

# **Building Pathways to Higher Education Success: a longitudinal case study**

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## **Abstract**

*The transition to university life has long been a poorly supported and problematic process. Strategic emphasis is traditionally placed upon academic needs but rarely focuses upon enabling networking and social connection within the university context. As a consequence the process is not fully integrated towards meeting the complete needs of incoming students. Many students take an extended period to adjust to their new life as a university student, while a significant percentage drop out at some point of their first year. The University of Southern Queensland's Springfield campus actively supports the initial and holistic transitioning of their domestic and international students through the Building Pathways Bridging program.*

*The Program was established in 2007 in response to student requests and was developed to actively target those students that the campus collectively deemed to be 'at risk'. This initiative responded to an enhanced understanding of the campus' unique cohort following the first year of operation and initial research into the Springfield student profile.*

*The Building Pathways program follows a structured program of ten modules that transition students through a cultural introduction to university life and fosters cross-faculty networking with peers and staff. The sessions are deliberately developmental, they aim to demystify university life, boost confidence and build familiarity as well as introduce new students to a broad suite of academic skills. Whilst short term (first semester) results have been shared in past publications the longitudinal study analyses data from the first two cohorts of students at the completion of degree stage (four years). Early program findings from the longitudinal data gathered from 2007-2011 will be shared. Results indicate the program has a notable impact upon the Higher Education Learning Experience and individual student results: retention statistics have improved, another 28% and student completion rates show an additional improvement of 12% across the Pathways groups.*

*Given the global focus on wider participation and retention, the Building Pathways program provides a model that could well be trialled internationally across the Higher Education sector.*

## ADDRESSING THE ISSUES: TRANSITIONING INTO UNIVERSITY

Longitudinal research of programs assisting students to transition into university are needed. Emphasis focuses upon academic needs. Many students take an extended period to adjust to their new university life. A significant percentage still drop out in their first year.

## BACKGROUND: USQ SPRINGFIELD & PATHWAYS

The Pathways Program was established in 2007 to actively target students the campus deemed to be 'at risk'. This initiative was a response to understanding the Springfield cohort: 57% mid and low SES, 50% mature age and 50% first in family to attend university.

### The Building Pathways Program

The Building Pathways Program is a university-funded week-long structured program that seeks to:

- demystify university life,
- boost confidence
- build familiarity with peers and staff
- introduce a broad suite of academic skills

Pathways Program results from the first six months have been shared previously (McIntyre, Todd, Huisjer & Tehan, 2012).

This longitudinal case study analyses the success and persistence rates as students complete their studies.

### Longitudinal Results (2011)

PATHWAYS STUDENTS 2007 and 2008	CAMPUS COHORT 2007 and 2008
<p><b>26.8%</b> Students successfully complete their study in the minimum time</p>	<p><b>16%</b> Students successfully complete their study in the minimum time</p>
<p><b>51.8%</b> Students persist with their studies</p>	<p><b>23.4%</b> students persist with their studies</p>

### Early Findings

- The students attending the early transition program show marked completion and persistence percentages when compared to whole of campus data.
- Establishing early social connection with campus staff and fellow students also appears to assist student persistence with study.

### IMPLICATIONS

An holistic transition program that addresses both academic and social needs would appear to make notable difference, in terms of students success and persistence, to complete undergraduate studies.