate, empower and encourage students to achieve their personal and academic goals. Students would experience a role which communicated the message: our job is to help you succeed, we are on your side and we want to help you write your own success story.

SSAs would have responsibility for specific programs on specific campuses, and in doing so be able to provide continuity of contact with students, be a well-informed source of current information about program requirements and resources, maintain effective ongoing working relationships with

academic staff and be a predictable point liaison with central university services. Depending on the size of student cohorts and the level of student need some SSAs may have responsibility for programs across two or more schools on a campus. SSAs will work collaboratively, under the guidance of the network leader, to ensure their professional capability and the dissemination of good practices.

Within the context of a collaborative team *Student Success Advisors* will:

- Collaborate with academic, administrative and professional staff in implementing a student centred educational experience and culture within schools and programs
- Collaboratively develop a lifecycle-informed co-curricular student success focused program of activities within Schools and programs
- Facilitate staff-student and student-student cohort relationships and communication through both face-to-face activities and social media processes
- Provide pastoral care, advice and support to individual students from both staff referrals and student-initiated contact
- Identify, actively outreach to and monitor students at risk of disengagement from their studies
- Refer students' to, and facilitate their accessing of, University services and resources appropriate to their needs and goals
- Facilitate academic staff awareness of, and responsiveness to, students' needs and circumstances
- Coordinate and develop peer support and learning processes within Schools and programs (e.g., peer support, peer mentoring, student associations and student leadership)
- Maintain program databases of at-risk students' needs and performance
- Liaise with central university services regarding

Describing the First Year Leader Role

The First Year Leader (FYL) role visibly and actively models the ethos of a *student centred* research university through their academic leadership of the first-year experience and the alignment of curricular and co-curricular strategies to provide a coherent and engaging learning environment. The First Year Leader (FYL) will work collaboratively with the Program Leader (PL) to coordinate and lead the first year experience in their school and/or program.

Student success is optimised in a school context where local leadership is actively exercised to convene and focus a coordinated student learning experience at both course and program levels., and where roles are aligned and key partnerships are established and maintained between academic, administrative and professional staff and students. Heads of School need to actively sponsor and resource this joined-up approach to enabling student success.

Within the context of a collaborative year team *First Year Leaders* will:

- Collaborate with academic, administrative and professional staff in implementing a student centred educational experience and culture within schools and programs
- Coordinate the overall first-year learning environment to enhance program coherence, effective learning and student success
- Collaboratively lead the curricular and co-curricular quality enhancement of the first-year experience within their school or program
- Supervise school or program co-curricular processes targeting first-year student engagement and retention
- Undertake systematic data-based review and evaluation of the first-year experience
- Coordinate review and planning of assessment and curriculum design to enhance the first year experience and the successful transition of commencing students
- Provide academic or program planning advice to students
- Liaise or partner with staff from second and later years to ensure a coherent learning experience across the degree lifecycle
- Liaise or partner with staff from central university services

What entry- training or professional development will be needed?

The SSAs will require a broad range of 'first-responder' knowledge, skills and attitudes. These would include:

- Communication and rapport-building skills (face to face, telephone and email)
- Advising, mentoring and coaching skills
- Small group facilitation skills
- Referral skills
- Mental health first aid
- Knowledge of university support resources and services
- Knowledge of school and program requirements
- Knowledge of the factors influencing student success
- Knowledge of university learning management system
- Capability with social media
- Capability with basic data-base management
- Capacity for self-initiated action
- Resilience and self-care

What qualifications or professional backgrounds?

SSA role may be suited to graduates with Social science or education background but discipline relevant experience may also be an advantage.

How will we evaluate?

A range of hard and soft data can be collected to inform progressive evaluation (e.g., retention, met need, satisfaction, etc).

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