



STUDENT PARTICIPATION, RETENTION AND SUCCESS

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

2019–2023

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CQUNIVERSITY'S VISION FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION, RETENTION AND SUCCESS

CQUniversity is a university of access and opportunity, and the tertiary institution of choice for a diverse cohort of students from all around Australia and the world.

At CQUniversity, all students, regardless of their background, location or career aspirations, are welcomed and supported to participate fully in education, training and university life, and to achieve their personal goals.

CQUniversity aspires to improve student participation, retention and success by:

- » working in partnership with our students throughout their learning journey
- » delivering high quality courses that are relevant, engaging and industry-focused
- » engaging in personalised, timely communication with our students
- » providing a welcoming and inclusive environment, whether physical or online
- » facilitating active engagement in all aspects of student life
- » streamlining our systems, services and processes to provide a coordinated and efficient student experience

Each of these factors plays a part in helping CQUniversity students to participate fully in their university experience, succeed in their learning endeavours, and importantly complete their studies wherever possible.

This vision is supported by CQUniversity's demonstrated commitment to quality engagement, research, learning and teaching, social innovation, and inclusiveness – traits that have led to CQUniversity being recognised among the top young universities in the world, and a truly great Australian university.



RETENTION AT A GLANCE

Across the Australian education sector, institutions are grappling with the issue of student retention.

CQUniversity is committed to promoting higher levels of student retention, success and completion, because we recognise the positive direct impact this can have on the lives of students who entrust us with their education and training.

For each year of university study completed, a student can enjoy an additional 11% of lifetime earning capacity¹. For a university like CQUniversity – where students from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds make up a significant portion of the overall cohort – this kind of impact can be life-changing and represents an outcome worthy of pursuit.

Despite some positive progress in CQUniversity's domestic undergraduate retention rate over recent years, there is still significant room for improvement, as well as opportunities to sharpen our retention and completion focus for VET students, international students, and domestic postgraduate students.

It is important to recognise that attrition or non-completion does not always equal failure. It may simply mean that a student has:

- » Put their studies on hold temporarily due to personal circumstances,
- » Gained their required skills and knowledge,
- » Obtained a job, or
- » Articulated to a further or higher degree, a vocational pathway, or pursued an alternative educational pathway.

Regardless of this, CQUniversity is committed to doing all we can to improve the likelihood of student retention. The University will achieve this by embedding a framework of evidence-based principles – “the six Ps” – across all student retention and success initiatives. The University's overarching ambition is to promote a level of student retention that will bring about a stepped change in educational attainment across the diverse communities served by CQUniversity.

¹The Productivity Commission estimates that for each additional year of education, the earnings of an Australian worker increased between 5.5 and 11.0% (Potential Benefits of the National Reform Agenda, Productivity Commission, 2006).

OUR STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

Student retention, participation and success at CQUniversity is underpinned by six principles, informally known as “the six Ps”.

These principles are based on Kalsbeek’s 4Ps Retention Framework², and the extended 5Ps Framework proposed by Wood et al (2016)³. The sixth “P”, Participation, is influenced by CQUniversity’s status as Australia’s most engaged university and its commitment to inclusion and social innovation.

The six Ps are not discrete components of a student participation, retention and success strategy; they are interrelated and dependent on each other.

Nor are they sequential activities; rather, the six Ps need to be aligned and seamlessly integrated into a holistic and inclusive approach.

This dynamic framework will inform the development of CQUniversity’s student retention and success initiatives over the next five years. All initiatives will be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain effective and fit for purpose.

THE SIX Ps

PREPAREDNESS

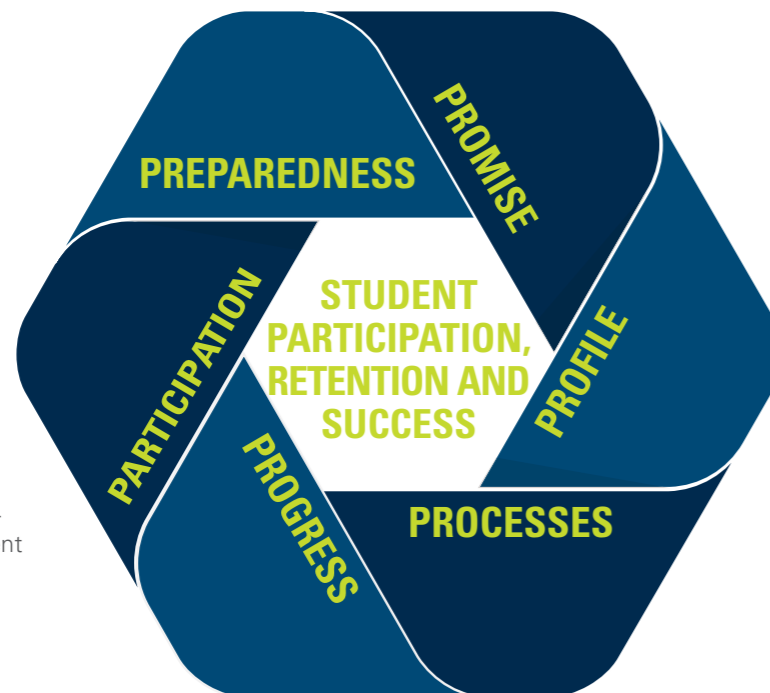
We engage with prospective and commencing students to assess their individual circumstances and help them prepare for the transition to CQUniversity.

PROMISE

Our brand, values and public persona reflect the reality of student life at CQUniversity.

PARTICIPATION

We promote inclusive and participatory practices that support student belonging, by enabling student participation in educational experiences, university decision-making, employment and extracurricular activities.



PROFILE

We tailor education and support options to suit the unique characteristics of our diverse student cohort wherever possible, including for students from underrepresented backgrounds or those studying online.

PROGRESS

Our students understand what is required for successful study progression, and we enable this progression through personalised student-teacher interaction and extracurricular support.

PROCESSES

We have accessible and efficient systems, processes and governance structures in place to support our students in all aspects of their university life.



PROFILE

Understanding the *profile* of students is a critical component of our participation, retention and success strategy, given the high correlation between student profile and retention and success.

CQUniversity defines itself by who we embrace, rather than who we exclude. This inclusive approach is reflected in the diversity of our student population, ranging from trade apprentices to domestic undergraduates and international postgraduate students, and encompassing students from a range of backgrounds including disadvantaged, mature aged, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, first-in-family and students with disabilities.

This diversity enriches CQUniversity’s community and requires an inclusive, strengths-based approach to supporting students, including ensuring transitioning students understand the requirements of their course and the supports available throughout their student journey, and the opportunities they can leverage to assist them to excel in their studies.

Our inclusive approach also requires an all-of-institution approach to ensuring our policies and practices reflect our values and are suited to the needs of our diverse student population.

²David H Kalsbeek, “The 4Ps as a Guiding Perspective” in Reframing Retention Strategy for Institutional Improvement, ed David H Kalsbeek, New Directions for Higher Education, Issue 161, 2013

³Denise Wood, “Pre-commencement interviews to support transition and retention of first year undergraduate students,” Student Success ISSN: 2205-0795, Volume 7, Issue 2, 2016



Many students commence their post-secondary studies with little preparation and a lack of understanding about what to expect.

CQUniversity plays a central role in transitioning its students to understand the demands of university life. These demands include managing workload and time commitments, becoming an independent learner knowing how to access resources and support services, and understanding the requirements of their future profession.

Transitioning students also need to develop the ‘cultural capital’ required to help them decode university processes and respond to implicit expectations – the tacit requirements students need to transition into the university student role. Devlin (2013)⁴ highlights the need for transitioning students to bridge these socio-cultural incongruities, arguing that this process needs to be a joint endeavour between student and institution making the adjustments necessary to ensure student success and achievement.

The preparation of students ideally begins in school and community through activities that raise awareness of the opportunities for post-school education. Preparation progresses through orientation and induction activities as students transition into their studies, and need to be carried through each stage of the student journey, as each stage requires preparation into the next (for example, transitioning to a new year and new units, commencing practicums or clinical placement, or transitioning out to further studies or work).

Our participation, retention and success strategy also recognises the need to support students to successfully *progress* and to complete their studies. This means paying greater attention to ensuring students are better prepared and able to make informed choices, and to the processes required to support student progress to completion, taking into account the particular supports required by students of varying backgrounds.

Supporting student progress requires an integrated approach in which the University reviews its policies and processes to ensure alignment between the mission and values of the University, the strategies to support the transition of students into university, and the methods the University employs to provide an enriching and engaging student experience that is reflective of the diversity of student needs.

Monitoring progress should be an affirming process, one in which students know they are supported throughout the student journey and where they can seek assistance when obstacles arise. Academic and teaching staff are the best positioned to monitor how their students are progressing through their studies, but they also need to be aware of the services available to support students who are disengaged or are having difficulty fulfilling the requirements of their course. Our inclusive approach needs to ensure that those students in need of additional support are identified and supported to succeed.

At the same time, we recognise that withdrawal is always a possibility and for some students, a change of institution or course, or a temporary pause in studies might be the best outcome. What matters is that students are supported to make informed decisions; hence the importance of ensuring students are adequately prepared and supported throughout the student journey to be able to make well-informed choices.

⁴Devlin, M. (2013). Bridging socio-cultural incongruity: conceptualising the success of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds in Australian higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(6), 939-949. doi:10.1080/03075079.2011.613991.



Institutional *processes* such as enrolment, choosing the right course, navigating student services and engaging with the online curriculum may either enhance student success or impede their ability to progress. It follows then that to improve student participation, retention and success, more attention needs to be paid to not only better preparing students transitioning into university and monitoring and supporting their progress, but also to ensuring alignment with the mission and values of the university, its policies and processes and the needs of students.

This requires a whole-of-institution strategy and willingness to review and update existing policies and processes to ensure our students have the best chance to succeed.

Following the strategies recommended by Schroeder (2013)⁵, CQUniversity recognises that we need:

- » Clear aims and a shared commitment to these outcomes
- » Alignment of policies, practices and processes that reflect the diversity of our student profile
- » A commitment to inclusive practices and the principles of universal design for learning in all of our processes and operations
- » Reviewing the effectiveness of existing processes and identifying gaps and areas of overlap that need to be addressed to provide an efficient and holistic approach to supporting student success
- » Transparent and open communication processes to ensure our services are integrated and that the needs of our students are central to everything we do

Promises are the messages the University conveys to key stakeholders including our prospective and existing students. Our messages need to be consistent with our capability and goals, and our ability to deliver on the promises we convey to our prospective and current students.

Promises also need to align with student expectations and the lived experience of being a student at the University. When student expectations are met or exceeded, they are more likely to remain committed to their studies at the University. Conversely, if student expectations are not matched by reality, they are more likely to leave the University, and potentially, their studies. This suggests the need for the following strategies to improve student participation, retention and success.

- » Ensuring that the branding of the University and the messages conveyed through marketing and other documentation matches the policies and procedures, services and learning and teaching experience that students will encounter.

- » Building strategic partnerships with schools and communities as part of a widening participation strategy that aims to not only promote higher education pathways, but also help students prepare in advance of applying for university studies.
- » Providing appropriate preparation and support for transitioning students so that students have more realistic expectations about the requirements of their studies and the services available to support them.
- » Considering the expectations students bring regarding their likely experiences and outcomes at the institution; the congruence of those expectations with the reality of their University experience; and our institutional response to ensuring our promises align with the reality of what students will experience when they undertake studies at the University.

⁵Schroeder, C. C. (2013a). Reframing retention strategy: A focus on process. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2013(161), 39-47. doi:doi:10.1002/he.20044



PARTICIPATION

An inclusive approach that reflects the diversity of our students must have student *participation* at its core.

Student participation is facilitated by an inclusive and engaging environment that is responsive to student needs. Beyond engaging students in their studies, CQUniversity aims to ensure that students have the opportunity to contribute to all aspects of student life including decision-making processes.

Accordingly, we are committed to the ‘Students as Partners’ (SaP) approach, which has been found to be effective in engaging students in the life of the University. The SaP approach is founded on respect, responsibility and reciprocity (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014)⁶. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) in the UK describes this SaP approach as a relationship in which students and staff are actively “engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together.”⁷

As the HEA emphasises, such an approach is distinct from listening to, or consulting with, students. Rather, this is a partnership in which all partners (students and staff) are respected as capable members of the academic community.

At the same time, we recognise that not all students will wish to or be able to engage in all aspects of University life. Thus, our inclusive approach provides opportunities for our students to contribute to university life and support to develop the skills they need to play an active role in decision making at the University, while also respecting the diverse needs and commitments of our students.

⁶Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: A guide for faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁷Higher Education Academy. (2018). *Student engagement through partnership in higher education: Key projects, resources and ways you can connect with student engagement*. Retrieved, 8th October, 2018, from <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/strategic-priorities/student-engagement>

OUR OBJECTIVES

CQUniversity is focused on progressive improvement in student participation, retention and success over each of the five years to 2023.

Through our actions, embedded in the University’s operational plans and guided by the principles outlined in this document, we anticipate annual improvements in:

- » Domestic student retention (undergraduate and postgraduate)
- » Domestic student course completion (undergraduate and postgraduate)
- » International student retention (undergraduate and postgraduate)
- » International student course completion (undergraduate & postgraduate)

- » VET student course completion
- » VET student unit completion
- » Course and unit satisfaction ratings

Acknowledging the two-year lag in published university attrition rates, CQUniversity will leverage its internal data collection and analysis processes to provide a more timely insight into progress against these performance indicators, wherever possible. This will allow CQUniversity to be more responsive to factors impacting student participation, retention and success at any given time.





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**TAFE AND
UNIVERSITY
QUALIFICATIONS**