



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

# School of Veterinary Science Student Plan

Wellbeing and sustainability







## Background

The world is changing rapidly and so is the nature of veterinary work. With the changing face of the veterinary workforce and a range of generic and nuanced work-related pressures, it is important that we continue to prepare our graduates with the necessary knowledge and skills to thrive in their chosen career. Challenges around workforce attrition, satisfaction and wellbeing within the veterinary profession are complex and multifactorial. As such, interventions and solutions must be multifaceted with individual, institutional and profession-wide responsibilities moving forward. Student support lies at the heart of the core values of the School of Veterinary Science. This document attempts to capture our multifaceted curricular, extra- and co-curricular approaches to support the wellbeing of our Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Bachelor of Veterinary Technology graduates and prepare them for positive and sustainable career engagement.





# Philosophy and guiding framework

The School aims to offer a range of complimentary learning activities, resources and services to equip students with: (a) realistic and contemporary insights into the nature of veterinary work and career opportunities; (b) personal resources for wellbeing and (c) a ‘help seeking’ mindset and knowledge of available support.

We aim to provide evidence-based teaching and resources based on contemporary best practice, responsive to changing professional needs and contexts. We acknowledge that students will receive messaging around these topics through a range of different sources from both within and external to the program, and via the formal, informal and hidden curricula.

Over the course of their studies, we aim to provide students with:

- an awareness of the positive personal and professional benefits of the many facets of veterinary work
- an awareness of the nature of working life including general and contextualised challenges experienced by veterinary personnel
- a range of skills and building-blocks to assist with navigating work and life challenges for positive and sustainable career engagement
- an awareness of various support structures and initiatives available to students and graduates and to foster a culture of ‘help-seeking’ and peer support

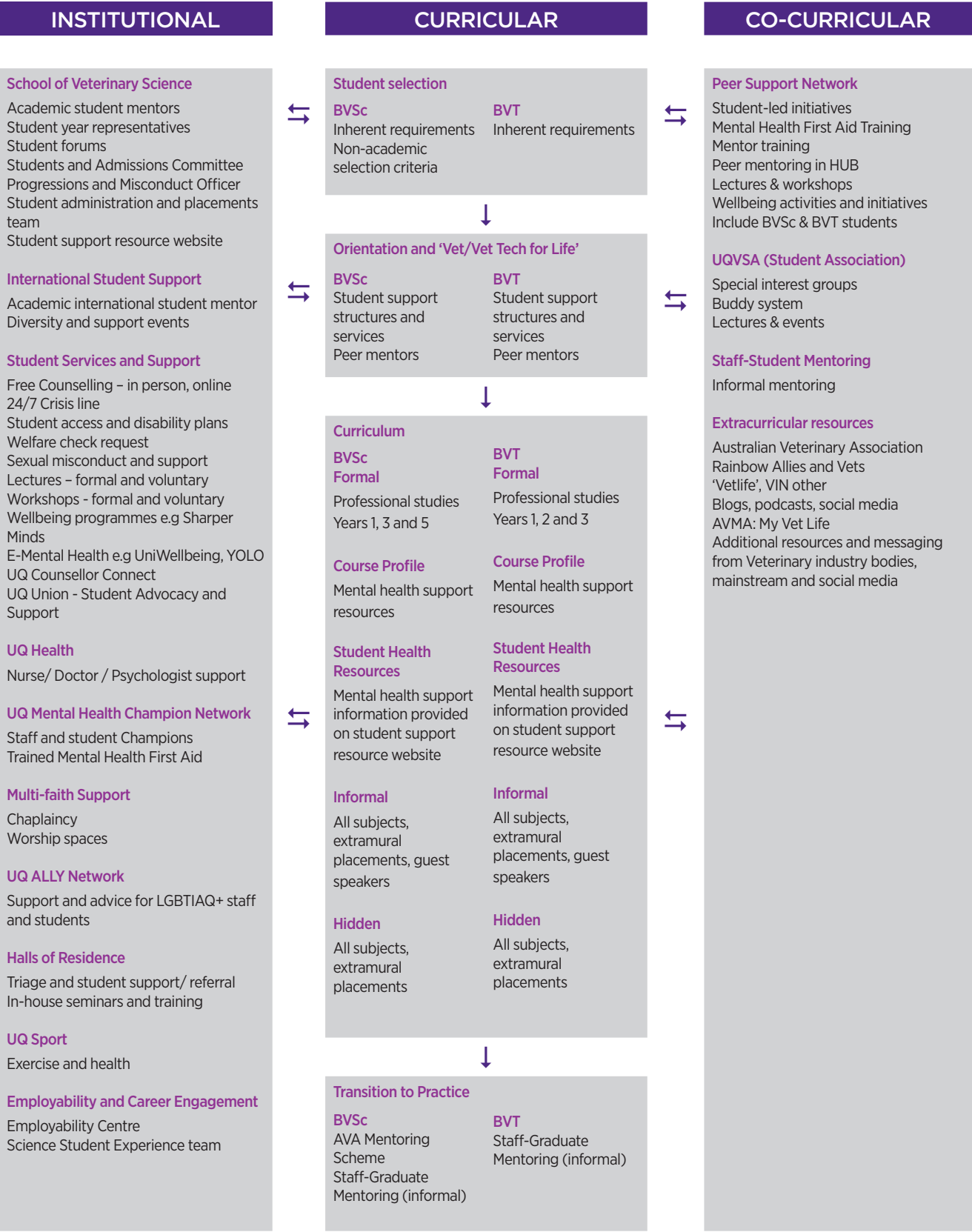
We acknowledge that students will not engage with every content offering, so aim to offer a range of curricula, extra and co-curricular opportunities to suit different needs, and at different times. Overall, we attempt to provide a balanced, constructive, and well-intentioned narrative for student engagement and growth. This approach is guided by a broad underpinning guiding framework (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Guiding framework for wellbeing and sustainability initiatives



An overview of student support initiatives (below) and a brief summary of three of the key resources listed: (1) Services provided by UQ Students Services, (2) Wellbeing curricula content, (3) Peer Support Network activities (page right).



**Figure 2:** Overview of key student support initiatives for Bachelor of Veterinary Science (BVSc) and Bachelor of Veterinary of Veterinary Technology (BVT) students.

# Student Services

Student Services offer a range of scaffolding and supporting services for the students on Gatton Campus. Students are entitled to 10 free counselling sessions including remote online video-conferencing sessions for students on placements. The counselling services help students to develop pathways to take control of their life and promote healthy wellbeing. In addition, the university offers 24/7 crisis support via the UQ Counselling and Crisis Line. Staff can send a 'welfare check request' to Student Services when concerned about a student or colleague in need. In addition to counselling services, Student Support offer a range of services for students with disabilities or access challenges, international students, careers and graduate employment plus 1:1 learning assistance. All students have access to a range of wellbeing programs and e-mental health resources designed specifically for students to develop skills which enhance resilience, promote wellbeing and emotional health. Staff from Student Services contribute to the formal and informal curricula at several points across the programs.

# Curricula Spotlight

Wellbeing and sustainable career engagement has featured in the Bachelor of Veterinary Science curriculum for many years thanks to the early pioneering work of Emeritus Professor Trevor Health, and has been present in the Bachelor of Veterinary Technology program since it's inception. Where available, we engage discipline experts including psychologists and counsellors to deliver relevant content. Content included has evolved and will continue to evolve over time, to match pace with current research, best practice, generational changes, delivery modes, and input and availability of experts. It is very difficult to delineate teaching in wellbeing and sustainable engagement from other content areas (for example practice organisation and management, reflective practice, communication skills and ethical problem-solving) and it is important to also remember that these topics are taught and learned through a range of informal channels too (the 'hidden curricula').

Throughout the programs, students hear about these topics from a wide range of members from the profession.

- Content areas covered include (but are not limited to):
- Orientation activities - facilitated by a team of staff and student mentors from older years. These events, underpinned by range of ice-breaking and experiential learning activities, explore a range of important topics including an introduction to the veterinary profession, personality types, understanding others, wellbeing in the profession and support services available for students
  - Career opportunities and engagement - via a range of specific forums, panels and guest speakers
  - Veterinary fulfilment - professional identity development, positive aspects of veterinary work, employability, finding your niche, goal setting, job match, transition to practice

- Student support - time management, identifying and managing stress, the maintaining a healthy mind, finding balance, building resilience (personal and contextual resources)
- General communication skills – including assertiveness and conflict resolution
- Strategies for identifying and managing work related challenges - common stressors, compassion fatigue, burnout and the qualities of healthy workplaces
- Mentoring programs - formal (for examples the AVA New Graduate Mentoring Scheme) and informal avenues.

# Peer Support Network

The Peer Support Network (PSN) is a student-run initiative formed in 2016 that is supported by the School with thanks to funding from the Douglas Slatter & Elizabeth Chambers Endowment Fund. The PSN aims to foster a supportive and healthy community, advocating for the welfare and mental wellbeing of all students. It endeavours to break the stigma associated with the theme, particularly amongst the student body, thus preparing them with healthy coping strategies for the present and the future. The PSN mentors undergo 30 hours of training in various skills such as effective communication, active listening and mental health first aid. The training system has been extrapolated from Oxford University's Peer Support Training Manual. The PSN organise professional development guest lectures on mental health awareness, confidential peer counselling and community-building activities, and have boosted the visibility of our LGBTQIA+ students.

School of Veterinary Science Wellbeing and Sustainability Working Party 2.0 (2024) consisted of:

- Chair: A/Prof Dan Schull, Professional Studies
- Dr Rebekah Scotney, Clinical Academic, Mental Health Champion
- Prof Joerg Henning, Director Students and Admissions, International Student Recruitment Coordinator, Member of UQ Cultural Inclusion Council
- Dr Donna Parker, Director UQVETS, Wellbeing Champion
- Dr Frances Shapter, HUB coordinator, Wellbeing Champion, Peer Support Network.
- Dr Shahab Ranjbar, Academic, Wellbeing Champion
- Dr Taylor Pini, Academic, Wellbeing Champion



## Contact information

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