

31 July 2017

Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Office of the Deputy Vice-  
Chancellor (Academic)  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
(Academic)  
Professor Joanne Wright  
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CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

Dear Mr Laming MP

### **Inquiry into school to work transition**

I write in response to email correspondence of 05 July 2017 inviting submissions to the *Inquiry into school to work transition* and provide the following feedback to the Terms of Reference:

#### **1. Measurements of gain in school and how this contributes to supporting students to prepare for post-school education and training;**

We have undertaken some research into whether there is a defined correlation between performance in certain school subjects and performance in tertiary studies. Our data from 2012 to 2016 indicate that not completing certain secondary school subjects, particularly Mathematics, Biology, and Chemistry, may be a significant contribution factor to failing courses at university. Furthermore, students who have completed secondary school Science and Physics may be over-confident with their background knowledge, and thus may also have a heightened risk of failing their university courses.

These results suggest to us that the support provided to students in secondary school should guide them to select enrolment in a university program which reflects their subjects completed. In addition, support programs could extend to student preparedness for completing university courses, and the focus of curriculum design and education for specialist teachers should be matched to their area/s of expertise. Universities could also be better cognizant of senior curriculum.

We also have data from several years ago examining the relation between results in Year 12 English and subsequent performance in the initial semester of enrolment (as measured by Grade Point Average). These data suggest that performance in English at secondary school correlated to success in tertiary studies; however, this would need to be reviewed given the new senior syllabuses being introduced. Insight from this study underpinned the development of an Enhanced Studies course, [WRIT1999](#).

#### **2. Opportunities to better inform and support students in relation to post-school education and training, including use of employment outcomes of students who undertake school-based vocational education or post-school tertiary pathways;**

UQ staff undertake in-school and on-campus engagement with students in Years 10 to 12 as well as events, campus tours, and other information sessions for key school contacts. At these sessions, we provide information on programs, accommodation and scholarships and have more recently added information specifically relating to employment outcomes, including career outcomes (with talks from UQ academics, industry connections, and senior student ambassadors), and employability (based on [EMPLOY101x](#) *Unlocking Your Employability*). In addition, we hold an annual *Careers that Shape the World* event and hold a dedicated workshop on the topic of transitioning from high school to university, which is delivered in term 4 to Year

12 students and utilises student ambassadors to talk about their journey from high school to university.

We also conducted an extensive survey of students to inform development of our recently launched Student Strategy and the survey data also suggested that students are generally motivated by future employment prospects, so being able to demonstrate employment outcomes is critical. The report on consultation outcomes is available here (<https://student-strategy.uq.edu.au/background>) and provides good data. This would seem to indicate that comparative data on employment outcomes and longitudinal salary analysis would be powerful in motivating students and helping them decide between career options. However, care would need to be taken due to the lag between a Year 10 student looking at job vacancies in one year and those vacancies/types of jobs still existing when that same student is graduating seven or so years later.

### 3. Other related matters that the Committee considers relevant.

The other critical factor is financial stress, as highlighted in the QILT Student Experience Survey and our own work with students (a recent 1st Year student success and retention project targeted commencing students through a series of telephone calls at crucial points in the academic year).

It may also be helpful for high school students to have realistic expectations about higher education and the differences to secondary, particularly in relation to greater independence and responsibility, and being a self-directed learner. Our experience is that many students struggle to make this transition.

We have additional data showing that there are a large proportion of male students who fail courses at university and continue to do so over additional years of study until they decide to leave in later years of university (having accrued course debts for failed courses). These students also often change their program of study. It might be helpful if students could be better advised in high school about the costs of further education and the need to be realistic about their preparedness for university study and program selection (our data also indicate that frequent program changes are a predictor of attrition).

I would also be cautious about schools and vocational education providers issuing “diplomas” for students at secondary school and ensuring that these comply with TEQSA and the revised AQF.

I trust these few comments will be useful. Please contact my office if we can provide any additional information.

Yours sincerely

Professor Joanne Wright  
**Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)**

Copy: Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning)