Editorial introduction
Supporting Beginning Learners in Higher Education (I)

Phillipa Sturgess, Central Queensland University, p.sturgess@cqu.edu.au
Geoff Danaher, Central Queensland University, g.danaher@cqu.edu.au

The massification of higher education is leading to not only higher enrolment numbers but also a more diverse population of students beginning their academic career each year. A very wide range of ages and experiences are represented, from students fresh out of secondary school to mature students wishing to upgrade their skills for employment. Increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds are represented, reflecting both the diversification of society and also the trend towards marketing higher education as a commodity on the global market. Even the way that students attend university has changed with more and more students studying completely or partially off-campus. This diversity in the identity of the student community means that there is also great variation in the experience of being a new university student and new challenges for those academics who are supporting them.

The authors in this issue (Part 1 of a two part series) examine the challenge of supporting new learners through many lenses, reflecting the myriad of factors that contribute to the success or otherwise of new learners. Nelson, Duncan, and Clarke adopt an institutional view, discussing a program to identify and support at-risk students. Huntly and Donovan look at teaching and learning strategies designed to develop students' ability to persist in their studies and Werth, Southey, and Lynch discuss teaching practices that may increase student retention and success rates.

Teaching approaches are also examined with Madsen considering the process of learning a new skill such as library research. Several authors examine teaching strategies aimed at specific student cohorts such as 'interrupted' learners returning to study later in life (Henderson, Noble, and de George-Walker), on-campus and distance students (Burton, Taylor, Dowling, and Lawrence) and students coming from a very different cultural background (Midgely).

Finally the important question of the role of peers in supporting beginning learners is discussed by Rossi and also by van der Meer.

The diversity in this issue reflects the complexity faced by tertiary institutions in supporting their new learners. We hope that you find these articles as interesting and thought provoking as we have.