

D4 Retention Workshop – Key Information about Retention

Rationale/National Context

'Retention' in the UK is about students remaining in one HE institution and completing their programme of study within a specific timeframe. (HEA, 2015)

Differential retention and attainment for specific groups of students remains a feature of UK HE, including where students enter university or college with similar entry grades.

Enhancing Access, Retention, Attainment and Progression in Higher Education (Webb et al. 2017)

Widening access to higher education (HE) for under-represented groups has been the chief focus of governmental and institutional policy and intervention until recently, when concern has spread to the persistence of those students – their retention within the institution (HEA, 2017, p.31)

This report states that continuation and progression of students depends on many factors been just their academic ability on entering university. In particular factors relate to academic and social integration (Tinto 1975).

Student can find it challenging transitioning from school to university. The first year is therefore important and is a key time for students drop out. In addition returning to study after the long summer break is another key point for students to drop out.

There is also evidence that the quality of teaching and learning contributes significantly to retention: student engagement being paramount to supporting retention.

Key Findings from the Higher Education Retention and Engagement (HERE) Project 2008-2011:

- Approximately one third of first year students have experienced doubts sufficiently strong to make them consider withdrawing at some point during the first year.
- Students usually report more than one reason for considering withdrawing.
- The primary reasons for considering withdrawing are associated with students' experience of the programme.
- There were four main reasons cited by those considering withdrawal for deciding to stay:
 - Support from friends and family – with friends being the most significant of these
 - Adapting to the course/ university
 - The student's personal commitment and drive
 - Whether the students perceived the programme can help them achieve future goals, particularly employment.
- The primary times for considering leaving are immediately before and after Christmas.
- Some student groups appear more likely to considering withdrawing than others: Part-time students, students with disabilities and female students tended to be more likely to consider withdrawing. There was a mixed picture for students from different ethnic backgrounds and ages.

Recommendations from that report:

- Identify and respond to students at risk
- Help students to make the transition to being effective learners at university
- Improve the communication and relationship with staff

- Help students make more informed decisions about choosing the right course in the first place
- Improve social integration
- Improve a sense of belonging to the programme
- Foster motivation and help students understand how the programme can help achieve their future goals
- Encourage students' active engagement with the curriculum
- Ensure that there is good communication and access to additional student support

University of Huddersfield Context:

The University retention is below the national benchmark for the sector and this is an area that is being targeted on for improvement, particularly as it is one of the TEF metrics. In the 2014-15 stats (published 2016) Huddersfield's attrition rate (students no-longer in HE a year after entering HE) for all entrants was 10.4% compared to the benchmark of 9.2% (HESA, 2016).

An internal project analysing retention rates for particular student characteristics has found that the students at highest risk of being negative for non-continuation are:

- Non-A/AS students (1.98)
- Asian Bangladeshi (1.79), Pakistani (1.3), Black African (1.43) and Other Mixed students
- Students in Applied science (2.3), Computing and Engineering (1.38), and Education and Professional Development (1.77)
- First years
- Men (1.32)
- Students from POLAR3=1,2 areas (1.16)
- Students with mental health conditions (1.38) (Aspland 2017)

For Annual Evaluation the figure used is withdrawal suspension and transfer (WST). This is the number of students who continue onto the next year of the same course. Anyone who has suspended their studies, transferred to another course (within the School, University or externally) or withdrawn will be counted in the w/s/t %.

Further Readings/Reports:

Aspland M. (2017) Statistical Analysis of non-continuation University of Huddersfield.

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<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/workstreams-research/themes/retention-and-success>

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- Webb, O., Wyness, L., & Cotton, D. (2017). Enhancing access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education A review of the literature showing demonstrable impact HEA: HEA.