

Enhancing Student Retention Through the Implementation of Academic Teaching and Learning Interventions

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from the Commencing Student Success Project (CSSP), conducted from 2021 to 2023 at the University of New England (UNE), a rural Australian university. The project examined pedagogical strategies that influence student engagement and retention among first-year students. The initiative involved 732 participants across six trimesters and identified five evidence-based strategies: flexible assessment submission portals, video explanations of assessments, clearly defined assessment rubrics, the provision of assessment exemplars, and consistent presentation within the learning management system. These strategies correspond with established theories in educational psychology and first-year pedagogy, which emphasise transparency, structure, and adaptability as essential for supporting students' transition to higher education. Results indicate that formative assessment practices, particularly those that make academic expectations explicit and consider student diversity, were strong motivators for student engagement. The evidence-based approaches developed through the CSSP have proven transferable across institutions, with 20 Australian universities now implementing aspects of the program. The study concludes that incorporating student-identified engagement strategies provides a practical and cost-effective method for improving both student retention and satisfaction within higher education.

Keywords: Student engagement; pedagogical strategies

Introduction

The massification of access to tertiary study in Australia commenced in 1989 (Dobson, 2001). This resulted in a wider range of students accessing tertiary study and required universities to provide support to students with 'non-traditional' backgrounds. 'Non-traditional' includes students who reside in regional/remote locations, study online, identify as indigenous, are first in their family to attend university, and/or are of mature age upon commencement (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018). The need to develop individualised student support within both teaching and learning and accessibility and wellbeing contexts, is an emerging focus in the academic literature (Hitches et al., 2025; Larsen et al., 2025).

Student attrition has been an ongoing challenge for Australian universities for decades, particularly for regional universities primarily using an online delivery mode, and who cater strongly for non-traditional students (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018; Naylor et al., 2018; Seidel & Kutieleh, 2017). This article describes a key historical shortcoming of the student support paradigm used at the University of New England (UNE), a regional Australian university with a predominantly non-traditional,



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online, and part-time student body. It also describes recent developments to address this shortcoming through the increased presence and engagement of academics embedding evidence-based engagement strategies into their units, and their students engaging with these innovative pedagogical interventions.

Background

Attrition of students in the first year of study is a particular challenge for the university sector, negatively impacting both students and the institution (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018). The impact of student attrition reduces a university's operating capital which has negative consequences for funding research and teaching, and may impact on their capacity to adequately support the learning needs of their students. If attrition is high enough, the reputation of the institution will be negatively affected. Beer and Lawson (2017) argue that, while Australian universities have allocated substantial resources to address the issue of poor retention, "they have made little impact on student attrition, which continues to negatively impact reputation and revenue" (p. 773). They also state that this reputational damage may reduce future enrolments, further reducing operating capital.

Completion rates for domestic students studying undergraduate degrees at Australian universities have demonstrated an ongoing reduction since 2005 (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018). The nine-year completion rate of students in degrees for all universities has reduced from 73.6% for 2005–2013 to 70.5% for 2016–2024 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025). For the same time periods, UNE completion rates have dropped from 61.3% to 52.4% (Harrington, 2022; Harrington et al., 2022; Harrington et al., 2024). Students who commence university but do not complete their study may accumulate a substantial tuition debt which, in current economic times, adds to financial stress. In addition, such students are more likely to experience feelings of failure and diminished personal value that may challenge their ongoing wellbeing (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2018). This can have an ongoing negative impact on the individual for a substantial period and may limit future earning capacity and career development.

Extensive research has attempted to identify the risk factors associated with university student attrition (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018; Farr-Wharton et al., 2017; Naylor et al., 2018; Seidel & Kutieleh, 2017; Stone & O'Shea, 2013). A range of factors have been described, most of which have focused on objective student attributes associated with their demographics and previous educational situation. The focus on student demographics was evidenced by the provision of funding by the Australian government under the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP; Australian Government Department of Education, 2026). The funding was provided to individual universities to support strategies intended to enhance the retention of students from three key demographic areas: i) students from regional and remote Australia, ii) those from low socio-economic status (low SES) backgrounds, and iii) those who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Beer and Lawson (2018) argue that "attrition ... is a wicked problem that includes many variables outside the influence of universities, which limits the potential of strategic approaches to problem solving" (p. 497). In the case of the HEPPP, the three foci of the program are largely or totally outside the capacity of the university to address.

This article explores a novel paradigm for supporting student retention within a regional Australian university. The historical paradigm involves two parts: a deficit approach based on students' non-traditional demographics, and the use of professional staff and university students working outside the teaching and learning boundary to support interventions to enhance student retention. An extended third paradigm is underpinned by the enhancement of academic staff's teaching capacities and unit 'presence', and enhancing academic–student engagement and student support provided within the teaching and learning context using two innovative program interventions.

Commonly Cited Factors Associated With University Attrition

A variety of student-related factors have been associated with increased university attrition. Cherastidtham and Norton (2018) conducted a regression analysis utilising a variety of student- and institution-related factors. In the Grattan Institute report, the authors state that the "main purpose of this background paper is to provide additional information on the Grattan Institute's statistical analysis of completion from bachelor degrees at public universities [in Australia]" (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018, p. 4). The factors included in the model were grouped under personal and family factors; previous academic performance; institution and course factors, focusing only on the institution attended, field of education, course length, and credit used; and a student-oriented group of factors categorised as 'Engagement with Study'. The Engagement with Study factors included the type and mode of attendance, remoteness of campus, move away from home, travel time, and commencement in Semester 2 rather than Semester 1. No factors in the model were associated with the quality of the educational experience, for example,

the nature of the engagement between academics and students, educational instruction quality, or outcomes in tertiary study. A second feature of this analysis is that virtually all of these factors are fixed objective conditions related to the individual student's life circumstances, that are not able to be changed either by the student or the university.

This approach to modelling student attrition/retention has also been seen in other major publications in this area (Kember & Fan, 2023; Ryan & Greig, 2017; Tinto, 1975). The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA, 2017, p. 10) included similar variables to the Cherastidtham and Norton (2018) study but also included a number of factors related to the teaching and learning context. However, the nature of engagement between academics and students or educational instruction quality were still not included. It is argued that this focus gives rise to a student deficit model for understanding retention/attrition that is not helpful in the debate about how to address the issue (Kember & Fan, 2023).

Kember and Fan (2023) argue that the approach of using student entry characteristics as indicators of attrition has been discredited, and that "such variables predicted little of the variance in retention and success" (p. 157). They also propose that the highly cited Tinto model (Tinto, 1975) used in this area has limited use in modelling attrition in online teaching as it does not include influences such as direct student–student and student–teacher contact. Models that take into account students' experiences during the course of their study have been proposed as a more contemporary approach (Ryan & Greig, 2017). Ryan and Greig (2017) identified a number of strategies to improve retention within the academic context, but the only consideration for intervention within a student's core study program was the use of innovative formative assessment. While support mechanisms for students at risk were included, addressing or improving the nature of the student–academic relationship was not described.

In a review of the higher education literature, Rotar (2022) identified four groups of factors that influenced tertiary student outcomes when learning in an online mode, namely student factors, course factors, social factors, and support factors. The support factors were divided into institutional support and external support, with institutional support proposed as playing "a critical role in ensuring student retention and progress" (Rotar, 2022, p. 13). The review established that theoretical models of tertiary student retention and progress addressed student, course, and social factors, but student support factors received limited, if any, attention. It was observed that student support needed to be relevant to the individual student's current learning context, and was only capable of addressing the challenges involved if offered at the time they were experienced. Support interventions were recommended "within different stages of the learning cycle" (Rotar, 2022, p. 18). Larsen et al. (2025) argue that in a number of Australian universities, the student support function is outsourced to staff external to the central teaching and learning journey, namely those in enabling programs and central services. They also propose that while "there is an increasing emphasis in official disclosures on enhanced support for students from diverse backgrounds ... the term 'support' remains poorly defined and understood" (Larsen et al., 2025, p. 78).

The need for enhanced involvement and presence of academics to support student engagement within the teaching and learning context has been described (Lawrence et al., 2024; Schmude et al., 2025). A study at the Southern Cross University, Australia (Farr-Wharton et al., 2017) established that the lecturer–student relationship was a "significant predictor of student engagement, course satisfaction and intention to leave university prematurely" (Farr-Wharton et al., 2017, p. 182). Farr-Wharton et al. (2017) argue against the student deficit model where attrition is attributed to student-related factors and emphasise the importance of the role of the student–academic relationship in supporting student success. A review of the higher education literature by Mastrokoulou et al. (2022) supported the role of a student-centred approach to teaching, which is perceived by students as being "more effective, engaging and performance-enhancing" (p. 1). Conversely, although student-centred teaching approaches may enhance student outcomes, institutional culture and academic attitudes may challenge academics' capacities to adopt this approach and they may resort to lecture- and content-based delivery involving limited engagement with students (Børte et al., 2023; Cameron, 2017).

It is evident from the literature that there are different paradigms adopted to understand university student attrition/retention. There is abundant evidence to support the argument that students' demographic circumstances, previous educational experiences, and mode of study at university are associated with attrition. However, using these as the sole basis for interventions within the university offers limited scope for addressing the issue as the institution is unable to impact these factors substantially. In particular, students who commence university with high risk factors for attrition, such as regional/remote residential status, low SES, mature age, online, and part-time study load, will be likely to maintain these

factors throughout their university study at a regional university such as UNE. This will be due to their life circumstances, irrespective of interventions to address attrition.

Student Support Framework at the Unit Level

Student support at UNE is comprised of four key components:

1. Student Support Services, staffed by professional staff members;
2. Current students supported by professional staff through HEPPPFunded programs, such as Peer Assisted Study Sessions and Peer Academic Mentoring;
3. Learning hubs established at the school level which aim to support students' academic skills in specific disciplinary areas, for example, Science Learning Hub (University of New England [UNE], n.d.); and
4. Teaching and learning projects to develop interventions to support academics within the teaching and learning context.

At UNE, components 1 and 2 have been in place for many years and have provided the bulk of student support functions, whilst components 3 and 4 have been adopted within the past five years. The goal of Component 4 has been to improve the student experience and retention by enhancing academic presence and engagement with students. UNE implemented the Commencing Student Success Project (CSSP) initially within the School of Education in 2020 and adopted it as business as usual throughout the university in 2025. The project aimed to develop a signature pedagogy (Harrington, 2022) to support highly effective engagement between teaching academics and students in the online environment. The CSSP complemented the Atrium project (Schmude et al., 2025), which commenced in 2020. The Atrium project's goals were to develop an institution-wide information technology tool, integrated with existing data systems, that would allow early identification by unit coordinators (UCs) of students at risk of attrition and to support intervention at the individual student level. It should be noted that prior to 2020, the student support function at the institution was largely outsourced to other administrative staff, with limited formal interventions available to support academics' engagement with students while teaching within units. This was considered to be a major shortcoming of the student support strategies at the institution.

Commencing Student Success Project (CSSP)

The CSSP was implemented in the School of Education at UNE for the following purposes (Harrington, 2022):

1. To provide UCs with a framework to better understand the experiences and challenges of transitioning university students into first-year tertiary study;
2. To develop a signature online pedagogy to enhance the first-year student experience and retention;
3. To provide UCs with a framework to understand how the evidence-based strategies underpinning the CSSP may challenge their own beliefs, attitudes, and academic identity; and
4. To provide UCs with a framework to evaluate their presence in their units and to understand their relationships with students.

The success of the CSSP has attracted 12 awards for teaching and learning excellence promoting student inclusion and engagement at the school, faculty, university, regional, and state levels, including an Australian Award for University Teaching (AAUT) in 2025. The research-driven signature pedagogy component of the project was developed successfully and implemented in all School of Education units between 2001–2024, and across the broader university in 2024.

The CSSP project identified 14 'Basic Elements' (BEs; summarised in Table 1), which are evidence-based strategies to promote student engagement and retention upon which the signature pedagogy is based. Academic staff are supported in their use of the signature pedagogy through a dedicated myLearn website, which is a part of the university learning management system (LMS).

The following results of the CSSP are student-driven. Three weeks after each teaching trimester had finished in July and November, the CSSP team sent students an invitation to participate in an online Qualtrics survey where their informed consent was gained. Students enrolled in education units were surveyed with a view to understanding the perceived and relative importance of the pedagogical strategies employed in the first-year units they had just completed. The survey comprised three

primary areas. The first two areas asked students to rate the challenge and overall engagement with the following aspects of the unit:

1. Understanding of the subject matter;
2. Learning in an online environment;
3. Navigating Moodle to find things;
4. Communicating with the UC; and
5. Communicating with other students.

This was followed by a section that asked students to rate their experiences relevant to the 14 BEs outlined in Table 1. Students rated the importance of each item on a Likert scale from 1 = *Not important at all* to 7 = *Very important*.

How important was each of the following strategies in respect of enhancing your experience of learning in your first-year unit/s?

The pedagogical focus for each BE is summarised in Table 1, which includes illustrative quotes taken from the LMS.

Table 1

Fourteen Elements of the CSSP

Element	Title	Pedagogical Focus
1	Videos by Unit Coordinator	Supports the building of relationships with students. An effective way to promote student engagement is to show them who you are i.e. your 'human' side Short video clips show the student how you appear in person and provides them with the opportunity to assess how approachable you may be to responding to questions or requests for help.
2	Flexible Assessment Submission Portal	Flexibility and consideration by educators towards first year student regarding due dates/deadlines, improves their confidence and influences their decisions with their studies.
3	In-Unit Post-Assessment Task Evaluation	Providing students with a voice or an opportunity to have their say, improves their sense of belonging and participation in their studies.
4	Examples of Assessment Expectations/Exemplars	Central to first year pedagogy is the concept of formative assessment, where UCs heavily scaffold and provide examples of their expectations, especially for assessment tasks.
5	Video Explanation of Assessments	Provides an in-depth explanation of what is required in assessment tasks and addresses frequently asked questions.
6	Post-Assessment Collective Feedback to Students	A short summary of what students addressed well, and what areas they need to consider for further development. This approach does not single out students who may be conscious of their academic shortcomings and provides them with reassurance that others share their challenges.
7	Unit Coordinator Presence & Availability	First-year students may be intimidated by academics' achievements and reputation and may not feel confident or 'welcome' to communicate with them directly. This element requires UCs to make themselves available in a safe learning environment without reproach.
8	Assignment Pitch — AQF Level	Assessment tasks should be suitable to the AQF level of the student, as well as their stage of development within the course. The design of assessment should be informed by Bloom's taxonomy.
9	Module Reflection Points & Goals	List what students are going to learn at the beginning of each module of learning to provide students with a sense of context and direction in their learning.
10	Clearly Defined Assessment Rubrics	Rubrics should be tailored to fit the assessment task and inform the student as to the specific requirements of performance at each level of achievement.

11	Consistency of myLearn Presentation	The layout of all units in the LMS should be consistent and in accordance with the CSSP format. Layout must be consistent across units, logical, easy to navigate, clear and user-friendly.
12	Embedded Links to Academic Skills Office & Assistance	Provide links within the unit LMS site to the various support options available, particularly the Academic Skills Office.
13	Student Achievement Certificates	Provide students with certificates to acknowledge good performance within a unit.
14	Removal of Exams	Exams are a high stakes and stressful approach to assessing student performance. Alternative forms of assessment should be considered for students transitioning into tertiary study.

It should be noted that Element 12, the provision of links to support services outside of the unit, was ranked by students as the least useful element. This suggests that students prefer support within the teaching and learning boundary from in-unit sources, particularly the UC.

Analysis of the student responses from the teaching Trimesters 1 and 2 were categorised by perceived importance for each cohort: the top five strategies that recorded the highest number of student votes were considered the top five preferred strategies. Data were collected in accordance with ethics approval (HE20-083 from the academic institution where the research was conducted.

The mean scores of the Qualtrics surveys for students were compiled and analysed at the end of each trimester, identifying emerging themes and patterns. The individual trimester results were then compared, and mean scores calculated for the perceived important of each BE for each trimester. The five highest ranked BEs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Student Responses — Top Five BEs 2021–2023

T1 Top 5	Mean/7.0	T2 Top 5	Mean/7.0
Flexible Assessment Submission Portal	6.1	Flexible Assessment Submission Portal	6.2
Video explanation of assessments	6.1	Clearly defined assessment rubrics	6.2
Clearly defined assessment rubrics	6.0	Video explanation of assessments	6.0
Provide examples of assessment expectations	6.0	Provide examples of assessment expectations	6.0
Consistency of Moodle presentation: teaching, presentation, location of items, structure	5.9	Consistency of Moodle presentation: teaching, presentation, location of items, structure	6.0

The five lowest ranked BEs are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Student Responses — Bottom Five BEs 2021–2023

T1 Bottom 5	Mean/7.0	T2 Bottom 5	Mean/7.0
Grouping of assessments — replacement of tasks that are small, e.g., <10%	4.6	Provide collective feedback to all students on how to improve their assessments	5.0
Embedded hyperlinks to UNE Academic Skills Office for assistance	5.0	Embedded hyperlinks to UNE Academic Skills Office for assistance	5.0
Assignment levels and requirements pitched at student level	5.4	In-unit post-assessment task evaluations	5.1
Provide examples of assessment expectations	5.5	Module reflection points and clear learning goals for each topic	5.3

The UC was present and approachable within the unit	5.7	Assignment levels and requirements pitched at student level	5.4
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Clearly defined assessment rubrics and exemplars were welcome scaffolds for students. These clear expectations help students understand what is required of them and can reduce feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Student comments included:

It was so good to know that I was always on the right track! That saved me a lot of stress with second-guessing. (Student 6, T1 2023)

The video explanations for the assessments are pure genius! I was able to really understand what I needed to do, and what to avoid. The videos are SO much better than just reading a page of instructions. (Student 9, T2 2022)

The clear rubrics gave me a guide from which to tick off that I had covered each area. I felt confident that I had delivered exactly what was required. (Student 10, T1 2023)

The consistency of the LMS is vital for students to navigate with ease to avoid stress, confusion, and disengagement. The CSSP strove to have highly accessed sections (for example, Assessment, Unit Resources, Due Dates) placed in the same position across all the LMS units. Students said:

How refreshing was it to find that my four units for the trimester looked identical when I opened them up in myLearn! I was able to find the same things in the same places across my different units. Less time wasted and less stress!!! (Student 5, T2 2022)

I loved how all the unit materials looked the same – clean, neat, easy to find and not cluttered. (Student 4, T1 2022)

I was able to easily find all the important information: due date, type of assessment, rubric and assessment length. (Student 2, T1 2021)

The most popular evidence-based ‘element’ was the flexible submission portal where students could extend the due date of an assessment by up to three weeks without evidence. Student responses were overwhelmingly positive and acknowledged the challenge students have in balancing their study, employment, and other environmental demands, for example, those associated with home commitments. Comments included:

The flexible portal made my work/life- study balance possible. Having a flexible submission portal allowed me to juggle my young family and study, without having to painstakingly justify everything. (Student 8, T2 2023)

The flexible portal is so helpful being a full time working single parent. Life happens and gets in the way, and the ability to just access that flexible portal took heaps of pressure off. (Student 3, T1 2021)

Flexible portals were fantastic as I have a young family and full-time job. It allowed me to succeed even when the unexpected happened. (Student 6, T2 2022)

The flexible assessment portal was a great way for me to transition to university, allowing myself time to adjust to new deadlines and managing my new uni/work/social balance. (Student 4, T1 2023)

Since receiving national recognition for teaching and learning excellence through the AAUT award in 2025, the CSSP team has received enquiries from higher education institutions and governments in Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. To date, over 30 universities, TAFEs, and government departments have sought guidance on how institutions can embed the BEs into their unit offerings. This high level of interest and uptake in response to the positive impact of BEs on student retention and engagement indicates that the issue of student attrition and disengagement is not specific to rural universities but remains problematic more broadly.

Atrium

UNE’s School of Education comprises 90% online students. The Atrium project was undertaken to facilitate the early identification of students at risk of attrition and to support the engagement between teaching staff and students. The Atrium approach was initially trialled using Excel spreadsheet data commencing in Trimester 1, 2021 and was made available as an online application for general use in Trimester 2, 2022. The Atrium project is a web-based application available to UCs and

course coordinators and professional support staff (Schmude et al., 2025). Atrium provides a separate user interface for course coordinators. The interface provides a summary of all information available for students in the course with amalgamated data from UCs available. It should be noted that the content of communications between UCs and students is not provided for privacy reasons. The application allows the creation and management by the course coordinator of academic reviews initiated under the university's Student Support Policy.

Atrium's real innovation lies in its ability to provide the UC with a wide range of student information in one place. As of Trimester 2, 2025, UCs are automatically and regularly provided with information relating to each student in their units (see Table 4).

Table 4

Data Included in Atrium Student Profile

• Last access date to the LMS	• Last access date to the unit of study
• Special assessments	• Total number of current unit failures
• Number of current unit attempts	• Unit enrolment date
• HEPPP status	• Course of enrolment
• Course GPA	• Referrals to support services
• Number of course unit completions	• Attendance mode
• Number of course unit failures	• Whether student is currently under academic review
• Number of course unit withdrawals	• Unit location
• Course progress rate	

Colour coding using a traffic light approach is provided to indicate risk level. The system includes the capacity for individual students to be referred to the various support services available in the university. Email communication with the student is also provided via their UNE and personal emails.

In 2025/2026, Atrium will be further enhanced to incorporate additional unit-level data from the UNE LMS to allow the UC to accurately assess student engagement with various aspects of the learning material, and to rapidly identify disengagement. It should be noted that whilst Atrium is not mandated for use by UCs, 80% of units at UNE utilised the application in Trimester 2, 2015.

Discussion

CSSP

The CSSP trimester results reflect what students rated as most important to their learning. Table 2 shows how students consistently highly rated the importance of strategies that explicitly illustrate what is expected of them in their assessments and units. First-year students preferred clear and well-defined expectations from their instructors, including clear learning objectives, assignment guidelines, and assessment criteria. The video explanations that complemented the written assessment requirements were popular with students, and business intelligence metrics confirm that on average students viewed the video recordings a minimum of three times each.

When students rated which BEs were least helpful to their learning, it was evident that they did not seem to rank highly those associated with the work involved for UCs when compiling the unit. This included ensuring assessment levels were pitched appropriately, how assessments were grouped, and stating what the module outcomes should be. Students also did not identify the embedded links to the Academic Skills Office (ASO) as being particularly helpful. This was consistently voted in the bottom five BEs. More research that specifically focusses on student reasons for this is required as no data were captured for this important strategy. The ASO is well resourced, with interactive videos and a user-friendly table of contents covering a

broad range of topics. However, students seem to prioritise and appreciate the overt scaffolding within the unit via video explanations, clear rubrics, and consistency of unit offerings.

It is important to highlight that a multifaceted approach is needed when implementing the evidence-based strategies to improve student engagement and retention. It is not as simple as incorporating the elements into a unit, to only set and forget. Students value the visibility and approachability of the UC across their units.

Atrium

A key aspect of the Atrium system is that it provides an essential tool for teaching academics to engage successfully with their students. UCs who utilise Atrium commented:

It was extremely useful to be able to get contact details, but also a picture of the student's study profile. It was of great significance. (UC 1)

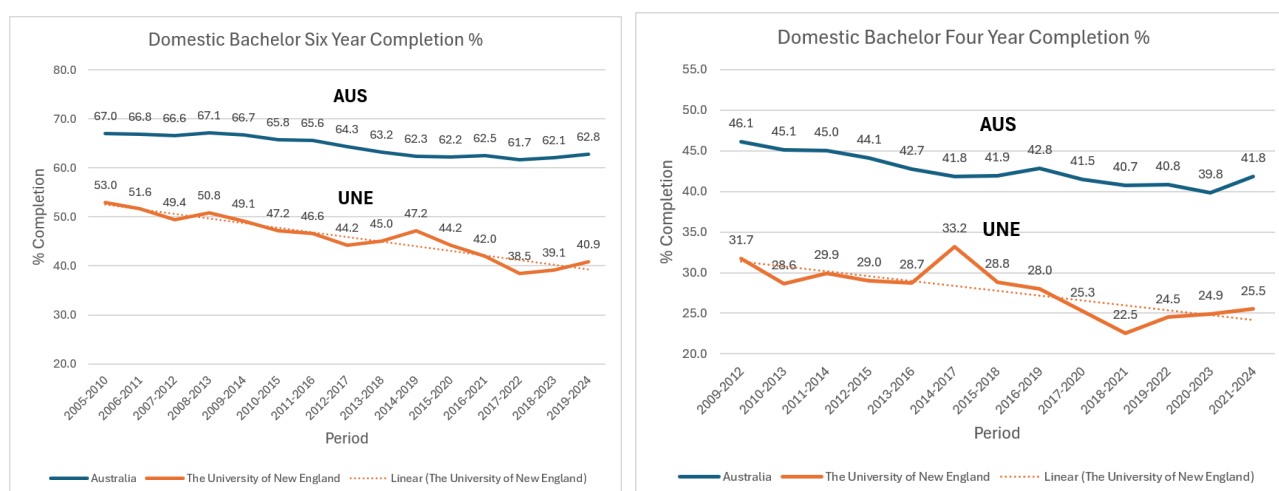
The dashboard was a significant resource. While it did not affect the way that I interact with or support every single student I teach, it made me aware of details for a number of students which I could not have known otherwise to do with their history and individual profile ... It greatly reduced my workload around investigation and monitoring of students and in communicating with student[s] by having access to their emails and phone numbers. (UC 2)

I got a much higher/faster response rate by emailing [a] student's personal email and giving them a call. This was very useful in dealing with time-critical issues around withdrawal deadlines and assessment submission. (UC 3)

Figure 1 shows the percentage of students who have graduated from undergraduate degrees at UNE within four and six years of commencement (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025).

Figure 1

UNE Bachelor Degree Completions



Note. Left panel: Domestic bachelor six-year completion. Right panel: Domestic bachelor four-year completion

It is evident that the rate of completion has improved since the 2017-2020, with a 3% increase in four-year completions. These improvements have followed a number of years of decline and reflect the institution's focus on student support within the direct teaching and learning context.

Conclusion

The UNE strategy in recent years to enhance student retention has attempted to address the issues described by Larsen et al. (2025), where student support is outsourced to professional staff external to the teaching and learning context. While these

support services serve an important role in supporting student welfare, it was considered that student support began with a high level of engagement and presence of the teaching academic/s.

It is evident that effectively addressing the issue of student engagement and retention requires a different approach to those has been traditionally and historically used. This paper has highlighted how the CSSP focuses on educator practice and presence, whilst Atrium is a tool to understand student engagement. The CSSP and Atrium projects provide an integrated intervention that enhances the academic's presence within their units; supports a shift in academic culture towards a more student-centred approach; and provides an integrated, highly effective technology solution to support the process. The evidence available from associated research (Harrington, 2022; Harrington et al., 2022; Harrington et al., 2024) and the improving student graduation rates over recent years provide a strong validation of the strategy and support the continued investment in and expansion of these innovative, academic-centric initiatives.

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