

What Works? Student Retention & Success



Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change

University of Glasgow
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What Works? Student Retention & Success is a Paul Hamlyn Foundation initiative working with the Higher Education Academy, Action on Access and 13 UK universities. The second phase (What Works?2) builds on the first phase of the initiative (What Works?1). What Works?1 culminated in the report: Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change (Thomas 2012).

1. Contextual overview

The University of Glasgow (UofG) is a broad-based research intensive institution with a good track record in widening participation. An institutional focus on retention since 2006, and on enhancing the first year student experience in particular, has resulted in improvements in Year 1 continuation rates (up 5%) however we still have more to do to achieve ambitious internal targets aligned with sector benchmarks. Our institutional strategy states a commitment to widening access to talented students from any background, and our successful pre-entry programmes both widen access and prepare students for success in Higher Education. Students from the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Scotland (the 20% or 40% of postcode areas as identified by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, henceforth termed MD20/MD40) are, however, retained at a lower rate than the undergraduate population as a whole. Our commitment has been cemented in Outcome Agreements with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in which we have determined to both widen access further and improve student retention. Our aspirations for the What Works? Student retention and success change programme were to build on work to mainstream student retention and success activities, to provide the best support to all our students.

1.1 Widening Access

UofG has well-established widening access programmes that have been providing entry routes into HE for many years. How well Scottish institutions perform in widening access is currently measured by the SFC using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), which identifies relative socio-economic disadvantage based on home postcode (Scottish Government, 2012). In 2013, UofG had 11.8% MD20 students and 24.4% MD40 students, just below the Scottish average of 12.1% and 27.5%, and notably higher than that of our peer group of other Scottish 'Ancient' Universities (SFC, 2015, Table 10a).

Additional issues that non-traditional or under-represented student groups may face in terms of transition to HE, retention and success have been well-documented in the literature, see for example Thomas (2002). These include barriers to engagement in student life and concerns over 'fitting in', which affect sense of belonging.

1.2 Student Retention

We take very seriously our duty of care for the well-being of all our students. Senior management established a Retention Working Group in early 2006 with a remit to develop, implement and monitor a strategy for improving student retention and to champion and communicate the importance of supporting student retention. Internal measures were developed to mirror the HESA performance indicator of non-continuation of studies (HESA, 2016) and continuation at the institution was benchmarked against peer group (Russell Group) to identify an internal KPI of 94% students to continue after year 1. With a focus

on student retention, particularly in first year, since 2006, improvements have been made towards this target, and the HESA published figures for the 2011/12 entry cohort at UofG is 92.1%.

HESA reports on students from low participation neighbourhoods in the rest of the UK through the POLAR indicator. This measure is not used in Scotland, where SIMD is used and the SFC report on retention and success of socio-economically disadvantaged students in their annual statistical report. The average continuation rates for MD20 and MD40 students starting at Scottish HEIs in 2011/12 were 87.3% and 88.1%, respectively, compared to the average for Scottish students of 91.3% (SFC, 2015, p36). This 3-4% difference was also seen in internal UofG data and identified this student group as one of the more hard-to-reach risk groups that had not seen the same improvements in retention from the work across the institution to date. Our aspirations for the What Works? Student retention and success change programme were to support meaningful change that would promote engagement and belonging in all UofG students but particularly those from the more hard to reach groups.

1.3 What Works? Student retention and success change programme at UofG

The University of Glasgow comprises four Colleges with 26 Schools/Research Institutes. The discipline areas involved in the change programme are three Schools representing three Colleges, with the fourth represented on the core team by the academic member of staff.

Initial team make up and number of disciplines were prescribed by the national coordinating team. Members of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme core team at the University of Glasgow were:

Role	Name
Team leader/ Convenor of Retention Working Group	Dr Donald Ballance (2013 – 2016) Professor Phil Cotton (2012)
Project manager/ Data expert	Alison Browitt
Academic support member of staff	Dr Lorna Love (2012 – 2013)
Academic member of staff	Dr Steve Marritt (2012 – 2013)
Student / student representative	Jess McGrellis (2012 – 2013) Breffni O'Connor (2013 – 2015) Liam King (2014 – 2016)

We have replaced core team members who have left with those already involved in the programme by co-opting discipline leads onto the core team:

Discipline/subject area	School of Interdisciplinary Studies (Dumfries)	School of Life Sciences	School of Engineering

Programme name	Primary Education with Teaching; Environmental Stewardship; Health & Social Policy	Biology Level 1; Various Life Sciences L2	Aerospace Engineering; Biomedical Engineering; Civil Engineering; Electronics and Electrical Engineering; Mechanical Engineering
Discipline team leader	Mr Carlo Rinaldi	Dr Chris Finlay Dr Maureen Griffiths	Dr Donald Ballance
Team members	Mr A Graeme Pate; Dr Alexander Whitelaw	Dr Rob Aitken	Prof John Davies; Dr Bill Stewart
Student team member	Jessica Chapman	Christopher Stewart	
Thematic area for intervention	Co-curricular	Induction/ Active Learning	Active Learning

1.4 Internal and external context

Since the start of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme there have been significant internal and external changes to context.

We have seen an increase in student diversity in our institution; including higher numbers of new entrants from the more disadvantaged postcode areas in Scotland due to additional SFC-funded MD40 places from 2013/14, to meet our Outcome Agreement targets. The potential associated risk with the change in demographics is that we know this group may be less likely to engage and more likely to withdraw from studies in this institution and across the sector (SFC, 2015). This can impact on a sense of belonging in the whole cohort, not only the individual.

The work of the Scottish Government's Commission on Widening Access (Scottish Government, 2016) supports the Scottish First Minister's aspiration that "a child born today in one of our most deprived communities will, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our least deprived communities" and has brought this to the forefront of the political education agenda in Scotland. Widening access needs to be coupled with student success to have an impact on social mobility.

The current QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme is Student Transitions (QAA Scotland, 2014); this will keep transition, retention and success of under-represented student groups as a mainstream Scottish sectoral, as well as institutional, priority for at least the three year duration of the Enhancement Theme

2. Impact data

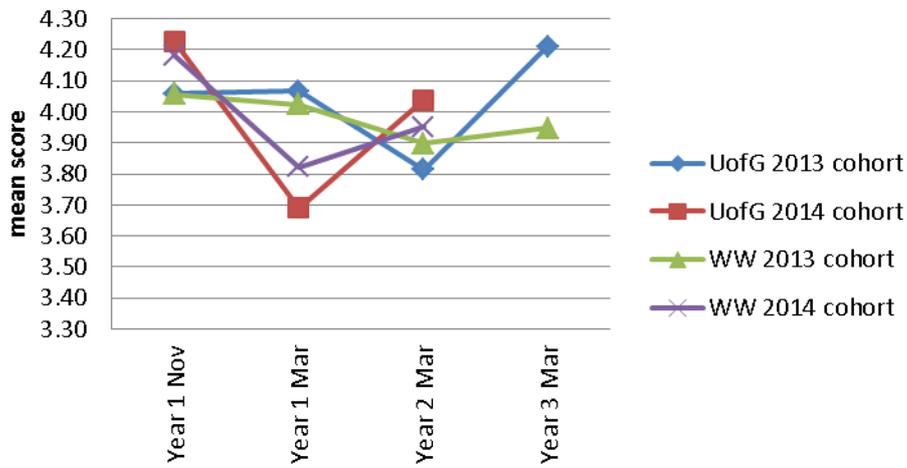
2.1 At a national level, the impact of the What Works? Student retention and success

change programme is being evaluated through the use of measures of student attainment and a survey of student engagement and belonging, designed and analysed by Professor Mantz Yorke. The survey methodology and initial findings are described in Yorke (2014).

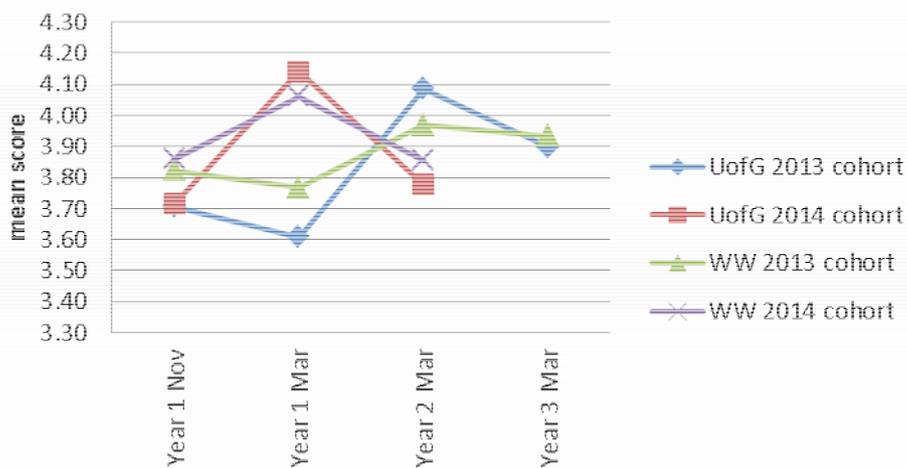
Two or three cohorts of students in the participating disciplines were surveyed once in each semester in year one, and again annually through years 2 and 3. The survey comprises of 16 items rated on a five point Likert scale, combined to three separate subscales: belonging, engagement and self-confidence.

2.2 The University of Glasgow results over time, compared to the sector average, are shown below for the three subscales (note the UofG population is large and represents approximately 20% of the sector totals). There is some variability in the results of the two cohorts starting in What Works? disciplines in 2013 and 2014. In part, this may be due to fluctuating respondent populations, ranging n=1370-3718 for the sector responses and n=313-949 for UofG.

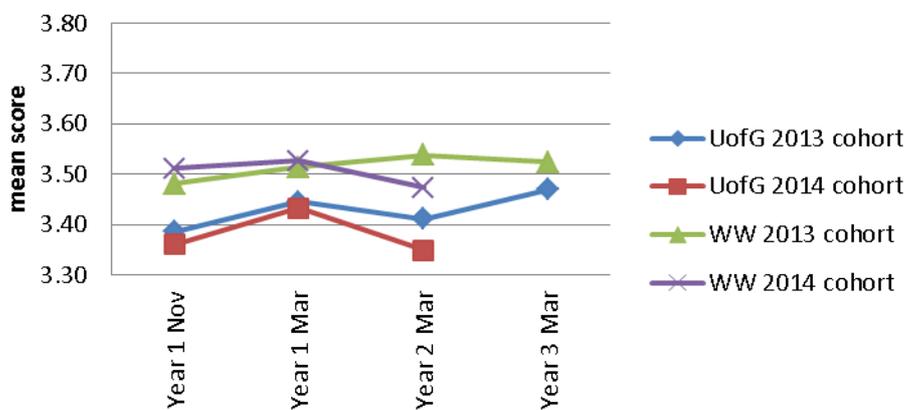
What Works? survey - Belonging



What Works? survey - Engagement



What Works? survey - Self-confidence



2.3 UofG students consistently score lower in Self-confidence than the students surveyed at the other participating institutions across the UK. The lower self-confidence of the Scots as a nation has been noted and discussed; in *The Scots' Crisis of Confidence*, Carol Craig comments on a lack of self-confidence, collectively and individually, as an intrinsic aspect of Scottish psyche and culture (Craig, 2011).

The other finding of note is the sharp increase in 'Belonging' in the UofG Year 3 cohort, above the sector average. This is not entirely unexpected as the pre-Honours years at UofG are broader and have less of a subject identity. Junior Honours (year 3 of the four year Scottish degree) is reported by students to be 'friendlier'; with the stronger subject identity when students have chosen their Honours degree programme, smaller classes and closer contact with tutors/lecturers/project supervisors.

2.5 Attainment data for participating HEIs was reviewed by Professor Yorke. It showed little change in mean marks achieved by the cohorts of students in the disciplines at Glasgow and Year 1 success is shown below (note smaller cohort sizes in Interdisciplinary Studies result in larger impact on percentages). Progression from year 1 to year 2 increased or stayed steady around or above 90%.

Programme	Entry Year	% Yr1 success	% Progress Yr1-Yr2
Engineering	2012	95	90
	2013	92	89
Interdisciplinary Studies	2014	96	
	2012	91	93
	2013	93	97
Life Sciences	2014	86	
	2012	95	92
	2013	93	92
	2014	96	

3. Planning for and implementing change

Application for and development of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme at the University of Glasgow was co-ordinated through the pre-existing Retention Working Group on the main campus, reporting to the Learning & Teaching Committee. The application was fully supported by senior management and the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching), in particular. Initial membership of the core team was drawn from the working group, and suggestions were gathered there for suitable disciplines to be involved, all under the strategic overview of the Vice-Principal.

We identified three disciplinary areas that, together, encapsulate major areas of challenge in improving student success as evidenced by our own institutional research. The disciplines chose to be involved in order to put their ideas for interventions that fitted the What Works? themes into practice, with the support of the programme. This enthusiasm and ownership within the discipline areas was crucial to the success.

3.1 Discipline 1: Life Sciences

Life Sciences, part of our BSc degree portfolio, exemplifies the challenge of breadth in the four-year, general entry Scottish undergraduate degree. In years 1 and 2, which essentially represent the transition stage to higher education, the students are faced with an exceptionally broad choice of course options in the curriculum that can expose them to an equally wide range of pedagogies and assessment strategies. This, together with the fact that some classes are very large (Level 1 Biology is the largest first year class with an annual intake of over 600 students and several classes in Level 2 have over 400 students) can be particularly challenging for students, leading to issues around sense of belonging. Being able to actively address retention issues and improve student engagement in such large classes will be of direct benefit across classes taken by BSc students as Biology students take a further two courses of their choice in year 1.

Level 1 Biology and the School of Life Sciences aimed to pilot activities under two of the What Works? Themes – active learning and induction. Introductory lectures would be redesigned and revisited a few weeks into the semester to provide relevant and well-timed information and interaction with new students. Building on previous work and expanding use of the VLE for providing induction information as well as formative self-assessment and skills assessment was expected to promote engagement and belonging by providing early opportunities for feedback on progress with learning. The activities were to be extended and developed for second year and future years to continue to impact on engagement and belonging throughout the degree.

3.2 Discipline 2: Engineering

Mathematically-based courses have been found to be among those with the poorest pass rates and this has a corresponding impact on retention. We selected Engineering as our second discipline because this subject is acutely impacted. We know this problem is not unique to Glasgow and so the inclusion of this discipline within the project may identify issues and produce outcomes that have added significance to the sector as a whole. Engineering was undertaking a major change and has moved from distinct degree pathways throughout (for Aerospace, Biomedical, Civil, Electronics and Electrical and Mechanical Engineering) to a common core of 90–100 credits for all Year 1 students in the School of Engineering. Aims included:

1. concentrating on fewer Year 1 courses to ensure that those courses are properly matched to student capabilities and knowledge;
2. undertake this major change in structure and teaching without it adversely affecting retention and the student experience;
3. fostering cohort identity through specific courses and group activities;

4. implement these changes which will make it easier for students to change degree programmes at the end of Year 1;
5. review the progression of subject material throughout the degree programme to ensure a clear and logical progression in the subject.

In 2013/14, the group activities in a new 'Engineering Skills' course were piloted as part of the active learning theme to promote student engagement with learning and a sense of belonging due to peer to peer interactions. Following the principles of effective practice identified in What Works? Phase I (Thomas, 2012) the activities are mainstream and relevant with the aim of engaging all students, including those who are less likely to engage with co-curricular 'optional' activities.

3.3 Discipline 3: Interdisciplinary Studies

We have a relatively large local student population which includes students from some of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Scotland. We have concerns over the engagement of our local 'commuting' students who travel in to campus and are less likely to be fully engaged in the social sphere of student life. This has been extreme in our School of Interdisciplinary Studies on the Dumfries campus, 80 miles from Glasgow. This campus has a cohort of students who have more established domestic lives as many live at home and therefore tend to travel in to study. In addition, as a small campus in a rural town rather than in a large city, resources affecting the student experience such as clubs and societies, student support facilities, library, residences, etc. are different and more limited than on the main campus. Widening access and participation in this context is paramount as success and well-being are associated with different levels of complexity on students' lives.

The School would pilot a peer mentoring scheme as part of the co-curricular theme. This is a mainstream activity involving all first year students, aiming ultimately for all staff and students on the campus to be involved when it has run for a few years and extended mentor/mentee 'families' are created across all years of study. The idea for the activity came from students in the Staff-Student Liaison Committee and development was a staff-student collaboration. The aims of the activity were to increase belonging and engagement as students get to know their peers of the same year and in the years above. The support provided by having more experienced student mentors was also expected to contribute to improvements in retention.

3.4 Observations on how the project team worked

Over the duration of the change programme we lost members of the core team through secondments or staff leaving the University. Our student representatives have changed due to sabbatical terms, however we have been lucky to have had continuity as some have stayed for two years as they have taken a second sabbatical post. We have replaced core team members with those already involved in the programme by co-opting discipline leads onto the core team; for example, when Professor Phil Cotton, the original team lead, left for a secondment he was replaced by Dr Donald Ballance as What Works? Student retention and success change programme lead as well as Convenor of the Retention Working Group. Dr Ballance also continued as Engineering discipline lead.

This continuity has had clear benefits for running the programme. Co-opting the discipline leads into the core team has taken advantage of all their many years of experience in student retention and success and has created a strong team who met regularly throughout the change programme to discuss discipline and core activities. The project manager role combined with that of 'data expert' provided the team with excellent administrative support, as well as data and evaluation support and advice. The discipline teams are supported through meetings and correspondence; sharing ideas and experience with each other and expertise in the core team.

Student input to the programme has been crucial. The core team has comprised two sabbatical officers from the Students' Representative Council (SRC) each year. They have provided support in terms of representation but also assisting in the discipline evaluations i.e. co-facilitating focus groups. We also chose to have student representatives in each discipline team and their input and advice on developing activities has been invaluable.

More detail on our approach can be found in the case study:

Title: Benefits of embedding a project team within existing University structures

Abstract: At the University of Glasgow, there were successes around how the project was run and how the project team worked together. It was led by the Convenor of the pre-existing Retention Working Group on the main campus, supported by a project officer who acted as project manager and data expert. The Working Group was renamed 'Retention & Success' and acted as a broader consultation group. Disciplines were chosen as areas with distinct challenges around retention and discipline leads were already involved in retention work and were co-opted on to the core team. Disciplines chose their own activities from ideas aligned with the project themes and had full ownership, with the project manager providing support. Another key success has been the involvement of students; on the core team and in the discipline teams, providing invaluable advice from students' perspective.

[4. Evaluation strategy](#)

Mixed methods were employed to investigate the stages of the over-arching evaluation framework, below, suggested by the What Works? Student retention and success change programme national coordination team. Following the steps of the logic chain model we used qualitative research and quantitative data for the evaluation of the activities; to understand changes to attitudes/behaviours; the impact of changes to attitudes/behaviours on belonging and engagement; and impact on retention and success.

Evaluation framework: logic chain model



4.1 Staff consultation

The institutional evaluation process involved gathering continuous feedback by reporting on progress in What Works? Student retention and success change programme activities in a standing item on the agenda of the Retention & Success Working Group (RSWG).

Broader staff opinion was gathered through consultations and workshops. For example, the four College Deans of Learning & Teaching and their nominees were consulted on data use and reporting; and workshops were held with academic and services staff involved in supporting student retention and success to consider what the priorities are and what staff need to know.

4.2 Student experience

Schools involved in the discipline aspects of the programme were considered the areas where impact on students would most likely be seen. In addition to the Engagement & Belonging survey and other central What Works? Student retention and success change programme evaluation, we have monitored engagement with: the VLE and physical attendance, internal School retention data, course evaluation forms and survey results, and student focus groups were held to better understand the student experience.

The core team also supported the evaluation of discipline projects by facilitating these focus groups with first and second year students. Employment of the core team (including student facilitators) in this context provides a neutral or independent interviewer/ facilitator to encourage open and honest feedback from participating students.

4.3 Quantitative measures

Internal retention and success data was examined. Our main measure of retention is continuation of studies after year 1, following the HESA definition used for the non-continuation performance indicator. Progression from year 1 to year 2 of a degree programme is our main measure of student success, although it doesn't capture the students who may be ultimately successful after transferring to a different degree programme at Glasgow or elsewhere, taking a year out or repeating a year.

With the improvement in data available at University, College and School level, and for MD20/40 cohorts, developed as part of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme, progress of students from the more socio-economically disadvantaged communities can be tracked and monitored in terms of continuation and progression to ensure institutional and local support initiatives are having an effect.

Student engagement was measured in terms of student attendance at classes or co-curricular activities, and interaction with the VLE.

Student satisfaction was also monitored through survey results and course evaluation forms.

5. Changes implemented at the institutional level

5.1 We have embedded the change programme in the work of the Retention Working Group; renamed as the Retention and Success Working Group to shift the focus towards the more positive aspects of supporting student success. It is through the existing structures in place to support learning and teaching that strategy is being developed, informed by our progress towards enhanced data collection and reporting, as well as learning from activities in the academic disciplines.

5.2 The core team objectives for the What Works? Student retention and success change programme had a focus on improving institutional data. First look continuation and progression data is now available mid-year through our work with the Planning & Business Intelligence team. Management summary reports have been agreed by the RSWG after consultation with Deans (L&T) and nominated representatives across the four Colleges. Consultation identified ideal data requirements (that vary in different areas of the University) and also the process for reporting. We have considered additional data as indicators of student engagement, such as VLE login and on-campus card swipes, and how this could be incorporated to inform student support. Development work on this will continue. More detail on our approach to improving retention data can be found in the case study:

Title: **Use of retention data: developing data sets and reports with RSWG**

Abstract: In collaboration with the Planning and Business Intelligence Service and the Retention & Success Working Group, improving use of data on student retention was a priority for the project core team at the University of Glasgow. Extensive consultation with the working group and Deans of Learning & Teaching and their nominated key staff in each of the four Colleges was carried out to investigate: the data available, optimal management information report format, types and granularity of data required in different areas of the University, and structures for dissemination of data. Degree structures and organisation vary and required differing levels of analysis of data.

5.3 The student representatives on the core team are providing an institution-level student perspective of Students' Representative Council members (SRC) alongside other forms of student participation demonstrated by the student reps in each discipline team. The SRC are supporting the discipline student reps directly, e.g. arranging for their involvement in the What Works? Student retention and success change programme to be recognised on their HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Record).

5.4 Staff engagement with planned workshops and presentations has been poor throughout the duration of the programme and formed the biggest challenge of the programme for us. It is, therefore, important that staff training and development covers aspects of student engagement and belonging. The findings of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme will feed in to this, as well as material from the series of workshops held with academic and services staff already involved in supporting student retention and success.

6. Impact

6.1 The improvements in timing and availability of retention data has meant it has been made available to the discipline teams during the span of the project; having the data at School-level allowed our disciplines to plan and monitor activities. The team worked together to look at how additional data, such as VLE use and card swipes on campus, could be used to supplement standard management information in the Schools involved; which in turn informs activity at the institutional level.

6.2 Changes at discipline level, because they take place in the academic sphere, have a more direct impact on changing students' attitudes and behaviour while the changes at institution level will trickle through to students more slowly. We expect the changes to data availability and enhanced collection and reporting will change staff attitudes and behaviour in time. During staff consultation, reliable retention data was highlighted as being essential to inform changes to practice. We expect the largest impact on students to be mediated by changes put in place by staff as we support them to support the engagement, belonging, retention and success of their students.

6.3 An unexpected, but significant, impact of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme is that it has helped promote greater links between staff and students on the main campus in Glasgow and on Dumfries campus.

6.4 Support for the project from senior management was strong but there are many competing strategic priorities that already stretched staff have to balance. We felt that retention and success was not understood to be a top priority although we hope the QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme of Student Transitions and the renewed institutional focus on transitions will make student engagement and belonging a high strategic priority.

When consulted about strategic enablers our experts in student retention agreed more could be done in the following areas:

- to improve staff reward and recognition;
- to make sure retention and success activities were well resourced;
- to improve data and understanding of issues.

6.5 Data has been provided for students from the most socio-economically disadvantaged postcode areas (MD40); a priority retention risk group that is a focus in our Outcome Agreement with the SFC. Data covering the period before commencement of (2011 and 2012) and during (2013 and 2014) the What Works? Student retention and success change programme are shown in the graphs below for first year continuation and

progression to year 2. The trend is generally positive showing an increase over time for the whole cohort and for MD40 students, although this fluctuates more year on year.

The availability of data has helped an increased awareness across the institution of under-represented students and we expect further understanding of potential issues they may face as obstacles to engagement and belonging, retention and success will make staff more conscious of the inclusivity of their pedagogy, curriculum design and student support roles. This will impact on our diverse student population from home and overseas.

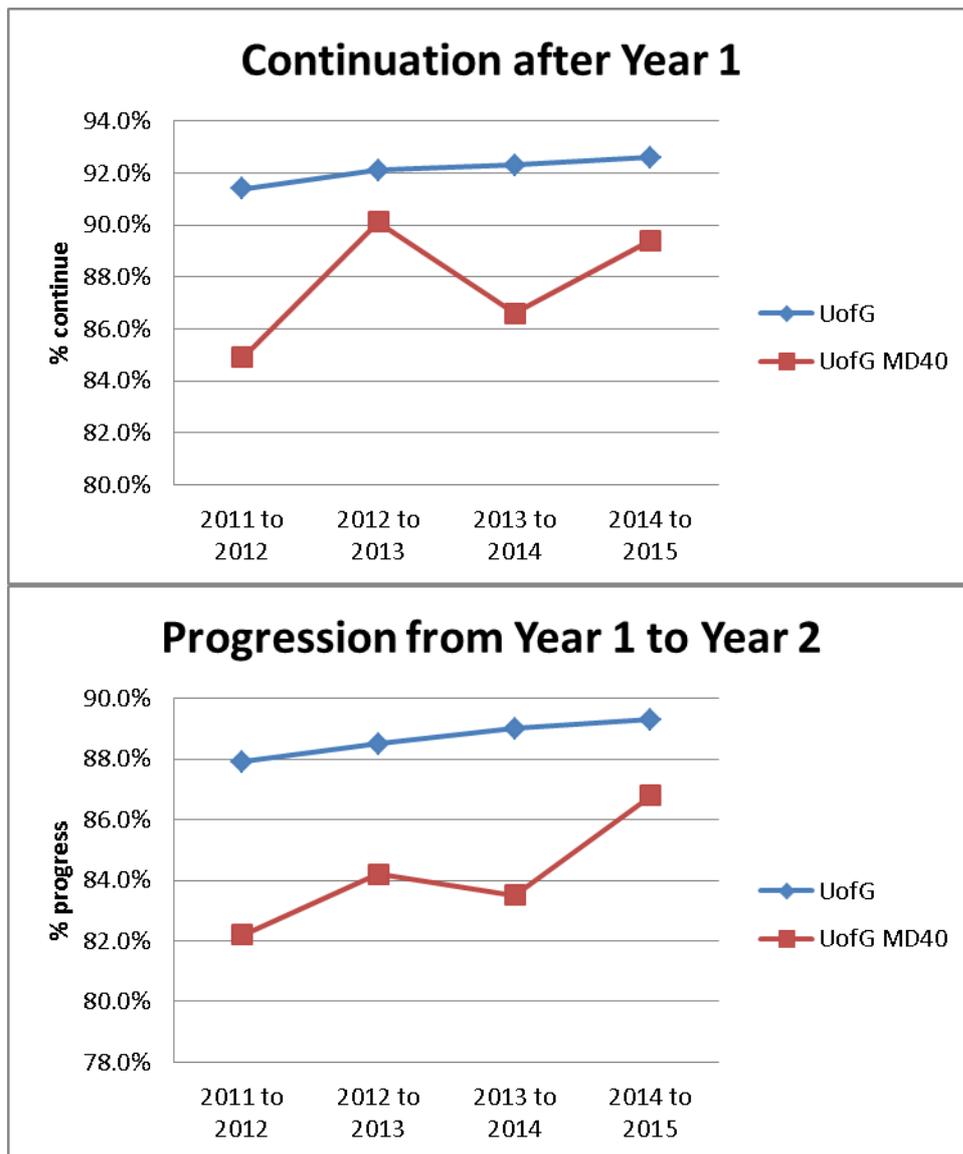


Figure 1: Continuation after Year 1 and progression from Year 1 to Year 2

7. Changes implemented at the discipline level and impact

7.1 School of Interdisciplinary Studies

Peer-mentoring was introduced across Dumfries campus for first year students on the three degree programmes. The structure chosen was a CLAN (Campus Life Advice Network) system and it was piloted in 2013/14. Second and Third year mentors were selected and trained – four CLAN chieftains were assigned with SEPT (Student Experience Programme Team) mentors and SEPT mentors with CLAN/SEPT members (taken from the same discipline).

All students on Dumfries campus have engaged with the CLAN scheme to at least some extent – meetings of mentors and mentees were held, with increased contact with mentors in person or via email noted as Semester 1 exams approached. The discipline team was successful in securing a small amount from the University's Chancellors' Fund to cover CLAN gathering socials during induction week and at other key times of the academic year, such as a Burns Night Ceilidh & quiz. CLAN gatherings have been well attended by students across all years showing strong student engagement.

Mentor training materials were developed. As a result of student feedback, it was decided to introduce a more rigorous training scheme for mentors. As students see the benefit of the scheme there has been huge interest in the first year cohorts in becoming mentors the next year – important for the long-term sustainability of the project. Training was done from the middle of semester 2 with each new mentor receiving two full morning training sessions.

Another point which came out of focus groups was that initially groups had not met until start of semester and they had felt that this was too late. Mentees are now informed of their mentors before induction week so that email contact can be made before start of semester 1, to start to promote an early sense of belonging with the community on Dumfries campus.

As well as the qualitative feedback through surveys and focus groups held to gather evidence for impact of the initiative, attendance records were used as a measure of engagement and show an excellent trend in attendance for all the courses. Student satisfaction was measured through regular course evaluations and although there was a significant increase in student numbers on the campus in recent years, the average evaluation scores remained as high as previous years. Retention statistics show continuation and progression of the 2013/14 first year cohort in the School of Interdisciplinary Studies improved relative to the 2012/13 cohort.

More detail on the changes implemented and impact can be found in the case study:

Title: **CLANs: peer-mentoring on Dumfries campus**

Abstract: It was decided to implement a peer mentoring scheme at the Dumfries Campus of the University of Glasgow to promote student engagement and belonging, as

a result of discussions held at the Staff Student Liaison committee. As a result of these discussions, it was decided to create a mentoring scheme under the name of the CLAN system (Campus Life Advice Network). Each CLAN is made up of first year students from across the three undergraduate degree programmes on offer at Dumfries. Each CLAN is sub divided into SEPT's (Student Experience Programme Team). Each SEPT has five or six mentees and a second year mentor all from the same academic programme to provide academic reassurance as well as social support.

7.2 School of Life Sciences

The School of Life Sciences aimed to improve induction and active learning with redesign of activities and increased use of resources including the VLE (moodle). Activities focussed initially on the first year Biology class and then improving support for cohorts moving through degrees in Life Sciences. Interventions included:

1. Expanding the current induction session over a longer period to avoid information overload in first few days of semester;
 - Redesigned initial introductory lectures to provide a more global outlook including degree pathways, research opportunities and the resources and support available for all students. These have been revisited and updated on the basis of student feedback;
 - Supplying the Course Information Document to all students before the start of teaching and encouraging students to come to induction activities with any questions;
 - Introduction of a further Q&A session several weeks into the session;
 - Supporting groups such as mature students who wish to develop a peer-peer support network.
2. Using VLE, allowing students to formatively self-assess their competencies on Level-1 Biology courses through online lessons and self-assessments: mock exam papers were created to enhance the provision and coupled with a 'Taster' quiz, to ensure all self-assessment activities connect clearly with each other.
3. Creating a central VLE site for all students on a Life Sciences degree to provide an easily accessible repository for course level specific information and a FAQ section. All course assessment marking policies are being made freely available – students can see the guides for all 4 years of degree programme, showing how they will build skills and progress.
4. Recording student attendance at all L1 and L2 pre-requisite lectures.

The attendance monitoring pilot in 2014/15 (attendance taken at all pre-requisite lectures as well as the usual compulsory labs) has been useful for the Life Sciences Advising team to identify students at risk but has proved to be expensive. The analysis incorporating VLE usage and additional electronic data will help inform whether this exercise is worth continuing or if alternative data already available can be used as a measure of engagement.

Focus groups were held with students in years 1 and 2 to further evaluate all activities. Positive comments were made about the use of online resources, activities and technologies as well as support for students by the Biology team. Students have generally been positive about having their attendance monitored with focus group participants showing an

understanding that the aim is to identify students needing support and commenting “it really motivates you to go to the lectures”. The level of support provided by staff in Biology was agreed to be exemplary.

Attendance at face-to-face sessions as part of the extended induction was high and it was concluded that online resources couldn't replace face-to-face interactions entirely as these promote personal interactions; an essential part in creating a sense of belonging.

VLE activity logs were monitored to ascertain usage of the new activities developed and this, with feedback from course evaluation questionnaires, class rep meetings and focus groups with years 1 and 2, showed the online resources were popular and thought to be useful.

Retention statistics show continuation and progression of the 2013/14 (and initial data for 2014/15) first year cohorts in the School of Life Sciences improved relative to the 2012/13 cohort, which was before commencement of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme initiatives.

More detail on the changes implemented and impact can be found in the case study:

Title: Expanding induction and using the VLE to enhance induction to First year Life Science.

Abstract: The compulsory first year Biology courses run within the School of Life Sciences has an annual intake of 650-750 students, with more than 20 different degrees represented in the class. With a relatively small staff management team the VLE has become central to fostering student engagement and communication. Transition into first year undergraduate study is a recognised challenge for students and the VLE has become central to reinforce delivery of the induction experience traditionally covered in lectures. The VLE is now being used to engage with the class and make essential information / learning activities easily accessible to all. There is still a need to reinforce specific material with face-to-face teaching activities, highlighting key information and providing an opportunity to answer any student questions. Student feedback and VLE logs have helped determine what resources are needed and how to make them accessible. The logs and feedback have also helped identify what content benefits from being delivered in other ways, e.g. exercises run in lectures, laboratory classes or online. We are now into the third year of developing this induction process and student feedback, along with VLE activity, has been captured throughout.

7.3 School of Engineering

An Engineering Skills course was introduced to Year 1 of a new common curriculum structure for the five disciplines and 13 degree programmes in Engineering, with the aim of promoting active learning as well as skills development.

The Engineering Skills course consists of:

- Small group work – groups made up of students on the same degree programme
- Presentation Skills

- Careers opportunities
- Effective learning
- Use of library resources
- Extended induction
- Mechanical workshop skills
- Electronic workshop skills
- Report writing
- Design, Build and Test activities – this activity differs according to the students' degree programme

In course evaluation feedback there were generally positive comments from students in relation to the Engineering Skills course, particularly in having the opportunity to get to know their classmates and meet others on their degree stream. This was echoed in focus groups held with students in Year 2 when asked to reflect on their first year experience. Positive impact showed in the Engagement and Belonging survey and is reported in the Engineering case study.

An analysis of attendance at lectures, VLE use and additional electronic data as measures of student engagement was carried out. Retention statistics show continuation of the 2013/14 first year cohort in the School of Engineering improved relative to the 2012/13 cohort, which was before the changes to the curriculum and commencement of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme. This is despite poorer grades observed for some students, possibly due to the introduction of compulsory questions in the exams.

More detail on the changes implemented and impact can be found in the case study:

Title: Active learning elements in a common First Year Engineering curriculum

Abstract: Within the School of Engineering a major change to the structure of the early years of the degree programmes was introduced in 2013/14. The changes resulted in a common core of 90 – 100 credits with the other credits being associated more closely with the degree chosen by the student. A concern when introducing these changes was that students would lose the feeling of identity that previously existed and that their sense of belonging would be diminished by being taught in much larger class sizes. To help alleviate this, an Engineering Skills course was created with the aim of developing generic and engineering career skills at an early stage, together with working in small groups to foster a sense of belonging. This case study looks at the success of this approach to active learning in small groups and reviews the lessons learned from the changes introduced.

7.4 Evidence of impact collected by HEIs

Evidence of impact of discipline level activities was collected through student surveys and focus groups, course evaluation forms and staff-student committee meetings, as well as monitoring engagement with the VLE and physical attendance at classes. Further detail of the impact of initiatives in the Schools can be found in the case studies.

Internal institutional retention and success data was reviewed. When comparing the continuation of the 2012 cohorts, as the baseline, with the subsequent cohorts who experienced the activities in place as part of the programme the trends are generally positive. The analysis on attainment (section 2) gives some support to this conclusion as mean marks of cohorts across the schools are generally steady or increasing over time.

In our internal retention data, we can compare trends for the University as a whole, the discipline Schools and the MD40 cohorts within these. There is a lot of variability year-on-year in the smaller cohorts in particular, such as Interdisciplinary Studies and the MD40 demographic sub-group in each School, and it is therefore not easy to draw firm conclusions on impact.

However, when compared to the institutional total, which is on an upward trajectory of small increments due to work across the institution, retention of MD40 students in our discipline Schools can be seen to be relatively higher compared to their peers. That is, latest data shows continuation of MD40 students lags behind the average continuation rate of the whole first year cohort by 3% (figure 1); in line with the sectoral averages published by the SFC (2015). Meanwhile, continuation of MD40 students in our discipline areas differs from the School cohorts by -1% to +4.5% (figure 2). Despite the variability in the relatively small cohort sizes, this gives us a positive indication that activities in the disciplines are improving the retention and success of a group of students most in need of support.

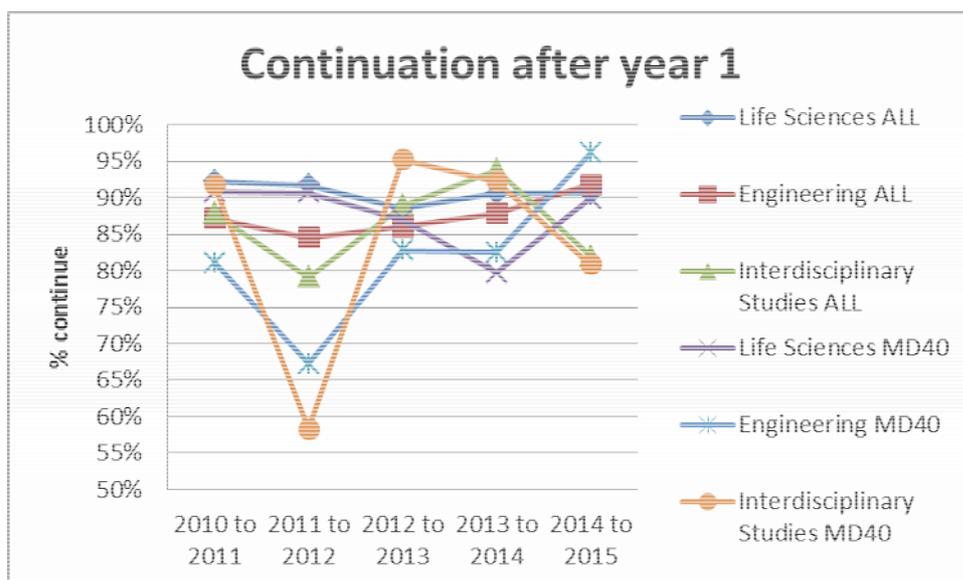


Figure 2: Continuation after Year 1 for UofG disciplines

7.5 Commentary about impact and learning about effective practice in the disciplines

The changes made to practice in the three disciplines all showed impact on student engagement, belonging and success, despite the diversity of activities carried out in very different academic disciplines and contexts. There is a lesson in the positive impact of focus and effort, but an appropriate focus and effort for the local circumstances – there is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution. Change needs to be led by one or more individuals, who are committed to the effort, prepared to convince others of the requirement for the change and will put in the time to ensure that all stakeholders have an input.

However, all our work has raised common points, such as the importance of the timely nature of any intervention or activity, and that personal interactions are vital for belonging – in agreement with one of the key findings from What Works? Phase I (Thomas, 2012).

We found there may be a case for multiple, joined up activities making more of an impact in combination. This was the main lesson learnt in Life Sciences – stand-alone activities appear to be perceived by students as one off and therefore quickly ignored or forgotten, while a combination of face-to-face approaches with innovative use of online resources in the VLE can help to foster a sense of belonging. In Engineering, the impact of the active learning course may have benefited by being part of the other changes made in the redesign of the first year curriculum. The CLAN system on Dumfries campus was designed to provide both academic and social support for new students in smaller groups but also at large CLAN gatherings.

Multiple changes happen in disciplines and in the broader institutional context and therefore it is difficult to evaluate any one activity, and break down the complexity to see correlations between individual activities. The cause of any observed trend cannot be claimed by one activity but all must be assumed to contribute.

We found student involvement and discussion is essential in ensuring activities are fit for purpose. Student involvement is invaluable in informing initial design of any change or intervention but constant feedback is also required for the iterative process of continual development in ever-changing contexts.

8. Sustainability

8.1 The work is embedded by our use of existing structures in the University, such as the Retention and Success Working Group. The working group has been replaced with a Transitions Working Group that we expect will continue the focus on retention and success beyond the period of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme. Lead by a senior manager and with a somewhat broader remit, to look at holistically supporting transitions across the student lifecycle, we expect improvements in student engagement and belonging to become widespread.

We have captured the expertise of those currently involved in student retention and success to feed in to the new working group and resources for staff awareness and training.

8.2 Changes made in disciplines have been supported by Heads of Schools and are part of the longer-term strategies. These projects are fully owned by the disciplines and already embedded in practice. We do not expect sustainability to be an issue as they are not reliant on short-term funding.

Our approach has been more of an evolutionary ‘process’ than an ‘initiative’-based approach and this has had the benefit of building in sustainability through the process.

8.3 In terms of sustainability of the learning from the involvement in the project, dissemination of findings beyond the initial disciplines has begun. Engineering presented the

early findings of the impact of their curriculum changes at the annual UofG Learning & Teaching conference in 2015; Life Sciences Induction best practice is feeding into resources of the Student Journey group; and closer relationships with Dumfries campus means the learning from their experiences of peer-mentoring won't be lost.

9. Conclusions

9.1 Successes

We have seen successes in the ways staff and students have worked together within our institution and across two campuses, 80 miles apart. Activities developed for the context of the individual disciplines have been discussed by a cohesive team, who have also worked together on the core aims, with every step being informed by student participation in the programme.

Improved data for monitoring student retention and the ability to identify successes, as well as areas for continued improvement, has shown activities in disciplines as part of the programme have contributed to improvements in measures of student retention and success, particularly of MD40 students from more socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

9.2 Challenges

The biggest challenge has been in engaging the broader staff community with the What Works? Student retention and success change programme as we had limited interest in the workshops and seminars we have offered. This has been discussed regularly at the Retention & Success Working Group. We understand the conflicting priorities and wide range of calls and demands upon people's time and are planning ways to better target our messages to the most relevant people at the right time and appropriate level.

9.3 Impact and learning, and reflection on the process

We have seen a positive model of central coordination of the project at the University of Glasgow with participation from Schools in three of our four Colleges and across two campuses. We have reported on benefits of the project team being embedded within existing University structures.

The support of the national What Works? Student retention and success change programme facilitation team and the other participating institutions over the life of the three year project has kept up momentum and provided a platform for sharing ideas, an essential part of the process. Meetings provided time and space for the team to focus on the project, away from the institution.

Enthusiasm and ownership within the discipline areas, coupled with support from School management, was crucial to the success. With no dedicated budget for the initiatives, resource for staff time for project development was necessary.

We found student participation in all aspects of our programme to be invaluable.

We learned there is a lot of data collected in a Higher Education institution that can be used to inform practice to support student retention and success. It is not always readily available or easy to work with and this can be exacerbated by changes to systems or the administrative structures of the institution. However, we found the endeavour to improve collection and use of data will pay dividends, as reliable data was highlighted as a key enabler for change.

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to issues around student engagement and belonging, our discipline work concluded that there may be a case for multiple, joined up activities making more of an impact in combination.

9.4 Conclusions and Implications

Our conclusions imply that a strong project team can facilitate meaningful change in a large, and in many ways disperse Higher Education institution. However, the process of change in such an institution can be slow and meaningful change is first implemented locally. Changes made in disciplines and by the core team are sustainable and will, therefore, impact on cohorts of students well beyond the life of the programme. We started with a focus on reliable data as an enabler to engage staff with issues around student retention and success, and provide the agency to make changes to practice in the longer-term. Changes in practice will be informed by the learning from our What Works? Student retention and success change programme disciplines and the national findings.

We found that effort on making a change to practice to support student engagement and belonging had an impact on student retention and success, particularly in the harder to reach groups of students who may face additional barriers. In many ways the type of action is not important (as it will vary in different contexts) but the effort and focus on students is what is important, however, we agree with a key finding of What Works? phase I; the biggest impact on the most hard to reach students will be achieved in the academic sphere (Thomas, 2012).

9.5 Recommendations/next steps

- Implications from the work done to date should be taken forward by the Transitions Working Group to embed learning from the What Works? Student retention and success change programme in promoting engagement and belonging across transitions in the student lifecycle;
- The Transitions Working Group should use learning from the programme in future strategy development and resource allocation decisions;
- Multiple champions for change related to student engagement and belonging should be identified within existing committee/group/management structures at all levels;
- Institutional data for retention and success should continue to be developed to monitor impact and be used to inform strategy;
- Reliable data should be used as a strategic enabler as part of awareness raising, to engage staff with issues and provide the agency to make changes to practice;

- Communications should be planned carefully to engage the most relevant people at the right time and appropriate level with evidence of the final outcomes of the national programme;
- Support staff engagement in supporting students by incentivising through reward and recognition;
- Consider ways to fund projects supporting student retention and success;
- Continue to involve students in the process wherever possible;
- Acknowledge the slow process of change in large HE institutions and be realistic about the extent of change achievable within limited project time-frames;
- Time should be allowed to embed changes to see longer-term impact on student engagement and belonging, retention and success, striving towards parity across all student groups.

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Case Study

Active learning elements in a common First Year Engineering curriculum

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Abstract

Within the School of Engineering a major change to the structure of the early years of the degree programmes was introduced in 2013/14. The changes resulted in a common core of 90-100 credits with the other credits being associated more closely with the degree chosen by the student. A concern when introducing these changes was that students would lose the feeling of identity that previously existed and that their sense of belonging would be diminished by being taught in much larger class sizes. To help alleviate this, an Engineering Skills course was created with the aim of developing generic and engineering career skills at an early stage, together with working in small groups to foster a sense of belonging. This case study looks at the success of this approach to active learning in small groups and reviews the lessons learned from the changes introduced.

Rationale for the case study

The School of Engineering at the University of Glasgow was formed in 2010 from four existing departments. Each department had previously run their degree programmes largely independently from each other with little sharing of courses between degree programmes in different departments. Within the new School of Engineering there are five disciplines (Aerospace Engineering, Biomedical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electronics and Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering) each running between one and five degree programmes. A review of the first year curriculum in 2011 identified 35 courses taught to students in first year with much duplication of taught material. For example, three different mathematics courses, each with a very similar but slightly different curricula, were taught in year one, with this pattern being duplicated in year two. Motivated by this, it was decided to undertake a major review of the early years of the curriculum for all of the degree programmes in Engineering and to substantially revise the degree structures for years one and two. This review coincided with the outcomes of phase one of the HEA What Works? Student Retention and Success programme (Thomas, 2012) and participating in phase two provided an opportunity to allow this to inform and help assess the effectiveness of changes implemented (Yorke, 2014). This case study reports obstacles to implementing the changes, the outcome of the changes and lessons learned.

Description/discussion of the intervention or change initiative and successful aspects

Changes to the level one and two curricula were implemented for three main reasons:

- 1) to ensure that all students in Engineering had a common core knowledge base which would enable them to understand the language that other engineering disciplines routinely used and to be able to share later years' technical option courses;
- 2) to enable successful students to change degree programmes (from one engineering discipline to another) at the end of the first year without having to repeat the year. This would also have the effect of preventing students who were failing in one area of engineering attempting to start again in another area without confronting the reasons for lack of success;
- 3) to reduce duplication in course design, review and assessment. It was recognised early on that savings in combining large classes (>100 students) together to produce very large classes (>300 students) would not provide great financial savings as the major costs are in the laboratory and tutorial support rather than in the lecturing assessment setting and QA aspects of the course. An additional benefit of reducing the number of courses would be that fewer courses would need to be monitored and adjusted when changes occurred to school qualifications and curricula.

It was recognised that such a major change, affecting up to 400 students per year, could have a major impact on staff and on student retention and success for a number of reasons:

- 1) large classes could make it difficult to identify students who were struggling to adapt to university life;
- 2) it might be very difficult for staff to give personal attention to students who were struggling in such large classes;
- 3) the move to a common core curriculum could result in students who had a very clear idea of the area of engineering they wished to study becoming alienated due to perceived lack of focus in their discipline area;
- 4) there was a possibility that not all staff would welcome the changes and that this could lead to a reduced student experience;

To mitigate against these adverse factors, and following extended and repeated consultation with both academic and support staff, it was agreed that the changes should be implemented with a number of principles designed to ensure that student engagement and belonging was not compromised in the changes. These principles included:

- 1) all degree programmes should share a common core of between 90 and 100 credits and would have between 30 and 20 credits of material specifically focussed on the discipline chosen by the student;
- 2) the large classes (>350 students) would be dual taught, with some students having morning lecture and afternoon labs, and others with morning labs and afternoon lectures;
- 3) no member of staff should teach more than half a large common course;

- 4) significant resource would be put into tutorial and laboratory support;
- 5) all examined courses would have a two hour exam with no choice in the questions;
- 6) the teaching office would be the focus for administrative support for all courses;
- 7) all students would take a 10 credit Engineering Skills course which would be a major focus for student engagement combining active learning approaches and opportunities for extended induction.

As a result of these changes, the number of year one courses take by students in Engineering reduced from 35 to 17. In addition to a 40 credit maths course, 6 other 10 credit courses are taken by most students. The remaining 10 courses are the discipline focussed courses taken by students following a particular degree.

The choice of assessment and the relatively long exam with no choice was the result of consultation with students who supported all questions being compulsory rather than having options, as one student put it “it will stop me from having to worry what might come up and what to study ... I will just have to study it all”.

A major focus of the design of the Engineering Skills course was to provide the students with a number of key skills while fostering a sense of cohort identity, belonging and engagement with their studies. For this course all students are organised into groups with other students on their degree programme. The key components of this course are:

- lecture series including:
 - introduction to graduate attributes, the need to develop transferrable skills and the importance of building their CV;
 - introduction to University services including the Careers Service, Student Learning Services, and University Library;
 - communication skills including report writing, presentation and posters. Students work of an Engineering Disasters project in groups of 4 or 5 and peer assess as well as being assessed on their group deliverables;
 - extended induction delivered over the course of the first three to four weeks with small items covered at the beginning of each lecture.
- computer Aided Design classes taught though video lectures and with online submission of design tasks;
- skills classes in electronics and mechanical workshops;
- design, build and test activities focussed in the discipline area of the degree programme on which the student is registered.

For each of these activities the same student groups are used to help aid sense of belonging and engagement. Feedback from students indicate that they value the early group work and the opportunity to meet students on the same degree programme.

Evidence of impact

Feedback from students on the Engineering Skills course has been very positive about the small group activities and includes recognition of the importance of making friends at an early stage of their university career. This has fostered their sense of belonging and engagement with their studies and recent provisional figures show a noticeable improvement in the continuation of from year 1 to 2 for 2014/15 into 2015/16.

Other areas of impact are an increasing number of students taking advantage of the opportunities to change degree programme at the end of year 1 and the collaboration engendered in designing a common early years' structure has permeated the thinking within the School of Engineering such that, from only 2 level 4 and 5 courses shared between the five disciplines in Engineering in 2010, there are now nearly 20 option courses shared between the disciplines. This has resulted in a wider choice of options for the later year students and a better overall use of resources within the School of Engineering.

Sustainability

The work is embedded in the ongoing activities of the School of Engineering and no additional resources are required to sustain the changes in the curriculum. Limited additional resources were required to implement the changes but overall the changes have been resource neutral.

Lessons learnt

Significant lessons learned from the major changes introduced are:

- it is important to engage with all stakeholders (students, employers, administrative staff and particularly academic staff) from the beginning and to have support for change from management in the School. Ensuring that everyone has had an input into the proposal takes time but it is worthwhile in the end;
- a major change needs to be led by someone who is committed to the change and is prepared to convince others of the requirement for the change;
- major changes are not complete when initially implemented but require continual revision for two or three years to fully achieve the goals.
- significant changes are required when moving from large to very large classes and changing assessments from exam with a choice to compulsory questions. Lessons are still being learned in this area and outstanding issues include the use of assessment teams rather than individuals and the use of multiple choice questions to alleviate the assessment burden.

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Case Study: Benefits of embedding a project team within existing University structures

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Rationale for the case study

At the University of Glasgow, there were successes around how the What Works? Student retention and success change programme ran and how the project team worked together. This case study will outline the benefits of our approach of embedding a project team within existing University structures to deliver the aims of the sectoral change programme, particularly as this relatively long-term project over three years inevitably saw changes in personnel and priorities.

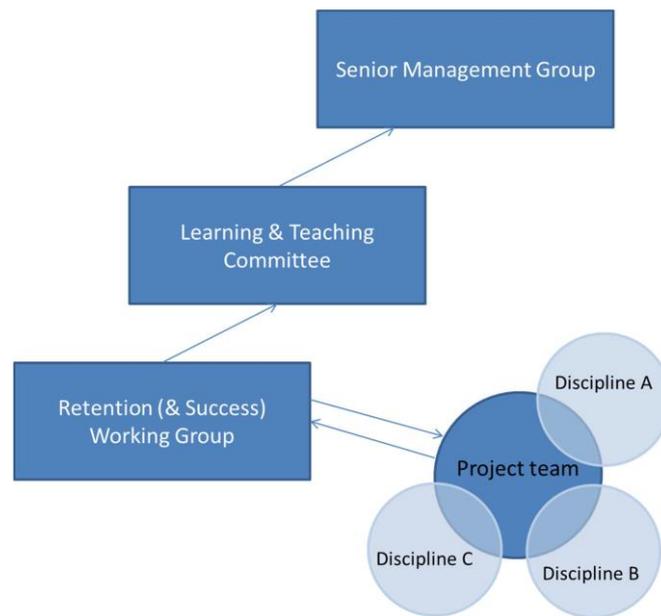
Description/discussion of the intervention or change initiative and successful aspects

From the stage of the original application from the University of Glasgow to be part of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme, co-ordination has been through the pre-existing Retention Working Group on the main campus. This group reports to the Learning & Teaching Committee and the programme has been supported by senior management and the Vice-Principal with responsibility for learning and teaching, in particular. The Retention Working Group was set up in 2006 to support the University Learning & Teaching Strategy in core strategic aims of supporting student engagement and success for all students and talented students from under-represented groups (The University of Glasgow, 2015). The remit of the working group included investigating issues around student retention through institutional research, informed by the literature and

work elsewhere in Scotland and the UK, such as, QAA Scotland Enhancement Themes (n.d.) and What Works? Phase I (Thomas, 2012). Raising the profile of student retention and success required an understanding of the local issues and what could be done in the context of this university, and therefore involved institutional research using management information, student and staff focus groups, and review of evaluations of pilot activities funded by the Learning & Teaching Development Fund, for example. The What Works? Student retention and success change programme as a sectoral initiative, supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access, was a welcome addition to our endeavours; to cement the work done so far and impact on the harder to reach student groups while aiming for lasting institutional change.

The reporting structures are shown below.

Figure 1: Embedding a project team within existing University of Glasgow structures



Initial membership of the core team, covering roles prescribed by the What Works? Student retention and success change programme coordination team, was drawn from the working group, and suggestions were gathered there for suitable disciplines to be involved, all under the strategic overview of the Vice-Principal. The Convenor of the Working Group is project lead and the Retention Officer responsible for providing research and data support to the group became project manager and data expert in the core team.

We identified three disciplinary areas that, together, encapsulate major areas of challenge in improving student success, as evidenced by our own institutional research. The disciplines chose to be involved in order to put their ideas for interventions that fitted the What Works? themes into practice, with the support of the programme. The discipline leads were already involved in retention work on main campus or Dumfries campus and this enthusiasm and ownership within the discipline areas was crucial to the success.

Over the relatively long (3 year) duration of the change programme we lost members of the core team through secondments or staff leaving the University. Our student representatives have also changed due to sabbatical terms, however we have been lucky to have had continuity with some staying on, having taken a second sabbatical post. We have replaced core team members with those already involved in the programme by co-opting discipline leads onto the core team. This continuity has had clear benefits for running the programme. Co-opting the discipline leads into the core team has taken advantage of all their many years of experience in student retention and success and has created a strong team who met regularly throughout the change programme to discuss discipline and core activities in parallel.

Student input to the programme has been crucial. The University of Glasgow has strong student representation on committees and working groups across the institution and the core team has comprised two sabbatical officers from the Students' Representative Council (SRC) each year. They have provided support in terms of representation but also assisting

in the discipline evaluations i.e. co-facilitating focus groups. We also chose to have student representatives in each discipline team and their input and advice on developing interventions has been invaluable. We have, in fact, involved students in the project in all four types of student roles in co-creation of learning and teaching identified by Bovill *et al* (2015): the SRC sabbatical officers on the core team have provided representation (type 4) and co-researcher (type 2) activity as they helped with evaluation by co-facilitating student focus groups, for example; the course level representatives on the discipline teams acted as consultants (type 1) and as pedagogical co-designer (type 3) when developing the co-curricular activities on Dumfries campus, for example.

The first action of the core team was to suggest renaming the Working Group 'Retention & Success' to emphasise the more positive messages around student success. With updates from the change programme team as a standing item on the meeting agenda, the working group acted as a broader consultation group as the project progressed. Further opinion was gathered through staff consultations and workshops. For example, Deans of Learning & Teaching and their nominees were consulted on data use and reporting; and workshops were held with academic and services staff involved in supporting student retention and success to consider what the priorities are and what staff need to know.

In a large institution with local cultural practices historically embedded in different areas, it is a challenge to engage all staff with a project towards cultural change when there are so many competing and ever-changing priorities. The pace of change in such an institution can be slow. We found that workshops advertised to all staff did not get much interest and have had to come up with other ways of engaging more broadly with staff, such as presenting to established networks and committees. We hope that presenting outcomes of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme will provide a narrative to engage staff more with the ideas around student engagement and belonging for retention and success.

Evidence of impact

We have seen a positive model of central coordination of the project with full participation from Schools in three of our four Colleges. The evidence of the success of the approach comes from the level of support reported by the team members to enable their work and achievement of project goals. At the wider What Works? Student retention and success change programme meetings, this high level of support was very positively commented upon as project teams in every institution did not feel supported in the same ways.

In November 2014, the discipline leads at each institution were surveyed by the What Works? Student retention and success change programme facilitation team at the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access. When asked 'In what ways have the core team supported you to be effective this year?' all UofG respondents were unanimous in agreeing that the core team:

1. 'reviewed our plans and kept us on track',
2. 'met with us to review progress',
3. organised 'meetings with other discipline teams',
4. 'provided institutional data'.

And added "Our institutional core team were superb!"

The disciplines were supported by the core activities, such as improved data, as well as the administrative support from the project manager, particularly around deadlines for reports and activities. The discipline teams were supported through meetings and correspondence with shared ideas, and sharing of experience and expertise. As the project manager was also the retention and widening participation research and data expert, she was able to provide advice and resources for data and evaluation, including helping with evaluation directly by facilitating student focus groups, providing a neutral or independent interviewer/facilitator to encourage open and honest feedback from participants.

The benefits of the core team group comprising discipline leads were that everyone felt involved with all aspects of the project: able to comment on each discipline intervention as well as the institutional level activity. Embedding the programme team in existing committee structures provided a forum for broader discussion of aims and activities.

The students involved reported an appreciation of being able to contribute to developments of their programmes of study, and their involvement in the What Works? Student retention and success change programme has been recognised on their HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Record).

The staff involved have gained benefits beyond the original aims of impacting on belonging and engagement and contributing to the success of their own students. These include: working with colleagues across the institution and across the other institutions involved in the What Works? Student retention and success change programme, publication opportunities and professional development that can be used for HEA Fellowship applications, for example.

An unintended consequence, but very positive outcome, came from the project team and programme activities spanning two campuses of the University. The School of Interdisciplinary Studies is situated on Dumfries campus, 80 miles from Glasgow. At this distance, it is very easy for the School to feel separate from the main campus. This work has helped promote greater links between staff and students on main campus and on Dumfries campus by facilitating increased dialogue. Project team meetings were held in Dumfries as well as on the main campus, to promote in the discipline team there a sense of belonging to the institutional effort as part of the programme. Student interaction across the campuses and with the SRC also improved through the programme.

Sustainability

The work is embedded by our use of existing structures in the University, such as the Retention and Success Working Group. The working group is being replaced with a Transitions Working Group that we expect will continue the focus on retention and success beyond the period of the change programme. The move to cover all Student Transitions reflects the most recent QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme for the Scottish HE sector and our work on the What Works? Student retention and success change programme has also supported the move to 'Transitions'. This project has highlighted transitions as key for retention and success and supported the move to a more holistic approach across the student lifecycle with the positive connotations around supporting students rather than student retention.

We have captured the expertise of those currently involved in student retention and success to feed in to the new working group and they will get the reports from the What Works? Student retention and success change programme. Having 'piloted change' we aim to inform University strategy and policy through this group, for example with enhanced data now available to continue to monitor retention and success, to embed the notion of student engagement and engage staff with supporting transitions, to make the cultural shift that requires all staff to be involved in promoting belonging and engagement (Thomas, 2012, p.19).

Changes made in disciplines have been initiatives that are supported by Heads of Schools and are part of the longer-term strategies. These projects are fully owned by the disciplines and they are not reliant on short-term funding, therefore we expect them to be sustainable.

Lessons learnt

Utilising existing structures within a large and diverse institution to embed the work of a short-term project team can promote the success of the project as well as building in sustainability from the start.

We consider essential requirements for a successful project team are:

- support from senior management and existing committee structures
- a fully engaged team who feel ownership of the project
- student involvement wherever and whenever appropriate
- dedicated administration/ project management support so at least one person has a good overview of all activities and deadlines to keep the project on track
- continuity of team membership
- time to embed changes to see longer-term impact on student engagement and belonging, retention and success

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Case Study: Use of student retention data: developing data sets and reports

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Rationale for the case study

This case study will demonstrate the progress with retention data use and reporting that has been made during the What Works? Student retention and success change programme at the University of Glasgow. While there is more work to be done to optimise the data and make sure it is fit for use by audiences with different responsibilities across the institution, this case study provides an overview of our challenges and successes.

Description/discussion of the intervention or change initiative and successful aspects

The team at the University of Glasgow had a core aim in the What Works? Student retention and success change programme around improving retention data and the reporting of retention data. The Retention Working Group was first tasked with looking at retention data when it was set up in 2006. The HESA definition of non-continuation after year 1 was adopted as the main retention measure for internal use and senior management set an ambitious KPI based on benchmarking of the HESA data available for the main competitor group of HEIs (HESA, 2015). A dataset was developed that could be compared to that of HESA, and reports at Faculty level had been developed.

Two major institutional changes took place at the University in 2010 and 2011. In 2010, we moved from 9 Faculties to 4 Colleges and in 2011, a new Student Records system was introduced. With these major administrative changes came, unsurprisingly, some disruption at many levels across the institution. In terms of institutional data and management information, not only did the source of the data change but structures for reporting also changed as departments and faculties merged or split to fit the new College structure.

Previous reporting systems were temporarily suspended and the timing of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme in 2012/2013 made retention data an obvious focus at the institutional level: to restore previous functionality and improve both the datasets used and reporting from the new system.

The reports had to enable monitoring of whether the previous improvements we had seen in student retention in year 1 (through an institutional focus on the first year student experience, in line with the sectoral focus precipitated by QAA Scotland's Enhancement

Theme, n.d.) were maintained but also to be able to highlight retention of certain demographic groups of students, where it lagged behind the average.

Since 2012, the Scottish Funding Council have placed an increased focus on improving access to HE and retention in HE of students from the most socio-economically disadvantaged postcodes. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is the measure used to identify relative socio-economic deprivation in areas across Scotland (Scottish Government, 2012). As those from the 20% or 40% most disadvantaged postcodes (herein as MD20 or MD40) are known to be underrepresented in HE, endeavours to widen access and participation are now measured in terms of proportions of MD20/40 students in Scottish HEIs. In addition, institutional Outcome Agreements with the Scottish Government have cemented a commitment to not only improving access to university study but improving the retention of students from MD20/40 postcodes. Across Scotland, MD40 student retention lags behind the average by around 3-4% and students at the University of Glasgow show a similar discrepancy when compared to the cohort average (SFC, 2015). With a good record of widening participation for a Scottish ancient institution, we have a high proportion of MD40 students and their retention and success is a focus, as these 'non-traditional' students may be expected to be more at risk of withdrawing from studies (Thomas, 2002) and have particular issues around engagement and belonging (Thomas, 2012).

The What Works? Student retention and success change programme team investigated data that could be incorporated to better identify disengaged students, in order to enhance the resources available to staff to monitor retention and success and be able to offer timely support (Thomas, 2012). For example, 'electronic footprint' data on students' use of VLE, logins and card swipes, was considered; to supplement attendance records with further evidence of physical and electronic engagement with the campus and their learning, in the academic sphere as well as the social and service spheres identified in What Works? Phase I (Thomas, 2012, p.16). While examination showed the additional electronic data could be a useful addition to sources for learning analytics, this task was not without challenges as it relied upon input from a number of services across the institution.

The Planning and Business Intelligence service took the lead on generating reliable retention data from management information in the new Student Records system and we developed reports that showed aggregated summaries of student continuation and progression from year 1 and year 2 (pre-Honours years in the four year Scottish undergraduate degree), for the whole cohort and for the subgroups of Scottish students from disadvantaged postcode areas. This included historical data to show a five year trend at institution, College and School level, as well as the 'first look' at the latest cohort, that would be reported by HESA next year.

The programme team carried out extensive consultation with the Retention & Success Working Group (RSWG) and Deans of Learning & Teaching and their nominated key staff in each of the four Colleges, to investigate: data available, optimal management information report format, types and granularity of data required in different areas of the University, structures for dissemination of data. Degree structures and organisation vary and we found some areas required differing levels of analysis of data, for example, different student groups are of more or less interest depending on³⁴ the demographics in the degree programme cohorts. We found different audiences required different levels and types of data,

depending on their responsibilities. While data was requested for many staff roles, the management information required to develop strategy and performance indicators was not applicable to that required by the Advising teams or course leaders to offer support to individual students.

Reports were made for Deans of Learning & Teaching to disseminate through College Learning & Teaching committees to School Learning & Teaching representatives, as well as through College representatives on the RSWG. Summary reports covering all four Colleges went to RSWG and the University Learning & Teaching committee for the Vice-Principal to take to Senior Management Group. While the dissemination at committee level has been good, there remains work to be done on reporting to more local levels, to all course leaders, for example, as well as being able to provide data at such fine granularity.

The Students' Representative Council were consulted through the working group. Students appear to have become less worried about monitoring, possibly due to young people's increasing use of digital platforms in all aspects of their lives, and particularly when it comes with a positive intent, such as to support student retention and success. However, information security issues and the ethics around use of personal data remain at the forefront in today's 'big data' society, and use of learning analytics in education has recently been examined (Sclater, 2015).

Evidence of impact

The evidence of the success so far comes from the feedback during consultation with the Retention & Success Working Group, and Deans of Learning & Teaching and use of the data by senior management, as well as the discipline leads in the What Works? Student retention and success change programme.

While historical trends were of interest, the most useful data was the 'first look' at the most recent cohorts. Measures of student retention and success have an inevitable time lag due to the longitudinal tracking of student progress required, whereas annual changes or tweaks to curriculum and the flux in all aspects of learning and teaching and institutional life can make the historical data quickly seem out of date. It was, for example, important for the discipline teams involved in the change programme to have up to date data for their School cohorts, in order to evaluate discipline level initiatives.

Changes in attitudes of staff towards the data included an increased level of trust in the reliability and relevance of the data provided. This change in attitude is the first step in being able to identify areas where improvements or changes in behaviour or practice need to be made to enable students' engagement and belonging, retention and success.

Sustainability

The work is embedded by our use of existing structures in the University, such as the Retention and Success Working Group. The working group is being replaced with a Transitions Working Group that we expect will continue the focus on retention and success beyond the period of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme. This will include working with the relevant university services to continue to produce and

improve retention data and ways of reporting on it. Work is ongoing to explore new datasets that could be informative, and increased use of data visualisation software should allow bespoke reports to become available to the different audiences within the institution.

Lessons learnt

There is a lot of data collected in a Higher Education Institution that can be used to inform practice to support student retention and success. It is not always readily available or easy to work with and this can be exacerbated by changes to systems or the administrative structures of the institution. However, we found the endeavour can pay dividends as reliable data can be an enabler to start to engage staff with issues and provide the agency to make changes to practice.

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Case Study: Expanding induction and using the VLE to enhance induction to First year Life Science.

Dr Maureen Griffiths & Dr Chris Finlay, School of Life Sciences Discipline Leads, University of Glasgow: What Works? Student Retention & Success Change Programme (2012-2015).

Abstract:

The compulsory first year Biology courses run within the School of Life Sciences has an annual intake of 650-750 students, with more than 20 different degrees represented in the class. With a relatively small staff management team the VLE has become central to fostering student engagement and communication. Transition into first year undergraduate study is a recognised challenge for students and the VLE has become central to reinforce delivery of the induction experience traditionally covered in lectures. The VLE is now being used to engage with the class and make essential information / learning activities easily accessible to all. There is still a need to reinforce specific material with face-to-face teaching activities, highlighting key information and providing an opportunity to answer any student questions. Student feedback and VLE logs have helped determine what resources are needed and how to make them accessible. The logs and feedback have also helped identify what content benefits from being delivered in other ways, e.g. exercises run in lectures, laboratory classes or online. We are now into the third year of developing this induction process and student feedback, along with VLE activity, has been captured throughout.

Rationale for the case study:

There are two first-year Biology courses, compulsory for all Life Science students, at the University of Glasgow. These courses have an annual intake of 650 -750 students. Approximately 500 of these students each year will be enrolled onto one of 18 degrees offered by the School. The remaining students are enrolled onto degree programmes offered by other colleges. The courses are designed to introduce students to undergraduate level study and highlight the biological detail central to all strands of our Life Science degrees.

These courses comprise one third of a student's curriculum. A multi-subject curriculum like this inevitably leads to duplication of first year induction activities. In reality this and the short time frame that these tend to be delivered in, normally fresher's week, means that students receive a lot of the same information from multiple sources, in multiple ways which may be leading to confusion.

As phase 1 of the What works? Student retention and success programme identifies there are a large range of issues impacting student access to HE. One such challenge is the transition process into first year undergraduate study (Thomas, 2012). For this study as part of phase 2 – the What works? Student retention and success change programme, the focus has been on making the induction process more appropriate and supportive of students from the very beginning (Lowe & Cook, 2010, Yorke, 2000, Leese, 2010).

Unfortunately, in a bid to ensure all students are aware of the essential induction material we could be in danger of overloading the students with too much information at

the start of their first semester. Thomas (2012, p25) states ‘ An effective induction actively engages students rather than being a passive process of providing information, and it extends over a longer time period than a few days. The activities should allow students to make friends, get to know the academic staff, understand the expectations of the institution, department and programme and develop academic skills.’

When considering how to best readdress our induction activities the course team appraised course evaluations, minutes from class rep meetings and student comments from focus groups discussions. It became clear that there were a few common areas around induction that it would be beneficial to focus on.

Firstly, the timing of the current induction activities and the repetition of these activities may not be the best way to deliver these important activities.

‘it was like there was loads and loads of intro lectures. Like loads and loads of intro lectures, an unnecessary amount...’

Secondly it quickly became apparent that students were concerned about not being aware or being able to easily work out, what was the expected level of work within their undergraduate courses.

‘The intensity [of first year] totally blindsided me. I wasn’t prepared for it and then from the beginning I found I was behind, because it went from totally relaxed to suddenly having multiple assignments on one day.’

‘...there isn’t really any kind of expected level ...and then obviously you get hit with stuff quite quickly so you don’t know where to pitch it, you don’t know where you are supposed to be.’

This case study will outline the response to try and address these student concerns and highlight some the initiatives designed with an aim of improving induction to help student’s acclimatise to university study.

Case Study: Description/discussion of the intervention or change initiative and successful aspects:

Initially the focus was on expanding the current induction session over a longer period to try and reduce information overload in the first few days of the first semester. The opportunity to have more face-to-face time with course staff and the ability to have specific questions answered was also considered. It was hoped that by expanding induction beyond a lecture in fresher’s week the content will make more sense to students and be more memorable. Specific activities include:

- Redesigning the introductory lectures to provide a longer, more contextual outlook including degree pathways, research opportunities, and student support. This longer induction culminated in a question and answer session.

The introductory lecture used to be one, fifty-minute presentation where all the course structure, student support information and timetabling detail was delivered. Students were also given a copy of the course information document at this lecture.

This has now been redesigned to introduce similar material but over the first couple of weeks with links to current research and degree pathways. When appropriate the university structure and student support services are introduced within the context of the biological detail being delivered. E.g. a member of student support staff helps deliver a 'getting the best out of your lectures' session. This builds throughout the semester with the support staff also helping deliver skills sessions on scientific writing, exam preparation etc.

A question and answer session was incorporated into the third week of the semester. Students are encouraged to e-mail their questions to the course staff so that they can collate and identify common questions. The answers are brought to the session itself and made available to all students via the VLE. Time is also included for an open floor format to allow students to ask additional questions.

- Supplying the Course Information Document (CID) to all students before the start of teaching.

The CID includes detail on the course assessments, detailed lecture synopsis as well as recommended reading and key words. In addition detail on the University's assessment, grading and additional support systems are presented for the students to see.

This had initially been suggested by the class reps as a way to let students explore the course in advance of the teaching starting. It was relatively easy to e-mail an electronic copy of the CID to the incoming Life Science students as the Biology courses are compulsory for them.

However, for the remaining 150-250 students the biology courses are optional at the time of enrolment. This immediately created a divide in who gets what information in the class.

- Supporting groups such as mature students who wish to develop a peer-peer support network.

With such a large class there are a diverse population of students. It was made clear to all students that we would encourage them, and support them, if they wished to establish their own peer support groups and networks.

This initiative has had variable response across the two years. In the first year several peer groups came together and course staff were able to provide meeting spaces, answer questions etc. These groups tended to be comprised of mature students from the course and they met regularly across both semesters of their first year. In the second year there were a small number of students who formed groups in this way. Or, very few that made themselves known to the course staff. This may be down to changing demographics within the course and the increase in student societies and other support groups (e.g. The International Student Network). Or, it may be that more staff involvement is required to encourage more peer support activities.

quick and easy communication between students and staff. Students currently get access to the VLE once they enrol on a Biology course.

The VLE has allowed for the design of specific activities aimed at helping students understand the expectations placed on undergraduate students in Biology and assess their own level of current knowledge as the course begins. The ability also exists for students to 'map' their own work and level throughout the course. Specific activities include:

- Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs).

Five SAEs are used within each semester's course. These were formative/ revision online quizzes focussed on specific content from the course lecture series. A large question bank was created and the VLE ensured that each student received a random selection of questions. These quizzes included MCQs, calculation, problem solving and text response questions. These opened on the day after the specific lecture block finished and remained live for one week. Students could take the quiz at any time and receive feedback on their answers and overall performance.

VLE quizzes are also used in the course as summative assessments with the main difference being the addition of a timer to the quiz and only 1 attempt being allowed. The student feedback on the SAEs has been very positive and they quickly asked that a timer be included in these as well to better simulate the summative assessment experience.

'I think they're really good online quizzes...I get the feeling that what its aimed at is making sure that you're revising as you go along.'

- A Biology 'Taster Quiz'.

A 'Taster Quiz' was also created within the VLE to allow students to experience first year level questions. This included a selection of questions from the semester's topics and was live during the first week of the semester. It was made very clear to all students that this quiz was to gain experience of the level of assessment they will encounter in the course. The score was unimportant as the content had not been delivered at this point. Students were also made aware that the same quiz would go live at the end of the semester if they wanted to assess how much their learning and understanding had changed over the course.

- Mock exam papers.

There are no past exam papers for the first year Biology courses and students are very keen to experience what the exam format is going to be like. In addition to the 'Exam Preparation' lecture and exam layout information on the VLE, a mock exam paper was created as an online quiz. This quiz reproduced the various sections of the exam paper for the students to complete. This received very positive feedback but the students also continued to request access to a paper copy. The questions used in the online quiz have been pulled together into a paper format exam and again made available as a pdf file on the VLE.

Lastly, the University of Glasgow normally runs an early warning system where student

engagement data (attendance, assessment completion etc.) is centrally analysed in week 6 of semester 1. Any students who are identified as having marginal, or no, engagement with their studies are flagged up and contacted to discuss their progress. This is a useful process and helps identify students who may benefit the most from supportive interventions by the School. However, the limitation of the early warning system is that it only takes place at one time point in the semester and by week 6 it may already be too late to make any meaningful intervention for some of the most at risk students (Thomas, 2012).

The use of the VLE logs and physical attendance data opens up the possibility that real time engagement indicators can allow for more timely contact and discussion with students deemed to be at risk. In the Biology courses lab attendance is compulsory and recorded at each session. A system was designed that flagged up students when they missed 2, 3 and 4 labs. An automatic e-mail was sent out at each step with specific text highlighting the importance of attendance and the requirement to attend to pass the course. The students' advisors of studies were also included in the e-mails and every attempt was made to make contact with the students.

This has proved to be very beneficial for two reasons. Firstly, it became obvious that even though we think we are clearly explaining the attendance requirements for the course a lot of students are unaware of it. The 2 labs missed e-mail highlights this requirement and helps to ensure that no student is mistakenly caught out because they thought attendance was optional. It also helped start a discussion with any students who were going through a difficult time and were unsure who to talk to or what to do.

Secondly these e-mails also helped identify the students who had decided that the course, or University study, was not for them. Again this started a discussion with these students over their reasons for leaving the course or the University. The Adviser of Study could also contact students at this stage to offer support outwith the course.

These discussions are now happening at a much earlier time than previously giving staff and students more opportunity to discuss exactly what is going on and what support the university can provide.

Lecture attendance is also recorded. This has proved a time consuming and expensive exercise for the school but again allows for earlier identification of students that appear to be disengaging with their studies. The students seem to be realising this as well:

'...the good thing about taking attendance is that if somebody is consistently not attending at least the staff when they are caring will register the non-attendance and start to look into why and if you are having a problem they will try and intervene and help you, which shows a good attitude.'

Evidence of impact:

The information and data below was collected from course evaluations, class rep meetings and activity logs from the course VLE. This data is representative of the two academic sessions.

- **Redesigned introductory lectures and Q&A session.**

Student feedback on these sessions has been very positive and the addition of the Q&A session has been well received by the class. It is worth noting that the questions forwarded each year have been different, as the questions from the

previous year were used to update the course VLE pages to make the information more obvious. The attendance levels throughout this extended induction ranged from 96-80% of the class in both years. For reference, by the end of the semester attendance is normally 60-70%.

- **Supplying the CID in advance to all students.**
 This has proved popular with the Life Science students but the non-Life Science students commented that they felt a bit behind as the information was not specifically sent to them. The CID is available on the course VLE and all students can access this as soon as they enrol on the course. Better signposting to this resource on the VLE may be a better way to allow students access at the point of enrolment.
- **Supporting groups setting up peer support groups.**
 The engagement with this process has been variable and to date has been left for students to start the process. The possibility of creating better links with existing student groups is being explored.
- **Self-Assessment Exercises.**
 These have proved to be very popular with our students and now also go live with unlimited attempts during the course revision period. These quizzes have seen anywhere between 11,315 – 1,117 views. However when they opened for the 1 week revision period they received between 49,348 and 26,103 views on the VLE, highlighting their usefulness and accessibility.
- **Biology Taster Quiz.**
 Student feedback on this has been positive with students reminding us that we need to make it very clear that quiz is for experience, and that students are not expected to know the answers at the start of the course. This quiz has had over 28,000 views on the VLE with over 72% of the class attempting the quiz in week 1 of the semester, with an average score of 10/20. It is worth noting that almost 54% of the class revisited the quiz later in the semester with an average score of 18/20.
- **Mock Exam Paper.**
 This is now available in both formats; as an online quiz and as a pdf file that recreates the 'paper' format of the exam. The online quiz has received more than 9,900 views and the pdf file has been viewed over 2,050 times. Students continue to tell us that these are very useful to them and encourage us to create more.
- **Additional Evidence:**
 There is lots of qualitative evidence of the success of these initiatives from the course evaluations and class rep meetings that have taken place over the last few years, as well as focus groups. Quantitative evidence has been provided by the data gathered as part of the What Works? Engagement and belonging survey (Yorke, 2014). This survey shows that student self-confidence has increased from 2013-2015. In addition there is evidence that:

 - Students feel more at home at the University.
 - Students are more willing to seek out academic staff to discuss their course.
 - Students are more confident that they will successfully complete their course.

Looking at institutional retention data, we compared the continuation rates after year 1 for the 2012 entry cohort with the subsequent cohorts who experienced our enhanced activities as part of the programme. We looked at UK domiciled cohorts, as reported to HESA, and Scottish students with an MD40 postcode. In the Scottish sector as a whole, retention of MD40 students lags by around 4% (SFC report 2015).

For all of these groups there has been a consistent upward trend with an average increase of almost 3% in continuation rates. Analysis of mean marks shows very little variation across the different years that the What Works interventions have been in place. This highlights nicely that the interventions are influencing continuation rates rather than academic achievement.

Within Life Sciences, this confirms the outcome from the belongingness survey indicating a positive change in students' attitude to their undergraduate studies.

Sustainability:

The initiatives described in this case study require a lot of joined up thinking from the course team. It is worth noting that the student involvement in this process has been invaluable and will continue to help direct the development of the course, and induction, for our first years.

In addition, as the capabilities within the VLE change other induction activities may be identified and incorporated into the course.

One further development is the recent creation of a central VLE page available for all Life Science students, irrespective of year or programme of study. This site aims to centralise the useful information and support that students may need throughout their studies. This again helps to prevent duplication, and possible inaccuracies, across multiple courses and VLE sites, and helps students visualise their learning across the four year degree programme. A bank of FAQs will be built up as a student resource.

There is now a proposal to have an "open" VLE that prospective students can access before they enrol on any course. This will allow realistic expectation of level of study at University. This will look similar to actual VLE to allow seamless transition on arrival. This will be an evolving resource for future cohorts.

Lesson learnt:

The main lesson from this experience is that all the activities need to make sense in combination with each other. Stand-alone activities appear to be perceived as one off and quickly ignored or forgotten. Building a joined up sequence of activities with opportunities for students to interact with and question course staff has proven to be very beneficial. This can be backed up with VLE activities but there is still a real need for face-to-face discussion with the students at this crucial point in their university career. Both approaches can work together to help foster a sense of belongingness in the students.

Student involvement and discussion is also essential in making sure that the activities are fit for purpose. This will be a never ending process as changes in the student cohort, school level curriculum changes and VLE changes will require continual development and consideration for what is being delivered.

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Caste Study: CLANs – Peer mentoring on a rural campus

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RATIONALE

There are three undergraduate programmes on offer at the Dumfries campus of the University of Glasgow: The three programmes are MA in Primary Education (MAPE), MA in Health and Social Policy (HSP) and BSc in Environmental Science (ES). The MAPE programme has roughly fifty percent of the undergraduate students with the other two programmes equally split. Part of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme theme is co-curricular student activity and as a result of discussions which took place at the Staff Student Liaison Committee it was decided to introduce peer mentoring on to the campus at Dumfries. After researching the format of such schemes at the University of Glasgow main campus and at other institutions, including those part of What Works? phase 1, it was agreed that the traditional structure of mothers, fathers and siblings was not suitable. It was felt that this traditional family structure may well not have been the norm for large numbers of first year students and that another structure should be sought. The concept of the CLAN was then developed to stand for Campus Life Advice Network. The importance of the peer mentoring scheme and its benefits were clearly documented in the HEA What Works? Phase 1 report (Thomas, 2012) and the associated 'Peer Mentoring

Works! Institutional Manual' (November 2011). This defines peer mentoring in Higher Education as follows:

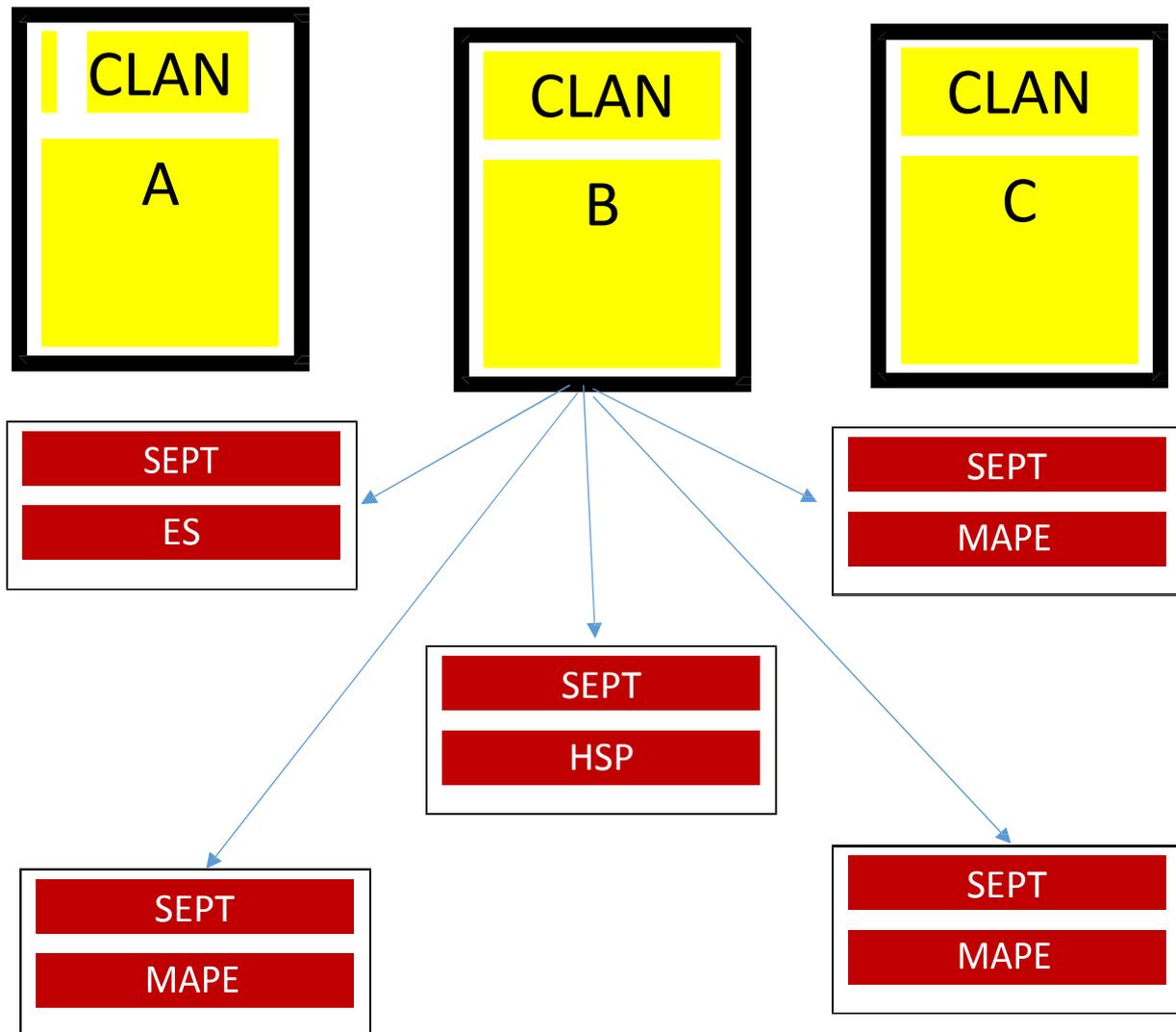
Within the UK higher education context, peer mentoring relates to the concept of reciprocal peer support and learning whereby a peer mentor helps to enhance and promote the overall university experience of either an individual student or group of fellow students. Peer mentors are generally slightly more advanced in their studies than peer mentees.....

The most important aspect of peer mentoring is that it provides the ideal means by which new students can develop a sense of belonging. It also acts as a safety net with mentors adopting a variety of roles ranging from friend and confidante, learning facilitator or 'study'buddy'.

As there are three undergraduate programmes on offer at the campus it was decided that the CLANs should incorporate students from across all three programmes. Each CLAN would be made up of smaller mentoring groups known as SEPTs – Student Experience Peer Team- each of which would be programme specific.(fig 1). This structure was decided on after feedback from the initial pilot scheme which found that students concluded it useful to meet with students from the same programme for academic discussions but also wanted to meet with students from across the campus for social events. There are also CLAN gatherings which are events designed for all the students on the campus to attend.

FIG 1.

EACH CLAN HAS 5 SEPTS
AND CLAN CHIEFTAIN (third year student)



EACH SEPT HAS BETWEEN 5 AND 7 FIRST YEAR MEMBERS
AND A SECOND YEAR STUDENT MENTOR

CLAN Campus Life Advice Network
SEPT Student Experience Peer Team

The scheme was developed with three members of teaching staff and one third year student who had been a member of the Staff Student Liaison Committee and was one of the first to suggest the idea of student mentoring on the campus. The concept of the CLAN structure was developed as it was felt that this would give the campus a peer mentoring structure which was Scottish themed and therefore relevant to the Campus. The pilot scheme was developed and the first CLANS created for the start of semester 2. A Burns ceilidh evening was organised to launch the structure. This was well attended. Initially, however, the clans met intermittently and really only took off later in the semester when assignments became due. A review of the pilot scheme was carried out at the end of semester with the mentors. The main points that came out of the focus group were the following:

- Scheme had to run from semester 1
- Training of mentors was essential
- Social clan gatherings were very important

As a result of this mentors were chosen for the following year and training was organised. Mentees were allocated to mentors before the start of semester 1. Unfortunately there was a problem organising the second year mentors to meet their mentees during induction as the majority of mentors were from the largest programme(MAPE) and they were on school placement for the four weeks running up to the start of semester one. This resulted in the scheme having a slower start than was hoped for and once again it only took off once assignments were due. Another CLAN gathering was organised at the start of semester two. By then the scheme was becoming embedded and SEPTs were beginning to meet more regularly. The relevance of the scheme was being more appreciated by the students and as a result twenty students volunteered to become mentors the following year. As a result of feedback gathered through a survey of mentors and mentees, carried out alongside focus groups at this point, further development of the scheme took place. Some illustrative comments are listed below:

MENTORS:

'Some mentees engage more than others'

'I found my mentees were more likely to get in touch close to assignment deadlines and during placements'

'I think it creates a friendly atmosphere on campus because it is now less divided by year group.'

'I feel I have become more confident within myself and have improved my people skills.'

'I feel mentees should be given email addresses of mentors before semester'

MENTEES:

'It was nice knowing that there was someone to ask who had been in the same position'

'It helped academically as I got lots of advice on how to organise my work load and what is expected from lecturers'

'The best element is knowing someone who is more experienced to whom you can questions. The worst is that there are not enough social events'

'I gained more confidence in my own abilities as I got to know more CLAN members.'

It was clear that it was essential for initial contact to take place at least during induction week if not before via email. As a result in a change of the structure of the MAPE programme second year students no longer had an August placement which therefore made it possible to have CLAN meetings during induction week in 2015. It was also clear that Mentors needed more training and so training of the mentors took place over a four week period during semester two. Mentees were allocated at the start of the following August and meetings arranged for induction week. A CLAN supper was organised as part of the social events for induction week. With the improved training and the early start of the scheme the CLANS have met regularly and meaningfully since the start of semester one. Internal and external factors influencing success were as follows;

- dedicated development team including a very engaged student representative;
- funding successfully secured from a University of Glasgow fund to produce training materials and subsidise social events;
- support from Head of School.

EVIDENCE

A major aim of the scheme was to ensure that first year students had an increase in their feeling of belongingness and the cohesiveness of the campus community. There was also a hope that there would be an increase in involvement of students in campus activities including the committees on the campus. Evidence of the success can be seen qualitatively from student feedback gathered from focus groups and surveys and quantitatively from the following data gathered from the 'What Works?' Engagement and Belonging survey (Yorke,2014) carried out during the past three years.

	Nov-2013		Nov-2014		Nov-2015	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Belongingness Scale	46	4.10	66	4.35	64	4.39
Engagement Scale	46	4.10	66	4.04	64	4.03
Self Confidence Scale	46	3.51	66	3.34	64	3.61

The data shows that the belongingness factor has improved. It is also the case from this data that that the feeling of belongingness is consistently stronger on the Dumfries campus than at the university as a whole.

There was also a 9.8% improvement in first year student continuation in the year 2013-14 from the previous year.

The take up of students attending the SSLC meetings regularly is very noticeable. There have been many more meetings this year and from an average students attendance of 7 or 8 last year this year it has increased to 19 to 20.

There have already been two large CLAN gatherings organised with an attendance of over 90 to each event.

Feedback from mentors about contact during semester one of the current year has been very positive with details of many more meetings and discussions already taking place. Some illustrative comments.

I have emailed my group on a number of occasions to see how they are getting on and met up with them as a group on a couple of occasions

We have all added each other on Facebook so we can contact each other easily if need be, and they all know they can come to me if they need any help with anything.

They agreed that the clan meeting and the ceilidh was a good thing and they would certainly like more of these events to take place so they can get to know more people.

The topics discussed with my mentees were: placement and what to expect (e.g. what happens during a tutor visit) and I shared my placement experience with them, exams. assessment guidelines (referencing, reliable sources, recommended textbooks they should read), settling in and new environments, the night life, clubs available within the university (CUCSA), we also discussed electives and how relevant they were in regards to their studies and future careers and we have briefly discussed international exchange and opportunities to be involved in the mentoring scheme

SUSTAINABILITY

While more intensive staff involvement was required initially for development and set up it is hoped that the scheme will become more controlled by the students themselves with each CLAN being allocated a staff advisor who will deal with issues that mentors feel they need help with. Financially the scheme will have to become self supporting with money being raised to allow the social events, which are a very important aspect, to be organised. Discussions and ideas about to raise funds are ongoing. Future developments include some form of branding of the CLANS so that the students remain members of CLANS for the full time of their studies and in this way the scheme should be sustained by the senior CLAN members taking on more of the organisation year on year.

LESSONS LEARNT

Two major lessons were learned. The first was that comprehensive training of the mentors is essential. This was made apparent from several mentee feedback comments which highlighted that some mentors had failed to communicate effectively throughout the pilot scheme. The second was that the CLANS have to be in place for induction week so that the students can make contact as soon as they arrive on campus. The evidence gathered from the initial pilot was essential in informing the design and final structure of the scheme. Input from students in development and as part of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme project team was also invaluable.

REFERENCES

Clark, R., Andrews,J., & Davies,K. (2011). *Peer Mentoring Works! Institutional Manual*

Thomas,L. (2012). *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change:final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme.*

Yorke, M. (2014). *The development and initial use of a survey of student 'belongingness', engagment and self-confidence in UK higher education*, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education. Available online (accessed 21 September 2015)