

# Editorial

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## *Welcome to 2026*

Welcome to the first issue of Student Success for 2026! This year we are delighted to welcome Dr Cathy Stone as Managing Editor. Cathy takes up this key position in the footsteps of Tracy Creagh, who was an integral foundation member and a driving force for the Journal during its establishment prior to the first issue in 2010 and since then until the end of 2025. Tracy's legacy is evident in the quality of the Journal and its publications, and the robustness of the review and publication processes which are both collegial and critically analytical. True to Tracy's collaborative approach, she has been 'mentoring' Cathy into the role, to make this transition as seamless as possible for authors and our valued reviewers. Cathy is a Conjoint Associate Professor with the University of Newcastle, with a background in Social Work, and key research interests in online student experience/engagement, as well as mature age, regional/remote and first-in-family students. If you would like to know more about Cathy's background and publications, please see <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/profile/cathy-stone>

In a previous editorial (Nelson & Creagh, 2025), we argued that tertiary institutions remain essential in developing graduates who are equipped to foster a more harmonious, and hopefully, a more environmentally sustainable world. We called for institutions to put students at their centre to foster the development of tolerance and trust in an uncertain world. Following this line of discussion, the **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Quality Education**: to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – sets out universal targets to be achieved by 2030. For institutional leaders, contributing to the achievement of this goal will require actively dismantling the barriers to equitable educational opportunities and outcomes, such as geographic and socioeconomic disadvantage. It will also require institutions to prioritise the creation of learning environments where all students are able to actively engage in the cognitive, behavioural and emotional processes associated with success (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Critically, it will require institutions to recognise and respond to the rapid adoption and ongoing development of AI and generative AI. In 2026, there is no doubt that we are at a critical point in the evolution of education. Our education systems and institutions must move away from measuring information and facts and focus on valuing, assessing and credentialling key human capabilities – the things that only humans can do – such as solving wicked problems, navigating uncertainty, coping with rapidly changing circumstances, protecting the environment, empathetic decision making – because these skills and knowledges are required now and will be required even more in the future. Some institutions are embracing AI driven advancements in virtual reality, large-scale analytics, data modelling, and enhanced predictive capability. Others will be exploring AI-driven opportunities for mass personalisation of experience and credentials – allowing individuals to tailor qualifications that align their talents and skills with job demands and professional work requirements, while at the same time ensuring that their learning is quality assured and validly credentialled. Realising this state is complex and will require governments, regulators, institutional and education leaders across our training and education systems to cooperate to deliver massive, collaborative and rapid shifts in policy and practice. We need new ways of shaping our education systems and institutions so that we are preparing students for living and working in an AI enhanced world; new ways of assuring and credentialling learning; and new ways of understanding what it means to be a future-prepared learner and then being prepared to design curriculum, assessment, teaching and credentialling policies and practices to fit. Thankfully, in the Australian context, this work is well underway and is described in the **Castlereagh Statement** (Castlereagh



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Summit, 2026) collaboratively developed by leaders across the Australian education sector. In July, Danny Liu, one of the facilitators of this statement, will elaborate on this theme in a keynote address at the Student Success Conference.

We are very much looking forward to the Conference, which this year is being held on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland from 29 June to 1 July. As in previous years, the STARS Conference, Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) and the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) are coming together to host the Conference. STARS, EPHEA and NAEEA believe there is a benefit in bringing together organisations whose key focus is student success, in a collegial forum to disseminate current research, good practice and progressive ideas and opportunities focused on enhancing the student learning experience. This Conference remains a key supporter of this Journal and we look forward to seeing many of our readers and authors there. The Journal will publish its annual **Conference issue** following the Conference.

Volume 17, Issue 1 of Student Success is once again packed with a range of inspiring articles and practice reports containing examples of research and practice from different parts of the globe. In this issue we are pleased to present eight articles and four practice reports. Together they represent a diverse range of research and practice from The Netherlands, the United States, Vietnam, the United Kingdom, Taiwan and Australia. Importantly each article and report contributes something new to the body of knowledge related to higher and tertiary education student experience and student success.

## Articles

The first article is by a group of 14 academics from across seven Australian and one UK university. **Ryan Naylor, Mark Rubin, Olivia Evans, Penny Jane Burke, Anna Bennett, Kristen Allen, Nida Denson, Heather E. Douglas, Monica Gendi, Peter Howley, Suzanne Macqueen, Carmen Mills, Sarah O'Shea and Maria Raciti** take us on a fascinating journey as they 'unravel' the various and complex factors that impact on student success and the ways in which these factors interact with each other, in turn, to affect student outcomes. In so doing, they challenge notions of deficit and encourage a strengths-based approach to how 'success' is traditionally viewed.

Following this, a research team from The Netherlands, **Hanneke Theelen, Chloé Dreesen, Josien Mennen, Iris Kanera, Nadine Spierts and Edith Geurts van Kessel** examine student wellbeing through the lens of an annual Well-being Monitor at a Dutch university of applied sciences, with their findings having broader implications and pointing to the need for integrated, student-centred approaches.

Next, **Xiao Li, Jae Man Park and Jordan P Mitchell** take a look at the use of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots in higher education, analysing survey data from the United States to explore how students and faculty perceive the efficiency of AI chatbots, and what other factors influence their perceptions.

The impact of a fully online, short introductory course on the confidence and academic achievement of first-year healthcare students at an Australian university is then outlined by **Natalie Bennett, Emma Ashton, Jacinta Pitman, Ted Brown, Luke Robinson and Elise Randle-Barrett**. Evaluation indicates that such an intervention has the potential to reduce anxiety while improving confidence and academic outcomes for students across a variety of disciplines.

The next article is from Vietnam, where **Hoa T. Pham, Ngan T. Nguyen, Oanh N. T. Bui, Thao N.T. Nguyen, Ngoc M.T. Nguyen and Cuong M. Nguyen** examine academic performance and persistence among ethnic minority university students. This study highlights the importance of institutional/family/community support and financial security in improving equitable student success in Vietnamese higher education.

**Aaron Timoshanko** then examines the gap between graduates' perceived employability value and actual employment outcomes, comparing alumni who graduated with or without Honours from a Bachelor of Laws program at an Australian university. The findings have implications for program design, not only for Law programs but also across other professional education contexts.

Meanwhile, from Taiwan, **Kuei-Chien Chiu** examines the effectiveness of a learning-centred bursary in supporting academic improvement among economically disadvantaged higher education students. Their findings indicate that financial aid alone may not be enough to improve student academic outcomes but is likely to be most effective when aligned with learning support and consideration of students' own readiness for self-directed learning.

The final article in this issue involves a large study by **Angela Hibbs, Rick Hayman & Remco Polman**, from the UK, Australia and Hong Kong respectively. This study looks at UK undergraduate Sports' students' confidence before beginning their degree, along with how they perceive the value of learning, community, employability and well-being; the aim being to examine the impact of these on the students' academic achievement and retention in their first year of study. The findings indicate a more complex relationship than might have been anticipated, with other factors, including gender, also playing a part.

## Practice Reports

The important topic of students' help-seeking is addressed in the first practice report by **Alice Huan** and **Matthew Clemson**. They describe practical strategies introduced at an Australian university that are scalable over large student cohorts to encourage students to seek appropriate help as needed. By embedding access to support within learning management systems, the process by which students can seek support is simplified, which in turn increases the take-up rate of supports offered.

Next, **Le Thanh Thao** and **Pham Trut Thuy** describe a *SWOT-Guided Reflection Design*, developed in a English-major program at a Vietnamese university. This three-stage model is designed to assist students with planning and reporting practicum and work-experience learning, with a focus on reflective, ongoing, interpretive learning.

Following this, **Nathan Pritts** describes the use of personalized video feedback to enhance student engagement, motivation, and persistence in online, asynchronous first-year writing courses at a US university. Students who received video feedback were more likely to submit further work when compared with previous cohorts who had received written comments only, with student feedback showing that students found this type of feedback more helpful and engaging.

The final practice report in this Issue is by **Anja Pabel, Colin Beer Michelle Thompson, Noal Atkinson, Yuliia Borysova** and **Danielle MacRae**, who describe a 'hyperflexible' online Masters' program at an Australian university. This self-paced postgraduate course, where students can enrol and submit assessments at any time, is designed to enhance equitable access for a wider range of students. The authors take us through the 'whys' and 'hows' of its development, as well as its advantages and disadvantages, for both students and staff, concluding that this model plays an important and distinctive role in widening participation and enhancing lifelong learning opportunities more broadly.

Congratulations to each of the 51 authors in total who have contributed to this issue. And once again, heartfelt thanks to the rest of the Editorial Team, to the Editorial Board, and all our wonderful reviewers, for their continued dedication to quality research on the student experience in higher and tertiary education. We welcome your feedback on the new issue and look forward to continuing the dissemination of good practice via the [STARS Conference](#) and *Student Success*.

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