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John Swinton portfolio includes staff support and development; leadership and management development; health and safety; and supporting major organisational change agendas.

He has held various management positions at Griffith University, including: Manager, Leadership Development Programs; Change Manager, New Age Business Services (People Soft Implementation); HR Consultant (Administration); and Manager, Staff Development. John has extensive experience in staff development and career counselling roles in higher education at Griffith, at the University of Melbourne, at Monash University and through an overseas secondment/ exchange with University College, Cardiff, UK. He has also worked for private and welfare organisations. John was a past Association for Tertiary Education Management (ATEM) Chairperson for the SE Queensland and Northern Rivers NSW region.

Joanna Peters area of responsibility at Griffith covers student support and development services relating to counselling and peer mentoring, careers and employment, welfare and student liaison, health and medical services, chaplaincy and student equity services.

Joanna provides leadership to a team of professional managers, practitioners and support staff working in the realms of student aspiration, well-being, development and success. The quality of programs conducted by Student Services at Griffith has been recognised in three Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Awards, and six ALTC Citations for programs that support student learning, and in other national awards. Joanna holds postgraduate qualifications in psychology, education, and management, and has worked in the post secondary sector (VET and higher education) for the past 30 years. She is currently a Queensland Regional Co-Convenor for the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association.

There is no question that leadership is practiced at all levels in student support and development services in Australian universities, within the institutions, and across the sector. Whilst there is some theorising in the literature about what makes for effective leadership in student support units in higher education more generally, proposed models tend to be normative rather than evidence-based. Most of the leadership research in universities world-wide focuses on executive and academic leadership, with some recent attention to professional units. There is relatively limited empirical research reported from overseas about effective leadership in student support services, and virtually none for Australian universities. Given increasing expectations and scrutiny of professional units in the current climate, and of increasing opportunities for them to influence university strategy and policy, research in this domain is timely.

This presentation will report preliminary findings of research currently underway that aims to identify the leadership styles of senior and mid-level leaders in student support services in Australian universities, and to gauge their sense of efficacy in and satisfaction with their roles. The presenters will explore how these findings can be useful for those in leadership roles in other central support units, who are leading professional teams. Themes discussed will include understanding personal leadership approaches and how to enrich these, leadership framed to respond to particular challenges and contexts, and advice to emerging leaders about effective and sustainable practices.

The presentation will also address aspects of work being done at Griffith University to identify what broad characteristics/behaviours are appropriate in supporting the University's specific strategic direction and culture – what it means to be a staff member in terms of institutional expectations. A key subset of this, of course, is the set of appropriate leadership characteristics. What are these? Are they any different to broader definitions? How does the context translate them into action? What are the implications for leadership development and support? How can we explore/adapt this and other research to best advantage?