

1. Equity outcomes and strategies

a) Outcomes for improving performance for equity groups from 2015-2017

In 2015 CQUniversity will implement the 'Inclusion is the Standard, NOT the Exception' approach which will revolutionise the way in which CQUniversity improves the outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The approach, based on the bio-psycho-social model of diversity and cultural-historical Activity Theory, is a learning-centred holistic approach which considers the impact of individual, program and institutional factors on the student journey at CQUniversity.

All commencing students will participate in a series of interviews with CQUniversity staff throughout their student learning journey (beginning at pre-enrolment) whereby students will identify aspects of their diversity that might impact on their ability to complete their program of study. Inherent requirements will be rolled out at CQUniversity and discussed with students during the interview process.

By referring to students' 'diversity', the University recognises the multiple disadvantages and challenges CQUniversity students face, rather than labelling them or placing them in one category (e.g. disability).

Students will be empowered to address the identified issues with proposed strategies (both personal and from CQUniversity) that will result in the student making informed decisions about their next steps and how to respond to future contradictions with the tertiary environment as they arise.

The intention of the 'Inclusion is the Standard, NOT the Exception' strategy is to improve the retention of CQUniversity students. In 2014, CQUniversity recorded a reduction in the attrition rate from 32.2 percent to 31.2 percent. The University aims to embrace the diversity of all students through the above model and by 2017 improve student attrition by a further three percent, i.e. to 29.2 percent.

b) Strategies for achieving the outcomes

The 'Inclusion is the Standard NOT the Exception' model will serve as the overarching equity framework for CQUniversity which builds on CQUniversity's progress with access, participation and success initiatives in the last Compact cycle.

This whole of institution approach will also be supported by a range of targeted and 'just in time' student support interventions that address the stages of the student's life cycle which are articulated in the Critical Interventions Framework.

CQUniversity will execute the following strategies to reduce student attrition:

Access

A comprehensive widening participation program that includes aspiration and skill building programs (including Start Uni Now) and Indigenous specific programs like AIME; clearer articulation of

pathways between school, VET and university; bridging programs; transition support for low-SES students (e.g. pre-orientation activities); and, an extensive scholarship and financial assistance program for low-SES students including support for students enrolled in sub-degree programs.

Participation

A suite of programs that complement CQUniversity's existing student services to facilitate transition including student mentoring; PASS online; the ESL café—specific academic support for students from non-English speaking backgrounds; academic tutoring; and, and an equity program to ensure disadvantaged students, e.g. students with a disability, equally access and succeed at university.

Continuation of Succeed at CQUniversity—a personalised program that proactively connects students experiencing challenges with targeted student support in their first term of study. This program includes identifying students with low engagement with CQUniversity's learning management system (the EASICONNECT project) and responding via a follow up phone call or electronic direct mail out. In 2015, staff will investigate the useability of CQUniversity's learning management system and make adjustments to improve accessibility for students with a disability.

CQUniversity will also continue master classes in distance education to advance the skills of mid-career teaching scholars aimed at retaining distance education students, many of which are rural and remote.

Progress and attainment and lifelong engagement

In 2015, CQUniversity will implement an alumni mentoring program that will match students with industry contacts. The program will help students prepare for graduate employment and increase employment opportunities. This program is in addition to the existing CQUniversity Careers and Employment service that assists students with improving their self-awareness, decision-making, and employability.

In 2015, Higher Education Participation Programme (HEPP) project leaders will participate in a series of workshops designed to ensure that the above projects are joined-up and seamlessly address stages of the Critical Interventions Framework.

2. Evaluation Plan

CQUniversity has a multi-pronged evaluation strategy. Feedback from students through surveys and questionnaires remains essential in measuring the impact of targeted CQUniversity programs and initiatives (on topics such as widening participation, orientation, scholarships, disability, and student readiness).

In 2015, CQUniversity will begin rolling out the 'The Retention Follow-Up and Return to Study' project which will involve staff telephoning approximately 6,000 students who have left the University to invite them back to study (and if they accept connect them to the 'Inclusion is the Standard NOT the Exception' strategy). The project will ascertain reasons why students left which will feed into improvement of CQUniversity's equity strategy.

CQUniversity will also externally review the widening participation program to analyse qualitative and quantitative data collected over four years. The report will evaluate the success of the program and provide recommendations for improvement.

The University will continue to track student progress through EASICONNECT, and monitor the access and participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. CQUniversity performs well on facilitating access and participation for disadvantaged students; and will focus upon completion rates, hence the goal to reduce attrition by three percent.

3. Partnerships and collaboration

CQUniversity will maintain the large scale Widening Participation program for 2015 – 2017 showing CQUniversity's commitment to improving the participation of low-SES and rural and remote students in higher education. The program will build upon the 200 mature partnerships with primary and high schools, TAFE, and community organisations such as Central Queensland Indigenous Development.

CQUniversity will also continue its collaboration with other universities in QLD through the State-wide widening participation consortium to discuss key issues regarding access and participation of low-SES students.