THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE EXPERTS

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Helping Prospective Students Make Better Decisions

Strengthening study readiness through more effective pre-application conversations.

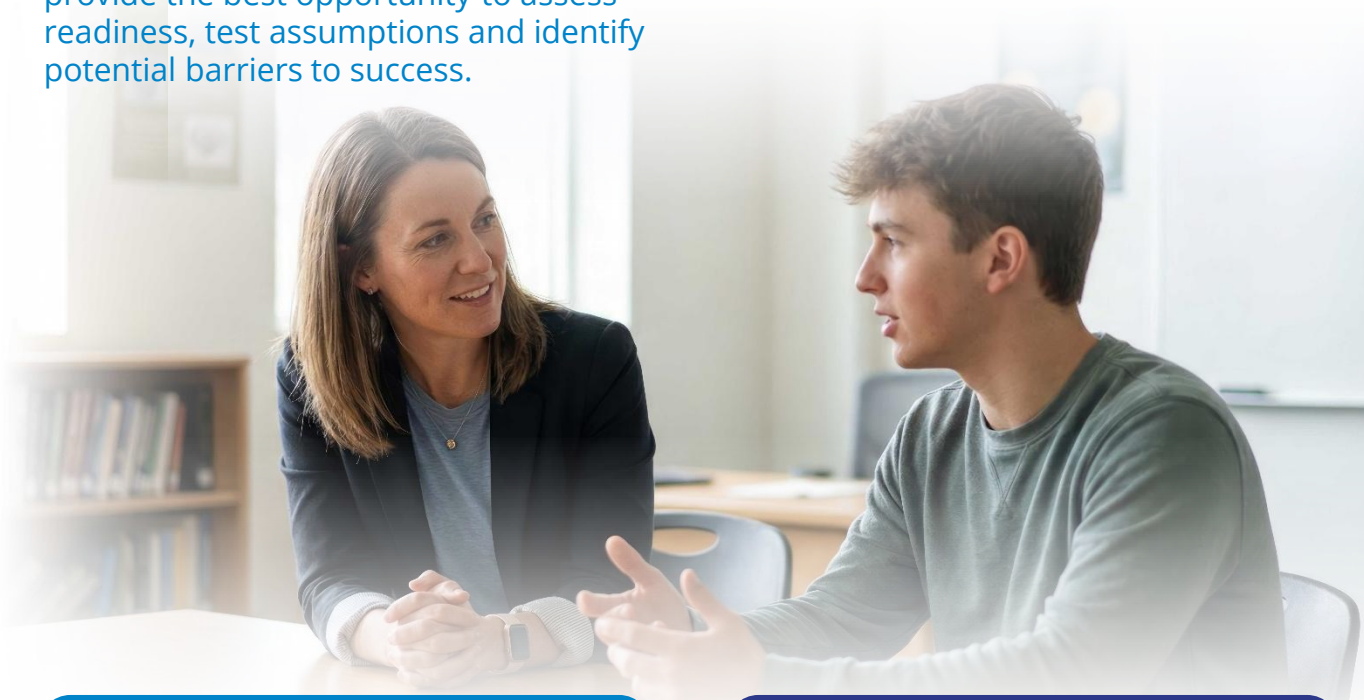


Commercial in Confidence | CSBA 2026

The enquiry stage is where retention risk is first visible

Handling an enquiry well and helping a student make a good decision are not the same thing.

Before students apply, conversations provide the best opportunity to assess readiness, test assumptions and identify potential barriers to success.



When handled poorly

Decisions are made without a realistic understanding of study demands

- Workload and competing commitments go unexplored
- Students commence with avoidable risks already in place
- Institutional risk builds before the student has applied.

When handled well

- Expectations are tested and clarified
- Students are guided toward the right course, pathway or timing
- Readiness risks are surfaced early, when they can still be addressed.

The quality of the enquiry conversation often determines the quality of the decision that follows.

Students reveal their readiness through conversation

While readiness presents differently for each student, these six signals appear consistently in successful readiness conversations.



Motivation clarity

Has a clear reason for studying and a realistic view of the outcomes they want to achieve.

Effort realism

Understands the workload, assessment requirements and time commitment involved.

Planning capability

Has considered how study will fit alongside work, family and other commitments.

Help-seeking

Shows willingness to access support and seek assistance when challenges arise.

Constraint awareness

Recognises potential barriers and has thought about how they will be managed.

Reflective engagement

Evaluates options carefully rather than rushing into applying.

Together, these signals help advisors distinguish between students *who are ready to apply and students who are ready to succeed.*

Why this matters now

The tertiary sector is being reshaped around student success. The conversation before application is becoming one of the most important moments in the student journey.

Funding is shifting

Managed Growth Funding and Needs-based Funding are moving the sector beyond enrolment volume alone. Increasingly, institutions are being measured on retention, completion and equitable student outcomes.

A new system steward

The Australian Tertiary Education Commission is helping shape a more connected tertiary system, with greater emphasis on participation, progression and successful outcomes across universities and TAFEs.

Institutions are being measured differently



Attracting enquiries is no longer enough. Institutions are increasingly judged on who succeeds, not just who enrols.

The enquiry stage is where influence begins



By the time a student applies, many expectations have already formed. The enquiry conversation is one of the few opportunities to explore readiness, identify potential risks and support informed decision-making before commitment occurs.

Helping students make the right decision matters most.



Students who commence with realistic expectations and a clearer understanding of study demands are more likely to begin their journey prepared for success.

Turning readiness signals into better decisions

Recognising readiness is the first step. Effective advisors use these insights to improve the quality of student decisions.

1.

Read the signals

Advisors actively explore motivation, expectations, study capacity and potential barriers.

Outcome

Students begin their study journey with fewer hidden risks and more realistic expectations.

2.

Strengthen decision quality

Advisors test assumptions and help students develop realistic expectations about study demands.

Outcome

Students make more informed decisions about whether, when and how to study.

3.

Recommend the right pathway

Recommendations consider readiness, circumstances and study fit—not just application progression.

Outcome

Students enter courses and pathways that are more closely aligned to their circumstances, goals and capacity for success.



Better student decisions begin with better readiness conversations

How well is your team supporting Study Readiness?

Most institutions assume readiness is being explored. Fewer can say with confidence that it is happening consistently.

Across future student assessments and conversation reviews, CSBA consistently observes three common barriers to readiness-led conversations.



1. Advisors focus on applications, not readiness

Conversations often prioritise courses, admissions requirements and application progression.

Motivation, preparedness and study fit receive less attention.

2. Important risks remain hidden

Workload expectations, competing priorities and potential barriers are not always explored before application decisions are made.

Students may commence without fully understanding what success will require.

3. Quality depends on the individual advisor

Without a common framework, readiness is assessed differently across teams.

As a result, the quality of decision support can vary significantly from one conversation to the next.

Many persistence risks are identifiable during the enquiry stage, but only when teams are equipped to assess readiness consistently.



The CSBA Study Readiness Program

A structured approach to helping future student teams identify readiness, support informed decision-making and build stronger foundations for student success.

PHASE 1

Understand

- Independent assessments of future student conversations using SenseCX quality standards
- Evaluate readiness-focused questioning, listening and decision-support techniques
- Identify conversation gaps, inconsistency and potential risk areas
- Deliver practical recommendations and priority improvement opportunities

Outcome:

A clear picture of how consistently readiness is being explored across future student conversations, and where the greatest opportunities for improvement exist.

PHASE 2

Improve

- Train teams to identify readiness indicators and potential risk factors
- Build skills in questioning, listening and decision support
- Practice through realistic student scenarios
- Equip leaders with coaching and feedback tools

Outcome:

Greater confidence that advisors are consistently supporting informed student decisions and exploring readiness in a meaningful way.

PHASE 3

Embed

- Ongoing future student conversation assessments
- Readiness-focused quality and performance measures
- Coaching, calibration and continuous improvement programs
- Benchmarking against leading practice

Outcome:

A sustainable capability supported by measurement, coaching and continuous improvement.

Open Universities Australia

"Over the past two years, our partnership with CSBA has helped us strengthen how consistently we support prospective students. Their experience framework, benchmarking and coaching have provided valuable structure and external perspective that complements our culture of continuous improvement."

Rachit Monga, Director of Advisory Services

Interested in understanding how effectively your team is supporting Study Readiness?

CSBA can help you assess student conversations, identify opportunities to strengthen readiness discussions and build a more consistent approach to informed student decision-making.

To learn more about how the program can support your institution's study readiness objectives, we'd welcome a conversation.

For better customer experiences

STRATEGY | RESEARCH | QUALITY ASSURANCE | TRAINING

For further details and insights, please get in touch:

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