**UNE L&T Symposium 2025 – Presentation Synopsis**

**1. Title of Presentation:**

*Building Belonging Before Day One: The UNE Begin Initiative*

**2. Presenter(s) Name(s) and Affiliation(s):**

*Dr Katherine Polain, School of Environmental & Rural Science, University of New England*

**3. Main Takeaways:**

***Takeaway 1:*** Engagement with our students starts from the letter of offer and continues throughout the learning journey.

***Takeaway 2:*** Providing students with early success, prior to the first trimester of study, builds confidence, fosters a sense of belonging to UNE and ultimately, results in decreased attrition.

**4. Application in Educational Contexts:**

***Teaching Methods:***

* Early engagement and learning experiences are designed to be self-paced by the student however, there will be certain ‘touchpoints’ with academic and professional staff to begin fostering connections;
* The ultimate goal will be utilising AI to create dynamic learning journeys, based on what students need and how they are able to meet learning outcomes.

***Assessment:***

* UNE Begin proposes informal assessment of student knowledge and skills prior to commencement of studies, which can then be used to build personalised learning journeys, develop risk profiles and inform teaching practices within units.

***Student Engagement:***

* The time between receiving letter of offer and commencing the first trimester of study is essentially a ‘dead zone’ and a time of significant attrition.
* Engaging students in preparatory learning from the point of offer, builds a connection with UNE, decreasing the likelihood of attrition, and provides early opportunities for success, which further contributes to ongoing student engagement and achievement.

***Curriculum Development:***

* UNE Begin seeks to ensure that all students are at the same ‘baseline’ when they commence their studies, but providing dynamic learning journeys suited to their individual needs. Ultimately, this will enhance the learning experience within units and allow academics to provide enriching learning experiences for all students, not teaching to the lowest level as a default, or leaving students behind.
* The targeted learning experienced would be mapped against the skills and baseline knowledge required for students to successfully engage with a course.

**5. Valuable Sources and References:**

N/A

**6. Weakness and Area for Future Research:**

**Weakness:** We are currently constrained by technology, as we are waiting for the AI to be at a point of development that allows dynamic journeying.

**Future Research:** This is an action research project, we are trialling different approaches and based on feedback and engagement, modify or re-evaluate our options accordingly.