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## Editorial

### Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention and Success (STARS)



The continuing interest and commitment to improving the student experience in the tertiary sector and the unrelenting search and development of improved and more sophisticated processes and ways to achieve this, was reflected in yet another successful *Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention and Success (STARS)* Conference recently held in Perth, Western Australia (June 29-July 2, 2016). Over 340 delegates - a mix of professional, academic and administrative practitioners and leaders - attended and participated in a range of activities including two Keynote addresses, Refereed papers, Good Practice Reports and Emerging Initiatives, along with Poster Presentations, Special Interest Groups and Workshops.

The concluding formal session provided one of the highlights of the Conference: A Student Panel consisting of a broad sample of students from the five Western Australian universities who each spoke on their

individual experiences as university students and the factors that have influenced their success.

The Conference Keynotes both focused on the continuing issues of equity and access to tertiary education and this framed the diverse array of presentations and activities that occurred throughout the event:

- Professor Barney Glover, Vice-Chancellor and President from the University of Western Sydney and current Chair of Universities Australia, explored the current challenges to widening access and participation in Australian universities in a current period of national policy uncertainty and funding constraints. Professor Glover provided a range of evidence to illustrate how large, sustained widening participation projects have increased access to higher education in the Western Sydney area and beyond.
- Associate Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, Director of the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre at Griffith University, in a very moving keynote, drew upon her lived experiences and creative and performing arts backgrounds to explore student engagement as a partnership with students and community and emphasised the role of music as an empowering and engaging process.

In keeping with this theme, the STARS Conference recognised two equity practitioners with Fellowships. The award of Local STAR was made to Dr Judy Skene from the University of Western Australia in recognition of her sustained service to Western Australian higher education. The award of STARS Fellow was made to Mary Kelly of Queensland University of Technology for her sustained service to equity in Australian higher education.

As is customary, this issue of the journal publishes the top research papers selected via a peer review process and the top *Emerging Initiatives* selected by the Conference Committee. As well, a *Good Practice Report* was selected for this issue. All of the authors are from Australian institutions, perhaps reflecting the proportion of submissions to the Conference.

Before previewing this issue, the Editorial team would like to note, with much sadness, the death of UK Higher Education Academy Teaching Fellow Professor Annette Cashmore. Professor Cashmore joined us for the 2010 First Year in Higher Education Conference in Adelaide, Australia and her presentation was published in the inaugural issue of the Journal, (previously known as the *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*). Professor Cashmore made a significant contribution to higher education in the UK, receiving multiple awards in recognition of her innovative work in teaching and approach to student engagement.

The University of Leicester [bereavement notice](#)

Int J FYHE Volume 1, Issue 1, 2010: [An ethnographic approach to studying the student experience: The student perspective through free form video diaries. A Practice Report.](#) Annette Cashmore, Paul Green, Jon Scott

### Invited Feature - Closure of the Office for Learning and Teaching

While *Student Success* promotes an international focus on the student experience in tertiary education, the closure of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) in June has prompted concern locally and abroad. Discussion has been focused on how Australia will continue to esteem and support best practice in tertiary learning and teaching; and ultimately to continue a national focus on student success and engagement practice and research.

As an example of the impact of OLT funded activities on good practice, we only need to analyse the topics covered in the 12<sup>1</sup> issues of this Journal. Eleven of the issues published a feature, an article, practice report or emerging initiative that was either:

- a dissemination of outcomes from a OLT-funded project;
- an initiative awarded recognition from the OLT (via a citation or Fellowship);

- awarded seed-funding to continue the research and dissemination of a OLT fully-funded project; or
- a combination of any of the above.

In summary, quite an extensive body of sector activity and good practice in teaching and learning has been disseminated through *Student Success* and we understand that a significant number of our authors will feel the loss of this national body. The *Invited Feature* in this issue republishes an article from Professor Sally Kift, President of the Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows (and one of the Editors of *Student Success*). The statement draws on and is representative of the national reaction to the closure of the OLT, highlighting the substantial role it has played in developing and disseminating innovation and good practice in tertiary teaching and learning.

### Articles

Denise Wood, Gillian Gray-Ganter and Robyn Bailey from Central Queensland University in Rockhampton, Australia report on the findings of a pilot study that aimed to provide comprehensive support for students transitioning into an undergraduate nursing program. Pre-commencement interviews with students were aimed at engaging students in self-reflection and self-assessment. Follow-up interviews confirmed that the information provided aligned to their experiences.

The University of Western Australia's successful Aspire UWA program is the focus of an article by Judy Skene, Louise Pollard and Helen House. The program develops and maintains partnerships with metropolitan schools in Perth and regional schools throughout the state, with an aim to have pre-tertiary students value and build academic attainment and aspire to access the benefits of further education. It currently engages with over 10,000 students annually, targeting low socio-economic, rural, remote and Indigenous students.

From Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Melinda Miller, Amanda McFadden and Ann Heirdsfield discuss a project designed to prepare culturally and linguistically diverse preservice early education teachers for field experience. Workshops with these preservice teachers centred around peer-learning activities with engagement from the teacher educators and academic language and learning educators. While the outcomes of the project inform approaches to teaching and learning in higher education, they also raise the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> The 12 issues include this issue.

professional development for industry supervisors in intercultural capacity-building.

## Emerging Initiatives

From Melbourne, Victoria University's John Hamilton examines the mismatch of expectations for both students and staff related to the academic conventions around attribution – in particular, citations and referencing. The paper explores why the skills involved in attribution may be less straight-forward than first thought, with Hamilton explaining that they represent a key 'threshold concept' for commencing higher education students.

Jessica Shipman Gunson, Elizabeth Abery, Lindsay Krassnitzer, Christopher Barton, Ivanka Prichard and Eileen Willis from Flinders University in Adelaide report on staff wellbeing and a program-level teaching support initiative implemented in a Health Sciences undergraduate degree. The authors argue that introducing support strategies for staff at a local level, has implications not only for students in terms of the delivery of quality learning experiences, but also for staff wellbeing.

From Deakin University in Melbourne, Chris Lim, Fiona Anderson and Robyn Mortimer detail a pilot program which took their already successful Peer-Assisted Study Sessions program online. A summary of feedback from students using the CloudPASS program notes the activity has assisted in strengthening their connection with others, which in turn has contributed to their feelings of inclusion rather than isolation.

## Good Practice Report

Finally, the University of Technology Sydney's successful First Year Experience (FYE) program is the focus of Jo McKenzie and Kathy Egea's Good Practice Report. In

2014, this Journal published a Practice Report that detailed the Program's emerging initiatives: [An evolving approach to developing academics' understanding of transition for first year students. A Practice Report.](#) This report builds on that, detailing the impact of the program on participants—the engagement of academic and professional staff and the improvement in the success of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds—as it has evolved over five years. McKenzie and colleagues highlight the lessons—essentially context-based—that they have learned about the importance of central coordination, sharing practice underpinned by a scholarly framework and the use of data and strategic alignment.

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## Student Success

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