

# CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK TRANSFORMATION TASKFORCE

## SUPPORTING STUDENT TRANSITIONS

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## 1 Introduction

This paper considers student transitions within the Curriculum Framework Transformation (CFT) Programme. Transitions are the changes navigated by students in their entry into and movement within and through Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. Successful transitions reflect social and emotional needs, academic literacies, and the development of a positive learner identity and sense of belonging within the University community, which together are essential to ensure effective and successful student achievement.

The CFT programme affords the opportunity to examine ways to improve opportunities for students to access support services and relevant information required to develop into independent and resilient learners. This includes the need to recognise the significant challenges facing many students and acknowledging their diversity and varying social and academic needs and aspirations. This includes delivery of enhanced transition resources and activities that are tailored to our cohort of learners and focused on student success and retention, and equity and community.

## 2 Transitions in *Taumata Teitei*

Successful transitions need to be cast as a partnership between the student and Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland that is based on trust, shared responsibility and collaboration. Effective student achievement and successful transitions are guided by principles of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga integrated across several priorities, as detailed in *Taumata Teitei*, and alignment with Waipapa Toitū where students and people are at the centre. These themes include:

- Developing an education model that is student-centric, that encompasses physical, digital, formal and informal learning activities, and is enriched by professional and community co-curricular activities.
- Extending informal academic, social and professional engagement between individuals, student cohorts, staff and the broader University community.
- Enhancing the student voice by reviewing student representative systems.
- Enabling engagement of students in the design of their programmes – this includes their learning experiences and the social, physical and digital contexts in which they learn.
- Through the richness of experiences of university life, the curriculum allows students to be highly connected to knowledges of place and conversant in mātauranga Māori, kaupapa Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles and accountabilities.

## 3 Methodology and Approach

This discussion paper draws on feedback from faculties, meetings with co-ordinators of current initiatives at the University and related reports and surveys, and examples from relevant literature and international institutions.

These include feedback from those involved in Summer Start, UniBound and Whakapiki Aki programmes, as well as comments on the emerging recommendations from representatives of the Auckland University Student Association (AUSA). Part of this approach was also to increase our

understanding of where responsibilities and governance may best sit; for example, at the university, faculty or course level, or a hierarchical matrix of activities across the required social and academic literacies.

Members of the CF programme Transitions Working/Reference Group include:

Professor Mark Vickers (Liggins Institute, co-lead)  
Dr Kaitlin Beare (Faculty of Science, co-lead)  
Gemma Skipper (Summer Start / Campus Life)  
Therese Lautua (UniBound)  
AUSA representatives (including Alan Shaker, Education VP)  
Dr Chris Moselen (Learning Services)  
Dr Clare Wall (FMHS)  
Dr Helen Ross (Director, School of Graduate Studies)

Reference groups will also include Māori/Pacific students (e.g., Whakapiki Ake and MAPAS), international students and Equity groups.

Recognition needs to be given at the outset that transitions need to represent a cohesive flow of experiences for the student rather than being viewed as discrete transition points.

## 4 Areas of Focus

A critical lens on transitions suggests institutions themselves must adapt to enhance student transition, meeting students where they are as opposed to assuming it is the student who must change to fit the University. Viewed from this angle, supporting transitions encompass much more than bridging programmes and academic skills workshops, although these remain important components. It also concerns *all* students, not just those entering the first year. Recent literature frames this conceptualisation of transition as a *transition pedagogy*: a continuum of cohesive experiences, both social and academic, across the student journey, and embedded at all levels of the institution.

Milestone student lifecycle transition challenges include: matriculation at University; embarking upon work-integrated learning experiences (WIL)<sup>1</sup>; moving to higher-level subjects with greater expectations (postgraduate (PG) study); and entering the workforce (Gale & Parker, 2014). Successful transitions spanning these milestones need to reflect a cohesive set of experiences and not focused solely on recognised transition ‘pain points’. Although there are key transition points as detailed below, there needs to be clear linkage between them to support students in and out of each transition ‘bubble’.

This paper therefore focuses on four key transitions:

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the CFT Work-Integrated Learning discussion documents for more information.

- Transition into undergraduate (UG) study from high school (including pathways and outreach into secondary schools) and transition/retention from generalist first year programmes into more specialised second year offerings (with particular focus on successful transitions for Māori and Pacific students).
- Transition from UG to PG degrees (including successful transitions between PG degrees).
- Transitions through different elements of PG study, doctorate and post-doctorate (preparedness for life post-PhD including employability skills for academic and other pathways).
- Other transitions into the University (adult learners, first-in-family, international students, professional retraining).

Students may enter or exit at any point, often by transferring into or out of workplace environments. In addition, different student groups will have different transition experiences. Māori students, Pacific students, international students or students living with disabilities may all have additional challenges entering an institution that was not designed with them in mind. Students coming from outside of Auckland will have distinct social needs compared to those who have arrived with all their school friends. First-in-family students face an environment that is likely foreign to both them and their support networks. However, a number of core principles underpin transitions for all students and can be used as a framework for developing meaningful responses.

#### 4.1 School to undergraduate studies

Transition to university can be challenging for students and understanding support requirements goes beyond the interventions viewed traditionally around curriculum innovation and academic development. Such challenges can include increases in academic standard and associated workload, loneliness and homesickness (particularly for international students). Difficulties in transitions frequently manifest as academic under-performance and to withdrawal from university. Successful student transitions can be significantly impacted by a lack of visible support services (including around mental health, financial and administrative support) and a lack of opportunities for social integration.

There is also a need to engage actively with secondary schools that extends beyond broad promotion, recruitment and induction/open days. This enables schools and the University to reach a common understanding about each other's educational setting, pedagogic practices, academic demands and expectations. Outreach to secondary schools, ideally commencing at Year 9, provides guidance around navigating subject selection and the need to ensure a balanced focus. These interactions will help to ensure uptake across lower decile schools and across diverse groups, including by Māori and Pacific students. Outreach also encompasses the need for early engagement with whānau, particularly for first-in-family learners and Māori and Pacific students, so that a shared understanding of the commitment required for tertiary study is met.

Besides availability of academic mentors and pastoral care services for all students, there is also a need to address the availability of academic literacy experts to support provided to academic specialists and lecturers who do have time allocated in their teaching workloads to focus on development of academic literacies. In this context, the linkage between student transition initiatives and academics at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland needs to be strengthened. It has also been commented widely that large class sizes in first year UG lectures can contribute to students' feelings of isolation, with

Māori, Pacific and under-represented minority students often feeling ‘culturally alienated’ within the tertiary environment.

The University also needs to provide more inclusive and flexible admission and selection procedures and policies to improve equity in access and outcomes for Māori and Pacific students. As an example, the Māori and Pacific Admissions Scheme (MAPAS, see Appendix) has resulted in marked improvements in academic outcomes for students in their first year of UG study. The University should, therefore, invest in an admissions process that is comprehensive and simplifies the current pathway complexities, including alternative entry pathways for Māori/Pacific students. Further, Māori, Pacific or students from under-represented minority groups frequently experience academic barriers to programme entry (often exacerbated by additional pastoral and socioeconomic factors) and are best supported by foundation/bridging programmes. Also, current admissions criteria (especially for limited entry courses) do not recognise applicants with strengths in mātauranga Māori over and above other criteria.

#### 4.2 Transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate studies (including PhD)<sup>2</sup>

Research suggests that the transition needs of PG students are similar to those of first year UG, but this is not normally acknowledged at an institutional level (Bunney, 2017). Transitions from UG to PG are not always straightforward and can be characterised, at least initially, by a sense of disorientation, self-doubt and anxiety. This can be further compounded by the complexity in the current PG offerings, particularly pathways in masters-level degrees. Further, there is also a need to understand the diverse contexts of the students e.g., international, Māori or Pacific students. Key challenges for PG students do not necessarily relate to the requirements of higher learning, but a lack of clarity around what PG study entails and a lack of opportunities for building a sense of belonging and integration. Peer support and ongoing mentorship, alongside earlier feedback and greater clarity around expectations, will help to smooth the transition into PG study.

#### 4.3 Transitions through elements of postgraduate study, doctorate and post-doctorate

For PhD level studies, development and integration of defined structured elements may enhance preparedness and transition to employment. The Monash University Doctoral Programme, for example, ‘enhances’ its PhD students by providing training to develop a broad range of skills and professional attributes that improve employability either in academia, industry, government, or community settings after graduation (see link in the Appendix).

*Note: Post-UG and post-PG transitions also need to encompass moving into employment (including academic paths and other) and the development of competencies that improve employability in an ever-competitive market. Embedding such competencies forms part of the work detailed by the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) group.*

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<sup>2</sup> This includes linkage to Learning and Teaching Delivery Framework and its consideration of research understanding / preparedness / experience in the UG curriculum, as well as additional needs for successful transition into PG research degrees

#### 4.4 Other transitions

Pathway programmes for international students are widely used to help PhD students embed the local culture and academic practice. For international students, a higher education experience at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland would also likely benefit from group work as an important opportunity for social learning. Participation in group assignments could positively influence learning and adjustment to the new educational and cultural environment.

Building professional knowledge and practice skills has become increasingly associated with higher-level study. However, returning adult learners are potentially more vulnerable in terms of managing the transition to Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. This may be because of their 'minority' status in many higher learning settings, a lack of recent exposure to formal education (i.e., 'becoming a student again'), and the increased likelihood of additional life pressures outside university. Further, for adult learners, a lack of previous educational success may impact on their development of a personal learning identity. Addressing such potential issues via a bridging programme may ease the transition process. For adult learners entering doctoral study, in particular, it has been suggested that an "underpinning criterion for success is the requirement for supervisors to be sensitive to strategies that can help competent professionals deal with the challenge of role transition" (Watts, 2009). Supporting adult learners also has the potential for feed-forward effects, as a positive learner experience may make them more likely to promote Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland to colleagues and family members.

As detailed above, there is also a need to recognise the transitional needs of first-in-family learners, including for Māori and Pacific students, and the need to engage with whānau early on to ensure a shared understanding of the requirements of tertiary study. Additional obstacles for first-in-family students often impact on their educational participation; such challenges have been reported to relate often to not having access to a "knowledgeable other who can guide them in unpacking 'insider' knowledge within universities" (O'Shea, 2018).

## 5 A Transition Pedagogy for Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland

There are a number of frameworks in place that encompass integrated concepts around successful student transitions which serve as a foundation for nurturing a sense of belonging as members of a new academic community. A widely used example is by Lizzio (2006) which highlighted that students' success at university was dependent on their sense of purpose, capability, resourcefulness, connectedness and academic culture (Figure 1). We need to draw on these notions to create a framework specific to Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland that more closely reflects the conceptual language of Waipapa Toitū. As an example, for Māori and Pacific students, it is important to engage whānau early on to ensure an improved understanding of the commitments required for tertiary study, particularly for those first-in-family learners.



Figure 1. Applying the five senses model. Designing an orientation and transition strategy for matriculating students. Adapted from Lizzio (2006).

At the heart of the working group's recommendations is the need for a transition pedagogy (or framework) that recognises the specific context of Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. First, a shared understanding of what 'transitions' mean is necessary if we are to develop initiatives that recognise both the unique needs of specific student cohorts and the strengths of the academic units involved, while maintaining a cohesive and integrated approach to transitions. Thus, a university-wide programme for extra-curricular activities, a departmental initiative to engage Pacific learners, and a course-based approach for students with learning disabilities, while very different in structure, would have a shared underpinning ethos. This framing will allow various academic units to identify which aspects of transition they are already addressing well, then recognise and address the gaps.

This transition pedagogy should be integrated across all levels of Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland, from large-scale projects through to Learning and Teaching policies. A significant portion of 'transitions' support needs to be delivered at a departmental or disciplinary level to better foster a sense of disciplinary belonging for students. This is a clear move away from so-called 'first generation' transition approaches, which focus almost exclusively on centrally administered responses.

Drawing on the five senses model, we have conceptualised the beginnings of a transitions framework that centres on the student's sense of belonging – of both valuing and feeling valued by Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland and its people. This sense of belonging is underpinned by three pou (pillars):

**Whanaungatanga.** Supporting connectedness means prioritising relationships and the spaces in which these can develop. This includes students' relationships with each other and with teachers and other staff involved in their learning. Fostering whanaungatanga requires the creation of opportunities for students to integrate their lives outside of university with their Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland experience. For some students, this may involve including their families as an integral part of their studies.

**Hoaketanga:** students gain a sense of purpose through personal development, vocational direction, disciplinary identity, and disciplinary relevance. Supporting purpose includes fostering a sense of belonging at a disciplinary level and creating opportunities for them to apply the skills gained at university in the context of their communities.

**Whakamanatanga.** This is at the heart of a positive learner identity and speaks to a student's academic confidence. We can enable this through the use of teaching and learning approaches and practices, particularly around assessment, that foster self-confidence and self-reliance/assurance. This should both recognise the existing strengths of the student, and the new capabilities they are developing. Empowering students means supporting them to develop independence and confidence in the academic environment. This requires systems that are easy to navigate, allowing students to take ownership of their academic journey. Empowerment includes academic processes that give students agency to balance their external commitments with their university expectations.

## 6 Draft Recommendations

Successful transitions require a partnership between the student and the University that is based on trust, shared responsibility and collaboration. Although Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland, like many other universities, has undertaken transition initiatives that have been impactful for subgroups of students, particularly around those commencing in their first UG year, there remains a need to achieve institution-wide practice that involves the entire student lifecycle. As such, there is a need to adopt a coordinated and evidence-based approach to improve transitions and pathways that feed into the overall student experience while also promoting the use of relevant data to inform strategic initiatives (and updates/refinements of current initiatives, where required) over the course of the student's Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland journey. The following sections detail our emerging recommendations.

### 6.1 Development of a Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland Transitions Framework

The development of a transitions frameworks requires that the University:

- Supports an integrated transition pedagogy across the institution.
- Recasts transition as a partnership between students and the institution.



- Aligns with the underpinning framework of Waipapa Toitū.

Elements of such a framework are detailed in Figure 2 (below). These include:

- Pathways that are clear and easily navigated, with a logic and progression that improves transition, retention and student success, including enhanced flow from UG to PG.
- A shift towards relational teaching and assessment practices that foster self-confidence and self-assurance within the Teaching and Learning Framework.
- Grading, assessment, and progression practices that create a 'safe to learn' environment at key transition points, alongside programme structures that support and normalise students starting at different life-stages.
- Development of strong and reciprocal relationships with secondary schools to support transition at both ends and increased recognition of the importance of bridging/foundation programmes.
- Scaffolded skills developed throughout UG studies, with oversight at a programme level, to facilitate smooth academic transition into PG studies.
- A need to ensure a balanced focus to ensure uptake across lower decile schools and across diverse groups, including by Māori and Pacific students.
- Departments/disciplines that foster inclusion and disciplinary identity for UG and PG students to facilitate smooth social transition into PG studies.
- Increased facilitation of first year 'experience co-ordinators' who liaise with the course convenors and subject-level co-ordinators to ensure the inclusion of information, learning support activities and opportunities for social/academic engagement within introductory courses to support transition.
- Provision of more inclusive and flexible selection and admission policies/criteria to increase equity in access and outcomes for Māori and Pacific students.
- Initiatives to support successful transitions need to incorporate measures of impact to allow adaptation and ongoing refinement of such transition initiatives as needed.
- A zero-point transition and orientation programme to support student success (all students).

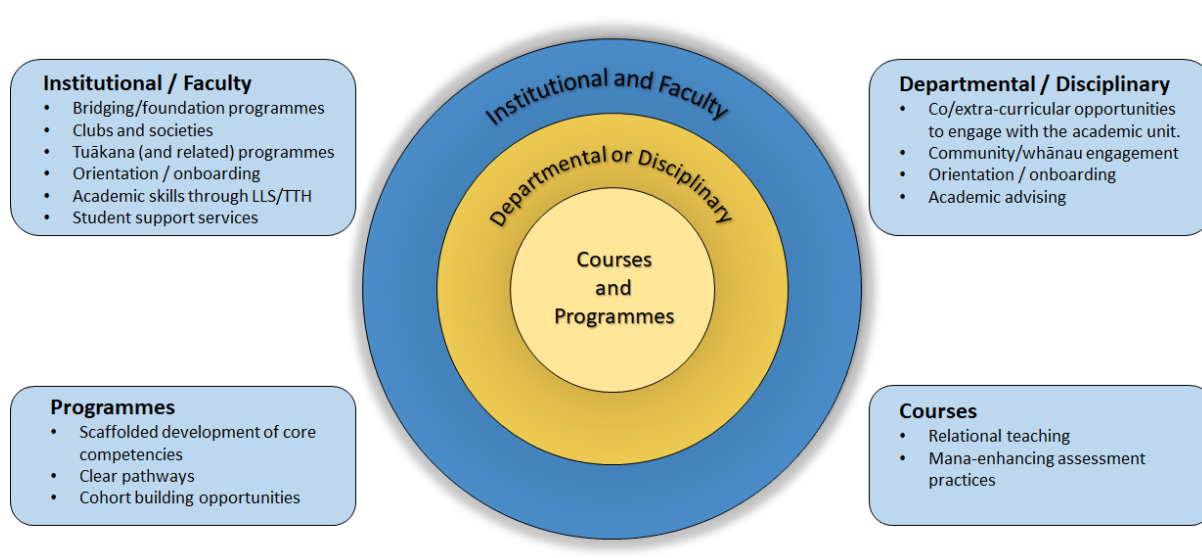


Figure 2. Key elements required to form an integrated 'Transitions Pedagogy' across all levels of Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. The implementation of an effective transitions framework would benefit from the establishment of governance structure that encourages clear and meaningful connections between various initiatives addressing transition, as well as staff working directly with students at key transition points.

## 6.2 Further recommendations

The following recommendations arose using the nascent framework to explore the gaps in our current approaches to transition at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland and try to capture the breadth of what is involved in taking a holistic approach to transitions. We recognise the incredible work that already happens in this space, from bridging programmes and targeted outreach to clubs and societies. These recommendations are intended to augment and connect, not replace these existing initiatives. We also anticipate that using a shared transition pedagogy, individual units will devise much more elegant solutions than we could ever imagine. We have organised these recommendations around the three pou of this draft framework, as many of them cut across year levels and transition points.

### 6.2.1 Whanaungatanga

- **Academic mentorship.** This reflects the increasingly recognised importance of academic peer mentoring programmes to support transitions, retention, and success. Such mentorship differs from that of faculty advisers, where the focus is primarily on the academic programme, and needs to encompass core aspects related to student success (sense of belonging and connectedness, capability, resourcefulness, culture and purpose).
- **Improved use of the pre-semester time period for cohort development and academic guidance.** The goal should be for students to recognise people when they walk into the classroom for the first time, and for them to stay in that class, as it was already an appropriate selection.
- **Clear and explicit handover between programmes.** Students coming through outreach, foundational or bridging programmes should be formally 'handed over' into their next

phase of study, both to celebrate their achievements and to help them forge relationships in their new contexts. The [Whakapiki Ake](#) programme in Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences provides an excellent model of this in practice.

- **Creation of opportunities to engage whānau in the Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland experience.** This is particularly important for Pacific learners, as well as first-in-family students, and recognises that not all students view university (and adulthood in general) as a step away from family.
- **A shift towards relational teaching** within the Teaching and Learning Framework.
- **Physical spaces that privilege connections**, and in which our diverse students can see themselves.
- **Development of strong and reciprocal relationships with secondary schools** across a range of demographic areas. This will support student transitions through a more integrated understanding about each other's educational setting, pedagogic practices, expectations and academic literacies. It will also create meaningful opportunities for outreach starting much earlier. The development of these relationships needs to be supported centrally.

#### 6.2.2 *Hoaketanga*

- **Departments/disciplinary culture and initiatives** that foster inclusion and disciplinary identity for undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- **Explicit opportunities to develop work-facing skills** at all programme levels from undergraduate through to PhD. For taught courses, this links in with initiatives in the WIL space. For doctoral students, this links to work being done in the School of Graduate Studies.
- Both informal and credit-bearing opportunities for students to engage in community projects that include scope for students to pursue their own interests and goals.
- Both informal and structured opportunities for students (and staff) to coalesce around common interests or shared identities.

#### 6.2.3 *Whakamanatanga*

- **Pathways that are clear and easily navigated**, with a logic and progression that improves transition, retention and student success, including enhanced flow from UG to PG.
- **Programme structures that support and normalise students starting where they are at**, coupled with first-year structures that can accommodate both students with a strong disciplinary/vocational identity and those who need some time to explore.
- **A comprehensive, scalable suite of foundational and bridging programmes** that builds on the strengths we already have in this area, and better captures the needs of international and postgraduate students as well as local undergraduate students.
- Student services that are well resourced, clear and easily navigated, especially for students in crisis.
- Grading, assessment, and progression practices that create a 'safe to learn' environment at key transition points.
- **Scaffolded skills developed throughout undergraduate studies**, with oversight at a programme level, to help students develop into independent and resilient learners and to

facilitate smooth academic transition into PG studies and/or the workplace. Supported by academic literacy and instructional design experts.

- **Co-curricular recognition programme** that actively encourages and recognises students' involvement in co-curricular activities that develop skills and learning experiences in a meaningful way.
- **Inclusive and more flexible selection policies** that better recognise the breadth of students' strengths (for example, mātauranga Māori, leadership etc.).

## 7 Summary

Diverse approaches have been adopted by higher education institutions to enable students, particularly those from equity backgrounds, to enable successful transitions into, through and out of university. Given the increasing diverse nature of student demographics, there has been a marked increase in research over recent years that has improved our understanding of how universities can best support the transition to and through higher education. Successful transitions require a continuum of cohesive experiences (social<sup>3</sup> and academic) that occur throughout the university years with development of a positive learner identity being essential to enable effective transitions and student achievement/retention. Retention of students also requires comprehensive support services for Māori and Pacific students and a culturally inclusive teaching and learning environment (including dedicated study spaces). Retention is also aided by the development of cultural competency and cultural safety of non-indigenous students. As evidenced by the examples detailed in the Appendix, there are several successful initiatives already in place at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. Of note, however, is that although many of these examples of scaffolding structures/bridging/foundation programmes are highly successful, they typically deal with small discrete student cohorts and are thus time and resource intensive and potentially difficult to scale. Further, most transitions models and research to date primarily focus on the challenges and barriers to enabling successful transition. However, exploration of these issues can enable the development of positive strategies to enable student empowerment and engagement, not just in the first UG year but throughout the student journey. The current initiatives also lack cohesion and connectedness across the wider University and thus development of a bespoke Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland Transitions Pedagogical Framework needs to be considered in order to meet the ongoing needs of our diverse student body at all points of their learning journey.

## 8 References

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<sup>3</sup> This also includes financial literacies, particularly relevant for Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland, given relatively high living costs

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## 9 Appendix: Examples of transition-focused initiatives and resources

Below are some examples of initiatives/resources currently in place to support successful student transitions at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland and some examples from other tertiary institutions.

### **Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland:**

[Summer Start](#)

[Maori and Pacific Admissions Scheme \(MAPAS\)](#)

[Whakapiki Ake – Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences](#)

[UniBound](#)

[Hikitia Te Ora – Certificate in Health Sciences](#)

[Learning Essentials](#)

[Learning Hub - Business School](#)

[Te-Kuhunga - Law School](#)

[UniGuides](#)

[Co-curricular Recognition Programme](#)

[Tertiary Foundation Certificate](#)

[Poutama STEPPS](#)

### **Examples of support initiatives from other institutions:**

Deakin University – [Digital Coach for Students](#)

Allianz Partners - [Wellbeing App for students](#)

University of Wollongong - [Purposeful transitions](#)

University of Wollongong - [First in Family students](#)

Monash University - ["Enhanced" PhDs](#)

Transitions Pedagogy - [QUT](#)