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Editorial

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Welcome to the 2026 Special Conference Issue of Student Success

In 2026, once again the Students Transitions Achievement Retention & Success Conference (STARS), Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) and National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) joined together to host the Student Success Conference. This third year of collaboration proved to be another excellent opportunity to disseminate current research, good practice, progressive ideas and opportunities focused on enhancing access and outcomes for students in post-secondary education. This year's Conference was held on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, where a record attendance of over 300 delegates shared their evidence-based research and practice, focussed on building student success from transition into university to graduation out and beyond.

This Special 2026 Student Success Conference issue brings together the accepted peer-reviewed articles and selected Good Practice reports. The very high number of submissions resulted in the acceptance of 11 peer-reviewed research articles, 10 from within Australia and one from South Africa, and three Good Practice Reports. Good Practice Reports are an integral part of the Student Success Conference program, being peer-reviewed submissions that outline practical initiatives, evaluations, and evidence-based institutional strategies for enhancing tertiary student engagement and retention, aligning with the four key themes of the Conference, of Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention and Success. The three that are published here were selected from the many excellent Good Practice Report presentations at the Conference.

The editorial team are particularly grateful to all the authors, reviewers, Advisory Board and Editorial Board members, for their sustained and generous support of this open access publication.

Articles

The articles begin with **Novia Minaee, Paul Koshy, Gemma Cadby** and **Ian Li** from the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES), who introduce us to "the students we don't see". Using latent class analysis to delve deeper into the experience of students from equity backgrounds, multidimensional patterns of underlying student experience and their associations with intention to leave and academic performance are revealed.

Next, **Rachel Whitsed** from Charles Sturt University examines university early offer schemes, finding that the benefits of such schemes, including widening participation and academic attainment, outweigh any perceived or actual disadvantages. Following this, **Ryan Naylor** from the University of Sydney, applies a marginalisation lens to how equity in education is framed, finding that a systems-oriented marginalisation framework offers greater potential for structural change, shifting responsibility from 'fixing students' to redesigning systems to reduce exclusion.

Continuing this theme of reducing exclusion, **Kelly Linden** and **Sarah Teakel**, from Charles Sturt University, examine the experience of part-time students in what they term "a full-time world" finding that studying part-time is not only more common than we might think, but is accompanied by a myriad of academic risks. Their findings include the need for greater institutional support, not only for the part-time students themselves, but also the staff who teach and support them.

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The topic of AI is raised by **Luis Camacho, Christopher Bridge** and **Birgit Loch** from Federation University, in their article about "GenAI-first Maths Support", with their findings pointing to the potential of AI "as a just-in-time learning tool". Meanwhile**, Trixie James, Nicoli Barnes** and **Tracey Muir**, from Central Queensland University, Federation and Australian Catholic University respectively, introduce us to the Peregrination Pedagogical Framework as a means of fostering a sense of belonging and agency amongst students entering Enabling programs.

Learning and teaching interventions designed to influence student engagement and retention among first-year students are next explored, by **Ingrid Harrington, Marty Schmude, Robert Whannell, Catherine Rita Volpe, Kristy O'Neill, Rachael Adlington, Traci-Ann Garrad, Harrison Munday** and **Sarita Guy**, from the University of New England. This is followed by **Amy Young, Samuel Cunningham, Renee Nightingale**, from Queensland University of Technology, and **Aurora Greane** from Melbourne University, who examine the identity-formation implications in the decision-making process of first-year engineering students as they select an engineering major.

From the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, comes a study by **Ilse Fouché** and **Maria Prozesky** on the mastery of English vocabulary by undergraduate Bachelor of Education students at a South African university, showing that relying on incidental learning is not sufficient, with explicit intervention required. Safety in student spaces such as campus libraries is the focus of the next article by **Sascha Jenkins** from Charles Darwin University, and **Catharine Pruscino, Caitlin Austin-Kanafani, Jasmine Lewin** and **Daniel Hamilton** from the University of Technology Sydney, which explores student experiences and perceptions on safety and disrespectful behaviour, with implications for institutional policy and practice.

The concluding article by **Michelle Roberts, Steven Pace** and **Amy Johnson** from Central Queensland University challenges the ways in which equivalence in face-to-face and online learning are generally measured, arguing that more needs to be considered than outcomes alone. Their research makes a compelling case for the need for institutions to consider students' experiences and perspectives if true educational equivalence is to be achieved.

Good Practice Reports

Three examples of excellent institutional practice are included within this section. We begin with **Katelyn Barney** and **Tracey Bunda** from The University of Queensland taking us through the interdisciplinary, collaborative approach being used at their university to Indigenise the university curriculum, ensuring that Indigenous students can see themselves reflected in the curriculum as well as enabling non-Indigenous students to engage with Indigenous histories, cultures and societies.

This is followed by **Anna Bennett, Kristen Allen, Michelle Mansfield, Nicole Garske** and **Georgia Way**, from the University of Newcastle, describing the development and implementation of a Best Practice Guide which ensures that the Framework elements from the Australian Government's National FEE-FREE Uni Ready (FFUR) Project (2026), can be appropriately operationalised within Australian Higher Education Enabling Programs.

The final Report is by **Kathy Egea, Amara Atif, Gavin Paul, Sonia Matiuk** and **Jo McKenzie** from the University of Technology, Sydney, who introduce us to the design and development of a practical tool for subject coordinators, an institution-wide Subject Dashboard that makes cohort-level diversity, enrolment patterns, and longitudinal performance data visible and usable.

We thank all our authors and now invite our readers to enjoy the contents of this Special Conference Issue for 2026!

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