

What Works? Student Retention & Success



Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change

University of Salford
April 2017

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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 (referred to as What Works?2 hereafter) 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. Description of the institution and its disciplines to provide contextual overview

The University of Salford traces its roots back to the late nineteenth century and the establishment of the Royal Technical Institute, providing advanced training and education to develop a skilled local workforce for world-renowned industries. This tradition continues today on a much larger scale; the university aims to offer real world experiences to its 19,000 students so that they are prepared for life as graduates who will contribute to society and shape industry, the economy and jobs of the future. Salford offers undergraduate and master's degrees in the broad discipline areas of the arts, media, social sciences, health and social care, sport, business, science, technology and the built environment.

Salford is proud of its strong track record in widening access to higher education among under-represented groups. The university consistently exceeds HESA institutional widening participation indicators for young entrants from state schools and colleges, lower socio-economic groups and low participation neighbourhoods. More than half of the total student population is mature, with students over the age of 21 on entry accounting for over a third of full-time UK domiciled undergraduate entrants in 2014/15. Two thirds of applicants who are admitted to Salford's undergraduate degrees have non-A level entry qualifications and a growing number of students live at home whilst studying and commute to class. An overview of the university's undergraduate population and the disciplines participating in *What Works?* is shown in Appendix 1. These data are highlighted as appropriate in this report.

Although Salford is successful in widening access to higher education, it has been less successful in retaining students through their undergraduate journey to completion of their degree. Diverse student populations present complexities and challenges in supporting students' transition to university-level study, and their retention and academic attainment. In 2007 the National Audit Office reported that 'some types of students are less likely to finish their course' (NAO, 2007 p20), leading to the establishment of *What Works?*1 to inquire what factors genuinely make a difference to student retention and success. More recently, Woodfield (2014) noted that certain background characteristics, such as age and distance between pre-HE address and HE provider, intersect in ways that are linked to higher non-continuation rates and variation in student attainment in individual disciplines.

The same study found male students more likely to be unsuccessful in their studies than female students. The *What Works?* survey across all participating institutions reveals that female students report more engagement with their study (but lower self-confidence) than male students. Female students are in the majority at Salford; the ratio is typical of University Alliance institutions. However the students on all the disciplines taking part in the project, except Performance, are predominantly male.

Moreover, students who enter university on the basis of vocational qualifications are more likely to come from areas with low participation in HE and have demographic characteristics that are associated with lower academic outcomes (Shields and Masado, 2015).

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Across the sector young entrants from areas that have low participation in HE are more likely to withdraw during their first year of study.

For English institutions the non-continuation rate for these students is 8.2 per cent compared with 5.7 per cent of entrants from other neighbourhoods (using POLAR3 methodology for 2013/14 entrants, HESA, 2016). Salford is making progress to reverse this trend and has recently seen a higher proportion of young low-participation students continue or qualify at the university – 87 per cent – compared to 85.1 per cent of the remaining young population (ibid). Entrants from other neighbourhoods have a slightly lower non-continuation rate - 10.1 per cent as opposed to 10.6 per cent – because a higher proportion of this group transfer to another HE provider (ibid).

A range of institutional initiatives have been implemented in the course of the last ten years that aimed to improve student retention and success. These included a Salford Retention Group, the appointment of individual academics as Widening Participation Champions and Retention Officers, and a Widening Participation and Retention Forum. Whilst these activities and groups were well intentioned, they lacked systematic co-ordination and coherence and, by concentrating on retention, they risked ‘mistaking the symptoms for the cause’ (Yorke and Longden, 2004 p. 132). As one of 13 institutions participating in the *What Works?*2 change programme, the university aimed to build its own evidence base of ‘what works at Salford’ and establish ways of creating sustainable change that are woven into the fabric of ‘how we do things’ as part of day to day activities.

1.1. Members of the core team

Team Role	Name	Position in university
Senior Institutional Manager	Professor Huw Morris (2012-13) Dr Sam Grogan (2014-16)	Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic Dean of Students
Project Lead	Gillian Molyneaux	Executive Policy Officer
Academic Lead	Debbie Whittaker	Associate Dean Academic, School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work & Social Sciences
Academic Support	Janet Lloyd (2013-14)	Head of Academic Development
Data Expert	David Singer	Planning Manager
Student Representative	Todd Hewitt (2013-14) Danielle Hinds (2014-15)	Vice-President, Students’ Union School Representative, Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work & Social Sciences
Discipline Lead, Aeronautical Engineering	Peter Bradbury (2012-2015)	Programme Leader
Discipline Lead, Music & Performance	Steve Davismoon	Director, Music & Performance
Discipline Lead, Sports Science	Helen Matthews	Programme Leader

1.2. Participating disciplines, programmes, members of the discipline teams, *What Works?* theme(s) addressed.

Discipline	Aeronautical Engineering
Programmes	MEng (Hons)/BEng (Hons) Aeronautical Engineering MEng (Hons)/BEng (Hons) Aircraft Engineering with Pilot Studies
Intervention theme	Co-curricular: Peer Mentoring
Discipline Team	Peter Bradbury – Discipline Lead Dr Philip Atcliffe Dr Les Johnston Robert Knight

Disciplines	Music and Performance
Programmes	BA (Hons) Music and associated Pathways BA (Hons) Performance and associated Pathways
Intervention theme	Co-curricular: Personal Tutoring
Discipline Team	Professor Stephen Davismoon – Discipline Lead Dr Tracy Crossley Denise Vernon Brendan Williams

Discipline	Sports Science
Programme	BSc (Hons) Sports Science
Intervention theme	Induction
Discipline Team	Helen Matthews – Discipline Lead Kay Hack Paul Jones John McMahon Clare Marsh Danielle Prescott

1.3. Significant internal changes or context to be taken into account when reading this report

The university has experienced a period of significant internal change throughout the *What Works?* programme. A series of senior management and governance changes took place between 2013 and 2015, including the re-framing of key leadership roles and the appointment of a new Chief Operating Officer, Chair of Council and Vice-Chancellor. The cross cutting role of Dean of Students was created in spring 2014 with the express remit of driving and facilitating improvements to the student experience across the institution. In parallel with these leadership changes, reviews of governance arrangements have resulted in changes to executive, Senate and Council structures and ways of

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working, leading to greater clarity of responsibilities and increased emphasis on student retention and attainment.

Structurally, the configuration of academic schools has been streamlined, moving from twelve academic schools located across four colleges, to seven schools that report directly to the university centre. Similarly, a review of Professional Services has led to a realignment of activity to more effectively support the strategic direction of the institution and provide seamless support to students. A new one-stop shop for student support - askUS - was opened in April 2015, bringing together a number of related student services in a single 'hub'. A major project entitled 'Enabling the Student Journey' is currently in train which aims to deliver significant benefits across student-facing processes via a renewed student information system.

Over the last eighteen months the university has embarked on major projects to overhaul its planning function, resulting in the introduction of a new planning framework, development of a new institutional strategic vision and production of a suite of academic and supporting functional strategies that will come into operation in 2016/17.

This complex organisational backdrop presented challenges to the *What Works?* core team's original plans (see section 3 Planning for and implementing change). How the team responded to this changing environment to deliver meaningful institutional change is described in the case study: *The challenge of creating change in a changing landscape*.

1.4. External national context

Just as Salford's internal context is characterised by major changes, the current external national landscape reflects significant shifts in the regulation, governance and operation of the HE sector in England and the UK. After more than 10 years of measures to control the number of students entering HE, the cap on student numbers was abolished in 2015/16. Over the last five or six years there has been growing awareness at Salford that retaining a greater proportion of the students already recruited to the university was an important means of 'expanding' student numbers within the parameters of funding council controls. Figures released by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) indicate that UK HE providers delivered improved first-year continuation rates in the period since the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee expressed concern about the lack of progress to address drop-out rates in 2007 and 2008. Of young entrants to HE in 2011/12 and 2012/13, 5.7 per cent did not continue on their original or another programme the following year, compared with 7.2 per cent of 2007/08 entrants.

However, data published in March 2016 show a slight rise in non-continuation among young, first year entrants who started their programme in 2013/14 to 6 per cent. Although this increase is small and pre-dates the removal of student number controls, it is potentially a timely reminder to the sector to avoid complacency in efforts to support student retention and success in the increasingly competitive market signalled by the HE white paper *Success as a knowledge economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*.

The overall positive trend in student retention over the last few years masks significant variation between different groups. A higher proportion of mature full-time students withdraw than young entrants, and part-time students of all ages are more likely to drop-out. Young students from areas that have low rates of participation in HE also have higher withdrawal rates. The introduction of increased tuition fees of up to £9,000 per year has not, so far, diminished demand for access to HE by traditionally under-represented groups, but the funding council has speculated whether the increase in mature student withdrawals – up from 10.3 per cent of 2011/12 entrants to 12 per cent

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of those entering in 2012/13 - is linked to higher fees (HEFCE, 2016). Interestingly, the sizeable gap in non-continuation between young and mature entrants at sector level is not evident at Salford. Latest publicly available figures show that the university out-performed its benchmark non-continuation indicator for mature students who started their programme in 2013/14 (HESA, 2016).

Analysis by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) illustrates the changing nature of qualifications studied by applicants seeking entry to HE. Since 2011 there has been a dramatic rise in the number of applicants studying vocational qualifications. The proportion of 18 year old applicants studying BTEC qualifications in 2015 rose to 42,130, up 18 per cent on 2014 (UCAS, 2015). While this rise represents an important route to widening access to HE, there are also challenges, such as provision of clear admissions information for BTEC applicants and supporting their successful transition into HE in terms of curriculum content and delivery, and assessment strategies. For these students, a positive experience of progression into HE must therefore address both social integration (Tinto, 1987) and preparation to meet the academic expectations of degree programmes (Yorke and Longden, 2004; Woodfield and O'Mahony, 2016).

Publication of the Government's green paper for HE in late 2015 followed by a white paper in May 2016 again put student retention and success under the spotlight with an increased emphasis on social mobility and a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) intended to 'drive up the quality of teaching in our universities to ensure students and tax payers get value for money and employers get graduates with the skills they need' (BIS, 2015). Providers that participate in the TEF will be assessed on the quality of teaching, the learning environment and student outcomes and learning gain as measured by selected questions from the National Student Survey, student non-continuation data and graduate destinations using the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey (BIS, 2016). Consideration is also being given to a 'highly-skilled jobs' metric. Although additional contextual information will be considered by TEF assessors and universities will contribute a written provider submission, the detail of how precisely the metrics and other evidence will be used, and the criteria that will be applied, are unclear at the time of writing.

The government has articulated aims to improve social mobility by doubling the proportion of disadvantaged students who study at HE level and increasing the number of students from black minority ethnic backgrounds. Commenting on the green paper, Gibbs (2016) identifies a clear tension between the TEF and social mobility, noting that those providers that proactively promote the latter are more at risk of suffering the potentially punitive consequences of a poor score in the TEF, such as reputational damage, decline in student numbers resulting in reduced funding and a possible knock-on downturn in teaching quality. It remains to be seen whether the new regulatory body, the Office for Students, and the data transparency measures described by the white paper that will require HE providers to publish applications, offer and withdrawal data by gender, ethnicity and social background at subject level, will provide appropriate safeguards.

Culmination of the *What Works?* student retention and success change programme in the form of a suite of institutional reports and case studies is timely. The presentation of the thirteen participating institutions' findings arising from over three years' work provide a valuable, additional resource for the UK HE sector that has the potential to inform effective, sustainable policy and action at discipline and institutional level. The University of Salford is grateful to the HEA and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for the opportunity to have been part of this change programme.

Publication of the *What Works?*2 outputs is also timely for Salford because of plans to create a 'Northern Powerhouse'. First articulated by the Chancellor, George Osborne in June 2014, the Northern Powerhouse is conceived as a networked regional economy to rival London. Underpinned

by massive investment in transport infrastructure, vastly reduced journey times between major northern cities would create opportunities and as well as potential threats for the region's HE providers. Relatedly, devolution of additional powers to the Greater Manchester combined authority from 2016 onwards as part of the 'Devo Manc' Agreement will influence the higher level skills and knowledge required by the region's workforce. These two local developments will shape, and be shaped by, the university as it continues to deliver a particular brand of success – based around real world experiences – for particular types of students.

2. Impact data

In considering the impact of the *What Works?* change programme interventions the university has drawn on the data shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sources of impact data

Source	Detail	Available context
<i>What Works?</i> survey	Students' attitudes and feelings about their course.	Comparison with results from across the whole <i>What Works?</i> programme. However as all the participating courses were selected for having some level of difficulty with student retention and success the programme may not match the national context. Comparison of first and second cohorts' responses.
<i>What Works?</i> achievement data	The university's own analysis of credits gained and module mark data supplied to the national <i>What Works?</i> team.	Comparison of <i>What Works?</i> cohorts with students on the same courses in the year immediately before the project began.
The university's own continuation and progression data	Percentages of students continuing their studies from one year to the next, and of those how many successfully move to the next year.	Comparison of the <i>What Works?</i> students with the university as a whole. National comparisons have not been used as data are not available at discipline level. Discipline is known to be related to differences in continuation and progression.

Despite the wealth of data for analysis our conclusions are necessarily tentative for a number of reasons.

1. The interventions implemented by the discipline teams were very different and could be expected to have quite different effects. The Aeronautical Engineering intervention (peer mentoring) was restricted to delivery of one module that did not start until the second half of the academic year. Staffing problems meant that the peer mentoring did not take place in the second year of the change programme. In contrast the Music and Performance programmes had

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some difficulty in generating enthusiasm from staff and students for personal tutoring at first; but once established the benefits were widely appreciated.

2. The university sought rapid growth of undergraduate numbers during the period and all the programmes experienced some additional strain as cohort sizes increased. More students have entered through clearing (see Appendix 1). There could well be a reflection in student retention and success.
3. National changes in higher education policy and the economy are likely to have had an effect on student behaviour.

The following observations of impact are made in cognisance of the above.

2.1. Student perceptions

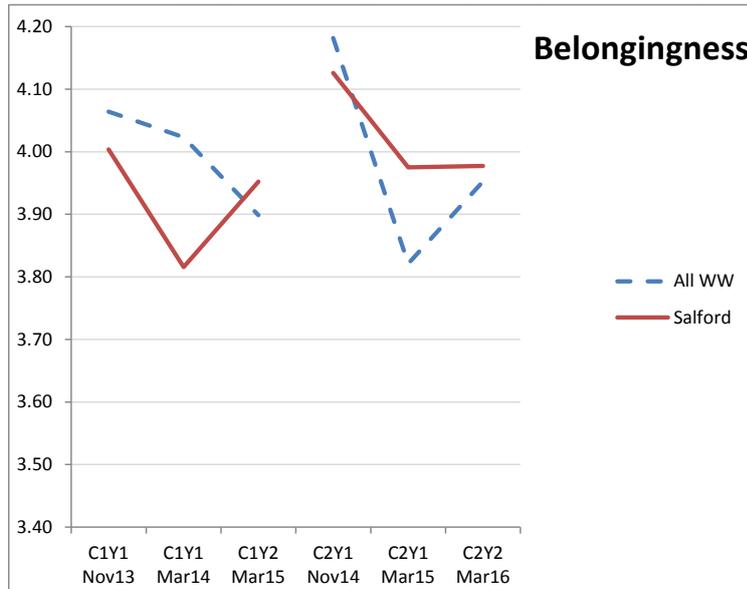
Charts 1 to 3 compare the changing experience of the two cohorts surveyed – C1 who started in autumn 2013 and C2 who started in autumn 2014. The solid red lines are the Salford group and represent respondents from all four disciplines; the blue dotted lines are the results from all the participating institutions. The 2013/14 entrants were surveyed on four occasions and the 2014/15 cohorts on three, as shown in Table 2. Cohort 1 response rates in the spring 2016 survey gave too small a sample to be reliable and are therefore omitted from analysis. Only in Aeronautical Engineering was the number of final year respondents sufficiently high to report and these results are included in the corresponding discipline case study.

Table 2: Administration of national *What Works?* survey

	Autumn 2013	Spring 2014	Autumn 2014	Spring 2015	Spring 2016
Cohort 1 2013/14	Year 1	Year 1		Year 2	Year 3
Cohort 2 2014/15			Year 1	Year 1	Year 2

For the most part students are more positive in the first weeks of their university career than half way through their second term. This is true for nearly every question in the survey, for both cohorts, and perhaps reflects difficulty adjusting to, or potential disappointment with, aspects of the higher education experience. For example, the majority of students will have undergone some form of assessment by spring of year 1. This observation is not universally true, however; overall the second cohort at Salford responded more positively than the first at the equivalent stage in their first year. This applies to all three scales in the survey.

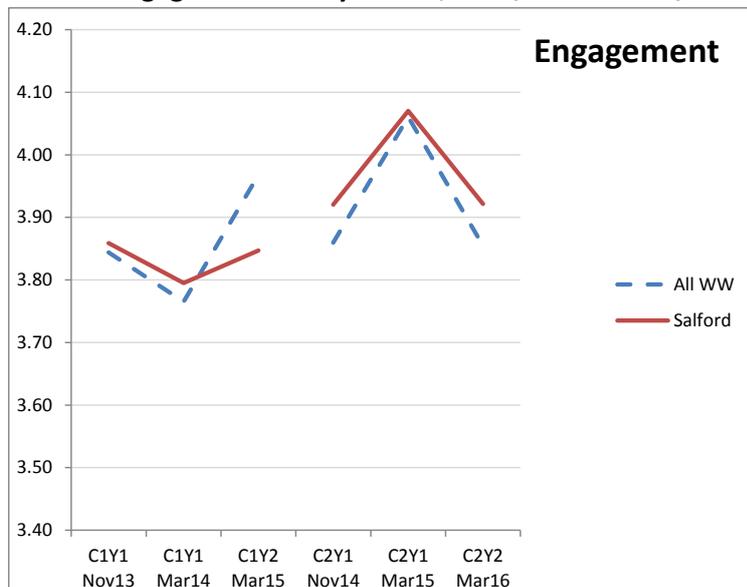
Chart 1: Belongingness survey results, 2013/14 and 2014/15 cohorts



The sense of belonging seems to fall for all students in the middle of their first year. A positive message for Salford is that there seems to be recovery by the middle of the second year and the second cohort is noticeably more positive in their first year than the first, despite a similar first term downturn on the belongingness scale.

Engagement also fell in the first year both in Salford and across all 13 *What Works?* institutions as shown in Chart 2. However the second cohort was more positive and engagement actually rose sharply during the first year. On the basis of the survey alone it isn't possible to discern if this is a general factor due, for example, to the economic climate encouraging all students to put more into their studies, or the combined effect of the interventions in the participating institutions. However, by spring of year 2, the increased engagement observed in cohort 2 in the first year had declined to the starting point 18 months previously. Again, this pattern is mirrored across all *What Works?* participants although at Salford this cohort reported higher levels of engagement than the previous intake at the same point in their studies.

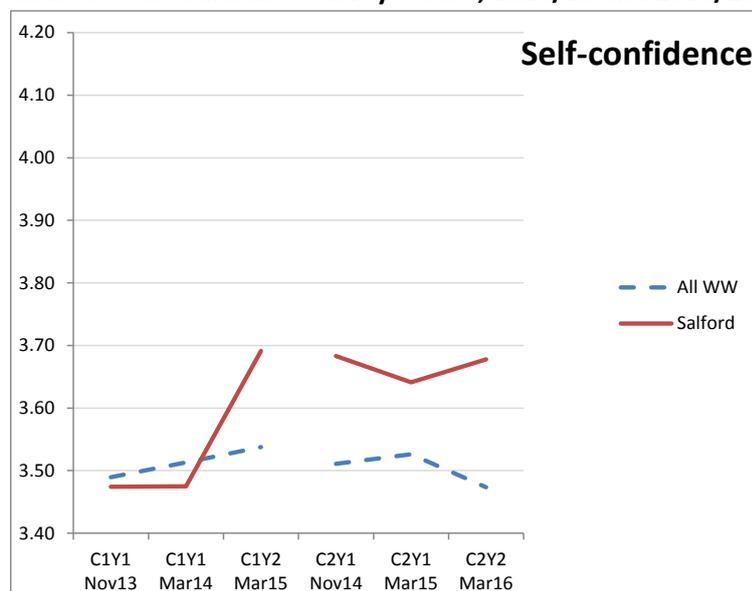
Chart 2: Engagement survey results, 2013/14 and 2014/15 cohorts



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Self-confidence is also stronger for Salford's second cohort, the dip during the first year recovering noticeably by midway through year 2 (Chart 3). The first cohort had improved markedly in their responses by their second year of study. In contrast, at the other institutions self-confidence rises gradually throughout, for both cohorts, with the exception of cohort 2 in the spring of the second year.

Chart 3: Self-confidence survey results, 2013/14 and 2014/15 cohorts



In conclusion, for the most part (there are exceptions) Belongingness, Engagement and Self-confidence was better for the second cohort than for the first. Although it isn't possible to be certain of the reasons for this improvement in students' feelings, this change was expected as a result of refinement and enhancement of the discipline interventions in the second year of operation. However, the results suggest that further research may be warranted, by the institution or more widely, to investigate the reasons for the downturn in students' feelings, particularly in respect of belongingness, in the spring of the first year of study.

The fact that Salford's first cohort was more positive on all three scales in their second year than in their first suggests that those who do progress to the next level of study have become, or are on their way to becoming, confident HE learners. The next section considers whether these changes in attitudes were reflected in students' success.

2.2. Student attainment

Looking at all the entrants to the programmes the first cohort did improve its performance as measured by average module marks in their second year compared with their first (Table 3). Furthermore the second cohort did a little better in their first year than the 2013/14. Both were better than the baseline cohort.

Table 3: Salford *What Works?* average mean marks (all disciplines combined)

	2012/13 (baseline)	2013/14	2014/15
Number of students	271	345	349
Average of Mean mark for Year 1	52.1	53.0	54.3
Average of Mean mark for Year 2	51.0	58.4	-
Average of Mean mark for Year 3	54.5	-	-

However the pass rate for the first year did not improve as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Salford *What Works?* first year pass rates (all disciplines combined)

	Pass Year 1		Fail Year 1		Total
	No. of students	%	No. of students	%	No. of students
2012/13 (baseline)	214	79%	57	21%	271
2013/14	268	78%	77	22%	345
2014/15	272	78%	77	22%	349

In their second year, those from the first cohort who had progressed did noticeably better than their immediate predecessors (Table 5).

Table 5: Salford *What Works?* disciplines second year pass rates (all disciplines combined)

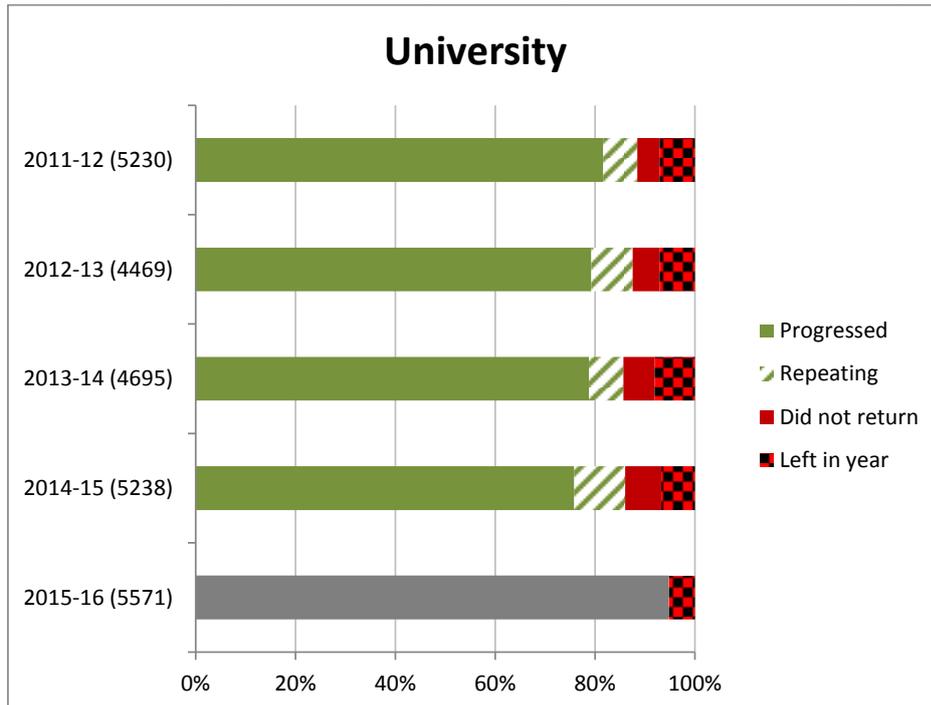
	Pass Year 2		Fail Year 2		Total
	No. of students	%	No. of students	%	No. of students
2012/13 (baseline)	173	87%	26	13%	199
2013/14	241	92%	21	8%	262

It should be noted that these whole change programme results in Tables 4 to 6 mask variation between disciplines.

2.3. Student retention

Across the university rising numbers have been accompanied by a decline in progression rates, though in the most recent year continuation has held up as many more students who had not passed their first year chose to repeat.

Chart 4: University first year undergraduate retention and progression



Against this background the improvements for Music (Chart 5) and Performance (Chart 6) are striking. The other two disciplines (Charts 7 and 8) fared less well; potential reasons for this are explored in the respective Aeronautical Engineering and Sports Science case studies.

Chart 5: Performance first year undergraduate retention and progression

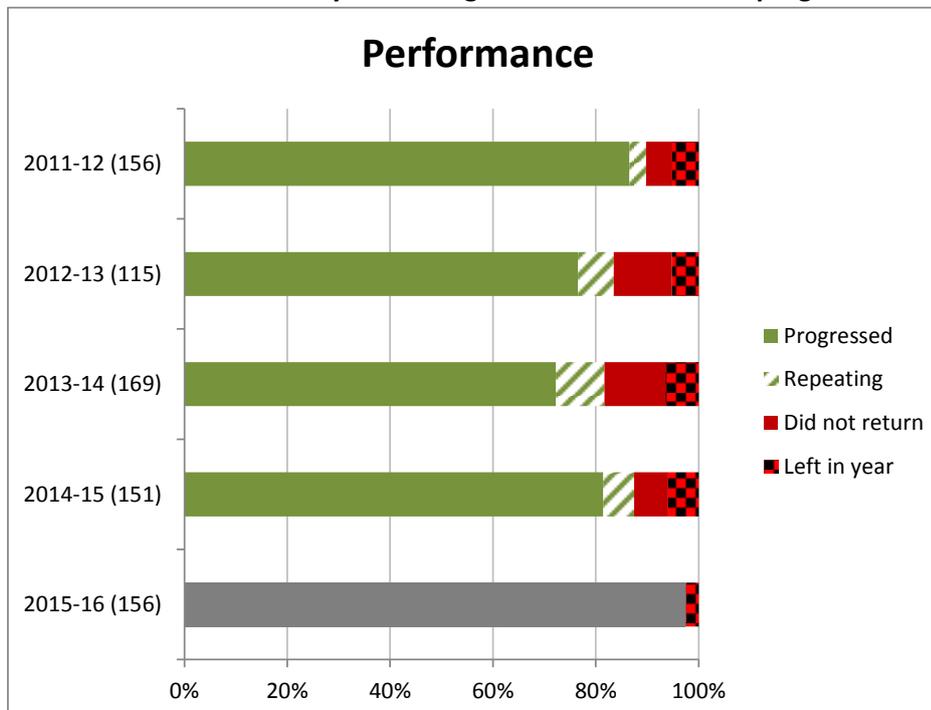


Chart 6: Music first year undergraduate retention and progression

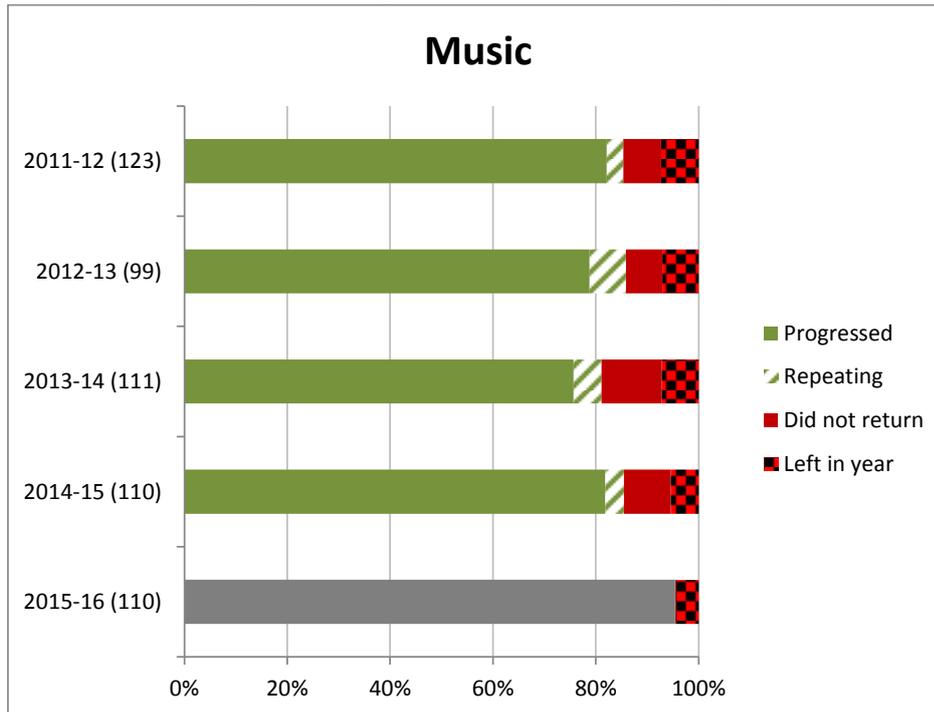


Chart 7: Aeronautical Engineering first year undergraduate retention and progression

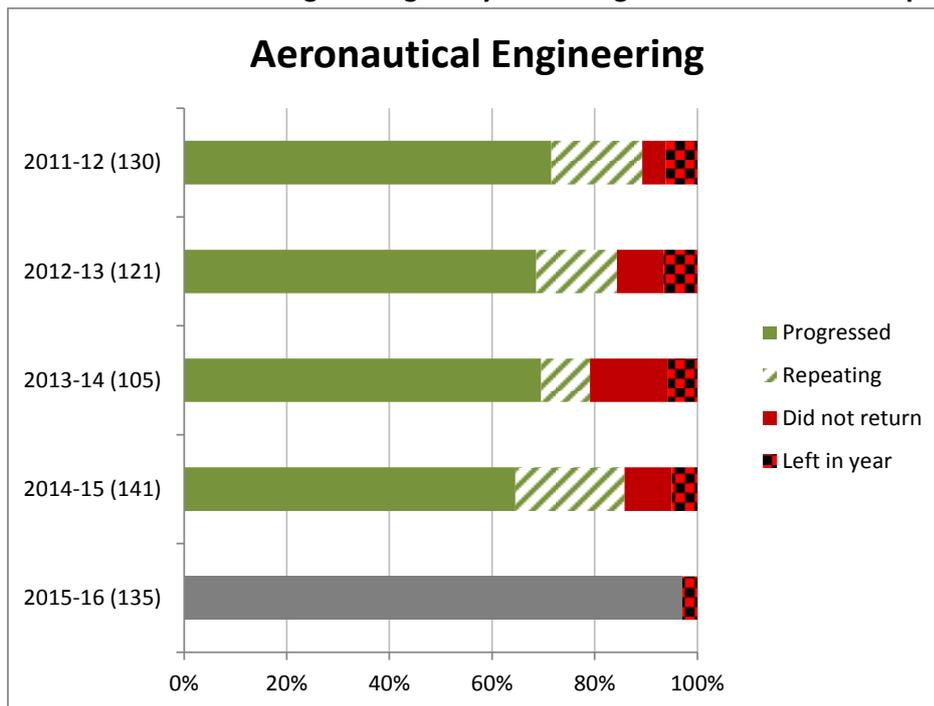
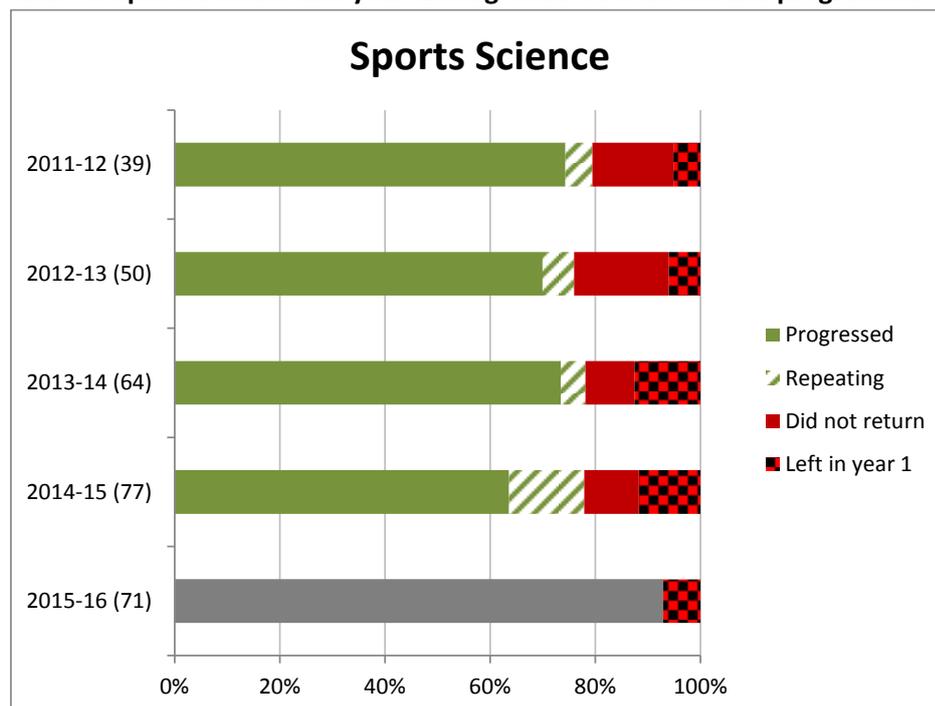


Chart 8: Sports Science first year undergraduate retention and progression



In conclusion, at the institutional level, there are positive outcomes associated with the period of the *What Works?* programme. The university faces a challenge to ensure that a higher proportion of students pass first time; nevertheless, of those who do not, more are choosing to persist.

3. Planning for and implementing change

3.1. Team selection

The university was keen to optimise institutional learning by involving a range of discipline areas that have differing approaches to the organisation and delivery of learning, teaching, assessment and academic support. In the first instance the Planning unit provided first year student retention data for the previous three years to identify degree programmes that could potentially benefit from participation in *What Works?* A shortlist of programmes for each academic College was produced; all shortlisted programmes had cohort sizes that would deliver meaningful impact data about the selected interventions.

The senior institutional manager and project lead consulted the relevant academic Heads of School to finalise the choice of disciplines and secure senior level support for the change programme. The project lead then engaged with colleagues who became discipline leads/discipline team members.

3.2. Interventions selected and team working

Discipline interventions were selected from one of the three areas set by the HEA: Induction, Active Learning and Co-curricular (personal tutoring or peer mentoring). Unlike some of the other *What Works?* institutions Salford did not adopt a single intervention that was common to all discipline areas. Although such an approach would most likely yield valuable change and impact data, the core team felt it was important to allow the discipline teams to choose which intervention they believed would make the most effective contribution to improved retention and success. Sustainability was another major consideration for the discipline teams since no financial support was available to design and deliver the interventions. In the case of one discipline, however, the Head of School

stipulated the team's intervention in order to bring the area into line with institutional policy on personal tutoring following the recent merger of two academic schools. The disciplines and interventions selected, and rationales, are shown in table 6.

Table 6: Discipline teams and interventions

College* and School	Programme(s)	Intervention	Rationale
College of Science & Technology School of Computing, Science & Engineering	MEng/BEng Aeronautical Engineering; MEng/BEng Aircraft Engineering with Pilot Studies	Co-curricular: Peer mentoring	There is a high degree of contact time so staff did not want to add anything 'extra' to students' timetables. One particular design module is problematic so second year students were recruited to become mentors to the first years.
College of Arts and Media School of Art & Design	BA (Hons) Music and Pathways BA (Hons) Performance and Pathways	Co-curricular: Personal Tutoring	Following the merger of two schools the Music Directorate had continued to appoint 'Year Tutors' to provide academic and pastoral support. <i>What Works?</i> was employed to support the transition to alignment with university policy on Personal Tutoring. The intervention was extended to Performance programmes when the Directorate expanded.
College of Health & Social Care School of Health Sciences	BSc (Hons) Sports Science	Induction	A robust personal tutoring system was already in place and the programme involved extensive active learning. The team felt that induction had become less of a focus as numbers increased and decided to use <i>What Works?</i> to direct renewed emphasis on student transitions.

*As noted in 1.3, Colleges were disestablished in 2014/15

The core team and discipline leads met regularly throughout the project; on a monthly basis during the first two years and every other month during the third year. Regular meetings were vital during

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the first eighteen months of the programme, when the team was operating without a senior institutional manager, following the departure of the Pro Vice-Chancellor who had championed the university's participation in *What Works?* The discipline leads were co-opted on to the core team and this arrangement, together with regular meetings, proved very successful in maintaining the change programme in the absence of a senior institutional champion. Original plans for institutional level activity were revised and efforts were focused on supporting the discipline leads to develop their intervention and address difficulties they encountered.

The core team developed a remarkably close bond even though this was a new group whose members had not previously worked together. Although each discipline was working on a different intervention, the leads found commonalities in some of the issues they experienced and were able to provide advice and offer potential solutions or workarounds in mitigation. This method of working enabled team members in central university roles to gain an in-depth understanding of each intervention; this proved invaluable to transferring discipline level learning and impact to institutional change following the addition of the new Dean of Students to the team as the senior institutional manager. With the remit to drive improvements in the taught student experience across the institution, the Dean of Students was ideally placed to champion *What Works?* internally and position the programme as both a catalyst for institutional change and a mechanism to shape future developments. See section 5 and the institutional case study for further details

Outside of regular meetings the teams adopted a flexible approach to working together to meet the needs of each discipline and to draw on the expertise of core team members. For example, the project manager held separate review/progress meetings with individual discipline teams as required; funding was secured for a bespoke staff development event for the Sports Science team; personal tutor resources were sourced and shared with the Music and Performance team; and bespoke data reports were produced by the data analyst. The academic lead worked with the discipline leads throughout the project, from advising on the design of the interventions and evaluation mechanisms to providing guidance and support on the preparation of case studies.

Examples of how the core team has supported the discipline teams include:

- Securing continued administrative support for the Music and Performance team;
- Implementing a workaround to enable extended induction sessions to be included in level 4 Sports Science timetables;
- Providing clarification of admissions processes to improve the quality of student data sent to programme teams post confirmation/clearing and pre-arrival;
- Providing senior management support to secure funding to create a dedicated social space for Sports Science students.

3.3. Examples of effective working

3.3.1. Creation of institutional networks

The inclusion of two centrally based members of the core team, the Dean of Students as the senior manager (from spring 2014) and the Executive Policy Officer as the project lead, have facilitated extensive cross-institutional networking to deliver changes informed by *What Works?* principles. This has enabled links to be established with relevant institutional projects and teams leading to synergies at both institutional and discipline level. For example, the importance of including co-curricular activities such as personal tutor meetings and extended induction activities has been recognised and is being addressed in longer-term development plans for the timetabling system.

Additionally, the centrally-based team members were able to facilitate the Sports Science discipline lead's membership of the university-wide project charged with reviewing policy and practice around welcome, registration and induction.

3.3.2. Cultural change at discipline level

The Music and Performance team were particularly effective in changing the culture within the Directorate to positive effect among both staff and student groups. These changes were created within a relatively short period of time and stem largely from the focused efforts of the discipline team and their belief that students would not buy-in to the personal tutoring system unless the staff did. The team undertook a 'hearts and minds' strategy to engage staff across the Directorate: they appealed to their colleagues' moral and social responsibility to provide a duty of care to students, backed up by a deliberately generous workload allocation to facilitate fulfilment of tutoring duties.

Despite personal tutoring being a completely new way of the Music and Performance Directorate providing academic pastoral support the team has demonstrated a remarkably mature approach in evolving the system in response to student needs and staff feedback. For example, the frequency of meetings in level 4 have been adjusted, a meaningful structure to meetings has been developed and a student-centred approach has been adopted at level 6, where students tend to receive personalised support from their final year project supervisor rather than their personal tutor.

Whilst a near 100 per cent completion rate for personal tutor reports might be indicative of a 'compliance culture', the discipline team report that, to the contrary, there is greater discussion among staff of issues relating to the student experience. Furthermore, matters raised by students are addressed quickly because of the regular opportunities to meet with their personal tutor and this has resulted in a decline in issues being 'saved up' for staff-student committee meetings.

4. Evaluation strategy

Each discipline team was afforded flexibility to develop its own evaluation strategy. Support was provided via core team meetings and through individual annual review meetings with each discipline team. The academic lead member of the core team took primary responsibility for working with the discipline teams to develop their evaluation strategy following the *What Works?* evaluation methodology shown in figure 1. Additional support was provided by the Business and Management Information Analyst.

Figure 1: What Works? student retention and success evaluation methodology



In addition to the main *What Works?* survey tool and analysis of student retention and attainment data provided by the HEA, the following quantitative and qualitative mechanisms were employed to evaluate changes in staff and student attitudes and behaviours as described in the next three subsections. The data collected was in accordance with the ethical approval application submitted by the core team to the appropriate university body at the outset of the change programme.

4.1. Aeronautical Engineering

Student focus groups were carried out by the leader of the module in which the peer mentoring intervention was embedded during the first year pilot phase. A small group of mentees participated in these discussions. Separately, teaching staff obtained informal feedback from the mentors during scheduled teaching sessions with the second year students. A further focus group was conducted by members of the *What Works?* core team in autumn 2015 with final year students who had been mentored in their first year, and with two of the original mentors who had progressed to a master's degree. Focus group discussions explored both mentees' and mentors' experiences of the peer mentoring intervention, including perceptions of belonging, engagement and self-confidence, and suggestions as to how the system might be improved. The evidence collated supported the earlier findings of *What Works?*¹ (Andrews & Clark 2011, Thomas 2012) that peer mentoring can successfully help students to develop meaningful relationships with their peers and become confident HE learners. Students' experiences of being mentored and acting as mentors are discussed in detail in the case study *It's gonna help yourself as well as someone else*.

Staff feedback was collected by the discipline lead through staff meetings and informal discussions. This was supplemented by informal meetings between core team members and individuals in the discipline team which took place at various stages throughout the intervention. These discussions included staff feelings about the intervention, practical aspects of its operation and views about its effectiveness in improving student retention and success. There was a noticeable change in staff views over time; initial confidence and enthusiasm to design and deliver a peer-mentoring intervention was, over time, replaced by a pragmatic need to focus on curriculum delivery as a result of significant staff shortages. The impact of this is further discussed in section 6.1.1 and the Aeronautical Engineering case study *It's gonna help yourself as well as someone else*.

Student attendance data at the timetabled sessions for the module was monitored via class registers. These took the form of weekly two-hour project group sessions. During the first year of the intervention attendance increased by over 25 per cent.

Pass rate data for the module in which the intervention took place were used to evaluate students' academic attainment. The first time pass rate improved by 12 per cent and the average module mark increased by 8.4 points higher than the previous year.

4.2. Music and Performance

Attendance at personal tutor meetings was used to measure student engagement with the personal tutoring intervention. In the early stages attendance was poor across all undergraduate levels, but particularly among second and final year students who were accustomed to the previous system of year tutors. Personal tutors were required to monitor attendance and follow up with students who did not attend. Over the course of the *What Works?* change programme there has been a significant increase in engagement with around 70 per cent of students regularly attending personal tutor meetings.

Personal tutoring became a standing agenda item at Staff-Student Committee meetings in order to obtain feedback from students' perspective via their programme representative. The minutes of these meetings show that a perceptible difference in the nature and tone of these committees occurred over the period of the change programme. The number of student issues reported greatly reduced because these were picked up and dealt with promptly and informally via the personal

tutoring system. This finding is described in more detail in the case study *A changed culture through personal tutoring*.

In addition to Staff-Student Committee meetings, an open student meeting was held in May 2015 at which any student could express their views, both positive and constructive, on the personal tutoring system. At the end of each year personal tutors ran a focus group with their tutees which informed enhancements for the next academic session. The outcomes of these meetings are reported more fully in the case study *A changed culture through personal tutoring*.

A Personal Tutor report form was completed by each member of academic staff, usually towards the end of semester and/or the academic year. This captured comments on attendance levels, the frequency of meetings, the usefulness of personal tutoring resources (themed calendar of meeting topics, Personal Tutor Handbook), specific comments on how personal tutoring contributed to student belongingness, engagement and self-confidence and whether their views on personal tutoring had changed, and why. This proved to be a rich source of qualitative evidence that fed into the discipline team's annual review of personal tutoring. Staff verbatim views are illustrated in the case study *A changed culture through personal tutoring*.

Staff Personal Development Review meetings were used to emphasize the importance of personal tutoring the expectations of tutors in return for the generous workload allocation awarded for tutoring activities.

Directorate staff team meetings provided opportunities for staff to collectively review the operation of the personal tutoring system, including consideration of an overview of the main points raised in the Personal Tutor report forms.

4.3. Sports Science

Students were asked to complete a questionnaire on their experience of Welcome Week two weeks after their arrival. The majority of respondents rated activities and opportunities to form relationships with fellow students and staff very highly. There was also evidence that most students felt prepared for university study. Constructive comments fed into future developments, for example, an even greater emphasis on programme-level activity and a reduction in 'information giving' sessions. Further details of the outcomes of student evaluations (including the focus groups reference below) are provided in the case study *Sports Science: an evidence-based approach in the areas of welcome and induction*.

Focus groups were held with first year students during semester 1. Discussions focused on the three areas covered by the discipline intervention: pre-arrival, Welcome Week and Extended induction. Students who read the pre-arrival newsletter reported positively on feeling welcomed and equipped with greater knowledge about the programme and potential career opportunities. However, there was variability in students receiving pre-arrival packs owing to technical difficulties and the predominantly male cohort feeling comfortable confirming they had completed the pre-arrival activity.

The discipline team used staff meetings to plan the intervention, ongoing changes and enhancements and discuss operational matters. For example, in working out how extended induction content would be embedded within taught credit-bearing modules rather than delivered as a discrete component as in the first year of the intervention.

The university's standard module evaluation questionnaire was used to evaluate the extended induction content, such as study skills, programme information, university regulations and support services. The questionnaire showed that students wanted this content to be delivered within their programme rather than as a separate 'bolt on' to another module. See the previous point about staff meetings and the case study *Sports Science: an evidence-based approach in the areas of welcome and induction* for further discussion on changes to the delivery of extended induction in response to students' views.

Section 6 for details of the activities delivered and evidence of their impact.

5. Changes implemented at the institutional level

As noted in the institutional case study, the core team reframed their original activity plans in response to major internal developments that occurred within the first few months of the change programme. The primary focus of institutional level activity became cross-institutional networking undertaken by various team members and using learning derived from the discipline teams to influence and shape strategic change (as noted in the earlier section on Effective working, see section 3.3). This phase of the change programme signalled the emergence of cultural change within and across the institution which is the single major output of *What Works?* at Salford. Appendix 2 shows the extensive network of connections that has been created as a result of the change programme. The core team's knowledge and understanding of phase 1, augmented by in-house application and adaptation in phase 2, has infused thinking, behaviours and practices in all of the areas that follow.

5.1. Strategy development

Salford's original institutional action plan articulated a desire to revise policies and strategies relating to student retention and success. During the course of the change programme new and revised policies and strategy have been developed across a number of areas.

A Student engagement, participation and attendance policy has replaced the *Student participation policy*. The new policy sets out the university's approach to supporting the development of students to become confident HE learners who successfully complete their chosen programme of study. The policy foregrounds engagement through supportive structures and the interplay of engagement, participation and attendance in creating student success.

The *Student voice policy* has been replaced by a new document - *Always listening: connecting with our students*. This represents a paradigm shift in how we communicate with our students and emphasizes the importance of regular engagement between students and staff to create agile and effective channels of communication, which in turn help to improve the student experience. The new policy has been directly influenced by the Personal Tutoring intervention delivered by the Music and Performance team. Further details are provided in the discipline and institutional case studies.

A revised *Student Interruptions and Withdrawals Policy and Procedure* which standardises the requirement for students to seek advice and support from nominated academic or professional services sources before making an application to interrupt or withdraw. Students on interruption now have access to enhanced learning resources during the period spent away from the university. In addition, communications have been formalised to maintain contact, signpost points of assistance and facilitate interrupting students' return to study.

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In July 2015 the governing body approved a new vision for the institution:

“By pioneering exceptional industry partnerships we will lead the way in real world experiences preparing students for life.”

Salford Curriculum+ outlines the university’s strategy for bringing this vision to life in respect of taught programmes and the student experience. Informed by Salford’s *What Works?* findings, over the course of the next five years (2016/17-2020/21) the strategy ‘will deliver an education and student experience which is bold, distinctive and accessible, *focus on student development and success*, and ensure our financial and academic sustainability.’ [Italics added for emphasis.]

The strategy seeks to embed a pedagogical philosophy which recognises and develops students as ‘active partners’ in a learning journey that is relevant to their future aspirations and plans. Emphasis will be placed on supporting students to successfully take on this responsibility since both phases of *What Works?* show that many students need time, support and clear direction to understand and meet the expectations of their HE programme.

5.2. Staff development, recognition and reward

Staff recognition and reward in learning and teaching have taken a major step forward with the introduction of a new promotion route to Reader and Professor in Learning and Teaching / Student Success. It is important to note the inclusion of wider definitions of ‘success’ within this promotion route. From 2014/15 eligible academic members of staff are able to submit a case for promotion based on their achievements in teaching and learning / student success in the areas of: innovation and impact, leadership, recognition of excellence, and evidence of future plans for further development. These promotion criteria are closely informed by the Areas of Activity, the Core Knowledge and Professional Values that form the Dimensions of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). Since it was introduced two academic members of staff have been awarded professor or reader status via this new route.

During the course of the last three years the university has seen a notable increase in staff achieving Fellowship of the HEA across all levels, but particularly in the Senior and Principal categories. The university intends to develop its own accredited routes to Fellowship via an internal CPD framework, a workstream that will be delivered within the auspices of the Salford Curriculum+ strategy.

5.3. Curriculum development

In 2014/15 an inclusive teaching pilot project was undertaken in a small number of programmes in one academic school. The project was developed in response to changes to the Disabled Students’ Allowance from 2016/17. These changes will mainly affect students with mild and moderate special learning difficulties such as dyslexia. By adopting a social model of disability, curriculum changes were designed to improve the learning experience of all students. *What Works?* principles underpinned this piece of work, such as mainstreaming inclusive teaching practices and a proactive approach to informing students about the aims of the project whilst enabling students who declared a disability to continue to access disability support and services.

Arising from this pilot phase, the Inclusive Student Experience Project is developing and rolling out an institutional framework which will be completed by September 2016.

5.4. Availability and use of data

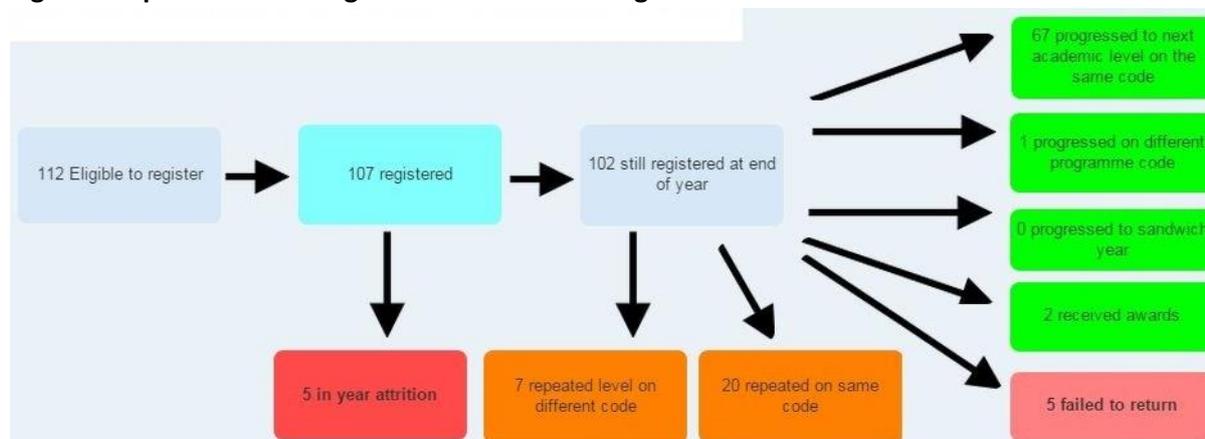
Significant progress is being made regarding the availability and content of student retention and progression data sets. All Programme Leaders have access to the institutional student data reporting tool, Qlikview, which they access at specific points as relevant data, including student retention and

progression rates, become available. These data help to inform completion of the Programme Action Log as part of the Programme Monitoring and Enhancement Procedure. Consultation with academic colleagues highlighted specific and underlying issues with the content and calculations of the retention data used to inform actions across the 2014/15 academic cycle. The key points raised were:

- The HESA methodology which is the basis for the university key performance indicator focuses on a very specific population and does not operationally help academic schools to understand what is happening on the ground;
- Schools wanted to understand rates of progression for all students in the classroom alongside the HESA methodology used for external benchmarking;
- Qlikview presented three different 'versions of the truth' – there needs to be only two versions (as above);
- There was insufficient guidance online to assist academics in interpreting what each data set meant and how it was to be used within the university, i.e. targets for managing programme performance;
- Further breakdown of the metrics to a programme, module and student level were needed.

In response to this feedback work was undertaken by the Planning team to produce two data sets, an operational version which includes all full-time registered undergraduates and a replica of the HESA data set which excludes certain student groups. From 2015/16 the Operational Management data set for retention is published through Qlikview for use by academic and professional services teams within Schools. The screen and overview of the data pertinent to a programme is presented in a simple, easy to interpret format as shown in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Operational management data set for Programme Leaders



Current understanding of undergraduate students and their behaviours is limited. In order to better understand whether our actions are having positive impact, a consistent, data driven knowledge of students is being developed. This understanding is being shaped by weekly monitoring of students' engagement with a variety of systems including university email, the VLE and Library services. These data are sent to Schools and form the basis of activity of the Student Progression Assistants (see section 5.5 below). Moreover, the university has recognised the need to work ahead of time has been recognised so that potential issues connected to student disengagement are addressed before the fact, rather than through a reliance on post-event analysis in order to effect a change 'next time'. To this end student profile data is being developed to focus on two areas:

1) Who I am

2) What I do

Focusing on these areas allows the university to move towards developing predictive behavioural analytics (2) in combination with an understanding of prior context (1). Developing a cohesive and nuanced understanding of student characteristic and behaviour will facilitate a more effective, efficient and economical use of resources in service of retention, attainment and wider enhancements to the student experience.

5.5. Student engagement and Co-creation

Student engagement has been a focus of institutional change, particularly in last two years. The creation of the role of Dean of Students, with a specific remit to lead cross-institutional working to improve the student experience, has led to significant positive change in staff-student relationships. Over the last two years a genuine feeling of mutual respect and team-working has been developed between the university's senior managers and the students' union. Together they are 'walking the walk' of the Always Listening Policy; regular, informal catch ups enable meaningful relationships between university and union officers to be developed and nurtured, and facilitate the agile two-way flow of information and communication.

An institutional narrative is developing around student engagement, particularly in relation to the concept of 'co-creation' of the student experience. Furthering the notion of collaboration, co-creation is a desired way of working that has now been explicitly articulated as a fundamental enabler of the new university strategy. Formally positioning co-creation as an enabler within the strategy signals the university's intention to work beyond more familiar notions of partnership and consultation in a more distributed balance of managed autonomy and decision making. This, in turn, offers agile operational structures in which each stakeholder has input not just into the shape of the outcome, but at the outset in the articulation of the problem to be solved. We are also exploring and trialling new systems to facilitate real-time communication and engagement with student representatives to make our response mechanisms more agile and more conversant with the 21st century mindset of the student body.

5.6. Student Progression Assistants

The 2015/16 academic year has seen the appointment of eight Student Progression Assistants (SPAs), one for each of the academic Schools and one for partnerships with FE Colleges. The purpose of these roles was to provide Schools with targeted, on-the-ground support in improving retention and progression. By using recent graduates as retention and progression officers, the role is positioned as close as possible to the undergraduate and postgraduate student experience, is empathetic to the needs and the 'voice' of students and is able to gain and action a detailed understanding of individual student needs and situations. A key function of the role is also to ensure students are brought effectively into the pastoral and support services provided by Student Life and the AskUS one-stop-shop services, and to help them to ensure that their services and resources are targeted appropriately. The principal duties of each SPA are:

- Key administration tasks focused upon monitoring and following up student non-attendance;
- Fostering and maintaining positive student contact and relationships;
- Working as a key Schools liaison with Student Life/AskUS to ensure that the necessary pastoral and support activities are targeted appropriately;
- Working with academic and professional services staff within the Schools to develop activities that foster a sense of belonging for the students.

The SPAs play what is predominantly a sign-posting role and are not actually providing explicit advice in the context of the students' reported issues, but bridging students across to the various support services where the relevant expertise lies in order to facilitate student engagement/re-engagement with their studies.

5.7. Impact

5.7.1. Institutional co-ordination – developing intelligence to understand the problem

What Works? has been pivotal in achieving a much richer, nuanced understanding of the factors that impact retention within the institution. Ongoing implementation of structured, supportive working with the programme teams that have the poorest retention rates, combined with improved data reporting and analysis, have given rise to important learning points:

- The working assumption that the issues underlying poor NSS performance and those underlying poor performance in retention are at the very least, significantly similar, has been disproved.
- Issues underpinning retention do not appear to focus upon the quality of the taught experience.
- The structure of the academic assessment calendar seems to be a contributing factor to poor retention, particularly in year one.
- The nature of the assessment diet is not cognisant of cohort character.
- It is clear that a student's pre-arrival understanding of both the individual programme and of wider university life is not always accurate or realistic.
- Transitions into and through the academic journey are problematic developmental thresholds for the students.

5.7.2. Institutional co-ordination - segmentation of the student journey

A tangible output of co-creative working with the students' union is an institutionally referenced 'spine' for the student journey which defines the purpose of each stage – or segment - of the student journey from the perspective of the student. There is a tacit assumption that students 'know' how to adapt to the various expectations of the different stages of their university journey. Given the eclectic and international character of our student body, there is a specific need to develop the path through each stage of transition, particularly 'transition into HE'. The segmentation identifies the following points:

- In the eyes of students there are several distinct phases to each academic cycle of study.
- There is a particular focus at each stage of transition into, through and out of the student journey on 'stepping up'.
- Students desire to be able to clearly 'see' the next stage before stepping into it.
- Students wish to see the 'path to professional' iterated clearly throughout their study.
- The Segmentation has the ability to act as a viable 'lens' through which the activities and intended plans of the institution can be viewed, developed and reworked according to their ability to meet the needs identified.

The intended benefits to be realised through segmentation of the student journey are:

- An increasingly cohesive student experience delivering targeted support and guidance as, when and where it is needed.
- An increase in student retention, engagement and satisfaction.

This work has received positive feedback from the University Management Team, comprising senior academic and professional services leaders, and the university's governing body. Segmentation of the student journey represents a fundamental shift in how the university understands and responds

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to student retention and success. An overview of all retention actions has been drawn up and will be structured using the segmentation of the student journey framework in order to develop a coherent approach across schools and professional services. The segmented student journey will become the framework within which retention and other student-centric initiatives and plans will be seen going forward with effect from spring 2016.

5.7.3. Increased focus on the academic sphere – Welcome, Registration and Induction

The academic sphere as the locus of engendering belonging has gained institutional traction and is developed as a central tenet of the university's timetabling policy and estates strategy, as well as the approach to welcome, registration and induction.

Over 600 students were interviewed about their experience of Welcome in September 2015:

- 94% of them said they felt 'welcomed or very welcomed' when they arrived at the university
- 80% found it easy or very easy to get around campus with the information provided
- 91% of students found registration to be efficient or very efficient

Respondents were also asked to describe in one word their impression of the university based on the pre-arrival instructions they received. The words most commonly used were: Good; Great; Welcoming; Amazing; Organised; Friendly; Exciting.

The communications work stream of the Welcome Registration and Induction (WRI) project overhauled the content and presentation of the online student channel. Year-on-year engagement with the student channel has recorded significant gains:

May 22 2014 – November 10 2014:

- Average time on student channel was 1 minute 29 seconds
- 7,479 views on the student channel direct from social media

May 22 2015 – November 10 2015:

- Average time on student channel was 5 minutes 27 seconds
- 13,738 views on the student channel direct from social media

5.7.4. Engagement and belonging – policy development

Student engagement and belongingness are also central themes in two new policies that were developed in 2014/15; *Student engagement, participation and attendance* and *Always listening: connecting with our students*. The aim of these policies is to build a narrative around student retention and belonging, in order to convey what it means to belong to an academic programme for both students and staff. Importantly, in the spirit of co-creation, as outlined above, these policies were developed with our students and signal a jointly created experience. The documents set out institutional and student responsibilities to signal a move towards an ethos of partnership working and the creation of a joint voice that represents the student and staff communities and facilitates two-way communication and engagement.

5.7.5. Engagement and belonging in action

An institutionally co-ordinated approach to the recruitment of student representatives, in partnership with the students' union, was successfully implemented for the first time in 2014/15. Central co-ordination on the part of the university and closer working with the students' union led to a 400 per cent increase in the number of student representatives recorded in the student information system within the first five weeks of teaching in 2014/15 compared with the previous year. Further improvements delivered in 2015/16 include over 90 per cent of undergraduate student representative places filled in all but one school. Four schools have achieved 100 per cent

recruitment of undergraduate representatives. The number of student representatives trained by the students' union is up 15 per cent on 2014/15.

SPAs have been keeping records of student feedback in respect of the services that they have been providing. In general terms, a clear and robust support system has been welcomed by students as have the consequential signposted interventions for students requiring help with their problems and studies. A large numbers of students it seems have been unaware of their obligation to attend minimum levels of scheduled learning events, and the potential for being removed from their programme if they don't do so. Some students have noted that it has been easier to talk to SPAs than their programme or module leaders because the SPAs have access to a wider range of potential support solutions. There is evidence also to suggest that students with attendance difficulties get into a position where it becomes simply too embarrassing to talk to personal tutors and where the SPA has become their bridge back to that facility. SPAs have indicated that a majority of students contacted about their attendance have been very appreciative simply because of the concern expressed for them. Anecdotal comments from students include:

Thank you for your concern regarding my attendance; Thanks for the information and support - It's much appreciated; Thank you very much for the help, much appreciated!; Like I said I'll be back if any further problems arise; I am really honoured to have met you yesterday - Thank you for listening; Thanks a million for today - I feel much better and felt truly supported.

SPAs have themselves reported an excellent reception of their roles by academic colleagues who have embraced the potential for them to make their own jobs easier. Verbatim comments best exemplify impact and help to inform further work requirements in the context of attendance and participation monitoring:

- *As Level 4 Year Manager it is vital I monitor attendance and engagement, from a pastoral as well as academic view point. The SPA's input has proved invaluable. She gives me updates during the semester (when there is time to contact students and meet them) and liaises with the student on my behalf.*
- *I have found our SPA to be a godsend - she is saving me a load of time, effort, energy and messing about. We work together using the registers and retention reports to make sure that we keep track of students that go AWOL.*
- *Students are being followed-up for poor attendance much more often and better records are being kept.*

As of January 2016 the SPAs had conducted over 3,000 virtual and physical interactions with undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. The proportion of students who re-engaged following interaction with a SPA varied between Schools, from 36% to 80%. The university will need to await a whole-year view of the data before it can fully assess the efficacy of SPA activity and any correlation between this activity and retention outcomes.

5.7.6. Inclusive student experience

Feedback collated in the evaluation phase of the Inclusive Student Experience Project indicated that students welcomed the changes and felt they had developed meaningful relationships with tutors. Staff generally welcomed the opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice and renew awareness that not students learn in the same manner. The second phase of the project commenced in 2015/16 and involves a greater number of discipline areas representing all academic schools. Each school has an Academic Cluster Lead who ensures that the guidance in development is fit for purpose in meeting the needs of students across all disciplines. Cluster Leads are also members of

the Implementation Group which is leading the development of nine work packages that will comprise the Salford Inclusive Teaching and Learning Framework. The full framework will be launched in August 2016.

5.8. Strategic enablers

Consistency in the majority of core team members enabled their work to continue in the absence of a senior manager. During this period a successful focus was placed on supporting the discipline teams to overcome challenges relating to central university issues that were beyond their control. The commitment of team members to the change programme, especially in a rapidly evolving internal environment and working with a high degree of uncertainty at times, is an achievement the team is proud of. Their resilience and adaptability helped to facilitate rapid, effective momentum in influencing change across the university following the co-opting of the Dean of Students as the institutional senior manager.

The appointment of the Dean of Students marked the emergence of a renewed institutional emphasis on a student-centred experience and an internal climate that is receptive to the findings of *What Works?*¹, and organisational learning from the phase 2 change programme, which helps the institution to 'wrap' its processes and practices around the student journey. A significant aspect of this emerging cultural change is a growing recognition that retention is 'everyone's business' and that all areas of the university and its staff have a part to play in improving retention and success. Creation of the role of Dean of Students has also enabled the core team to overcome the challenge of securing student input. The role is a conduit for student-focused activity across the university and as such has enabled *all* students to engage in *What Works?* either directly or indirectly.

Over the course of the 2014/15 and 2015/16 academic years, robust processes have been implemented to deliver joined-up communication, ownership and action between the university centre and academic Schools. Each autumn the Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic and Dean of Students meet with each Dean of School and Associate Dean Academic to review and agree the priority programme areas for dedicated retention support in the year ahead. The Dean of Students then meets with teaching staff from undergraduate programmes that failed to meet a stipulated threshold for progression from level 4 to 5 in the previous session. The School Associate Dean Academic and professional services staff from relevant support areas also attend so that appropriate local and institutional actions can be agreed in response to the issues identified. These actions and their impact are then followed up across the year. At the end of the academic year a final review meeting is held with the Dean of School and Associate Dean Academic to brief them on the progress made during the year – at both local and institutional level – and to formally 'hand back' ownership of any remaining local level actions. Informal feedback from Schools indicates that this partnership approach is valued by the Deans and programme teams. Cross-institutional learning is facilitated via periodic workshops on student retention and success with the University Management Team which comprises academic and professional services leaders.

*What Works?*¹ has been a powerful strategic enabler in a number of ways. Firstly, phase 1 provided an established evidence base that has informed and shaped change within the disciplines and at institutional level. Secondly, the prestige associated with Salford's participation in an externally-led, national change programme has helped to 'get things done' within the institution. The university has gone beyond the application of the findings of phase 1 by internalising *What Works?* concepts and language. For example, the impact of 'space' and 'place' on staff and student feelings of belongingness, and retention, has been recognised by senior managers. Consequently the concept that 'tribes thrive' has gained institutional currency and measures are being taken to zone students' timetables with the aim of engendering a connection with the physical learning environment. Finally,

What Works? has given the institution space to start to understand the root causes of non-continuation and enabled Salford to initiate work to support and enhance student success, rather than treat the symptoms of retention issues.

6. Changes implemented at the discipline level and impact

6.1. Aeronautical Engineering

The Aeronautical Engineering team had experience of peer mentoring and chose this as an appropriate intervention to improve student retention and success. As previously noted, an intervention that was integrated into the curriculum was selected because of the high proportion of contact time and also because of the constraints of above average staff-student ratios. The intervention was introduced in a first year design module that had a low pass rate compared with other modules. In this particular module, students from three different degree programmes form project groups of five to eight to design a four-seater light aircraft. As far as possible students are grouped with others on the same degree programme to encourage cohort identity and effective peer relationships. The discipline team believed that students find this module challenging because it requires the application of mathematical concepts and calculations, i.e. 'hard data', combined with creative thinking and decision-making since numerous design outputs could be 'right'.

Level 5 students who had completed the module the previous year were recruited to mentor first year project groups. The mentors were given guidance on how to provide peer support and staff received training on facilitating inter-year team working. The project groups met for two hours each week; during this time each group met with an academic tutor who monitored progress and addressed issues. In the remainder of this timetabled session the student mentors were available to answer questions and help support the groups' thinking as they moved from understanding the assessment brief to refining their solution. Mentors were able to work with different groups, allowing the first year students to benefit from different inputs and perspectives.

6.1.1. Evidence of impact

Prior to the introduction of peer mentoring the first time pass rate in the design module was stable at around 70 per cent. In the first year of the intervention (2013/14) this rose to 83 per cent, and the average mark for the module was 8.4 points higher than the previous year. Positive changes in student engagement in the module, as measured by attendance at the weekly project team meetings, were observed. Attendance increased by over 25%, from an average attendance at 11 events in 2012/13 to 15 in 2013/14.

The intervention was well received by both the first year mentees and the second year mentors. Focus group feedback from each year group was very positive about the intervention; surprisingly, the mentors were initially more positive about the mentoring scheme, possibly as a result of having previously gone through – and survived – the challenging learning process and because they could identify the wider skills they were developing. It was clear that the mentoring relationship was reciprocal with distinct benefits having been recognised by the mentees and mentors.

In contrast to the positive results seen in student engagement and attainment data at a module level, the Aeronautical Engineering group were consistently among the lowest scoring of the discipline teams in terms of belonging, engagement and self-confidence as measured by the standardised *What Works?* survey (see section 2.1 for further details of the survey tool). Although on one level this might mean that the intervention had little impact beyond the module in which the peer mentoring scheme was delivered, academic attainment data show that the average mean year

1 mark increased by over 3 marks and the same students' average year 2 mark increased by over 7 marks.

Qualitative evaluation revealed that the intervention had filled a gap in the academic and pastoral support afforded to the first years that would normally be fulfilled by a Personal Tutor. Students were acutely aware of academic staff shortages and looked to the mentors to address wider programme and study matters, such as options choices and planning for the subsequent year of study. It is possible that the low scores in the main *What Works?* survey reflect, to some extent, the impact of staffing levels on students' belonging, engagement and self-confidence.

Taking the quantitative and qualitative data together, the change programme team concludes that peer mentoring has had positive impact on both students' feelings of connectedness to the university and academic achievement. Although this intervention took place within a technical module with a specific assessment rubric, the principles applied in Aeronautical Engineering can be transferred to other disciplines. Indeed, the university has already begun to make preparations for extending the intervention to other areas as part of a wider initiative to address student retention and success (see section 7, Sustainability).

The discipline case study *It's gonna help yourself as well as someone else* contains full discussion of the multifaceted aspects of meaningful peer relations observed in the intervention and the impact data.

6.2. Music and Performance

The Music and Performance area differed from the other disciplines in that the intervention was selected by the Head of School. The rationale behind this decision was to bring the Directorate into line with institutional policy to provide academic and pastoral support via smaller personal tutor groups rather than the year tutor system – whereby one academic member of staff assumes responsibility for a whole year group - which was in operation following the merger of two academic schools. The intervention was led by the Director of the Music who had line management responsibility for all academic staff within the Directorate. In the first instance the intervention was implemented across all undergraduate Music degree year groups (i.e. levels 3 to 6) and was later extended to Performance programmes when the Directorate expanded.

The decision was made to assign personal tutor responsibilities to all academic staff. High staff-student ratios meant that initially groups were large; in 2012/13 the average group size was 45. Each tutor received a workload allocation of three hours per student, plus an additional twelve hours to deal with complex issues. Group sizes meant that tutors could not meet regularly with students on an individual basis and so group tutorials were added to students' timetables. Students were able to book one-to-one appointments with their personal tutor on request.

All students were originally scheduled to meet as a personal tutor group once a week but this proved unpopular with second and final year students and attendance was low. Over time, the pattern of meetings has changed in response to student and staff feedback: in 2015/16 first years still meet weekly in semester 1 but fortnightly in semester 2; second years meet fortnightly throughout the year; and final year students meet with their personal tutor nine times a year at key points. Personal tutors are required to monitor attendance and follow up students who miss meetings to check if individual support is required. Staff also complete periodic personal tutor reports which are used to monitor the effectiveness of the intervention and inform enhancements.

During the second year of the intervention the discipline team developed resources to support staff across the Directorate. These included the development of a thematic calendar as the basis for

meetings, for example, topics were aligned to each year group at appropriate points in the academic year, and a Personal Tutor Handbook.

6.2.1. Evidence of impact

In the early stages of the intervention the main change in behaviour and attitude among staff was that, for the first time, personal tutoring took on a much more serious, recognised, official work-duty focus. These changes were evidenced through Personal Development Review meetings, receipt of workload balancing allocation, timetabling of personal tutor sessions, and the near 100 per cent return of personal tutor report documents across the academic sessions 2013/14 and 2014/15.

During the first year of the intervention variation in levels of student attendance and engagement across programmes were observed, particularly among second and final year students to whom personal tutoring seemed less relevant. Engagement across all year groups increased in 2014/15, which is attributed to a combination of the personal tutoring system becoming more embedded within the programmes, staff feeling more confident about their tutoring role, and the development of personal tutor resources. Feedback meetings with students indicate that they have become much more aware of the core nature of personal tutoring sessions and value meetings as a way of connecting with their peers and staff.

The most striking impact of the intervention is the evidence of cultural changes that have positively shaped staff-student relationships. The volume of student complaints and issues reported to Staff-Student Committee meetings has dropped dramatically as a result of students having regular opportunities to raise matters with their personal tutor, the majority of which are resolved swiftly and informally. The effectiveness of this approach to listening and responding to students has formed the basis for the university's new student voice policy.

Responses to the *What Works?* belonging, engagement and self-confidence survey also support an improvement in relationships with staff. Both 2013/14 and 2014/15 entrants report increased feelings of belonging at the university, particularly in relation to feeling at home at Salford, viewing their discipline as welcoming and being shown respect by members of staff. By 2014/15 improvements had also been observed across Music and Performance programmes in terms of progression from level 4 to 5 and retention of first year students.

Although the impact of this intervention has been very positive, its success was far from certain in the first year of the project. The discipline lead faced significant challenges in convincing staff and students of the value of a systematic approach to personal tutoring. Full discussion of these challenges, how they were overcome and how the team went on to deliver a very effective intervention can be found in the discipline case study *A changed culture through personal tutoring*. Commentary of the team's impact on institutional policy is provided in the institutional case study *The challenge of creating change in a changing landscape*.

6.3. Sports Science

A programme of extended induction activities was selected by the Sports Science team as their intervention. The team felt that this was an area of particular importance in light of increased intakes which has seen the number of entrants almost double, from 39 in 2011/12 to 77 in 2014/15. A timeline approach was adopted around the following key points:

- Pre-entry/arrival
- Welcome
- Extended induction and transition into HE

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The pre-entry and welcome programme were designed to facilitate early engagement with the programme, staff and other students through social activities rather than information dissemination. A light-hearted newsletter and pre-arrival activity were sent to new students by email prior to arrival to help create a sense of belonging and manage student expectations. Activities during welcome week featured lots of opportunities for social interaction with group activities such as 'Sports Science Superstars', 'A Question of Sport' and icebreaker sessions.

Throughout the first year the team delivered a series of study skills sessions across the first year – seven in semester 1 and four sessions in semester 2. These weekly timetabled sessions provided an extra hour of contact time to cover additional material in a staggered way according to its relevance to the student journey. Content covered study skills, programme information, university regulations and support. Material was delivered through a combination of the programme team and the Student Life support service. Several newsletters were also sent out to students to provide information and support at critical moments – prior to Christmas and semester 1 exams, and prior to Easter and semester 2 exams. In response to student feedback, delivery of this material was embedded across all first year modules rather than as standalone content.

Full details of the intervention's design and delivery can be found in the discipline case study *Sports Science: an evidence-based approach to shaping institutional policy in the areas of welcome and induction*.

6.3.1. Evidence of impact

Students reported that the pre-arrival newsletter helped them prepare for the programme, they felt welcomed, had a greater knowledge of the course, and gained some understanding of future careers. Focus group feedback indicated that there was variability in the extent to which students accessed this support. The reported completion of the pre-arrival activity was low, possibly because some students did not feel comfortable admitting to having done the exercise.

Welcome week activities were received very positively, with 95 per cent of respondents to an evaluation questionnaire stating that they either strongly agreed or agreed that: welcome week encouraged interaction with tutors and peers; they felt at ease with tutors; their Personal Tutor was encouraging and supportive. Eighty-five per cent felt they were prepared for study. During focus group discussions students were able to identify the inclusion of study skills support within the curriculum. As noted above, in response to student feedback the team adjusted how this material is delivered by embedding it across a range of first year modules.

The *What Works?* survey tool supports the discipline team's findings that students felt welcomed by the university and department. Both the 2013/14 and 2014/15 entry reported high levels of belonging in the autumn of starting their programme; 4.36 and 4.33 respectively on a five-point scale (with 5 being highest). Engagement and self-confidence scores were slightly lower but, across all three measures (belonging, engagement and self-confidence), the Sports Science students scored above average compared with all institutions taking part in the change programme.

The introduction of an enhanced suite of pre-arrival, welcome and induction activities has not resulted in significant changes in the proportion of students who are retained and progress. What has changed significantly is the cohort size which has almost doubled over the last four years. It is therefore possible that the intervention has mitigated a further decline in first year retention trends. The findings suggest that further research is needed into the impact of student number growth on non-continuation and the reasons for withdrawals in this discipline area.

During the course of the change programme the university initiated a project to review the institutional approach to Welcome, Registration and Induction (WRI). The Sports Science discipline lead sat on the WRI project board which ran for two successive September intakes (2014-2016). Notable among the outputs of the project is an increased focus on students' integration with their programme (as opposed to the institution) and development of 'Minimum Guidelines for Programme Welcome' with which all programme must comply. Lessons learnt by the discipline team have been shared across the institution to positive effect, as noted in section 5.6 (Impact of institutional changes).

6.4. Impact and learning about effective practice in the disciplines

Senior management support was an important factor in enabling change to happen. For example, the Director of the Music & Performance Directorate was the discipline lead and therefore had direct line management of the staff involved in the intervention. Although it was challenging to combine the two roles, leadership by a senior manager within the school was a crucial part of the success of the personal tutoring intervention.

Committed and enthusiastic discipline leads made a huge difference to the success of the interventions, especially in challenging circumstances. All three discipline teams experienced staff shortages at some point during the change programme. The fact that all three interventions were designed and delivered is a remarkable achievement. A sudden and unexpected sharp decline in staffing in one area meant that the intervention could not be delivered in 2014/15.

The teams' familiarity with the type of intervention selected did not appear to impact on effectiveness. Two of the discipline teams chose interventions that were familiar, either because they had implemented something similar in the past or because it was an area that had previously been a priority but had 'got lost' over time. It was clear that these teams felt confident in designing their intervention and what steps were needed to deliver a pilot scheme in 2013/14.

The third discipline team was initially less confident about their intervention, partly owing to it being a new activity and possibly also because the area of change was selected for them by the Head of School. However, these factors do not appear to have had a detrimental effect on either the design or implementation of the intervention. If anything, the newness of the activity perhaps helped the discipline team coalesce over time and it is evident that lessons were quickly learned and acted upon.

6.5. Development of the change programme team

Without a doubt, the individuals involved in the HEA student retention and success change programme at Salford have developed knowledge and skills they are unlikely to have gained without participation in *What Works?* Team members have undertaken specific development activities, for example, members of the Sports Science team participated in a bespoke workshop with Nicholas Bowskill on Student-Generated Induction: A social identity approach, which shaped their extended induction intervention. Another member of the core team undertook public speaking training as part of their preparation for presenting the university's work at a national event. Two members of the core team are in the process of preparing applications for Senior Fellowship of the HEA as a direct result of the development undertaken and results delivered within the *What Works?* change programme.

What has made the change programme distinctive within the institution is its successful embodiment of co-creation, one of the key enablers of Salford's strategic plan. Moreover, the project team successfully challenged traditional ways of working – often characterised by a 'silo'

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approach and mentality – to deliver sustainable improvements. Team members operated without hierarchy, contributing their skills, knowledge and ideas as individuals, rather than role holders, to deliver positive impact and exemplify desired future working practices. The team has also developed new skills in the area of pedagogical research ‘in action’, a key work stream in the new Salford Curriculum+ Sub Strategy.

6.6. Impact beyond the university

Beyond the immediate internal context the core team is increasing external visibility of Salford’s *What Works?* learning points and achievements via presentations and working sessions in a range of sector-wide fora. Members of the *What Works?* programme team have either been invited to speak at, or successfully applied to present at, the following external events and conferences.

- *Priorities and challenges for institutional change to support success throughout the student lifecycle*, Westminster Higher Education Forum Keynote Seminar: Improving student attainment and retention: financial support, additional needs and widening participation, December 2015
- *Placing Students at the Heart of the University by co-creating their journey; a case study at the University of Salford*, UK Advising and Tutoring Conference, March 2016
- *Priorities and Challenges for Institutional Change to Support Success Throughout the Student Lifecycle*, Association of University Administrators Managing Change in Higher Education Network Annual Meeting, July 2016
- *A Journey to Improving our Students’ Experience*, Association of University Administrators Managing Change in Higher Education Network Annual Meeting, July 2016
- *Supporting transition, improving retention and student success, and transforming culture through Personal Tutoring*, Ready for Retention Conference, July 2016
- *Segmenting the student journey at the University of Salford: a student-centric action-orientated approach to enhancing transition, retention and attainment*, Ready for Retention Conference, July 2016

7. Sustainability

Although the *What Works?* change programme will formally draw to a close in 2015/16, Salford’s work in this area is far from over. There is clear recognition that this programme represents one (of several) meaningful points of engagement in retention work that have allowed the university to reflect upon and assess practices in a systematised and purposeful manner, recognising that the institution is in the early stages of a much longer journey. At a discipline level, all four subject areas have expressed a commitment to continuing to deliver, and enhance, the local interventions they developed and which are now largely embedded within business as usual activities. The discipline leads are reference points for other colleagues across the university who wish to learn about their particular intervention and how it may be translated into their own academic area. Additionally, there is the institutional legacy of each discipline:

Sports Science: The focus on first year students’ social integration at programme level during Welcome and Induction has been adopted across the whole institution and is being further enhanced for 2016/17.

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Music and Performance: The unexpected legacy of the personal tutoring intervention is the promotion of agile and effective two-way communication between students and staff in the Always Listening Policy.

Aeronautical Engineering: From 2016/17, peer mentoring is one element in a suite of enhanced activities that will be introduced in those disciplines that have lower than expected retention rates.

The ways in which the discipline interventions have shaped institutional activity have at times been subtle and indirect. For example, a common thread in both the Sports Science and Music and Performance areas was staggering the timing of content delivery to help students transition into university and become successful HE learners. In Sports Science this was done via extended induction and study skills, and in Music and Performance via the theming of personal tutor meetings. This initially gave rise to the concept of a 'calendar of student concerns' with the aim of developing guidance for staff to help support students at critical times, as pinpointed by the discipline teams. Over time, this piece of work has been, and continues to be, co-created with the students' union and has developed from weekly themed newsletters into *Segmentation of the Student Journey*, a work stream of Salford Curriculum+. Rather than focus on a deficit model of student concerns, the model has been flipped to identify the key things students need in order to successfully transition into, through and out of the student journey. This might take the form of information and guidance, threshold concepts in their degree programme (Woodfield and O'Mahony, 2016) or gaining employment related skills and experience. Crucially, segmentation has become the organisational locus for all institutional and school based retention activities, thereby ensuring that these take place within a coherent, co-ordinated institutional framework.

What has emerged very clearly from the change programme is the need to take a holistic view of the whole first year experience. In addition to organising retention-related activities around the different stages of the student journey, the university is also starting to look at the real *purpose* of the first year of undergraduate study and refocus on the 'essentials' that will provide the solid foundation on which students can build successfully in subsequent years. As an example, the Aeronautical Engineering team that took part in *What Works?* is in the process of redesigning the first year curriculum and assessment diet in recognition that almost half of students enter without A level mathematics. Similarly, the Salford Inclusive Teaching and Learning Framework is being formulated to benefit all students. These initiatives are intended to underpin a personally satisfying and successful student experience, regardless of an individual's starting point upon entry to HE, and contribute to the evidence base and debate around the emerging concept of 'learning gains'.

The project team's aim to raise the profile of student retention and success across the institution has been realised. The profile of retention as an institutional focus has been embedded within strategic documents, language and key performance indicators for the university. Similarly, a wider notion of student success as espoused by the project literature has been embraced in the institution's longer term education vision and strategy. Following reviews of executive and senate structures there is clear, co-ordinated oversight of the student experience – including both student retention and attainment – across the university's management and governance functions. This will ensure appropriate accountability is maintained and the impact of improvement activities closely monitored.

Importantly, in addition to the cultural changes previously referred to, development of key parts of the university's infrastructure, including organisational development, professional services support, estates development and the student information system, will support the 'normalisation' of activities that contribute to improved retention and success.

8. Conclusions

8.1. Successes:

- We have developed three distinct interventions which have made a significant impact on attitudes and behaviours at discipline level.
- Supporting resources for all the interventions have been developed which can be shared and adapted by other discipline areas.
- We have sustained institutional and discipline changes over a three year period at time of significant internal and external change.
- We have had a remarkably good degree of stability in the core and discipline teams throughout the change programme. This has been valuable in light of the extent of internal changes that have taken place over the last three years.
- We are beginning to see cultural changes across the whole institution, including the development a new language around 'co-creating' the student experience with students and external stakeholders and a common understanding that 'tribes thrive'.
- We have successfully influenced major institutional projects, initiatives, services and thinking, helping to ensure a student-focused approach is taken by academic schools and professional services working in partnership.
- We are successfully sharing our learning experiences and the impact of changes at Salford with the wider HE sector.

8.2. Challenges:

- Funding – there was no budget allocation to the project. One of our original aims was to develop discipline interventions that could be implemented without significant financial investment and therefore be sustainable, but the changes implemented have not been cost neutral. Significant staff time was required to develop, implement, monitor, evaluate and enhance all of the interventions. The core team attempted to secure funding for individual student retention and success initiatives that programme teams could bid for as part of the institution's Access Agreement, a funding stream that had been introduced by another *What Works?* participant. Unfortunately this request was unsuccessful.
- Staff buy-in both during and after the end of the project. Where discipline leads were not in a position to direct staff resources, securing staff buy-in was sometimes difficult, particularly in the early stages and during periods of staff shortages which affected all discipline areas at some point over the last three years.
- Staff engagement and motivation. In many parts of the university research is seen as more important for promotion and career progression, although it is hoped that recent changes to the academic promotion procedure noted in this report will help to change this perception. Recruitment policies also need to be considered to ensure that good teaching is valued as much as a candidate's research profile.
- Student buy-in to the interventions was unexpectedly challenging at times.

- Data and systems did not always work in harmony and tensions were experienced in managing the quality of students admitted to programmes and achieving school and institutional recruitment targets.

8.3. Drawing together impact and learning, and reflection on the process

The change programme has been a significant learning experience for the teams involved in *What Works?* and the wider institution. A major finding was just how much work the institution needed to do to improve student retention and success, particularly around infrastructure and strategic enablers. In many ways a significant part of the last three years has been spent *reaching* a baseline from which we can go on to realise significant changes in the retention and success of our students in the next three to five years.

As a result of participating in *What Works?* the university has been able to dispel several myths about student retention and success. For example, quantitative and qualitative data have shown that the issues underpinning the external measures of NSS and retention are, for the most part, different in nature and location. This is highlighted most clearly by the fact that only one programme is common to lists of 'red' retention teams and 'red' NSS teams (approximately 15 programmes in each list). The large majority of programmes with retention issues have no issues with satisfaction, with some red retention programmes achieving above average scores for overall satisfaction. The data for these programmes indicates that the students desire to continue and progress in their studies, but are failing the assessment at first attempt. We have also discovered that the timing and nature of assessment in year one are problematic for some students, and realised the importance of a strategic, co-ordinated approach to supporting the transition from school/college to university.

One of our original aims in participating in the change programme was to take the findings of phase 1 of *What Works?* and discover *what works in the Salford context*. On reflection, perhaps we should have referred to Salford *contexts* since the differences between the disciplines, and between different areas of the university, meant that multiple, nuanced approaches and strategies were adopted to deliver change. We have gained knowledge about the 'toolkit' required to create change and how to deploy these tools to deliver positive impact. *What Works?* has been both a *catalyst* for institutional change and a means of informing institutional direction and thinking within Salford's wider change agenda and current strategic development, seen itself in the context of a shifting set of sectoral priorities.

8.4. Conclusions

In many ways Salford's *What Works?* experience is very much like many students' academic journey in that we are beginning to experience 'exit velocity', that is, significant progress is being made as the change programme comes to an end. Hard data does not necessarily tell the whole story and it would be unfortunate if the success of these interventions is judged solely on retention, progression and student achievement data over a two or three year period. As previously noted, given the extent of change that was (and is) required across the whole institution, it is unrealistic to expect a significant turnaround in student retention and success during the life of the programme.

The team has learned the importance of being realistic about the extent of change that can be delivered, particularly at institutional level. The three year period of the programme enabled a sustained programme of exploratory work to be undertaken which has undoubtedly been beneficial in embedding key *What Works?* messages across the institution.

The teams has not made any new or remarkable discoveries about creating change in large organisations; it is a complex, creative, and often messy process and the output of change does not

always resemble what was originally envisaged. In addition, the internal climate has to be receptive and the case for change strong. By far the most significant asset to the change process has been the people involved; the colleagues who formed the core and discipline teams, the wider staff groups who helped to implement the interventions and institutional changes, and the students who engaged in the interventions and evaluation processes.

8.5. Implications

Significant change can be implemented at a local (i.e. discipline) level but this is only part of the 'answer' to improving student retention and success. An institutional desire and support for change, as well as the necessary resources and infrastructure, are necessary to address those institutional and systematic changes impacting upon the project that are beyond the control of programme teams.

An evidence based approach can deliver significant benefits to institutions seeking to emulate and implement the lessons learned by other HE providers. However, the learning process is not necessarily linear, and in some cases it is necessary for a degree of 'relearning' what has already been 'found' to take place in order to establish ownership for change in a different institution or context.

Consistent messages and a common language are required to help gain traction and buy-in to the change process.

At a time when higher education is increasingly seen as a marketised commodity, inextricably bound to notions of students as consumers (and associated legal ramifications), it is important not to lose sight of the individual and joint responsibilities of HE providers and students to nurture an environment in which students can develop and be successful.

8.6. Recommendations/next steps for the institution

1. That discipline teams who are charged with the responsibility for implementing interventions to support student retention and success are given time to develop, implement and evaluate this work. The success of such interventions can be compromised if the expectation is that such initiatives can be carried out as part of the 'everyday' job.
2. That the university considers adopting the What Works? belongingness survey or similar tool to complement existing work on student profiles/identifying at risk students.
3. That the institution continues to learn from, and work in partnership with, discipline teams and students in building on the important foundations of the Salford *What Works?* change programme through the emerging priority of co-creation and other strategic developments.

8.7. Considerations for the sector/HEA

1. That colleagues in HE providers who are charged with the responsibility for implementing interventions to support student retention and success, especially those at discipline level, are given time to develop, implement and evaluate this work. The success of such interventions can be compromised if the expectation is that such initiatives can be carried out as part of the 'everyday' job.
2. That demonstrable excellence in the areas of student retention and success are recognised in institutional reward and promotion policies.
3. That a further follow up study be undertaken within the next five years to provide a fuller picture of the true impact of the student retention and success change programme.

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4. That the sector considers adopting the *What Works?* belongingness survey or similar tool to complement existing work on student profiles/identifying at risk students.
5. That the sector continues to lobby for a greater focus on student engagement in sector metrics such as the National Student Survey.
6. That the findings from *What Works?*¹ and *What Works?*² inform national policy on/approaches to learning gains, particularly in relation to the Teaching Excellence Framework.

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Appendix 1: Overview of student population at University of Salford

The student population at Salford is typical of the University Alliance mission group:

Total student population 2014/15	18,899 (all students, all levels HESA population)
Total UG population	14,896 (13,851 f/t; 1,045 p/t)
Total PGT population	3,298 (1,827 f/t; 1,471 p/t)
Total PGR population	724 (522 f/t; 202 p/t)
UG population	
Gender	54% Female, 46% Male
Ethnicity	68% White, 26% BME, [6% not known]
Declared disability	14%
State school/college	98% (Young, f/t undergraduate entrants)
Low participation neighbourhood	20% (Young, f/t undergraduate entrants)

Entrants to Undergraduate programmes 2014/15

	Number & (% of student body)	Aeronautical Engineering	Music	Performance	Sports Science
Female	3,462 (55%)	8 (7%)	18 (17%)	100 (64%)	14 (20%)
Male	2,833 (45%)	102 (93%)	88 (83%)	57 (36%)	57 (80%)
Young (under 21 on entry)	3,684 (58%)	87 (79%)	69 (65%)	117 (75%)	59 (83%)
Mature (21 or over on entry)	2,615 (42%)	23 (21%)	37 (35%)	40 (25%)	12 (17%)
Parent with experience of HE	1,088 (20%)	35 (33%)	28 (34%)	24 (30%)	19 (29%)
A level entry qualifications	2,096 (33%)	50 (45%)	23 (22%)	41 (26%)	14 (20%)
Vocational/non-A level entry qualifications	4,203 (67%)	60 (55%)	83 (78%)	116 (74%)	57 (80%)

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Entry through clearing	1,539 (24%)	32 (29%)	13 (12%)	34 (22%)	8 (11%)
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- The proportion of young entrants to undergraduate programmes has been rising across the sector in recent years and the same trend is evident at Salford:

Year of entry to Salford	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Young (under 21 on entry)	54%	50%	56%	58%

- Nationally there has been a small rise in the proportion of students entering through clearing. The rise at Salford has been faster than nationally:

Year of entry to Salford	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Entry through clearing	19%	23%	24%

Appendix 2: University of Salford Map of Connections



Acknowledgments

This work was undertaken as part of the 'What Works? Student Retention and Success Change Programme', funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access.

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1. Case study: Aeronautical Engineering

“It’s gonna help yourself as well as someone else” – observations on developing meaningful peer relations through multiple dimensions of mentoring in Aeronautical Engineering

Gillian Molyneaux and Debbie Whittaker

2. Rationale

Progression rates from level 4 to level 5 of the Aeronautical Engineering programmes suggested that a common ‘design’ focused module was the most challenging for first year students to achieve success. The discipline team recognised that the Aviation Business Enterprise module required extra support but staff shortages meant this was difficult to provide. The literature (Rodger and Tremblay, 2003; Colvin and Ashman, 2010; Dennison, 2010) supports the use of peer mentoring as an appropriate intervention to improve student retention and success and, since the team had previous experience of peer mentoring, they felt confident that integrating this type of intervention within the curriculum would provide ‘an accessible and informal alternative to approaching a formal lecturer’ (Andrews and Clark, 2011 p.51). Furthermore, the *What Works?* phase 1 project (Thomas, 2012) found that students who develop meaningful peer relations are more likely to feel a sense of belonging to their HE institution and are less likely to withdraw.

Mentoring support was provided by second year volunteers who had studied the same module the previous year.

This case study focusses on the student experience of mentoring both as mentor and mentee. It will demonstrate that students developed meaningful peer relations *through multiple dimensions* as a result of the mentoring scheme. Whilst recognising the positive benefits of the intervention, including improved student success rates, there are several lessons to learn in relation to peer mentoring and wider issues of student pastoral and academic support.

3. The peer mentoring scheme

Students from three different programmes come together in the level 4 compulsory module Aviation Business Enterprise. This is a full year module which is split into two distinct parts: semester 1 comprises a traditionally taught introduction to key concepts; in semester 2, students work in small groups (typically 4 to 8 students) to design a four-seater small aircraft. Students are put in project groups based on the overarching subject of their degree despite this module being interprofessional learning. This is done to develop student identity and a sense of cohort belonging (Thomas, 2012).

The discipline team believed that the primary reason students experienced difficulty in the group design project was the requirement to think differently. Up to this point in the course they had learnt about ‘concrete’ concepts and calculations. The design project on the other hand involved applying this learning in a creative way and to make decisions:

You’re dealing with a nebulous mass that you’ve got to kick into shape. It’s got to take a solid form. There isn’t a single hard answer, so they’ve [the project groups] got to make choices.

(Aviation Business Enterprise Tutor)

Second year student mentors were recruited to provide informal support to the first year project teams with the aim that tacit knowledge would be shared with mentees, thereby contributing to increased confidence as effective HE learners (Andrews and Clark, 2011; Thomas 2012). Module tutors used second year lectures to inform level 5 students of plans to establish a peer mentoring scheme within the Aviation Business Enterprise module and to ask students to volunteer to be mentors. The second years understood the rationale for the intervention, having studied the module themselves, and responded enthusiastically to the invitation to help the first year project groups. Five students volunteered to become mentors; staff agreed that all were strong academically so a selection process was not implemented. Mentors received guidance on the role from the module leader. This was specific to the task, that is, it was a narrow remit to answer the mentees' questions about the design brief and to encourage the students to think differently and consider alternative solutions. As will become clear in the findings, the scope of the mentors' role in reality was wider than originally envisaged, suggesting that greater attention needs to be paid to mentor training.

The first year project teams met for two hours each week. Within that time they had a short session with one of the two tutors delivering the module with the remainder of the time dedicated to group work and the opportunity to discuss their module assessment with a mentor. The fact that the arrangement was largely informal and operated without staff supervision enabled the creation of a 'constructivist environment' which is suited to effective peer learning (Patel & Little, 2006). Each mentor could work with any of the specified groups, allowing the first years to benefit from a range of different inputs. In this way no group was left without support in the event that their mentor could not attend the session. This flexibility also enabled different learning styles to be successfully accommodated (ibid).

From the second years' perspective, becoming a mentor was primarily an altruistic endeavour. It was not possible to offer the mentors a financial incentive, nor was the voluntary work formally recognised or certified by the academic school or university. As shown in the findings section, the mentors clearly remembered the difficulties they themselves had encountered as first year students and articulated a genuine desire to help support the learning of their younger peers. During focus group discussions the mentors clearly identified employability benefits but it is unclear to what extent, if any, this was a driver to volunteer.

4. Findings: multiple dimensions of meaningful peer relations

The primary aim of the intervention as conceived by the discipline team was pragmatic: to nurture belongingness and peer relations in an academic setting to improve student retention and success. Qualitative evaluation suggests the mentees and mentors experienced more complex, multiple dimensions of peer relations as a result of the mentoring scheme.

(a) The academic relationship

Mentees felt supported academically, particularly in relation to the assessment brief which they realised they were over-complicating:

Because we were just first years...we thought it was more than we had to do, what work we were supposed to produce and stuff.

(Male 1 level 4 mentee)

I was kind of scared, it seemed really complicated.

(Female 1 level 4 mentee)

We were overthinking everything.

(Male 2 level 4 mentee)

(b) The empathetic relationship

For the mentors, the experience of working with first year students caused them to reflect on when they had faced a similar academic challenge whilst studying the same module. For some of the mentors this was a major factor in volunteering to become a mentor, adding an empathetic element to the intervention and reflecting the findings of Fox & Stevenson (2007):

I saw myself...I saw what it is to struggle...I really regret not having a mentor to give me a hand.

(Male 2 level 5 mentor)

(c) The developmental relationship

The mentees reported that their knowledge of the subject and confidence had increased as a result of working with their mentors:

Maybe it's just about feeling more confident because you have reassurance from someone.

(Female 1 level 4 mentee)

He guides you towards the right sort of answer...and helps you put the report in the right format.

(Male 3 level 4 mentee)

Some of the mentors seemed to have conflicting views about the contribution of the intervention to the first years' academic development. On the one hand they recognised that the mentees needed a 'helping hand', but on the other there was a sense that the mentees may be gaining an unfair advantage. One mentor reported there was 'an expectation that the mentor does the thinking for you' whereas he had to 'learn for myself'.

For the mentors there was also a strong sense of self-awareness of how far they had come in their own journey as confident and successful HE learners:

If someone gives me a problem now I'd have a better idea and get better results.

(Male 2 level 5 mentor)

Interestingly, both groups of students viewed the intervention as developmental for the mentors, partly because they were refreshing their knowledge of material covered earlier in the course:

It also reinforces the learning of the mentor.

(Male 1 level 4 mentee)

It's gonna help yourself as well as someone else.

(Male 4 level 4 mentee)

For the mentors though, there was another distinct aspect of the developmental relationship: it was reciprocal, that is, mentee-mentor relationships had evolved 'to become mutually beneficial' (Andrews and Clark, 2011, p10). The mentors acknowledged that they could 'always learn from a mentee', for example, by needing to further research and to have a full understanding in order to be able to explain a topic to the mentees.

(d) The peer mentor vs peer tutor relationship

What Works? phase 1 made a clear distinction between peer mentoring and peer tutoring (see Andrews and Clark, 2011 for extensive discussion). Although the Aeronautical Engineering intervention was designed within a mentoring framework with second year students acting as 'guides' (Shapiro, Hazeltine, and Rowe, 1978), for example, explaining how to approach the task, there was some evidence that the parameters of the role were less clear to the mentors who inferred a hierarchical facet in the relationship:

We were like mini lecturers!

(Male 1 level 5 mentor)

[It was] an experience to supervise somebody, a small team. It was a great experience.

(Male 2 level 5 mentor)

From the tutors' perspective the boundaries of the mentor role was fixed within the confines of the module and associated assessment. As the above comments in a focus group shows the mentors either had a very different view of their role or, in the absence of debriefings or check-ins with tutors, their original perception of the scope of the role expanded over time. It is equally possible that the nature of the mentors' role expanded in response to genuine need on the part of the mentees, as suggested in the pastoral dimension of the peer mentoring relationship.

(e) The pastoral relationship

It was evident that the mentees valued the pastoral support received during the intervention:

They came over to us and asked what kind of questions we had. We just bombarded them with questions...about their overall experience.

(Male 3 level 4 mentee)

They'll tell you what they've experienced already.

(Male 1 level 4 mentee)

It made us feel more comfortable, they were easier to approach.

(Male 5 level 4 mentee)

The first year students liked the idea of having a mentor with whom they could discuss all of their modules, and the wider student experience, not just Aviation Business Enterprise.

We need someone who will come and tell you what's going to happen in that year [of study] for every subject.

(Male 2 level 4 mentee)

Both groups of students were acutely aware of the impact staffing shortages had on their tutors' availability to speak to them about overall or general course matters, stating that they didn't seek them out for these purposes because they were 'too busy'. It was also evident that the students in this intervention had a clear perception of their personal tutor as an *academic* personal tutor and therefore would not go and speak to an allocated personal tutor 'who did not know about planes', raising questions about whether these students were receiving personal tutor support as defined by the university.

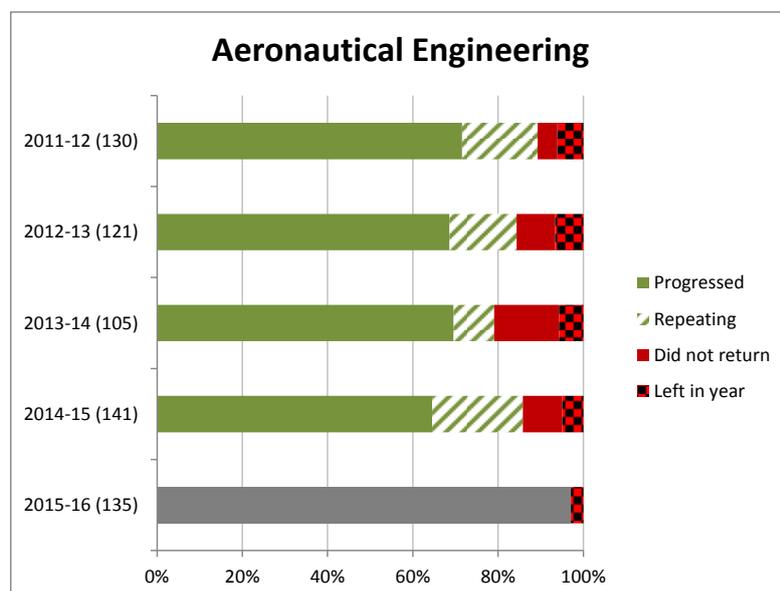
5. Evidence of impact

In addition to the qualitative evidence of how mentees and their mentors developed supportive peer relationships, quantitative evaluation suggests there were significant changes in student attitudes and behaviour. For example, student engagement in the module, as measured by attendance at the weekly project team meetings, increased by over 25 per cent, from an average attendance at 11 events in 2012-13 to 15 in 2013/14.

Student achievement data indicates that the intervention had the desired outcome of improving the academic performance of the mentees. The number of students who passed Aviation Business Enterprise at the first attempt had remained stubbornly static at around 70 per cent. In the first year of the mentoring system (2013-14) the first time pass rate increased from 71 per cent to 83 per cent, and the average mark for the module was 8.4 points higher than the previous year. Attainment across all modules also improved among the 2013-14 cohorts. The average mean year 1 mark increased by over 3 marks and for year 2 the increase was over 7 marks.

The Aeronautical Engineering programme has had poor progression rates for a number of years with a high proportion of students repeating the first year. In 2012-13, the year immediately before the intervention was introduced, the number of students repeating year 1 fell, also reducing overall retention to less than 85 per cent. Nevertheless numbers on the programme have grown and in the last complete year (2014-15 intake) overall retention has recovered a little. Though the progression *rate* is disappointing the number of students successfully completing the first year is the highest since 2011-12 and the number repeating is also up. These trends are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Aeronautical Engineering year 1 retention and progression*



*Cohort numbers shown in brackets next to the intake year

Levels of belongingness, engagement and self-confidence, as measured by the *What Works?* main survey (Tables 2 to 4), were consistently lower across all areas than the other participating disciplines at Salford and the average for all of the institutions participating in the change programme. Unsurprisingly, feelings of belongingness, engagement and self-confidence were significantly higher for cohort 1 (students who commenced their programme in 2013/14) than for cohort 2 who entered in 2014/15.

The already stretched staffing levels in the programme team reduced even further in 2014/15 resulting in a postponement of the peer mentoring scheme that year.

2. Case Study: The challenge of creating change in a changing landscape

Gillian Molyneaux, Sam Grogan, David Singer, Debbie Whittaker, University of Salford

1. Rationale for the case study

There was a clear rationale for Salford to participate in the *What Works?* phase 2 student retention and success change programme: at the start of the project, Salford's non-continuation rate for first year students was 3 per cent above its HESA institutional benchmark and 6 per cent higher than the national average. Similarly HESA data from 2012/13 through to 2014/15 shows a downward trend in continuation, albeit decreasing in severity.

The change programme took place against a backdrop of major internal changes and a rapidly evolving external environment. Throughout the change programme, internal changes occurred at every level of the institution all of which impacted explicitly, or tacitly on the student experience; the early part of the programme was undertaken in the middle of a change process focusing on the dissolution of College structures, replacing these with smaller School entities. This in itself was undertaken to redress issues arising from an internal process of 'transformation'; a movement to rationalise programme delivery and resourcing structures towards an overarching 'model'. In the later stages of the *What Works?* phase 2 student retention and success change programme, the university also reviewed and modified its Senate structures, its Executive structures and reconsidered the Committees of its Council, (with the result that Student Experience Committee of Council was created). In addition to this, there were a number of key personnel changes at the university, not least the arrival of a new Vice Chancellor and, in the arena of the student experience, the creation of the new role of Dean of Students. On a cumulative and tacit level, this extremely unsettled landscape created a fragmented, disjointed student experience in which the facilitative structure of the university developed somewhat silo-based thinking. Sitting underneath this landscape was the institutional recognition that performance in key student-centric metrics was not as desired – consequently the *What Works?* change programme has itself been a welcome part of the wider movement to reconfigure facilities, services and resources to effectively support student retention and success.

Given this internal shifting landscape, creating change on the scale needed to reverse the university's non-continuation trends landscape required the *What Works?* team to navigate complexity on a scale they had not imagined at the outset of the programme. Consequently, this case study will demonstrate that although change did not happen in the way originally planned, by adapting their approach and responding appropriately to developing situations, the project team was able to contribute at an institutional level to sustainable change in a changing landscape.

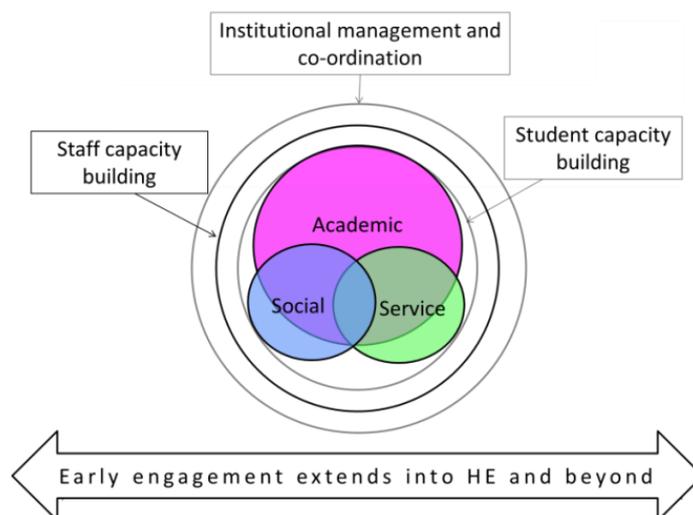
2. Description/discussion of the intervention or change initiative and successful aspects

Informed by the *What Works?* model of student retention and success developed from phase 1 (see figure 1 below) and the Institutional reflective checklist (Thomas, 2012, p.70-71), the core team identified four major areas of work:

- Policies and procedures – helping to creating an institutional infrastructure and culture to support retention and success

- Staff development – to build staff capacity to engage
- Student development – to build student capacity to engage
- Curriculum design and delivery – to embed mainstream activities to engender staff and students' sense of belonging within the academic sphere (Thomas, 2012)

Figure 1: What Works? model of student retention and success (Thomas, 2012 p. 16)



More than 30 individual key activities were defined across these four areas. This was an ambitious number of objectives, especially since the Pro Vice-Chancellor who originally supported the university's bid to participate in the change programme – and who was the senior manager on the core team – took up another post outside the university soon after the programme started. In the early stages of the complex shifting internal landscape noted at the start of this report, there was a sense that *What Works?* was *contingent* on the *resolution* of internal changes rather than being a *catalyst* to shape and direct change.

In light of these developments it is easy to understand why 'Up to 70 per cent of all change initiatives fail; a figure so high it means that most change initiatives are doomed to failure from the start.' (Blanchard, 2010, p44). In response to this evolving environment, the core team revised their approach in the following ways:

- The number of activities and their scope were revised and reduced;
- More explicit links were made between institutional activities and the discipline interventions to strengthen support for these areas;
- The modus operandi shifted from the core team delivering institutional activity as a discrete unit, to becoming institutional advocates for *What Works?* through the development of a sophisticated network of internal connections to effect change. Crucial to this new mode of operation was the addition of the discipline leads to the core team.

The agility of the team has resulted in *What Works?* shaping some significant institutional changes and developments focused on the following areas:

(i) *Institutional Language*

The internal language and discourse around the subject of retention has been significantly shaped by the *What Works?* project and the individual discipline specific interventions. It is possible to see that a lexicon, which recognises the literature and practices associated with the project, has permeated policy language - in particular the Engagement, Participation & Attendance Policy and Interruption and Withdrawal Policy noted below - and operational language across the various working groups and committees of the institution, such as the Welcome, Registration and Induction Steering Group, Associate Deans Academic Forum and the University-Students' Union Steering Group. Moreover, the language of *What Works?* has not only been accepted but internalised. For example, 'space' and 'place' and their impact on feelings of belongingness, and retention, have been recognised by senior managers. Consequently the concept that 'tribes thrive' has gained institutional currency and measures are being taken to zone students' timetables and help engender a connection with the physical learning environment. It is important to emphasise the importance of this permeation; institutional language shapes behaviours and expectations across disparate areas. Having a shared language with a particular focus and slant has helped create and shape a *shared understanding in action* across the university. It has helped clarify our institutional attitude and has given various bodies and individuals a foundational terminology on which to base actions and through which to describe activity. Though still emerging, the value of this cohesion is not to be underestimated in creation of a joined up, focused student experience.

(ii) *Policy Development Landscape*

The *What Works?* student retention and success change programme has significantly impacted policy development at the University of Salford. Influenced by the working of the internal project to reconfigure services and facilitative structures around the experience of the student, rather than the reverse, three policies in particular have been overhauled and reengineered;

- Engagement, Participation & Attendance Policy (formerly Student Participation policy)
- Interruption and Withdrawal Policy
- Always listening: connecting with our Students (formerly the Student Voice Policy)

In each of the instances above the particular trajectory, or path of the student has been considered and the policy has been designed to facilitate them successfully moving along that path. For instance, the revised interruptions and withdrawal policy now includes a revised set of steps which require the student to seek face-to-face help, guidance and advice before completing the process of withdrawal/interruption. Similarly, the policy stipulates principles of the communication a student will experience during interruption and articulates a revised suite of university facilities to which they will have access whilst on interruption. These revisions are designed to ensure students remain connected to the university community whilst away from their studies and the learning environment.

In addition to the content of each policy signalling a student-centric emphasis in thinking, each policy was co-created with our students. This co-creative approach moves beyond a process of consultation and sees all stakeholders: the students' union, student representatives, students themselves and academic and professional services colleagues sitting down together to co-define the problem to be solved. Through a process of agile iteration and group input the policy framework is designed and finessed. This has led to significant levels of 'buy-in' and support from all involved.

(iii) *Specific operational manifestations*

Leading on from the policy landscape outlined above, the change programme and the discipline interventions have had considerable impact on day-to-day operations. Two specific examples are useful to explore here.

Firstly, the personal tutoring intervention implemented by the Music and Performance discipline not only improved student retention and success, it also resulted in a significant drop in the number of student complaints raised at Staff-Student Committee meetings because the regular interaction between staff and students means that the majority of issues are resolved informally and swiftly. This evidence directly informed the university's approach to operationalising the student voice policy - *Always Listening*: connecting with our students noted above. The policy goes beyond the traditional student voice opportunities centred on periodic module and course evaluation questions: *Always Listening* has been operationalised through a multi-modal feedback loop that sees students feed back on their experience through digital platforms and through face-to-face vox-pops across campus giving the university a dynamic in year picture of student perception, satisfaction and key points of concern. Importantly, this data and information, which is split by school and key student demographics, then informs communication and engagement back out to the students so that as the year unfolds, the university is able to effectively tailor its local and institutional communication to speak to the concerns of the moment. Taking its inspiration and lead from the intervention in Music, the operation of this engagement framework positions effective communication leading to positive change as being co-created by students and staff working together as equal partners.

Secondly, the university's Welcome, Registration and Induction programme has been completely redesigned. The way we now welcome our students has been directly shaped by colleagues in Sports Science who developed an intervention on Extended Induction. Welcome Week and the shape of activities leading into it, now focuses on students' social integration with their peers and teachers within the sphere of their *academic programme* (Thomas, 2012), rather than an anonymous, generic university welcome. Again, the focus is on specific co- and extra-curricular activities aligned to the programme area which seek to build cohort identity and a sense of belonging. This is supported by a redeveloped thread of pre-arrival communication and engagement and an interactive welcome pack specifically designed to create a 'moment of delight'. In turn, this work is complemented by significant direction of students prior to arrival through social media and the use of welcome hashtags, all of which is designed to promote active engagement and belonging in the process of registration and induction.

3. Evidence of impact

Two significant factors contributed to the project team's impact across the university.

Firstly, consistency in the majority of core team members enabled their work to continue in the absence of a senior manager. During this period a successful focus was placed on supporting the discipline teams to overcome challenges relating to central university issues that were beyond their control. Institutional level change gained rapid, effective momentum following the appointment of a Dean of Students who joined the core team as the senior manager.

Secondly, the appointment of the Dean of Students marked the emergence of a renewed institutional emphasis on a student-centred experience and an internal climate that is receptive to the findings of *What Works?* phase 1 and organisational learning from the phase 2 change programme. Inserting the role of Dean of Students into the organisational infrastructure has aided widespread understanding of the scale and complexity of the university's retention challenge.

This has been supported by increased levels of open communication and a commitment to a co-created partnership approach in addressing systemic institutional issues and local level action, informed by improved, timely and reactive student data and reporting mechanisms which help the institution ‘wrap’ its processes and practices around the student journey.

As outlined below, evidence of impact is wide-ranging and continues to develop.

i) *Impact: What Works? survey results*

Two cohorts who entered the first year (level 4) of the four participating disciplines in 2013-14 and 2014-15 completed the standardised *What Works?* survey at specified intervals during the change programme. The survey assessed students’ feelings of belongingness, engagement and self-confidence and recorded anonymous demographic and student characteristic information. These data indicate that, for the most part, students in the change programme across all 13 participating institutions are more positive in the first weeks of their university career than half-way through their second semester. As can be seen in the graphs immediately below in Fig. 1, overall the Salford students who entered in 2014-15 responded more positively than the 2013-14 cohort at the equivalent stage in their first year. This change applies across all three scales in the survey. Although it isn’t possible to be certain of the reasons for this improvement in students’ feelings of belongingness, engagement and self-confidence, this change was expected as a result of refinement and enhancement of the discipline interventions in the second year of operation.

Chart 1: Tracking Belongingness in participating academic disciplines at the University of Salford

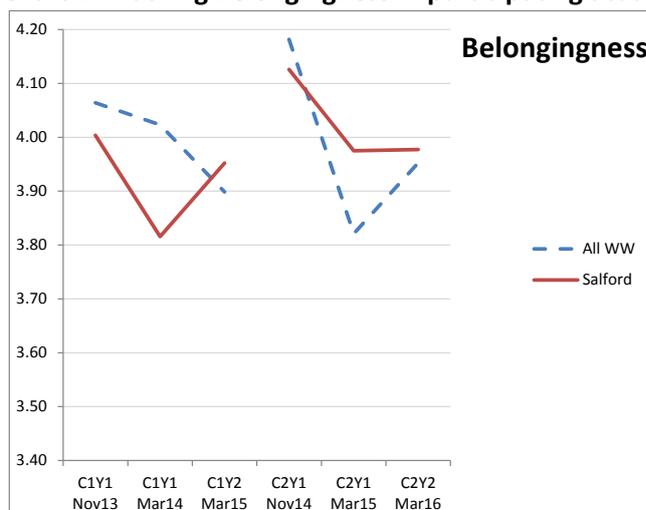


Chart 2: Tracking Engagement in participating academic disciplines at the University of Salford

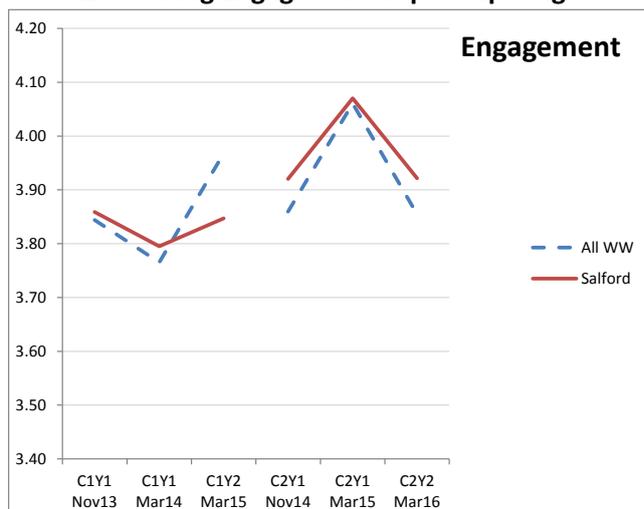
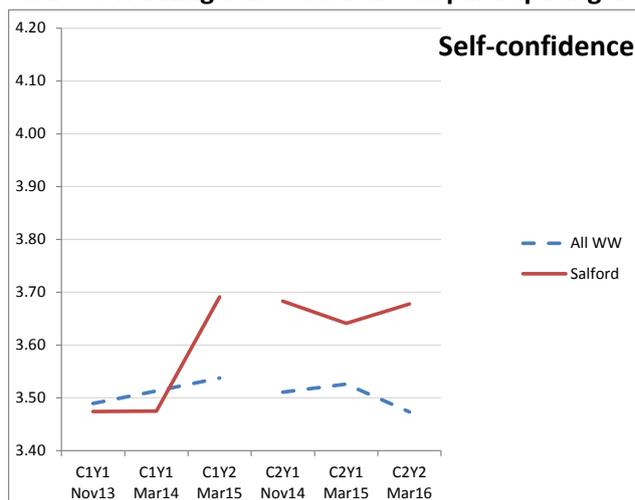


Chart 3: Tracking Self-confidence in participating academic disciplines at the University of Salford



(i) Impact on annual operational activities – Welcome Registration and Induction

Evaluation of the new approach to student Welcome showed that of the 600+ students interviewed about their experience of Welcome in September 2015:

- 94% of them said they felt ‘welcomed or very welcomed’ when they arrived at the university
- 80% found it easy or very easy to get around campus with the information provided
- 91% of students found registration to be efficient or very efficient

Respondents were also asked to describe in one word their impression of the university based on the pre-arrival instructions they received. The words most commonly used were: Good; Great; Welcoming; Amazing; Organised; Friendly; Exciting. Similarly, noting the influence of the work undertaken in Sports Science, the Dean of Health Sciences commented that;

'Their [Sports Science] evidence-based work on transforming student pre-registration, welcome and induction activities from an information giving approach to a student focused one where belonging, social integration and extended academic support is prioritised [...] has significantly contributed to the development of a more transparent University-wide process for welcome, registration and induction which clearly delineates the purpose of each of these steps in the student journey.'

Evaluation of Welcome Registration and Induction also gave us a useful set of constructive negatives which are being used to further enhance the work in 2016/17. For instance, some students reported that they had not received e-mails for Welcome, Registration and Induction, with these being directed to junk folders. Some postgraduate students felt that the Welcome events were targeted towards the undergraduate population. This has provided us with impetus to take the lessons learned from the Sports Science intervention and the wider revisions to Welcome Registration and Induction and translate them to a postgraduate context through a dedicated work stream for 2016/17.

We also noted that year-on-year engagement with the student channel (completely overhauled as part of the communications stream) recorded significant gains:

May 22 2014 – November 10 2014:

- Average time on student channel was 1 minute 29 seconds
- 7,479 views on the student channel direct from social media

May 22 2015 – November 10 2015:

- Average time on student channel was 5 minutes 27 seconds
- 13,738 views on the student channel direct from social media

(ii) Impact on shaping the facilitative learning environment

The *What Works?* change programme has aided in raising the visibility and prominence of the retention and student success agenda within the university management team. Noting the discipline interventions undertaken at Salford as part of the programme, in March 2016, the PVC Academic and the Dean of Students led the University Management Team in a workshop on retention and success, resulting in the strengthening of work in this area, such as the Interruption and Withdrawals policy and the identification and sharing of good practice at a senior level as seen in the personal tutoring intervention.

Also at an institutional level, and arising out of the chronologically thematic approach to student experience espoused by the personal tutoring intervention in Music, the Dean of Students has worked in partnership with the students' union, to create a high level segmentation of the Student Journey. This 'map' is now being used as a means of understanding how current and planned work streams and activities add value to the student journey. It is being used as 'lens' during operational planning and allows the university to address points of weakness in provision and also to see where effort is being duplicated.

(iii) Impact on continuation and progression

Returning to the core team's original intended impact, the team's Vision Statement articulated the following aims:

Within three years' time we will have improved student retention at level 4 from 84% to 87% and progression from level 4 to level 5 from 78% to 82%.

Whilst the target for continuation has been exceeded – 2014-15 out-turn shows a continuation rate of 87.3% - we have fallen slightly short of the progression target stated for the project aims. In hindsight, and with an evolved understanding of the complexity and scale of the actual issues underpinning retention at Salford, and the nature of the starting position, it is realistic to anticipate that the full impact of the changes that have taken place over the last three years will only start to emerge over the next three to five years.

4. Sustainability

Although the *What Works?* change programme will formally draw to a close in 2015-16, Salford's work in this area is far from over. What is already evident is an emerging cultural change leading to 'visible actions' (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Building on the earlier points made on the development of an institutional language, there is a growing recognition that retention is 'everyone's business' and that all areas of the university and its staff have a part to play in improving retention and success. For example, development of key parts of the university's infrastructure, including organisational development, professional services support, estates development and the student information system, will support the 'normalisation' of activities that contribute to improved retention and success.

There is clear recognition that the change programme represents one (of several) meaningful points of engagement in retention work that have allowed us to institutionally reflect upon and assess our practices in a systematised and purposeful manner, recognising that we are in the early stages of a much longer journey.

At a discipline level, all four subject areas have expressed a commitment to continuing to deliver, and enhance, the local interventions they developed and which are now largely embedded within business as usual activities. The discipline leads are reference points for other colleagues across the university who wish to learn about their particular intervention and how it may be translated into their own academic area. Additionally, there is the institutional legacy of each discipline:

Sports Science: The focus on first year students' social integration at programme level during Welcome and Induction has been adopted across the whole institution and is being further enhanced for 2016-17.

Music and Performance: The unexpected legacy of the personal tutoring intervention is the promotion of agile and effective two-way communication between students and staff in the Always Listening Policy, as well as the ongoing development of the Segmentation of the Student Journey as an institutional tool to help shape our organisation and prioritisation of resource.

Aeronautical Engineering: Peer mentoring has become one element in a suite of enhanced activities in those disciplines that have lower than expected retention rates which will be piloted on a wider basis within a number of discipline areas in 2016/17.

The project team's aim to raise the profile of student retention and success across the institution has been realised; the profile of retention as an institutional focus has been embedded within strategic documents, language and key performance indicators for the university. Similarly, a wider notion of student success as espoused by the project literature has been embraced in the institution's longer term education vision and strategy. Following reviews of executive and senate structures there is clear, co-ordinated oversight of the student experience – including both student retention and attainment – across the university's management and governance functions. This will ensure appropriate accountability is maintained and the impact of improvement activities closely monitored.

5. Lessons learnt

Arguably, at an institutional level the key lesson arising from this case study is the value of understanding the nature of the university's retention and success problems. Some of the activities originally agreed by the core team did not have the benefit of the full picture in terms of data intelligence, or recognition of scale or complexity. As such it was appropriate to revise the number and scope of activities as the team's understanding of the internal retention landscape evolved. The project team's experience of progressing their work for several months without a senior management champion highlights the importance of institutional commitment and leadership in creating a culture of belonging (Thomas, 2012).

Through the implementation of three different interventions in four discipline areas, plus through conversations with other academic areas and with the students' union, and analysis of change programme data, a second key institutional lesson learned has been in the recognition of the importance of the transition from school/college to higher education. Whilst other transitions through the various levels of study at Salford have also been highlighted, it is this first transition for the student that is now rightly the focus of considerable work and attention from the university. Salford's *What Works?* change programme has revealed the complexity and subtlety of issues affecting student retention at a discipline level. This understanding will be further enhanced as we examine the implications of more recent research on undergraduate retention and attainment in the disciplines (Woodfield, 2014, Woodfield & O'Mahony, 2016).

This work was undertaken as part of the What works? Student retention and success change programme, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access.

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3. Case Study: A Changed Culture Through Personal Tutoring **Stephen Davismoon and Gillian Molyneaux, University of Salford**

1. Rationale

In the run up to the academic year 2012-13 the Music programmes had experienced some problems with respect to student retention. This trend however stood in stark contrast to its buoyant recruitment figures. The implementation of a systematic Personal Tutoring system was decided upon as the disciplinary intervention to improve student retention and success as part of the HEA *What Works?* student retention and success change programme. The intention was to replace the 'Year Tutoring' scheme with timetabled, smaller group personal tutoring sessions structured around core topics. Research carried out during Phase 1 of *What Works?* found that personal tutoring could help students to build effective relations with their peers and academic staff (McCary, Pankhurst, Valentine and Berry, 2011; Thomas, 2012), thereby nurturing a sense of belonging which, in turn, can increase their disposition to stay in higher education (Harding and Thompson, 2011). Initially this course of action was implemented for the Music degree programmes and later adopted in the Performance area.

This case study will demonstrate: a changed culture that recognises the importance and value of personal tutor meetings on the part of academic staff **and** students; that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work for each programme even within a given subject area; a paradigm shift in the operation of Staff-Student Committee meetings; and the positive impact of a thematic approach to personal tutorials.

2. Focus of the intervention

During the academic year 2012-13 the discipline lead, who was also the Director of the Music and Performance disciplines, commenced the implementation of a systematic approach to personal tutoring. The Year Tutor system existed at the time of the intervention but this was, at best, vague in conception and patchy in operation. It was felt that personal tutoring would facilitate students' academic and social integration, particularly since many are first generation university attendees who may have additional support needs (Harvey and Drew, 2006).

An important development consideration with respect to ensuring success of the Personal Tutoring system was that it should be linked meaningfully to workload allocation. Each tutor was allocated three hours per student, with the expectation that at least one hour would be spent with each student during the course of the academic year. Twelve additional hours were allocated to deal with serious or more complex issues. From the inception of the intervention it was decided that all academic members of staff should act as personal tutors.

During the first year, staff-student ratios did not enable regular individual meetings to take place and students therefore met with their personal tutor on a group basis. Students however, were able to book individual meetings to discuss personal issues. Initially groups were large, the average size being 45 students, though some staff had groups significantly larger than this. By year 3 of the intervention staffing levels improved such that the average group size is now 25-30.

Personal Tutorial groups were based on academic programmes as much as possible to support the formation of peer-to-peer and student-staff relationships as well as cohort identity (Thomas, 2012).

The Personal Tutorial system was instigated, designed and refined by way of iterative feedback. Initially all students were to have a weekly meeting with their personal tutor; however, students and staff were unanimous, by way of team meetings and staff-student meetings, that formal personal tutor contact was occurring too frequently. Over the next two academic sessions the meeting patterns were revised such that by 2015-16, level 4 students have weekly meetings in semester 1 and fortnightly sessions in semester 2; level 5 students have fortnightly sessions throughout the year and level 6 groups meet nine times a year at key points in the academic calendar.

Informed by the recommendations of McCary et al (2011), tutors were required to keep attendance records and follow up with students who did not attend group meetings. Staff also completed periodic Personal Tutor reports which were used to monitor the effectiveness of the intervention and inform developments.

3. Challenges

The most challenging aspect of the intervention was the almost total lack of staff buy-in at the start of the intervention. The discipline lead reported there was 'unbelievable resistance.' He remembered 'getting seriously concerned about the change programme, since for very long periods of time it seemed that no one was engaging with it and often felt that the team was acting significantly against it.' He reports that implementing the intervention was certainly 'one of the most difficult things I've ever had to achieve as a manager and leader.'

An initial absence of student buy-in was also an enormous challenge. It was anticipated that students would welcome the intervention; however it soon became evident that they didn't want to engage with personal tutoring. For a period of time the student body almost unanimously did not see the purpose in attending group meetings because they did not gain academic credit. Attendance was also problematic during the first year of operation because tutorial meetings were not included in any timetable. Crucially, although the Personal Tutoring system had been designed to be: mainstream; proactive; well-timed and delivered via appropriate means; collaborative; and was monitored (Thomas, 2012), the fact that the students could not identify with any *relevance* of the intervention to their experience, contributed to a negative impact on student engagement with, and the overall effectiveness of, the Personal Tutoring system.

Staff resistance was overcome by a process of 'gradual negotiation and robust dialogue' centred on the taking of responsibility and leadership in 'our duty of care to students' and making personal tutors accountable for their tutees in return for the substantive workload allocation. In 2013-14 a small group of key staff bought into the intervention, forming a 'critical mass of colleagues' that played a significant role in its development and roll-out.

The lack of student buy-in was approached differently: the subject lead attempted to put himself in a place of empathy with the student body; over time he convinced them that the personal tutor sessions were not a waste of time, even if they were 'the only student in the group meeting.' The potential career benefits of spending an extra hour with their personal tutor were emphasised. Steps were also taken to overcome negative perceptions, for example, some students felt that personal tutor sessions were there only to deal with problems and that attending such meetings was a sign of weakness.

Attendance improved over time as the intervention was refined and as level 4 students in particular understood the benefits of attending. In the 2015-16 session most level 3, 4 and 5 personal tutoring sessions are timetabled within the Music subject area and this is working very well with respect to attendance which is now at healthy levels.

4. Success factors

The turning point for the intervention was the externally facilitated discipline team residential in April 2014. This was the first time that the group had spent a significant amount of dedicated time discussing and working on the personal tutoring system. The frequency of tutorials was reviewed since it was apparent that a 'one-size-fits-all' pattern was not appropriate across all year groups. In addition, flex was introduced to enable meetings to take place on a smaller group or one-to-one basis according to the needs of the specific discipline area, thus acknowledging that studio, performance and theory learning require different approaches to personal tutoring.

The team also discussed how to give more focus to sessions and how this would change over the academic year. This led to the development of a Personal Tutoring Calendar to assist colleagues in suggesting content for their tutorials by way of theming meetings, e.g. choosing options, plagiarism and what's happening in Manchester. Again, this reflected an increased understanding that the format of the personal tutoring sessions did not have to be standardised but should in fact follow a dynamic pattern of theming in concert with the academic year. Arising from these discussions was the idea of writing a complementary Personal Tutor Handbook as a further staff resource.

Perhaps most importantly, the team left the residential with a collective understanding of the value of the intervention and came away knowing that:

We had to lead by example – that the students would never buy into it if we didn't.
(Discipline lead)

5. Cultural change

Qualitative evaluation of the intervention indicates that cultural changes within the Directorate have been realised as a direct result of the intervention. These changes have been observed in staff and student attitudes and behaviour, and in the nature of staff and student interactions. The primary means of qualitative evaluation were: discipline team meetings; staff meetings; student forums and focus groups; Staff-Student Committee meetings (SSCM); and Personal Tutor report forms, all of which were crucial in the refining of the model now being used. Feedback on the operation of the personal tutoring system was a standing agenda item at SSCM.

Staff attitudes and behaviours

The overwhelming majority of staff are now engaged meaningfully in the Personal Tutor system; they are following the Calendar, using the Personal Tutor Report Forms and carry out personal tutor meetings as part of their 'business as usual' activities. As one tutor comments:

I was reluctant to change to this from the Level Tutor system...However, with the allocation of workload for personal tutoring and obvious benefits to students my initial reluctance has changed.

(Personal Tutor Report Form, Performance Tutor 1)

Staff have also indicated that personal tutoring is helping to nurture social integration and a sense of belonging:

There still has to be some understanding between tutor and student...generally my 1st years liked meeting. In our last session we talked about Apps as art and platforms for storytelling.

So these sessions can aid conversations around performance. This fosters our sense of community.

(Personal Tutor Report Form, Performance Tutor 2)

In my view it helped immensely with the students' transition into university and helps to foster belonging on the programme. An example is that there was a high percentage turnout from my groups at the Christmas Party.

(Personal Tutor Report Form, Performance Tutor 3)

When students offer feedback or ask questions that are relevant to a large number of the group, it promotes a feeling/awareness of shared experience. Students can feel collectively reassured by the dissemination of relevant information, and as each session asks them for their feedback/questions, they feel more engaged with their programme.

(Personal Tutor Report Form, Music Tutor 1)

In short personal tutoring has become 'holistic' rather than narrowly focused on academic matters. Students value the opportunity to come together with their personal tutor to connect and 'catch up':

Sometimes we're just having nice chats...about what they've seen at the theatre. They're just feeling involved...we hang out and have a chat.

(Level 4 Performance Personal Tutor 3)

Student attitudes and behaviours

As reported in section 3, student engagement with personal tutoring has increased during the course of the change programme with around 70 per cent of first year students regularly attending. A focus group with students in May 2015 suggested that students, particularly those in the first and second year, do now recognise the value and purpose of these meetings. When asked if the personal tutorial system helped them to integrate, responses included:

Yes, massively, meeting the people that I'll be working with and so on.

(Level 4 Music student 1)

[I] feel I know people much better because of Personal Tutor sessions.

(Level 4 Performance student 1)

Upcoming events talked about, feel part of School.

(Level 4 Music student 2)

Students confirmed they felt empowered to include their agenda items in tutorial meetings. When asked if they felt they could ask questions of their personal tutor, one student representative replied: 'Yes overwhelmingly...forum was open and questions encouraged.'

Interaction between staff and students

One of the biggest indicators of success of the Personal Tutor system is evidenced by the very significant drop in the reporting of complaints and issues at SSCM. As an example, a comparison of the minutes from such a meeting held within the Performance subject in February 2012 (before its involvement in the intervention) to those from a meeting held in April 2015, reveal a very marked reduction in the number of problems and complaints reported by student representatives and a commensurate increase in the number of issues that were resolved or closed. The same conclusion is arrived at for the Music subject area across a similar time-span, demonstrating that attitudes and working relationships between the staff and student bodies have transformed quite significantly across both subject areas.

In this way the intervention has been effective in dealing with student issues in a much more timely fashion, with staff proactively using personal tutor meetings for this purpose:

There have been several other issues that have come to light that I thought it worth us trying to investigate from personal tutor meetings.

(Personal Tutor Report Form, Music Tutor 2)

More recent evidence collected via student focus groups in May 2016 suggests that personal tutor meetings are continuing to contribute to positive relationships between students and staff:

The personal tutor meetings have been helpful throughout my first year. They have allowed us to ensure that we have someone to talk to at a regular time slot, if we have any problems, and they have made sure that we have had a smooth first year. They are informative, giving you information on events both in the department and throughout the university.

(Level 4 Music student 3)

Personally just keeping up to date with University activities and being reminded of deadlines was useful. It's also good to hear about how other people are getting on.

(Level 5 Performance student 1)

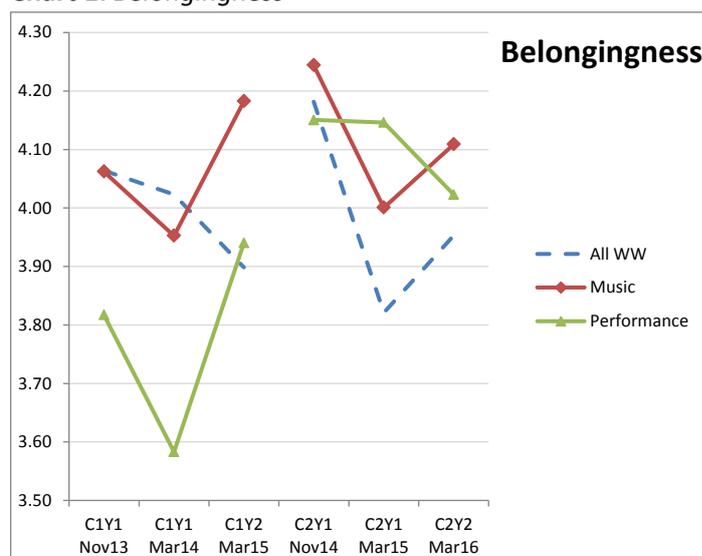
The positive impact on SSCM was a major unintended consequence of the intervention. Whereas these meetings had often been fairly 'confrontational' encounters focused on students' complaints and issues, they are now 'almost non-eventful because niggles don't bubble up and grow legs' (Discipline Lead).

6. Evidence of impact

Belongingness, engagement and self-confidence

In terms of quantitative impact, the *What Works?* change programme main survey (Yorke, 2014) showed a general improvement in positive scores for the extent to which students felt they belonged at Salford, were engaged with their studies and were confident about successfully completing their course. Chart 1 shows the two cohorts' (those entering in 2013 and 2014) combined score on questions on the Belongingness scale.

Chart 1: Belongingness



All scores on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being most positive

Overall the first cohort of Music students were more positive in feelings of belongingness than the Performance students, both showing a dip in feelings of belonging in the second half of their first year (common across the whole of the *What Works?* programme.) By the start of the second year, when the personal tutoring system was more firmly embedded, students on both programmes had recovered and were generally reporting more positive feelings than when they started. The sample size of respondents to the spring 2016 survey when the first cohort was in the final year was too small in both disciplines to include in analysis.

The second cohort that entered in 2014/15 shows a much less marked difference between Music and Performance students, suggesting that the impact of the intervention had caught up after a later start in the Performance subject area. In some instances the Performance students responded more positively than their Music counterparts, particularly in spring of the first year. While changed responses to individual questions are clearly subject to chance variation, the overall consistent improvement across all scales suggests that the personal tutoring arrangements have had a significant positive effect on how students feel about being at Salford and in their relationships with staff. Qualitative evidence collected via focus groups in May 2016 supports the positive data trends in students’ feelings of belongingness and engagement:

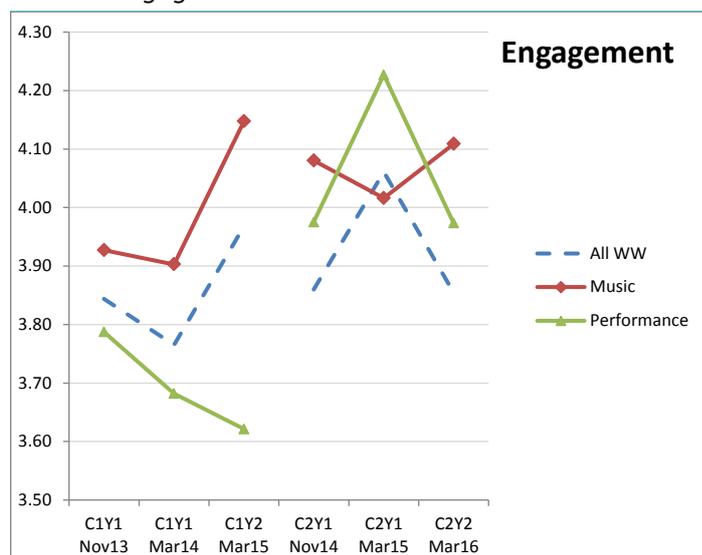
Tutor meetings have been a way of connecting the Musical Arts Group together – whether they are from the popular music background or the classical. We have great comfort to speak openly throughout these meetings and therefore feel like we play an important part within this University as the student body.

(Level 4 Music student 4)

I felt like I was genuinely cared about and recognised as an individual rather than just another student.

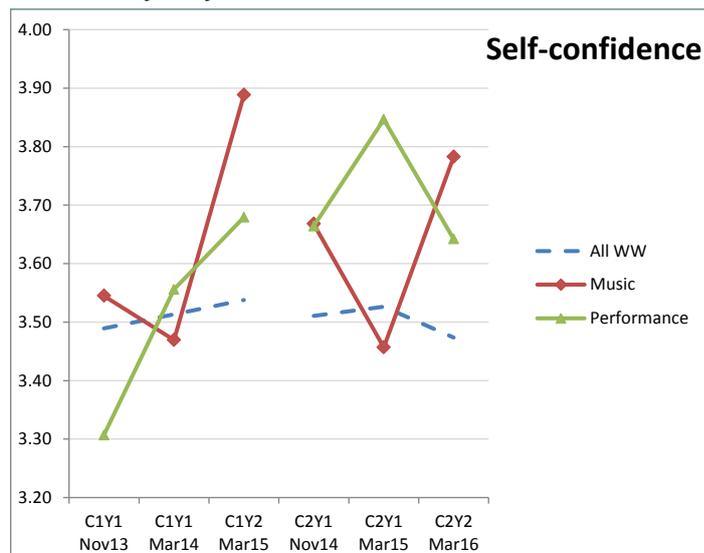
(Level 4 Performance student 2)

Chart 2: Engagement



There are some similarities in the comparative patterns of response of Music and Performance students to the questions on Engagement with their studies. Once again the Music students show a dip in the second half of their first year, improving by the second year survey; the second cohort’s second year improvement is more muted than that of their predecessors. The Performance students are generally a little less positive.

Chart 3: Self-confidence



The pattern of responses of the Music students to questions on the Self-confidence scale closely mirrors those for Belongingness and Engagement. The Performance students show more variation and an overall trend is hard to discern.

Student success

By 2014-15 significant improvements in student success had been seen across both Music and Performance as shown in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Performance progression and retention, level 4 entrants

	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Progressed	86	72%	124	69%	124	84%
Repeating	3	3%	21	12%	10	7%
Retention	89	74%¹	145	81%	134	91%
Left	31	26%	35	19%	13	9%
Total	120	100%	180	100%	147	100%

¹ rounded percentages do not add up

Although the Performance programmes saw a dip in progression for 2013-14 they recovered strongly for 2014-15. Retention improved for both of these years; latest figures available show that 91 per cent of 2014-15 entrants were still at Salford in 2015-16.

Table 2: Music progression and retention, level 4 entrants

	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Progressed	79	76%	89	78%	99	88%
Repeating	8	8%	5	4%	5	4%
Retention	87	84%	94	82%	104	93%¹
Left	17	16%	20	18%	8	7%
Total	104	100%	114	100%	112	100%

¹ rounded percentages do not add up

In Music, progression of first year students improved markedly from 2012-13 to 2013-14, before the personal tutoring system was implemented. There was an increase in 2013-14 entrants leaving after the first year, but this fell by more than half to 7 per cent the following year.

With retention rates of over 90 per cent, both of these subject areas are now performing above the institutional average.

7. Sustainability

The personal tutoring system is now completely embedded within the Music and Performance areas and is being used as a reference point for effective practice across the institution; for example, the discipline lead is now being approached by colleagues in other subject areas who wish to learn about the approach taken to personal tutoring.

The practice of regular and open communication between students and staff, which has led to the dramatic reduction in ‘niggles’ being raised at SSCM, has directly informed a new institutional ‘student voice’ policy titled *Always listening: connecting with our students*.

8. Lessons learnt

The findings arising from this intervention largely confirm the findings of *What Works?* phase 1. In particular, this intervention suggests that an environment in which staff and students are enabled to develop meaningful relationships based around the academic discipline helps students to transition into higher education and have a positive, successful experience of university. That students who participated in this intervention felt confident articulating their personal tutoring needs has enabled support to be tailored to the differing needs of each year group.

The overriding lesson learnt from this intervention is an appreciation and understanding of the different tactics, reasoning and sheer persistence that were needed to overcome resistance to change. That these were ultimately very successful is testament to both the discipline team and the wider staff and student groups who have embraced the Personal Tutoring system. It is therefore rewarding and satisfying for the team to have played a part in shaping institutional policy in how we listen to and connect with our students.

Acknowledgments

With thanks to: Tracy Crossley, Brett Baker, Denise Vernon, Nicola Spelman, Debbie Whittaker, Sam Grogan and David Singer from the University of Salford Student Retention and Success Change Programme team.

This work was undertaken as part of the 'What works? Student Retention and Success Change Programme', funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access.

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Table 2: Belongingness

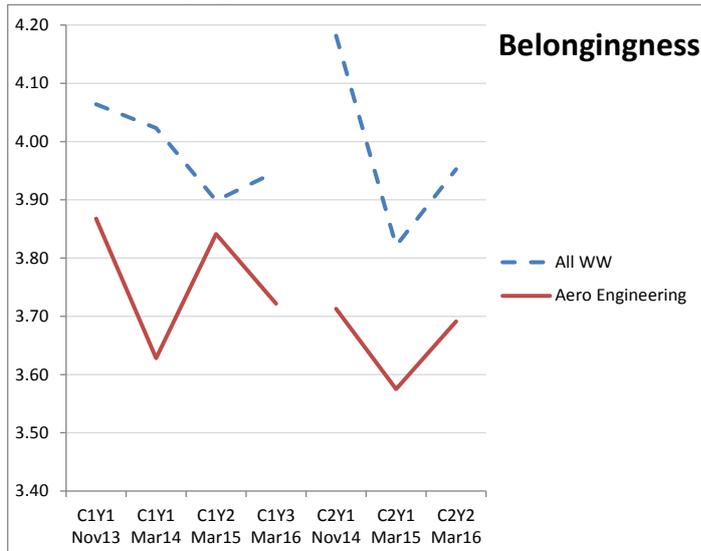


Table 3: Engagement

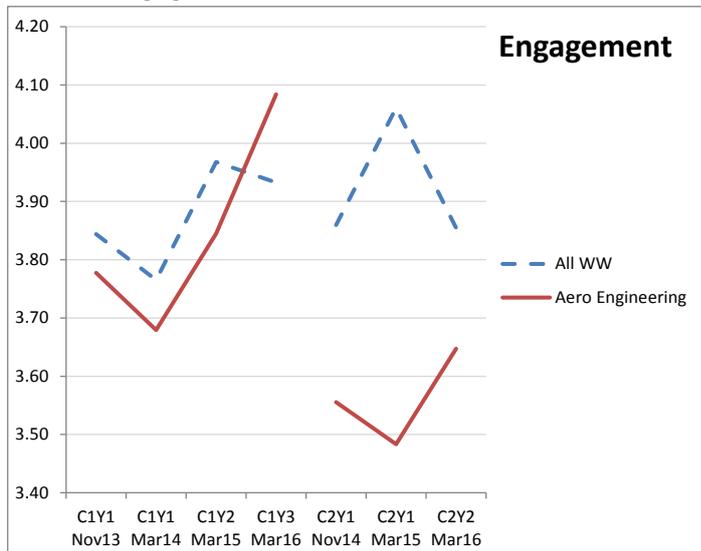
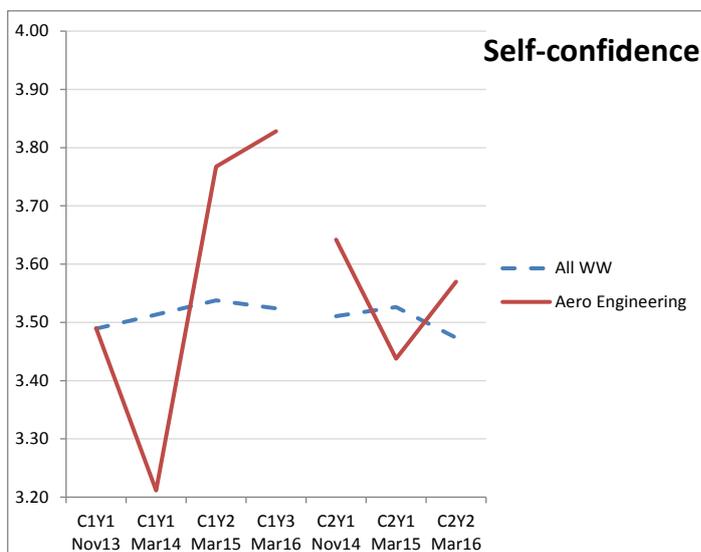


Table 4: Self-confidence



Of particular note is that scores across all three measures actually *declined* between autumn 2013, prior to the first years' experience of peer mentoring, and spring 2014 when they had experienced several weeks of the group project work with mentors. At both of these survey points the mentees reported low levels of engagement in relation to the question 'I seek out academic staff in order to discuss topics relevant to my programme', potentially reflecting awareness of the staffing challenges in the discipline area. However, it should be noted that belonging and engagement declined across all 13 participating institutions in spring 2014, potentially reflecting a general shift in mood as new entrants progress through their first year of study.

Cohort 1's levels of engagement, belonging and self-confidence increased noticeably by spring of year 2, with self-confidence levels rising by nearly 20 per cent. Similar results are seen for all of Salford's participating disciplines, suggesting that those who successfully transition into and through the first year of study possess higher levels of belonging, engagement and self-confidence. By the spring of their final year, the 2013/14 cohort's self-confidence and engagement were at an all-time high; conversely, their sense of belonging declined.

An unintended outcome of the intervention was the enthusiasm and commitment of the mentors, as evidenced in the previous section. The personal benefits they gained, including employability skills such as leadership and an empathy for others who need help, chime with the findings of *What Works?* phase 1 (Andrews and Clark, 2011).

9. Challenges

As previously noted, the very promising start to the intervention in 2013/14 could not be continued the following year as a result of a sudden further deterioration in staffing levels in 2014/15. This unfortunately meant that some early qualitative evaluation data were lost. Despite attempts to maintain the intervention, the staffing situation, plus timetable clashes which meant the mentors were not generally available during the first year group project sessions, resulted in postponement of the scheme in 2014/15. This may account for the lower levels of belonging and engagement seen in the second cohort in autumn 2014 and spring 2015, which, for the purposes of the intervention, have been treated as a control group.

10. Sustainability

Additional staff have been recruited to the discipline team in 2015/16 and plans are underway to recommence mentoring in the Aviation Business Enterprise module in semester 2. The discipline team originally planned to rollout the intervention across all levels of undergraduate study, such that final year students mentor those in the second year, and these plans are now back on track for implementation in 2016/17.

11. Lessons learnt

Several lessons can be taken from this intervention that may be of benefit to others who are considering embedding mentoring within the curriculum, particularly in engineering disciplines:

- i. Provision of structured training for mentors is required to make explicit the expectations and boundaries of the role and to better equip mentors to undertake the role. Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that future schemes make explicit reference to support mentees in the more general aspects of 'being a student and what that means' (Fox & Stevenson, 2007).
- ii. Improved selection of mentors, for example involving discussion with a member of the teaching team in addition to consideration of the potential mentor's academic record, to avoid situations in which 'the blind lead the blind'. Formalised recruitment and selection processes would then link coherently with better training (see i. above).

- iii. Clearly position the mentoring scheme as one element of an integrated system of academic support and pastoral care.
- iv. Explore how peer mentoring can be extended across the whole course for first year students, including during the all-important stage of transition into HE (Andrews and Clark, 2011).

12. Conclusion

The Aeronautical Engineering discipline team's experience of peer mentoring reinforces the findings of *What Works?* phase 1: that is, peer mentoring nurtures the development of supportive peer relations that can benefit mentees academically and socially, and mentors in their future career aspirations. The outcomes of this particular intervention were limited for reasons that included clarification of the mentoring role and the way in which the peer mentoring system was originally set up, and also the challenging staff shortages which impeded the provision of overall support to the mentors. Despite these challenges some positive aspects were achieved, particularly in relation to student engagement and attainment. In order to deliver impact on student retention and success within Aeronautical Engineering more broadly, peer mentoring needs to span the whole of the programmes and be integrated into the overall support mechanisms provided by the School.

The discipline team wishes to stress that although this study related to a rather unique form of assessment within an engineering discipline, the intervention, and lessons arising from it, are applicable to any undergraduate subject. The principles of providing a framework within which meaningful peer relationships can be developed and building feelings of belonging through learning what it is to be a successful HE learner are relevant to any programme team, especially those seeking to improve student retention within a resource-constrained environment.

Acknowledgments

With thanks to: Peter Bradbury, Phil Atcliffe, Tony Jones, Les Johnson, Sam Grogan and David Singer from the University of Salford Student Retention and Success Change Programme team.

This work was undertaken as part of the 'What works? Student Retention and Success Change Programme', funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access.

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4. Case Study: Sports Science: an evidence-based approach in the areas of welcome and induction

Helen Matthews, University of Salford

1. Context and Rationale

During a time of significant change in the sector, student retention and success is a primary concern for higher education institutions (Thomas, 2012). The reasons for withdrawal by individual students are often complex (Jones, 2008) and may include lack of preparation for the transition to Higher Education, difficulties with social integration, lack of academic experience, mismatch to institution and/or programme of study, and financial and personal circumstances. Evidence from the first phase of *What Works?* (Thomas, 2012) specifically highlighted a sense of belonging and early academic engagement as key factors in retention and success.

As part of the HEA ‘*What works?*’ Retention and Success Change programme, we took a discipline-focussed approach to the implementation of welcome and induction activities to improve retention and success. The interventions were directed at students enrolled on the Sports Science programme at the University of Salford. Drawing on evidence from the first phase of *What Works?* (Thomas, 2012) we focused on the enhancement of belonging, the development of staff, student and peer relationships, and improving academic skills to promote student confidence (Andrews et al., 2012).

The Sports Science programme at this institution has undergone a period of rapid growth in recent years with higher intakes (increased from 35 to 80) and greater numbers of students progressing to later years. This has, however, also been accompanied by lower rates of retention. On our Sports Science programme, the student profile is dominated by young male students (see Tables 1 & 2) that live at home, commute to university, are self-funded, and have to work to remain at university. Their primary reported worries are time management (41%), course difficulty (39%), and finance (29%). Of particular concern for this programme is the evidence suggesting that male students are more likely than females to drop out, with national data showing that 7.9% of men do not complete vs. 6.5% of women (HEPI, 2009).

The Sports Science student profile is also dominated by students that live at home who are largely still embedded in their pre-existing, school-friend oriented, social sphere, and this provides a real challenge to any initiative trying to make them feel a meaningful connection to university life. Therefore the aim of this project was to implement a series of activities designed to address these concerns, report and evaluate the findings of the intervention, and discuss the challenges and lessons learned. In addition, this case study highlights how our activities and findings at a Sports Science discipline level prompted significant institutional change to the welcome and induction of students across the university.

Table 1 - Age Profile Year 1

<i>Age on entry</i>	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<=18	44%	24%	38%	44%	38%
>=19	56%	76%	62%	56%	62%

Table 2 - Gender Profile Year 1

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Female	22%	4%	26%	19%	27%
Male	78%	96%	74%	81%	73%

2. Focus of the intervention

In light of the student profile and the evidence from *What Works?* phase 1 (Thomas, 2012), this study focused on building student relationships with peers and staff through pre-arrival and welcome week activities. In addition, the study focused on early academic engagement through a series of extended induction activities throughout year one. The activities were planned along an induction timeline, which spanned the pre-entry stage, the transition to higher education, and the whole of the first year at university. We focused on 'critical moments' through the first semester and after the Christmas vacation as these times were highlighted as key occasions for students considering withdrawal (Thomas, 2012). To build a sense of belonging, support peer relations, develop academic skills and confidence in learning, and be relevant to future aspirations, the activities were in line with the *What Works?* characteristics of effective practice (Thomas, 2012).

The pre-arrival information was designed to make students feel prepared for university and raise awareness of what will be required. To encourage a sense of belonging and interaction with staff and peers prior to arrival, students were encouraged to engage with university social media. We also developed a newsletter and pre-induction activity pack, which was sent to all new students via personal email. Based on the findings of *What Works?*, the newsletter focused on links with staff, pre-arrival academic activities, and careers information (Foster et al., 2012).

Making and maintaining social support with peers and staff is central to a student's sense of belonging (Wilcox et al., 2005), with students' long-term relationships with their academic department and institution arising from and building upon relationships founded during the initial stages (Gorard et al., 2006). To encourage students' sense of being valued and included within the group, Welcome Week activities focussed heavily on belonging and social support. The week was redesigned to focus both on social activities with peers and staff, and the provision of essential information where appropriate. The timetable included group activity sessions such as icebreaker activities (e.g. Human Bingo, Unique Facts), 'Superstars', and 'A Question of Sport'. The sessions all focused on building friendships with peers (Andrews et al, 2012) and encouraging supportive relationships with key staff such as the Year 1 Manager and Programme Leader. The activities also linked students with their personal tutor, as male students, in particular, appear to benefit from a clearly defined point of contact (Higher Education Academy, 2011). During the Welcome Week, we also held small group sessions to discuss student concerns about coming to University based on the Student Generated Induction model of Bowskill (2013).

Extended induction activities were designed to encourage transition to, and early engagement with, the academic programme (Tinto, 1993). With a series of timetabled sessions across year 1, delivered by programme or student support staff, we focused on providing the right information and support at the right time. Content covered study skills, programme information, university regulations and support services. The aim of these sessions was to develop confidence and skills for learning alongside their module activities. For example, we focused on note taking and writing skills early in semester one, with later sessions providing support for revision and assessment.

In response to student feedback, the extended induction sessions were further developed during the second year of the project by embedding material directly within modules and aligned to specific learning and assessment needs. We also utilised newsletters and social media at critical moments to inform students of key dates and events.

3. Findings

This study set out to increase retention through belonging and engagement. The findings are based on institutional data, the HEA belonging and engagement survey (Yorke, 2014), and discipline specific questionnaires and student group feedback.

Table 3: Survey of student ‘belongingness’, engagement and self- confidence

	Cohort 1, 2013-14 entry						Cohort 2, 2014-15 entry					
	Autumn 2013		Spring 2014		Spring 2015		Autumn 2014		Spring 2015		Spring 2016	
	*SS	**W W	SS	W W	SS	W W	SS	W W	SS	W W	SS	W W
Belonging	4.3 6	4.06	4.0 4	4.0 2	3.8 6	3.9 0	4.3 3	4.1 8	3.8 8	3.8 2	4.1 8	3.9 5
Engagemen t	3.9 3	3.84	3.8 6	3.7 7	3.8 2	3.9 7	3.9 7	3.8 6	4.2 4	4.0 6	4.0 0	3.8 5
Self- confidence	3.6 5	3.49	3.4 5	3.5 1	3.4 5	3.5 4	3.7 8	3.5 1	3.7 0	3.5 3	3.7 7	3.4 7

All scores on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being most positive

*SS – Sports Science scores

**What Works? – average across all 13 institutions

Table 3 shows the *survey of student ‘belongingness’, engagement, and self- confidence*. There were three surveys of 2013 first year entrants (Cohort 1): in the autumn, when they had just started, the following spring, and in the spring of their second year. Cohort 2 entered the first year in the autumn of 2014. They were surveyed that autumn and again in the spring of 2015 and 2016.

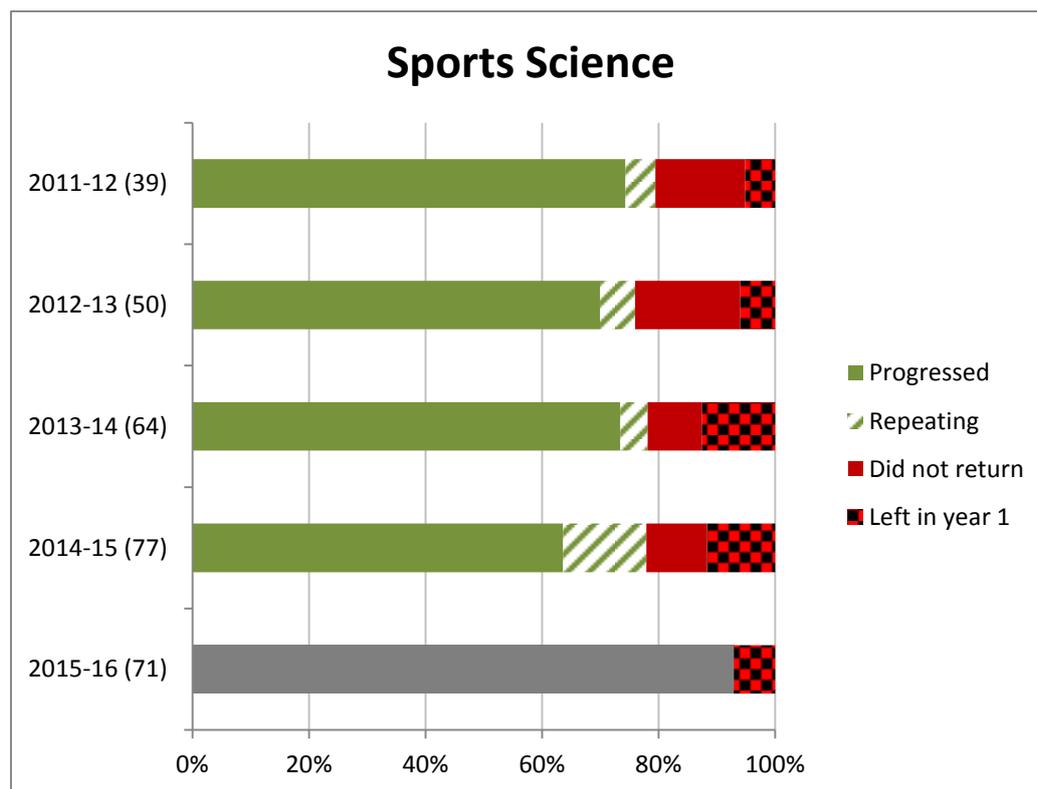
The initial belonging scores for Sports Science are above average, which suggests that, at the beginning of their studies, the students felt that they belonged to the programme. Scores then drop for the spring survey, suggesting that we need to do more to maintain that feeling throughout the first year.

Engagement is generally higher than the average across all institutions, is higher for the second cohort than for the first, and rises rather than falls in the first year.

This may reflect the extended induction activities embedded within the programme during 2014/15. Engagement also rises among the 2014/15 cohort across all the *What Works?* institutions, which might indicate similar enhancement of the interventions made by the other participants or that other factors are in play.

Despite the enhanced sense of belonging and engagement, there has been no significant impact on retention rates. Chart 1 shows the proportions of level 4 students who progressed, repeated and left during the first year, or did not return for the second year in each year from 2011/12 (with the total number in the first year in brackets). Due to the substantial growth in student numbers, it is difficult to make comparisons between cohorts. The chart shows that the proportion of students leaving during or at the end of the first year has changed little despite a near doubling of the programme size. Although difficult to substantiate, the retention activities may well have limited any further decline. However the progression rate to the second year of the programme has dropped. Analysis over a longer period of time will assist in fully understanding the long-term impact of the interventions.

Chart 1: Progression and Continuation



4. Evaluation

Welcome Week Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered two weeks after Welcome Week each year. Ninety-five per cent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that Welcome Week encouraged interaction with tutors and peers, that they felt at ease with tutors, and that their Personal Tutor was encouraging and supportive. Eighty-five per cent felt they were prepared for study. The highest rated activities were discipline led and included the ‘Superstars’ and ‘Question of Sport’. Activities with lower ratings tended to be either ‘information giving’ or institutional talks. The findings from the questionnaires were shared as part of the Retention and Success Change programme within the institution. After the first year, in terms of the welcome activities, we were able to influence the degree of institutional input and control, with the focus changing primarily to programme-based activities and also some school level input. This is in line with the findings of the initial *What Works?* programme (Thomas, 2012).

Student Group Feedback

Questions were devised focusing on the three stages of Welcome and Induction, namely pre-arrival, Welcome Week, and Extended Induction. Additional questions explored the students’ feelings towards belonging.

Students reported that the newsletter helped them prepare for the programme, they felt welcomed, had a greater knowledge of the course, and gained some understanding of future careers. Focus group feedback, however, reported that there was variability in students accessing this support.

The students provided few reasons as to why they had not used this information, although the length of the e-mail and some technical difficulties in accessing information were cited. The reported completion of the pre-arrival activity was low. We understand, however, that some students did not feel comfortable admitting to actually doing this. This may be a factor with a male dominant cohort (HEA, 2011).

The activities in the Welcome Week appear to have made an impact, with students articulating clearly what was included during the week. In general the activities were well received and appear to have contributed to student integration onto the programme. Students reported a strong impression that they felt part of the Sports Science programme at the university.

Students identified the inclusion of study skill support, however this was not always well received, with issues raised regarding the timing and content of this support. Although the activities were all embedded in the academic sphere, some students chose not to attend or engage with many of the support activities. The team responded by altering the delivery to embed the material and support sessions within modules.

Overall, the interventions have had a positive impact with improvements in the sense of belonging, but issues of student engagement and motivation remain a concern for retention.

5. Sustainability

The disciplinary approach to welcome and induction is continuing to evolve. In this subject, to ensure that students are making the right choices and understand their suitability for the programme area, we recognise the need to provide information at an earlier stage. Our approach to pre-arrival is focussing on the use of social media to convey messages and engage students with the programme and staff prior to their arrival at university.

The feedback from students illustrates the need to manage a fine balance between encouraging social integration and belonging, and ensuring that students have the information and skills they need to start their studies. This can change each year according to the profile of the cohort, and there is a need to adapt activities to meet the needs of each group.

Although the extended induction has improved student awareness of required study skills and available support, we recognise the need to continue these activities as students transition from year to year.

Another significant challenge will be maintaining staff engagement beyond this project. With relatively low staff numbers, a culture focussed towards research and innovation, and increasing pressures on staff time, there is a need to ensure that the student experience remains a priority.

This study took place during a time of significant change within the sector and the institution. In particular, changes to student finances, a substantial growth in student numbers, and the introduction of new admissions processes, proved a challenging environment to initiate and sustain new activities. Although a discipline lead and core team supported the retention and success project, at times other workload commitments took priority. This affected continued staff engagement and sustainability of the project. As our students often have heavy work and family commitments outside of university, we found it particularly challenging to engage existing students in the design and implementation of the new induction activities. New students also failed to engage fully, often citing work commitments as a reason to miss activities.

This case study also illustrates the wider impact a discipline specific intervention can have on change at an institutional level.

As a result of the discipline intervention, the university incorporated feedback from students and staff into a wider review of welcome and induction. This has allowed the discipline lead to actively contribute to reshaping the university's welcome, registration and induction strategy. The lessons learned at discipline level have been shared across the institution and a fresh approach was implemented for the new students in 2015-16. This includes the use of the timeline for the student experience from pre-arrival, welcome, and extended induction to ensure we are giving students the right information at the right time. In particular, the university is focusing on continued opportunities for students to engage and feel good about being at the University of Salford. As illustrated in the survey findings, repeated engagement may be required to increase retention and belonging.

Although the retention data do not yet support the changes we have made, the sense of belonging and relationships with both staff and peers have improved, and the impact on the wider institutional approach is clear.

6. Lessons learnt

Lessons learned from this case study include:

- It is important to understand your student cohort – this project, in particular, highlighted the difficulties of engaging and building supportive relationships with young male students. This is reflected in previous findings which suggest that young male students are less likely than females to report liking university, to agree that 'fellow students are supportive', to conform to the requirements of education, and to accept help (Woodfield et al., 2006; Higher Education Academy, 2011).
- There is a need to have a plan in place to engage students who choose not to attend welcome and induction activities. These are likely to be the students most at risk of leaving.
- In order to foster a sense of belonging, it is crucial to gain the support of all staff and for this to be valued within the academic workload.
- It is critical to gather and maintain accurate and up-to-date student information – e.g. email addresses for pre-arrival contact. Moreover, there is a need for pre-induction University communications to be in a format that will not be flagged as 'Spam' by commercial email accounts.
- Be patient – it takes time and perseverance to effect change.

Acknowledgments

With thanks to: Clare Marsh, Paul Jones, John McMahon, Martyn Matthews, Kay Hack, Debbie Whittaker, Gillian Molyneaux, David Singer and Sam Grogan from the University of Salford Student Retention and Success Change Programme team.

This work was undertaken as part of the '*What Works?* Student Retention and Success Change Programme', funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access.

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