

Mature age students: Enhancing retention through targeted support services

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A significant proportion of the student population at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) is comprised of mature age students (MAS). The UWS Students at Risk Project was conducted from 2007-2008, identifying MAS as among those most at risk of early withdrawal, failure or poor performance (Campbell, 2008). In response to these statistics the Mature Age Student Equity Project (MASEP) was commissioned. From 2009-2011 this project undertook student surveys, focus groups and research to better understand the often complex and diverse circumstances of MAS, with a particular focus on the provision of UWS support services. The students involved in this project were explicit about the support services they want delivered. To improve the support provided to our MAS and implement the MASEP report recommendations, UWS appointed a Mature Age Student Officer (MASO) in 2013 using HEPPP funding. Adopting a collaborative approach, the MASO has successfully developed a number of projects with the aim of improving retention for domestic and international MAS. This paper will discuss key outcomes of the MASEP report and demonstrate the importance of the MASO role. It will outline several UWS initiatives, both planned and completed, and illustrate how blended delivery options are being explored to enable greater accessibility. The challenges faced in accessing such a diverse group of students will also be addressed.

Key Words

Mature age students, domestic, international, retention, support services, blended delivery and accessibility.