

First Year Experience and Retention Policy

Section 1 - Policy Principles

(1) QUT is aware of the significant transitional challenges facing first year students and acknowledges the diversity and changing social and educational needs and aspirations of its entering cohorts. QUT believes that a positive and involving First Year Experience (FYE), which connects new learners with their teachers and peers in a community committed to learning, provides the critical foundation for transition to later years' learning success and career attainment and enhances student satisfaction, course experience and retention.

(2) At QUT, the FYE, successful transition of our students, and retention of students is the responsibility of all staff. QUT focuses on providing the best possible experience for new students in an environment where they are supported to take responsibility for their own learning, and to embrace an active role in succeeding to their full potential (academically and personally) as new learners in our University.

(3) Therefore QUT will deliver a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated approach to the FYE that:

- a. is mediated through intentionally designed curricula and co-curricula;
- b. is facilitated by a quality learning environment and high quality teaching and support;
- c. is promoted and supported by all academic and professional staff interactions with students, where staff are developed, valued and rewarded for their FYE-focused perspective and partnerships;
- d. fosters easy and timely access to services and programs that aid academic and social orientation, integration, and support;
- e. is appropriate to QUT's culture and creates a sense of belonging;
- f. is scholarly, evidence-based and enhanced by regular evaluation; and
- g. is given a high priority by the University to ensure that the conditions that promote successful student transitions and retention are appropriately resourced and are sustainable over time.

Section 2 - Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Faculties	<p>Faculties are responsible for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. developing, implementing and evaluating intentionally designed curricular and co-curricular experiences for first year students; 2. providing quality learning experiences and high quality teaching as appropriate to QUT's approach to whole of course curriculum design and the varied learning needs of new learners; 3. promoting and supporting engagement through staff-student interactions that enhance first year student experience and retention strategies for new students and other cohorts; and 4. engaging with Divisions and university wide programs that support first year students and other cohorts as necessary to improve retention.
Divisions	<p>Divisions are responsible for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. providing appropriate support and advice to faculties, including quality data that informs best practice, as they enact first year experience and retention strategies; 2. promoting and supporting engagement with staff-student and peer interactions that enhance first year experience and retention strategies; and 3. ensuring there is easy and timely access to services and programs that aid administrative, academic and social orientation, integration and support.

Section 3 - Orientation and Transition

(4) QUT recognises that students undertake learning transitions which may involve large-scale academic, social, and environmental change. QUT aims to facilitate a positive and successful transition for all commencing students to their discipline(s) of study, campus, and learning environments through orientation processes which provide academic, social, administrative and geographic familiarisation with QUT and embrace the diversity of their previous experiences.

(5) QUT considers orientation to be a process that occurs over time, both independently of the curriculum and embedded in the curriculum, and which incorporates the following activities:

- a. a process of academic and social integration to facilitate learning engagement
- b. just-in-time information provision and timely access to support services
- c. a particular focus on critical time periods such as Welcome Week.

(6) Faculties and divisions are expected to base their orientation activities on the good practice principles set out in the [Student Orientation and Transition](#) information (QUT staff access only).

Orientation and Welcome Weeks

(7) 'Welcome Weeks' are recognised as the official commencement to the academic year for commencing students, and are scheduled over specific days in the weeks immediately preceding Week 1 of the standard teaching semester. Faculty orientation sessions held during the weeks preceding Week 1 of the standard teaching semester are considered to be compulsory for students, and must therefore be designed to be accessible by all commencing students.

(8) A University-wide approach to orientation is promoted through the following:

- a. the Orientation Organising Committee is responsible for the operational coordination of a University-wide approach to orientation, including the coordination of Welcome Week; and
- b. faculties, divisions, and campuses, together with the Student Guild are responsible for developing Orientation Plans to address transition issues relevant to particular commencing student cohorts, and for ensuring adequate resourcing and staff allocation, particularly over critical time periods.

Section 4 - Retention Strategies

(9) QUT provides a range of programs and activities designed to support student engagement, retention and success. Relevant course/unit/cohort/student progress data and best practice standards are used to design, implement and evaluate a range of activities and programs intended to improve retention. Interventions may be designed centrally or by faculties however timely consultation between divisions and faculties regarding focus, methodology, evaluation and resourcing will occur. Retention activities and programs may vary in aims, scope, resourcing, staff and student involvement as relevant to the purpose and desired outcomes. Example programs and activities include:

Support Services for Students

(10) The University provides a suite of student-centred support services, including dedicated cohort-based services for specific groups with particular needs (such as Indigenous students, low-income students).

Campus Engagement

(11) QUT develops commencing students' sense of belonging to the University by offering a range of programs and activities that promote involvement in university life, including engagement with peers and QUT staff, and support social transition.

Peer Support Programs

(12) QUT ensures that all first year students have the opportunity to engage in peer to peer activities, and is committed to facilitating peer-to-peer interactions as outlined in the [Peer Mentoring and Support](#) information (QUT staff access only).

Monitoring Student Engagement

(13) QUT supports programs, at faculty and university level, that proactively support student engagement, particularly during their first 96 credit points of study, and provides early interventions that lead to improved levels of persistence and enhanced performance. Outreach programs work in collaboration with faculty stakeholders and divisional partners to monitor first year students and other cohorts for signs of disengagement, and to ensure the timely provision of support and advice.

Section 5 - Definition of Relevant Terms

Term	Definition
A First Year Student	A First Year Student has not completed 96 credit points (i.e. 8 units @ 12 credit points = 1 full-time year) of study at QUT within their currently enrolled course. This includes students entering through alternative pathways (such as advanced standing for TAFE or equivalent certificates) who are commencing in their second year of study, and may therefore miss the intentionally designed first year curriculum.
The First Year Experience	The First Year Experience is the student's experience at QUT from the point of offer until the successful completion of 96 credit points of study in the student's current course of study.
The First Year Curriculum	The First Year Curriculum, in line with QUT's approach to whole of course design (Curriculum Design, Approval and Accreditation Policy), involves units and learning experiences which have been specifically designed and placed into a course to introduce threshold discipline concepts. The first year curriculum aims to foster the development of key academic skills to underpin successful course progression, in line with a successful adaption to the QUT environment to enhance self management, study skills, interaction with peers, and familiarisation with QUT resources to facilitate a rewarding learning experience. The first year curriculum principles are used to guide and evaluate good practice in curriculum design and enactment.
Retention Strategies	Retention strategies refers to the development of a range of resources and processes which identify and support first year students as part of the larger 'at risk' cohort within QUT. Retention strategies are enacted through curricula and co-curricular activities.

Status and Details

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