Response to recommendations

HESP Final Report - Improving retention, completion and success in higher education

Recommendation	Response
Expectations of completion in the current context 1. As a first priority, institutions should ensure students who have the capacity to succeed in higher education are given the best chance to complete their studies through the appropriate provision of academic and other support services as required of them by the Higher Education Standards Framework.	Agree. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) should plan to issue a good practice note on student retention to lift performance in this area. The note could be based on evidence of effective strategies used by higher education providers in retaining students. This would further support The Higher Education Standards Framework which requires higher education providers to offer a range of student support services.
Supporting students to make the right choices 2. School students and mature-age people need better access to effective career advice. The National Career Education Strategy (NCES), due to be released in 2018, should be closely monitored to identify improvements in the area of student career advice, including study options and pathways, and information about the post school learning environment. This strategy should also be expanded to include mature-age students or a separate strategy should be initiated for this cohort.	Agree. Implementing the NCES will be progressed through the Education Council during 2018 and monitored through these processes. While the NCES is formally focused on support for school students, the department is considering how best to leverage current and future activities to better support mature-age students to make the right choices in regards to their tertiary education options and pathways.
3. Career advice cannot be left to schools. Every higher education institution should ensure that their students are given the opportunity for career planning and course advice on entry to the institution and as they require it throughout their studies.	Agree. TEQSA will examine the effectiveness of systems providers use to make available information to students about pathways to employment and about selection of courses and units of study.
4. Where and how student success, completions, retention and attrition data is made accessible to students should form part of considerations by the Department of Education and Training in the establishment of a new online information platform.	Agree. Student success, completions and retention data is already available on the department's website. Where it is published will be considered as part of the ongoing research to inform the development and enhancement of the new online platform.

Supporting students to complete their studies	
5. Every institution should have its own comprehensive student-centred retention strategy, which is regularly evaluated. These strategies could include institutional retention benchmarks and, as appropriate, processes for entry and exit interviews, the integration of data-based risk analytics and targeted support interventions, a suite of support services and a means to re-engage with students who have withdrawn.	Agree. Institutional retention strategies are expected to have a positive impact on student completion. The TEQSA risk assessment framework includes attrition and progress rates. Providers that are deemed to be high risk are required to respond to TEQSA about strategies employed to address these risks.
6. Institutions should automatically review the enrolment of all students who have not engaged in their studies to an agreed level by the census date.	Agree. Levels of student participation should be determined by institutions and included in their retention strategies.
7. Institutions should pay particular attention to ensuring their support services are meeting the needs of external students who are not regularly attending campus because these students are identified as at risk of not completing their studies.	Agree. Institutions to adopt this recommendation.
8. Every institution should have an institution-wide mental health strategy and implementation plan.	Agree. Institutions to adopt this recommendation.
9. Institutions should increasingly offer nested courses, which are appropriate and compliant with the Australian Qualifications Framework, to provide students with a greater range of exit options with meaningful qualifications.	Agree. A greater range of exit options with meaningful qualifications would be of benefit to students.
Sharing best practice	
10. There is already a wide variety of approaches to sharing best practice within the higher education sector. However, these approaches are not always scalable or frequently evaluated. Peak bodies should collaborate to develop streamlined processes to collect and disseminate best practice, with support from the Department of Education and Training. A dedicated website could be established for this purpose.	Agree. The department will consult peak bodies to develop an implementation plan.

Clarity of definitions and enhancing transparency	
11. The higher education community should work together with the Department of Education and Training to ensure a greater understanding and clarity of definitions in attrition, retention, success and completions data. The department should continue to measure and publish adjusted attrition, retention, student success and completions data.	Agree. The department will undertake a consultation exercise across the sector to clarify definitions in attrition, retention, success and completions data.
12. At present some institutions have a trimester structure of teaching and this can lead to different timings for assessment, graduation and reporting. As a result, students who complete Semester 1 and 2 and enrol in Semester 3 but not Semester 4 are recorded as not completed. Consequently, the definition of attrition should be changed to reflect the trimester teaching structure.	Agree. The department has made this change and it is reflected in the publication of the 2016 full year student data.
13. The adjusted attrition rate should be the primary measure of attrition published for domestic commencing bachelor students.	Agree. This is now the case.
14. The Department of Education and Training should further develop and publish the calculation of attrition rates that take into account key student characteristics so as to better reflect institutional differences.	Agree. This work is underway. Attrition rates adjusted for population will be supplementary to the current adjusted attrition figures, which will continue to be published.
15. The Department of Education and Training should report attrition among non-university higher education providers on a similar basis to its reporting of Table A and B universities.	Agree. This is now the case (Appendix 4 2016 student data)
16. The Department of Education and Training should publish attrition data at more disaggregated levels, for example, by institution, by study area and by student characteristics.	Agree. This work is underway.
17. The Department of Education and Training should establish a common student identifier to better understand student pathways across tertiary education with a view to working with State and Territory Governments to establish a common student identifier across all levels of schooling.	Agree. The department is investigating options to adopt the Unique Student Identifier (USI) in schools and higher education.

Accountability and regulation	
18. TEQSA already has sufficient powers in relation to provider compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework in terms of the identification and tracking of students at risk with support strategies in place, analysis of student performance and evidence on reasons for attrition. TEQSA should continue to take account of every institution's retention performance in assessing whether these standards are being met.	Agree. TEQSA is already taking into account institutions' retention performance in assessing whether the Higher Education Standards Framework is being adhered to.