GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY
STUDENT RETENTION
PROJECT

FINAL REPORT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Student Retention Project recognises the strong imperative to improve student retention rates, especially at the undergraduate level and also for research higher degrees. Retention rates at Griffith University are of concern. Comparative data indicate that Griffith University is ranked between 30th and 33rd amongst Australia’s 38 Universities for its commencing undergraduate student retention rates and between 25th and 34th for non-commencing undergraduates. For RHD students commencing 1990-1998 the possible completion rate for Griffith University is 5% lower than the national average.

Clearly, improving retention rates involves an investment in both attracting and recruiting students to Griffith University and also in developing ways to improve the educational experience of students once they are enrolled. Taking a strategic focus, the Student Retention Project aimed to develop a more systematic, integrated and cohesive framework for enhancing student retention. An organisational learning framework (Dixon, 1994) and a cross-Element approach to benchmarking good practice models within Griffith was central to the project.

This report is divided into six sections. Section 1 provides relevant background to the strategic and educational importance of student retention at Griffith University and outlines the approach used in this project. Section 2 reviews the wider national and international literature and research relating to student attrition and retention. Section 3 examines relevant statistical data and identifies other sources of university-wide data available at Griffith University. Section 4 identifies 25 School-based and university-wide projects designed to improve the retention rates for both postgraduates and undergraduates, presented at the Griffith University Retention Symposium, July 2002. Observations and feedback from the Symposium are presented in Section 5. Principles underlying recommendations arising from Stage 1 of this project and a summary of recommendations are presented in Section 6.

Focussing on student-centred approaches, the recommendations are grounded in a theoretical base and emphasise the enhancement of student engagement with learning processes at the university. Priority is given to the development of user-friendly statistics to clearly inform those working with students of the present situation, and for future quantitative evaluation of initiatives. Frontloading of efforts focussing on first year undergraduates is recommended, using collaborative approaches between academic and student support areas. It is also recommended that at-risk student cohorts be identified for early intervention and gifted and talented students be targeted for special attention, with encouragement and reinforcement continuing through to postgraduate level. On-going monitoring of student experiences is recommended as a qualitative evaluation measure to ensure a continuing student-centred focus. To facilitate organisational learning, knowledge sharing of the creative initiatives identified as internal good practices is encouraged. Overall these recommendations need strategic leadership from the senior officers of the university, in terms of policies, and incentives for Elements to instigate successful initiatives and thus improve outcomes in these areas.
SECTION: 1.0
STRATEGIC AND EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF RETENTION

1.1 Introduction

An increasingly competitive higher education environment makes it necessary for Griffith University to find ways to more effectively use limited resources and to maximise outcomes for both individual students and the institution as a whole. This Student Retention Project examined the wider literature and mapped current Griffith retention practices, in order to focus on the development of a strategic framework for student retention, which could inform policies, teaching and learning, student support, data collection, retention strategies and marketing to prospective students.

Griffith University has a significant undergraduate retention problem in comparison with other Australian universities (see Appendix A for definitional issues). While ranking methods and their significance have been debated recently, comparative data indicate that Griffith University is ranked between 30th and 33rd amongst Australia’s 38 Universities for its commencing undergraduate student retention rate. For non-commencing undergraduates, Griffith is ranked between 25th and 34th amongst Australian Universities. By comparison, data for postgraduate coursework students indicate that Griffith University is ranked between 4th and 11th compared to other universities, indicating better outcomes in this area.

Although there have been various initiatives at Griffith University related to examining and improving student retention, there has been little systematic review and integration of the results from various surveys or the many perspectives about retention. There appears to be little easily accessible, clear information or data to inform strategic policy development. While retention initiatives certainly occur in academic and support elements, there is an apparent lack of cross fertilisation of ideas and information exchange, reflecting a ‘silo’ effect that potentially wastes time and resources. Thus, an important task has been to assemble and review the available information and initiatives to provide a picture of what is already known, what is being currently done and what we can learn from this. The resulting recommendations for a more strategic approach to retention are therefore based on Griffith University information and the findings from relevant national and international research.

1.2 The Strategic importance of retention for Griffith University

In addition to the aforementioned data, concerns about retention are salient to members of the Griffith community. A key feature of the project was the Symposium entitled, Developing a Strategic Framework for Student Retention at Griffith, conducted in July, 2002 (see section 1.5) where the strategic importance of retention to Griffith University was the focus for the Vice Chancellor, the then Acting DVC Teaching and Learning and the Dean of Postgraduate Studies in their keynote addresses.
The Vice Chancellor noted a strong concern that retention is an issue, regarded important not only by the Commonwealth Government but also... *it is important to Griffith, but above all, it is important to our students.*

Relating retention to quality of teaching and learning, the Vice Chancellor said:

> Retention is important also to us because it marks our success as teachers. Just as our memories as students are marked by the teachers who inspired us, so our lives and work as scholars are marked by the students we encourage, support, engage – and may we hope, inspire.

The Vice Chancellor also discussed attrition issues:

> High undergraduate attrition gets the university into a regressive cycle of high intakes to meet Commonwealth load targets, enrolling large numbers of students who are less likely to stay at Griffith, and further increasing the university’s attrition. We need to reverse this cycle.

> One of the factors often mentioned at Griffith is some students’ wish to transfer to another institution having proved themselves at Griffith... While it is hard to change the perception of people who don’t know Griffith well – a task we will nevertheless undertake with a bold campaign later this year – I am very concerned that students who have studied at Griffith successfully still wish to leave for another university.

> An alternative perspective is to consider the things we can do to make Griffith a more attractive place to return to, both for students contemplating leaving for another university and those who risk leaving study altogether. I will be interested in your advice on this.

And finally the Vice Chancellor asked the following question focussing on internal good practice and organisational learning,

> In stark contrast to undergraduate attrition rates, Griffith’s postgraduate coursework attrition is much lower than most other institutions. The Commonwealth calculates that Griffith’s postgraduate coursework attrition rate is only 22%, the equal 4th lowest nationally. This is a good outcome in itself, but also may offer an example for us to improve Griffith’s undergraduate attrition rates.

The Dean of Postgraduate Studies focussed on postgraduate retention rates suggesting that RHD study is “risky business” highly affected by personal factors with attrition of 30-40% considered to be normal. He suggested that the university could aim at improving the retention rate by up to 15% through personal and financial support of students, institutional actions directed at reviewing admissions and improving the academic research culture.
The Acting DVC Teaching and Learning in his keynote address identified some reasons why Griffith University should be concerned about student retention.

- Every student who enters Griffith and uses their studies to gain entry to a more prestigious university (such as UQ) lowers the reputation of Griffith as a destination university of choice.
- Bright students who use Griffith only as a staging post depletes the pool of really talented students at Griffith, reduces the number of in-house RHD prospects and frustrates Griffith’s academic staff who watch these students stream off to heritage universities.
- Recruitment becomes an important issue. First year intakes of Australian students have to be larger than they otherwise would be to make up for the losses in later years. This depresses the minimum OP score needed for entry to fill Griffith’s quotas, and this has a spiral effect on Griffith’s academic reputation.
- Recruitment of international students is expensive, and these costs are wasted for non-completers.

1.3 Organisational learning approach

This project focuses on the complex, multi-faceted problem of retention (Blythman & Orr, 2001-2002), which no doubt links to organisational culture. It has been argued that change in universities is largely incremental in nature (Bhanot, 2001, Bolman & Deal, 1997:66) and the result of gradual organisational learning processes. Garvin (1993) sees a learning organisation as one skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights. Similarly, O’Dell and Grayson (1998), suggest turning knowledge into action by identifying and transferring internal and external ‘good practices’ throughout the organisation, via people to people interactions.

Using the principles of organisational learning cycles, this project aims to improve organisational outcomes. Organisational learning refers to “the intentional use of learning processes at the individual, group and system level to continuously transform the organisation in a direction that is increasingly satisfying to the stakeholders” (Dixon, 1999: 6). A four-phase process or repetitive cycle proposed by Dixon (1999) provides a framework for facilitating change through organisational learning.

Table 1: Stages of organisational learning as outlined by Dixon (1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>The widespread generation of knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Integration of the new information into the organisational context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>The information is collectively interpreted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>Organisational members are authorised to take responsible action, based on the outcomes of the learning.</td>
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This process was employed for this project, with the first phase involving the identification and sharing of good practice initiatives at Griffith. These initiatives within Griffith were also reviewed in the light of national and international research in the area of retention in Higher Education to enable the development of broader institutional frameworks.

1.4 Outline of retention project plan

- **February-March, 2002**: Recruitment of the Research Assistant, Identification of internal stakeholder groups
- **April-May**: Review of international and national literature on retention.
- **June-July**: Identification of programs and research conducted at Griffith over the past 3 years, designed to increase retention of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Organise symposium
- **July**: Conduct of symposium, consultation, gaining feedback and recommendations from participants.
- **August-September**: Compilation and evaluation of research and programs presented at the symposium and follow up other projects not presented.
- **September-December**: Preparation of draft report with consultation from project team, reference group and other university stakeholders.
- **February-March, 2003**: Dissemination of information

1.5 Identifying projects and research addressing retention issues

A number of retention initiatives have been or are currently being funded through either Griffith University Strategic Grants or Quality Grants, whilst other initiatives were funded by individual elements. Projects were identified through a number of means: university wide advertisement via an email from the Acting DVC of Teaching and Learning, University networks, and lists of successful grant holders.

As noted earlier, a one-day Symposium entitled *Developing a Strategic Framework for Student Retention at Griffith* was held to attract interest on retention issues and to create a forum through which retention projects could be shared with the wider university community. The Symposium promoted increased awareness, facilitated information exchange, and encouraged organisational learning. Participants had the opportunity to make recommendations for further improvements in retention practice.

**The aims of the Symposium were to**
- Identify why student retention matters for Griffith now and why it will matter more in the future;
- Enable us to share current research and practices, and develop new ideas for student retention

**And as a result to**
- Develop a coherent strategic framework, which can be used to inform teaching, student support, administration, and policy at Griffith.

In the interest of maximising interaction and exchange between diverse groups as recommended by Dixon (1999), all participants were provided with a complete set of abstracts for the projects to facilitate information exchange and follow-up of relevant
projects at a later stage. Some projects were presented in small group discussion sessions, followed by opportunities for participants to give information about other initiatives in their own departments. Other projects were presented in dual sessions in the afternoon to maximise the exposure and information exchange for participants.

As the project covered initiatives in the areas of undergraduate and postgraduate students, and it was perceived that initiatives in each area could inform practice in the other, the presentations were given in mixed groups with no differentiation between whole university and single School or faculty projects.
SECTION 2.0
BACKGROUND LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

2.1 Definitions of attrition

In discussions of this area, the words attrition, discontinuance, withdrawal, non-completion and drop out, are often used interchangeably. Non-completion, the definition adopted by DEST, represents the ‘non-achievement of outcomes generally considered the norm for the sector concerned” (McInnis, Hartly, Polesel & Teese, 2000). For universities, it refers to students who commence study but do not gain a university qualification at that particular institution. As McInnis et al (2000) point out; non-completion does not necessarily equate with failure and may, for some students, signify the achievement of desired goals. It is therefore necessary to define what forms of non-completion are of concern and to understand which institutional policies and practice can make a difference.

According to the definition used by DEST attrition is calculated by comparing the number of students enrolled in a year with the number of students enrolled in the following year and subtracting the number of students who have graduated. Three possible categories of attrition are represented:
   a) Systems attrition (students lost to the HE system)
   b) Institutional attrition (students lost to the particular institution)
   c) Internal attrition (students lost to the program, through transfer to another program, same institution) (Price, Harter & Cole, 1991)

It is also possible to discriminate between involuntary and voluntary withdrawal. Students, who leave a course because of unacceptable levels of performance and consequent subject failure, represent involuntary withdrawals. By contrast in the case of voluntary withdrawals students are involved in and initiate the decision to leave. In some cases these students may undertake a targeted transfer at the end of first year to their course of first preference, representing the successful achievement of the student’s primary goal.

2.2 Implications of non-completion

Student non-completion reflects a complex interplay of personal and institutional factors, with likely associated detrimental costs to both (Brunsden, Davies, Shelvin & Bracken, 2000: 301). From the institutional perspective, non-completion is considered a waste of university resources, especially in an environment of limited financial and other resources. Non-completion also potentially damages the reputation of particular institutions, creating longer-term implications for attracting students who will make proactive choices for that course or institution (Ozga & Sukhnanandan, 1998). From the student’s perspective, involuntary withdrawal because of academic failure, or inability to cope with the demands of the system, lowers self-confidence and self-esteem. When individuals do not achieve their full potential, this represents wasted talent not only for the individual but also for society as a whole, which does not realise the benefits of their development through further education.
It must be noted, however, that for some students withdrawal may yield beneficial and positive outcomes in terms of a student achieving their personal goals. Some degree of early exit seems unavoidable given that no system will have perfect matches (Ozga et al, 1998). Each institution must therefore decide which forms of non-completion will be of concern and be targeted for ameliorative action, and which forms of non-completion should be defined as regrettable but perhaps unavoidable.

2.3 The complexity of retention issues

There appears to be agreement that retention issues are becoming more complex. For example, Australian national research findings (McInnis et al, 2000) highlight increasing financial pressures and work demands on the student population. As students spend more time in paid work, they also expect more flexibility of universities and teaching staff in order to achieve their goals (McInnis et al, 2000). Other issues that significantly affect the ability of institutions to meet the needs of students include the expanding and increasingly diverse student population and the growing importance of marketing and positioning in the higher education market.

Technology has also added to the complexity of student engagement. Braxton et al (2000:584) suggest “considerable psychological energy is required for students seeking social interaction in commuter classrooms”. Given that the majority of the student population at Griffith University campuses have access to flexible learning options and given the increasing student commitment to part-time work (McInnis et al, 2000) achieving academic and social integration of students to facilitate institutional commitment is an increasingly difficult issue. Two recent studies (Paying Their Way: A Survey of Australian Undergraduate University Student Finances, 2001 and Watson, Johnson & Billet, 2002) support the view that conflicting commitments form a particularly significant issue for students enrolled at Griffith University.

2.4 Student engagement and disengagement

However, to focus only on attrition gives an incomplete picture of the factors related to successful completion. There has been an increasing emphasis on the overall quality of the university experience as being of paramount importance to student retention. James (2001) suggests that some students may actually, after a few weeks or months at the university, decide to limit their involvement in the academic and social life of the university, simply doing enough to survive the system. James (2001) argues that this “detachment” or, as others have termed it, “disengagement” (McInnis, 2001A), may actually be the broader concern which requires tackling. Universities may be missing the opportunity to ‘capture’ student engagement during the early formative weeks (James, 2001). Australian and international researchers (James, 2001, McInnis, 2001A, Tinto, 1993) therefore suggest that actions and initiatives should address broad quality of education issues, which improve the educational experience for all students, rather than focus solely on “at-risk” students. It is also necessary to broaden thinking away from how to simply retain students to how all students can be assisted to acquire the skills and dispositions to become effective learners at university (Tinto,1993).
2.5 Negotiated engagement

The more traditional focus on the importance of students’ personal attributes and ‘background characteristics’ (pre-entry ability, gender, class) in determining levels of commitment to course and institution (Tinto, 1993) has been questioned. An important criticism is that traditional models overemphasise the role of the student, and underemphasise the role of the institution, in the departure process. Such a focus leaves institutions the temptation to blame students for their own failure, rather than seek a more balanced view (Stage & Hoessler, 2000). More recently significant researcher in this area has focussed on the importance of social and academic integration of students in ‘learning communities’ (Tinto, 1997), thus bringing the role of the university and its processes more sharply into focus.

McInnes (2001: 4) argues that universities need to take a strategic approach to cultivate a climate of negotiated engagement and to demonstrate leadership in structuring learning experiences of undergraduate students,

*It is more accurate and more useful for policy and practice, to re-conceptualise the undergraduate experience as a process of negotiated engagement rather than assuming that disengagement is an intractable problem and that students are to blame.*

The reciprocal and mutual responsibilities of both students and the university is highlighted by McInnes (2001:13)

*While the role of student responsibility in their learning and development cannot be overlooked, universities have the obligation to ensure that students are obliged to engage and understand the significance of the need to commit.*

2.6 The importance of student HE preferences

Issues related to preference rankings also need consideration. British research has shown that those who gained their preferred HE choice appeared to be more likely to experience high levels of institutional and course compatibility and thus go on to complete their course (Ozga et al, 1998). Students often make decisions based on limited information about courses and thus judgements are often based on the perceived status of the institution, rather than the quality of education received or the fit with their personal academic goals (James, 2001, Ozga et al, 1998).

The perception for some universities (and Griffith appears to be among them) is that some students enter the university having failed to get their first preference and stay for a year, in order to then reapply for their preferred course the following year. Although losing large numbers of capable students to other institutions is undesirable, the question is how much a university can realistically do about realigning preferences.

From an alternate perspective, Tinto (1993:136) suggests, “Though the intentions and commitments with which individuals enter college matter, what goes on after entry
matters more.” Perhaps through the processes which occur on entry and thereafter, it may be possible to impact upon the outcome in some of these cases. In other words, general processes instituted to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early stages of courses may impact upon the integration, engagement and commitment of all students and thus as a consequence increase the retention of a broad range of students into later stages of their program.

2.7 The importance of “front-loading” efforts to improve retention

The whole first year experience has been recognised nationally and internationally by researchers in higher education as a key to many students’ experience of and success in higher education (McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000; Pitkerthly & Prosser, 2001). Front-loading retention efforts therefore may reflect the most effective deployment of limited resources. According to Tinto (1993:152) first year “represents a strategic leverage point where the investment of scarce resources can yield substantial future benefits in both learning and persistence”. Students’ perceptions of the university are formed from initial contacts, marketing, offering of places and enrolment processes (Berger, 2001-2002). The importance of the initial experiences of university for the subsequent engagement of students with the academic process has been emphasised by several researchers (Pargetter et al, 1998; McInnis, 2000; Tinto, 1990). Many researchers have stressed the importance of the quality of the initial orientation or induction process to student continuation and commitment (Dickson, Krause & Rudman, 2002; Lintern, Johnston & O’Regan, 2001, Blythman & Orr, 2001-2002). Others have found that students’ successful negotiation of first year is closely associated with their retention in subsequent years (Elkins, Braxton & James, 2000).

2.8 Strategic approach to retention

While many Australian universities are actively trialing first year experience projects (Asmar, Brew, McCulloch, Peseta, & Barrie, 2000), there are fewer examples of more strategic models which focus on a whole university approach. Pitkerthy and Prosser (2001) do, however, report a project developing over a number of years at Latrobe University, designed to develop a university wide approach and policy to improving retention. The underlying premise of the approach involves enhancing the learning experience of all first year students, thereby more students will achieve greater success and retention rates will improve. The project was tailored to take account of Peel’s (1999, reported in Pitkerthy et al, 2001) “basic set of expectations” which should be included for successful transition programs (see Appendix B). As Pitkethly et al (2001) point out, all universities are unique in their circumstances and client groups and thus each must make a decision on how to define and work with the issues relating to retention.

Based on this background, Griffith as an institution needs to decide how to define non-completion issues and to identify which issues are core to its mission. From an overall strategic perspective and in terms of priorities, it is essential to decide what forms of student non-completion are of concern and are able to be affected by institutional action. For broader retention strategies the question to be addressed is, what types of action are likely to be appropriate and effective in the Griffith context at a School, faculty and university wide level?
SECTION 3.0
ATTRITION AND RETENTION DATA

This information is based on information given in presentations to the Retention Symposium by the Manager of Planning and Statistics, the Vice Chancellor and the Dean of Postgraduate Studies. (The relevant DEST definitions of retention and attrition rates are included in Appendix A). All retention figures and graphs referred to are provided in the Appendix D of this report or in the Proceedings of the Retention Symposium (available from L.Elphinstone@griffith.edu.au).

3.1 Data from Planning and Statistics

As previously indicated overall comparisons with other universities can be contentious (Sharma et al, 1994), however benchmarking against other universities especially those in the local area is useful (See Appendix D, Table 10). Examining Griffith figures for retention from 1992 onwards, there are indications of a gradual increase in retention rates for both commencing and ongoing students from 1999 onwards following a significant decrease in 1998 which was matched by QUT figures while retention rates for the University of Queensland for the same year was higher than previous years. The lowest retention rate is for commencing students (77% approx in 2001 compared to non-commencing students, 81%). Comparison of full-time and part-time students and their retention rates suggests for the years 2000 and 2001 retention for full-time students was 82% and 82.5% respectively whilst part-time students in the same period had lower retention rates of approximately 64% and 66% respectively. Hence overall there is a trend to gradual improvement in retention rates, with rates for part-time students lagging well behind full-time students as is the case across the HE sector.

Comparisons in terms of ranking with other universities suggests that Griffith is performing most effectively in the area of retention of coursework postgraduate students, being ranked 11th out of 38 universities. Comparison with national figures suggests that undergraduate retention rates particularly for commencing students are of most significant concern for Griffith, given its ranking in the bottom 25% of universities in Australia. RHD completion rates are also of concern given significant funding implications. With regard to RHD students, the Dean of Postgraduate Studies suggested that the maximum completion rate for Griffith is around 65%, in comparison with the maximum completion rate of 80% at ANU. He suggested that RHD study constitutes “risky business”, affected significantly by personal factors. As a consequence he suggested that Griffith as an institution might at best influence the completion rate by 15% through institutional measures.

The higher level of retention in the area of coursework postgraduate students may reflect a number of factors not applicable to undergraduate students including:

- Students enrolled in these programs have actively selected Griffith University and therefore in the majority of cases may be in their first choice of courses.
- These students have undergraduate experience and are acculturated to university study and expectations.
- Faculties perceive a strong financial incentive through the existence of full fees, to retain these students and may work harder to do so. (No such similar factor operates as an incentive in the undergraduate area.)
Although the university-wide statistics provide a broad picture, there is clearly enormous variation between individual campuses, faculties and Schools in terms of retention (See data included in Appendix D, Table 11). University-wide statistics provide only a broad macro picture, which is of less value in terms of developing and planning intervention programs in individual Schools and for individual programs. Overall, it is clear however that the significant area in need of immediate attention is at the undergraduate students level both for commencing and continuing students. RHD students have been the target of concentrated focus and effort in the past year under the leadership of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies (This is discussed in more detail in Section 4).

3.2 Other sources of University-wide data

In addition to statistical data, there are other rich sources of information and data already available from various surveys conducted at Griffith University. These include:

- A large study undertaken by Academic Administration which followed up students who had withdrawn from study at Griffith University titled, *A Quantitative Study of the Factors Underlying Students Discontinuing Study at Griffith University* (2000). (A significant percentage of these students intended to return to study at Griffith, however, our student data does not discriminate between students who have transferred to another university and those on temporary leave from their Program.)

- *Analysis of QTAC Rejection Survey*, Student Administration (2002). Overall 36.2 percent (N=741) of respondents to the survey reported changing course choice, which might suggest better course advice and provision of information, could influence this. (Contact: Ron Elms, R.Elms@griffith.edu.au)

- The Office of External Relations has conducted some research into the *Views of Prospective and New Students and Employers* (2002), which has implications not only for marketing strategy but also for the general orientation, engagement and focus and direction of students once they enrol at Griffith.

- The AVCC (2001) Survey *Paying Their Way: A survey of undergraduate student finances* indicates that Griffith students are higher than the national average on some financial risk variables (e.g. missing lectures due to lack of money), which could potentially affect their academic performance.

- There are several surveys on the student experience which could inform retention policy and strategies, including:
  - *First Year Survey* (2002) conducted by GIHE (C.Zimitat@griffith.edu.au),
  - *Course Experience Questionnaire*,
  - *Griffith University Student Satisfaction Surveys*, 2002 conducted by a number of Elements at Griffith,
  - *Stay on Track Evaluation* of students on probation. (K.Vivekananda@griffith.edu.au)
3.3 Key learnings regarding availability and usage of data

A consistent theme emerging from staff discussions of student retention concerns the challenges associated with the accessibility and value of current university information systems and the management and distribution of data. The development of user-friendly systems is seen as vital in aiding effective and timely problem identification at the School level. Accurate data is also needed for ongoing feedback and measuring outcomes of particular interventions. A number of priorities are proposed:

- **Developing a clearer picture of retention/attrition rates for the University as a whole, as well as for specific faculties/Schools/degree programs.**

  This may involve the collection of additional data, but of equal importance, the currently available data needs to be translated into more user friendly, easily accessible and meaningful formats - an essential step to enabling the timely monitoring and ongoing evaluation of student engagement.

- **Determining the most appropriate level(s) at which to collect retention and engagement data.**

  One potential approach to complement university level data collection is for individual program areas to establish local retention assessment processes to inform local intervention programs. The Micro Electronic Engineering project (MEE) analysed the statistics for that School in order to accurately pinpoint when students were discontinuing. In that case it was then possible to identify the coincidence of course events with discontinuation and to target students within specific time and event frames to maximise the possibility of providing appropriate and timely assistance. It is recommended that academic elements be encouraged to analyse the retention data for their own students.

- **Encouraging monitoring for signs of student disengagement at the program level.**

  One deficiency with regard to university data is associated with the fact that students are motivated to formally withdraw in the early stages of the semester due to HECS deadlines and to avoid the registration of a failure. However, later in the semester there may not be any reason for formally registering withdrawal, hence students do not show up in the system until they do not re-enrol, allowing no possibility of assisting them and preventing their withdrawal. In this case record keeping within programs becomes vital for tracking when students start to disengage or discontinue participating in the course by non-completion of assessment tasks, non-attendance at tutorials or laboratory sessions, thus allowing the possibility...
to provide support and assistance to students before they disappear. Initiatives such as the F/DNS (Fail/Did Not Sit) project in the Faculty of Arts (Wimshurst & Wortley, School of Criminology) are attempting to track students earlier in the process, as is the Stay on Track Project (Vivekananda, Dalmau & Watson, Student Services & LAS), which endeavours to assist students identified by the probationary and warning enrolment process to be at-risk.

- **Tracking the reasons for students’ withdrawal and their destination.**

  Currently when students withdraw from a program they are not required to provide any information about their reasons for doing so, or their future intentions (e.g. other course, other university, work, leave of absence and return to course/university etc.). Thus the university is deprived of useful evidence about contributing personal or institutional factors and also information about the nature of the attrition (systems, institutional or internal, as in transfer to another course). When students complete withdrawal forms or take leave of absence from their Program, it is recommended that data be gathered as to reasons for the withdrawal, and future intentions. At this point information could also be provided regarding sources of assistance within the university for future support and decision-making.

- **Integrating and synthesising the various rich sources of data collection and surveys already available.**

  Currently a range of surveys which have been conducted in different parts of the university have not been collated and the information shared for maximum benefit and understanding of the outcomes. These results could inform the process of developing a strategic plan in this area.
SECTION 4
BENCHMARKING CURRENT GOOD PRACTICE

This Report now turns to the internal benchmarking of current practice carried out as part of Stage I of the Retention Project. This will be followed by recommendations for further stages of this project based on the literature review, internal benchmarking and feedback gained from staff.

In total 25 projects were presented at the Symposium and their focus is shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Project focus by student target groups and distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student target group</th>
<th>Total number of projects</th>
<th>Faculty/School/Element initiated</th>
<th>University wide projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate programs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate programs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 below gives project titles for initiatives designed to improve postgraduate retention and Table 4 shows undergraduate initiatives with the faculty/Schools and elements which initiated/participated in the projects.

**Table 3. Postgraduate Retention Initiatives** (See Appendix B for abstracts and faculty contacts)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title / Content</th>
<th>Faculty / School / Element(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment writing &amp; research skills for PGs/ ISM Bridging program/ ExcelL Intercultural Training Program. Orientation sessions and social programs for PGs with staff / School based PG Association</td>
<td>School of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops for PGs(Thesis writing/managing coursework/ESL issues)</td>
<td>Learning Assistance Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing a Post Graduate environment on a new University campus</td>
<td>Faculty of Nursing and Health / GIHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Doctor of Philosophy: Improving completion rates from pre-enrolment</td>
<td>School of Marketing &amp; Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIRS (Postgraduate Information Research Skills)</td>
<td>School of Health / Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving retention rates and quality outcomes of research higher degree students in Education, with potential application for other elements in the Arts group.</td>
<td>Faculty of Education / Faculty of Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring program for students – Intensified communicable diseases control project, Indonesia</td>
<td>International Projects Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing the postgraduate experience in Cooperative Research Centres</td>
<td>Aust. School of Environmental Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The supervisor management styles model</td>
<td>School of Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate peer support forum: Enhancing the experience</td>
<td>School of Applied Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of Project / Content</td>
<td>Faculty / School / Element(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capability Program: Years 1-3+ Clarifying goals &amp; direction, developing capability, work placements &amp; Graduate outcomes.</td>
<td>School of Applied Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay on Track- Retention of students on probation</td>
<td>Student Services &amp; Learning Assistance Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing clarity about course choice and career direction early in a student’s academic career</td>
<td>Student Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor training for undergraduate tutors/ mentoring program</td>
<td>School of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Education strategic improvement project to enhance student retention, satisfaction &amp; achievement</td>
<td>Faculty of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research into MEE existing retention rates and strategies to improve transition</td>
<td>School of Micro- Electronic Engineering, GIHE, Learning Assistance Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key findings and recommendations of the Indigenous Student Task Group – a targeted equity initiative addressing retention and other participation issues for Indigenous Australian students.</td>
<td>Student Equity, Student Services &amp; Gumrrii Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QTAC Rejection Survey</td>
<td>Student Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settling into University / Surviving &amp; succeeding at University</td>
<td>Student Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting students and staff in a flexible learning environment: A case study.</td>
<td>Centre for Human Services &amp; School of Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uni-Key: Unlocking the secrets of academic success…</td>
<td>Student Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNS (Fail No Submission): A Case Study in the Faculty of Arts</td>
<td>School of Criminology &amp; Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language proficiency and success of NESB international students</td>
<td>International Centre &amp; Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Residential Colleges' contribution to Student Retention at Griffith University</td>
<td>Bellenden Ker Residential College &amp; Campus Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaining 1st year students - the Engineering experience</td>
<td>School of Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rates: The contemporary context of the issue.</td>
<td>Faculty of Arts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Current initiatives will be considered in three categories: School and Faculty based initiatives in the area of postgraduate education, undergraduate education, and finally, university wide programs to improve the retention of undergraduates. Summary abstracts of all projects are provided in the Appendix B at the end of this report.

4.1 Programs designed to improve the retention of postgraduate students at Griffith University

A wide range of projects is currently in place to enhance the retention and completion rates of research higher degree students. The majority of these are located in specific academic elements.

Projects focussing on student support and skills include the development of

- Peer support/mentoring programs
- PG information research skills
- A common research subject for PG students
- A pre-enrolment training workshop and manual for PhD students
- Supplementary education options for RHD students
- Orientation of postgraduates
- Intercultural training of postgraduates through the Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership (ExcelL) program
- General skills and support at critical phases in development of research proposals and thesis writing for RHD students across the university

Other projects have focussed on the development of staff supervisory skills

- The analysis of supervisory styles

There are further opportunities here for cross-element sharing of good practice approaches in areas of postgraduate orientation, developing entry-level skills, ongoing research training, and social and administrative support processes. Many of these programs could be applied in other elements of the university, and programs such as the ExcelL program have broad applicability especially for improving performance and retention rates of international undergraduate as well as postgraduate students.

One project entitled Improving retention rates and quality outcomes of research higher degree students in Education, with potential application for other Elements in the Arts group (McMeniman & Tyson) encompasses many of the features of the above programs, taking a broad strategic approach to retention and the quality of outcomes for PG students in Education. Many participants felt that this approach had the potential for application across other faculties and would address broad quality issues with regard to postgraduate education whilst improving retention.
4.2 School or Faculty based programs designed to improve the retention and engagement of undergraduate students at Griffith University

In this section some examples of good practice initiatives are highlighted as having potential for transfer to other areas of the University.

Disciplinary areas concerned with the training of helping professionals (e.g., psychologists, teachers, human service workers) are implementing a number of lighthouse projects using early intervention approaches to target the enhancement of student engagement. The ongoing project in the Faculty of Education (Watson et al., 2002) is assessing students’ perceptions and experiences of university. Initial findings indicate that, although students were enthusiastic, they were generally unprepared for university and had an unrealistic perception of the amount of time required for university study. The Faculty of Education intends to implement interventions such as advising students more clearly about the demands of university life (time commitments) and providing opportunities early in the course for a higher level of involvement in the academic community.

A project in the Faculty of Arts coordinated through the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice (Wimhurst et al.) aims to track a specific undergraduate student group who stay enrolled but fail to submit assessment items. There are useful lessons from this project regarding better ways to manage the process of informal student withdrawal.

The project implemented in the School of Engineering (Edwards) aims to increase student-staff interaction through cost-effective means in order to reduce attrition of particularly top students. This project is a good example of managing student engagement in a more technical disciplinary context.

The Common Time program in the School of Human Services (Fowler & Branch) is designed to increase the interaction of students with staff and with other students and to provide structured learning support (e.g., study skills) for first year students. This program has also been acknowledged nationally through the Good Teaching Awards as an example of good practice. This type of program, with the goals of increasing staff and student interaction, offers some practice principles that are more generally applicable.

A model for statistical analysis of student cohorts provided critical tracking about when students leave, and the coincidence of course related events with student departure is provided by the School of Micro-Electronic Engineering.

The Professional Capability Program (Lizzio & Wilson) developed in the School of Applied Psychology is a coordinated series of programs with the overarching aim of helping students become more confident and competent in their current learner and future professional roles. The program seeks to provide a coherent expression, at the School level, of university priorities in areas such as facilitating student engagement, developing generic skills and enhancing graduate employment prospects. The program focuses on the development of linked and expanding professional skills throughout the three years of the degree. A systematic evaluation of this program showed that it contributed to students’ overall satisfaction with their degree program and level of identification with the School. Clearly this type of program has a high level of applicability to other program areas in the
university, which have a professional focus. However, there are also process elements of this program (eg. self-assessment of skills, use of peer mentors, attention to students changing needs over the degree lifecycle) that are relevant to more generalist programs.

4.2.1 Features common to current School and Faculty level good practice initiatives:

• Use of action research methodologies to derive a good match between students needs and program design.
• Strong attention to not only the academic, but also the social aspects of students’ experience of university.
• Integrating “developmental projects” into the teaching practices of the School.
• Exploring and negotiating more effective working relationships (and models of local service delivery) with central support elements.
• Valuing systematic evaluation of project processes and outcomes.

4.3 University wide initiatives to improve the retention of undergraduates.

There are a number of university-wide good practice initiatives emanating mainly from Student Services and Learning Assistance Services. Reference is made here to particular examples, which have broad university application and also have good fit with the retention literature.

The Stay On Track project (Vivekananda et al) is designed to identify and target assistance to students on probation with the aim of improving their academic success and retention rates. The first stage of this project identified at risk student cohorts to be at higher academic risk as being undergraduate male students, particularly in three faculties, Commerce and Management, Arts & Engineering and Technology. International, undergraduate, full fee paying students are highly over represented in the student group on probation, constituting 24% of the total whilst constituting only 11% of the overall student population. The Stay on Track project trailed five levels of interventions; a self-directed Stay on Track Plan, email contact, one-to-one interviews with a counsellor, web-based information, Stay on Track Workshops. Students evaluated all interventions but the last as useful.

This finding is supported by results reported by Wylie (Centre for Applied Linguistics & Languages) relating to satisfaction and attrition of International students at Griffith, based on a study conducted jointly with the International Centre. Based on survey data their recommendations include, a review of English language admission requirements and on-program support for NESB students, with support to address the differing needs of postgraduate and undergraduate NESB students.

Another program which focuses on increasing student’s clarity about course choice and career direction early in their academic career has targeted students in the orientation and first year stage (Walck & Hensby, Student Services) This is designed to assist students to clarify their career goals and where necessary to make appropriate changes. A related program offered through Student Services focuses on developing skills related to employability and to enhance students’ future job options. Both projects relate to student
course choice, motivation and longer-term goal focus which have been found to be significant for retention of students in undergraduate programs (Ozga et al 1998).

4.4 Initiatives relating to the retention of undergraduate and postgraduate International Students

In the area of postgraduate coursework students, one initiative related to the development of a mentoring program for international students and two other studies/initiatives have relevance to RHD and coursework PG students, as well as international undergraduates. These are the English proficiency and success of NESB students (Wylie, Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages) and the approach taken by residential colleges in supporting student retention (Atkinson, Campus Life). The English proficiency study highlights the need for a review of the admission standards and ongoing language and cultural support for international students to ensure their maximum potential for success at university study.
SECTION 5
FEEDBACK, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM

5.1 Recommendations and observations made by keynote speakers

Keynote speakers including the Acting DVC, Teaching and Learning, Dean of Postgraduate Studies and the Academic Registrar made observations and recommendations for approaches and future action. These are detailed in the following section.

The then Acting DVC Teaching and Learning, in his keynote address suggested some ways that Griffith University could address retention issues.

- Become data-driven.
  - Invest in finding out where in the University the problem is most acute, and focus there.
  - Try to find out reasons for non-completion. Look for broad patterns (first year?), but expect there to be a wide range of reasons.
  - Do not search too hard for a single factor, because it may not exist.

- See whether the main domain of problems appears to lie
  - Academic (including poor courses, poor teaching, lack of connection with professional life, redundancy across courses)
  - Administrative (bungles, inconsistent data, things do not work, misleading information, no one takes responsibility)
  - Personal (finances, relationships, accommodation, loneliness, loss of confidence, lack of direction and motivation). We often cannot do much about these, but counselling services may be of some help to individuals who seek assistance.

For academic factors

- Pursue good teaching that results in exciting, high quality learning. This includes technical expertise in the subject matter, teaching expertise and a healthy and mature attitude towards students and learning. Good teaching leads to profound respect from the best students and satisfaction and self-esteem for moderate students.

- Arrange for an independent evaluation of the teaching of the programs and courses worst affected. Lean towards open rather than structured questionnaires to allow students’ voices to be heard. Structured items pre-select the issues for students, and may not cover the critical aspects of teaching that they feel strongly about.

- If teaching appears to be a key factor, face the facts and work towards remedying the situation. Do not be defensive. Put the School's proven-best
teachers in the most sensitive areas. These teachers may be anyone from Lecturer A to Professor, full time or sessional (casual). Resource them properly to do a first class job, even if this amounts to special treatment for them. This is only fair.

- Listen to students (Deans, Heads of Schools, Program Conveners) in frank, informal settings. Involve students in the life of the School so far as possible. Pick up on early warning signs. Arrange for all valid concerns to be attended to, within resource limits.

**For administrative factors**

- See things holistically from the student's point of view (student as client, customer or consumer), not from your own 'delivery' perspective. Think strategically; identify and remedy weaknesses.
- Focus on high quality service delivery everywhere. Tolerate no lapses; establish and maintain a culture of precision and connectedness.
- Dismantle silo mentality; promote efficient transfers of information and responsibility between different service elements.
- Ensure follow-through of action when promised; keep the student informed.
- Ensure that all staff, academic or general, who interact with students have excellent interpersonal skills, are knowledgeable about their work and are positive about Griffith University.

The Dean of Postgraduate Studies made some suggestions for action to improve retention of Postgraduate students. These are detailed in table 5.

**Table 5**

**Some institutional options for addressing attrition in PhD programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Domestic’/private – limited options for institutional support</td>
<td>Admission – selection of candidates, prior information and advice, ‘informed consent’, induction programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial – scholarships of limited advantage, but could be more targeted</td>
<td>Candidature – quality of supervision, management of thresholds, recognition of progress; quality of communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational – support and counselling; career guidance; employment opportunities during program</td>
<td>Culture – engaging and integrating students - professional development (conferences, professional associations), research culture (seminars, team research, ‘geek groups’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The then Academic Registrar provided a *Summing up* at the end of the Symposium and in the process suggested that a university wide coordinated approach might have the following features:

- Grounded in good theoretical base
- Empowering of local action
- Appropriate supports (learning, English language)
- Leadership from the top
- Partnerships between Schools and support units
- Openness to feedback
- Negotiated engagement with students
- Facilitated sharing of experience and knowledge
- Facilitated access the provision of resources
- Maintenance of consciousness and focus on student centredness
- Nurturance of scholarships and role models for other students – sense of pride and excellence.
- Acknowledgement of different ways of learning
- Encouragement of knowledge of support services
- Recognition and reward of good teaching (students, think hope expect good teaching)
- Strategies for engagement of staff as well as students

Finally she noted that,

> We must learn to teach the students we have, not the students we wish we had or think we deserve.

### 5.2 Feedback from participants at the Symposium

A total of 115 participants representing general and academic staff from all campuses of the university including 35 elements overall and 25 academic departments, attended the Symposium and provided;

- feedback about important issues with regard to student retention in their own elements
- suggestions for future actions to improve retention at the element level and
- recommendations for broader action at the university wide level.

Participants were asked at the end of the day, to respond to the following question *“How could we meet the challenges of student engagement and retention at the element level and at the university wide level?”* A summary of the participants’ feedback is contained below. The recommendations were summarised and categorized by chronological stages, which students pass through at university and then also collated into overall themes.

It was clear from the response of participants that many academic staff were surprised to learn of the university-wide initiatives enacted particularly by Student Services and Student support staff were surprised to hear of many of the individual school based initiatives. The effectiveness of these initiatives would be enhanced by closer cooperation and liaison between academic elements and service sectors. Recommendations from participants were also combined into university wide themes.
5.3 University-wide themes

Good practice approaches at Griffith / Collaborative approaches

- Distribute and make others aware of “good practice” examples at Griffith, e.g. Applied Psychology, Education, MEE, Postgrad. Education and Postgraduate approaches (Marilyn McMeniman).
- Draw out the principles of good practice and apply generally across the university
- Encourage collaboration/networking/sharing ideas across faculties to avoid re-inventing the wheel and “silo” mentality. Also further collaboration between Student Services, Learning Assistance Services and Faculties

Integration of Support Services with Academic course offerings:

- Students come to Griffith to study a particular course, therefore focus support/assistance (Student Services, Learning Assistance Services & INS) in the Program area- recognising students have complicated lives and time constraints (‘One stop School focus’).
- Increase academic staff awareness of support facilities for referral of students
- Need to develop generic skills training within course offerings.
- Academic writing (& maths in some areas) skills a strong area of need, not only at 1st year.

Statistics

- Need to have statistics to identify when students leave, critical points in the year and degree stage. (This would involve an interpretation of the present statistics being available to Schools etc.)
- Relationship between entry characteristics and success/progression
- MEE study demonstrates a way to develop a retention/attrition data set applicable to other Schools.

First Year

- Institute a special emphasis on first year, timetabling to enable interaction, best teaching a staff assigned, teaching methods which encourage and facilitate student-student and staff-student interaction
- Assign the best teachers to first year
- Specific training for lecturers and tutors assigned to first year classes
- Rewards for good teaching/rewards for teaching first year students
- Develop mentoring programs which involve 3rd year students working with 1st year students
- Create opportunities for staff and students to interact more (teaching approaches and social opportunities)
- Integrate career/course awareness in course programs to enable students to focus on directions
- Focus on face-to-face interaction especially in first semester.
English language proficiency needs

➢ Consistently apply an across the university English proficiency standard for entry with no waivers possible.

High achieving students

➢ Identify these students from first year (first semester results) and provide congratulations letters, opportunities for extensions programs and information about honours and post-grad programs
➢ Link Honours and RHD and Coursework students: treat Honours more like postgraduates and give possible direction for the future by encouraging them to consider postgraduate study at Griffith.

Career awareness

➢ Offer pre-enrolment career/course counselling
➢ Integrate career/professional focus in courses so students have a sense of where they are going and stay focussed.
➢ For all years starting at 1st year to increase the perception of relevance and sense of direction.
➢ Bring in past Griffith students to showcase their career.

At-risk students

➢ Identify students early, failed 50% first semester, failed to hand in first assignment, failed first assignment and follow up systematically.
➢ Individual follow up for students on probation
➢ Follow-up with enrolment options for students on leave of absence

Student experiences

➢ Find out more about what students are experiencing, their feelings /needs. What was most successful for third years who have succeeded?

Marketing

➢ Align expectations with realities of university study

On-line enrolment

➢ Make the process user friendly
➢ Offer assistance and training to students who are not proficient at on-line operations.
SECTION 6.0
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The development of recommendations

This review has highlighted some areas of good practice and innovation at Griffith, as well as identifying several gaps and areas for further improvement. The recommendations provided by participants in the symposium and by others following the symposium were wide and varying, however a core group of recommendations emerged which were common to many participants. This list of suggestions has been considered together with the research evidence presented and the projects already being enacted at Griffith. In this way it is intended to utilise the information and expertise already developed in the area to inform future policies and practices. As was seen in the previous section, only six of the projects involved more than one Element at Griffith. In order to maximise organization learning, a vital part of this process is the exchange of information between sections of Griffith University with the aim of developing stronger partnerships.

As the research indicates, the path of students into and through Higher Education is increasingly non-linear in many cases and as a consequence there will always be an amount of attrition. In terms of developing a strategic university wide approach it is vital to focus on the aspects of retention and attrition, which can be influenced by institutional processes by recognising the areas that are within our power to change and influence and those which are not. Strategies, which are developed will need to be both proactive and reactive, and should involve the overall quality of learning experiences and engagement process for all students, whilst also assisting students identified as ‘at-risk’ throughout the process. Proactive processes will look at the process from orientation onwards and address the significant issues, which are known to affect the commitment and engagement of students. The reactive is also important to address the students who, as part of the process, are identified as at risk.

6.2 Principles underlying recommendations

It is recommended that a strategic approach to the improvement of student retention at Griffith University ideally will:

- Be grounded in a sound theoretical base,
- Be student centred focussing on improving the overall experience for all students to facilitate and maximise student engagement with the educational process,
- Have demonstrated leadership from the top while giving ownership for the retention activities to those involved in implementing changes and programs,
- Be based on an clear understanding of the present situation (statistics/data at the macro & micro levels) at Griffith University,
- As a priority, emphasise frontloading efforts to improve student retention, by providing resources for and focusing on improving the first year experience for all students,
- Reward Schools, faculties, and support services which make successful initiatives to improve retention,
• Facilitate sharing of experience and knowledge to create a learning organization, avoid reinventing the wheel and to ensure the effective transfer of good practice examples,
• Facilitate cooperation and active partnership between academic and support service areas to maximise outcomes for students and effective use of resources,
• Include on going monitoring of the experience of students
• Developing systems for identifying and intervening with students in Programs and Schools at higher risk of attrition
• Use accessible/meaningful statistical data for the purposes of ongoing feedback and evaluation of initiatives,

6.3 Specific strategies

The following are specific strategies recommended to bring effect to the above principles:

6.3.1 Statistics

➢ Develop and make available to Faculties a user-friendly statistical set, which will enable tracking of student cohorts throughout the year and effective evaluation of retention initiatives.
➢ Collect further data on student progress rates for identified at-risk student groups including, International, equity, low OP entry, males, part-timers and students entering through alternative pathways to inform approaches in this area.
➢ Collect information from students withdrawing to identify reasons for leaving and destinations.
➢ Track and take proactive steps to re-engage students on leave from the University who might return.

6.3.2 Collaborative approaches and partnerships

➢ Identify common goals/issues requiring mutual effort and cooperation between elements.
➢ Encourage and facilitate projects, which involve multiple elements working cooperatively.
➢ Clarify and articulate the relationship between different support services.
➢ Encourage and promote projects involving cooperation between Academic Elements and centralised support service areas (e.g. Student Services, Learning Assistance Services, GIHE, International Centre, GUMURRI Centre).
➢ Facilitate the integration of initiatives from student support areas (e.g. Stay on Track, Careers clarification, orientation programs, Uni-Key) into academic programs.
6.3.3 Frontloading retention efforts

Orientation

➢ Develop effective and intensive orientation processes for first year students to actively structure new students’ engagement with their learning, with a strong integration of the academic, personal, social and administrative processes.

➢ Improve linkages between specialist orientations for targeted equity groups and mainstream orientations ensuring relevance and taking account of cultural diversity issues.

➢ Encourage senior staff participation in orientation programs to communicate to all students their importance as part of the University’s mission.

First year undergraduate programs

➢ Make first year undergraduate programs a priority area for retention efforts with strong academic leadership provided, as to educationally sound and desirable orientation and transition processes.

➢ Encourage Program coordinators to institute some of the following initiatives in first year programs.
  o Assigning the best teachers to first year.
  o Using formative assessment processes especially in first semester.
  o Focussing on face-to-face interaction especially in first semester.
  o Prioritising timetabling for first year classes to enable small group teaching and to facilitate student-student and staff-student interaction.
  o Providing rewards for good teaching of first year students.
  o Developing mentoring programs which involve 3rd year students working with 1st year students (e.g. as already used by the Uni-Key program).
  o Integrating generic skills within the first year teaching process with the cooperation of LAS.
  o Integrating career/course awareness in course programs to enable students to clarify goals.
  o Identifying, encouraging and rewarding talented and high performing students as early as possible.
  o Tracking student progress in first semester (i.e. assignment completion) to identify and assist at-risk students at the earliest possible stage.
  o Adjusting teaching, learning and assessment to recognise the diversity of student approaches and backgrounds

➢ Reward Schools and Faculties, which implement first year programs and demonstrate an increase in student satisfaction and retention.
Compare Griffith University’s practices against national benchmarks, *First Year Charter*.

### 6.3.4 Identifying and intervening with at-risk student groups

- Encourage Program coordinators to work with Student Services, Learning Assistance Services and GUMURRII to identify and develop a coordinated approach to assisting students identified as at risk through the academic warning and probation system.
- Investigate ways to engage, support and where possible to provide flexible alternatives for part-time students.
- Give special attention to the provision for Full Fee Paying International students who are in a high risk group in terms of academic progress (including those who commence in 2nd year) using the following strategies;
  - Ensuring that the stipulations of the AVCC Code of Practice for the Provision of Education to International students and the Commonwealth ESOS Act, 2000 are put into effect at Griffith.
  - Making all staff aware of the above provisions to ensure the University is meeting standards set in this area.
  - Ensuring that all staff understand the need for minimum levels of English proficiency and that English Language testing is undertaken by qualified personnel and not waived in any circumstances by other personnel.
  - Giving attention to the English proficiency levels of students entering at later stages in courses and articulating from other programs and ensuring that these are of an acceptable standard.
  - Encouraging the development of mentoring programs for international students, which facilitate pairing with local students to facilitate support and adjustment.
  - Facilitating the extension, dissemination and integration of the ExcelL program across the university in courses, which have high proportions of International Students.

### 6.3.5 Encouraging gifted and talented students

- Identify, recognise and acknowledge gifted and talented students from first semester first year, to encourage continuation at Griffith through undergraduate programs, through to Honours and PG programs.
- Have talented 2nd and 3rd year students participate in mentoring programs for 1st year students.
- Encourage successful graduates to return and promote career options and goal clarification for undergraduates.
- Facilitate high performing 3rd years meeting with Honours and PG students and encourage participation in research seminars.
- Recognise Honours students as Post Graduates and encourage mixing with and integration with RHD students to facilitate retention into PG programs.

### 6.3.6 Strategic approaches to providing motivation for grassroots action

- Introduce resource allocation strategies and incentives to encourage targeted initiatives towards improved student retention.
- Implement clear and direct funding implications for Schools with successful outcomes in terms of increased retention in both undergraduate and postgraduate areas.

### 6.3.7 Good practice approaches at Griffith University

- Promote organisational learning and reduce duplication by implementing an ongoing process for the transfer of information regarding good practice initiatives in the area of increasing student engagement and retention.

### 6.3.8 Monitoring students’ experiences

- Synthesise the information obtained from surveys of student experiences collected at Griffith in 2002 (First Year Survey, student satisfaction surveys including International students etc.) to create a coherent picture.
- Implement an ongoing process of data collection in this area to continually assess and monitor student experiences.
- Introduce student staff consultative committees for all programs to ensure that the views and experiences of students, representing the diversity of the student population, are taken account of in planning processes.

### 6.3.9 Evaluation

- Evaluate retention strategies and policies both quantitatively and qualitatively through effective statistical analysis of changes in retention and progress rates and feedback from stakeholders.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

1.0 Definitions

The relevant DEST definitions of retention and attrition rates are as follows;

- **Retention Rate:** The retention rate measures the percentage of students enrolled in one year who are enrolled in the subsequent year. (Students completing a course and not continuing on to another course are not included in calculation of the retention rate.)
- **Attrition rate:** The attrition rate measures the percentage of students enrolled in one year who are not enrolled in the subsequent year. Students completing a course are counted as retained students.

2.0 Peel’s (1999 reported in Pitkethly *et al.*, 2001) “basic set of expectations” for the elements which should be included for successful transition programs

- Strategies for identifying and predicting problems of new students;
- Routines for collection, analysis and dissemination of data concerning the experience of new students;
- Mechanisms for addressing the problems related to teaching and learning;
- Mechanisms for addressing university wide transition issues;
- Feedback and monitoring of problems, initiatives and strategies;
- Evaluation of outcomes in relation to objectives and a process of strategic response.

Following these principles, innovations introduced as part of the Latrobe University project as reported by Pitkethly *et al.*, 2001) focussed on four goal areas;

- To familiarise students with the university
- To develop a sense of purpose and direction by promoting a clear understanding of why they are doing their subjects and courses and where they are heading;
- To facilitate engagement in university life by promoting involvement in university life
- To promote and enhance students’ learning by developing basic skills and knowledge.
APPENDIX B: Abstracts of Projects presented at the Symposium

1.0 Initiatives to improve Undergraduate Retention

School of Management Initiatives
Sheryl Ramsay, School of Management

The School of Management is part of the Faculty of Commerce and Management in the Business Group and is located on Nathan and Logan campuses. The School offers a range of courses in the areas of Human Resource Management, Management, and Information Systems Management to undergraduate and postgraduate students. There are a number of School-focused initiatives aimed at enhancing student engagement, support, and academic skills. The programs are organised and conducted by administrative and academic staff within the School. While tutor training sessions (for sessional staff) are focused on undergraduates, many initiatives are directed at postgraduate students, including intercultural training and mentoring programs; additional orientation activities; assignment writing and research skills sessions; social functions involving staff and students, and an ISM bridging program. The School is continuing to review and develop initiatives aimed at student engagement, academic success, and, ultimately, retention.

Professional Capability Program
Alf Lizzio, School of Applied Psychology

Based on a systematic assessment the School of Applied Psychology (Mt Gravatt) identified a number of key areas of academic, personal and vocational need. The School currently offers students five extra curricula programs organised in a developmental sequence under the integrating idea of "developing capability". Each program has a unique focus-systematic orientation, developing a sense of professional identity and career direction, gaining workplace experience, and preparing for the transition to work.

Mapping Retention Practice within Learning Assistance Services
Jenny Tannoch-Bland, Learning Assistance Services

Through a generic skills program, workshops embedded in academic courses and individual consultations, the LAS impacts on student retention in three main areas: Readiness for higher education, Engagement with university experience and Academic achievement. Learning assistance programs are designed to assist students to understand and negotiate academic culture in order to develop the attributes of the Griffith Graduate. Further, a concern with postgraduate completion rates has prompted the LAS to develop a discrete postgraduate workshop program.

The LAS maintains a client database and conducts an annual client feedback survey to produce an Annual Report. Student feedback endorses existing services but highlights Literacy/English language competency as a critical aspect of readiness, engagement and achievement. Whereas the LAS assists with development of generic skills, many students (not only NESB students) require intensive instruction in Literacy/English language competency. This need is not met at an institutional level. A holistic institutional response might consider a pre-enrolment program establishing English competency, or embedding English language literacy in degree programs.

Student Services
Joanna Peters, Student Services

Students Services exists to facilitate student and staff achievement in and satisfaction with their academic and work endeavours, and their personal and career development through the provision of
high quality, ethical and responsive services and programs. These services and programs include welfare, counselling, careers, chaplaincy, equity and health support. Our activities are targeted to assist students throughout all stages of their association with Griffith - from aspiration through familiarisation, transition and engagement, to academic success and graduate employment.

Our services and programs are developmental and student-centred, focusing on developing students’ problem solving and life management skills. Students can self refer or be referred by staff or other students to any of our centrally provided services, which are free, confidential and voluntary. Alternatively we work through faculties and other elements providing programs and seminars tailored to students in particular cohorts, at particular stages (e.g. commencing, continuing, graduating) and at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Staff in Student Services also contribute to the overall quality of the learning environment for students by input to university policy development and strategic planning; and through consultancy support to other staff on matters concerning student welfare, well-being, career planning, equity and diversity.

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**QTAC Rejection Survey**

Ron Elms, Admissions Manager

In March 2001 QTAC conducted a survey of 7687 applicants who rejected their QTAC offer to ascertain the reasons for their rejection. 2046 or 26.6% responded. The survey sought information on why applicants rejected their offer and covered such areas as course and institutional factors, financial reasons, employment outcomes, effect of work commitments, personal factors, and preparation for tertiary study. The study also sought information on what non-tertiary study and/or employment these applicants were undertaking instead of tertiary study. Although the study focused on why applicants did not commence their study, it is still relevant to retention. The proposition is that the factors identified in the QTAC study, which prevented applicants from starting their study in the first instance, are most likely the same factors that cause students to cease study after they have commenced.

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**Faculty of Education Strategic Improvement Project to enhance student retention, satisfaction and achievement**

Professor Neil Dempster & Dr Glenice Watson, Faculty of Education

The Strategic Improvement Grant is funding an interventionist research project that has as its goal the identification and development of strategic responses that improve student retention, achievement and satisfaction within specific programs of the Faculty of Education at Griffith University. The programs selected were Bachelor of Education (Primary), Bachelor of Education (Secondary) and Bachelor of Adult and Vocational Education (BAVE).

The investigation aims to identify the factors that shape student satisfaction, achievement and retention under the broad classifications of (i) Individual Histories; (ii) Engagement; and (iii) Institutional Affordances. These classifications were synthesised from a review of literature. Individual Histories refers to factors associated with students’ familiarity with higher education studies, their readiness for academic study, and the relatedness of the program to individuals’ interests. Factors associated with Engagement include the degree of support that students might find in their ‘home life’ outside the University, and extends to distractions that students may face. Institutional Affordances comprise factors associated with the students’ experiences within the University.

The procedures adopted for the investigation comprise four interrelated phases of data gathering and analysis. The first is a review of literature of issues associated with student achievement, satisfaction and retention. The second phase comprises access to supplementary data comprising existing records of student cohorts. The third phase of data comprises that provided by current students through surveys (reported below), interviews and focus groups. The fourth phase comprises a period of data analysis.
and reporting, including the identification of strategic approaches and strategies to enhance student satisfaction, achievement and completion.

*Ready or not? Results of an orientation week survey of education students* (presented at the 6th Pacific Rim Conference on First Year in Higher Education July 2002) reports on aspects of the data obtained through an initial survey that was administered to students during Orientation Week. This survey focussed on the first two of the identified factors, namely *Individual Histories and Engagement*. A key finding within the *Individual Histories* category, that extends across most of the five cohorts, is the students reporting relatively high levels of enthusiasm to begin university study compared with their relatively low level of "preparedness" to achieve a successful outcome to a university degree. However, the Secondary and the BVAE cohorts report the lowest levels of enthusiasm and were markedly less enthusiastic than the primary cohort. A further commonality across most of the cohorts regarding the other major category, *Engagement*, was a high level of support for their studies. This is counterbalanced however with an equally high level of distraction, mainly in the form of paid and unpaid work, that could ‘disconnect’ them from university academic and social life. However, in the light of prior research the relative maturity of the cohort (excluding the secondary cohort) could indicate the potential for success at university.

In mid Semester I, 15 focus groups across the target programs were conducted. These groups discussed the background of the students and their experiences so far. This data is in the process of analysis. A second survey that explores the extent students availed themselves of *Institutional Affordances*, and their perceptions of these services, during Semester I has been prepared for administration at the beginning of Semester II.

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**Stay On Track: Towards improving the success and retention of students on probation**  
Dr Kitty Vivekananda, Counselling Service  
Ms Mary Dalmau & Ms Kathy Watson, Learning Assistance Services

*Stay on Track* pilot project was developed, implemented and evaluated by the Counselling Service of Student Services and Learning Assistance Services (LAS) in 2002. It aims to re-engage academically “at-risk” students on probation with their studies and with the University in general. At the end of 2001, 1626 students (1501 undergraduate students and 125 postgraduate students) were identified as on probation (i.e. with a cumulative GPA of less than 3.0). Particular cohorts of students have been identified as having higher risk for poor academic performance.

The *Stay on Track* pilot project offered five different interventions to students on probation: 1) Self-help web based information; 2) A pen and paper motivational tool, *Stay on Track Plan*; 3) Email assistance from LAS and Stay on Track Project Officer; 4) Individual counselling with a counsellor; 5) *Stay on Track Workshops*.  
Students evaluated the first four interventions as most useful, in addition, to phone contact with the Stay on Track Project Officer.

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**Increasing Clarity About Course Choice and Career Direction Early in a Student’s Academic Career: Towards Positive Outcomes for Students and the University.**  
Donna Walck & Sharon Hensby, Student Services

This paper explores the issues of degree and career decision making of first year students. The literature draws attention to the importance of this decision making to students' satisfaction with degrees, making a successful transition into university studies and being motivated to persist with degree choices. Findings of this research are consistent with most findings from other Australian studies and indicate that the majority of students are satisfied with what they are doing and where they are heading, but a substantial proportion are uncertain of their degree and career plans. A substantial
proportion also indicated that they have not received enough help prior to commencing university to reach these important decisions.

In terms of whether and how we intervene to assist students in degree and career decision making, results indicate that: (1) providing assistance can be of benefit, (2) assistance needs to be timed appropriately and matched to students’ needs at the time, and (3) the type of assistance should vary from flagging services and normalising messages about being uncertain and changing, through to more extensive assistance when it is required. By providing these services, students will be more satisfied and motivated to persist with their studies, therefore increasing retention rates.

**Settling Into University**
Deborah Twining & Donna Walch, Student Services

Student Services regularly conducts an orientation activity ‘Settling into University’ across the various campuses. This popular workshop is conducted pre O week and addresses the personal, social and academic transition issues students may face whilst at University. Various staff from relevant support services also attend to offer an early interface between students and staff.

Following on from this as an ongoing support activity Student Services offers -

**Surviving & Succeeding at University**
For many students the first year at university is critical. Success or failure depends on how well students can adjust to university life and cope with the stress and anxiety it generates. This weekly, one-hour session aims to provide an opportunity for students to meet and talk with other students about transition difficulties and to work on challenges as they arise in a supportive environment.

**FNS (Fail No Submission): A Case Study in the Faculty of Arts**
Kerry Wimshurst & Richard Wortley, School of Criminology & Criminal Justice

The School of Criminology and Criminal Justice has commenced a project to investigate the conditions of students who record the grade of FNS for their courses. These are students who remain enrolled but submit no work for assessment and hence fail (the grade of WF might point to similar situations). The project is looking at the FNS problem across the five Schools that constitute the Faculty of Arts, and is funded by the Faculty. The relationship between FNS and the retention/attrition of students is unclear. It may be that FNS is a phenomenon quite distinct from other patterns of students withdrawing from or ‘dropping out’ of a program. It is unclear also whether the problem resides essentially in the characteristics of non-completing students, or whether there are structural/institutional factors that facilitate FNS.

**Research into MEE Existing Retention Rates and Strategies to Improve Transition**

**PROJECT AIMS**
This project was aimed at establishing reasons for failure to progress from first to second year for students in the School of Microelectronic Engineering, and creating recommendations to improve the retention rates in time to come. Specific aims of this project were in addressing the questions as follows:

- What has the research project revealed about the relationship between student attrition and the microelectronic engineering or University environment? In other words, what can be addressed by the School/University?
- How do we ensure our action is a strategic response to the research findings, and not merely a bandaid?
How are we to define sustainable interventions? What factors need to be considered, ie cost, resources, implementation?

How can we capture the expertise and experience that exists in First Year Experience interventions within the Griffith community?

What does the literature say and how can the First Year Experience research literature assist us to design our response to the research findings?

**PROJECT OUTCOMES**

The following was conducted:

- Questionnaires were designed to collect data, which will help the School to lower the student attrition rate and improve services offered to the School’s students;
- An “Attrition Rate Database” was developed classifying students into four different categories: Students who withdrew their enrolment from a Microelectronic Engineering undergraduate degree; Students who elected to take a Leave of Absence from their studies; Students who transferred to another undergraduate degree (both within the School and from other Schools/Faculties of the University); and students whose enrolment lapsed. Students identified commenced their undergraduate studies in the School of Microelectronic Engineering during 2000 and 2001. The database contained information pertaining to 66 students;
- Responses from the questionnaires were received from 35 students in total;
- Detailed analysis was undertaken looking at responses received from students who withdrew/deferred and students who had transferred. Further future study was recommended to monitor the “Attrition Rate Database” and its effect on the University’s retention rate figures.
- Explanations of the findings and analysis of data were provided.
- Recommendations for a strategic approach to retention were produced addressing the following issues:
  - Academic partnership approach
  - Issues that may affect transition
  - Strategies for tapping into resources within Griffith Academic Community
  - Need for further first year experience data collection
  - Related work
  - Implementation plan

For further details, please contact Associate Professor Ljubo Vlacic, MEE, L.Vlacic@me.gu.edu.au, ext: 55024. This project development and implementation was supported by a Griffith Strategic Improvement Grant in 2000 with significant contributions from:

- Associate Professor Ljubo Vlacic, Sonya Betros, Carol-Joy Patrick, Mira Vlacic and MEE Students (School of Microelectronic Engineering, (MEE))
- Dr Carol Bowie (Griffith Institute for Higher Education (GIHE))
- Deborah Peach, Jennifer Tannoch-Bland, Kathy Watson (Learning Adviser, Learning Assistance Unit (LAU))
- Miles Allen (Griffith Flexible Learning Services (GFLS))

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**Key findings and recommendations of the Indigenous Student Task Group – a targeted equity initiative addressing retention and other participation issues for Indigenous Australian students**

Suzanne Wilkinson, Student Equity, Student Services & Maureen Newton, Coordinator of the GUMURRII Centre

Indigenous student retention rates at Griffith University have improved incrementally since 1998, but they are the lowest of the University’s target equity group outcomes. For this reason, improving retention rates of Indigenous Australian students is a high priority of the University’s Equity Strategy 2001-2005.

The Indigenous Student Task Group was convened in 2001 to identify reasons for the University’s relatively poor performance in this area and devise new approaches towards improved educational participation and outcomes of Indigenous Australian students. The final report has now been...
considered by the University’s Equity Committee and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, and priorities agreed.

This presentation will examine the University’s performance, present Task Group findings about the variables that dominate students’ decisions to stay on with their studies or otherwise (including the results of a significant student consultation), and discuss the recommendations of the Task Group.

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**Retaining 1st year students - the Engineering experience**  
David Edwards, Senior Lecturer, School of Engineering

In response to concerns about a falling 1st year - 2nd year retention rate, the School of Engineering has introduced a number of student support measures. These include Common Time, a one hour per week “get together” time for all students and staff. More recently drop-in tutorials for mathematics were reinstated. This year general drop-in tutorials and small study groups were trialed. Since the commencement of these measures the retention rate has improved.

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**‘Uni-Key’ Unlocking the Secrets of Academic Success…**  
Jo Merley, Student Equity Programs Officer, Student Services

The Uni-Key Program is a Griffith University initiative to encourage the retention of students from equity backgrounds: low socio economic; non-English speaking background; disability; Indigenous; rural and isolated and women studying in non-traditional areas.

The program offers:
1. Pre-Orientation skill development workshops
2. Weekly mentoring from experienced students in the same study area.
3. Weekly group support meeting- a collaborative venture with the Uni-Key coordinator, Counselling and LAS staff.
4. On-Going individual contact with the Uni-Key Coordinator.

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**Supporting students and staff in a flexible learning environment: A case study.**  
Jane Fowler & Sara Branch, School of Human Services, Logan Campus

This paper reports on an intervention undertaken by the School of Human Services at the Logan Campus of Griffith University. An innovative program called “Common Time” (CT) was introduced in an endeavour to provide support to students and staff in a flexible learning environment. An evaluation of CT suggests achievement of objectives for which the program was designed and some serendipitous outcomes for students and staff. (This paper will be updated in August/Sept, 2002 and the authors are happy to provide further information at that stage.)

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**Retention rates: the contemporary context of the issue**  
Professor David Moss, Dean of Arts

This brief presentation sketches part of the context in which the analysis of retention rates in 2002 needs to be set, notes some findings from the relevant literature, and summarises the direction of the research that I am currently conducting on the academic trajectories of two cohorts of BA students.
English language proficiency and success of NESB international students
Elaine Wylie, Centre for Applied Linguistics & languages

This presentation focused on the results of the 2000 Quality Enhancement project Maximising the satisfaction of international students and minimizing their attrition. (Sefton & Wylie). The focus was on international students who had performed poorly in their critical first semester, considering whether they had been accepted on the basis of prior studies in English or had done an English language test; and, if the latter, what the test was and what scores they had achieved. A summary of data and recommendations were presented.

2.0 Initiatives to improve the retention of Postgraduate Students

Improving retention rates and quality outcomes of research higher degree students in Education, with potential application for other elements in the Arts group.
Professor Marilyn McMeniman & Wendy Tyson, Faculty of Arts

This project aimed to improve the quality on entry, retention rates and development of graduate characteristics of RHD students within participating University elements by developing (i) more stringent and consistent quality control on entry to the Faculty of Education’s RHD programs; (ii) more frequent within-Faculty checks on student progress to stem attrition and to ensure that students stay on track, on time and on task; (iii) a student-responsive, flexibly-delivered RHD induction program, and (iv) ways of embedding specific characteristics of the Griffith Graduate. The five stages of the study included mapping and analysing the Faculty’s attrition data; surveying successful RHD graduates; interviewing experienced Faculty supervisors; developing an interactive RHD induction program; and developing quality control mechanisms throughout the RHD candidature.

Nurturing a Post Graduate Environment on a New University Campus
Dr. W. Moyle, Professor D. Creedy, Faculty of Nursing and Health & Dr. C. Zimitat, Griffith Institute of Higher Education

A new and developing campus at Logan provided the ideal opportunity to investigate alternative strategies to improve the experiences of postgraduate research students. Staff and students from four disciplines volunteered to participate in the project. The project aimed to [1] develop, implement and evaluate a common research subject that could be used by students from all disciplines to develop their research proposal, [2] give students a sense of ownership in design and maintenance of the subject, and [3] evaluate an existing postgraduate website. The subject ran alongside parallel sessions for supervisors of postgraduate students. Although the project presented a number of challenges it is argued that the principles of design and development of the subject could be used in fostering other supportive learning environment for postgraduate students and supervisors.

The Doctor of Philosophy: Improving Completion Rates from Pre-Enrolment.
Dr Geoff Carter, Marketing & Management, Gold Coast Campus

While the general picture that emerges regarding the PhD process is one of satisfaction, productivity, stimulation and reward, it is well known that the process is a long and difficult one, requiring one to often work alone and unaided. Research suggests common difficulties affecting good completion rates include the supervisory relationship and student characteristics. This investigation examined the
characteristics of self efficacy, coping resources and procrastination tendencies in existing PhD students and their perception of their supervisory relationship/s in order to devise a set of indicators specifically relating to student traits which could predict the future completion rates of students. A secondary aim was to develop a psycho-educational training program for student prior to their enrolment in a PhD. The results indicated that the variation in supervision relationships as per existing PhD students could not be explained in terms of the students’ characteristics. This was discussed in light of response rates and bias, and the development of the psycho-education program, and future recommendations were made for examining this population.

**Outcomes:** Development of training workshop and manual for students at pre-enrolment status, as per the identified indicators in the literature (the conducted study did not support the hypothesized indicators because of the return rate of questionnaires, and so the workshop/manual was developed based on existing literature) This project was funded under Strategic Improvement Projects in 2001

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**Postgraduate Peer Support Forum: Enhancing the Experience**

Louise Horstmanshof, RHD Student, School of Applied Psychology, Gold Coast.

The Background

From informal discussions with both students and staff in first semester 2001, it appeared that there were unresolved issues that were contributing to extensive delays in the completion of, and in some cases, the failure to complete the thesis component of the degrees. This resulted in lost of time and money for both students and the university. In addition many students were finding the research environment lonely, unsupported and in some cases even hostile.

It was proposed that a forum consisting of students and lecturers (supervisors) be set up on the Gold Coast campus to deal with the extent and nature of the problems being experienced.

I set out a proposal and presented this to Ass Prof Ian Glendon who pledged his support and assistance. A focus group meeting was held on 25 July 2001. From this initial meeting the main points of concern were identified. Over the next months, I organised further sessions, attempting to provide assistance. I consulted widely during this period, meeting with both Dr. Linda Conrad and Professor Mark Finnane.

In October, with assistance from Dr. Linda Conrad and support from Ass Prof Ian Glendon, I put in an application for a Strategic Improvements in Research Training Scheme Grant. The application was successful, and this year, with the assistance and support of Dr. Linda Conrad, I have put together a seminar series for 2002 that covers the following topics:

- Time Management and Goal Setting
- Literature Search, Review and Data Base Management
- Formating Research Questions and Selecting Appropriate Methodology
- Writing Skills, Proofreading and Revision
- Managing Interpersonal Relationships
- Presentation Skills, Confirmation Seminars and Conferences
- Publication Syndicates and the benefits of publishing as you go.

I have made use of the expertise available on campus to augment the sessions. The program has been designed to provide opportunities for students at various stages of the process. The emphasis is on adult learning methods of sharing information, reflecting on content and problem solving in a supportive learning environment. The resulting manual will be available to future cohorts in the university.
PIRS (Postgraduate Information Research Skills)
Dianne Selzer, Librarian, Health / Science

The PIRS program was developed through a Quality Enhancement Project, aimed at improving information skills training for research postgraduate students. Information Skills are integral to effective research and quality research outcomes. The PIRS program adopts the approach of providing effective and relevant information skills training within a collaborative model of support involving students, supervisors and academic liaison librarians. The program is based on learner-centred strategies delivered within a flexible, online learning environment utilising the Blackboard Educational Management System.

Mentoring Program for students – Intensified Communicable Diseases Control Project, Indonesia
Jan Tiley International Project Officer, International Projects Unit

At present thirty-four members of the Ministry of Health, Indonesia are undertaking a Master of Science in Public Health along with concurrent English language training.

However it became evident that students required further English speaking practice and friendship therefore a mentoring program was instigated. With the support of dedicated Griffith staff members, who have been willing to spend time to meet with the students the program commenced early this year. The mentors are assisting the students with their social English expression and more importantly have become an Aussie friend. From the present mentors’ feedback it is already proving to alleviate some of the problems associated with living and studying within another culture.

The supervisor management styles model
Terry Gatfield & Frank Alpert, School of Marketing

There is a substantive increase in the number of candidates seeking Ph.Ds. Whereas the literature is relatively substantial and informative regarding advice to candidates and supervisors in many areas it does little to assist in providing understanding of supervisory styles and changes of style over the supervisory period. This paper attempts to close that research gap through examining 60 items of literature related to Ph.D completion. Eighty key variables were extracted from the literature and used to develop a four-quadrant supervisory style management grid. The grid was subject to a verification study through the results obtained from 12 in-depth interviews with supervisors. Further, a hypothetical model is developed to examine changes in supervisory style over time.
APPENDIX C:
1.0 Summary of feedback from Symposium participants by chronological sequence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-enrolment/General Promotion of Griffith</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer course/career choice counselling. Uni seen as unhelpful at this stage/may assist more students to make more appropriate choice</td>
<td>Problems with enrolment on-line. Need to sort it out make it user friendly</td>
<td>Offer writing for university skills courses in this period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give appropriate expectations which match reality, when talking to prospective students/advertising expectations should match reality</td>
<td>We make assumptions about enrolling students ability to use the on-line facility</td>
<td>Increase students awareness of support services offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use past successful graduates to promote courses- links course to career outcomes</td>
<td>Offer assistance to students with difficulties or without the background in this area</td>
<td>School to offer orientation camps and other activities, which give the students face-to-face, contact with staff. Social activities, barbecues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer pre-enrolment writing courses and other courses to make students more successful</td>
<td>Have and English language standard, which is standard across the university and cannot be waived.</td>
<td>Schools to have specific orientation material, which relates to teaching/learning in their area. e.g. ”How to study successfully in…….”Clear outlines of course expectations etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate parents and partners about university demands etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Educate parents and partners about university demands etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Feedback obtained from Symposium participants by chronological sequence (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST YEAR</th>
<th>SECOND YEAR</th>
<th>THIRD YEAR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate face to face contact, student and staff, Engineer interactions</td>
<td>Focus on student majors/promoting information/directions etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>between students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have every student have one staff member who knows them by name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have social interactions staff/students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have 3\textsuperscript{rd} year students mentor first years</td>
<td>Have 3\textsuperscript{rd} year students mentor first years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have Australian students mentor international students</td>
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<td>Target crisis points, e.g. first assignment times, letter to students.</td>
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<td>Identify every student who does not hand in or fails first assignment and</td>
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<td>offer follow up</td>
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<td>Use special timetabling for first years to facilitate the above social</td>
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<td>interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide course/career related advice and information to assist students</td>
<td>Provide course/career related advice and information to assist students</td>
<td>Provide course/career related advice and information to assist students</td>
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<td>to stay focussed</td>
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<td>Target high achievers from first semester-letters of congrats-awareness of</td>
<td>Target high achievers from first semester-letters of congrats-awareness of</td>
<td>Target high achievers from first semester-letters of congrats-awareness of</td>
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<td>honours/PG – establish a high achieving group/foster</td>
<td>honours/PG – establish a high achieving group/foster</td>
<td>honours/PG – establish a high achieving group/foster</td>
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<td>Identify at risk students, eg. Failed more than 50% first semester: require</td>
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<td>personal interview. Probations students identify and follow up</td>
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<td>Integrate generic writing skills within courses appropriate to level</td>
<td>Integrate generic writing skills within courses appropriate to level</td>
<td>Integrate generic writing skills within courses appropriate to level</td>
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<tr>
<td>required</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Griffith University Student Retention Project, February 2003. *For internal distribution only*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST YEAR</th>
<th>SECOND YEAR</th>
<th>THIRD YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make English writing skills unit compulsory for all students, exempted only by passing a test by the School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards for courses which carry out and promote retention strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Quality lecturers assigned to first year.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rethink idea of flexible learning approaches for first years- need face to face contact initially</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate Student Services, LAS and Ins support into course areas. Have a specific person from those areas responsible and assigned to each course area.</td>
<td>Integrate Student Services, LAS and Ins support into course areas. Have a specific person from those areas responsible and assigned to each course area.</td>
<td>Integrate Student Services, LAS and Ins support into course areas. Have a specific person from those areas responsible and assigned to each course area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.0 Feedback obtained from Symposium participants regarding postgraduate students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honours</th>
<th>Postgraduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrate honours students with RHD students and Coursework PGs.</td>
<td>Offer assistance with research early in the process. (e.g. an initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>certificate in research to begin with.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat as honours students as Postgraduates not undergraduates</td>
<td>Develop peer mentoring for postgraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage mentoring and social events for Honours students with RHD &amp;</td>
<td>Offer assistance with getting published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG Coursework students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage honours students to continue on to do PG study at Griffith by</td>
<td>Offer early assistance with writing and understanding the process of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including them in the research seminars.</td>
<td>Postgraduate study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have PG’s meet with honours students to encourage honours students to go on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Look at English language proficiency levels at PG entry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider university wide implementation of Marilyn McMeniman’s approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>applied in the Faculty of Arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assist PGs with financial support by finding tutoring possibilities and other</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>options.</td>
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APPENDIX D
1.0 Statistics supplied by Planning and Statistics

Table 6.
Sum of retention by program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Retention by program level</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
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<td>Coursework HD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other PG</td>
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<td>Grand Total</td>
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<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>79%</td>
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</table>
Table 7.
Sum of retention by campus

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<tr>
<th>Sum of Retention by Campus</th>
<th>1991</th>
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<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
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<td>80%</td>
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<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Bank</td>
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<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
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<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>79%</td>
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Table 8.
Sum of retention by attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Retention by Attendance</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
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<td>83%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
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<td>65%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>64%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
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<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>79%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 9.
Sum of retention by commencement

<table>
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<th>Sum of Retention by Commencement</th>
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<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
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<td>Commencing</td>
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<td>76%</td>
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<td>Continuing</td>
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</table>

Table 10.
Comparison with other Universities

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<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>72%</td>
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<td>79%</td>
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<td>80%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>75%</td>
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<td>71%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD Total</td>
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<td>78%</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<td>76%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Griffith University Student Retention Project, February 2003. *For internal distribution only*
The following statistics were provided by Planning and Statistics. It is important to note that the Schools/Elements have been reconfigured since 2001 hence the element codes in the table below do not correspond with the present element codes and direct comparisons cannot therefore be made with the present situation.

Table 11.
Sum of retention by host elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Retention by Host Element</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BDD</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<td>CSR</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMS</td>
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<td>73%</td>
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<td>CAL</td>
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<td>KEL</td>
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<td>EPS</td>
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<tr>
<td>VTA</td>
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<td>81%</td>
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<td>69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sum of Retention by Host Element</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>MKT</td>
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<td>PBH</td>
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<td>Sum of Retention by Host Element</td>
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### 2.0 PhD progress rates

The Dean of Postgraduate Studies provided the following statistics, as part of his presentation to the Retention Symposium.

**Table 12.**
Griffith University – PhD Progress rates (all commencers 1990-1998) compared to Australia (1992 commencers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All RHD students</th>
<th>PhD All students</th>
<th>PhD Scholars</th>
<th>PhD Non-scholars</th>
<th>Australia 1992 PhD, by 1999</th>
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<tr>
<td>% Cancelled</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Completed</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Current</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>N =</td>
<td>1544</td>
<td>1215</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>2647</td>
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