

# **A learning place where a high-risk student cohort can succeed: curriculum, assessment and teacher recruitment**

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The Associate Degree in Dementia Care is a course offered by the University of Tasmania, developed in consultation with the Australian aged care industry to support the professional development of its workforce. Aged care workers do not typically possess higher education qualifications and the initial cohort of 180 students, consisted predominantly of mature age, non-traditional students normally classified as 'high risk' of failing to meet the demands of a university level degree. The challenge in designing a course targeting this workforce was to create a learning place in which students could succeed and, in turn, become change agents in the field of dementia care. This paper describes the rationale and method of course design and implementation, reports the demographics and retention data for the first student cohort, and shares barriers to retention and progression. The course development approach aligned curriculum design (content and delivery) with staff recruitment and provision for student support. The interventions designed into the course, including a dedicated student support officer, highly scaffolded foundation units and blended learning delivery mode. Early

outcomes evidence attrition rates comparable with the first year of undergraduate studies and lower than for other pre-degree courses. The authors argue the curricular approach underpinning the broader course design provides a model for other pre-degree courses where enrolled students are at increased progression risk due to entry-level capabilities and personal background and where there is strong industry engagement in selection and support of students.