

# CONTEXTUAL & SITUATIONAL INFLUENCES ON STUDENT SUCCESS

Keynote Presentation  
ANZSSA & ISANA Conference

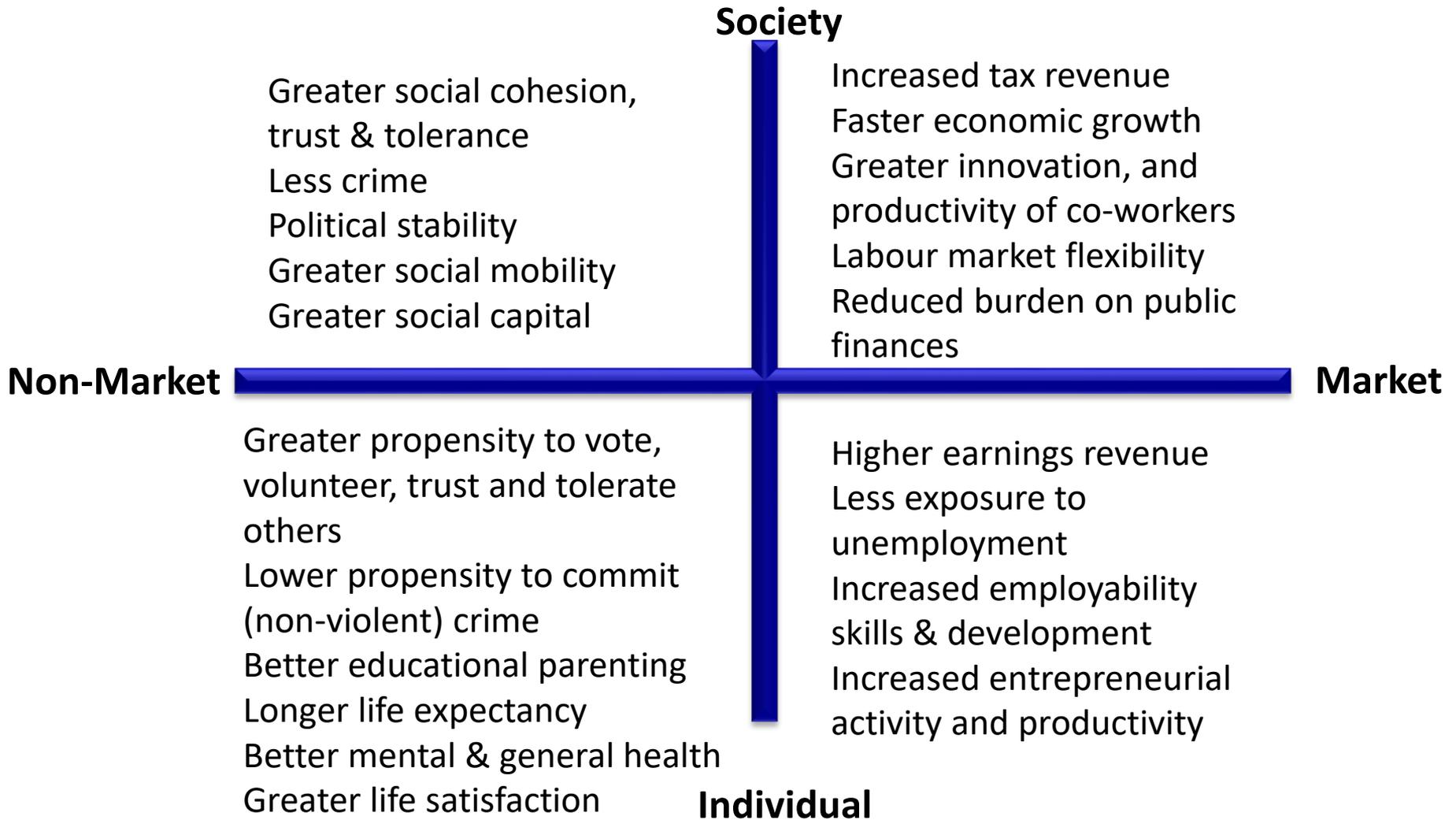
7 December 2017

Professor Karen Nelson  
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students)

*“Higher education can transform the lives of individuals and through them their communities and the nation by engendering a love of learning for its own sake and a passion for intellectual discovery”.*

Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales (2008)  
Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report

# “The Quadrants”



<https://www.gov.uk/search?q=benefits+of+higher+education>

# Even a little higher education 'is better than none', study suggests

Dropouts do better in the labour market than those who never entered university, finds international analysis. Jack Grove writes

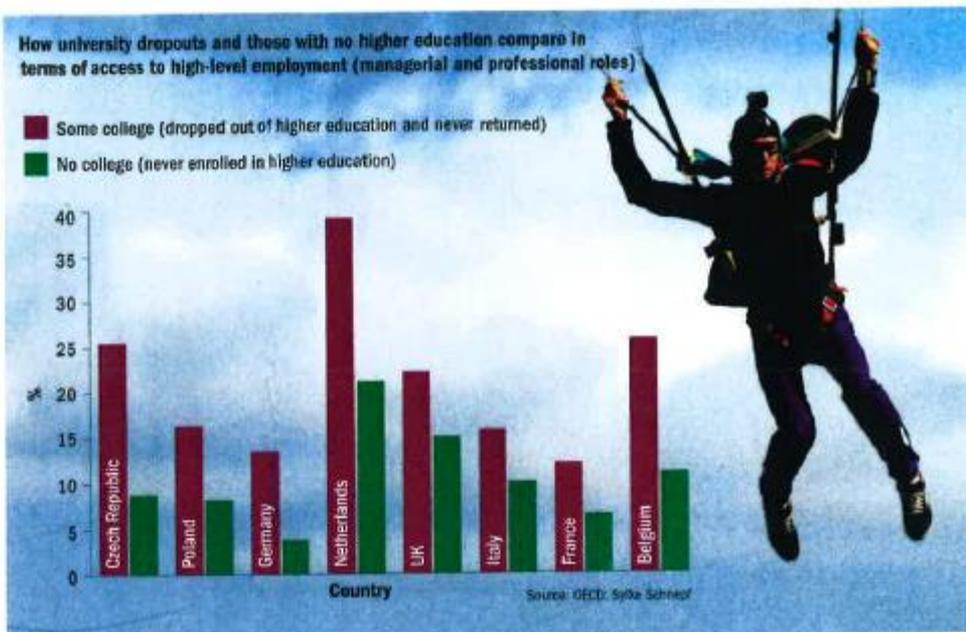
Is it better to be a university dropout or to not have gone to college at all?

While there are often very good reasons for leaving university early, many worry that having "some college, no degree" on their job application will result in their CV being moved to the bottom of the interview shortlist pile.

Those university non-completers might wonder if they should have been advised to plunge straight into the job market rather than face a lifetime of explaining why they failed to graduate.

However, dropouts should not write off their time on campus because even a small amount of higher education is likely to improve a learner's life chances, according to a study published in *Higher Education Quarterly* this month.

While dropouts may fret about the stigma of leaving university



tertiary education – a 14.4 percentage point difference.

Disparities between university dropouts and those with no higher education are even greater if access to "top-level roles" is considered, says Dr Schnepf.

backgrounds than other upper secondary school graduates, which alone could explain their better career progression," admitted Dr Schnepf.

However, the paper takes account of this inbuilt "selection bias" in favour of dropouts by comparing

Some 23.5 per cent of students in Denmark drop out, but 58 per cent of these people return to complete their tertiary education.

In the UK, a third (33.8 per cent) of dropouts later came back into the system to graduate, a similar proportion

Sylke Schnepf  
(2017) HE  
Quarterly 71(1)  
pp.75-96 DOI  
10.1111/hequ.12  
112

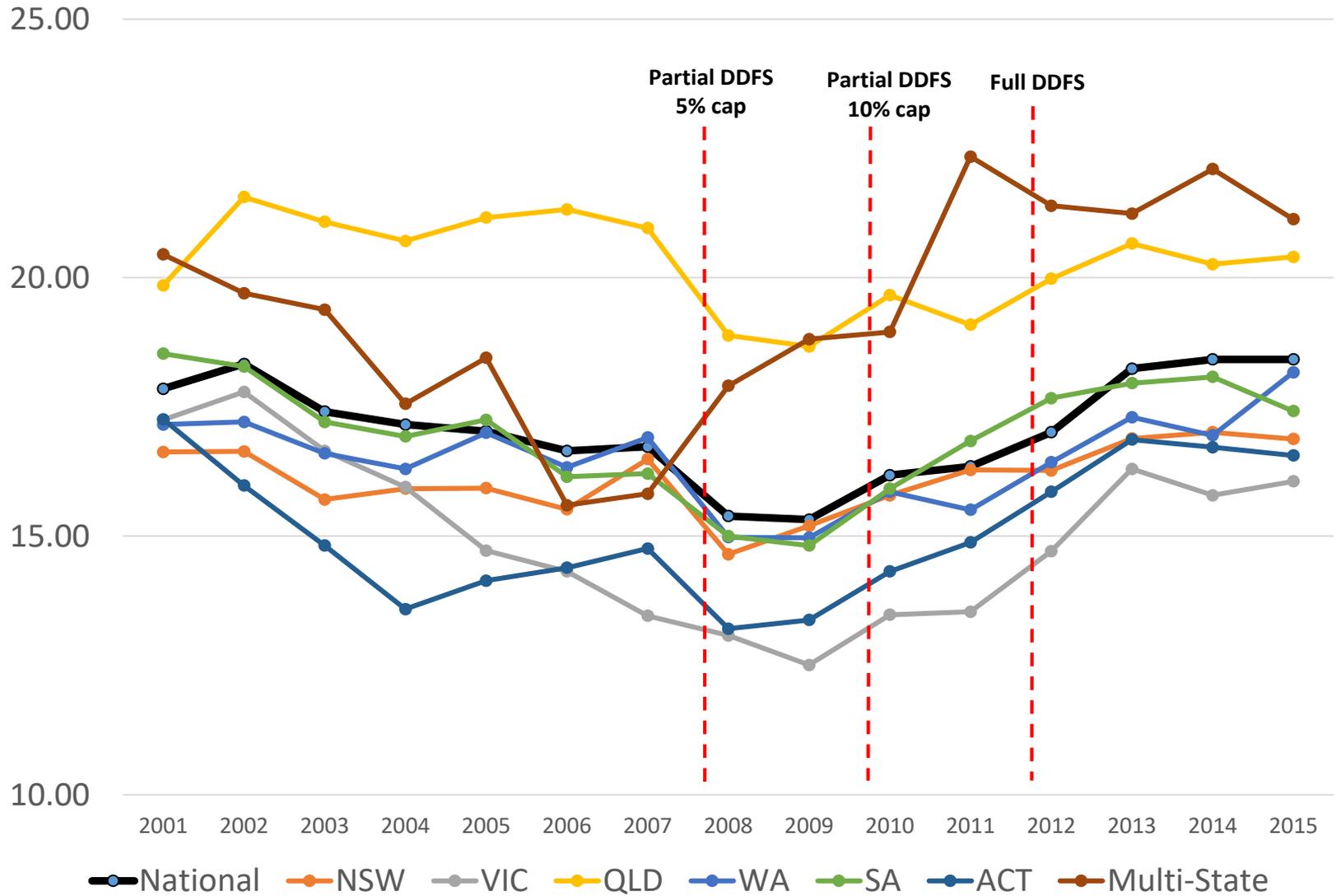
# Financial imperative\$

	<b>2016/1 to 2017/1</b>	<b>1% better</b>	<b>2% better</b>	<b>5% better</b>
<b>Base students 2016/1</b>	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
<b>Attrited students</b>	2,000	1,900	1,800	1,500
<b>Additional students kept</b>		100	200	500
<b>Additional funding *</b>		\$1,650,000	\$3,300,000	\$8,250,000

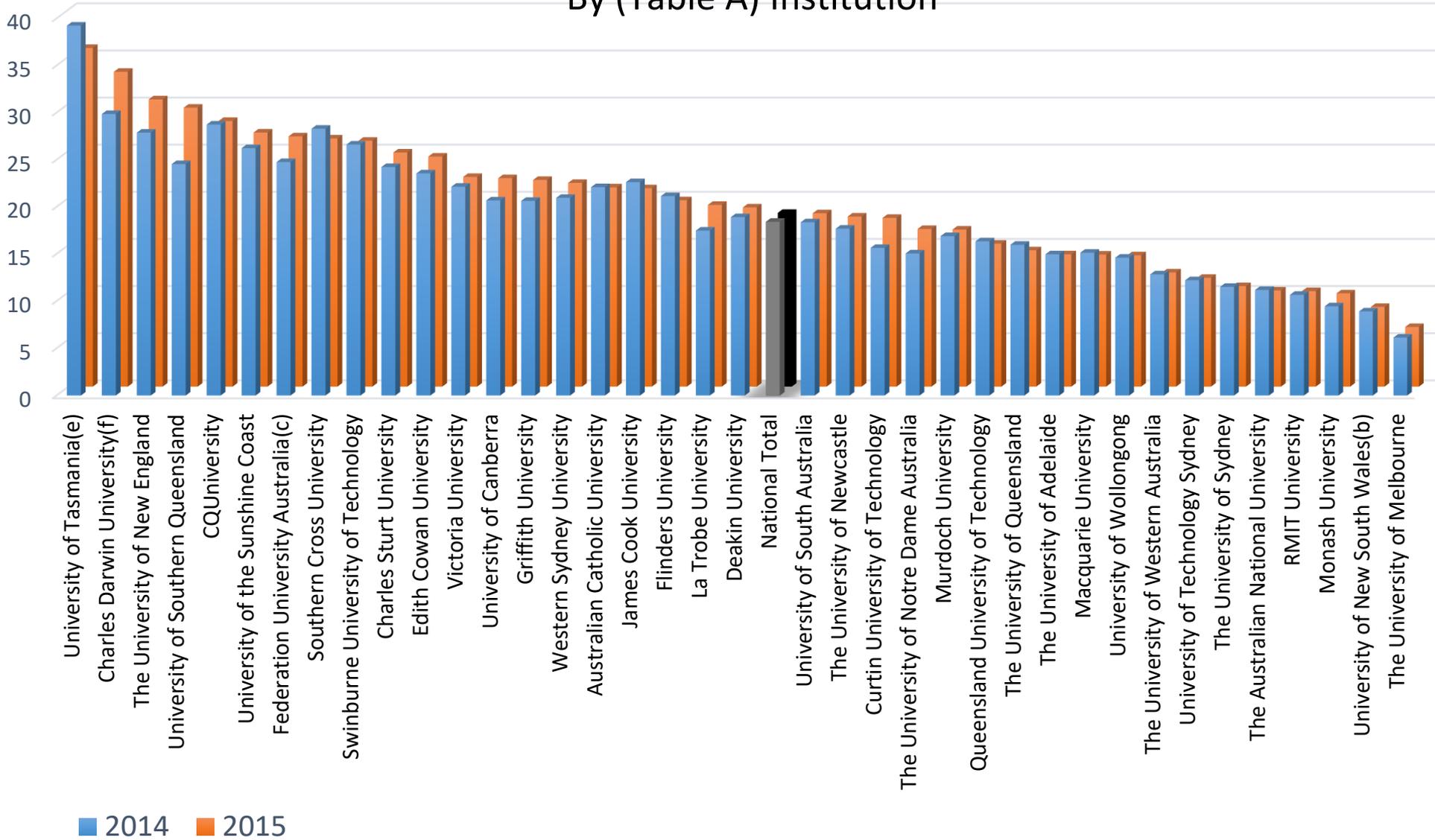
\* For the following one year - based on avg. total income/student in 2017 \$16,500



# New Attrition Rate (%) for all Commencing Bachelor Students by Australian State (exl NT and Tas) 2001-2015

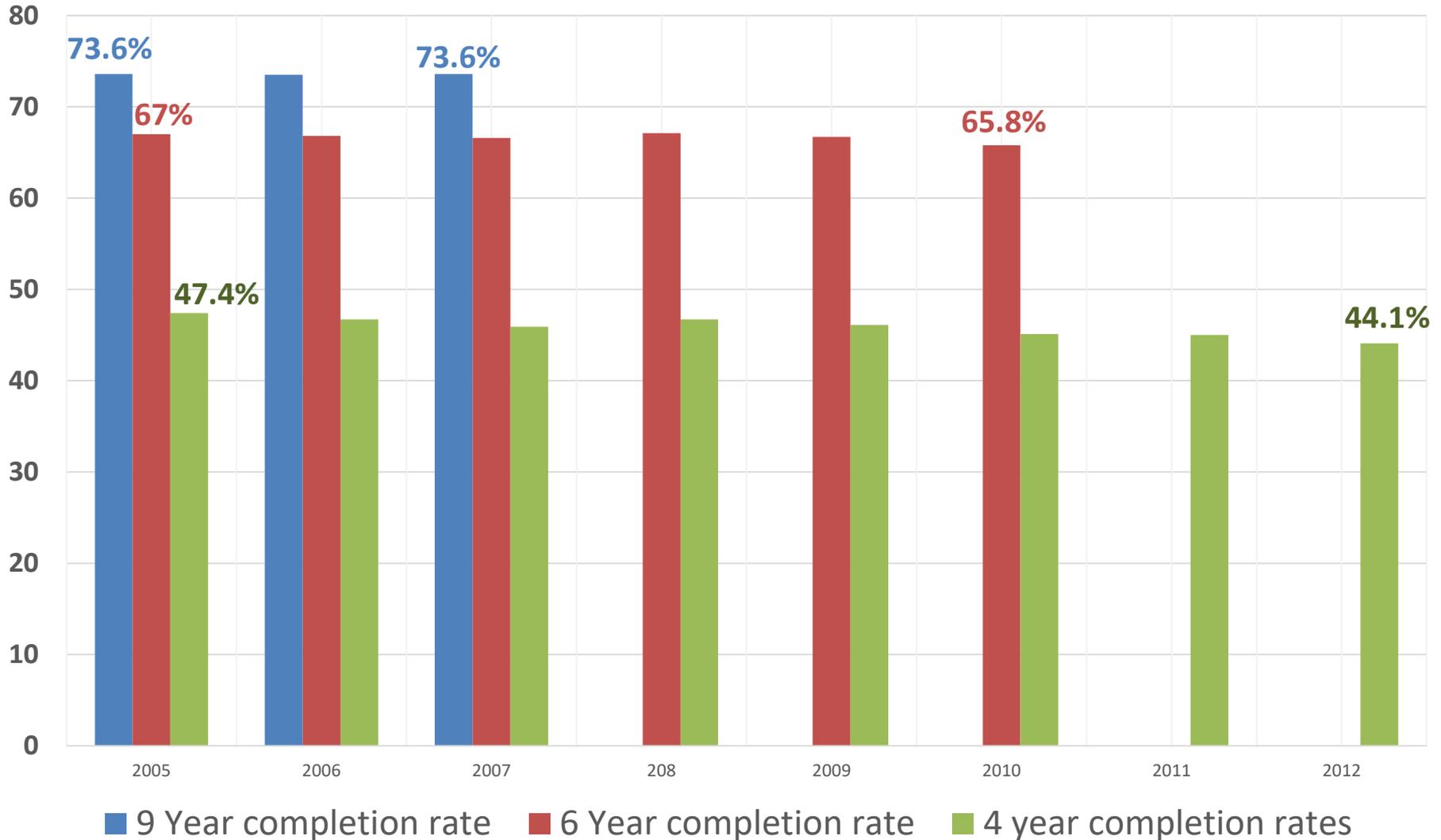


# New Attrition Rate (%) – All Commencing Bachelor Students 2014 & 2015 By (Table A) Institution

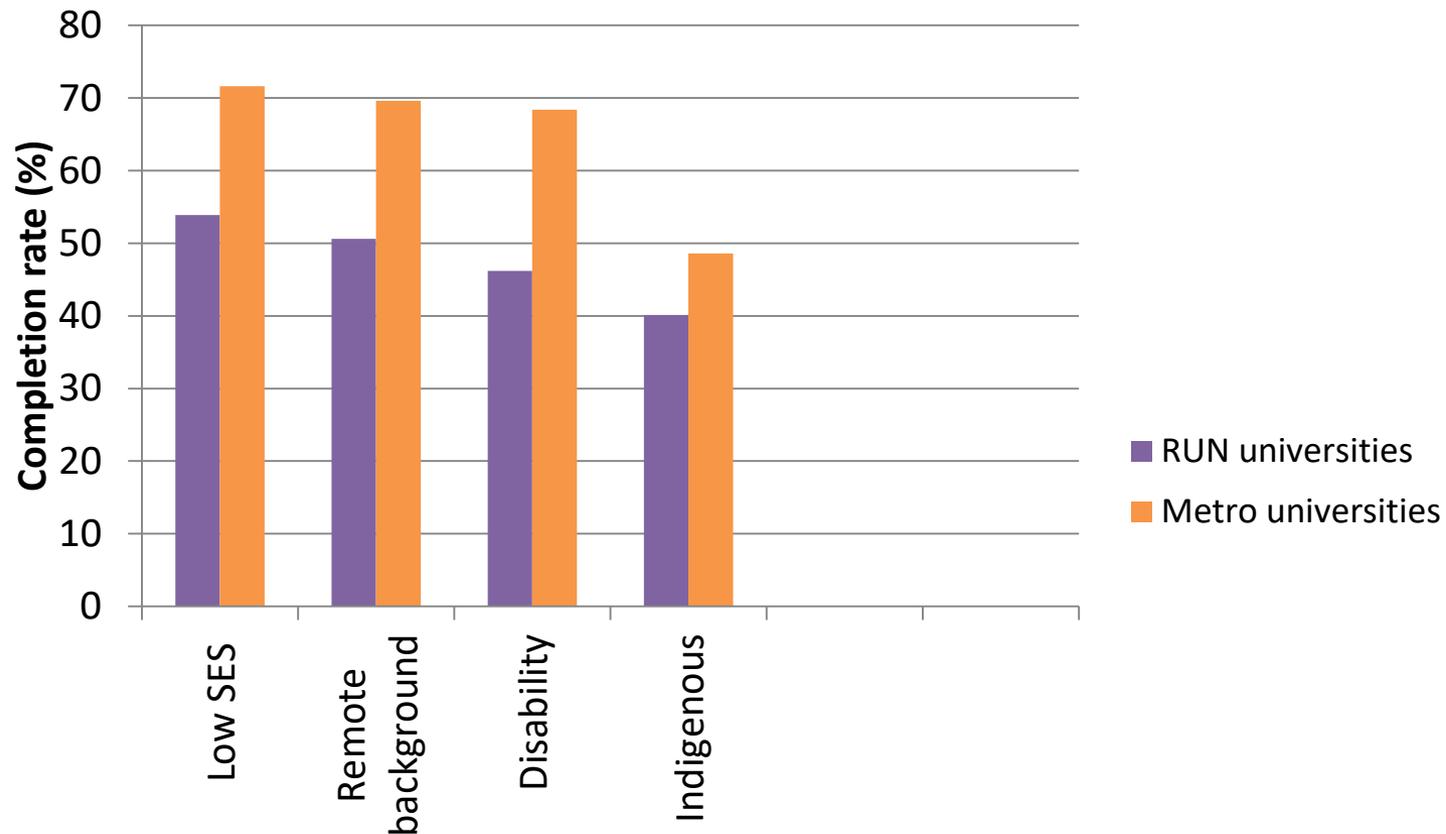


# Completion Rates (%) 2005-2015

## Australian Domestic Bachelor Students



# 9-year completion rates – by ‘equity’ group and type of university



Nelson, et al 2017 Understanding the completion patterns of equity students in regional universities. <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Nelson-Completion-patterns.pdf>

# So, what could explain these differences?

Australian Higher Ed – not an homogenous system

*Both structural & functional diversity*

- Critical differences in social, financial & cultural capital (Devlin 2013: ‘Socio-cultural incongruity’)
- Different levels of academic preparedness: well to “underserved”
- Different proportions of first in family & equity group students
- Different age profiles ...
- Different socio-cultural & geographical contexts
- Different institutional contexts

## Reject a Deficit Discourse

(Lawrence, 2005, Gale 2009, Devlin 2013)

## Stop Problematising Students or Institutions

(Devlin, 2013, Kift 2015,)

## Predictive Factors & Correlations

Exist But Are Not Directly Causal

(Kahu & Nelson, 2017)

# Jan 2017: 2005-2014 Cohort Completions Analysis

- 4 year completion rate 45.1% (2010 cohort) and 45% (2011)
- 9 year completion rate 73.6% (2005) and 73.5% (2006)

Student Characteristic	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> (variation explained), %
Type of attendance (full-time, part-time)	6.31
Age group	3.87
ATAR decile band versus other basis of admission	3.86
Mode of attendance (internal/external/multi-modal)	3.65
Field of education	2.08
Socio-economic status (SES) <sup>9</sup>	0.57
Indigenous	0.45
Regional classification (metropolitan/regional/remote) <sup>10</sup>	0.36
Gender	0.25
Person from a Non-English speaking background <sup>11</sup>	0.05
<b>Full model including above variables</b>	<b>12.16</b>

<https://www.education.gov.au/completion-rates-cohort-analyses>

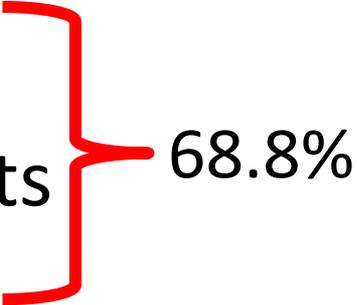
p.7 Low proportion of variance “likely to be many other factors not captured by the model that might account for completion”

*...motivation ... and resilience*

# June 2017 TEQSA

*Characteristics of Aust HE providers and their relation to First Year attrition.*

Whole of sector model:

- Admission on VET basis
  - Lower % of p/grad students
  - Smaller institutions
  - Lower % senior academic staff
  - Higher % part-time enrolments
- 
- 68.8%

# June 2017: HESP Discussion Paper

*“Improving retention, completion and success in HE”*

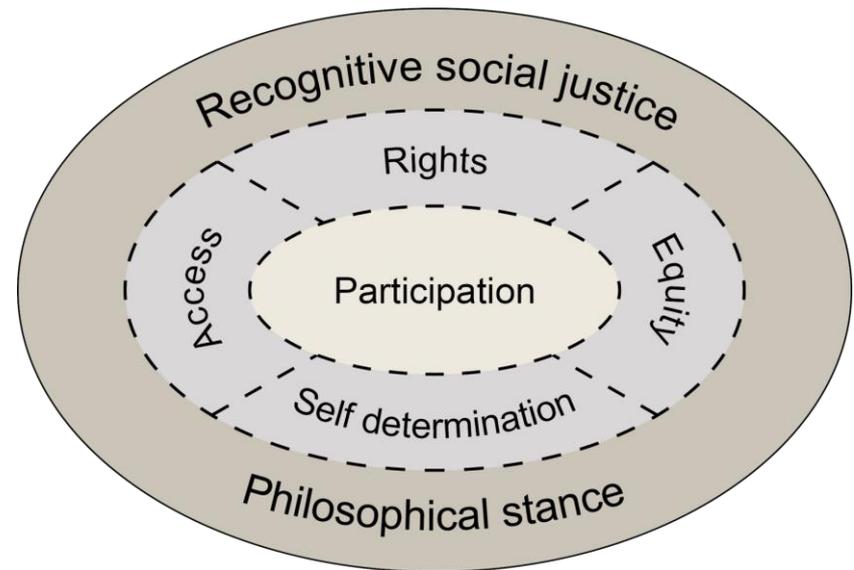
- Investigated the ‘crisis’ in attrition rates wrt:
  - Poor admission standards
  - Students with low ATARs
  - DDS having delivered too many students
- Crisis – what crisis – facts do no support assertions

Student Characteristic	Variation explained %
Institution	18.83
Type of attendance (full/p-time)	4.94
Mode (int, ext, mm)	3.12
Age group <20, 20-24, 25+	2.66
Basis of admission	2.51
FoE	1.49
SES	0.29
Indigeneity	0.14
NESB	0.08
Gender	0.01
<b>FULL MODEL</b>	<b>22.55</b>

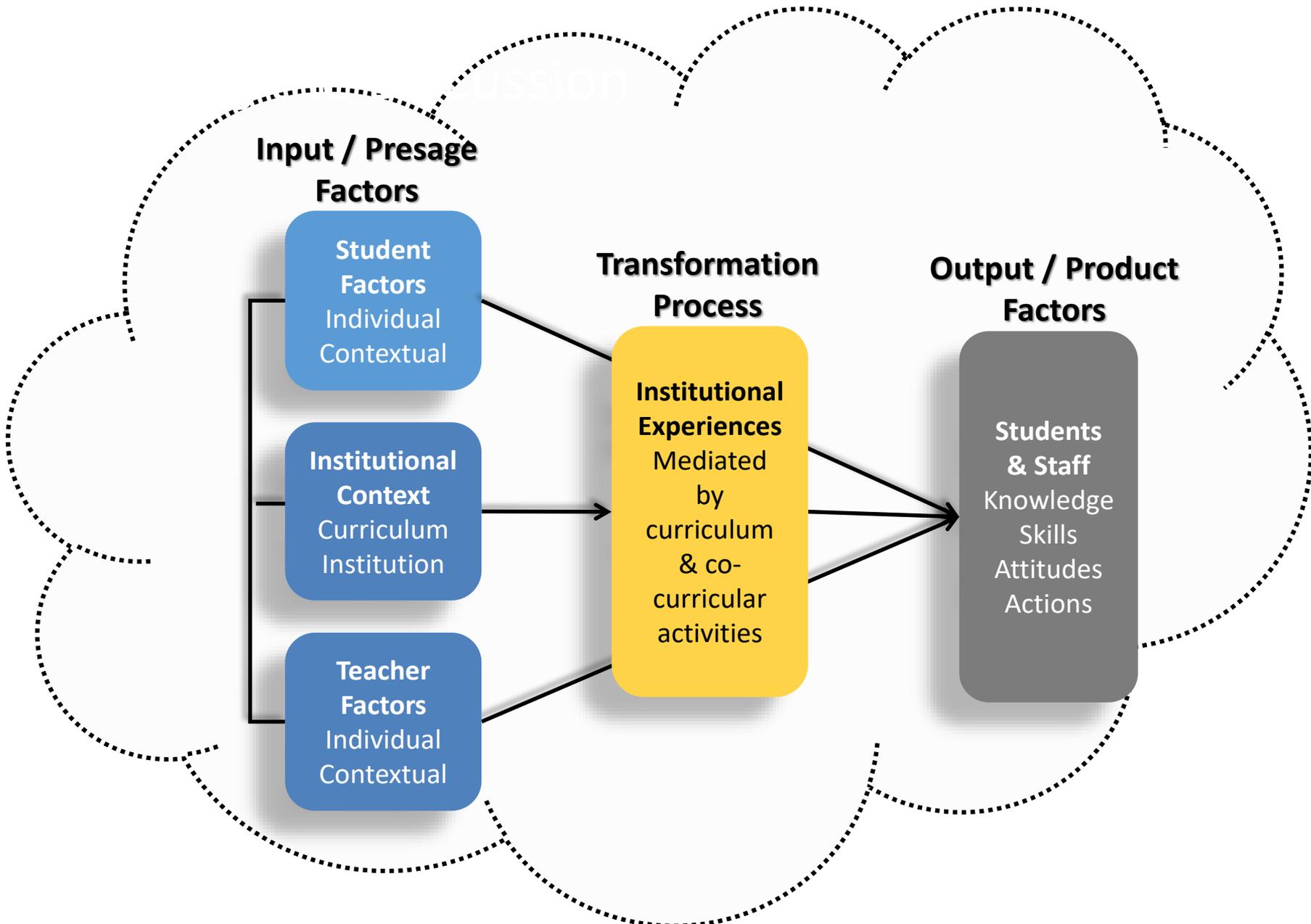


Image: <http://www.complex.com/art-design/2013/11/banksy-greatest-works/follow-your-dreams>

A moral and ethical imperative to work out what is going on so we can provide the best possible opportunity for students to succeed.



<https://safeguardingstudentlearning.net/>



Nelson, K., Kift, S., & Clarke, J (2012) A transition pedagogy for student engagement and first year learning, success and retention. In Ian Solomonides, Anna Reid and Peter Petocz (eds) *Engaging with Learning in Higher Education* (ELHE) Faringdon, UK Libri Publishers.

# External Environment

## - Structural factors

- Geographical location:
  - Near & distant regional, c.f. remote (Pollard, 2017)
  - Access to campus / study location
- Financial constraints → financial stress:
  - Living affordability
  - Access to regular and secure employment
- Resources:
  - High-bandwidth internet
  - Child care (student friendly!)
- Travel:
  - Time, opportunity and \$ cost, practical distance
- Inter-generational socio-cultural disadvantage & poverty
- Multiple equity group membership
  - Compounding impact

Nelson, et al 2017 Understanding the completion patterns of equity students in regional universities.

<https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Nelson-Completion-patterns.pdf>

# Suite of responses

## **Political, regulatory and policy responses (External to HE)**

- Increase investment in regional schools and pathways to tertiary opportunities
- Continue to build partnerships to enhance regional infrastructure and communities.
- Focus on building economic stability in regional communities.
- Mitigate inter-generational disadvantage.
- Promote emotional wellbeing through compensating disadvantage.
- Establish and maintain constructive engagement with regional communities.
- Continue to support relevant research.
- Recognize flexible progression pathways and nested qualifications.
- Financial subsidies for most disadvantaged students

# Institutional actions

## Influencing external environment

- Continue community and family outreach programs to further develop responsive student support networks.
- Engage families and communities to broaden the understanding and experience of 'going to university'.

## Internal environment

- Offer flexible access to learning resources, curriculum structures, delivery modes and schedules.
- Create a sense of belonging through partnerships with students.
- Respond to students' challenges by enabling **constructive cycles** of learning.
- Offer greater flexibility in learning & assessment design & strategies.

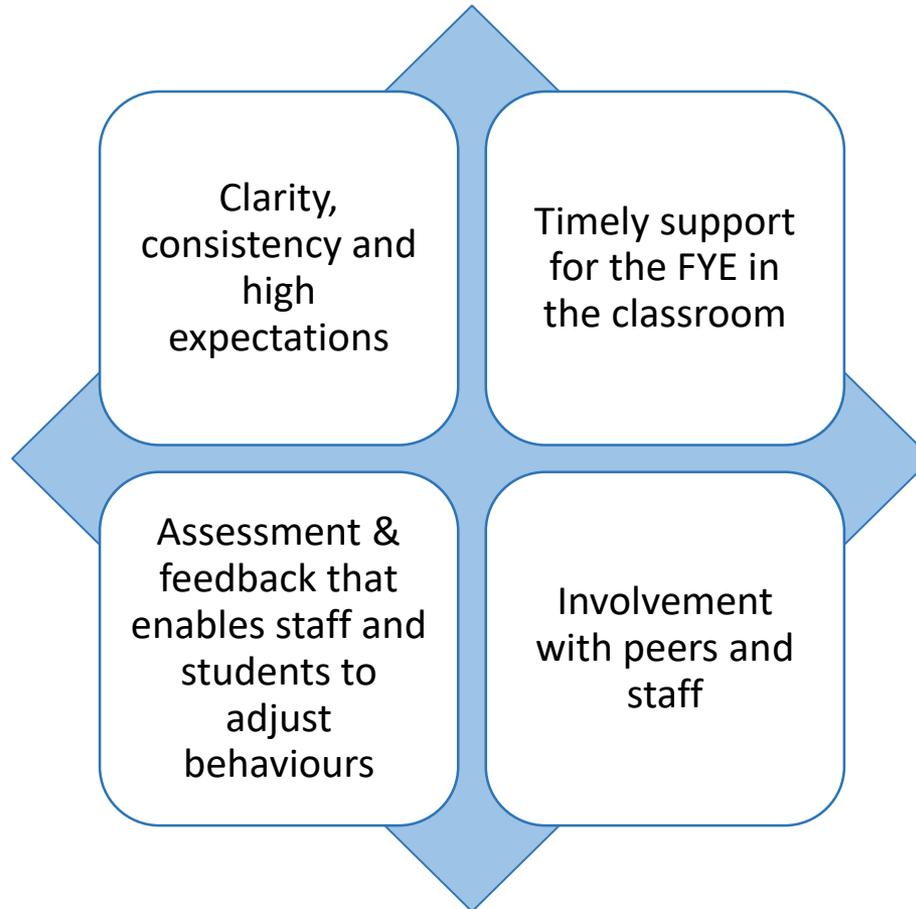
# For educators:

## 7 Good Practice Principles

1. Encourage contact between students and academic staff
2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation between students
3. Encourage active learning
4. Give prompt feedback
5. Emphasize time on task
6. Communicate high expectations
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

Chickering and Gamson 1987

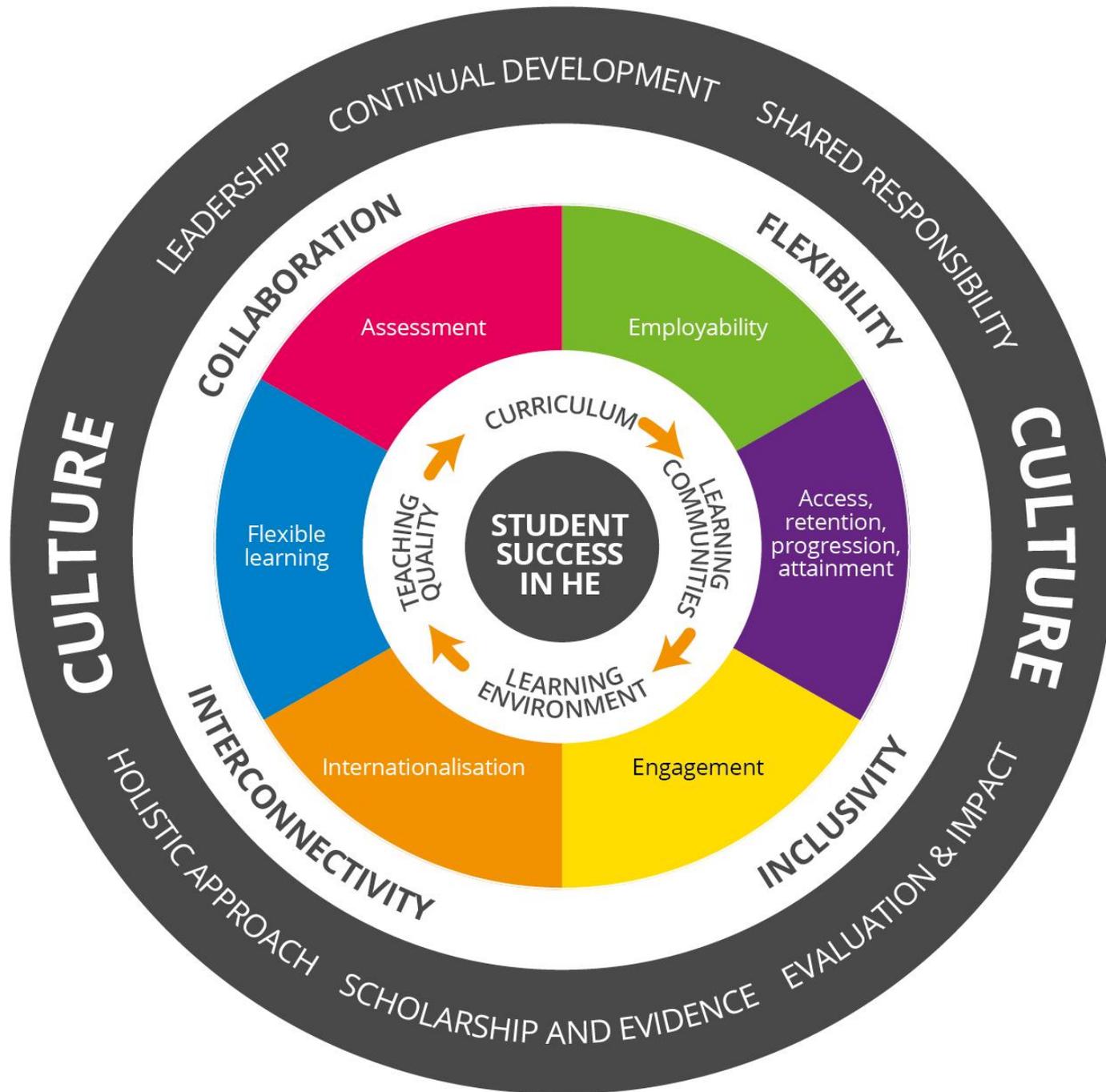
# Conditions for Student Success



Vincent Tinto (2012)  
Completing College: rethinking  
institutional action. The  
University of Chicago Press,  
Chicago.



<b>5 Categories</b>	<b>18 Processes</b>	<b>63 Practices (e.g.)</b>
Learning	Assessment	4: Design, feedback and relevant
	Curricula	2: Designed for progress and participation
	Teaching Techniques	4: Interactive, simulates SW, learning-centric
	Pedagogical style	3: builds employability skills
Supporting	Information about ...	3: subjects/programs, milestones, support
	Services and resources	3: financial, build capacity & skills
	People rich	3: local & central, advocacy, peers
Belonging	Interaction	4: inclusive, intentional, future focus, social
	Inclusive activities	4: cultural, diverse cohorts, int & ext comm
	Identity development	3: student and professional, leadership, confidence
Integrating	Academic literacies	3: peer learning, skills, partnerships
	Personal literacies	4: in curric, social personal & prof attributes
	Activities (student-led)	5: fostered, aligned, monitor & track progress, x-inst
Resourcing	Staff Development	5: ac, sessional & prof, investment, rec & rew
	Roles and responsibilities	3: ed tech, defined, workloads
	Evidence base	3: available, shared, evaluated
	Communication	2: online & social media, clear procedures
	Learning environments	5: formal & inform spaces, resources, timetabling..



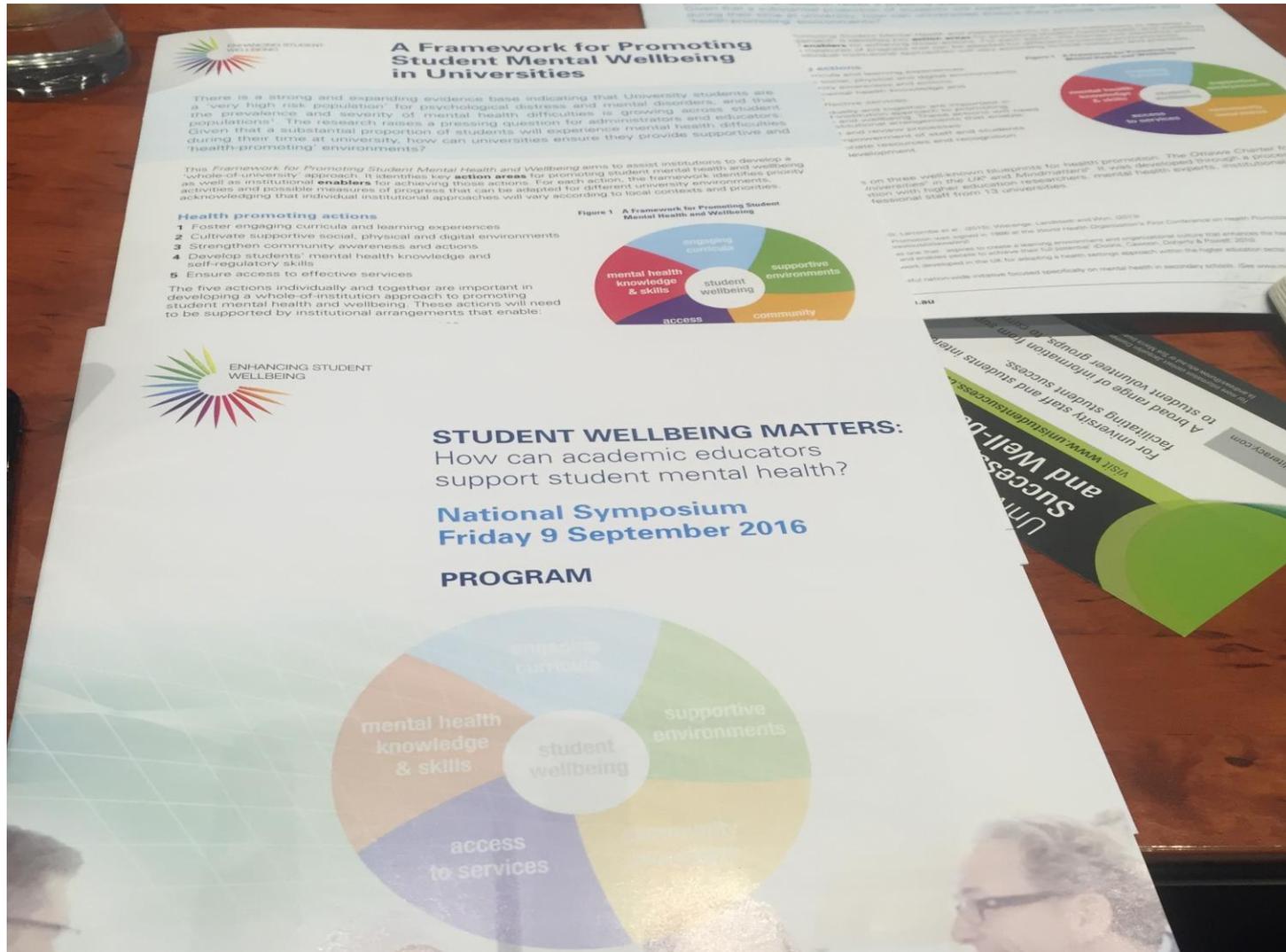
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Enhancing Student Success in Education

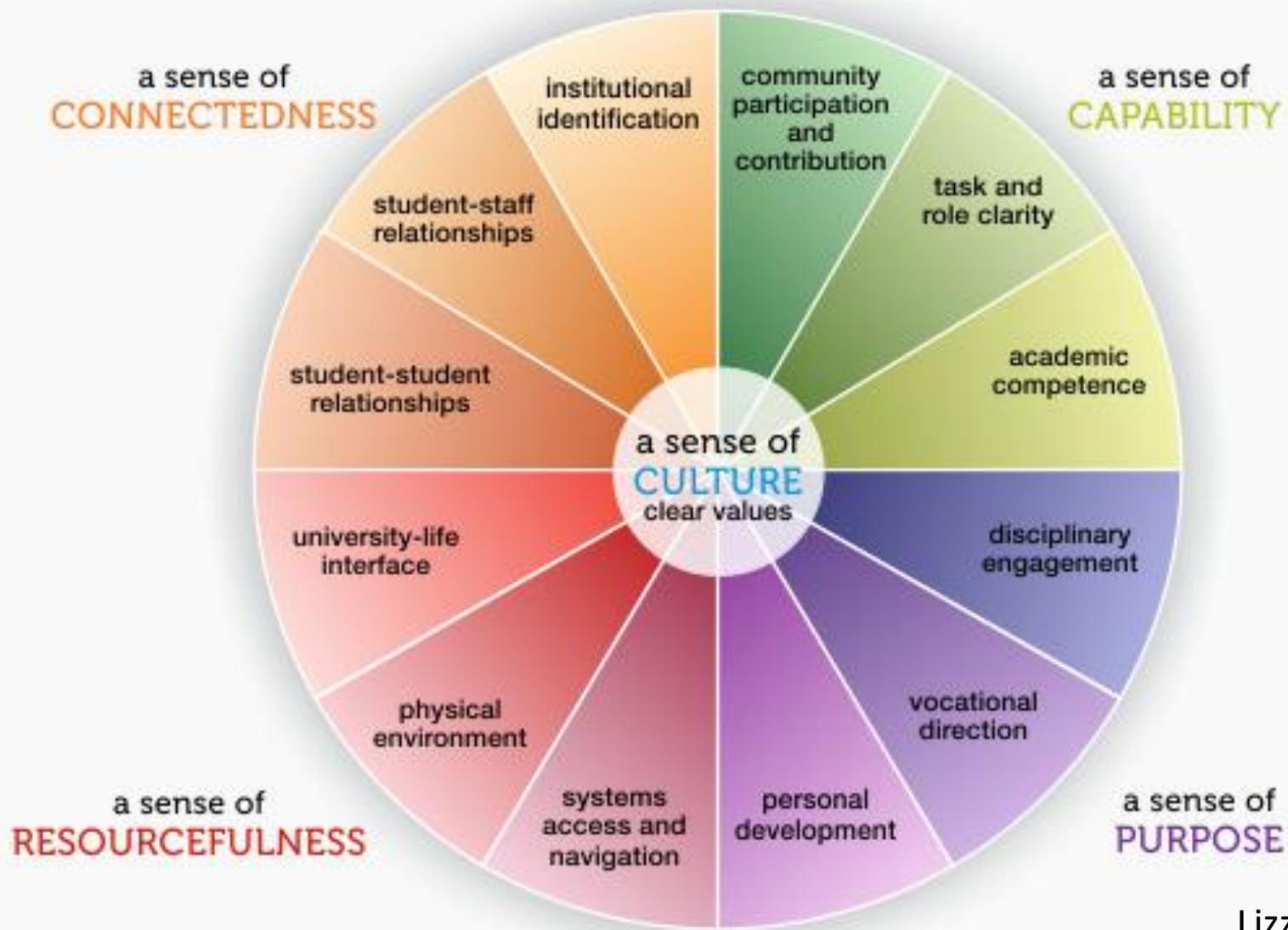
# Students as partners

- HEA – Student engagement survey and **toolkit**
- UK QAA – Student engagement in quality
- SPARQS – Student Participation in Quality Scotland
- In governance and decision making – Sally Varnham UTS
- In collaborative partnerships to enhance teaching and learning – Kelly Matthews UQ

# Increasing evidence that Student Wellbeing Matters!



<http://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/experience/enhancing-student-wellbeing/2016-symposium-student-wellbeing-matters>



Lizzio (2011)  
Five senses  
of success

*The 'Five Senses' of Successful Transition*

But, **how** do all  
these 'things' work  
to influence  
student outcomes?

# Focus on student engagement

1. Enhances students self belief
2. Enables all students to work autonomously & together, to build and feel competent and to
3. Builds social and cultural capital
4. Supports transition into university (the FYE)
5. Uses disciplinary knowledge to engage students
6. Considers student well-being
7. Adapts to changing student expectations
8. Enables students to become active citizens

“An enigmatic phenomenon”

Valuable tool in examining an  
enhancing the student experience

Solomonides, Reid and Petcoz (2012)

“A complex business”

Students investment in learning  
Supportive institutions & classrooms  
Enabling external environment

Zepke (2013) Int J FYHE 4(2), pp.1-14

Zepke & Leach (2010) ALHE, 11(3), p169

“Student engagement is  
complex with many  
meanings and conceptual  
uncertainties”

Ramsden & Callender (2014)

# The concept of engagement

**“The time and effort students devote** to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and **what institutions do to induce students to participate** in these activities (Kuh, (2001, 2003, 2009a) in Trowler, 2010)

**“the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions** intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.” (Trowler, 2010. p. 3)

the behaviours,  
thinking and emotions  
that lead to successful  
learning

(Reschly & Christenson, 2012).

# Refined Conceptual Framework of Student Engagement

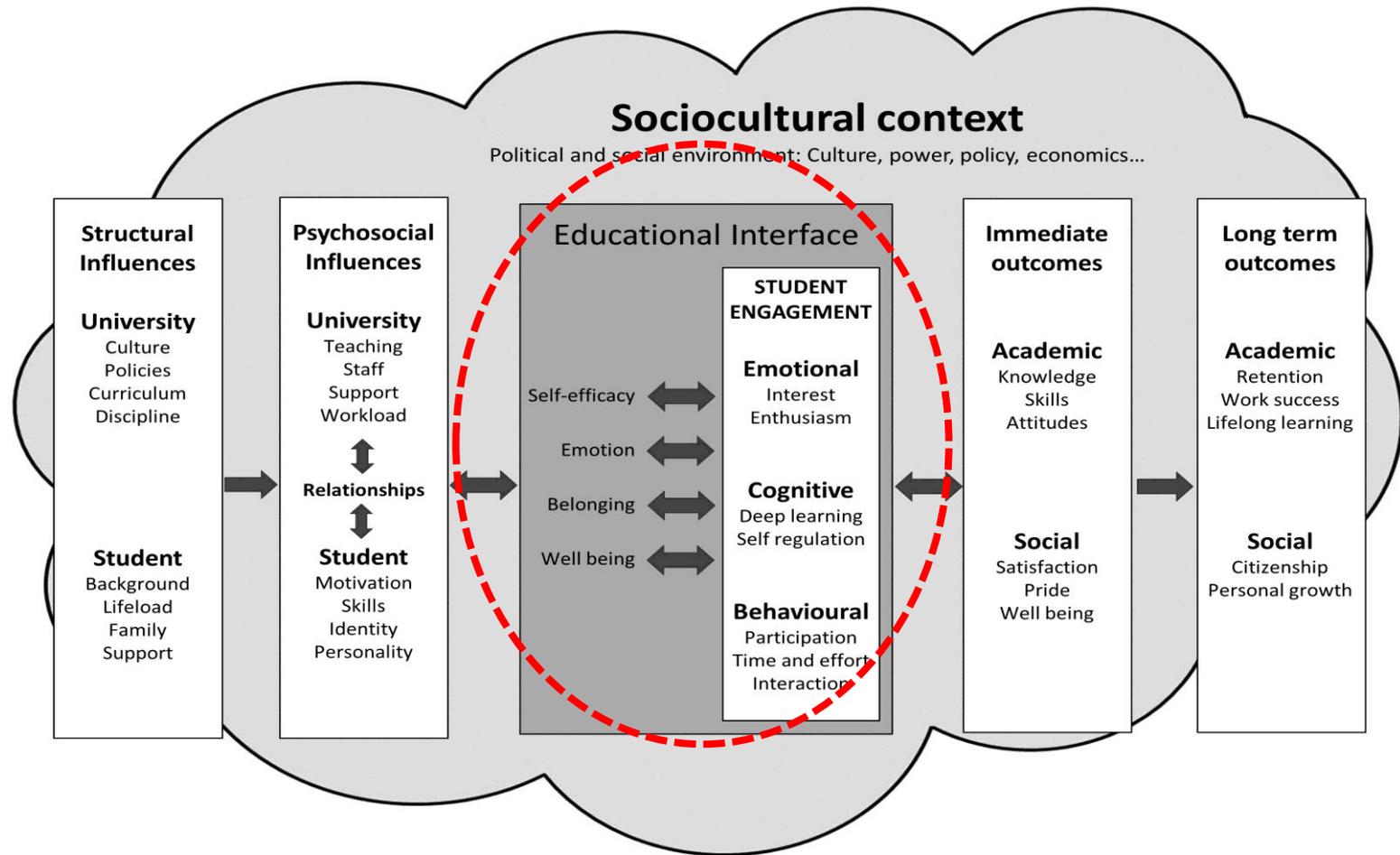
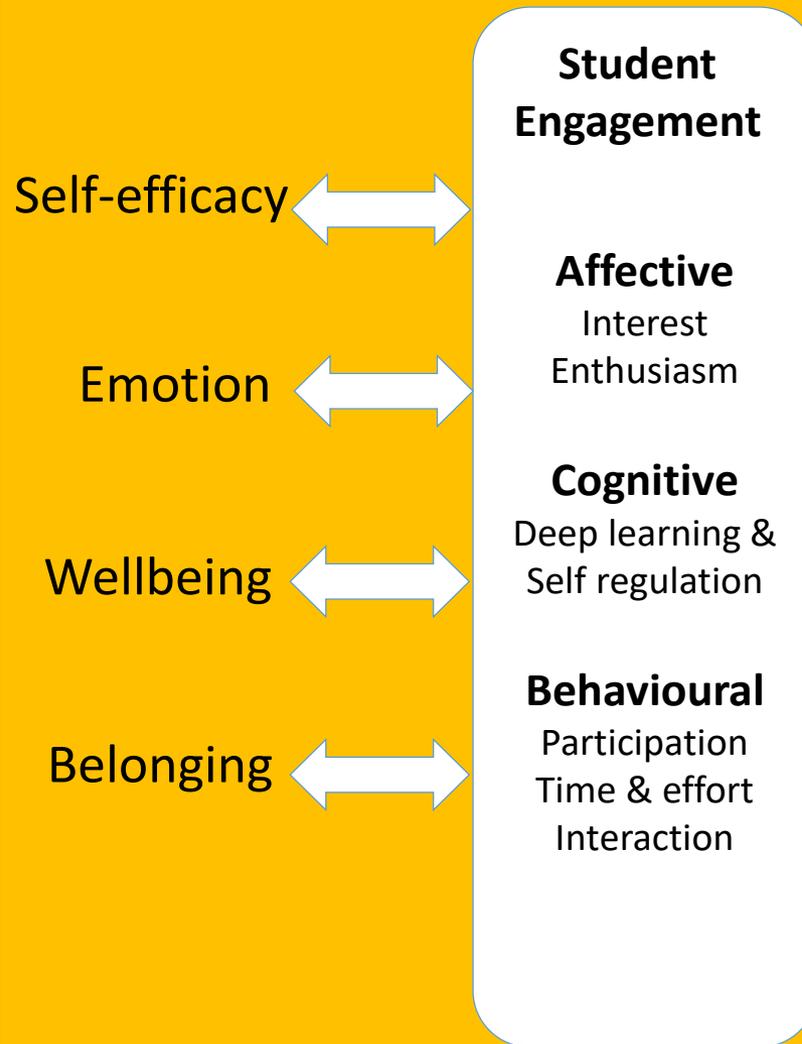


Figure 1. Refined conceptual framework of student engagement incorporating the educational interface

Kahu & Nelson (2017) *Student engagement in the educational interface: understanding the mechanisms of student success*. Higher Education and Development <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07294360.2017.1344197>

# The Educational Interface



Kahu & Nelson  
(2017)

# The mechanisms of student engagement

- Explain how institutional / course program initiatives/practices/behaviours 'work' for individual students
- Provide a design brief for new initiatives/practices
- Enhance & enrich learning outcomes for all students
- And critically, have the power to:
  - Mitigate previous and current disadvantage
  - Help address structural (external) challenges
  - Combat institutional characteristics influencing attrition
  - Change institutional culture



# Shaping the 21st Century student experience at regional universities



<http://shapingtheregionalstudentexperience.com.au/>

OLT Research Project: SP14-4602



# Research Overview

RQ – how do institutional practices ‘shape’ the student experience?

- 8 Institutions
- Analysis of existing data sets: demographics, UES, GDS
- Case Studies
  - 110 participants (65 students 45 staff)
  - 90 hours of data collection (99 Interviews / focus groups)
- Amalgamated data – for cross case analysis

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7 case studies

3113 NVivo codes

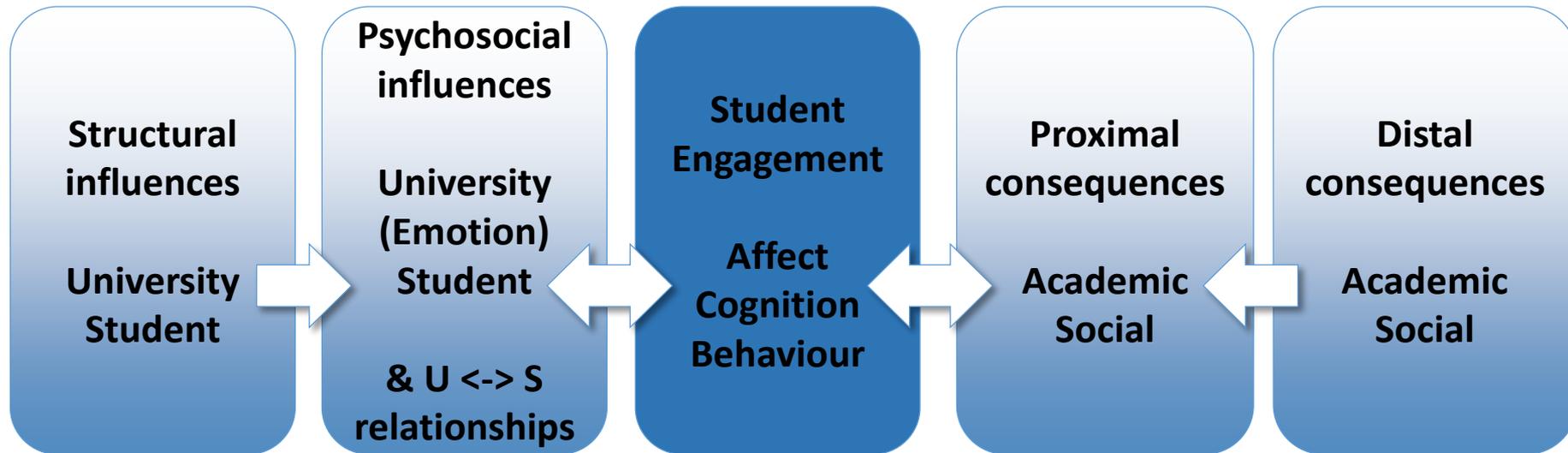
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390 000 words

1934 cross codes

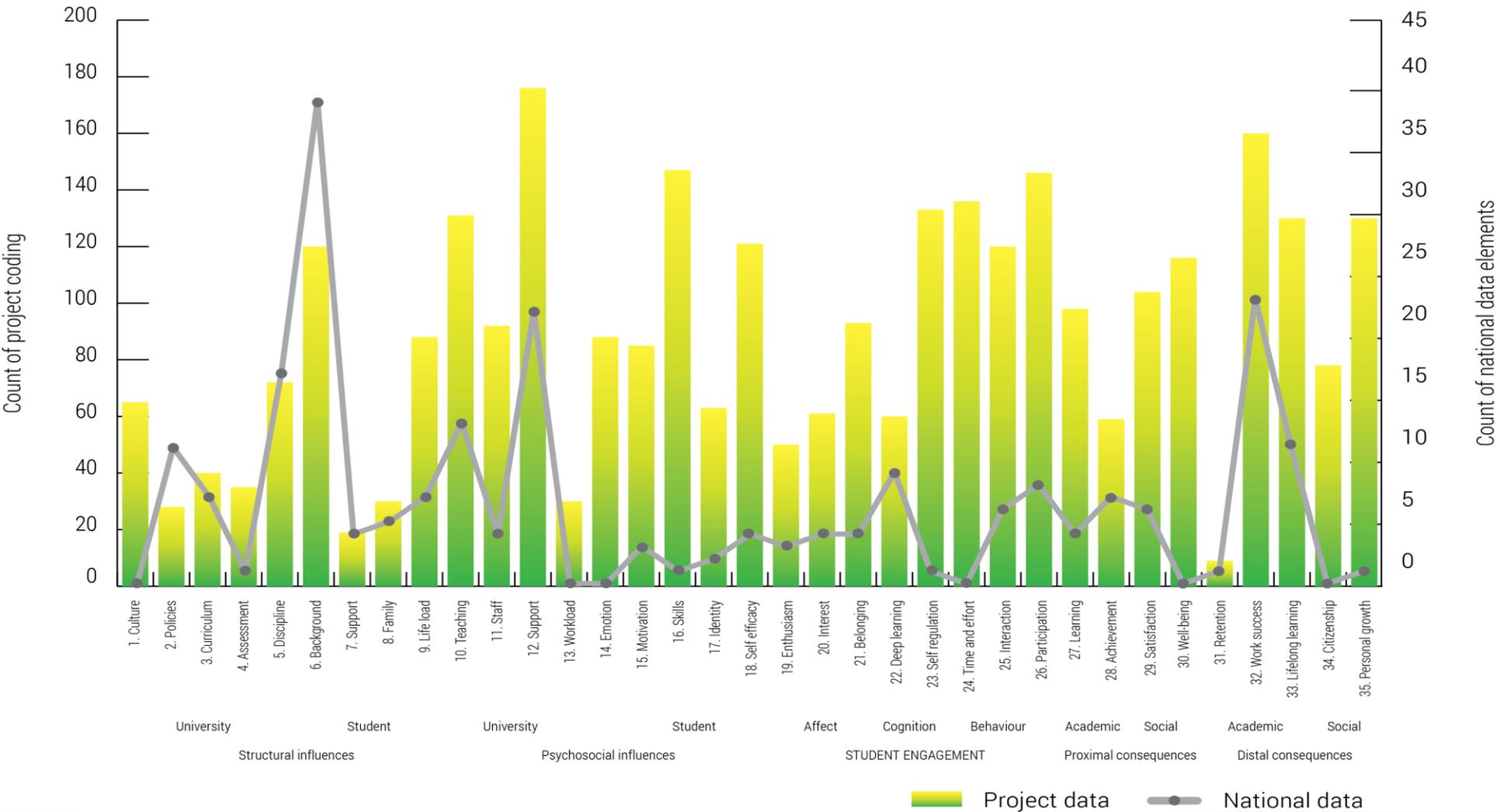
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# Framework for Student Engagement



Adapted from Kahu, E. (2014). *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 5(2), 45-55.

# Currently: input and output data only



# Case Studies: Curricula & Co-curricular Initiatives

- CSU – Online tools to enable joined up WPL
- CQU – Early IAR-focused early “intervention”
- FedUni – Access to student support
- JCU – Peer to peer support
- SCU – Enabling pathways
- UNE – Building citizenship capability for / in DE
- USQ – Scaffolded discipline skills design in FY
- USC – WIL in non professional programs

## Case studies

Each of the eight project partners conducted case studies investigating the student experience of initiatives in their institutions.

	Institution	Initiative context	Case study key finding	Good practice to shape the student experience
	<b>Charles Sturt University</b>	Workplace learning (WPL) program at a regional university.	Workplace learning shapes the student experience.	Use technologies to support relationship development among students, supervisors and academics, and to strengthen workplace learning experiences.
	<b>QUniversity</b>	Pre-enrolment interviews designed to communicate program requirements.	Early people-rich intervention improves transition and first year retention.	Begin students' transition to university with personalised two-way interaction to discuss students' needs in relation to inherent program requirements.
	<b>Federation University Australia</b>	Centrally provided student academic and transition support services and programs (SS&Ps).	Student support promotes 21st Century student engagement in a regional context.	Select and support high-quality and enthusiastic Student Leaders to facilitate positive interactions among less experienced peers in the transition to university.
	<b>James Cook University</b>	Peer-to-peer student mentoring program.	Peer support and advising enhance the student experience.	Promote and resource mentor programs to support new students as they negotiate the structural environment of the university.
	<b>Southern Cross University</b>	Preparing for Success Program (non-award enabling program).	Enabling pathways lead to successful outcomes.	Orient the curriculum and teaching in formal transition programs to enable student success while supporting them to manage life-load and other structural challenges.
	<b>University of New England</b>	New England Award Program.	Citizenship and graduate attributes enrich the student experience.	Institutionalise adaptable extra curricular programs to inspire students to engage with their communities as part of their learning.
	<b>University of Southern Queensland</b>	Compulsory first year core courses that embed core online and university literacies.	Embedded and scaffolded course design enhances students' online learning experiences.	Commit to whole-of-program, embedded approaches to enhancing digital literacy and fluency with online teaching and learning modes.
	<b>University of the Sunshine Coast</b>	WIL when it is not an embedded component of the program.	Work integrated learning enhances graduate capabilities, employment and career opportunities.	Work with students to design opportunities for innovative, authentic work integrated learning in programs where there is not an embedded placement component.



## Work integrated learning enhances graduate capabilities, employment and career opportunities

### The challenge

The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) strategic plan 2016-2020<sup>1</sup> focuses on the university as a capacity builder, and this aspiration includes a specific focus on its regional communities. In this regard, one of the educational strategies USC seeks to use is work-integrated learning (WIL). At USC WIL is offered as part of the curricula for 43 disciplines across both its faculties. WIL experiences can be broadly identified in two groups: first, those that are part of highly structured learning requirements in externally accredited programs, organised as an iterative, scaffolded curriculum, for example Nursing and Education; and second, those that are required or elective courses in undergraduate programs, which incorporate a broad range of stand-alone internships, special projects, study overseas programs and other opportunities for work integrated learning. Four different types of this second group of WIL activities (not externally accredited) were investigated for this case study. Law WIL, entrepreneurship WIL, drama internship and tourism WIL.

All these initiatives are established and embedded components of course curricula in Bachelors of Laws, Arts, Serious Games, Creative Industries, and Business.

Thirteen undergraduate students who were currently enrolled in or had undertaken the WIL course in the previous 2-3 offerings, and 8 academic staff with experience in development and/or delivery of each of the courses participated in the interviews.

*It was reassurance that I've picked the right degree... They're coming from local businesses on the Sunshine Coast, and it was that thing that tourism is real here, and if you want a job and you want to stay on the Sunshine Coast, you can do that*

The findings support WIL as an authentic educational experience that supports the development of transferable knowledge and skills for lifelong learning, employment and career development.

### Key findings

The data analysed for this case study revealed two key themes: Learning Works which captured and described students' experiences into three subthemes: crafting and practising; applying, innovating and experimenting; and developing

## 4

## Programs which activate students' motivation and self-efficacy assist in building identity and engagement

### Influences on these practices

The two practices described in this statement focus on student motivation, skills, identity and self efficacy, all of which are influenced by the emotions students experience as they participate in university education. Both practices are drawn from institutional case studies in different regional universities that have demonstrated the positive impact of engaging students emotionally in their interactions with the university – the first case study involves a university level initiative that allows commencing students to choose who mentors them through the first stages of their university life and the second demonstrates the importance of authentic workplace experiences in students' identity development.

### Good practices at Regional Universities

These practices influence students' psychosocial states, and act to influence and engage students throughout their time university.



James Cook University (JCU) Case study theme: Peer support and advising enhance the student experience

### Good practice 4.1

Promote and resource mentor programs to support new students as they negotiate the structural environment of the university.

JCU has a practice of providing incoming students (mentees) with the opportunity to personally choose a discipline-based mentor for their first semester of university study. Mentors are academically successful students in their second year or above who have been identified as positive role models. They participate in a competitive selection process and a one day training session

that focuses on their role, university-based support services available and cross-cultural awareness.

At JCU, the Student Mentor Program has been identified statistically as the university's most effective influence on retention.

Incoming students have the opportunity to meet prospective mentors on Welcome Day in Orientation Week of both semesters. On Welcome Day, mentors, based in their discipline groups, introduce themselves to incoming students and share aspects of their 'story' as a means of providing students with sufficient information for them to make a decision about whom they wish to choose as a mentor.

*we have such a diverse demographic of people, a lot of mature age, it's an absolute salad bowl of students, and we can always match them up... we look after absolutely everyone.* (Interview)

The JCU Student Mentor Program is a practice designed to support incoming students to negotiate the university environment during their first semester of university. Mentors act as role models who foster academic success and support appropriate help-seeking behaviours in the incoming student.

*once you recognise a community like that [the mentor program], you start to recognise how that fits into a broader community. Then that has really helped me to feel deserving, to belong somewhere, because I can give back.* (Focus group)

Mentors take on the role because they experience a sense of belonging in and to the university, which is created either by feeling fully supported as a mentee or recognising and valuing the sense of community found as a mentor. The mentor program should be viewed as more than just a retention strategy because of the skills and attributes that are developed in the mentor cohort.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.usc.edu.au/en/our-history/strategy-quality-and-planning/strategic-plan-2016-2020>

## Key findings

Five key narratives about the student experience



### Critical first encounters

When students encounter intentionally designed curriculum and support interventions, student emotion is enhanced and positive psychosocial (motivation, skills, self-efficacy and identity) responses are triggered.

**What this means in practice** is that curricula and co-curricular initiatives should be intentionally designed and implemented to activate motivation, skills, identity and self-efficacy.

**Evidence:** Of all the data collected, 46% were relevant to Critical First Encounters.

7 Image created by Gerald Wildmoser from the Noun Project



### Compensatory effect

Positive psychosocial influences increase student engagement and reduce the impact of previous disadvantage and structural risk factors.

**What this means in practice** is that initiatives designed and implemented to strengthen student motivation, skills, identity and self efficacy, will positively influence student engagement and mitigate previous disadvantage.

**Evidence:** Of all the data collected, 50% were relevant to the Compensatory Effect.

8 Image created by Hea Poh Lin from the Noun Project



### Constructive cycle

Positive psychosocial responses increase student engagement, which in turn increases learning outcomes, student satisfaction and well-being.

**What this means in practice** is that institutions are responsible for creating environments which engage students to achieve positive learning outcomes.

**Evidence:** Of all the data collected, 54% were relevant to the Constructive Cycle.

9 Image created by Wesley Hare from the Noun Project



### Capacity building

Student engagement increases students' academic and social outcomes, and builds capacity for post-university contributions/life.

**What this means in practice** is that all disciplines should develop students' 21st Century skills in context.

**Evidence:** Of all the data collected, 54% were relevant to Capacity Building.

10 Image created by Marek Polakovic from the Noun Project



### Cultural change

Achievement, satisfaction and retention generate enduring changes, which can break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and therefore bridge sociocultural incongruence between under-represented groups, and university cultures and systems.

**What this means in practice** is that improving the outcomes for current students also redresses inherent inequalities.

**Evidence:** Of all the data collected, 44% were relevant to Cultural Change.

11 Image created by József Balázs-Hegedűs from the Noun Project

## Compensatory Effect



Created by Hea Poh Lin from the Noun Project

Positive psychosocial influences increase student engagement and reduce the impact of previous disadvantage and structural risk factors

**What this means in practice is:** that initiatives designed and implemented to strengthen the student motivation, skills, identity and self-efficacy, will positively influence student engagement and mitigate previous disadvantage.

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**What this means in practice** is that improving the outcomes for current students also redresses inherent inequalities.

**Evidence:** Of all the data collected, 44% were relevant to Cultural Change.

11 Image created by József Balázs-Hegedűs from the Noun Project

- 1. Intentionally design and enact** administrative practices, including admissions pathways, **to ensure all students are able to participate fully** in the university's formal and informal activities.
- 2. Intentionally design all curricula and co-curricular activities to activate** student motivation, **build** academic skills, promote discipline and **student identity**, and develop students' **self-efficacy**.
- 3. Design and universally implement** curricula and co-curricular interventions to ensure that previous disadvantage and structural risk factors are **mitigated through systematic** institutional practices **that privilege** behavioural, cognitive and affective **student engagement**.

- 4. Assure quality** in learning, teaching and student experience practices, **measured by** positive student learning outcomes and achievement, and high levels of student satisfaction and well-being.
- 5. Focus, within discipline curricula, on developing future-proof employability skills**, including advanced digital literacy, enterprise skills and entrepreneurship.
- 6. Minimise the socio-cultural incongruence** between communities and higher education institutions, through **sustained attention** to cultural, structural and practical organisational change.

7. **Provide access to information** about students' movements, over time and among institutions.
8. **Review the learner engagement scale in the SES**, to ensure the collection of data is aligned with contemporary understandings of student engagement.
9. **Review indicators in the CEQ, GDS and (proposed) ESS**, to ensure the collection of information about students' engagement experience and skills is aligned with the key findings of this study.

# CONTEXTUAL & SITUATIONAL INFLUENCES ON STUDENT SUCCESS

Keynote Presentation  
ANZSSA & ISANA Conference

7 December 2017

Professor Karen Nelson  
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students)