Student Success: Engage-Succeed-Progress-Complete

The *Student Success Project: Engage-Succeed-Progress-Complete* (ESPC) was conceived by UNE's Academic Quality and Analytics (AQUA) for the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) in response to a request from the Regional University Network Student Success Innovation Cluster (RUN-SSIC). The purpose being for each member university to undertake a retention related project that could be shared amongst members to inform practice improvement across the Network.

Whilst student retention and success in higher education is well researched, the principal aim of this project was to determine whether we could identify any additional factors particular to UNE students, UNE's academic delivery or UNE's policy, process and systems that may be impacting on student engagement, success, progression and completion. The secondary aim was to identify and develop a framework, methodology, and internal capacity for analysing multiple unstructured datasets to inform the quality improvement cycle.

The project was developed as the first phase (Phase 1: Exploration) of what could be a larger Design Thinking (DT) project. Thus, the focus was on understanding the wider non-University contextual environment in which students live; how the current university structures, systems, processes and practices impact on students; and to explore the problems these create for student success to identify insights to inform improvement. By adopting an approach that was student-centric in its design, both aims were met.

Outcome of Aim 1: Identify factors particular to UNE students, UNE's academic delivery or UNE's policy, processes and systems that may be impacting on student engagement, success, progression and completion

Existing unstructured data collected by UNE for a number of purposes was analysed at three levels to reflect the:

- contextual environment in which students interact with the University (Macro Level);
- course environment which supports student learning (Meso Level); and
- unit environment in which students learn (Micro Level).

The analysis identified a number of insights at each level that, although not all particularly unique to UNE, appear to impact not only on success and retention but on overall satisfaction with the University. These insights are summarised below.

Level	Student Experience	Insight
Macro …	*"We don't know enough about student motivation for study, their support structures and life-load to inform course and unit delivery and target support"*	Our current data collection does not collect sufficient information on important factors such as motivation for study and life-load (work, family and financial commitments) to target support and enable informed decision making
	"A little bit of respect goes a long-way"	Whilst many students find staff "extremely supportive" and keen to "provided us (the students) with the best possible chance at a higher education" this is not a universal experience

Level	Student Experience	Insight
Macro continued	*"Remember the KISS principle – we haven't got the time or patience to click through lots of webpages or read booklets."*	In spite of current strategies, some students remain confused about study periods, the services available to them and student related policy, procedures, and requirements
	"Disengaged students do not check email!!"	Current communication strategies may not be effective enough in engaging with different student cohorts
	"Don't cut me out and don't cut me off"	Students are experiencing mobile accessibility issues in relation to accessing the LMS and other university services. These need to be mobile friendly. Access to UNE email etc. when enrolment lapses is also an issue
Meso	*"Do you people even talk to each other? I get different answers from every person I speak to."*	Consistency in academic expectations, staff support and course progression advice are important to students as is the ability to progress and study in desired study periods
	"Thanks goodness, it's not just me!"	Some students are seeking a greater sense of belonging to a course or academic community as a positive motivator
	"OK, uni's taught me to think, but what's it actually taught me to be able to do?"	Some students, particularly in professional courses, are seeking ongoing preparation for their transition to the workforce or for use in their current profession
Micro	*"We want it all, and we want it now!"*	The 'drip release' of unit materials does not allow students to plan around their other commitments
	"Blessed are the flexible as they shall not be bent out of shape"	Lack of flexibility in relation to accessing unit materials, engagement opportunities and assessment submission is a common theme in unit evaluations
	"I can Google the content. What else have you got to offer?"	Growing sentiment around a perceived lack of 'value for money' over and above content delivery (applied knowledge, assessment, & experience)

Outcome of Aim 2: Identify and develop a framework, methodology and internal capacity for analysing multiple unstructured datasets to inform the quality improvement cycle

A number of the insights above have already been reported to UNE's Senior Executive and Academic Committees over the last twelve-months. Our ability to report on a number of these issues throughout 2016 and early 2017 is as a direct result of developing a sound methodology for analysing the multiple unstructured data sets collected and stored by the University.

Although resource intensive, AQUA is now in position to undertake 'deep-dive' analyses of data to inform existing quantitative reporting. This has resulted in the development of a number of new reports which will become a part of AQUA's standard reporting such as the *Thematic Analysis of Unit Evaluation* and the report on UNE's *Annual Review Cycle* as well as a number of ad hoc reports based on specific issues. It has also informed the *UNE Engagement and Success Framework* and its associated *2017 Rolling Action Plan.2*

Suggestions for Innovation and Change

While designed as a study to interrogate student data and to facilitate improvement in retention and success, the study has raised a number of issues which may not only impact negatively on student outcomes but, if addressed, also have the potential to positively influence service improvement across UNE.

A copy of the project replication report is available **on the LH Martin Institute website**.