



Student Experience Strategy
2016 - 2020
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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Pillar 1: Build the capacity of students to engage in their university experience in ways that are both individually transformative and that build the social capital of the institution and community

- Re-vision of the pre degree and pathway framework to enable wider participation in University in alignment with strategic priorities
- Ensure the institution-wide Curriculum Review implements best practice approaches to enabling access to higher education
- Embed a diverse range of student wellbeing and equity initiatives which promote quality engagement and facilitates connections
- Deliver a comprehensive program of orientation and welcome events that considers individual and cohort needs
- Ensure that all student services and resources are inclusive and accessible

Pillar 2: Provide high quality environments, experiences and clear communication strategies that assist students to make connections with peers, support staff and the broader community

- Ensure prioritisation of the student experience is included in capital investment and campus space planning initiatives
- Ensure that the University is well placed to provide high quality library and support services
- Embed a strong, more supported and connected online student community through on-line and blended co-curricular 'student life'
- Enhance the promotion of the University's residential culture and its role in contributing to the vibrancy of the University
- Embed a diverse range of quality engagement opportunities for students which facilitate peer connections

Pillar 3: Embed a suite of quality services for students that are integrated, responsive and focused on supporting students' holistic wellbeing, academic success and engagement

- Embed a comprehensive suite of accessible quality student services, facilities and amenities
- Embed consistently high standard of service provision across all institutional services and facilities

Pillar 4: Facilitate high impact experiences that enrich and extend students' program of study, including leadership, employment, international exchange and civic engagement

- Coordinate, expand and strengthen promotion of opportunities for on-campus student employment
- Enhance opportunities for work integrated learning (WIL) experiences within the University and broader community
- Ensure students have an opportunity to undertake leadership, peer learning and civic engagement (volunteering) opportunities
- Ensure students are recognised for participating in high impact experiences that build and evidence graduate capabilities
- Expand international exchange opportunities for students that are complementary to and wherever possible embedded in curricular

Pillar 5: Strengthen the partnership between students and the University through conversations, co-creation and celebration.

- Provide opportunities for students to provide feedback on their University experience, and ensure outcomes are widely promoted
- Ensure that student representation in University governance is effective and informed to ensure impact on strategic decision making

1. The Student Experience in a Global Context

Contemporary students are seeking an intellectually and socially stimulating learning environment, embedded in a research culture with a wealth of extracurricular experiences available to them (Universities Australia, 2014). Increasingly, students expect access to comprehensive and quality support services and innovative and flexible learning spaces, irrespective of whether their mode of study includes campus, blended learning and/or fully online experiences; further, the extent to which their time at university leads to desirable graduate outcomes is becoming a strong measure of the performance of an institution. Universities not only have a responsibility but also a necessity to produce well educated, resilient and capable graduates who are globally and culturally aware and connected.

Universities operate in an intensively competitive, dynamic and increasingly de-regulated global marketplace. The quality of an institution is recognised through international reputation, rankings and capacity to attract high quality staff but equally through its capacity to attract and retain quality students from all over the world. As a key determinant in student attraction, satisfaction, retention and ongoing connection to the institution, the student experience becomes more critical to the institution's value proposition and sustainability. It is therefore essential that the University of Tasmania develops and implements purposeful strategies to draw a diverse range of local, interstate and international students to the University as a destination of choice, and for the University to support students in their pursuit of desired educational and graduate outcomes.

Commissioned by the Student Experience Committee and unique in the Australian sector at that time, in 2012 the University of Tasmania developed the *Student Experience Plan 2013-2015*. The *Student Experience Strategy (2016-2020)* is informed by and builds upon these foundations.

Over the next four years, the *Student Experience Strategy (2016-2020)* will drive significant enhancements and performance improvements by focusing on five strategic pillars:

1. Build the capacity of students to engage in their university experience in ways that are both individually transformative and that build the social capital of the institution and broader community;

2. Support a diverse and dynamic university community through the provision of high quality environments, experiences and clear communication strategies that assist students to make connections with peers, support staff and the broader community;
3. Embed a suite of comprehensive and quality services for students that are integrated, responsive and focused on supporting students' holistic wellbeing, academic success and engagement;
4. Facilitate rewarding and high impact experiences that enrich and extend students' program of study/academic journey, including leadership, international exchange, work based learning and civic engagement;
5. Strengthen the partnership between students and the University through conversations, co-creation and celebration.

In alignment with the University *Retention and Success Strategy (2015-2017)*, these strategic pillars are underpinned by the following principles:

- A comprehensive student lifecycle approach: This strategy is developed from a student lifecycle approach, recognising that success can be best enabled through access to a full range of student support programs and commences from the point of recruitment and first contact with the University, through to transition to the University, progression in academic studies and the student support and experience that enables success, through to graduation.
- A whole of institution responsibility: This strategy acknowledges that student experience, retention and success are the responsibility of all staff and organisational units of the University, with each area embedding clear implementation plans resulting from this Strategy.
- An evidence-based approach: This strategy requires the provision of timely and relevant data relating to engagement with study and the broader student experience, and in that context recognises the need for a coordinated approach to student feedback, reviews, benchmarking and evaluation
- An approach which promotes inclusion and connection: This strategy recognises activities should encourage all students to collaborate and engage with their peers, with staff and the broader community in order to build their sense of belonging and maximise opportunities for success and graduate outcomes.

2. Defining the Student Experience

The idea of the ‘student experience’ as an identifiable set of interconnected activities to be institutionally managed is a relatively new concept (Temple, Callender, Grove and Kersh, 2014). The term itself continues to have multiple meanings with the boundary between the learning and teaching experience and those aspects of the university life which inevitably impact the learning experience being imprecise.

In defining ‘the student experience’, we suggest a degree of uniformity that does not exist in practice (Temple et al, 2014); in reality a student’s journey is intrinsically unique to each person, is influenced by the person’s journey prior to study and whether a student is on a pre-degree or VET pathway, studying an undergraduate or postgraduate course or has progressed to higher degree research. However for the purpose of defining the student experience to underpin the strategy, it is reasonable to focus on commonly accepted patterns related to the student lifecycle that the institution has some potential to influence.

Thus for the purposes of the *Student Experience Strategy (2016-2020)* we have broadly adopted a scope drawn from a recent Higher Education Academy (2014) study which includes four components of the experience:

- The initial transition experience: The experience of prospective students as they engage with the institution for the first time to the point of arrival and transitioning through the first year of study irrespective of the entry level.
- The academic experience: Student interactions with the institution associated with their studies that align with the formal learning and teaching environment, which is addressed in the University of Tasmania Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan.
- The student life experience: Student engagement with the broader student life including those activities that may take place beyond the institution (referred to by the Higher Education Academy as the ‘campus life’).

- The graduate experience: The institution's role in supporting the student to transition into employment and work based opportunities and retaining Alumni connections.

3. The University of Tasmania Commitment

Open to Talent: Strategic Plan 2012-onwards articulates the commitment of the University of Tasmania to cater to an expanded and increasingly diverse student cohort. As the only university in the State, the University of Tasmania is committed to providing access to higher education and an equitable and inclusive experience for all students, regardless of background, country of origin, cultural identity, gender or sexual orientation.

The *Student Experience Strategy (2016-2020)* draws from and expands upon the University's Strategic Plan in a number of ways. It reinforces our commitment to students to provide access to excellent student support and guidance services, regardless of their location and mode of study. It reaffirms the value of interaction and connection between peers and with staff outside the formal learning and teaching environment and as such, highlights the importance of the design of physical and virtual spaces to facilitate informal interaction.

The Strategy reinforces that diversity and quality of student accommodation and catering options contribute to the vibrancy of campus life and that there is a key role for leadership programs, clubs, societies and social activities in the development of interpersonal, leadership and employability skills. Finally, the *Student Experience Strategy (2016-2020)* highlights the value of participation in the holistic student experience through civic and community engagement, international experiences, employment and work integrated learning and that through such opportunities, students are supported to make new connections and reach into spaces outside the traditional learning environment where the most rewarding learning experiences can take place.

4. Institutional Context

The University of Tasmania has seen an increase in Equivalent Full-Time Student Load (EFTSL) of more than 25% since 2008 with growth in overall domestic load, as well as international onshore student load (Department of Education, 2014). In 2015, there were over 30,000 individual students enrolled, of which around 20% were international students. The University of Tasmania continues to attract a high percentage of the mature market, with nearly 40% aged over 30 years and less than 20% under 20 years.

In considering the provision of a high quality student experience, it is imperative that the University identifies the specific needs of different cohorts and creates pathways to connect these students as a community while supporting their individual needs. Specifically the attainment of growth targets in relation to specific cohorts such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, international students and students with previously low levels of education attainment relies upon appropriately nuanced student-centred strategies. Furthermore, this consideration extends to whether students are accessing study through blended and fully online modes of delivery.

Importantly, the University of Tasmania has a unique relationship to the State and shares responsibility for lifting educational attainment of Tasmanians. The University is deeply committed to ensuring that as many Tasmanians as possible are able to acquire the knowledge and qualifications they need for the jobs of today and the future, and believe this is key to a more skilled, productive and prosperous community.

A number of sub-groups of Tasmanians remain under-represented within the University student population. These include students from Tasmania's regional areas, low socio-economic or first-in-family backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Such cohorts of students also have lower rates of progression and completion than the broader student body and therefore demonstrates a compelling need to ensure that support to underpin the student experience of these groups are explicit and culturally appropriate. Such principles apply equally to a range of sub-groups including, but not limited to students with disabilities and students identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and/or Asexual.

The distinct academic and social needs of international students are also considered in the Strategy. Capitalising on our increasingly strong global standing, the University has been pursuing aggressive international growth targets in recent years. Welcoming greater numbers of international students to Tasmania provides significant benefit to the institution and the State by enriching the community intellectually, socially, culturally and economically. However, the success of student settlement in, and engagement with the community must be consciously facilitated and supported by the University, particularly given the perception of global isolation and relative cultural homogeneity of the State.

5. Monitoring the Quality of the Student Experience

In 2013/14, three key external surveys provided data on student perception of the University of Tasmania co-curricular student experience; the *University Experience Survey (UES)*, the *International Student Barometer Survey (ISB)* and the *Australian Graduate Survey (AGS)*. The results of these surveys inform the development of the Strategy.

Moving forward, the University recognises that the recently revised suite of Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) student experience surveys will also need to be complemented by a range of local feedback mechanisms and evaluations, with capacity to segment and analyse results to ensure the diverse student cohort is better served.

Formal accountability for the Student Experience Strategy lies with the Division of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Students and Education. Collective commitment and responsibility for the Strategy's priorities, targets and timelines will be articulated in the plans of Faculties, Institutes and Divisions.

The Strategy's *Implementation Plan and Milestones for the period January to December 2016* is attached and represents the targets for the first twelve months. The Student Experience Committee (SEC), chaired by the Executive Director Student Experience, will monitor progress against the Strategy, coordinate the annual review of performance and revise the annual implementation plan and milestones for the Strategy's lifespan.

As a critical member of the SEC, the University of Tasmania acknowledges the Tasmanian University Union as the constitutionally endorsed student representative body and their important role in the development and ongoing monitoring and review of the Strategy through their inclusion in the SEC governance.

The SEC will also have institutional responsibility for monitoring student perception of their experience through the coordination of an annual review of the suite of student feedback, survey and evaluations. This will be reported through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Students and Education (DVC S&E) to all levels of University governance, Divisions, Faculties and Institutes, and will be promoted widely to students.