



## Staying the Distance – Strategies to Improve Student Retention

The University of Newcastle's Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment is currently implementing three key strategies to improve student retention: a strategic communications plan to build a strong, integrated staff, student and professional community; the delivery of tailored support to specific segments of the student population at key points in their study cycle; and a direct approach to addressing mathematics background issues.

In 2013 we presented to the TEMG on our multi-layered student communications strategies. We will provide an update on our progress toward building a stronger community of staff, students and professionals, highlighting a number of projects including: online facilitation of student membership of professional bodies; an internal marketing campaign to educate staff and students about our unique selling points; and brokering industry partnerships to deliver a unique branded content strategy.

Increasingly, at key points in the student life cycle, we are delivering personalized communications and tailored support and social experiences to improve retention and encourage the best outcomes for our students. We will share some examples of these initiatives including one-to-one touch points for low SES and other at-risk first year students; events and communications for our high achieving students with the intention of building their loyalty, their capacity to inspire their peers and their inclination toward postgraduate research; and special events and activities for female students.

Like many other institutions, a high proportion of our engineering students enter their degree without sufficient mathematics background. Evidence shows that in previous years around 85% of students with a general mathematics background, attempting our first year mathematics course, MATH1110, failed or attrited. Naturally this situation compromised both their student experience and their program progression. In 2013 we introduced a prerequisite for MATH1110 to manage these preparedness issues. It is hoped that this change will lead to an overall better student experience and greater retention. We will share the early results of this initiative, discuss our experience of the mathematics background problem and touch on our long-term community outreach and educational strategies to address its root cause.

