



Student Success and Retention Strategy 2019–2021

We are what we
repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not
an act, but a habit.

– Aristotle



Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge and honour the Giabal and Jarowair peoples of Toowoomba; the Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul peoples of Springfield and Ipswich; the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, Sydney; and the Kambuwal peoples of Stanthorpe as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways where the University of Southern Queensland is located. Further, we acknowledge the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respect to Elders past, present and future. We celebrate the continuous living cultures of First Australians and acknowledge the important role played by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian society. The University respects and acknowledges our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, Elders and visitors who come from many nations across Australia.

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STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

USQ Culture

Respect

Integrity

Excellence

Our Guiding Principles

1. Student success is everyone's business
2. A student centred approach is part of who we are
3. Supporting our staff facilitated student success
4. A sense of belonging is essential for all of us
5. Inclusive practice is best practice
6. Students and staff working in partnership generates a sense of connectedness

Our Commitment

Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3	Pillar 4
<p>Knowing our students will help us support their journey</p>	<p>High quality educational experiences are key</p>	<p>Targeted, timely and relevant support facilitates student success</p>	<p>Communication and collaboration enables a coordinated USQ approach</p>
<p>1.1 Generate and harness data to provide actionable insights to support student success.</p> <p>1.2 Identify the numerous cohorts within USQ in order to initiate cohort analysis that facilitates a greater understanding of our students and how to respond to their learning needs. Utilise these learnings in order to identify cohorts who would benefit from entrance or exit interviews.</p>	<p>2.1 Strengthen the first-year experience.</p> <p>2.2 Enhance and innovate our educational product offerings including curriculum design.</p> <p>2.3 Promote access, equity and diversity in the student cohort.</p>	<p>3.1 Monitor, identify and develop intervention programs for all students.</p> <p>3.2 Design and implement a university wide integrated student support and service model that supports student transitions.</p>	<p>4.1 Facilitate student engagement by developing and implementing a coordinated approach to student communication.</p> <p>4.2 Facilitate staff engagement by developing and implementing a coordinated approach to staff communication.</p> <p>4.3 Develop and implement a 'students' as partners' program to help shape, frame and drive student success.</p>

USQ Culture



USQ CULTURE

The USQ culture is founded on our core values of respect, integrity and excellence.

Respect: We respect each other and value diversity of people, culture and ideas within USQ's community. As an institution, we respect the role each staff member plays in student success and retention. We equally respect our students, their diverse backgrounds and the skills and attributes they bring with them.

Integrity: In all we do, we apply and expect the highest personal, professional and ethical standards. Together we act with transparency, consistency and fairness. The University commits to being accountable for the actions set out in this Student Success and Retention Strategy. We will take collective responsibility for ensuring that the plan is appropriately implemented and reviewed, with outcomes reported.

Excellence: Through expertise, innovation and creativity, we work together to excel in all that we do as a university community. We will pursue the goals of the Student Success and Retention Strategy vigorously and to the utmost of our ability. We aim not only to fulfil the expectations of our key stakeholders but to exceed them.



Our Context

OUR CONTEXT

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) was founded by a group of community minded people, passionate about providing access to higher education for rural and regional students, and determined to create an institution that would make a difference to the lives of individual students and their communities.

The past 50 years has seen many changes in society and in our own institution, which has evolved from a



single institute of adult learning to a university renowned for distance education. USQ is now a mature higher education provider offering quality experiences for students across three campuses – Toowoomba, Ipswich and Springfield – and online.

Rapid changes in society, the ubiquity of technology and the pace of technological change, the nature of employment and how students participate in post school education,

mean that little remains the same in the lives of our students. Shifting public policy agendas, regulatory conditions, societal norms and student demographic profiles have transformed higher education policy and practice. At its core, however, the role of universities remains the same, to provide a high quality teaching and learning experience that engages and supports students to persist and succeed as they transition through their education and on to their chosen future.

OUR CONTEXT

In addition to meeting government, industry and our own expectations for quality and excellence, regional universities perform a unique role within their communities of providing education to students who might not otherwise have the same opportunity to access higher education as their metropolitan peers.

Recent reviews (see References) on key aspects of the student experience, including attrition and completion rates, and the development, in consultation with the sector, of a performance-based framework and associated funding

incentives, have refocused attention on student success and retention.

Whilst retention and completion are clearly important outcome measures of the student experience,

USQ acknowledges

that our students, communities and employers, may define and measure success in other ways.

USQ is committed to enhancing students' experiences and improving their success and retention. We support students as they strive towards their own, personal measures of success, while at the same time ensuring institutional improvement against external benchmarks.



REFERENCES

Department of Education and Training 2017, Final Report – Improving retention, completion and success in higher education, Higher Education Standards Panel, Australian Government, viewed 21 August 2019, <https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_report_for_publishing.pdf>

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency 2017, Characteristics of Australian higher education providers and their relation to first-year student attrition, TEQSA, Australian Government, viewed 21 August 2019, <<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/attrition-report-june-2017-19dec2017.pdf?v=1513650539>>

OUR CONTEXT

In striving for excellence, we acknowledge that more needs to be done to improve student success and retention. We acknowledge the need to respond to the changing and individualised needs of our students as they transition through their learning stages.

This three year strategy represents the next step in our continued focus on student success and retention, building on current work and providing a foundation for future work.

Success is a multi-faceted phenomena, influenced by many situational, institutional and student factors that interrelate in a complex, individualised and changeable manner.

This strategy recognises our regional context and the profile of our students who are largely mature-aged, online and part-time. We respect the autonomy of our students and its centrality to their own success. We acknowledge the success factors that sit outside our sphere of influence and seek to address those that lie within.

Both the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) have identified that institutional factors are influential on student success and retention. This empowering fact highlights that by collectively actioning the strategies articulated within this plan, we can make a meaningful difference to student success and retention at USQ.

OUR CONTEXT

DEFINITIONS

Retention rate:

the proportion of students who were studying in the given year that returned in the following year, excluding those that completed their studies.

Success rate:

the EFTSL of units passed by students as a percentage of the EFTSL of all units attempted.

The USQ Student Success and Retention Strategy was also informed by recommendations in the HESP's report on improving retention, completion and success in Higher Education, drawing on sector good practice and the outcomes of consultation with key stakeholders throughout the University. The Student Success and Retention Strategy sits within the wider context of USQ's overarching Education Goal and is directly aligned with the strategic objective of leadership and innovation in the quality of the student experience.

The primary purpose of the USQ strategy is to enhance student success by unifying USQ in a whole of university commitment to student success.

Our strategy is designed to address the three major phases of a student's relationships with the institution: transition in, transition through and transition out. These phases, and the transition points between them, offer opportunities for USQ to step up and support student success. Our strategy acknowledges the pivotal role played by academic and professional staff in the successful implementation of the strategy and, ultimately, in optimising student retention and success.

REFERENCE

Department of Education and Training 2017, *Higher Education Statistic 2017 – Section 16 Equity Performance Data (definitions of equity performance indicators)*, Australian Government, Canberra, viewed 25 January 2019, <<https://docs.education.gov.au/node/51496>>.

OUR CONTEXT

Our plan is guided by six principles that encapsulate the values and culture of our university. In turn, the guiding principles are facilitated through four pillars to success which will provide students with the opportunities and supports that they need to successfully transition through each phase and stage of their journey at USQ.

Whilst created to address our current institutional and regulatory context, the plan also seeks to embrace innovation and prepare students for future employability pathways that are currently emerging or not yet known.



Our Guiding Principles



OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles were developed to guide the creation of this strategy and identify resulting actions. They are interconnected and intersect with the different stages and phases of student transitions.

1

Student success is everyone's business.

At USQ, we believe that an institution wide approach to student success and retention is best practice. We understand that each and every staff member within the university can impact on our students in a positive way. We believe that a university wide approach allows staff to collectively support a shared vision of student success; where consistency does not mean a 'cookie cutter' approach but, instead, allows for nuanced approaches that reflect individual student needs and discipline characteristics.

2

A student centred approach is part of who we are.

Our staff put students first. High quality teaching and learning focuses on the student. We adopt a holistic view of our students, recognising they lead complex lives and bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience. We acknowledge that each student will experience all transition stages and that they will do so in highly individualised ways. We seek to support them through all the phases and stages of learning while preparing them for, and creating a sense of connectedness with, their future goals and aspirations.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3

Supporting our staff facilitates student success.

We recognise the important role played by each USQ staff member. We know that supporting our staff is the best way to support our students. We acknowledge their expertise, dedication and readiness to enhance student success and retention. We value our staff and believe investing in professional development that enhances their capacity and addresses their identified needs is critical to student success. We understand that maintaining high quality learning and teaching necessitates changing our practices to reflect the changing needs of our students and our changing educational context. We seek to support our staff throughout this process and believe that, by doing so, we will support students to succeed.

4

A sense of belonging is essential for all of us.

Our University community is spread across three campuses, with online learners throughout Australia and the world. Collectively, we represent one community. It is the values shared by staff and students, our mutual understandings and developing relationships that allow us to generate a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging engenders dedication in both staff and students and, through this, we collectively strive for success.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

5

Inclusive practice is best practice.

We understand that some students experience more barriers than others and that some of these barriers are created by society and institutional norms. We seek to acknowledge and address these barriers and believe that, by doing so, we will improve the educational opportunities for all. We seek to actively promote equitable access through embracing best practice models for inclusive education.

6

Students and staff working in partnership generates a sense of connectedness.

We believe that partnering with students throughout their studies empowers them to become engaged members of our community and to contribute to solving broader societal and university issues. We acknowledge students have both a right and an obligation to be active participants in shaping their learning journey. This document was developed in consultation with students and finalised after receiving their feedback. We are, and intend to continue, working in partnership with our students.



Student Transitions

STUDENT TRANSITIONS

Development of this strategy revealed synergies between governmental guidelines, research literature, sector-wide practice and our perceptions. There is consensus that students move through a series of transitions from future students and potential applicants, through to novice and continuing students, and then on to experienced students ready to graduate. These transitions are usually portrayed in three major phases which can be used to guide the structure of student success and retention plans.

The concept of transitions acknowledges that all students will move through these phases with each student experiencing the phases uniquely, bringing different experiences, meeting different challenges and having

different conceptions of success.

By acknowledging each student's unique series of transitions, initiatives can be designed around key transition points and are not just point-in-time activities, but are available as and when needed.

Consultation with USQ staff and students revealed a shared understanding of the stages and phases that represent key points of transition and, thus, moments to step up to success.



STUDENT TRANSITIONS

Stage

Our role:

Transitioning In (Future Students)

- We believe potential students deserve the opportunity to get to know USQ, who we are and what we value.
- We seek to provide opportunities for potential students to fully understand the educational offerings we offer and how they link to potential future pathways.
- We seek to appropriately identify, shape and meet the expectations of our future students.
- We believe that careers planning and education assists in guiding students to make informed decisions when selecting programs.
- We acknowledge that diverse student cohorts will transition into USQ at many different stages of life and bring with them different educational, personal and career experiences.
- We believe that enabling students' knowledge of, accurate self-assessment of and enhancement of, academic and personal readiness leads to effective transition into university.

Transitioning Through (Current Students)

- We believe supported and smooth movement into, between and out of year levels and programs, is achieved by addressing key transition stages.
- We acknowledge our student cohort may, within the course of their degree, transition through in a non-linear, non-traditional or segmented manner.
- Whilst there are many transition points, we see the first year experience as pivotal.
- We believe that partnering with students will support transition.
- We believe enhancing engagement with learning, peers, academic staff, support services, university life, careers education and online environments is essential for students to achieve success.
- By tracking student progress, identifying potential risk indicators and providing timely support, especially at transition points, we believe we can support progression.

Transitioning On (Graduating Students)

- We recognise employment as central to definitions of success. Consistently making explicit the connections between course and program content, assessment and career outcomes, develops employable and employed graduates.
 - We acknowledge the numerous pathways open to students upon graduation and seek to engender in our students a life-long love of learning.
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Our Commitment



OUR COMMITMENT

The issues associated with student success and retention have been widely investigated. While there is no single formula that ensures success, several key themes are apparent, drawn from existing research, best practice and industry guidelines.

These themes have been used to develop four pillars which underpin this strategy and span all transitions. The pillars are actioned differently for each transition phase, responding both to changing institutional contexts and student needs. The pillars are interdependent, with each facilitating the other.

The following actions, grouped under the four pillars, directly align with our institutional priorities, in particular, the student experience.

They seek to address and support our diverse learners, be

they part-time, full-time, online or on campus. The actions are not exhaustive. They are designed to focus on current needs as well as remain responsive to our changing context and, by doing so, enhance and strengthen student success and retention.



OUR COMMITMENT

Pillar 1: Knowing our students will help us support their journey.

We acknowledge that our students are a diverse group of individuals, each undertaking their study in different ways. We believe getting to know our students – who they are, how they learn and why they succeed – is essential to supporting their to transition from new student to graduate. Collecting, integrating and interrogating data on the learning behaviours of our students in real-life digital environments will assist us to better monitor student progress and support learning at each stage, from offer to employment. In order to do this, USQ will introduce systems that allow for automated analysis down to the student cohort level, and identify ways that this data can be communicated, or 'pushed out', to key stakeholders in a timely manner, resulting in improvements to learning design, support services and intervention strategies.

PILLAR 1: KNOWING OUR STUDENTS WILL HELP US SUPPORT THEIR JOURNEY

Action

- 1.1** Generate and harness data to provide actionable insights to support student success, through the following activities:
- Implementing and refining the use of Learning Analytics, that: unifies and clarifies the University's data needs; identifies priorities and articulates how the data will be collected and deployed; and includes the development of specific measures and targets related to student success and retention.
 - Applying current understandings of why students disengage with study to better support and improve the experience of USQ students in courses, programs, and across disciplines.
 - Use data to develop a better understanding of our online learners and the measures of 'success', 'at risk' and 'engagement' that are specific to this cohort.

- 1.2** Identify the numerous cohorts within USQ in order to initiate cohort analysis that facilitates a greater understanding of our students and how to respond to their learning needs. Utilise these learnings in order to identify cohorts who would benefit from entrance or exit interviews.

Responsibility

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education)
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services)
Executive Deans

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services)
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education)



OUR COMMITMENT

Pillar 2: High quality educational experiences are key.

Learning and teaching is our core business and our passion at USQ. Best practice in learning and teaching is achieved through investing in staff, effective support services for students and well-designed learning environments. To this end, USQ will provide high quality learning and teaching through a collective commitment to innovative pedagogical practices, with a learner-oriented focus, in an inclusive learning environment. Capacity building for staff will be supported through provision of opportunities for professional learning and development and through the recognition and reward of innovative and effective teaching. Student transitions will be enhanced through improved learning and assessment experiences that prepare them for the next stage of their learning journey.



PILLAR 2: HIGH QUALITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES ARE KEY

Action

Responsibility

<p>2.1 Strengthen the first-year experience through the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a USQ First Year Curriculum Pedagogy, and applying initially to the first-year experience in Education, Engineering, Nursing and Business. • Recognising the specialised role played by educators working with first year students by developing targeted professional development in transition pedagogy and the first-year experience at USQ. 	<p>Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) Executive Deans</p>
<p>2.2 Enhance and innovate our educational product offerings including curriculum design through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and implementing a USQ Learning and Teaching Model that can equitably meet the needs of online and on campus students and is appropriate to the different level and design of programs. • Shaping pedagogical and technological approaches to engage online learners, by identifying and applying best practice, in order to improve the educational experience and outcomes of our largest student cohort. • Providing an assessment environment that enables success, through authentic tasks that clearly link to the learning experience of courses and timely provision of appropriate assessment materials and feedback. • Build capacity of all staff (including casual staff) through the provision of a suite of professional development initiatives (including appropriate induction procedures), that are tailored to support student success and retention and reflect the initiatives within this strategy. 	<p>Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) Executive Deans</p>
<p>2.3 Promote access, equity and diversity in the student cohort through the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying guidelines for Universal Design for Learning and Teaching to strategically identified courses in order to enhance inclusive practice. • Develop a systematic approach to identifying courses with high failure and/or low student satisfaction rates and implement targeted intervention and support programs to enhance skills in course design and delivery, and embed academic supports. • Over the course of the strategy, identify eight to ten core undergraduate courses across a range of disciplines, and two full program, and significantly reduce the cost of study by adopting open source textbooks. 	<p>Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services) Pro Vice Chancellor (Education) Executive Deans</p>

OUR COMMITMENT

Pillar 3: Targeted, timely and relevant support facilitates student success.

Currently, there is a wide range of support services available to students; however many students who could benefit from these services do not take up the opportunity, or appear unaware, of the supports available. Using reliable data helps us to identify times of potential risk, as well as the indicators that anticipate risk, to ensure the provision of timely and targeted support, including interventions for learning, and embedded academic and personal services that ensure students

have the support they require to be successful learners.

We will create a support model that focuses on developing a sense of belonging through partnerships with students, promoting

emotional well-being and encouraging active learning.

This will be contextualised for each transition phase and students' diverse needs and experiences as they transition in and through higher education.



PILLAR 3: TARGETED, TIMELY AND RELEVANT SUPPORT FACILITATES STUDENT SUCCESS

Action

Responsibility

3.1 Monitor, identify and develop intervention programs for all students, through the following activities:

- Develop and implement support strategies for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are experiencing significant challenges and disadvantages with accessing and participating fully in learning opportunities.
- Implement a program for targeted cohorts to assist in developing resilience, self-efficacy and engagement.
- Implement Phase 2 of the Assistive Intervention Management Strategy (AIMS) with a sophisticated and contemporary suite of intervention activities to support student retention at USQ.

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education)
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services)
Executive Deans

3.2 Design and implement a university wide integrated student support and service model that supports student transitions through:

- Creating an intuitive and robust end-to-end enrolment process where 90% of students can successfully navigate the path from login to subject enrolment independently, using the self-service resources available to them without needing to contact a University representative.
- Facilitating the embedding of employability and career development across the curriculum by developing modules for first year and capstone courses.
- Drawing upon the existing knowledge base on enhancing student mental health and wellbeing to cater to the diverse needs of students within the USQ context.
- Employing cohort-building strategies within programs and disciplines, tailored to students studying online, on campus and through the residential colleges.
- Developing a USQ Digital Literacy Blueprint that enhances the digital literacies of staff and students, enabling the development of the digital skills needed to thrive in a global work context and to become effective, engaged, global citizens.

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services)
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education)

OUR COMMITMENT

Pillar 4: Communication and collaboration enable a coordinated USQ approach.

The final theme is the need for a whole of university approach to success and retention that is founded on clear communication and collaboration. Communication with students prior to commencing study provides them with the opportunity to begin to develop the skills and knowledge required to transition to successful tertiary study. Ongoing communication, as students transition through education, will be purposeful, 'just in time' and delivered in the right style and format. We understand the importance of recognising students as socio-culturally diverse participants in higher education, and that students will respond best when communication is linked to their life experiences and self-constructions.



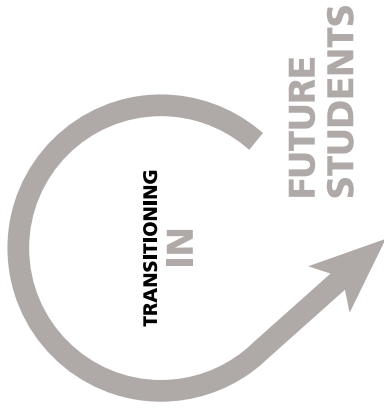
PILLAR 4: COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION ENABLES A COORDINATED USQ APPROACH

Action

Responsibility

<p>4.1 Facilitate student engagement by developing and implementing a coordinated approach to student communication, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaking an environmental scan of key messages sent to students throughout their studies, including analysing current messages, gaps and duplications. • Coordinating information and key messages to current students across multiple providers and channels, which is tailored to specific disciplinary needs. • Continuing efforts towards improving information and communication about our academic products and product offers, with a focus on current and desired student experience. • Creating an inclusive, accessible readiness program to assist students to transition into university by developing: self-confidence, appropriate expectations and the skills necessary to succeed. 	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services)
<p>4.2 Facilitate staff engagement by developing and implementing a coordinated approach to staff communication, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing USQ standards for the use of StudyDesk in courses to improve the student learning journey resulting in a higher quality learning experience. • Facilitating student access to support services by providing education and training to all USQ staff. 	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services)
<p>4.3 Develop and implement a ‘students’ as partners’ program to help shape, frame and drive student success, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a student governance framework and facilitate meaningful engagement of students in decision-making at the University. • Developing a co-creation model to learning and teaching design and delivery. • Optimising Meet-up as a student as partners in learning model. • Strategically targeting the work of the Student Learning and Development team in courses and programs in order to further support academic literacies with a focus on online learning, English for academic purposes, and STEM literacy. 	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services) Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education)

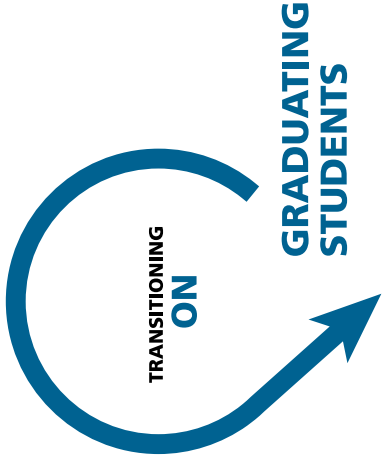
ALIGNING OUR ACTIONS TO THE STUDENT TRANSITION PHASES



- Develop a readiness program
- Improve communication to students of our academic products



- Implement and refine the use of learning analytics
 - Better understand online learners
 - 'Students as partners' program
 - USQ Learning and Teaching Model
 - USQ First Year Curriculum Pedagogy
 - Targeted PD on transition pedagogy and the first year experience
 - Engage online learners
 - Provide an assessment environment that enables success
 - Enhance PD and retention and reflect the initiatives within this action plan
 - Apply guidelines for Universal Design for Learning and Teaching
 - Identify courses for targeted intervention
 - Open textbooks
 - Mental wellbeing strategy
 - Resilience program
 - Employ cohort-building strategies
 - USQ Digital Literacy Blueprint
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- Support strategies for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - Strategically extend and enhance Meet-Up
 - Develop USQ standards for StudyDesk
 - Develop a framework for effective student communication
 - Facilitate student access to support services by providing education and training to all USQ staff
 - Further support academic and STEM literacies
 - Apply current understandings of why students disengage to improve student support and experiences
 - Develop a co-creation model of learning and teaching design and delivery
 - Meaningfully engage students in decision-making
 - Develop a student governance framework and meaningfully engage students in decision-making
 - Undertake cohort analysis to understand and improve the student experience



- Embed employability and career development in curriculum



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usq.edu.au