



MONASH
University

STUDENT RETENTION STRATEGY 2019

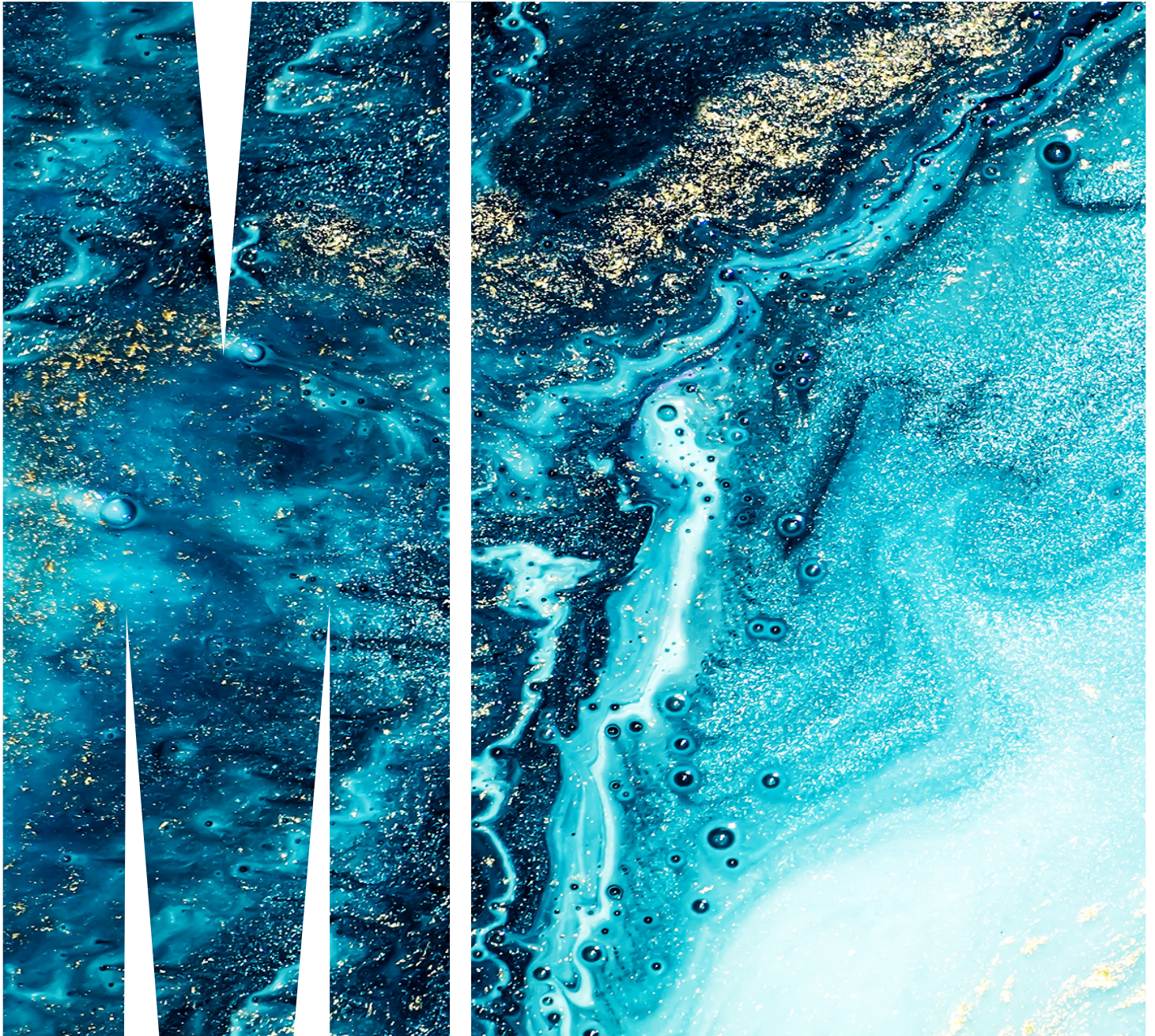


Table of contents

Message from Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)	2
Vision	3
What is student retention?	3
Who is the strategy for?	3
Why is student retention important?	3
Current retention profile at Monash University	4
Enablers of student retention at Monash	5
Action Plan:	7
1. Better utilise data and predictive analytics to allow for timely and relevant interventions...8	
2. Strengthen students' sense of belonging, starting at orientation and continuing throughout their learning journey	10
3. Better understand the discontinuation experience, including providing students with an alternative to discontinuing	13

Message from Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)

At Monash, we see the success of an institution and the success of its students as inseparable. We are committed to maximising the success of our student community, by promoting and sustaining high levels of student retention, success and completion.

Monash recognises the direct positive impact of high levels of retention, success and completion upon students' life-chances and opportunities. Monash aims to provide students with the necessary tools for success as scholars and citizens. A successful retention strategy depends on the combined efficacy of our courses, services and programs, and requires the endorsement of the entire Monash community. To this end, retention is included as a key indicator of our success within the University-wide KPI framework. Significant investment has been made in programs supporting our students, including our commitment to mental health and wellbeing, residential colleges, peer assisted study sessions, peer mentoring and library resources and services.

The Monash *Student Retention Strategy* set out in this document is a response to the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) 2018 report – *Improving retention, completion and success in higher education* – recommending that every institution have a comprehensive, student-centred retention strategy that is evaluated regularly. Monash has a whole-of-institution commitment to, and shared responsibility for, retention, inclusion, partnerships, and fostering a sense of belonging among students. Critical components to ensure student, and therefore, institutional success include satisfied students and alumni; competent, caring faculty and staff; and concerned/aware administration.

Professor Susan Elliott

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)
Monash University

Vision

Monash University will support, engage, and motivate all of our students to thrive in their courses and achieve academic success. We aspire to become a model of excellence in retention nationally and internationally, and to be recognised for our development, implementation, delivery and assessment of innovative programs and services that enhance student access and success, particularly for at-risk students.

What is student retention?

Retention is an important, but not the only, measure of student success. Fundamentally, student retention refers to a student's continued enrolment at an institution from one period to another. There is no single definition of retention, and the definitions currently in use, even within Australian higher education, vary considerably. The national measure is year-to-year retention, and considers students retained by individual institutions (the 'normal' retention rate) and also within the higher education system (the 'adjusted' retention rate). The most common measure used at Monash is the 'normal' retention rate, which captures the percentage of students enrolled in a given year who either continue the following year or complete their course requirements. A student may change their course of study and still be counted as retained, so long as one of these two conditions are satisfied. A related concept is student attrition, which refers to the percentage of students who neither complete their studies in a given year nor return the following year.

According to the HESP (2018) report, student demographic and enrolment characteristics (i.e. type of attendance, mode of attendance, age group, basis of admission, field of education, socioeconomic status [SES], Indigenous status, non-English speaking background, and gender) collectively explain only 15.2% of the overall variation in student attrition rates across the sector, whereas the institution being attended has a greater influence on retention (18.8%). The report goes on to note that many student traits not measured in the analysis, such as motivation and resilience, might also account for attrition. At Monash, analysis suggests that the strongest predictor of student retention is student academic performance, which was not considered in the analysis presented in the HESP report. Consistent with the findings of the HESP report, student demographic and enrolment characteristics are much weaker predictors of retention at Monash. These results highlight the importance of supporting students to maximise their academic success and underscore the difficulty associated with identifying students at risk of attrition on the basis of their demographic and enrolment characteristics alone.

Who is the strategy for?

The scope of this strategy is all undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students at Australian campuses. Similar plans will be developed for Malaysia and other international locations. Monash College has also developed a Retention Strategy to support their cohorts, including students articulating to Monash University.

Why is student retention important?

Student retention has far-reaching benefits that extend beyond our immediate learning community.

- For students, success in higher education has significant social and economic benefits, with non-completion or non-continuation having financial consequences both in the short and longer term. It also has a positive impact on a student's wellbeing and future opportunities.
- For Monash, student retention confers reputational benefits, with associated positive impacts on student and staff recruitment and satisfaction. Moreover, performance-based funding is a way to incentivise correct behaviour within higher education institutions. For these reasons, student retention is critical for Monash's future sustainability.

- For society at large, student retention supports social and cultural development and helps to address societal inequalities through increasing higher education attainment.

Current retention profile at Monash University

Historically, Monash's performance on retention has been strong, sitting among the highest performing institutions in the sector and well above the sector median. Monash's current retention rate is 91.4%, just behind University of Melbourne at 93.2% and University of New South Wales at 91.5%, and has been ranked within the top five universities nationally on student retention for over a decade. Not content with this strong performance, Monash has set as a University key performance indicator the achievement of a 95% retention rate by 2020.

Part of the reason Monash's retention rate has been consistently high over recent years is a result of the considerable investment in educational innovation to support our students. The University's education agenda, [Focus Education](#), commits to initiatives designed to improve the student experience and better enable student success. These include a focus on flexible and innovative learning and teaching, supported by expert educators using the best in learning technology and spaces.

Ongoing efforts and investment by Faculties to improve student learning experiences, refresh curriculum and upskill educators have been complemented and enabled by university-wide programs. Key initiatives include significant upgrades to learning spaces – including the construction of the Learning and Teaching Building – to better support active learning, the MOVE virtual learning environment, ongoing upgrades of the Learning Management System, increased live-streaming, and improved support for educator development through the Monash Education Academy.

This focus on learning is complemented by a comprehensive suite of programs to support students, including:

- **Mental Health Strategy:** the Monash University Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2020 articulates a 'whole of university' approach to empower students and staff in leading a life of sound psychological and emotional health. Monash offers a range of activities to educate students and staff about common mental health issues, and how to support others. The Monash Student Association also has a student-run a Mental Health and Resilience Committee in response to this identified need.
- **Yulendj Indigenous Engagement Unit:** Yulendj provides a wide range of support and engagement services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students including tutorial support, leadership programs and community events.
- **Non-Residential Colleges:** Non-residential colleges are made up of a collective of students living off-campus. A calendar of social, cultural and sporting events for each non-residential college provides an enhanced Monash experience and greater sense of community for students living away from their campus.
- **Monash Residential Services:** Living on campus provides students with unique opportunities for social connections, leadership and life skills, where learning continues beyond the classroom.
- **Monash Student Organisations:** Student organisations create thriving student communities through social and academic support activities, student clubs, volunteering and mentoring, welfare programs and independent representation for students. Student organisation advocacy services make a significant and direct contribution to improved retention rates, by supporting otherwise disenfranchised students through to completion.
- **Peer-Assisted Study Support (PASS):** PASS is an academic mentoring program, usually aimed at first year students transitioning from high school to university. It is a program of guided study groups to provide support with difficult units. PASS is a student-led initiative

where issues relating to course material and student life can be discussed in a friendly, informal environment with peers and trained student facilitators.

- **English Connect:** English Connect enhances students' English language skills and cross-cultural communication. The programs offer a fun, free way to meet and talk with other students, and share their time at Monash. Interactive programs are delivered by specially trained students in an environment that helps students make friends, discover new perspectives and increase their confidence in English.
- **Widening Participation Strategy (2016-2020):** Monash has committed to provide financial and practical support to students from low SES communities, with a target of ensuring that academic outcomes, including retention, progress and completion rates for low SES students are at parity with the overall domestic Monash cohort.
- **Library:** The Library provides resources, skill development programs (within and parallel to curriculum), services and spaces that enable student academic success. Online resources include Research and Learning Online, library guides, reading lists, databases, electronic books and journals. Experts are available to help students develop a range of research and learning skills at the daily drop in points and through individual consultations. The Library also delivers free face to face classes on a range of research and learning skills including expectations at university, time management, academic research, writing and communication, and exam preparation.

Enablers of student retention at Monash

Supporting students to persevere in higher education requires a detailed understanding of what makes them stay enrolled and focused on their studies. To this end, Monash has undertaken a comprehensive analysis which demonstrated that multiple and complementary retention strategies are needed for our diverse student cohort. The results of the student experience survey have been widely distributed to faculties, divisions and campuses. Increased partnership between Monash and Monash's Student Organisations' student networks present an opportunity to increase feedback channels, and greatly improve student outcomes. As noted earlier, academic performance was found to be a key driver of student retention, with students who were underperforming academically at a much-increased risk of dropout. In addition to this critical factor, retention rates were found to vary across faculties, campuses, modes of study and course types. Retention was higher for international students compared to domestic students, and slightly lower for Indigenous students and low-SES students.

Another key factor associated with student retention is a strong sense of belonging to Monash. The lower an undergraduate student's sense of belonging, the more likely they are to have considered leaving university. Undergraduate students who have considered leaving Monash¹ are most likely to indicate that this was due to health or stress, boredom/lack of interest, study/life balance, work load difficulties, and needing a break, which underscores the importance of providing students with timely and relevant support. The retention rate for students who have considered leaving is substantially lower than those who have not considered leaving (82.3% compared to 95.1%), which shows that considering leaving is a precursor to leaving for many students. Attention should be given to these students before considering leaving translates into actual discontinuation. The Student Success Advisor model developed by the Faculty of Education, in which students receive regular proactive contact from a dedicated team, is one example of ongoing support enabling successful early intervention.

Common withdrawal reasons given by departing undergraduates include transferring to another institution; they were no longer interested in the course; they failed to re-enrol; and their course expectations were not met. In comparison, common reasons given by postgraduate students

¹ As per the results of the 2018 Student Experience Survey.

include transferring to another institution; being unable to balance study, work and/or family commitments; new employment opportunity or relocation; and they were no longer interested in the course. Of the almost 3,500 discontinuations among *Monash Online* students since 2015, the top five reasons given were an inability to balance study, work and/or family commitments; failure to re-enrol; academic reasons; a major life event (e.g. birth, death, divorce); and health reasons.

Action Plan:

Building from a strong foundation of learning and teaching and student support initiatives, the following priority areas have been identified for further action:

1. Better utilise data and predictive analytics to allow for timely and relevant interventions;
2. Strengthen students' sense of belonging, starting at orientation and continuing throughout their learning journey; and
3. Better understand the discontinuation experience, including providing students with an alternative to discontinuing.

Within these three priorities, ongoing improvement programs have been identified, along with additional actions for improvement.

Implementation of this Action Plan will be led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), with regular monitoring through the Student Experience Committee and the Education Committee.

Reports will also be provided to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Committee.

1. Better utilise data and predictive analytics to allow for timely and relevant interventions

Goal	Use data and analytics to develop and inform targeted intervention and outreach.	
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing development of learning analytics through the Learning Analytics Working Party, Monash Education Innovation, Monash Education Academy and Faculties. • Monitoring of initial engagement with IT systems by Student and Education Business Services (SEBS) in advance of semester census dates for commencing Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) students. This program will be extended to all commencing coursework students from 2020, linked to Faculties and support services. • The Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy will continue to support students with early intervention and access to quality health care. • The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework 2019-2030 will continue to increase the participation of and support the success of our Indigenous students. • The Diversity and Inclusion Framework is supported by multi-year action plans serve to strategically implement our objectives, measure our impact and achievements and deliver outcomes consistent with our strategic plan to ensure student success, particularly for those students who are at higher risk of attrition. • Continue to refine and report analysis of retention rates by faculty of study, degree level, mode of study, campus, and some demographic factors. 	
Strategies		
Update the Commencing Student Survey to better capture students' expectations.	<p>The Commencing Student Survey will be redesigned to better capture students' expectations of study at Monash and their motivations for undertaking higher education.</p> <p>This will establish a baseline for measuring student perceptions and inform communications and interventions.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Working Group convened by Director, Strategic Insights Unit.</p> <p>Timing: November 2019 for Semester 1, 2020.</p> <p>Success measures: Commencing Student Survey is redesigned, administered, and survey outcomes are subsequently used to inform interventions.</p>
Use Moodle student engagement analytics to predict behaviour and trigger alerts.	<p>Historical student behavioural patterns and engagement on Moodle will be analysed to predict expected behaviours of current students in the same unit as well as their expected academic performance.</p> <p>Unit coordinators will be able to identify students with low engagement early on in the semester. Students can then be offered appropriate support and early assistance to get them back on track</p>	<p>Responsibility: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Education Portfolio; Faculty Associate Deans (Education).</p> <p>Timing: Pilot in Psychology and Engineering in Semester 2, 2019; Fully operational 2020.</p> <p>Success measures: pass rates in units using Moodle student engagement analytics increase relative to the previous semester, or existing high pass rates are sustained.</p>

<p>Use attendance and performance analytics from On-Task software to allow instructors to alert students who are showing signs they are not engaged.</p>	<p>On-Task was developed to provide Personalised Learning Support Actions at scale. The synthesis of information from multiple tools (e.g. Moodle and forums) gives teaching staff a clearer understanding of their students' educational engagement.</p> <p>In doing so, the instructor can tailor the feedback provided to students as they can form their own insights based on the data presented.</p> <p>Increased student involvement in how data analytics are used will also assist in identifying relevant support services.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Professor Learning Analytics, Faculty of Information Technology.</p> <p>Timing: Pilot in specific courses to commence Semester 2, 2019.</p> <p>Success measures: Pilot is evaluated to inform full roll-out.</p>
<p>Link student attendance data and space utilisation modes to inform delivery modes of units.</p>	<p>Wi-Fi student roaming data has demonstrated that students are more likely to attend workshops and find them more engaging than lectures. These data will be continually reviewed and presented to course leaders to ensure the most appropriate venue and teaching mode is offered to students.</p> <p>Support for educators to develop active learning strategies is provided through the Monash Education Academy.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Education Portfolio; Scheduling Services, SEBS, Monash Education Academy.</p> <p>Timing: ongoing.</p> <p>Success measures: Increased class participation in learning activities.</p>

2. Strengthen students' sense of belonging, starting at orientation and continuing throughout their learning journey

<p>Goal</p>	<p>Collaborate across all key areas of the University to deliver a comprehensive commencing student experience including purposeful programs, events, services, and activities that promote student development within and beyond the classroom, tailored to study level and mode.</p> <p>Support services and processes will be streamlined to provide a coordinated and efficient student experience. Induction, co-curricular activities and pre-arrival and post-arrival strategies will be ongoing to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, regardless of whether they are on-campus or online, or if they are undergraduate or post-graduate.</p>	
<p>Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation Committee coordinates university-wide orientation activities. • Continued development of the aMigo platform for commencing international students. • Engage in timely communication of accurate information with our students about support services and the role of staff who can assist them, and continue to improve web-based orientation and transition tools for students. • Partner with student organisations to improve communication with students and engagement with campus activities. • Provide timely information to students about their rights and responsibilities as a Monash student. 	
<p>Strategies</p>		
<p>Continue to improve Monash's integrated approach to orientation and early transition.</p>	<p>Ensure clear and consistent messaging and administrative processes across the whole University around admissions, within the One Monash program.</p> <p>Review the provision of tailored support for postgraduate coursework, online and blended-mode students to ensure that the needs of these cohorts are met.</p> <p>Continue current work to focus on transitions for international students, including the web-based aMigo social network app that allows students to connect with students across the world, and various other pre-arrival engagement strategies.</p> <p>Connect Monash College and Monash University programs to better support students transitioning through College pathways.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education); Director, Student Engagement & Campus Experience, Campus Community Division, Monash College.</p> <p>Timing: Ongoing.</p> <p>Success measures: Orientation and Transition Framework has clear accountabilities and processes.</p>

<p>Improve communication to students to make navigating transition easier</p>	<p>Review communication to students at key transition points with the aim of personalising communications and reducing information overload.</p> <p>Review the Montrack program to focus on students at risk.</p> <p>Review learning from the Faculty of Education Student Success Advisors model and how this can be applied more broadly.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Chief Marketing Officer; Student Connect Communications; Executive Director, Campus Community.</p> <p>Timing: March 2020.</p> <p>Success measures: Develop an updated lifecycle model for key communications.</p>
<p>Increase student input into transition activities.</p>	<p>A review of the University's <i>Students as Partners</i> engagement model within the Education Portfolio is currently under development. This will enable us to build formal feedback processes, deepen opportunities for students to share their experiences, and allow students to become active participants with valuable expertise to contribute to shaping learning and teaching, and other work of the University, alongside academic and professional staff.</p> <p>Various students as partners programs are already operating successfully across the university, so a coordinated approach to share best practice will be established.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education); Executive Director, Campus Community.</p> <p>Timing: March 2020.</p> <p>Success measures: Develop a pilot program that can be replicated across the university to support students on governance committees and establish a community of practice to share best practice of student partnerships.</p>
<p>Expand the Peer Mentoring pilot across the University.</p>	<p>Given that over a quarter of students with a weak sense of belonging considered leaving Monash, the peer mentoring program is designed to help new students transition socially and academically into university life and give current students the opportunity to gain mentoring experience.</p> <p>Mentors build important leadership and communication skills that are vital to career success.</p> <p>Some Faculties have offered excellent peer mentoring programs, however not all students have had access to mentoring to support their transition.</p> <p>During 2019, a coordinated peer mentoring trial commenced in a number of faculties with the aim to roll this program out across the university in 2020. Feedback to date on the trial has been very positive from both mentors and mentees.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Director Social Inclusion, Education Portfolio; Faculties.</p> <p>Timing: 2019 Semester 1 pilot with Arts and Law Faculties; Semester 2 pilot with Science, MADA and IT; 2020 work with remaining faculties to develop new and existing program for 2020.</p> <p>Success measures: The program will be refined based on feedback and then rolled out across the University with positive experiences reported by mentors and mentees.</p>

<p>Enhance student engagement at Caulfield, Peninsula and Parkville</p>	<p>Building on improvements to orientation at Caulfield in 2019, Monash will continue to enhance programs at Caulfield that cater to the majority-international cohort on this campus, including the Non-Residential Colleges, Culture Connect student partnership program, English Connect and MONSU and MPA activities.</p> <p>Ongoing attention to changing student needs and parity of provision at Peninsula and Parkville campuses will also be a focus.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Culture Connect Team, Student Academic Experience, Education Portfolio.</p> <p>Timing: 2019 Semester 2 pilot.</p> <p>Success measures: Student engagement at Caulfield, Parkville and Peninsula campuses is enhanced.</p>
---	--	---

3. Better understand the discontinuation experience, including providing students with an alternative to discontinuing

Goal	Connect with students considering discontinuation, enhance understanding of why students are deciding to discontinue, review discontinuation forms and information collected, and ensure the evaluation of strategies and interventions inform ongoing improvement to increase retention.	
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic students who discontinue via WES complete a series of four questions providing insights into reasons and/or consultation regarding discontinuation. Data is made available to faculties regarding these reasons. • Discontinuing international students are required to complete a hard copy form and engage with Faculties. • Work with Monash's Student Organisations to gain insight into issues facing students experiencing difficulties. 	
Strategies		
Review, with a view to expanding, the current set of discontinuation 'reasons' displayed on Course Discontinuation Forms	<p>Domestic students applying to discontinue via the Web Enrolment System are asked the reasons why they are discontinuing and if they have sought advice about their decision to discontinue from their course.</p> <p>This information will be used to alert a faculty staff member to contact the student and ensure they have considered all other options prior to being discontinued.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Senior Director, Student and Education Business Services.</p> <p>Timing: October 2019.</p> <p>Success measures: Number of students considering discontinuing re-engaged with intervention strategies or alternatives.</p>
Conduct exit interviews with students who have discontinued to inform future retention practices.	<p>Currently at Monash, over 30% of undergraduate students and over 20% of GPG students discontinue without providing a reason, resulting in a lost opportunity to understand what drives student discontinuation behaviour.</p> <p>Students will be contacted after they have discontinued to share their experience while enrolled to determine if other programs, support services or initiatives should be introduced to enable them to stay at Monash.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Senior Director, Student and Education Business Services; Executive Director, Campus Community Division.</p> <p>Timing: December 2019.</p> <p>Success measures: Shared student experiences inform future strategies to minimise student attrition. Student feedback reviewed and shared with faculties.</p>
Better promote financial assistance options	Review the promotion of financial assistance to eligible students near the end of their courses.	<p>Responsibility: Monash Connect, Community Campus Division.</p> <p>Timing: March 2020.</p> <p>Success measures: Reduced student attrition of students towards the end of their degree experiencing financial difficulty.</p>

<p>Actively engage with students on intermission</p>	<p>For those students who have taken a leave of absence, we will actively engage with them to make their transition back to Monash easier to reduce the risk of them discontinuing either before or after they return to their studies.</p> <p>Data sets will also be reviewed to investigate how many students do not return following an intermission.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Senior Director, Student and Education Business Services; Faculty General Managers.</p> <p>Timing: Ongoing.</p> <p>Success measures: There is an increase in the proportion of students on a leave of absence returning to complete their studies.</p>
--	--	--