

# TOP PROFESSIONAL VOICES IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



**General Manager, Student Guild  
University of Southern Queensland**

Andrew Johnson is the General Manager of the UniSQ Student Guild. With over a decade of years' experience in events and student engagement, he is passionate about creating inclusive environments that support students to thrive academically, socially, and personally.



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## Can you share a bit about your background and the journey that led you to your current role in student engagement?

I finished my English Literature degree in the late-2000s and, in true humanities graduate fashion, had no idea what I wanted to do—other than knowing it wasn't leading teams in a bank, which is exactly what I'd been doing. That realisation nudged me toward a more creative, people-focused path, and after more than a decade in the performing arts and venue management sector, I transitioned into higher education at the University of Southern Queensland.

I began by supporting creative arts programs, helping deliver countless student productions in the in-house production house, but quickly saw how those skills translated into building student experiences that foster belonging. Over the last decade, I've worked across marketing, outreach, student enrichment, and engagement—leading teams on everything from clubs and events to leadership and professional development. I've been involved in nearly every major student milestone, from Open Day and Orientation through to Graduation, so I feel I've seen the whole journey.

In 2023/24, I also had the pleasure of convening the operational group of Student Voice Australasia (SVA), supporting the sector-wide work of that great organisation. And in 2024, after almost 10 years at the University, I took the leap into independent student associations, stepping into my current role as General Manager of the UniSQ Student Guild.



### A Note from the Founder

Andrew and the team at UniSQ Student Guild are true collaborators. They helped us promote a record-setting event this year and we hope to continue working alongside them for a long time.



*Andrew serving students at one of the many Guild BBQs on campus*

**Find out more about the UniSQ Student Guild [HERE](#).**

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**What are the key responsibilities and goals in your role for boosting student engagement and retention at your university?**

As GM, my role is to ensure the Student Guild creates meaningful opportunities for connection, support, and growth. Engagement and retention aren't abstract metrics—they're lived experiences for students juggling study, work, and personal responsibilities. At UniSQ, many students are regional, mature-aged, or balancing family and employment, so the Guild has to offer flexible, inclusive services that meet students where they are.

Practically, this means overseeing student advocacy, running clubs and events, managing facilities like our gyms and Guild Hubs, and ensuring food security through programs such as the Food Pantry and Breakfast initiatives. Strategically, my goal is to strengthen the student experience arm of the Guild—building belonging on our Springfield and Ipswich campuses, as well as online—and ensuring we're equipped for the changing higher education landscape.

Day to day, I focus on building strong, positive relationships with students, staff, the University, and the broader community. Success is measured not only in numbers, like rising event and club participation, but also in stories of students finding a community that supports them through challenges. Ultimately, the aim is simple: students shouldn't just study at uni—they should thrive and truly feel they belong.

**Can you share some examples of how your work has positively influenced the lives of university students and enhanced their overall experience?**

One of the most meaningful experiences of my career has been supporting UniSQ's program for incarcerated students, which has been running for over a decade. While I was involved only for a portion of its lifespan, I had the privilege of helping manage the team that delivered the program to more than 400 students and witnessing the extraordinary impact higher education can have in correctional settings. The program provides study support, resources, and advocacy, allowing students to continue—or even begin—their academic journey despite significant barriers.

The moment that stays with me most was visiting a correctional facility to meet with both education officers and students. Sitting across from people pursuing higher education while incarcerated was humbling; their determination to learn, grow, and transform their futures was profound. For many, education represented more than qualifications—it was hope, dignity, and a second chance.

I often say this work will likely remain the most powerful experience of my higher education career. It reminded me that equity and access are at the heart of student engagement, and that our work can transform lives even in the most challenging environments.



Andrew (far left) at the opening of the new Student Guild Hub at Springfield, with UniSQ Executive.

**Could you tell us about a specific project or initiative you led that significantly boosted student engagement?**

The project that stands out most is our recent relaunch of the Student Guild on the Springfield and Ipswich campuses, which included opening new Guild offices and establishing our student experience arm. For a long time, students on these campuses had fewer opportunities to engage meaningfully with the Guild. Creating a physical presence was about more than opening doors—it was a statement that these students are just as central to our community as those on the main campus.

The new offices act as hubs for advocacy, clubs, events, and cost-of-living support. We also launched tailored programming to reflect local student needs, from club activities to social events. The impact was immediate: more foot traffic, higher advocacy requests (showing trust in the service), and growing attendance at events. Most importantly, students now tell us the Guild feels “for them,” which is the best measure of engagement.

This initiative was a highlight because it combined infrastructure, strategy, and cultural change—demonstrating how investment in place-based engagement can transform the student experience.



Andrew presenting as part of a panel at the inaugural UniSQ Student Roundtable.