

Report for the Robbie Ewan Fellowship

Widening Access, Transition and Induction at three Melbourne Universities

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Acknowledgements

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La Trobe University, Monday 22nd and Tuesday 23rd February

Jenny Lee (Executive Officer) to the Vice-President (Administration)
Julianne East, Director Student Learning & Engagement LTLT
Susan Davies, Director Community Engagement
Angela Cincotta-Segi, Coordinator of Student Learning
Mark Rose, Executive Director Indigenous Strategy & Education
Sharon Karasmanis, Manager Learning & Teaching, Library
Robyn Shaw, Associate Director Business Transformation
Laurie Ransom, College Education Team Leader, SHE
Shawn Walker, Director, Schools Engagement & Student Recruitment

Monash University, Wednesday 24th (Caulfield Campus) and Thursday 25th February (Clayton Campus)

Kate Duyvestyn, Manager, Access Monash
Judith Little, Manager, Orientation and Transition

University of Melbourne, Friday 26th February

Dr Ryan Naylor, Lecturer in Higher Education, Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education

Background

Student Transitions is a very topical issue with the current QAA Enhancement Theme of Student Transitions focusing on transitions into, during and out of university. The opportunity to explore the approach to induction and transition in another country allows the sector and Queen Margaret University (QMU) to benchmark where we are against other, international institutions. My own particular area of interest and work is around widening participation and how we can improve the transition for students coming from under represented or non-traditional backgrounds.

In Scotland, we are careful to offer targeted support to specific cohorts of widening participation students. This might include some or all of the following groups:

- first generation in HE,
- SIMD 20 postcodes,
- mature students often coming from a Scottish college into year 1 (Access courses) or
- students entering with advanced level entry from an HNC/D,
- care leavers,
- students from schools with traditionally low levels of progression to HE.

Australia has long had many similarities to Scotland in terms of widening access and attracting non traditional learners. For a number of years, Australia has sought to increase the number of students progressing to higher education from their “equity groups”. These include;

- students from a low Socio-Economic Status (SES) area (similar to SIMD20/40),
- students with low ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank) scores,
- students with an aboriginal or Torres Strait Island background,
- students from a remote area,
- students who are from non-English speaking backgrounds,
- increasing the numbers of women in non-traditional areas,
- students with a disability.

My visit included visits to the following institutions:

- The University of Melbourne, meeting with a researcher in the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education to explore similarities between Australia and Scotland’s widening access agendas
- LaTrobe University, as one of QMU’s exchange partners, it would be beneficial to see what type of induction and transition experience new students to LaTrobe have,
- Monash University provides “Access Monash” – a successful school mentoring scheme and access programme

One of the major differences between Scotland and Australia is that there is a demand driven HE system with uncapped numbers for undergraduate places. This is due to the fact that university study is not funded by the tax payer and students must contribute to the cost of their education.

There was a major review of higher education in Australia, commissioned by the government in 2008 known as the Bradley Review. The subsequent report, “[Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System](#)” made several recommendations, amongst which were:

- high targets for widening participation in higher education, with a particular focus on students from low socio-economic backgrounds
- promoting diversity and quality via targeted funding
- an upgrade of university and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) infrastructure
- further support to regional education provision
- development of improved pathways between the higher education and vocational education/training providers

The somewhat controversial targets set by the Bradley Review (Bradley et al. 2008, p. xiv) include:

- By 2020, 20% of enrolments will be from low SES backgrounds
- By 2020, 40% of 25-34 year olds will hold a bachelor degree

The Australian Government subsequently announced funding in response to the Bradley Review in order to support higher education institutions to achieve the goals set out, over the following four years.

In a similar move, the Commission for Widening Access established by the Scottish Government in 2015 produced it’s final report, “[A Blueprint for Fairness: the Final Report of the Commission on Widening Access](#)” in March 2016 and made 34 recommendations aimed at helping achieve equal access for all in Scotland. Amongst it’s ambitious aims is a statement that, “By 2030, students from the 20% most

deprived backgrounds should represent 20% of entrants to higher education.” (2016, p.18) with interim targets in 2021 and 2026 set for individual institutions and the sector as a whole.

More recently, there has been a shift in Australia from increasing participation to improving achievements and outcomes. This implies a need to consider equity issues across the entire life cycle of the student journey and not just at the point of access.

La Trobe University



La Trobe is a multi site university with in excess of 35,000 students and approximately 4000 staff. Its main site is in Bundoora where it was established in order to serve the local community in the northern suburbs of Melbourne which, at that time, was largely made up of low SES areas and had a large immigrant community. In addition, La Trobe’s regional campuses were set up in rural areas where there was a lack of aspiration to move away from home for education.

The University is celebrating its 50th birthday next year and as such is making considerable investment by upgrading existing buildings and facilities this year and in years to come.



La Trobe has just been ranked at number 58 in the world in the latest 2016 Times Higher Education 150 Under 50 ranking of the world's best young universities.

The programme for my visit was arranged by Jenny Lee (Executive Officer) to the Vice-President (Administration) and involved a series of meetings with time scheduled in for exploring the campus during the busy induction week.

Julianne East, Director, Student Learning & Engagement

Julianne took the time to set the context for my visit and we discussed various access routes and approaches to Widening Participation in Australia. Of particular relevance was the role of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges and similarities with articulating students in Scotland.

La Trobe Melbourne is a TAFE (Technical and Further Education) College offering qualifications which enable advanced level entry to La Trobe University. Throughout our discussion it emerged that La Trobe experiences similar issues to many higher education institutions in Scotland regarding the academic preparedness of advanced level students. Many are not ready for the academic requirements of degree level study and have unrealistic expectations of the courses and the level they will have to work at. A significant amount of work has been invested recently in updating and tailoring the online module, "[Ready for Uni](#)", which aims to help with preparation for the move to university level study. Once they are at La Trobe they can make use of the module "[Achieve at Uni](#)"

La Trobe recognizes that for many of their students, they may not be on their first choice of degree course, and this can cause retention issues further down the line. Therefore, in line with the Australian Government and 8 years after the Bradley Review (2008), La Trobe is now moving the focus from widening access to retention.

[Susan Davies](#), Director, Community Engagement

Much like Queen Margaret University, La Trobe is a campus on the outskirts of a city, and the university is keen to engage the local community. They invite local residents onto campus for events through out the year. Examples of this are the "Colour Me Red" fun run in May, a Comedy Festival in April and the Olivia Newton John Fun Run for Cancer Research in September. All these events provide opportunities for La Trobe students studying Events Management to obtain first hand experience of organising and delivering events. In addition, like Queen Margaret University's Business Gateway on campus, and the proposed development of the surrounding land, La Trobe University offers "incubator spaces" for start ups and small businesses in the local community, for example, they are working with Australia Post to offer a business mentoring service for the local Somali community in unused Australia Post offices.

La Trobe is fortunate to have a large campus with largely unrestricted development opportunities as planning allows for most development that is classified as being for the "purposes of education". There are some older buildings with historical listing (below) which are being renovated in order to house all administrative functions, such as HR and Marketing, but also a large section of this building is being set aside as a dedicated centre for school engagement and outreach work.



The wildlife sanctuary/corridor that runs through and around a large area of the campus is used as a practical “research lab” for students.

The Community Engagement team also works with a local community worker on projects designed to improve and benefit the local area. Project 3081 provides small grants and mentoring to initiatives in the deprived 3081 postcode area. For example, they recently awarded money to a local school to buy new basketball team uniforms and also provided funds to a local initiative which buys educational toys for the nearby detention centre, for young children to play with when visiting a parent. The funds are allocated through a scheme which invites local schools or community groups to submit a bid to La Trobe. The pupils/group must research their idea, obtain quotes, write the proposal and present it at an event on campus, thereby also providing a unique learning opportunity to young people who take part.

On a more formal, strategic level, the Director of Community Engagement sits on various community planning groups and identifies opportunities which will provide added value for La Trobe such as employability experiences to students, for example, expansion of the local hospital onto the edges of the campus.

La Trobe is a key anchor point of the local government’s development strategy for North East Melbourne as it is expected to expand by over 1 million residents in the next 10 years.

Professor Mark Rose, Executive Director, Indigenous Strategy and Education

“La Trobe is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both as individuals and communities through teaching and learning, research and community partnerships across all our campuses.” (Gamagoen Yarrbat, Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2017, p. 1)

By 2017 the university aims to have met the Bradley Review Access Rate, where the indigenous undergraduate population will be 0.9% of all enrolments (this is in line with the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders declared in the 2011 Census for Victoria). It is acknowledged that this is a challenging target and Professor Rose explained the main challenges facing both indigenous learners and universities in meeting such targets. It was striking to note the similarities that students from disadvantaged communities and backgrounds in Scotland have with this cohort.

Indigenous learners are more likely to fall into the Australian Equity Groups previously described.

As with young learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in Scotland, there is an attainment gap and indigenous learners are more likely to have a low ATAR. This means they frequently use the TAFE route to access university. Their academic preparedness can also be an issue for them regarding not only access, but retention and completion of studies. Access to schools for indigenous learners in remote areas and absenteeism – which is significantly higher in this cohort than others - contributes to reduced levels of academic achievement, detrimentally affecting their ability to complete school with the required ATAR.

	Indigenous learners completing school	Non-indigenous learners completing school
Male	45.1%	72.1%
Female	49.5%	82.7%

Other issues which can affect indigenous learners engagement with education include coming from a family with limited financial resources (when travel to secondary schools from remote areas may be expensive), and possibly being non-native English speakers.

Once at University, retention is a major issue as indigenous learners often struggle to develop a sense of belonging and will frequently have financial concerns. In order to address some of these concerns, La Trobe has additional counselling services available to indigenous learners and supplementary academic input in the form of extra tutorial schemes. There are also a number of scholarships available to support indigenous learners financially with general education costs or accommodation costs associated with full-time study.

Professor Rose believes that tackling the long standing under representation of indigenous learners in Australian HEIs requires a two pronged approach:

1. Teaching *about* aboriginal and Torres St Islanders so that people can understand the historical and current challenges they face. The University has introduced an interactive learning module, Wominjeka La Trobe, which all new students will complete from 2015 entry and which will provide them with an understanding of the knowledge and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
2. Teaching *to* aboriginal and Torres St Islanders, so that they may achieve their potential throughout the different stages of their educational journey. This involves not only developing the culture within schools to support indigenous learners, but also working to improve the connections between schools, parents and the local community so that this cohort of learners have appropriate information, advice and guidance at all stages.

Angela Cincotta-Segi, Coordinator of Student Learning

There is a team of 9 staff at Bundoora campus, with additional staff resource at the regional campuses, who offer a series of academic support inputs for students. These can be viewed [here](#). Students are referred by their lecturers for one to one support, or can attend drop in sessions. These sessions are provided by peer learning assistants (PLAs) who are high achieving students, with a student learning lecturer always available for referrals or in case of problems or over subscription of a drop in session.

Peer Learning Assistants, including Senior PLAs, are recruited from all subjects, and ideally with a mix of demographics, different entry routes etc. The recruitment and training of PLAs requires a large amount of work to get the job description correct, advertise, shortlist and interview, and training needs to be designed, evaluated and tailored. The training includes advice on managing interactions (PhD students studying Psychology help with training regarding boundaries and referring on), and mental health awareness. Additionally, they need ongoing training, and support in the form of mentoring and supervision. PLAs are paid, which creates another administrative burden for staff and cost to the institution.

The University has identified 1st and 2nd year modules with particularly high fail rates and has provided extra training for staff on how to identify and support at risk students, including making appropriate referrals to the student learning lecturers. There is also a suite of online resources to support student's academic development. These actions have resulted in marked improvement in these areas.

Academic Advisor roles (Personal Academic Tutors at Queen Margaret University) are not yet widespread in Australia; however, there is recognition at La Trobe that retention rates increase if a student feels they are known by a member of academic staff. La Trobe is in the process of setting up a formal academic tutoring system. These tutors will be "Academic Development Advisers", not academic staff. They will offer a holistic service and will not just focus on academic advice. They can assist the student to "unpick" their problems, develop an action plan, negotiate the support services and follow up on progress. It is seen as a key part of the Retention Strategy for the University.

[Sharon Karasmanis, Manager, Learning & Teaching, Library](#)

The library offers a variety of methods for providing an induction to library resources – both personal and via interactive technology. For example, there are online orientation activities such as the new [Escape Room app](#) which takes the students through a library tour in the form of a treasure hunt. For those who prefer a more personal touch, during Orientation Week there are library tours delivered by library staff departing hourly and lasting for 2 hours. "Library Starter workshops" run throughout the first two weeks of term.

Furthermore, there is a package of new, redeveloped online [modules](#) for this academic year, focusing on various academic skills, designed and developed by the in house team.

An Online [Orientation Planner](#) allows students to build their own induction – they have some sessions which are "recommended" and the rest are optional.

[Robyn Shaw, Associate Director, Business Transformation](#)

The current focus of the Business Transformation unit is redesigning and improving student administration and services. There are 5 main projects being worked on at the moment:

1. AskLT: a one stop shop for students seeking advice on the Library, Registry, Student Services and IT. A centralised service with a Customer Service focus, it is based in the library and there is a "Concierge" who manages the queue. Students are booked in online to see the correct member of staff, and can then leave the library until their appointment time. They receive a text message to say their time slot is approaching, and then another to say it is now their allocated time. They have 3 mins to arrive before the next person is taken. There are 6 members of staff allocated to AskLT, but up to 40 extra casual staff are taken on at peak times to ensure enquiries are dealt with promptly. These staff also work in the Contact Centre.
2. Contact Centre: normally staffed by 12, this increases during peak time when they can receive up to 7000 calls per day. All calls are routed through this contact centre so they can be recorded, referred on and tracked.
3. CRM: Development of the CRM system allows the Business Transformation team to identify statistics and trends, and then look at solutions. The AskLT appointment system can feed into this analysis, allowing the team to flag up at a very early stage any problems which are arising on a regular basis across the institution.

4. Communication strategy: all emails, newsletters, promotions, formal letters regarding procedures etc will be sent out centrally from the contact centre.
5. Other opportunities to improve student life on campus through technology, such as transforming the campus into a cashless site and enabling all student forms to be submitted electronically.

The team is also working on a pilot of a Case Management system through CRM. They are working with 4 courses (800 students) to provide a dedicated “Guide” – a familiar point of contact for them who offers a personalised and proactive service. Each student has a PIN which they enter when calling, and it directs their call to their dedicated Guide. The system is being used to target at risk students who need a bit more support, and it is hoped that La Trobe will see improvements in both retention and completion. If the pilot is successful, the scheme could be rolled out to prospective students as a method of improving conversion. The applicant would have a consistent point of contact to provide them with pre entry guidance and assistance with enrolment. The student would then be “passed over” to a learning and teaching Guide (this could be the Academic Development Advisers, when established) once they had arrived at La Trobe.

At one of the regional campuses, Bendigo, the contact centre is starting to make outbound calls to applicants as part of their conversion activities.

Outreach in the College of Science, Health and Engineering

Laurie Ransom, College Education Team Leader

Outreach work is funded by the government through the HE Participation and Partnership Programme (HEPPP), which requires universities to target low SES groups through their work.

La Trobe awards money to schools in low SES areas to enable their students to attend workshops on the campus, for example, it might cover travel costs for those participants. This income is generated by charging affluent schools to attend workshops. Any remaining profit from the outreach work is reinvested into developing new workshops. Workshops can take on average 1.5 days per week of staff time throughout a semester to design, test and evaluate.

La Trobe works with a number of partner schools and targets pupils by subject. All their outreach work must add value to the school curriculum but not replicate it. Therefore, staff at the schools involved and La Trobe work closely to align any outreach activity with the curriculum.

Additionally, outreach work will be designed to complement the courses on offer at regional centres. This acknowledges the fact that students in remote or rural locations tend not to travel for education and therefore encourages them to experience subjects they can study further at their local campus.

In an effort to use the outreach work to engage the local community in the work of the University, the outreach team will employ local people such as retired or part time teachers and postgraduates, to deliver the outreach activity.

The Future Student Advisers (Recruitment team) have a remit including the Aspire programme. Aspire is a key element of the university's widening access activity. La Trobe believes "community counts" and therefore offers the Aspire Early Offer Programme which recognises volunteering and community engagement experience, and makes early offers (pre ATAR results) to enrolled Aspire students.

Students can apply to be part of the Aspire Generation programme in years 9, 10, and 11, and the Aspire Early Offer programme from year 12, and if successful, can secure not only the early offer, but participation in the Enrichment Programme. This offers:

- Support through the final stages of high school
- Revision lectures on campus during school holidays
- Access to the library
- Access to specialised online Aspire support
- Various on campus events, including a "Welcome to La Trobe" activity

Also, in a new initiative, the University is now following up with students who withdrew from a course, sometimes several years after they have left, to see if they are ready to return to education.

Although not part of my visit, I have heard Andrew Harvey speak at an Open University event on International Approaches to Widening Participation, and note the relevance of his contribution following my visit to La Trobe. He was speaking about the use of "Enabling Programmes" in Australia and their use in widening participation and preparation for HE level study.

Enabling programmes are bridging or foundation programmes that enable study at HE level for students who do not meet the traditional entry requirements for university. Enabling programmes aim to actively prepare students for undergraduate study, and provide a supported transition for underrepresented groups.

Typical groups of students who are attracted to enabling programmes include key equity groups such as:

- Refugee and indigenous populations,
- 1st generation students who have a lack of familiarity with HE ,
- those with low academic attainment and subsequently limited preparedness for study at degree level,
- students with additional external responsibilities,

LaTrobe's enabling programmes are delivered in partnership with a TAFE institution, and at regional campuses. Places are funded by government and therefore numbers are capped.

Attrition can be high on enabling programmes as there is link between prior educational attainment (ATAR scores below 50) and retention, so any evaluation of enabling programmes must take account of the type of student attracted to it.

It is difficult to evaluate enabling programmes as they do not fit into the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and people can be dismissive of them based on their high attrition rates. Deakin

University, Federation University, La Trobe University and Newcastle University are conducting a research project which will map how many students come through an enabling programme, who they are, what their achievement is before getting on a degree, and attainment and retention once on the degree. The project will try to demonstrate the effectiveness of enabling programmes in how they aid progression.

Monash University



Monash University is one of the prestigious “Group of Eight” institutions in Australia and is ranked by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings at number 73. Monash University is Australia’s largest with around 60,000 students studying at 5 campuses across the state of Victoria. Originally founded with an emphasis on science and technology courses, the University has expanded to offer courses across numerous disciplines including: Art, Design and Architecture; Arts; Business and Economics; Education; Engineering; Information Technology; Law; Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences; Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences; and Science

Caulfield Campus: Access Monash Team

The Access Monash team leads the widening participation activity for the University, with a particular focus on low SES communities in the south east of Melbourne and Victoria.

The team has a number of different outreach activities, for example, activities such as Schools Access Monash and Access Monash Mentoring, SEAMS (Strengthening Engagement and Achievement in Maths and Science) and LEAP (Learn, Experience and Access Professions) which all contribute to the [strategic aims](#) of:

- Encouraging participation in higher education,
- Engaging with schools, students, families and staff about the benefits of higher education,
- Providing information about university programs and campus life,
- Providing academic development.

“Pathways to Monash” is the University’s adjusted offer scheme, and [PASS](#) and [MonTrack](#) provide transition support for first year undergraduates.

Since 2005, Access Monash has been supported financially by the University, after the government funding was reduced. The University diverts a substantial amount of its fee income into a \$10million equity based scholarship fund which supports the outreach programmes and school work carried out by the Access Monash team.

The Access Monash team monitors the retention and achievement of the students they work with and have data which shows that pupils who have come through an Access Monash scheme do succeed at Monash University.

Schools Access Monash (SAM) and Access Monash Mentoring

The team works with 40 carefully targeted schools and provides support for students in years 8 to 12, helping them to make informed decisions about their future and increasing their knowledge of university and campus life.

There are a range of in-school and on-campus activities which aim to increase engagement with higher education and allow the school pupils to experience university life first hand.

In years 9 and 10 at school, Access Monash offers a group mentoring programme known as the “Champions Programme”. There are around 50 mentors who are 1st year undergraduate students, and they work on a project with the pupils. The intention is that they will transition to one to one mentoring via Access Monash Mentoring in years 11 and 12.

Access Monash employs around 330 mentors who work with approximately 440 mentees. Around 90% of mentees enrolled on the Access Monash programme progress to higher education and indeed, a large number of these students move on to Monash University.

The mentoring sessions are designed to enthuse mentees about their future by exploring and developing their potential career interests and understand the options regarding education to help them achieve their aims. They work with their mentor on goal setting and developing a plan, as well as working on their study techniques, communication skills, motivation and resilience to ensure they are prepared for their next steps.

In addition, the Access Monash team organise faculty and industry experiences as part of the mentoring experience which helps the pupils to feel connected to and part of the university.

There is also a limited e-mentoring programme which supports around 100 school pupils for 20 weeks in years 11 and 12.

The recruitment and training of mentors is a substantial part of the work at Access Monash. This year they received around 900 applications and conducted 400 interviews at the end of 2015. High achieving students tend to be selected and all mentors should have a B+ minimum. Training takes place at the start of the academic term each year. All mentors receive a \$4000 per year scholarship, in recognition of the fact that they may sacrifice paid employment in order to provide mentoring.

The matching of mentors and mentees is carried out by the programme coordinator who takes account of:

- Personal interest
- Subjects taken at school
- Mentees potential area of study
- The school attended

The commitment made by the mentors involves meeting their mentee once per fortnight for 60 – 90 minutes during term time. This equates to around 8 meetings.

At the first meeting the mentee will complete a self assessment which is used to inform the direction of and focus of future meetings. Meetings are tailored to suit the mentees needs and the mentor uses a series of prompt/information sheets developed by the Access Monash team to use as conversation starters.

The Access Monash Team train their mentees to cover 7 key areas during the mentoring meetings. These are:

1. School and Learning
2. Skills Development
3. Motivation? What's important?
4. Plans for the Future? (aspiration)
5. Knowledge of university application process
6. Influences and building resilience
7. Concern re the transition to university

PASS

The University has run a Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) scheme since 2008 and this mainly operates at undergraduate course level although postgraduate is being introduced this academic year. A full time PASS Administrator is employed to support the delivery and development of the scheme.

[Research at the University of Wollongong](#) has shown that attendance at PASS sessions can lead to an increase in marks.

Sessions are run for 6 weeks per semester and are tailored to match the curriculum at the time. They generally run 1 week behind the lecture timetable so that students can attend lectures and have time to review content before attending a session. Sessions are timetabled and students are required to sign up beforehand, and attendance at the session is taken.

Sessions are delivered by 2nd year undergraduates who are known as Student Leaders. This academic year, 58 student leaders were recruited.

To become a Student Leader with PASS, students must be high achievers and should have accomplished a distinction (70%+) in the unit they are going to teach. They may respond to a targeted invitation email from the PASS team or be recommended by a member of academic staff. Following completion of an application form, the students are interviewed by the PASS Administrator and the Unit Coordinator. Recruitment is completed before the end of the academic year.

Student Leaders are contracted for an academic year and can typically expect to provide 3 one hour sessions per week, however, the number of sessions they can deliver is capped at 20. Student Leaders are paid for both preparation time and delivery, and preparation may include sitting in on the lecture once again, reviewing online materials, observing another leader, meeting with module coordinator etc.

Boundaries and expectations are set early on during a one day training session, where the emphasis is on redirecting; it is not re-teaching or remediation.

New leaders are observed twice per semester either by staff or by a senior leader, and feedback is provided. They are encouraged to film their own sessions and reflect on their own performance.

Clayton Campus: Orientation and Transition team

Transition support is managed by the Orientation and Transition team, who work directly with the faculties to design and deliver induction programmes. This year, the team have launched their redeveloped [orientation webpages](#) and, like La Trobe, offer an orientation e-planner for students to design their own induction experience. Some activities are recommended and others are optional.

Montrack

A key role of the Orientation and Transition team is the delivery of MonTrack. MonTrack is a program designed to support the transition and retention of first year undergraduate students. MonTrack employs around 80-90 students, known as Student Success Advisers (SSAs), to make outbound calls to new students at crucial points during first year, providing advice and guidance and assisting with any transition issues they may be facing.

Initially introduced to support first generation students, the scheme was so successful that it was recently expanded to include all first year undergraduates. Students who are first in family to progress to higher education still benefit from an additional post-offer/pre-entry call which provides advice regarding the offer, enrolment and settling in at university.

Student Success Advisers are recruited via an application form and interview. They should be able to demonstrate leadership and customer service skills, and should be progressing well with their own studies. A group training session is provided for SSAs and there is a briefing prior to each call round to discuss the key transition message for that period. A handbook is provided containing information on transition issues and possible responses, student services and faculty contacts as SSAs provide information and referrals either immediately or via a follow up email.

MonTRACK is currently reaching over 50% of commencing students each call round and in 2014 SSAs had at least one conversation (although the average was slightly over 2) with 7479 of the 10,227 students on the list of new students (73%). SSAs perceive that 97% of calls are 'well received' by students and this is supported by feedback gathered by the team.

Recipients of calls can opt out from further calls at any point; however, in 2014 only 621 opted out of further calls after round one.

Timing of call		Target audience	Conversation topic
Post offer/Pre entry		All first generation, 1 st year UG applicants	Offer & Enrolment
Semester 1	Weeks 3 & 4	All 1 st year UG including 1 st generation students	Campus life, settling in, 1 st assignment
	Weeks 10 & 11	All 1 st year UG including 1 st generation students	Semester 1 assessments and exams
Semester 2	Weeks 3 & 4	All 1 st year UG including 1 st generation students	Semester 2 check in and results and feedback from semester 1 exams
	Weeks 10 & 11	All 1 st year UG including 1 st generation students	Semester 2 assessments and exams, how to re-enrol for 2 nd year

University of Melbourne



Dr. Ryan Naylor, Lecturer in Higher Education,
Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education

March 2015 saw the publication of the findings of some research by the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education based in the University of Melbourne entitled “The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from two decades, 1994-2014”.

This longitudinal study showed some general positive trends in the transition experience, for example:

- Students are better prepared for the transition to HE level study, and better links between schools and universities have had a positive impact here
- Students have clear reasons for attending university
- Students were more satisfied with their course

However, research has shown that students from under-represented groups and/or low ATAR students acutely experienced additional stresses; they felt less prepared for university, less able to cope academically, were less engaged academically, were more likely to have suffered financial hardship and had additional work pressures, and were engaged at a lesser level with the university community, spending less time on campus. All of these factors result in lower levels of motivation for study and put these groups at a higher risk of withdrawal, meaning more intensive support is required to be put in place in the first year of study.

Students with low ATAR scores do tend to be admitted to less prestigious institutions and to degree courses with less demanding entry requirements. The courses they end up studying may not have been their, first, second or even third choice of course, hence lower levels of commitment and motivation.

Universities are continuing to address this through specially developed and well targeted initiatives designed to help students through the transition, develop a sense of identity and belonging to the institution, and improve general academic preparedness. The report recommends that enabling students to interact with each other in and out of timetabled hours should be considered in course design as it will help to tackle the risks associated with an increase in online learning and subsequent lack of engagement in university life.

Additionally, the researchers believe that better identification and monitoring of at-risk groups will contribute to improvements in persistence and retention. Technology can assist with this identification and monitoring and Dr. Naylor is exploring how technology is used by other institutions to deal with this.

Provision of on campus employment opportunities may also help tackle the issue of financial stresses which are well documented as having a negative effect on students from a low SES background, and it is acknowledged that as the cost of education in Australia increases, increasing numbers of students will have to work longer hours.

Reflecting both the increase in numbers of students entering higher education in Australia from low SES and indigenous backgrounds, and the general shift in Australian policy, Ryan's research is now focusing less on increasing participation and more on the retention of these cohorts, and improving their achievements and outcomes.

Key Findings

It was not only interesting but also reassuring to learn that many of the issues facing higher education institutions in Melbourne were very similar to those we experience in Scotland. There are initiatives we could learn from and adapt for Scottish institutions, and at QMU we will be trialing a version of the MonTrack project in the coming academic year as a result of this visit.

Particular differences which were of interest are as follows:

- Admissions systems have much more flexibility in them as they are administered at a state level as opposed to UCAS at a national level, allowing innovative approaches such as La Trobe's Aspire programme to be quickly recognised and embedded.

- Successful transition schemes, such as Access Monash, have significant financial resources behind them as a result of a non-government funded approach to HE where fee income can be directed as the institution sees fit.
- Although it may be due to the size of institutions I visited (compared to Queen Margaret University), there is much greater use of technology in Orientation Weeks. Students receive less targeted interventions which are dependent on their “status” as a widening participation student, and universities take more of a “whole institution” approach to offer the same experience to all students.
- HE in Australia seems to be several years ahead of us (Australia’s Bradley Review 2008/Scotland’s Commission on Widening Access 2015) in terms of national target setting and as such is now moving it’s focus onto retention and completion of studies.

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