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# Student Retention and Success Plan 2022-2024

Professor Philippa Levy  
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Learning)

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# 1. Introduction

This document sets out the University of Adelaide's second integrated, institution-level plan for student retention and success. The Plan aligns with and supports a range of University strategies and plans which also address student retention and success outcomes. Relevant goals and actions of other strategies and plans are not reproduced in the Student Retention and Success Plan (SRSP).

## 1.1. SRSP 2019-2021

The University developed its first institution-level plan for student retention and success during 2018, informed by review of relevant literature and guidance, and by extensive consultation with key stakeholders across faculties and divisions including students and professional and academic staff. The SRSP 2019-2021 brought together existing and new initiatives under a coordinated strategic framework, with distributed responsibility for the delivery of actions and with governance provided by the new Student Retention and Success Committee chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Learning). The Plan was managed by the Student Retention and Success Plan Implementation Group which reports to the Student Retention and Success Committee, and its success was monitored through an evaluation framework that incorporated process, outcome and impact evaluation.

The SRSP 2019-2021 established eight goals with strategies and multiple actions nested under each of the goals at divisional and faculty levels. An additional international student retention and success initiative was introduced in 2020 and continued in 2021 in response to the circumstances of the pandemic, providing targeted engagement and academic support to international students studying offshore and in Adelaide.

Goals not met within the life of the SRSP 2019-2021 principally required actions that relied on the progress of other strategic initiatives that were discontinued or deprioritised. Over 70% of actions were delivered in full or with modifications that, in most cases, were made to accommodate changes caused by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some actions were removed from the Plan as priorities changed or when an action was absorbed into other activities. Some actions have been carried over into the current Plan.

## 1.2. Performance against targets

The Vice-Chancellor's Executive established institution-level targets for retention specifically for commencing undergraduate students in 2018, although the SRSP encompassed actions to address the retention and success of all students. An ambitious target for retention was set: to improve the University's retention performance for domestic undergraduate students to match the average of the Group of Eight universities, which was 87.2% at that time.

With the strengthened focus and coordination of our retention and success activities prior to and under the auspices of the Plan, retention of commencing undergraduate students improved substantially from 81.4% in 2018 to 83.7% in 2019. This result was sustained (and further improved) in 2020 and 2021.

Specific targets for the Learner Engagement subscale of the Student Experience Survey of the Australian government's Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) also were set. However,

across the sector, learner engagement was substantially affected in 2020 by the impact of remote learning and these targets were not achieved.

### **1.3. Performance of signature initiatives**

Academic outreach and support services, delivered as a partnership between central and faculty staff, were found to be very successful strategies under the 2019-2021 Plan. However, while successful overall, they were found to have variable reach and a less positive impact for some student cohorts, including certain equity cohorts, mature age students, some year 11 entry pathway cohorts, and offshore international students. Key strategic retention initiatives such as Succeed@Adelaide were much more successful reaching commencing undergraduate students than engaging cohorts at risk of poor academic progress. The design of some programs such as Peer Mentoring varied across faculties, resulting in substantial differences in student participation in these programs.

Some initiatives could not be delivered as planned, including early intervention and re-engagement of students who leave the University (temporarily or permanently), and changes to the design of the curriculum. Surveys conducted at the point when a student decides to withdraw from their program of study consistently have demonstrated that around half of all such students ultimately plan to return to the University to continue studying, either by taking leave of absence or by transferring to an alternative program. Students who do wish to withdraw entirely cite health or stress, study-life balance, needing a break or to take paid work, financial difficulties and family-related matters, as reasons. The withdrawal survey points to the need to improve re-engagement efforts.

Overall, the evaluation of the first Plan indicated that targeted initiatives to support students at risk of attrition, including equity cohorts and in particular students at risk of poor academic progress, should be incorporated into the next Plan. Academic Progress Risk status was found to be a key indicator for early intervention. A stronger connection between the activities led by the Wirrtu Yarlu Aboriginal Education Unit and the actions of the SRSP should strengthen cross-cultural capability development and enable sharing of best-practice in the support of equity cohorts.

There is also clearly more to be done to help students to develop a strong sense of belonging to their academic discipline or program cohort and to ensure that the student experience for international students, including but not only those students studying offshore, connects with that of domestic students in integrated academic communities.

While the 2019-2021 Plan had a strong focus on commencing students and the initial transition of school leavers into university, evaluation showed that the next Plan should incorporate actions that capture other key transition points for students throughout the student lifecycle.

Monitoring and evaluation of the first Plan demonstrated the value of a strong culture of systematic data collection and analysis targeting key strategic initiatives. It also revealed the limitations of some of the existing data resources at the University, which considerably restricted the capacity to measure the impact of a number of actions of the 2019-2021 Plan.

## **2. SRSP 2022-24**

The overall aim of the 2022-24 SRSP is to increase the impact of the Plan to improve retention and success outcomes for a wider, more diverse cohort of students.

The 2022-24 SRSP builds on the achievements of the 2019-21 SRSP and focuses on those areas identified for further uplift through evaluation of the impact of the 2019-21 Plan. It also seeks to address the disruptive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student retention and success, including the significant impacts of international and national border restrictions that required continuation of remote learning for many students through 2021 and, as expected at the time of writing, into 2022. A number of strategies focus on personalisation and tailoring to meet the needs of individuals and specific cohorts.

## 2.1. Scope

Student retention is defined for the purposes of the Plan as *retention within the University*, as distinct from retention within the student’s initial program, faculty of enrolment, or wider higher education sector. Student success is taken to encompass both successful academic performance and progression, and preparedness for graduate employment or further study.

The Plan focuses on a limited set of prioritised strategic initiatives for retention and success across the student experience that, based on evidence from the wider sector and from evaluation of the first cycle of the Plan, we believe will deliver significant uplift of retention and success outcomes. Continuous improvement processes for relevant embedded practices and services are out of scope.

The Plan adopts a student lifecycle perspective on the planning of support for student retention and success from pre-enrolment to graduation. The Plan focuses in particular on the retention and success of undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate coursework (PGCW) students, inclusive of domestic and international students.

## 2.2. Institutional Target

Given the ongoing impact of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the target set is proportionate and achievable while still driving enhancement actions. While the target specifically focuses on commencing domestic students, the Plan aims to improve the retention and success of all student cohorts across the University.

Target	Measure	Reported
<b>Student retention</b>	<b>Internal retention measure</b>	<b>Commonwealth attrition data</b>
Improve domestic undergraduate attrition by 1% from 2019 baseline year	Unadjusted retention performance report Baseline – 83.7% measured in Q3 2020 Target – 84.7% measured in Q3 2024	Commonwealth reported New Adjusted Attrition Baseline 2019 retained to 2020 – 9.7% Target 2023 retained into 2024 – 8.7% Q3 2025

The Implementation and Evaluation plan for the SRSP will set targets at faculty and program level that support the achievement of the overall, institutional target.

## 2.3. Principles

The Plan adopts a number of widely accepted principles for student retention and success.

1. Student engagement and sense of belonging to the University community are key to positive retention and success outcomes. Academic and social integration in discipline contexts is especially important.
2. The quality of the educational experience is key to retention and success, in particular:
  - the relevance of academic program learning outcomes and learning activities;
  - the quality of teaching;
  - positive student-educator and peer-to-peer relationships;
  - employability development in the academic and broader student experience.
3. Flexible support tailored to the needs of individual students and of specific cohorts is essential. Strategies should address the differences between student identities and circumstances that affect the ability to engage in higher education and the outcomes achieved.
4. Students are active agents in their own and peers' engagement and success, and should be empowered as partners and co-creators in the development and delivery of retention and success initiatives.

## 2.4. How we work

Responsibility for, and ability to improve, student retention and success are widely distributed across the institution. Our retention and success initiatives are delivered in a partnership between academic and professional staff, between the University's faculties and divisions, and with students. Our actions in support of student retention and success uphold the University's values, our commitments in the Student Charter, and our Student Partnership Values. The Plan is evidence-based and informed by a process of continuous evaluation. Implementation is monitored and actions adjusted as needed to ensure success.

The Plan links to and supports other University strategies and plans, and promotes the inclusion, in those strategies and plans, of priorities and actions that will help to deliver the goals of this Plan. Related strategies and plans include:

- Academic Integrity Plan
- Assessment and Feedback Strategy
- Digital Learning Strategy and Roadmap
- Disability and Inclusion Action Plan
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Reconciliation Action Plan
- Student Employability Plan
- Tarrkarri Turrka Aboriginal Education Plan

Key stakeholder groups are:

- Students and their relevant bodies including the Adelaide University Union and Adelaide University Sport
- Academic units (schools, departments) and academic staff in the faculties
- Professional and academic support services and staff in the Division of Academic and Student Engagement (DASE) and in faculties
- Planning and Analytics in the Division of University Operations

The Plan affirms the benefit of strategic initiatives developed under the SRSP 2018-21 that now move into business-as-usual service delivery, and that of other business as usual services and activities that support retention and success. Institutional services include:

- Academic skills services (Maths Learning Centre, Peer-Assisted Study Sessions, Studiosity, Writing Centre)
- Careers and employability services
- International student support services
- Library academic support activities
- Outbound call service (Succeed@Adelaide)
- Orientation activities and program advice
- Student peer-mentoring programs
- Student Life services supporting students with disabilities and providing counselling
- Wirltu Yarlur Aboriginal education support

The Plan is overseen by the Student Retention and Success Committee, a sub-committee of the University Education Committee convened by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Learning).

## **2.5. Objectives and Action Areas**

Objectives and action areas under this Plan are informed by evaluation of processes and impact of the first SRSP 2018-21, stakeholder consultation, and guidance from the sector's evidence-base. Appendix 1 provides a key point of reference, from Advance HE, for evidence-based institutional initiatives to improve student retention, attainment and progression.

### **Academic Experience**

The Plan encourages the development of tailored actions to meet the retention and success challenges of prioritised programs and courses with lower rates of student retention and success. Programs will include tailored learning activities, content and assessment matched, as appropriate, to the needs of different cohorts (OB1). All commencing UG students will experience a 'high impact' program/discipline-specific cohort learning experience in Year 1 (OB2). Academic skills support, including support tailored to specific cohorts, will be embedded into the curriculum of discipline-based courses and made accessible via flexible delivery modes (OB3).

### **Student Experience**

We will strengthen our support for student equity, diversity and inclusion across student services and education delivery (OB4). We will ensure all students, whether studying remotely or on-campus, develop and retain a strong sense of belonging the University community and to their discipline/program cohort (OB5). Students will experience their transitions and progression into, through and out of their studies as a seamless process (OB6). Opportunities for peer interactions within and outside the curriculum will be enhanced (OB7).

### **Values and Culture**

We will develop a culture where academic and professional staff see care as one of their primary responsibilities and student success as a measure of their own success (OB8). Students will be actively engaged as partners in the development and evaluation of student retention and success initiatives (OB9).

## Performance Monitoring, Data and Evaluation

We will drive a holistic approach to engagement and change through target-setting and monitoring at institutional, faculty and program levels (OB10). We will ensure all staff involved in supporting student retention and success are able to access support to use data to develop insights for practice improvement (OB11). We will use data and evaluation to develop a deep understanding of our students' needs and use this to plan initiatives and monitor their success (OB12).

## 2.6. Actions

The actions under the Plan are designed to be delivered through business-as-usual processes as much as possible, recognising the resource-constrained environment. Priority actions are identified (in bold) some of which may require strategic resourcing or prioritisation by delivery partners in work planning.

### Area 1: Academic Experience

Programs will include tailored learning activities, content and assessment matched, as appropriate, to the needs of different cohorts (OB1). Commencing UG students will experience a 'high impact'<sup>1</sup> program/discipline-specific cohort learning experience in Year 1 (OB2). Academic skills support, including support tailored to specific cohorts, will be embedded into the curriculum of discipline-based courses and made accessible via flexible delivery modes (OB3).

Actions	Objectives
<b>1.1 Create and implement tailored retention and success plans for prioritised academic programs and courses (with sustained evidence of poor student retention, high fail-rates, or high enrolment of at-risk cohorts)</b>	1,2,3
<b>1.2 Further embed and increase flexible academic skills support into prioritised courses</b>	3
<b>1.3 Create a targeted professional development program for academic (including sessional) staff teaching into prioritised courses</b>	1,2,3
<b>1.4 Provide learning design and academic development resources and support for retention and success</b>	1,2,3
<b>1.5 Develop a retention impact assessment methodology and embed into processes for program and course reviews</b>	1
1.6 Establish a community of practice for retention and success, inclusive of a focus on equity, diversity and inclusion, to enable academic peer leadership, support and mentoring, and student partnership	1

### Action Area 2: Student Experience

We will strengthen our support for student equity, diversity and inclusion across student services and education delivery (OB4). We will ensure all students, whether studying remotely or on-campus, develop and retain a strong sense of belonging the University community and to their discipline/program cohort (OB5). Students will experience their transitions and progression into, through and out of their studies as a seamless process (OB6). Opportunities for peer interactions within and outside the curriculum will be enhanced (OB7).

<sup>1</sup> See References for sources that discuss 'high impact' student engagement experiences in the curriculum



<b>Actions</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>2.1 Establish institutional governance and plan for Student Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (SEDI), linked to the SRSP</b>	4
<b>2.2 Review and improve mechanisms for student communications, to ensure that our communication with students is inclusive, i.e., tailored to and effective for diverse cohorts</b>	4, 5
<b>2.3 Establish an integrated institution-wide peer-to-peer academic mentoring, transition and orientation program providing discipline-contextualised, streamlined suite of activities and single platform/process of engagement for students as they transition to and through university</b>	4, 5, 6
<b>2.4 Create a standardised and seamless institution-wide leave of absence and withdrawal process that supports re-engagement as a priority</b>	5
<b>2.5 Develop and implement an institutional framework to support enhanced interaction between domestic and international student cohorts</b>	5,7
2.6. Create enhanced program of pre-enrolment and prospective student activities with student peers to develop discipline cohort identity including early engagement with clubs and societies of the Adelaide University Union and Adelaide University Sport clubs	5,6
2.7 Review and enhance existing alumni-to-student engagement initiatives and establish an organising framework at institution level that includes connecting existing student cohort activities with alumni network activities	5,6,7
<b>2.8 Explore the feasibility of cohort timetabling in large first year core courses</b>	1,5,7

### **Action Area 3: Values and Culture**

We will develop a culture where academic and professional staff see care as one of their primary responsibilities and student success as a measure of their own success (OB8). Students will be actively engaged as partners in the development and evaluation of student retention and success initiatives (OB9).

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
3.1 Consider student retention and success targets in professional development review activities and in academic and professional role statements	8
<b>3.2 Create professional development resources for educators to support the University's Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan and build capacity of teaching staff to support student wellbeing</b>	8
<b>3.3 Actively promote performance of the SRSP among students through the Student Newsletter and partnering with student representative bodies and other student groups</b>	9

### **Action Area 4: Data, Evaluation and Performance Monitoring**

We will drive a holistic approach to engagement and change through target-setting and monitoring at institutional, faculty and program levels (OB10). We will ensure all staff involved in supporting student retention and success are able to access support to use data to develop insights for practice improvement (OB11). We will use data and evaluation to develop a deep understanding of our students' needs and use this to plan initiatives and monitor their success (OB12).

Actions	Objectives
4.1 Establish nested retention targets (under and aligned to the institutional target) at faculty and prioritised program levels and monitor annually	10
4.2 Review and enhance data, systems and processes currently in use to trigger support for students at all Academic Risk levels including development of a University-wide framework	1,5,12
4.3 Develop an agreed <i>minimum data set</i> (defining the data we will collect for evaluation of each action under the Plan) that will also harmonise data collection approaches and enable comparison of initiatives across cohorts, settings and delivery modalities	10,11,12
4.4 Identify staff who are responsible for interpreting and applying insights from each retention and success action dataset	11,12
4.5 Make available a user-friendly Student Retention and Success dashboard that can be used by staff at all levels to support SRSP actions and initiatives	11,12
4.6 Make available professional development/training to support evaluation design including data collection and analysis.	11
4.7 Establish a Student Advisory Board for retention and success to monitor student outcomes and support interpretation and development of insights for decision-making	9,12

## 2.7. Implementation Planning

This Plan sets out high level actions to meet its aim and objectives. Each action (or group of actions) will have a detailed implementation plan developed in collaboration with stakeholders of each action area, with accountabilities, timeframes, expected outputs and outcomes, together with an evaluation plan that identifies appropriate indicators and measures to judge success.

The implementation plan will phase and prioritise actions. Capacity/resourcing implications of the 2021-22 Organisation Sustainability Program will be considered in the development of implementation planning. Actions that will have the highest and most immediate impact for students at key points in the student lifecycle, and that address ongoing considerations relating to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., return of international students to campus), will be prioritised for the first implementation phase.

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## APPENDIX 1: Evidence-based institutional initiatives to improve student retention, attainment and progression

This list of institutional enablers is derived from the AdvanceHE Essential Frameworks for Enhancing Student Success: Student Access, Retention, Attainment and Progression (AdvHE 2019)<sup>2</sup>

### Retention

Building whole-institutional commitment to, and shared responsibility for, retention, inclusion, partnership and students' sense of belonging

Embedding equality and diversity within policy and practice to increase retention and engagement, and enrich curricula, learning and teaching

Developing curricula that draw on the plurality of students' life experiences, their interests and backgrounds to engage students and enhance retention

Implementing a range of practices to support retention within all disciplines, such as active learning, ongoing induction, co-curricular activities and pre-arrival and post-arrival strategies

Enhancing attendance systems and adopting the widespread use of inclusive and assistive technologies to aid learning and teaching

Developing supportive learning environments where all members of the learning and teaching community feel they are safe, they belong, and are able to challenge the behaviours, attitudes and practices that can undermine inclusion and thus student retention

### Attainment

Sharing retention and attainment data, in a timely and accessible manner at a programme, department, school, and faculty level, to discuss and build awareness of differential student achievement and act as a stimulus for change

Co-developing and reviewing curricula in partnership with students, ensuring that assessment literacies are integrated into curriculum design to minimise attainment differentials

Having high expectations of all students, and engendering students' high expectations of themselves, to enable attainment and success

Recognising that students learn in different ways and that teaching that responds to a range of student preferences can improve attainment

Promoting peer-led learning to help build students' expectations and confidence

Ensuring all staff, and students where possible, have ongoing developmental opportunities to address unconscious bias and to develop equality and diversity competence to challenge the behaviours, attitudes and practices that can undermine inclusion and thus student retention

### Progression

Sharing progression data within and between departments to support dialogue about social mobility and widening participation

Developing progression plans with students to enable career and academic progression and promote shared responsibility and commitment

Building systematic approaches to postgraduate progression, in particular reflecting on why, how, when, and which students are encouraged to consider postgraduate study

Creating networks with alumni to offer all students guidance, role models and professional opportunities as part of the wider curriculum and employability offer

Developing processes for regular evaluation and impact assessment to aid reflection and input into future iterations of all learning and teaching-related policies and practices

Developing a whole-institutional commitment to employability to enable students' progression and long-term success to challenge the behaviours, attitudes and practices that can undermine inclusion and thus student retention

<sup>2</sup> Access is out of scope for the SRSP and is not considered here

## APPENDIX 2: Plan self-audit against strategies with impact

This list of strategies with impact was prepared as part of a review of the literature and sector trends for the first Student Retention and Success Plan (see SRSP 2019-2021, Appendix 2)

<b>Pre-admission</b>	<b>SRSP 1 (2019-2021)</b>	<b>SRSP 2 (2022-2024)</b>
Early career advice	achieved	retain
Clear and accessible academic program information to enable prospective students to make informed decisions	achieved	enhance
Opportunity for prospective students to experience pre-introductory aspects of an academic program		<b>new action</b>
Academic preparation and bridging including effective range of enabling and pathway programs	partial	enhance
Pre-orientation readiness resources and activities such as pre-entry webinars, training	partial	enhance
<b>Orientation and beyond</b>		
Accessible program and course advisory support	achieved	retain
Discipline specific orientation programs with explicit academic purpose, designed and delivered by academic program teams, commencing early and extending for a whole semester or year	partial	enhance
Diagnostic student profiling (academic preparedness) and early academic skills support	achieved	enhance
Proactive, compulsory 'personal tutoring' (academic mentoring, advising) extending from Orientation onward throughout degree		
<b>Progression and re-engagement</b>		
Pro-active outreach and early intervention to at risk students	achieved	enhance
Exit interview or survey of exiting students and re-engagement strategy	partial	enhance
Academic year that promotes momentum and avoids lengthy summer break, e.g. trimesters, summer bridge programs		out of scope for SRSP
Sequential curriculum (students take one course at a time in intensive blocks rather than several concurrent courses);		out of scope for SRSP
'Nested' programs and micro-credentials allowing for flexibility of exit and re-entry		out of scope for SRSP
<b>Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment</b>		
Work Integrated Learning and professional experiences in programs	achieved	enhance
Student centred active learning, 'high impact' educational practices with strong peer-to-peer and teacher-student interaction	partial	enhance
'Transition pedagogy' as guiding philosophy for first year curriculum design and support	partial	enhance
Courses specifically designed to provide 1 <sup>st</sup> year cohort identity and skills development, e.g. first year seminars programs		
Alumni engagement from the 1 <sup>st</sup> year; alumni mentoring		<b>new action</b>
Early opportunity in courses for assessment and feedback	partial	enhance

'Authentic' and peer assessment; staggered assessment deadlines		out of scope for SRSP
Learning communities including digital communities to support belonging		<b>new action</b>
Academic staff training and communities of practice on teaching and mentoring for retention and success		<b>new action</b>
<b>Co-curricular activities</b>		
Opt-out (not opt-in) academic mentoring and peer mentoring taking place in the discipline context	partial	partial
Use of learning analytics by academic mentors/advisors	achieved	enhance
Peer led study support programs (Peer Assisted Study Sessions)	achieved	retain
Dedicated success programs combining academic and social support for certain groups of at-risk students	achieved	enhance
<b>Governance, organisation, data</b>		
Integrated institutional framework connecting pathways, progression, employability, learning and teaching, with retention targets	achieved	retain
Academic as well as professional staff coordinators for student retention and success in faculties		
Connected datasets and access by academic and support staff to shared data on support interactions with and progression of at-risk students e.g. 'students of interest' reports		<b>new action</b>
<b>Place and space</b>		
Social learning spaces for peer-to-peer and student-staff interaction	partial	partial

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