

## **SMARTHINKING at Open Universities Australia: Supporting learners' academic experiences to achieve better retention**

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Open Universities Australia (OUA) offers courses by distance and online. It attracts students with a diverse range of academic preparation levels and understanding. Enrolments in the range of courses offered at OUA have grown exponentially in the last three years and are expected to continue growing. This has an effect on the capacity of tutors to respond to student learning needs as student numbers as well as the scope of student learning issues increase.

OUA sought an academic support intervention to address the tensions described above. The intervention needed to be online and accessible to learners at times that suited their study schedules (often crossing time zones). In 2007 OUA trialled a tutorial service called **Smarthinking.com** with interesting results.

The results of the trial will be presented in this paper demonstrating the positive effects of using Smarthinking as an academic support intervention in terms of:

- Improved retention into subsequent units
- Improved unit completion rates
- Improved student satisfaction with the level and timeliness of tutor feedback
- Improved student grades

The paper will detail the aspects that demonstrate how the learning intervention provided a way of personalising and enriching the e-learning experience for students.