



Charles Sturt
University

Student Retention and Success Framework



Foreword

Charles Sturt University has a proud tradition of delivering high-quality learning, teaching and research which creates new knowledge, benefits lives, enhances regional profitability and helps communities to flourish.

Students are at the heart of everything we do at Charles Sturt and we understand the importance of setting our students up for success through a variety of support services, targeted programs and curriculum embedded skills development. We are proud of our strong focus on student support and retention, and through provision of sector-leading support to our students, we have seen a decrease in first year attrition and enabled students to remain enrolled and successfully complete their degrees.

The Charles Sturt University Student Retention and Success Framework sets out the principles and focus areas guiding our retention strategy and provides an overview of the interventions, support and curriculum improvements that are contributing to better outcomes for students in terms of progress and completion.

The framework reflects our unwavering commitment to ensuring that every student has the best chance to complete their studies, succeed in their chosen path, and to fulfil the promise of our ethos *Yindyamarra Winhanganha*; the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in.

Jacqueline Clements
Executive Director, Student Success
Charles Sturt University



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Student Retention and Success Framework

Our vision

Universities have long understood that a sustained, deeply embedded and institution-wide focus on student retention and success leads to better outcomes for students, the institution as a whole, and particularly in the case of a regional university, the communities it serves.

Student attrition has, however, remained a persistent problem for many Australian higher education institutions, as outlined by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in its 2017 Higher Education Standards Panel Final Report – Improving retention, completion and success in higher education.

The retention and success of students is a key element of Charles Sturt's University Strategy. It is our vision for Charles Sturt students to have a high-quality learning experience and to graduate with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and professional networks for a meaningful life and successful career.

The Student Retention and Success Framework demonstrates the university's ongoing commitment to the retention and success of our students. The framework responds to the recommendations of the Higher Education Standards Panel and is informed by international best practice and the evidence obtained by Charles Sturt University during our own pilot and other programs where we have determined the most appropriate framework, tools, data and action required to improve student retention and provide students with the best chance for success. The framework will inform and guide the design, execution and evaluation of the university's retention-related activities. Our success will be demonstrated through:

- strengthened retention of students through improved subject progress rates
- maintained levels of high student satisfaction – shown in student feedback through the QILT Student Experience Survey
- high levels of student completion – shown in improved student completion rates
- maintaining sector-leading graduate employment rates.

Our strengths

Charles Sturt delivers a broad range of successful services, initiatives and interventions to support student retention. Recent retention and success initiatives have resulted in a significant increase in subject progress rates and a significant decrease in first year attrition. The key areas of success are highlighted below.

Effective student support model

Charles Sturt University has a sector leading model of student support that synergistically overlays with the curriculum to identify and support disengaged students, shown in Figure 1. Best practice transition pedagogy, and academic and library skills support are embedded into first year subjects in all of our undergraduate courses. Targeted support is offered to students who do not engage.

High student satisfaction

External surveys show strong student satisfaction with the teaching quality, learner engagement, learning resources, student support and skills development at Charles Sturt. Graduates at Charles Sturt also have the highest full-time employment outcomes of all Australian universities (Graduate Outcomes Survey, 2020).

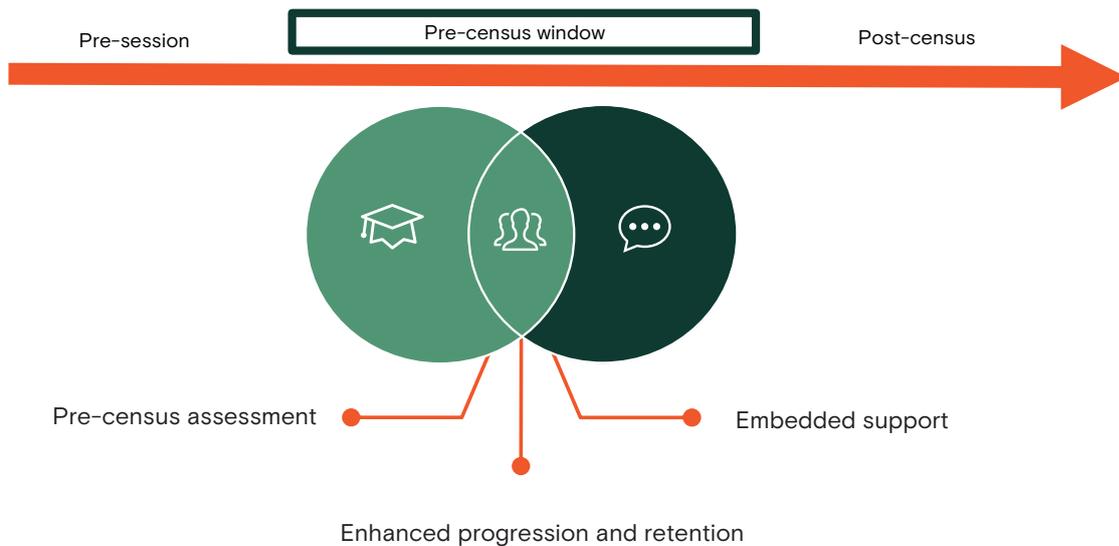


Figure 1: Student Support Model



#1 in Australia
for grads who get jobs

Good Universities Guide 2021/22



Top 10 in Australia
for undergraduate starting salaries

Good Universities Guide 2021/22



Top 5 in Australia
for postgraduates who get jobs

Good Universities Guide 2021/22



Top 10 in Australia
for first-in-family students

Good Universities Guide 2021/22

Effective student progress interventions

Innovative processes have been put in place to identify students at risk of disengaging with their studies and ensure timely, targeted support is provided. We have seen a significant increase in subject progress rates in first year subjects when disengaged students are identified and contacted pre census, as shown in Figure 2. By monitoring the enrolment of all commencing students in at least one subject in their commencing semester, we can see that there is a trend for increased progress rates for both online and on campus commencing students from all three faculties, as shown in Figure 3.

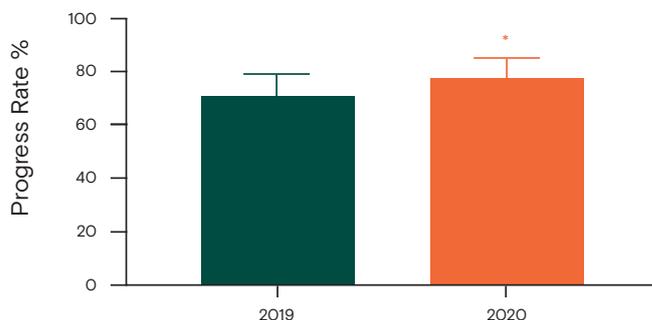


Figure 2: Significant increase in subject progress rate in 2020 following targeted student contact pre census

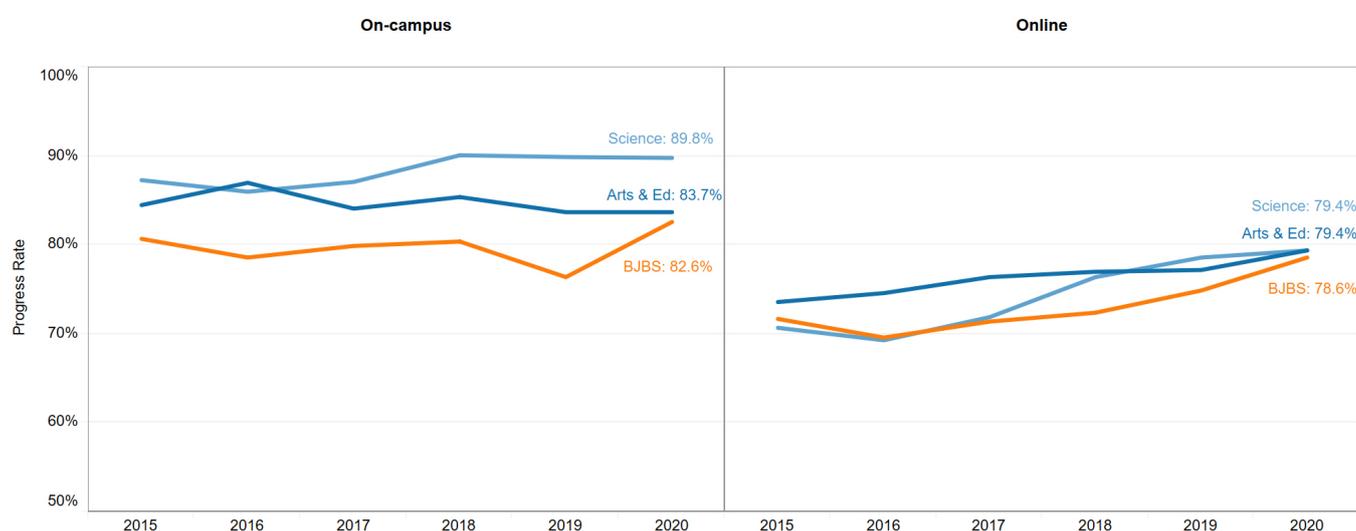


Figure 3: Official undergraduate progress rates for on-campus and online students
Source: 2021 OPA Cohort Report-Bachelor

Well supported transition into university

Charles Sturt has provided new pathway courses to broaden access to university for more students from a wide range of backgrounds. Pathways ensure students are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to be successful in their studies. Pathways are complemented by high quality Study Link courses that allow students to fill knowledge gaps during their transition to university, at no cost. Students receive a personalised orientation, including academic, library, support services, and social sessions and experiences, both on our campuses and online. Charles Sturt's course and subject policy and procedures require an early assessment task to identify students who require academic skills, English language or other types of support. A key feature of this approach is that students are provided with feedback on developmental progress and directed to sources of support ranging from academic skills workshops to personalised appointments and online resources.

Strong sense of student connection

On-campus and online students have many opportunities to engage and connect in the Charles Sturt community. Charles Sturt has more than 60 student clubs, sporting teams on each campus, and a wide range of social opportunities both on campus and online. Student mentoring programs provide opportunities for peer support. Students are also heavily involved in university decision-making through governance and representation bodies. A targeted program supports First Nations Students with a sense of belonging, pastoral care and study support. First Nations Study Centres on each Charles Sturt campus work to create a culturally safe experience for students.

The framework

The framework is relevant to all Charles Sturt University students regardless of cohort, demographic background or course level. It informs a concerted, university-wide approach to addressing the challenge and impact of student attrition and complements the university's Institution Student Performance Report – produced under Standard 5.3 (Monitoring, Review and Improvement) of the Higher Education Standards Framework in order to meet our reporting obligations to TEQSA. Tracking, recording and reporting on actions relevant to student attrition and retention continues to form part of the annual Institution Student Performance Report and related Student Retention Strategic Plan.

Charles Sturt's retention and success activities are guided by the following five overarching principles.

Framework principles

1. A strong focus on transition into university
2. Students will receive a high quality, flexible learning experiences
3. Our approach to retention and success activities will be informed by evidence and meaningful and actionable data
4. Our communication with, and support for, students will be personalised and proactive
5. The University Policy Framework will support student retention and success



Focus areas

Charles Sturt's retention activities are prioritised around the following eight focus areas — drawn from the recommendations of the Higher Education Standards Panel (2018) and the TEQSA Good Practice Note: Improving retention and completion of students in Australian higher education (2020).

Focus area 1: Preparation and admission

Our preparation and admission activities ensure students are admitted with appropriate academic preparation and English language skills, increasing the likelihood of them continuing and completing their course.

Objectives	A rigorous policy framework reflected in clear, accessible, and easy to understand admissions requirements.	Efficient admission processes which give students a fast, accurate response to their application, and advice about what to do if they do not meet admission requirements.	Accessible, relevant and tailored pathway and preparation courses designed to prepare students and help them with the academic skills they need to succeed at university.
Service summary	The Admissions Team assesses applications against clearly defined entry criteria. This criteria is reflected in promotional material for courses and is accessible to all applicants.	Applicants who meet admissions criteria are given an offer. Applicants who do not meet entry criteria are directed towards alternate pathways.	Pathways Courses offer guaranteed entry into a range of degrees at Charles Sturt and help students develop the required academic skills. StudyLink short courses give students the opportunity to fill knowledge gaps and improve relevant skills at any point in their degree.

Focus area 2: Orientation and transition

Our orientation and transition programs recognise the diversity of commencing students and address the academic and welfare needs of students in the early years of study.

Objectives	A university-wide commitment to delivering targeted, timely and relevant orientation.	Orientation activities are personalised to student demographics, targeted to student needs and accessible to all students.	Personalised student communication gives students the information they need, when they need it and through methods accessible to them.
Service summary	Academic and professional areas participate in a university-wide working party to produce a holistic, personalised and student-centred orientation program at the beginning of each main session.	A range of orientation activities provide students with relevant information and support, including: online workshops, downloadable resources and course-specific preparation sessions.	Students participate in a dynamic and personalised communication campaign, tailored to provide relevant and timely information through a range of channels.

Focus area 3: Clear enrolment processes

Clear and easy to follow processes in place for new and continuing students to enrol in subjects. Students are equipped to make well-informed decisions about their course structure and understand what action they need to take to enrol in subjects and when, preventing any unnecessary abandonment of study.

Objectives	A suite of integrated online tools which enable students to plan their course, inform them of their enrolment obligations, and make it easy to fulfil their obligations.	Timely, proactive contact from the University to help students enrol for future sessions, offering peer-to-peer advice and technical support if required.	Personalised student communication which gives students the information they need, when they need it, through channels accessible to them.
Service summary	The Student Portal, Handbook and Graduate Planning System help students plan their course and enrol in the right subjects at the right time.	Students who have not enrolled in their upcoming session are proactively contacted by phone and SMS to discuss their study plans and offered support based on their personal circumstances.	SMS and phone contact is complemented by a dynamic email campaign and supplementary online content which gives student relevant enrolment information.

Focus area 4: Curriculum design

A high-quality learning and teaching framework which focuses on first-year teaching quality and staff professional development.

Objectives	A university-wide commitment to delivering a high-quality learning and teaching student experience.	Comprehensive academic, information and employability skills development opportunities, embedded in courses.	Use of innovative learning technology, Learning Management Systems and assessment models to embed student support and scaffold learning around first year assignments.
Service summary	The curriculum model within the Charles Sturt education framework outlines the principles of high quality course and subject design. The curriculum is designed for transition and retention and improved first-year teaching quality.	Academic, information and employability skills workshops and resources are tailored to suit courses and embedded within course content to give students easy, fast access to information relevant to them.	Low-stakes pre-census assessment tasks designed to identify students who require academic skills, English language or other types of support early in their course.

Focus area 5: Early identification of disengaged students

Early identification of students who are disengaged and timely, targeted supports provided

Objectives	Application of timely and accurate data to identify and proactively contact students who are disengaged in their course and/or at risk of failure.	Personalised communication with students who are disengaged in their course and/or at risk of failure to offer immediate support.	Online tools and information help students self-assess areas of need and identify sources of support suited to their particular needs.
Service summary	Data from the Learning Management System and student records systems is used to identify students who have not engaged in their studies and or are at risk of failing and support provided.	Students who are identified as disengaged and or at risk of failing are proactively contacted by phone and SMS to discuss their personal circumstances and offered personalised, tailored support and advice.	Student Portal and Academic Progress Plan tool available to students to self-assess their progress and identify supports suitable to their personal circumstances.

Focus area 6: Learning and wellbeing support

Easy to find, accessible support services provided to all students

Objectives	A whole-of-university commitment to raising awareness of and normalising access to support services.	Innovative use of online tools which make it easy for students to find and access support services.	Personalised student communication giving students the information they need, when they need it, through methods accessible to them.
Service summary	Staff are knowledgeable and up-to-date on supports available to students.	The Student Portal is personalised to show students information about relevant support services.	The Student Portal is complemented by email campaigns and supplementary online content.

Focus area 7: Student connectedness

Every student is supported in their transition to university and personalised communications build a strong sense of belonging, and connection to the university

Objectives	An inclusive student community is fostered, providing both internal and online students with the opportunity to build connections with their peers, staff and the University community.	Multi-channel, student-driven campaigns to raise awareness of student clubs centred around sport, social and study interests.	Provision of peer-to-support and opportunities for network building through a suite of on-campus and online tools.
Service summary	Academic and professional staff are aware of the needs of students from different backgrounds and can either provide or direct them towards appropriate support services using student-centred and inclusive language.	Peer-to-peer communication about student clubs is supported by online information, communication campaigns and referrals by staff.	Proactive peer-to-peer support through Student Central, mentoring programs and social media networks provide students with a range of opportunities to connect with and learn from each other.

Focus area 8: Students from different backgrounds

Information and support services are personalised and tailored to meet student needs, from admission and preparation through to graduation.

Objectives	First Nations students are provided personalised, accessible and culturally informed programs and communication.	Building aspiration for university for students from low SES, and regional and remote backgrounds and First Nations students to consider university a realistic option for their future.	Specialised services and interventions for students from low SES, regional and remote, backgrounds.
Service summary	The First Nations teams are dedicated to the support and success of First Nations students at Charles Sturt and offer culturally safe spaces (physical and virtual) to find help.	In-school workshops and events on-campus, designed for the specific cohorts, introduce students to university and build confidence.	Tailored interventions at regular intervals for low SES and regional and remote students which are triggered when learning analytics indicate student is disengaging from their studies. Identified students are guided to build their own, personalised support plan, which responds to the issues they are facing.

Next Steps

The Student Retention and Success Framework provides a meaningful structure to the many services and initiatives in the student retention space. This work is further supported through a number of new initiatives and projects:

Optimise meaningful and actionable data

- Extract relevant data from the Learning Management System and use this to better understand factors influencing student retention
- Map attrition and identify hotspots
- Develop dashboards for first year teachers with actionable data
- Model 'at risk' data
- Review and improve student surveys, entry and exit surveys

Student success support mechanisms

- End to end approach to supporting regional students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and First Nation Students
- Strengthening student engagement and connectedness
- Personalised student experience
- Embedding student retention activities in the curriculum
- Strengthen the overall student experience

Policy framework to support student retention

- Apply a progress and retention lens to all policies under review
- Develop new academic progress policies and procedures to meet the legislative requirements of the Job-ready Graduates Package.



Addendum

Current services and initiatives

Charles Sturt currently delivers a range of successful services, initiatives and interventions to support student retention and success, as detailed below. These initiatives have resulted in a significant increase in subject progress rates and a significant decrease in first year attrition.

Focus area 1: Preparation and admission

- The Charles Sturt Advantage early offer program offers early entry to Year 12 students and transition support that prepares them for university study.
- The First Nations Access Program is a tailored pathway program for prospective First Nations students. Prospective students participate in a week-long residential program and are offered a place in a range of selected degrees following successful completion
- Charles Sturt University offers two admission pathway programs: the Diploma of General Studies – a one-year full-time alternative entry pathway offering guaranteed entry into a range of degrees following successful completion of the course; and the Charles Sturt University Pathway – a 14-week full-time course offering an admission pathway into many Charles Sturt degrees.
- HSC students can access pre-entry study support through the Charles Sturt Library's HSC Guides. The guides use the same format of guides that students will experience in most university libraries and assist students in their final years of schooling as well as familiarising them with what to expect at university.

Focus area 2: Orientation and transition

- Personalised orientation at Charles Sturt – includes academic, library, support services, and social sessions and experiences, both on our campuses and online.
- Dynamic onboarding campaigns aid a smooth transition to university study.
- Personalised information and support via the Student Portal complemented by promotion of support and resources through the Charlie blog, social media, web content and email campaigns.
- Commencing students are guided through their onboarding journey via a series of checkpoints in the Student Portal.
- Peer to peer support provided by the Student Central Outreach team who proactively contact students ahead of their first session of study via phone and SMS to ensure all students feel supported and ready to commence their studies.
- Commencing students are encouraged to connect to their peers through the new mentoring program that supports students to transition into university study.
- Free, short online enabling subjects are available to prepare students for success in their degree, as well as fill existing knowledge gaps.

Focus area 3: Clear enrolment processes

- Students admitted into a course of study have their enrolment for the first year automatically applied. Automated enrolments take away many of the administrative hurdles and barriers for first year students.
- The student experience has been improved by digital innovation, including the Graduate Planning System which helps students plan their enrolment.
- The re-enrolment campaign provides personalised information to students based on their course, study mode and key demographics, ensuring they get the information they need when they need it.

Focus area 4: Curriculum design

- Charles Sturt Education Framework – ensures that all courses have high quality subjects and resources available for students.
- Curriculum requires early assessment – Charles Sturt's course and subject policy and procedures require an early assessment task to identify students who require academic skills, English language or other types of support. A key feature of this approach is that students are provided with feedback on developmental progress and directed to sources of support ranging from academic skills workshops to one on one appointments and online resources.
- Charles Sturt's Assessment Policy defines the criteria for identifying students at risk of exclusion and how the university supports students at each stage of the Academic Progress Procedure.
- Embedded support is provided for courses where the development of literacy and numeracy skills is particularly critical for success.
- Library and the Student Skills and Engagement teams work closely with academic staff to embed the development of key academic, information and employability skills within subjects.

Focus area 5: Early identification of disengaged students

- The Student Retention team monitors a wide range of courses with over more than 80 per cent of all commencing domestic undergraduate students enrolled in at least one subject monitored by the team. The Retention Team monitors the online learning environments and assessment submissions and collaborates with academic staff to accurately identify students who are showing early signs of disengagement.
- Proactive phone and SMS campaigns reach out to students identified as disengaged from their studies. Students are provided with personalised and empathetic support to help navigate whatever their barrier to study success may be.

Focus area 6: Learning and wellbeing support

- The Academic Skills and Library teams support the retention and success of students through the development of the literacy, learning, researching, numeracy, referencing, and digital literacy skills critical for academic and professional success. Support can be accessed seven days a week through resources and interactive services. Services include:

- Course embedded support
- Online resources
- Individualised support
- Learning support plans
- Academic English for Australian Tertiary Studies (StudyLink)
- Subject Zero Campaign – In 2021 the Subject Zero campaign emphasised the university’s zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour or harassment. Students were informed about how to report sexual misconduct, be safe on campus, consent, how to seek support and how to call out harassment by being an active bystander.
- Health promotion initiatives and online modules available to all students to provide resources and a tool kit to be safe, remain well and live well while studying.
- Counselling services – All students have access to free and confidential counselling services for concerns that may be affecting on their academic performance or mental health and wellbeing.
- Disability Service – Charles Sturt supports students with disability and access needs to reduce the impacts of a disability and health condition on study. When students register with the service, our Disability Liaison Officers work to create an individualised study access plan.
- Student advocates – In the beginning of 2021 a new student advocate team was established to provide advice to students around misconduct, appeals, equity and diversity and link students to other support services.
- Student Voice – Supporting the inclusion of the Student Voice in university decision-making, through the support of student representation on Student Senate, faculty and school boards, and support for Student Representative Committees.
- Charles Sturt works to remove financial barriers for students.
 - Students can access a financial support adviser to discuss any financial concerns. The financial advisor can refer to other services, advice on external and internal financial support mechanisms.
 - The Library has liaised with publishers and purchased eBooks so that more than 80 per cent of prescribed textbooks are now available free of charge to our students.
 - Charles Sturt has an extensive suite of equity and merit based scholarships as well as accommodation scholarships to support students in their university journey.
- Development of employability skills – Charles Sturt’s Careers and Skills Hub offers a comprehensive suite of interactive, online resources to assess students’ employability skills, identify gaps and create a personalised development plan to develop their skills. The Library teaches career-specific information skills into every course, so that graduates have the skills they need at the start of their career.
- Online Student Community – To engage and connect with students both online and on-campus social media channels are utilised to create a community where our students can share their experiences with their peers.
- Mentoring program – Charles Sturt’s one-to-one mentoring program connects students to their peers and industry throughout the student lifecycle. Launched in 2021, the program has three key focus areas: supporting commencing students to transition into university; building employability skills for students in the mid-years; and transitioning into industry, connecting final year students with alumni.
- Student centred culture – Charles Sturt builds a student centred culture that connects students with each other, with their learning, and with the scholarship of the university.

Focus area 8: Students from different backgrounds

- First Nations Students supported by a range of initiatives:
 - First Nations Student Connect is a three tiered consolidated service for current First Nations students of Charles Sturt. It comprises: Tier 1: Culturally appropriate self-serve materials; Tier 2: General advice, advocacy and connect sessions; Tier 3: A range of specialist services such as access to a tutor, disabilities, counselling, libraries and new services to be introduced in First Nations Social and Emotional Wellbeing, mentoring, employment coaching, academic skills.
 - First Nations Student Centres – Seven centres across campuses offer a culturally safe place to gather, seek advice, access printing and computers and participate in Connect sessions with staff and other students.
 - First Nations Student App – From 2021, an app will be available to support First Nations students to access information about a range of services available to them, and make contact such as making an enquiry or making an appointment with a staff member. The app also includes a feedback form which can be completed with contact details or anonymously to provide a safe way for First Nations students to report their experience.
- International Students are supported through a range of services to enhance their experience at Charles Sturt University.
- The Elite Athletes Program supports more than 150 elite and pre-elite athletes, elite performers and elite sports personnel to help them successfully balance their sporting career and studies.
- Regional students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds
 - Future Moves program works with school students to build awareness of, and aspiration for, higher education.
 - HEPPP-funded programs provided support specifically targeted towards regional students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds to support them to be successful in their studies.

Focus area 7: Student connectedness

- Student clubs and events – Charles Sturt creates an inclusive student community with a focus on providing all students, regardless of their mode of study, with the opportunity to build connections with their peers, with staff and with the university.



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