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## Editorial



### In this Special Issue

We were delighted to hold the 2018 *Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention and Success* (STARS) Conference in Auckland from July 8-11, 2018. This year's Conference confirmed that STARS is now firmly established as a collaborative and inclusive annual event for tertiary educators and leaders. Nearly 300 delegates—a mix of professional, academic and administrative practitioners and leaders—attended and participated in a range of presentations and activities which included, Refereed papers, Good Practice Reports and Emerging Initiatives, along with Poster Presentations, Special Interest Groups, Workshops and STARS Network meetings. The STARS Networks, now number nine and include: First-in-Family Network; First Year Experience Network; Peer2Peer Alliances Network; Psychological Well-being Network; Sharing Ideas, Resources and Experiences Network; STEM Network; Student Equity Network; and the Transition-Out Network.

The Conference Keynote, delivered with much enthusiasm by Professor Martin Carroll, Executive General Manager Academic and Provost, Manukau Institute of Technology, challenged delegates to explore the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its application to tertiary education settings. Attendees were highly engaged by the review of current developments in AI, and were invited to consider some curious, and

fanciful predictions as well as believable and possible trends.

The 2018 STARS Conference hosted three plenary panels:

*Access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori students and for Pasifika students: an enhancement theme approach* was moderated by Dr Joe Te Rito, Kaihautū Mātauranga Māori (Deputy Director Māori), Ako Aotearoa, New Zealand.

*Higher Education Employability & Careers: OUT with Whether & Why, and IN with When & How* was hosted by Professor Shelley Kinash, Director, Advancement of Learning & Teaching at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

And finally, a higher education leaders Question and Answer panel as the closing event which focused on scaling up good practice innovations, supporting staff in an increasingly complex work environment and managing technological disruption and the pace of change.

### Invited Feature

This year STARS announced two new STARS Fellows: Dr Linda Leach and Associate Professor Nick Zepke, who recently retired from full-time academic life at Massey University, New Zealand. Their scholarly contributions to higher education and their prolific work on student assessment, success and retention and student engagement represents a lifetime of active research and publishing and their vast body of work has contributed greatly to our understandings of the student experience. We are extremely pleased to publish their article *A critical reflection on a research partnership* as the

Invited Feature in this issue. There is always something new to be learned from this wonderful pair and this article is as informative for experienced scholars and practitioners as it is for those who are more recent to the field. As you read this article, we are sure you will agree that we are indebted to Nick and Linda for all their contributions. Recognising their work through the Fellowships was a way of saying thank you, from all of us striving to enhance students tertiary experiences.

As is customary, this special conference issue of the Journal publishes the top ranked research papers selected via the blind peer review process and a selection of the highest quality *Emerging Initiatives* selected by the Conference Program Committee and the Journal Editorial team. Each of these submissions is described below.

## Articles

The Succeed @ La Trobe program seeks to identify and outreach to students in their first year who demonstrate signs of academic struggle or disengagement. In ***Intra-university partnerships improve student success in a first-year success and retention outreach initiative***, Sarah Cox and Ryan Naylor from La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia outline the collaborative approach taken to develop the intervention and the resulting benefits and implications for practitioners that may be applicable across other institutions.

From the University of Wollongong, Australia, Theresa Millman and Jacinta McNamara present outcomes of two studies which focus on the lived experience of transition by students entering higher education from two divergent pathways: Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and a university based enabling program. In ***The long and winding road: Experiences of students entering university through transition programs*** the authors point to the efficacy of human endeavour and individual willingness to implement strategies for success as significant precursors of academic perseverance.

Judith Kearney, Glenda Stanley and Gina Blackberry from Griffith University explore the experience on a non-traditional university student applying an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as their methodology. In ***Interpreting the first-year experience of a non-traditional student: A case study*** the authors describe the experience from the student's perspective. They also offer their own insights into the student's sense-making of that experience to encourage colleagues who work with non-traditional students to recognise the inadequacy, and therefore the unsuitability, of interpretative lenses that rely on demographic categories.

Alison Green from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia identifies three- benefits for students acting as Widening Participation (WP) outreach ambassadors. ***The influence of involvement in a widening participation outreach program on student ambassadors' retention and success*** details the outcomes of a survey of QUT student ambassadors, based on Kahu and Nelson's (2018) conceptual framework of 'mediating mechanisms' that influence student outcomes, indicating that the role positively influences students' retention and success.

## Practice Reports

A significant component of the STARS Conference program is the presentation of *Emerging Initiatives*. These presentations allow for new ideas, early stage initiatives or pilot programs to be shared and discussed with colleagues. The Emerging Initiatives selected from the STARS Conference program display the breadth of approaches to student engagement and the diversity of the cohort at the centre of projects and programs. Authors of highly rated STARS submissions were invited to respond to a second round of editorial comments and are presented in this issue as Practice Reports.

Griffith University's innovative online support resources for undergraduate and postgraduate students as they transition across the student lifecycle are previewed in ***Toolkit for success: The Griffith Health suite of online student support resources***. The 'toolkit for success' includes school-specific orientation websites, a targeted writing and referencing online guide, and a 'one-stop-shop' resource where students can quickly and easily connect with all of the support services and resources available across the University. Authors Rebecca Eaton, Jacob Sharples and Nicholas Buys discuss the success of the toolkit and the increased access to resources both across the institution and externally.

In ***The use of personal experience as a strategy for critical reading and writing*** Ella Kahu and Hannah Gerrard from Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand report on two first-year courses that explicitly draw on student engagement theory to actively engage students through assessments that use personal experience as a strategy for critical reading and writing. the redesign of the institution's Bachelor of Arts degree, and the addition of five compulsory courses with two strands: transferable skills and citizenship, provided an opportunity to utilise Kahu's (2013) framework of student engagement and to design assessments that would actively engage students in a way that would

enable skill development alongside such a transformation.

Finally, Renee Dowse, Jacqueline Melvold and Kristine McGrath from University of Technology Sydney, Australia included student peer review in an assessment for a large first year science subject. In *Students guiding students: integrating student peer review into a large first year science subject* the authors noted that using transition and engagement pedagogies to design student peer review activities resulted in a formative learning process, and facilitated engagement between students, their teaching staff and the work of their peers.

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## References

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Kahu, E. R., & Nelson, K. (2018). Student engagement in the educational interface: Understanding the mechanisms of student success. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(1), 58-71. doi:10.1080/07294360.2017.1344197

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