Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change

Glasgow Caledonian University
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Students’ Association Representatives
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Theme: Co-curricular

What Works? Student Retention & Success is a Paul Hamlyn Foundation initiative working with the Higher Education Academy, Action on Access and thirteen UK universities.
Executive summary

Contextual overview

GCU reflects a contemporary sector wide (Scotland and UK) drive to view students increasingly as co-producers and co-creators of knowledge rather than just the ‘end stage’ recipients. This approach has gained significant ground in Scotland since the Quality Enhancement Framework was originally established in 2003.

In 2012 a small team of academics, professional staff and representatives from the Students’ Association submitted an application to the HEA (Higher Education Academy) to become a partner institution in the ‘What Works?’ Student Retention and Success Programme. The resulting collaboration with the HEA took the form of a programme of academic practice activity undertaken in conjunction with 13 other UK Universities over a three year period; from 2012-2015.

The HEA theme was co-curricular and the GCU intervention selected was the (then) new institutional academic advising standard (PPACT¹). The disciplines (Business, Life Sciences and Engineering) participating in the project collectively represented the diversity of the GCU student population including; mature students, school leavers, college articulation and MD 20/40 students (index of multiple deprivation by post code).

Building on the successful implementation, positive evaluation and widespread acceptance of the new academic advising standard, in 2014 a small team of academics and professional staff in partnership with the GCU Students’ Association (GCUSA), introduced an additional enhancement; a one year institutional Student Engagement (SE) project (Engage²). This project was incorporated into the GCU ‘What works?’ programme of activity.

All work and activity undertaken at GCU as part of the HEA ‘What works?’ Programme aligned with major internal drivers; GCU Strategy 2020, the Student Experience Framework (SEF) and the Strategy for Learning (SfL) and external drivers; QAA (Quality Assurance Agency), SFC (Scottish Funding Council), and sparqs (Student Partnership in Quality Scotland).

Impact data

As an HEA partner institution GCU provided regular cohort based retention and progression data for analysis to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, a major funder of the ‘What works?’ Programme. From 2013-2015, GCU students participated in a UK wide survey exploring development of belonging, engagement and confidence. In addition the GCU team collected and collated qualitative data as part of a university wide evaluation of academic advising. The retention and progression data, the results of the belongingness survey and the qualitative evaluations broadly triangulate.

The high level GCU findings indicate that the introduction and mainstreaming of co-curricular support mechanisms such as academic advising:

- support the development of attributes such as belonging, engagement and self-confidence as part of an overarching institutional strategy to enhance retention and progression

¹ http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/academicadvising/ppactacademicstandard/
² http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/
add credibility to the idea that the use of co-curricular activities such as academic advising can add value and contribute to the development of belongingness, engagement and confidence in students

These findings are supported by external scrutiny and feedback namely; the positive outcomes of the QAA GCU Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) and are validated by the conferment of a sparqs Student Engagement award in 2015.

Planning for and implementing change

In 2011 a GCUSA report presented at the Academic Policy Committee (APC) stated that in the post re-structure environment academic advising lacked a consistent and operationally agreed approach across the newly formed Schools and Departments.

In 2012 a senior discipline based academic scoped the dimensions of practice across the new Departments and Academic Schools. The consultation involved key academic and support staff working in partnership with the GCUSA.

The outcome and output of the consultation emerged as a new institutional standard for practice; the 'GCU PPACT Standard\(^3\) (Personal, Professional, Academically informed, Consolidated, Transitional).

Evaluation strategy

In session 2013/14, an institution wide ‘early impact’ evaluation of the new academic advising standard was undertaken across the university and elicited the views of both students and staff (appendix 1). Discipline teams were asked to discuss the new advising approach at team meetings and in classroom settings with their students. The GCUSA also collected views from a wide range of individual students. The evaluation was informed by face to face meetings at both School and Departmental level and staff were asked feedback from their experience of implementing the new advising standard.

The main findings demonstrated that:

1. The PPACT Standard is being implemented by academic staff across the institution.
2. Academic advisors are generally supportive and well regarded by their students however this is not a universal experience
3. The use of group approaches to advising is perceived as positive by students and provides a valuable peer support network
4. Students are engaging; however more can be done to raise awareness of the value of academic advising generally.
5. Academic advising is utilised more at undergraduate level and more complex for the diverse range of PGT students
6. There is emerging evidence to support the idea that academic advising promotes reflection and forward planning
7. There are a growing number of examples of innovative practice in the area of student engagement across the university

Overall the qualitative evaluation findings support the quantitative survey data and add credibility to the idea that the use of co-curricular enhancements such as academic advising can contribute to the development of belongingness, engagement and confidence in students.

\(^3\) [www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/academicadvising/ppactacademicstandard/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/academicadvising/ppactacademicstandard/)
Changes implemented at the institutional level

The PPACT standard is accepted and used in all academic Schools and Departments as the vehicle for academic advising. In addition, hours have been allocated to academic advising within the GCU work allocation model (WAM). The academic advising standard has informed strategy and policy development specifically; the GCU Strategy for Learning (SfL), the Student Experience Framework (SFL). The strategic impact, widespread utility and staff buy-in to the new academic advising process is evidenced throughout the QAA GCU ELIR Technical Report4.

The academic advising standard is sensitive and adaptive to the changing requirements of the university and the disciplines. It has continuously been adapted by discipline based staff and is now firmly integrated into the academic sphere (Thomas 2012). The sustainability of academic advising within the institution lies in the original roll out as a 'whole of institution' approach, managed within existing organisational structures (Evans 2015).

Building on the positive results of implementing the new academic advising standard, in 2014 the university introduced a new one year institutional SE project; ‘Engage’5. This new arm was incorporated into the HEA ‘What works?’ programme of activity. Engage aimed to promote and enhance the student experience through a visible, integrated and embedded institutional model of student engagement and partnership working.

The model now supports the mainstreaming of student engagement across schools and departments to embed and sustain participation and partnership within core academic activity and professional functions.

Changes implemented at the discipline level and impact

The discipline teams, based on the academic evaluation undertaken with staff and students, all moved to an adapted, sustainable and embedded approach to academic advising. In Business the team implemented the standard in a new employability module, now undertaken by all undergraduate Business students. In Life Sciences the team rolled out the standard as part of the new embedded Careers Portfolio and in Engineering the standard was integrated into the Professional Orientation and Practice (PoP) module.

Encouragingly work has not come to a standstill. The School of Health and Life Sciences (SHLS) are building on the SE work through the appointment of an intern. The Glasgow School of Business and Society (GSBS) are undertaking further research focussed on belonging, engagement and confidence using the ‘What works?’ survey data as the starting point for a larger mixed method study. The School of Engineering and the Built Environment (SEBE) are using the findings to develop the role of the academic advisor in the School.

Sustainability

Fostering a sustainable culture of SE and partnership working requires the buy-in at all levels and by all students and staff; academic and professional. The work on confidence, belonging and engagement by Trowler (2010), Kift et al (2010), Thomas (2012), Healy et al (2014) and Evans (2015) support the institutional findings, signpost future development in HE and generally appear to validate the concept of SE as normal practice, integrated into the existing academic infrastructure.

5gcu.ac.uk/engage/
To be sustainable in the longer term enhancements like academic advising and ‘Engage’ have to be locally owned and developed to align with School and discipline priorities. The discipline teams and departments across the university have used the work undertaken as part of the ‘What works?’ Programme to inform longer term academic practice development in the area of co-curricular working.

Conclusions

- The high level GCU findings indicate that the introduction and mainstreaming of co-curricular support mechanisms such as academic advising:
  - support the development of attributes such as belonging, engagement and self-confidence as part of an overarching institutional strategy to enhance retention and progression
  - add credibility to the idea that the use of co-curricular activities such as academic advising can add value and contribute to the development of belongingness, engagement and confidence in students

- The qualitative findings from the academic advising evaluation re-enforce the survey data and add credibility to the idea that the use of co-curricular activities such as academic advising can add value and contribute to the development of belongingness, engagement and confidence in students.

- These findings, taken together and supported by the validation of positive practice that emerged from the process of external scrutiny (QAA and sparqs). Collectively they appear to add credibility to and help build a case for the increased use of academic enhancements not just as a feature of the co-curricular zone but as an integral and embedded part of main stream academic activity.

- The academic advising design pedagogy is proving to be sensitive and adaptive to the changing requirements of the Schools and the disciplines. The impact evaluations undertaken at an institutional and discipline level indicate that the academic advising standard is accepted by both staff and students. The key indicator of success has been the widespread adoption and adaptation of the standard by programme teams. Academic advising is fully integrated into the academic sphere and has been developed and modified by programme staff to meet the demands of the disciplines. It is now just part of what we do.

- The key messages from the work undertaken by the GCU team throughout the three years of participation in the ‘What works?’ Programme aligns with the evolving body of SE literature. To be successful in the long term and to push beyond tokenism, SE should form a sustainable core of all learning and teaching activity and it must make sense to staff and students. The work on confidence, belonging and engagement by Trowler (2010), Kift et al (2010), Thomas (2012), Healy et al (2014) and Evans (2015) also support the broad institutional findings, signpost future development in HE and generally appear to validate the concept of SE as normal practice, integrated into the existing academic infrastructure.

- In this respect SE will almost inevitably transition from ‘first generation’ to ‘second generation’ narrative akin to the progress and recognition of the first year experience described by kift et al (2010) and reflecting the holistic process described more recently by Evans et al (2015). Second generation narrative in SE is a bench mark and way
forward for further exploration of the integration and ‘homing’ of co-curricular activity within the wider academic sphere.

Case studies

1. Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students in a Scottish University

Professor Nicky Andrew (Lead author: n.andrew@gcu.ac.uk), Professor Ruth Whittaker, Jackie Main, Dorothy MacFarlan, Kirsty Roden and Lesley McAleavy

Abstract

Working in partnership with students requires institutions to take a cultural U-turn and do things differently. Working with students challenges existing norms, potentially raising the student voice to a level of influence traditionally not experienced by academic and professional staff. This case study explores partnership working with students in a Scottish University. Described by Healey et al (2014) as an important 21st century challenge capturing the student voice below the level of strategic and sector policy making is proving a challenge for UK HE. The majority of universities recognise the importance of this challenge and are moving from a position of student engagement as a comparative novelty towards that of serious institutional commitment (Thomas 2012, Andrew 2015).

2. Academic Advising and Employability Awareness

Dorothy Macfarlane (Lead author: D.M.Macfarlane@gcu.ac.uk), Anne Smith, Alan Pellow and Allison Grant (Discipline Leads)

Abstract

During their time in the university community the 21st century graduate is expected to develop a range of attributes that will prepare them for work in a diverse contexts and cultures. The new GCU Student Experience Framework (2013-2017) sets out the strategic direction for the delivery of the student experience and articulates what students can expect from the university and what, in turn, the university expects from its students. Underpinning this is the need to provide meaningful interaction between students and staff and opportunities for developing supportive peer relations (Thomas 2012). Extensive work within the institution on recognising the relevance of early intervention as a contributing factor in the student sense of belongingness and engagement (Andrew et al, 2009; Andrew et al, 2011; Andrew and Whittaker, 2013) culminated in the development of a new university-wide standard approach to academic advising, which is the focus of this case study.

3. Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University

Lesley McAleavy (Lead author: Lesley.McAleavy@gcu.ac.uk) and Professor Nicky Andrew

Abstract

In Scotland, a partnership rather than consumerist model is and remains a key driver for higher education (HE) development. The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) (2003) is moving the sector towards an enhanced student experience, characterised by demonstrable engagement with institutional learning, teaching and quality processes. The QEF prioritises a culture of institutional enhancement and student involvement; institutions are expected to evidence this as a core function of the QAA cycle of Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR). It is likely, therefore, that student engagement in both academic and co-curricular spheres, evidenced through the centrality of the student experience, will continue to influence the sector-wide quality enhancement agenda for the foreseeable future (QAA 2014a).
Abstract

The College Connect Strategy 2013-2020 heralds an exciting and innovative development for Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and its relationship with its partner colleges and students. The Strategy is designed to promote and support widening participation across the Scottish Higher Education sector through increasing the number of students progressing to degree-level study from college.

1. Contextual overview

1.1 In the UK generally, 'learner-centeredness' emerges as a cross-cutting theme. Funding bodies are moving the sector towards a demonstrable and mature relationship with Students' Associations. The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education prioritises a culture of institutional enhancement and considers student involvement to be fundamental to the development of institutional policy and practice in learning, teaching and quality enhancement. Institutional student engagement is often enshrined in a social contract involving the university, its staff and students that results in the co-production and enhancement of transformational learning. Social contracts or formal student partnership agreements align with the QAA (2014b) wider agenda of student engagement with internal and external quality assurance and enhancement. The QAA (2012) UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Chapter 5) states that:

'*……all students should have the opportunity to be involved in quality enhancement and assurance processes in a manner and at a level appropriate to them' (p3).

1.2 There are multiple definitions of engagement which vary according to the needs of the student population on campus. Coates (2007 p122) defines student engagement as

'*……a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience’ (p122).

The pathway to permanent change in student engagement culture and practice necessitates a process that accepts, adopts and normalises sustainable practices within existing organisational structures (Evans et al 2015). These processes are more likely to be successful if they are accepted as normal practice by students, academics and professional support staff alike (Trowler 2010). Successful student engagement is defined by Thomas (2012) as supportive peer relations leading to meaningful interaction between staff and students, and practice development around student confidence and identity. Adopted as normal practice within an institution, these characteristics can contribute to a university experience that meets the goals of the both the individual and the institution (Healey et al 2014, Andrew et al 2015).

1.3 Approaches to student engagement are often characterised by the interplay of student and teacher roles, enacted as a formal, staged process beyond normal academic practice and characterised by formal meetings and ‘snap shot’ evaluations. Student engagement research offers multiple views on ‘how students, teachers, institutions and the external environment facilitate engagement’ (Zepke 2014, 699). Much of the literature focuses on the extra things that universities could and should do to promote student engagement. Outcomes are generally illustrated by standalone examples of good and best practice that demonstrate a deliberate ‘designing in’ of activities intended to ‘get students engaged’.

1.4 Understanding what constitutes successful engagement in the literature however is not straightforward. Exploration of this type is often undertaken in the form of small scale, single institution or discipline focussed qualitative case studies.
Institutions instigate time bounded projects and initiatives that sit in a space outside normal academic and professional practice. This can result in a series of manufactured special initiatives, quantified by ‘snap shot’ evaluations and recommendations which may or may not be implemented (Trowler 2011).

1.5 An ongoing commitment to access to Higher Education (HE), regardless of ability to pay continues to set Scotland apart from the rest of the UK. The hallmark of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF 2003) for HE in Scotland is the continuing emphasis on and promotion of reflection, self-evaluation and quality enhancement; not enacted as a quality assurance audit tool or a deficit identification model. Student Engagements in the Scottish HE sector is driven by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and sparqs (Student Partnership in Quality Scotland). The SFC (2011) believes that students should have a strong voice and be involved in shaping their University experience and expects institutions to demonstrate that they are listening and responding to their students. The SFC emphasises learner engagement and identifies ‘learner-centeredness’ as a cross-cutting theme of its corporate plan; a key element of an institutional student partnership agreement. The QEF (2003) prioritises a culture of institutional enhancement and student involvement and is moving the sector towards an enhanced student experience characterised by a demonstrable level of engagement with institutional learning, teaching and quality enhancement.

1.6 GCU reflects a contemporary sector wide (Scotland and UK) drive to view students increasingly as co-producers and co-creators of knowledge rather than just the ‘end stage’ recipients. This approach has gained significant ground in Scotland since the Quality Enhancement Framework was originally established in 2003. It is likely therefore that student engagement in both the academic and co-curricular spheres, evidenced through the centrality of the student experience will continue to influence the sector wide quality enhancement agenda for the foreseeable future. The NUS (National Union of Students) publication; ‘Building a Framework for Partnership with Students’ advocates that universities should now consider partnership working with students to be the norm and not an ‘add on’ activity (NUS 2014).

1.7 In 2012 at the behest of the PVC (Learning and Teaching) a small team of academics, professional staff and representatives from the Students’ Association submitted an application to the HEA (Higher Education Academy) to become a partner institution in the ‘What Works?’ Student Retention and Success Programme (Phase 2). The resulting collaboration with the HEA took the form of a programme of academic practice activity undertaken in conjunction with 13 other UK Universities over a three year period; from 2012-2015.

1.8 The HEA theme was co-curricular and the GCU intervention selected was the (then) new institutional academic advising standard (PPACT). The disciplines (Business, Life Sciences and Engineering) participating in the project collectively represented the diversity of the GCU student population including; mature students, school leavers, college articulation and MD 20/40 students (index of multiple deprivation by post code). The new academic advising standard was implemented by the HEA discipline leads (GCU Programme Leaders) at the start of the ‘What works?’ Programme, and in September 2013 it was rolled out across the university.

1.9 Building on the success of academic advising, in 2014 the university introduced a new one year institutional SE project; ‘Engage’. This new project was incorporated into the GCU ‘What works’ programme of activity.

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7 http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/academicadvising/ppactacademicstandard/
8 gcu.ac.uk/engage/
The project aimed to promote and enhance the student experience through a visible, integrated and embedded institutional model of student engagement and partnership working.

1.10 All the work and activity undertaken at GCU as part of the HEA ‘What works?’ Programme aligned with major internal drivers; GCU Strategy 2020, the Student Experience Framework (SEF) and the Strategy for Learning (SfL) and external drivers; QAA (Quality Assurance Agency), SFC (Scottish Funding Council), and sparqs (Student Partnership in Quality Scotland).

2. Impact data

2.1 Phase 2 of the HEA ‘What works?’ Programme focussed on the collective practice of different disciplines in 13 diverse HE institutions across the UK. The majority of participating Universities (11) were located in England and Northern Ireland where a three year Honours degree programme is standard unlike Scotland where a four year programme continues to be the hallmark of the Scottish sector.

2.2 Over the three years of HEA ‘What works?’ Programme, as part of a wider UK study, the GCU data expert provided progression and retention data for analysis to Paul Hamlyn Foundation, a major funder of the ‘What works?’ Programme (Phase 2).

2.3 Simultaneously as part of the UK wide study, students consented to take part in a Belongingness survey distributed to all participating universities by Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The Programme (HEA discipline) Leads administered the questionnaire twice a year, over a two year period to the students who were involved in the pilot discipline areas (Business, Engineering and Life Sciences). The questionnaires were administered in November 2013, March 2014, November 2014 and March 2015. The GCU team also collected, collated and analysed a range of qualitative data (appendix 1).
2.4 Table 1 maps the main project themes to the research approaches and the relevant case studies (appendix 2).

**Table 1: Case Study Mapping**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Theme</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Case Studies (appendix 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belonging, Engagement and Confidence</strong> (HEA, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Action on Access)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>• Academic Advising and Employability Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Belongingness survey</td>
<td>• Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students at a Scottish University</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Retention/Progression data</td>
<td>• Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Enhancement</strong></td>
<td>Qualitative Impact Evaluation:</td>
<td>• Academic Advising and Employability Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Academic Advising (GCU)</td>
<td>• Students' Association</td>
<td>• Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students at a Scottish University</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• University wide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participating disciplines (Business, Life Sciences, Engineering)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Engagement/Student Experience</strong> (GCU)</td>
<td>Qualitative Project</td>
<td>• Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students at a Scottish University</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Project</td>
<td>• Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Academic Advising and Employability Awareness</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Making the Connection: Enhancing the Student Journey through Higher Education</td>
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</tbody>
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2.4 The quantitative approach explored links between the use of enhancements, (such as academic advising) and the impact on progression and retention/achievement. Specifically, the main aim of the UK study was to ascertain:

‘To what extent do the progression and achievement statistics (cohort data) fit with the expectations of the enhancements that have taken place under ‘What Works?’ (survey data)’

2.5 Table 2 shows a two year comparison across all disciplines and reveals an overall increase in the scores on the scales of Belongingness, Engagement and Self-confidence over the period. The figures are on a par with the sector.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belongingness</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.6 The results of the GCU survey demonstrate an increase in the scores on the scales of belongingness, engagement and confidence for all participating disciplines over the time period of the ‘What works?’ Programme. This supports the proposition that the use of co-curricular enhancements such as academic advising may promote and develop these attributes in the student body.

2.6 Year on year Business students consistently demonstrated a ‘better’ rate of success/progression. Business represented the largest cohort and were the group least defined by age and sex. The other cohorts were too small to consider separately. Additionally, the academic advising qualitative evaluation findings (section 5) and the emerging impact of the SE project (section 5) also validate the idea that academic enhancements may contribute to the development of belonging, confidence and engagement in students.

2.7 Collectively the retention and progression data, the results of the belongingness survey and the qualitative evaluations broadly triangulate and indicate that the introduction and mainstreaming of co-curricular support mechanisms such as academic advising:

- support the development of attributes such as belonging, engagement and self-confidence as part of an overarching institutional strategy to enhance retention and progression
- add credibility to the idea that the use of co-curricular activities such as academic advising can add value and contribute to the development of belongingness, engagement and confidence in students

2.8 These findings are strengthened by external scrutiny namely; the positive outcomes of the QAA GCU Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) and the conferment of a sparqs Student Engagement award in 2015, further discussed in sections 4 and 5.

2.9 All results are tempered by the limitations of the research undertaken. The discipline groups were not of a uniform size. Life Sciences represented the smallest cohort (average intake 15), Engineering in the middle (average intake 26) and Business the largest by some measure (average intake 180). The discipline groups varied considerably in gender and age distribution. The Engineering cohort had the largest number of older males and in Life Sciences the majority of students were younger females. Business provided a more balanced population distribution across age and gender. The disciplines also varied in mode of study. Life Sciences and Business are configured as traditional Scottish undergraduate (4 year) Honours Programmes. The Engineering cohort comprised students who articulated from partner colleges into the third year of an UG M Level engineering programme.
2.10 The *Academic Advising and Employability Awareness* case study discusses the impact of academic advising on the participating disciplines in greater detail.

3. Planning for and implementing change

3.1 In March 2011 a GCUSA report to the Academic Policy Committee (APC) stated that in the post re-structure environment academic advising lacked a consistent and operationally agreed approach across the newly formed Schools and Departments. In response, the PVC (Learning and Teaching) instigated a university wide consultation exercise to identify the status and application of academic advising across the institution.

3.2 In 2012 a senior discipline based academic scoped the dimensions of practice across Departments and Academic Schools. The consultation involved key academic and support staff working in partnership with the GCUSA. The results of the consultation highlighted that although academic advising was happening, the approach lacked consistency. The consultation also indicated that academics and the GCUSA jointly were in favour of the introduction of a new agreed university wide approach. It was also agreed that the new academic advising system should place emphasis on employability from first year rather than third year of a four year undergraduate programme.

The outcome and output of the consultation emerged as a new institutional standard for practice; the ‘**GCU PPACT Standard**’ (*Personal, Professional, Academically informed, Consolidated, Transitional)*.

3.3 The standard (Table 3) acknowledges that students ‘learn at particular times and in relation to particular tasks’ (Bliuc et al 2011 p 561) and offers a contemporary approach to advising; grounded in reflection and focussed on academic, personal and professional growth and development. The standard innovates by promoting career development and employability from first year, wherever it occurs.

**Table 3: Key Elements of GCU Academic Advising (PPACT) Standard**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>P Reflection, review of relevant personal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>P Career planning and employability, leadership, achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically informed</td>
<td>A Feedback/forward; review and discussion of academic results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidated</td>
<td>C Evaluation of learning in all areas identified above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>T Reflection and action planning to feed forward into next year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 The elements identified above underpin the GCU PPACT Standard shown in Figure 1 below.

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[9](www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/academicadvising/ppactacademicstandard/)
3.5 The academic advising standard builds on the previous work undertaken by the GCU team (Andrew et al 2007 a, b, Andrew et al 2009, McKendry, McKay, Boyd, and Andrew 2010, McKendry, Boyd, Andrew et al 2011, Andrew et al 2013, Andrew and Whittaker 2013, Andrew et al 2015). The standard is grounded in and was designed to incorporate the proven characteristics and criteria of success described by Thomas (2012). The key areas identified are; supportive peer relations, meaningful interaction between staff and students, and practice development around student confidence and identity. These characteristics of success support the design of an educational experience that is relevant to the future goals of the both the individual and the institution.

3.6 The GCU approach to academic advising is distinctive because it takes account of employability and graduateness from the beginning of the student journey rather than only focussing on graduate attributes towards the end of the degree programme. Questions exploring extra and co-curricular student activity, as well as feedback/feedforward opportunities are standard practice within all advising meetings. The standard integrates with the university Feedback for Future Learning (FFL\(^{10}\)) initiative. The aim was to join up delivery, promote student engagement with FFL activities and facilitate dialogue between academics and students around feedback issues at all advising meetings.

\(^{10}\text{http://www.gcu.ac.uk/futurelearning/}\)
3.8 In 2012 at the behest of the PVC (Learning and Teaching) a small team of academics, professional staff and representatives from the SA submitted an application to the HEA (Higher Education Academy) to become a partner institution in the ‘What Works?’ Student Retention and Success Programme (Phase 2\textsuperscript{11}). The resulting three year partnership with the HEA took the form of a longitudinal project focussed on the co-curriculum and undertaken in collaboration with 13 other UK Universities over a three year period; from 2012-2015. The three GCU participating disciplines were selected by the Associate Deans (Learning, Teaching and Quality) in collaboration with programme leaders in each School. Negotiation with discipline teams and taking part in a voluntary capacity was seen as key to the success of the project. The Programme Leaders of the nominated programmes became HEA discipline leads.

3.9 The disciplines chosen; Business, Life Sciences and Engineering collectively represented the diversity of the student population including; mature students, school leavers, college articulation and MD 20/40 students (index of multiple deprivation by post code). Ethical approval was obtained via the appropriate GCU LEAD Research Ethics Committee. All students involved received written information about the project, a participant’s guide and all gave consent in writing.

3.10 A core project institutional team was formed to act as the steering group. A member of the steering group acted as the academic lead for the project and named link between the discipline and the core teams. The academic lead worked across the disciplines and liaised directly with the discipline leads. The institutional and discipline teams worked collaboratively and met face to face in a variety of forums; at HEA progress events (internal and external) specific team meetings, project meetings and via online project updates.

3.11 In 2013, after a period of preparation, the discipline teams introduced the PPACT standard to year one of the selected programmes as part of programme induction. Preliminary advising meetings were scheduled during the first three weeks of Trimester A, and follow up meetings in Trimester B and C. The standard also rolled out across the university in September 2013.

4. Evaluation strategy

4.1 In 2014, an institution wide ‘early impact’ evaluation of the new academic advising standard was undertaken across the university and elicited the views of both students and staff (appendix 1). Discipline teams were asked to discuss the new advising approach at team meetings and in classroom settings with their students. The GCUSA (Glasgow Caledonian University Students’ Association) also collected views from a wide range of individual students. The evaluation was informed by face to face meetings at both School and Departmental level and staff were asked feedback from their experience of implementing the new advising standard throughout session 2013/14.

4.2 The main findings demonstrated that:

1. The PPACT Standard is being implemented by academic staff across the institution.
2. Academic advisors are generally supportive and well regarded by their students however this is not a universal experience
3. The use of group approaches to advising is perceived as positive by students and provides a valuable peer support network
4. Students are engaging; however more can be done to raise awareness of the value of academic advising generally.

\textsuperscript{11}\url{https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/themes/retention-and-success/what-works-student-retention-and-success-change-programme}
5. Academic advising is utilised more at undergraduate level and more complex for the diverse range of PGT students.

6. There is emerging evidence to support the idea that academic advising promotes reflection and forward planning.

7. There are a growing number of examples of innovative practice in the area of student engagement across the university.

4.3 Table 4 shows the overall evaluation strategy mapped to case studies and key GCU policy documents.

**Table 4: Academic Advising Evaluation Mapping**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation finding</th>
<th>Case Study (appendix 2)</th>
<th>GCU Strategy, Policy/Practice Benchmarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. The PPACT Standard is being implemented by academic staff across the institution | • Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students in a Scottish University  
• Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University  
• Academic Advising and Employability Awareness | • Programme Monitoring  
• Strategy for Learning (SfL)  
• Student Experience Framework (SEF)  
• School/Department Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees  
• Programme Boards  
• Programme Monitoring |
| 2. Academic advisors are generally supportive and well regarded by their students however this is not a universal experience | • Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University  
• Academic Advising and Employability Awareness | • Strategy for Learning (SfL)  
• Student Experience Framework (SEF)  
• School/Department Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees  
• Programme Boards  
• Programme Monitoring |
| 3. The use of group approaches to advising is perceived as positive by students and provides a valuable peer support network | • Academic Advising and Employability Awareness  
• Making the Connection: Enhancing the Student Journey through Higher Education | • College Connect Strategy  
• Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees  
• Programme Boards  
• Annual Programme Monitoring |
| 4. Students are engaging; however more can be done to raise awareness of the value of academic advising generally | • Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University  
• Academic Advising and Employability Awareness | • Annual Programme Monitoring  
• School/Department Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees  
• Programme Boards |
| 5. Academic advising is utilised more at undergraduate level and more complex for the diverse range of PGT students | • Academic Advising and Employability Awareness | • GCU Taught Post Graduate Experience Project |
6. There is emerging evidence to support the idea that academic advising promotes reflection and forward planning.

- Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University
- Making the Connection: Enhancing the Student Journey through Higher Education
- College Connect Strategy
- Strategy for Learning (SfL)
- Student Experience Framework (SEF)
- Programme Boards

7. There are a growing number of examples of innovative practice in the area of student engagement across the university.

- Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students in a Scottish University
- Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University
- Academic Advising and Employability Awareness
- GCU Strategy 2020
- College Connect Strategy
- Strategy for Learning (SfL)
- Student Experience Framework (SEF)
- Annual Programme Monitoring

4.4 At the outset the project team took the decision to explore group advising in first year as a positive pedagogical choice and not a last resort. This has impacted on the way GCU views advising and has stimulated wider discussion at meetings of the cross university Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Network (LTQEN) about the use of group advising in the formative years.

4.5 Establishing the project and making it work over a three year period, at both institutional and discipline level, has been a major undertaking. The challenges have been around the broad area of engagement, although students are engaging with the new process we are aware that there is still work to be done; raising awareness in year two is required. The fact that the new standard was more successful with UG students indicates a need to explore the needs of PGT students experience in greater depth. This finding fed into the recent exploration of the TPG (taught post-graduate experience) at GCU.

4.6 The findings of the university wide evaluation were discussed at individual meetings with the discipline leads to allow them to reflect on and benchmark their experience against the general findings, reflected in the discipline reports. The fact that a group approach was well received by the students and staff alike provided validation for those teams who were primarily implementing advising in year one as group process. This finding also points to the early development of a sense of belonging, with students commenting positively on the use of group advising to support the development of peer support networks. Working as part of a package of support underpinned by proven and workable student centred academic practices appears to contribute to an environment that supports and promotes the concept of achievement and success (Thomas 2012).

4.7 Overall the qualitative findings support the quantitative survey data and add credibility to the idea that the use of co-curricular enhancements such as academic advising can contribute to the development of belongingness, engagement and confidence in students.

4.8 Collaborative working amongst the discipline leads created a sustainable support infrastructure for advising and ongoing participation in the project developed their expertise in the area of student support. This established their institutional credibility.
They are now regarded as the ‘go to’ individuals for advice and guidance on academic advising and have been generous in their support of peers in Schools and Departments. The role of the discipline leads is further explicated in the Academic Advising and Employability Awareness case study.

5. Changes implemented at the institutional level

5.1 The PPACT standard is accepted and used in all academic Schools and Departments as the vehicle for Academic Advising. The findings of the early evaluation are linked to foreword movement captured in the HEA/GCU case studies and integrated within university policy and practice. In addition, hours have been allocated to academic advising within the GCU work allocation model (WAM). In addition external scrutiny provided by the QAA provided further evidence as to the effectiveness of the GCU approach to academic advising.

5.3 In March 2014 GCU was subject to the four yearly QAA led ELIR (Enhancement Led Institutional Review), part of the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework (2003). The strategic impact, widespread utility and staff buy-in to the new academic advising process is evidenced throughout the QAA GCU ELIR Technical Report12.

The academic advising process supports students in developing personal, academic and professional skills at the University. The University uses the PPACT (Personal, Professional, Academically informed, Consolidated, Transitional) standard of academic advising, developed in response to cross-university consultation. The model, introduced across the University in 2013, covers academic and social matters and seeks to develop a strong sense of belonging in all students. The PPACT standard provides staff with a clear set of guidance for advising students, ensuring parity of provision. The standard supports partnership working between students and staff by implementing a series of regular meetings between the student and their academic advisor to identify and review interventions and opportunities. Staff are positive about this model of academic advising, and recognise benefits of the formalised approach including ample training for advisors and positives in building relationships with students13 (p10).

5.4 The GCU ELIR Technical Report also acknowledges the contribution of the standard to the GCU employability strategy.

The [University] commitment to employability is supported by the Personal, Professional, Academically-informed, Consolidated, Transactional (PPACT) standard of academic advising. This standard ensures each student engages with employability skills and related opportunities that are appropriate to their study and career ambitions13 (p12).

5.5 Academic advising is referenced in the GCU SFC Outcome Agreement for 2015/16 as part of GCU strategy for Retention and Support for Learning.

5.6 The academic advising standard has informed university strategy and policy development specifically; the GCU Strategy for Learning (SfL), the Student Experience Framework (SEF). The work has contributed to a funded HEA Literature Review (Wayne et al in press), and has been published online (Andrew and Whittaker 2013). The methodology was published online as a case study by HEA (Scotland), was presented at EFYE (European First Year Experience) and the QAA Enhancement Theme international and national conferences (2013, 2014, 2015).

13 www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Funding_Outcome_Agreements_2015-16/Glasgow_Caledonian_University_Outcome_Agreement_2015-16.pdf
The work supports the development of a Personal Tutoring system at Cork Institute of Technology and was presented to a delegation of senior managers from Medawel; a project that aims to develop welfare-oriented for students in the MEDA region countries (Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine).

5.7 SE at GCU is designed to have a ‘wide reach’, incorporating the academic sphere, student body and professional services. GCU offers a collaborative, fluid space, underpinned by crossover and parallel working amongst students, academics, professional support staff and senior managers and managers (Andrew et al 2015). Building on the positive results of the new academic advising standard, in 2014 the university introduced a new one year institutional SE project; ‘Engage’14. This new arm was incorporated into the HEA ‘What works’ programme of activity. Engage aimed to promote and enhance the student experience through a visible, integrated and embedded institutional model of student engagement and partnership working.

5.8 The GCU team collaborated with the SA to raise institutional awareness of engagement and partnership working and to contribute to the development of a fluid, dynamic space for enhancement within the academic and professional spheres (Kuh 2008, Healy et al 2014). In particular the themes of ‘introspective and discipline-based engagement’ and ‘inter-relational engagement’ (with staff and peers) were thought to be important for the development of (in all students) belonging, engagement and confidence (Thomas 2012).

5.9 The resulting conceptual model (Figure 2) now supports the mainstreaming of student engagement across schools and departments to embed and sustain participation and partnership within core academic activity and professional functions.

14 [gcu.ac.uk/engage/](http://gcu.ac.uk/engage/)
5.10 Crucially the model aligns with the major internal drivers; GCU Strategy 2020, Strategy for Learning (SfL) and the Student Experience Framework (SEF) and external drivers; the SFC, sparqs, and the QEF (2003).

5.11 Development work was underpinned by key findings from the literature and drew on notable publications such as Trowler 2010, Tinto 2010, Thomas 2012, Healy et al 2014 and Thomas 2015. Engage expresses and captures the concept of working with students as adults and partners. The ways in which institutional communication is enacted is further explored in the Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students in a Scottish University case study.

512. Engage is grounded in the University’s Common Good Mission and is designed to develop the capacity and confidence of students to act as co-creators and co-producers in two main ways:

- Engaging students in their own learning
- Engaging students in shaping the learning and teaching experience at GCU

5.13 The model is also aligned with the current QAA (Scotland) Enhancement Theme; Student Transitions\textsuperscript{15} and reflects the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education\textsuperscript{16} which identifies two domains of student engagement:

- Improving motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently
- Participation by students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience

And was designed to incorporate and be underpinned by the sparqs Student Engagement Framework; five key elements of effective engagement\textsuperscript{17}:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Improving motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently
  \item Participation by students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{15} \url{www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes}
\textsuperscript{16} \url{www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code}
\textsuperscript{17} \url{www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/SEFScotland.pdf}
• Students feeling part of a supportive institution
• Students engaging in their own learning
• Students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning
• Formal mechanisms for quality and governance
• Influencing the student experience at national level

5.14 The team focussed on those activities that were sustainable, inclusive and able to be accessed by all students (student feedback, academic advising, student action group for engagement; SAGE) rather than targeting specific sub groups of the student population (Thomas 2012). The team utilised a divergent methodology expressed through two key principles; what is needed now? And what will be needed to support SE into, through and out of university in the future (Evans 2015). The need to work within existing structures and not ‘invent’ extra work for staff and students was a guiding principle. All development was designed to work with and not be extra to the existing learning infrastructure (Evans 2015).

5.15 The SE project was referenced in the 2014/15 GCU SFC Outcome Agreement. Partnership working and was cited as an example of good practice in the QAA/GCU 2014 ELIR Technical Report.

‘The Engage initiative, a cross-university initiative led jointly by the GCU Learning Enhancement and Academic Development department (GCU LEAD) and the Student Experience Directorate and working in partnership with the Students’ Association is key to the University’s successful strategy implementation. Driven by SfL and SEF, it utilises a team partnership approach to co-construct a cross-institutional understanding of the distinctive nature of the GCU student experience. This approach ensures staff and student contribution to strategy policy and practice as well as institution-wide dissemination and implementation’. (p5)

‘Engage, the cross-university initiative for enhancing the student experience through partnership working is based on the sparqs framework for student engagement. Engage works closely with the Students’ Association, academic schools and professional support services to promote cross-university understanding of student engagement through a defined programme of activity.’ (p8)

‘The University's partnership approach is evident through effective working relationship with the Students’ Association and student-led initiatives such as the teaching awards and Student Leadership programme. The Student Action Group for Engagement (SAGE) parallels the staff-led LTQEN and operates in collaboration with the Students' Association. While SAGE is at an early stage of development, it provides a useful tool for engagement and has the potential to positively impact upon the student experience by capturing and reporting on the views of all the University’s students.’ (p 8)

5.16 The work has published online by the QAA (Andrew et al 2015), has been presented at the sparqs international conference in 2015, and the team received national recognition in 2015 as the recipients of a sparqs Student Engagement Award. The case studies; Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students at a Scottish University and Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University describe the work of the team in greater detail.

5.17 The external validation provided by the QAA and sparqs, in conjunction with findings from the qualitative and quantitative research helps to build the case for the use of enhancements to improve belonging, engagement and confidence at the level of the individual student.
5.18 The use of and meaningful and valid SE projects to promote institutional partnerships and collaborative working with the SA also emerged as an unexpected but valuable outcome of this project.

5.19 Capitalising on the impact of the SE project, in 2016 a team from the School of Health and Life Sciences (SHLS) successfully bid for monies from the Greater Glasgow Articulation Project (GGAP) to fund a one year internship for a recent graduate focussed on Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching. The intern will work with the Professor of Learning and Teaching to contribute to the development of a sustainable student engagement (articulation/widening participation) infrastructure in the SHLS underpinned by:

- Building resilience/academic buoyancy
- Developing social belonging
- Self-management of expectations

5.20 The post directly aligns with the GCU Strategy 2020 Goal; *Transforming lives through Education* and is underpinned by the key messages from Thomas (2012). The case study; *Making the Connection: Enhancing the Student Journey through Higher Education* provides the background to this internship weaving a narrative around the GCU focus on articulation and widening participation.

5.21 The work of the GCU team was been influenced by the work of Kift et al (2010). They discuss the development of the FYE (First Year Experience) in HE emphasising the pivotal nature of the first year on campus. Kift et al detail their journey from a peripheral position on the margins of the academic sphere, external to the curriculum, to the attainment of full integration into mainstream academic activity. Kift et al (20100 describe a ‘third generation’ approach to FYE. SE will almost inevitably make a similar transition and move from the current ‘first generation approach’ of external ‘add on’ activities, to a ‘second generation’ narrative, similar to the one described by kift et al and reflecting the holistic process described more recently by Evans et al (2015).

6. Changes implemented at the discipline level and impact

6.1 The Academic Schools and disciplines are shown in Table 5 below

Table 5: Academic Schools and Disciplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic School</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow School for Business and Society (GSBS)</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Health and Life Sciences (SHLS)</td>
<td>Life Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Engineering and the Built Environment (SEBE)</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 All disciplines utilised the academic advising standard as the main intervention. Collectively the disciplines used a range of advising approaches in year one including:

- One to one advising sessions
- Group advising sessions
- Online advising sessions
- Drop in advising sessions

6.3 Discipline teams drew data from meetings and focus groups with students, analysing the making and keeping of appointments and the output of student survey’s and Programme Board Departmental Quality Committee discussions.
6.4 The general findings of the overall discipline evaluation and the impact of the new PPACT Standard aligned to the key ‘What works?’ criteria are shown below in Table 6.

Table 6: Impact of the PPACT Standard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘What works’ focus</th>
<th>Key findings and impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Belonging         | • Students value having a named advisor  
|                   | • Personal meetings encourage a focussed approach  
|                   | • Group advising supports the development of peer networks and increases a sense of belonging in beginning students  
|                   | • Interventions that build peer networks are highly rated by students  
|                   | • An increased sense of belonging reported in beginning students  |
| Confidence        | • Students report being more confident about approaching a named advisor  
|                   | • Enhanced student/staff communication  
|                   | • A familiar advisor, early intervention by staff and students increased willingness to signal for help  
|                   | • School leavers value the use of group approaches  
|                   | • Group advising promotes team working skills  
|                   | • Individual and group meetings help to increase personal confidence  |
| Engagement        | • Advising can promote reflection on learning  
|                   | • Online advising can lead to increased uptake  
|                   | • Employability is becoming a strong area of focus  
|                   | • Embedding the process into a Module or Portfolio promotes sustainability, increases relevance and clarifies the purpose of advising  
|                   | • A minority of students report a lack of interest in having an advisor or engaging in the process  
|                   | • Academic advising is now part of Programme induction  
|                   | • One to one meetings promote forward planning  |

6.5 The findings of the 2014 institutional ‘early impact’ evaluation were discussed at meetings with the discipline team leads to allow them to reflect on and benchmark their findings against the main GCU evaluation in preparation for Year 2/3.

6.6 In year 2/3 the discipline teams, based on the evaluations undertaken with staff and students, all moved to an adapted, sustainable and embedded approach to academic advising. In Business the team implemented the standard in a new employability module, now undertaken by all undergraduate Business students. In Life Sciences the team rolled out the standard as part of the new embedded Careers Portfolio and in Engineering the standard was integrated into the Professional Orientation and Practice (PoP) module.

6.7 The academic advising standard is sensitive and adaptive to the changing requirements of the university and the disciplines. It has continuously been adapted by discipline based staff and is now firmly integrated into the academic sphere (Thomas 2012). The sustainability of academic advising within the institution lies in the original roll out as a ‘whole of institution’ approach, managed within existing organisational structures (Evans 2015).

6.8 Encouragingly work has not come to a standstill. The School of Health and Life Sciences (SHLS) are building on the SE work through the appointment of an intern. The Glasgow School of Business and Society (GSBS) are undertaking further research focussed on belonging, engagement and confidence using the ‘What works?’ survey data as the starting point for a larger mixed method study. The School of Engineering and the Built Environment (SEBE) are using the findings to develop the role of the academic advisor in the School.
7. Sustainability

7.1 Fostering a sustainable culture of SE and partnership working requires the buy-in at all levels and by all students and staff; academic and professional. The work on confidence, belonging and engagement by Trowler (2010), Kift et al (2010), Thomas (2012), Healy et al (2014) and Evans (2015) support the institutional findings, signpost future development in HE and generally appear to validate the concept of SE as normal practice, integrated into the existing academic infrastructure.

7.2 A recent HEA report; Engaged Student Learning (Evans et al 2015) highlights the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of partnership working and student engagement. The work undertaken by the GCU project team preceded this publication however it reflects a number of the key areas discussed within this report. In particular the selection of evidence informed approaches to enhancement and academic practice development, manageability and sustainability of methods within existing organisational structures, the need for cultural buy-in through a ‘holistic’ and ‘whole of institution’ approach and a design pedagogy that is sensitive and adaptive to the ‘changing requirements of the context’ (p7).

7.3 To be sustainable in the longer term enhancements like academic advising and Engage have to be locally owned and developed to align with School and discipline priorities. The discipline teams and departments across the university have used the work undertaken as part of the ‘What works?’ Programme to inform longer term academic practice development in co-curricular working.

8. Conclusions

8.1 The high level GCU findings indicate that the introduction and mainstreaming of co-curricular support mechanisms such as academic advising:

- support the development of attributes such as belonging, engagement and self-confidence as part of an overarching institutional strategy to enhance retention and progression

- add credibility to the idea that the use of co-curricular activities such as academic advising can add value and contribute to the development of belongingness, engagement and confidence in students

8.2 The qualitative findings from the academic advising evaluation re-enforce the survey data and add credibility to the idea that the use of co-curricular activities such as academic advising can add value and contribute to the development of belongingness, engagement and confidence in students.

8.3 These findings, taken together and supported by the validation of positive practice that emerged from the process of external scrutiny (QAA and sparqs). Collectively they appear to add credibility to and help build a case for the increased use of academic enhancements not just as a feature of the co-curricular zone but as an integral and embedded part of main stream academic activity.

8.4 The academic advising design pedagogy is proving to be sensitive and adaptive to the changing requirements of the Schools and the disciplines. The impact evaluations undertaken at an institutional and discipline level indicate that the academic advising standard is accepted by both staff and students. The key indicator of success has been the widespread adoption and adaptation of the standard by programme teams.
Academic advising is fully integrated into the academic sphere and has been developed and modified by programme staff to meet the demands of the disciplines. It is now just part of what we do.

8.5 The key messages from the work undertaken by the GCU team throughout the three years of participation in the ‘What works?’ Programme aligns with the evolving body of SE literature. To be successful in the long term and to push beyond tokenism, SE should form a sustainable core of all learning and teaching activity and it must make sense to staff and students. The work on confidence, belonging and engagement by Trowler (2010), Kift et al (2010), Thomas (2012), Healy et al (2014) and Evans (2015) also support the broad institutional findings, signpost future development in HE and generally appear to validate the concept of SE as normal practice, integrated into the existing academic infrastructure.

8.6 In this respect SE will almost inevitably transition from ‘first generation’ to ‘second generation’ narrative akin to the progress and recognition of the first year experience described by kift et al (2010) and reflecting the holistic process described more recently by Evans et al (2015). Second generation narrative in SE is a bench mark and way forward for further exploration of the integration and ‘homing’ of co-curricular activity within the wider academic sphere.
9. References


10. Appendices

Appendix 1

Evaluation of ‘early impact’ of the PPACT Standard

Student Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please tell us about your experience of academic advising and how you think it contributes to the overall student experience at GCU?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think that academic advising supports your overall engagement with learning and teaching at GCU?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How you think we can improve academic advising in the future?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are you implementing the new approach to academic advising? (e.g. individual/group meetings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please give an example from practice of the way you think academic advising can be used to promote Student Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you use the PPACT process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving forward; how do we to make the best use of academic advising as part of the overall student experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2: Case Studies

1. Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students in a Scottish University

Professor Nicky Andrew (Lead author: n.andrew@gcu.ac.uk), Professor Ruth Whittaker, Jackie Main, Dorothy MacFarlane, Kirsty Roden and Lesley McAleavy

Abstract

*Working in partnership with students requires institutions to take a cultural U-turn and do things differently. Working with students challenges existing norms, potentially raising the student voice to a level of influence traditionally not experienced by academic and professional staff. This case study explores partnership working with students in a Scottish University. Described by Healey et al (2014) as an important 21st century challenge capturing the student voice below the level of strategic and sector policy making is proving a challenge for UK HE. The majority of universities recognise the importance of this challenge and are moving from a position of student engagement as a comparative novelty towards that of serious institutional commitment (Thomas 2012, Andrew 2015).*
2. Academic Advising and Employability Awareness

Dorothy Macfarlane (Lead author: D.M.Macfarlane@gcu.ac.uk), Anne Smith, Alan Pellow and Allison Grant (Discipline Leads)

Abstract
During their time in the university community the 21st century graduate is expected to develop a range of attributes that will prepare them for work in a diverse contexts and cultures. The new GCU Student Experience Framework (2013-2017) sets out the strategic direction for the delivery of the student experience and articulates what students can expect from the university and what, in turn, the university expects from its students. Underpinning this is the need to provide meaningful interaction between students and staff and opportunities for developing supportive peer relations (Thomas 2012). Extensive work within the institution on recognising the relevance of early intervention as a contributing factor in the student sense of belongingness and engagement (Andrew et al, 2009; Andrew et al, 2011; Andrew and Whittaker, 2013) culminated in the development of a new university-wide standard approach to academic advising, which is the focus of this case study.

3. Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University

Lesley McAleavy (Lead author: Lesley.McAleavy@gcu.ac.uk) and Professor Nicky Andrew

Abstract
In Scotland, a partnership rather than consumerist model is and remains a key driver for higher education (HE) development. The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) (2003) is moving the sector towards an enhanced student experience, characterised by demonstrable engagement with institutional learning, teaching and quality processes. The QEF prioritises a culture of institutional enhancement and student involvement; institutions are expected to evidence this as a core function of the QAA cycle of Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR). It is likely, therefore, that student engagement in both academic and co-curricular spheres, evidenced through the centrality of the student experience, will continue to influence the sector-wide quality enhancement agenda for the foreseeable future (QAA 2014a).

4. Making the Connection: Enhancing the Student Journey through Higher Education

Yvonne Wayne (Lead author: Yvonne.Wayne@gcu.ac.uk) and Professor Ruth Whittaker

Abstract
The College Connect Strategy 2013-2020 heralds an exciting and innovative development for Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and its relationship with its partner colleges and students. The Strategy is designed to promote and support widening participation across the Scottish Higher Education sector through increasing the number of students progressing to degree-level study from college.
Title of case-study

Making the remarkable unremarkable: working in partnership with students in a Scottish University

Professor Nicky Andrew (Lead author: n.andrew@gcu.ac.uk), Professor Ruth Whittaker, Jackie Main, Dorothy MacFarlane, Kirsty Roden, Lesley McAleavy

The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of John Gaughan (Student Vice President Education) and Michael Stephenson (Student President), Glasgow Caledonian University Students’ Association to the development of ‘Engage’.

Rationale for the case study

Student experience policy is currently driven by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) Student Engagement Framework (2011). The SFC believes that students as partners in HE should expect to have a strong voice and be involved in shaping their university experience. The SFC also now expects institutions to respond by working collaboratively with student representative bodies. An evolving body of literature increasingly equates positive student engagement with a successful student experience. Contemporary definitions of a successful student experience in HE therefore are likely to be interpreted through the lens of engagement and partnership working.

Engagement is perceived as equating with success and achievement, improved academic outcomes and sustained and improved institutional progression (Thomas 2012, Zepke 2014). Engaging students as partners in Higher Education (HE) is identified by Healey et al (2014) as an important 21st century challenge. The majority of UK universities recognise this challenge and are moving from a position of student engagement (SE) as a comparative novelty, towards that of serious institutional commitment (Trowler 2011, Thomas 2012). The final report from the HEA ‘What works? Student Retention and Success Programme (Phase 1) recognises that the profile of students varies across the higher education sector (Thomas 2012).
The Student experience in Scottish Higher Education

In the UK generally, 'learner-centeredness' emerges as a cross-cutting theme. Funding bodies are moving the sector towards a demonstrable and mature relationship with Students’ Associations. The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher prioritises a culture of institutional enhancement and considers student involvement to be fundamental to the development of institutional policy and practice in learning, teaching and quality enhancement. Institutional student engagement is often enshrined in a social contract involving the university, its staff and students that results in the co-production and enhancement of transformational learning. Social contracts or formal student partnership agreements align with the QAA (2014) wider agenda of student engagement with internal and external quality assurance and enhancement. The QAA (2012) UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Chapter 5, 3) states that:

‘......all students should have the opportunity to be involved in quality enhancement and assurance processes in a manner and at a level appropriate to them’.

The QAA and the SFC want HE providers to create a space where students are encouraged to shape their experience and contribute to, and impact on the development of the culture and environment. This is a welcome intention. The move however from strategic intent to normal practice is deceptively complex. Currently universities struggle to both understand and measure engagement and find it challenging to define what the dimensions of a successful experience might look like.

Zepke (2014) argues that evaluating the quality of educational provision is complex, fluid, contextual and situational and that insights gained from mainstream quantitative surveys are limited and reduce the student experience to a ‘lowest common denominator’ metric. Working in real and realistic partnership with students requires the institution and individual staff members to delve deeper than the survey results, take a cultural U-turn and do things differently. Working with students challenges existing norms and potentially raises the student voice to a level of influence traditionally not experienced by academic and professional staff. Staff may be wary of this level of change and students themselves may not seek out or be comfortable in a democratising system.

A Scottish University

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has a strong social mission and is committed to access to higher education regardless of economic or social background. GCU has a commitment to the ‘Common Good’ demonstrated by an excellent track record of widening participation, actively recruiting students from socially and economically disadvantaged communities, successfully engaging those who are ‘first in family’, mature students and those who transition and articulate from the college sector. These values are reflected in the major university strategies and policies.

Raising the student voice beyond the level of tokenism is a 21st century challenge for UK (United Kingdom) higher education. Increasingly universities are working in partnership with their Students’ Associations to co-create and co-produce an institutional approach to student engagement that aligns with external drivers and captures the strategic priorities of the institution. This is generally presented as a student partnership or charter agreement. Getting engagement acknowledged as sector and strategic priority is relatively easy. Getting it accepted by staff and students and then normalised within existing organisational structures is a more complex challenge.

Fundamental to this change is the core requirement to ensure that the student is at the centre of the sector and the institution. The National Union of Students publication; ‘Building a Framework for Partnership with Students’ advocates that universities should now consider partnership working with students to be the norm and not an ‘add on’ activity (NUS 2014).
Contemporary definitions of transition emerging in the literature suggest that it should focus on building confidence, engagement and belonging (Thomas 2012, Andrew and Whittaker 2013).

The philosophy underpinning the GCU student experience is enshrined in the University’s mission for the Common Good expressed in the GCU Strategy 2020, GCU Values and Behaviours, the Strategy for Learning (SfL) and Student Experience Framework (SEF). The SfL and SEF are focussed on an outstanding student experience which equips students with the employability and entrepreneurial skills to succeed as global citizens and enables them to make a positive impact within their communities, transforming their lives and the lives of others. The SfL supports the overarching GCU Strategy 2020 values of Integrity, Creativity, Responsibility and Confidence.

The GCU commitment to the student experience embraces all aspects of student life and includes what happens both inside and outside of the university in academic, social and cultural spheres. The SEF takes account of and reflects the key messages of the HEA ‘What works’ Student Retention and Success Programme (Phase 1) with emphasis on belonging, engagement, confidence, and ultimately retention and completion.

GCU believes in promoting and listening to the student voice; an approach that develops identity and belonging and crucially, nurtures and supports the growth of intellectual maturity and personal confidence (Thomas 2012). Working towards the model of ‘Students as Partners’ (GCU Strategy 2020) these characteristics can contribute to a university experience that is relevant to the future goals of the both the individual and the institution (Healey et al 2014).

The case study
This case study explores partnership working with students in a Scottish University. Described by Healey et al (2014) as an important 21st century challenge capturing the student voice below the level of strategic and sector policy making is proving a challenge for UK HE. The majority of universities recognise the importance of this challenge and are moving from a position of student engagement as a comparative novelty towards that of serious institutional commitment (Thomas 2012, Andrew 2015).

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

Defining student engagement
There are multiple definitions of engagement which vary according to the needs of the student population on campus. Coates (2007) defines student engagement as; ‘a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience’ (p122). The pathway to permanent change in student engagement culture and practice necessitates a process that accepts, adopts and normalises sustainable practices within existing organisational structures (Evans et al 2015). These processes are more likely to be successful if they are accepted as normal practice by students, academics and professional support staff alike (Trowler 2010). Successful student engagement is defined by Thomas (2012) as supportive peer relations leading to meaningful interaction between staff and students and practice development around student confidence and identity. Adopted as normal practice within an institution, these characteristics can contribute to a university experience that meets the goals of the both the individual and the institution (Healey et al 2014, Andrew et al 2015).

Approaches to partnership are often characterised by the interplay of student and teacher roles, enacted as a formal, staged process beyond normal academic practice and characterised by formal meetings and ‘snap shot’ evaluations. Student engagement research offers multiple views on ‘how students, teachers, institutions and the external environment facilitate engagement’ (Zepke 2014, 699).
Much of the literature focuses on the extra things that universities could and should do to promote student engagement. Outcomes are generally illustrated by standalone examples of good and best practice that demonstrate a deliberate ‘designing in’ of activities intended to ‘get students engaged’.

Understanding what constitutes successful engagement in the literature however is not straightforward. Exploration of this type is often undertaken in the form of small scale, single institution or discipline focussed qualitative case studies. Institutions instigate time bounded projects and initiatives that sit in a space outside normal academic and professional practice. This can result in a series of manufactured special initiatives, quantified by ‘snap shot’ evaluations and recommendations which may or may not be implemented (Trowler 2010).

**Student engagement as normal practice**

The idea of student partnerships and engagement enacted as normal and democratising practice in HE is relatively recent. In the UK, growing recognition of the needs of diverse student groups and the increasing influence of the student voice means that universities are starting to take the views of their students seriously (Healey et al 2014). Students engage from the point of application and as they transition into and through university. Engagement is therefore most likely to be successful when it is adopted as a natural ‘whole of institution approach’ (Kift and Nelson 2010, Tinto 2010) and not expressed as an onerous set of extra tasks.

McFadden and Munns (2002) describe the message systems that illustrate the cultural and complex nature of relationships between universities and their students. Thomas (2012) suggests ways to work within the existing message systems (normally integrated into the academic sphere) moving from a presumptive hierarchy to shape a more contemporary democratising approach to partnership and engagement. Engagement coalesces around a culture of active participation within an academic community that is designed to build confidence and develop a sense of belonging (Andrew and Ferguson 2008, Andrew et al 2008, Thomas 2012).

Partnership is a positive and deliberate move that often initially has to be brought into being at a strategic level and thereafter made to work within existing operational structures. Most institutions will ‘progress to tokenism’ at a strategic level. Progression through and beyond tokenism moving engagement into mainstream practice is the key challenge. Whole institution acceptance of partnership and engagement as ‘just part of what we do’ moves the sector away from subjective judgments about engaged/non engaged students, to acceptance of students as adults and natural partners in the development of their learning. This level of acceptance provides the cultural U-turn needed to enable students to voice their opinion confidently and have that opinion heard at all levels of the organisation.

The status of the relationship between universities and their students and the ‘message’ that institutions convey to their students can be explored through ‘transaction’. Transaction in this context represents an adaptation of Transactional Analysis (TA) (Berne 1961, 1964) originally used as a method of diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric disorder. TA is based on an analysis of defining aspects of human interaction and social intercourse; referred to as a transaction. Transaction is defined as a ‘unit’ of social intercourse that occurs when:

‘…two or more people encounter each other… sooner or later one of them will speak, or give some other indication of acknowledging the presence of the others’ (Berne 1961, 29).

TA is a way of analysing human interactions using ego states to define the nature and meaning of the transaction. The ego states described by Berne (1961) as **Adult, Parent and Child** were originally used in a clinical setting to interpret and describe interactions between individuals.
Transactions and their associated ego states resonate with the nature of institution and sectoral messaging. The transactional reality (at any given time) can be more generally expressed as 'the way things are done around here'.

Ego states act a barometer for and can be used to set, listen, respond to and adjust the 'institutional tone'. They are not meant to be interpreted literally, but used as a guide for developing institutional self-awareness and broadcasting the desired institutional tone. Ego states will vary according to the situation and the environment. Mismatched transactions may set the wrong tone or broadcast the wrong message (Thomas 2012). No ego state is unavailable, however a healthy institution will largely transact with students in adult to adult mode. Co-creation and co-production are operational examples of adult to adult transactions. Transacting in other ego states is not necessarily negative and may be needed to safeguard, ensure and protect the rights and the wellbeing of all students and to underpin the fair governance of the institution.

**Student partnership at a Scottish University**

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) actively partners the GCU Students’ Association to articulate a co-constructed approach to student engagement that reflects key messages of the sparqs Student Engagement Framework (2011) and the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Student engagement at GCU is designed to have a 'wide reach' and incorporates the academic and professional spheres creating; 'a fluid space between and among academic and professional domains' (Trowler 2011, 43). This approach informs and underpins a 'whole of institution' approach (Kift et al 2010) to student engagement making it normal practice, and 'just part of what we do'.

In 2014, a small team of academic and professional staff at GCU collaborated with Students’ Association to develop an institutional approach to partnership working. The model (Engage) was developed over a two year period and supports the mainstreaming of student engagement across schools and departments to embed and sustain participation and partnership within core academic activity and professional functions. The team worked with the Students’ Association to raise institutional awareness of engagement and partnership working and to contribute to the development of a fluid, dynamic space for enhancement within the academic and professional spheres (Kuh 2008, Healy et al 2014). In particular the themes of 'introspective and discipline-based engagement' and 'inter-relational engagement' (with staff and peers) were thought to be important for the development of (in all students) belonging, engagement and confidence (Thomas 2012).
The model is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: GCU Engage model**

Partnership working at GCU is designed to align with the concept of working with students as adults and equals. It is grounded in the University’s Common Good Mission and is designed to develop the capacity and confidence of students to act as co-creators and co-producers of knowledge.

A recent HEA report; *Engaged Student Learning* (Evans et al 2015) highlights the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of partnership working and student engagement. The work undertaken by the team at GCU preceded this publication but reflects a number of the key areas discussed within the report. In particular the selection of evidence informed approaches to academic practice development, manageability and sustainability of methods within existing organisational structures, the need for cultural buy-in through a 'holistic' and 'whole of institution' approach and a design pedagogy that is sensitive and adaptive to the ‘changing requirements of the context’ (p7).

The team focussed on those activities that were inclusive and accessed by all students (such as feedback and academic advising) rather than targeting specific sub groups of the student population (Thomas 2012). Approaches to feedback and academic advising were based on a divergent methodology that encompassed a spectrum ranging from what is needed now to what is needed to support transition into, through and out of university. The need to work within existing structures and not 'invent' extra work for staff and students was a guiding principle. To this end all development was designed to work with and not be extra to the existing learning infrastructure (Evans 2015). Approaches to feedback and academic advising are successfully embedded within the academic sphere and accepted by staff and students as normal practice; making the remarkable unremarkable. The project team received a sparqs student engagement award in July 2015.
Evidence of impact

The work undertaken by the GCU team supports the future development of partnership working enacted as normal practice and integrated into the existing academic infrastructure and the key messages are incorporated into the GCU Strategy for Learning and Student Experience Framework.

The work has published online by the QAA (Andrew et al 2015), has been presented at the sparqs international conference in 2015, and the team received national recognition in 2015 as the recipients of a sparqs Student Engagement Award. The GCU approach to partnership working has also been recognised externally by the QAA who, as part of the feedback from ELIR 2014, commented on the relevance of the approach viewing it as key to the future implementation and embedding of institutional partnership working.

Sustainability

Student engagement and partnership is an evolving area in the majority of UK universities. Part of the process of maturation is the ongoing embedding of organising principles and mechanisms for delivery. Kift et al (2010) discuss the development of the FYE (First Year Experience) in HE, underlining the pivotal nature of the first year on campus. They detail their journey from a peripheral position on the margins of the academic sphere, external to the curriculum, to attaining full integration with mainstream academic activity. Kift et al (2010) describe this as a ‘third generation’ approach to FYE. Student engagement will almost inevitably make a similar transition and move from the current ‘first generation approach’ of external ‘add on’ activities, to a ‘second generation narrative’, similar to the one described by kift et al (2010) and reflecting the holistic process described more recently by Evans et al (2015).

Approaches to partnership are sustainable within existing organisational structures and work within established academic and professional spheres. SE will almost inevitably transition from ‘first generation’ to ‘second generation’ narrative akin to the progress and recognition of the first year experience described by kift et al (2010) and reflecting the holistic process described more recently by Evans et al (2015)

The work on confidence, belonging and engagement by Trowler (2011), Kift et al (2010), Thomas (2012), Healy et al (2014) and Evans (2015) signpost future development in HE and generally appear to validate the concept of student engagement as normal practice, integrated into the existing academic infrastructure. Furthermore, the principles and conditions identified by Kift et al (2010) as key to the movement of students into university also support transition through and out of university.

Lessons Learned

The major learning from the project aligns with the evolving body of student engagement literature. To be successful in the long term and to push beyond tokenism, student engagement must be a sustainable core aspect of all activity across the institution and it must make sense to staff and students. Fostering a culture of student engagement and partnership working requires the buy-in at all levels and by all students and staff; academic and professional.

The need to embed new ways of working within existing organisational structures is of paramount importance to the acceptance, sustainability and normalisation of academic practice development. If this is not ‘planned in’ or ‘homed’ at the beginning, initiatives remain as short term projects without a defined exit or adoption strategy.
What Works? Student Retention & Success is a Paul Hamlyn Foundation initiative working with the Higher Education Academy, Action on Access and thirteen UK universities.

References


https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Engagement_through_partnership.pdf


Title of case-study

*Academic Advising and Employability Awareness*

Dorothy Macfarlane (Lead author: D.M.Macfarlane@gcu.ac.uk), Anne Smith, Alan Pellow and Allison Grant (Discipline Leads)

Rationale for the case study

During their time in the university community the 21st century graduate is expected to develop a range of attributes that will prepare them for work in a diverse contexts and cultures. The new GCU Student Experience Framework (2013-2017) sets out the strategic direction for the delivery of the student experience and articulates what students can expect from the university and what, in turn, the university expects from its students. Underpinning this is the need to provide meaningful interaction between students and staff and opportunities for developing supportive peer relations (Thomas 2012). Extensive work within the institution on recognising the relevance of early intervention as a contributing factor in the student sense of belongingness and engagement (Andrew et al, 2009; Andrew et al, 2011; Andrew and Whittaker, 2013) culminated in the development of a new university-wide standard approach to academic advising, which is the focus of this case study.

The new model for Academic Advising, the GCU PPACT Standard (Personal, Professional, Academically-informed, Consolidated, Transitional) was introduced in Glasgow Caledonian University in 2013 following consultation with students and academics.

**Key Elements of GCU Academic Advising (PPACT) Standard**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Reflection, review of relevant personal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Career planning and employability, leadership, achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically informed</td>
<td>Feedback/forward; review and discussion of academic results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidated</td>
<td>Evaluation of learning in all areas identified above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>Reflection and action planning to feed forward into next year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following a number of pilot projects using the new standard, academic advising is currently identified as a strategic institutional priority. With a strong focus on employability embedded in the standard, the aim was to develop student confidence in their ability to manage their academic, personal and professional growth. Initial evidence from a range of evaluative mechanisms suggests that the Standard has been embedded in policy at university level and also in practice at programme level with encouraging results on student engagement with elements of the process.
**Description/discussion of the intervention or change initiative and successful aspects**

The ‘What works?’ Student Retention and Success Change Programme (Phase 2) presented an opportunity for the new standard to be tested by three disciplines in Business, Engineering and Life Sciences, and to embed the principles of academic advising into their programmes. Collectively the disciplines selected represented the diversity of student groups (undergraduate full-time) on campus including; school leavers, mature students, articulating and international.

A core project institutional team was formed to act as a steering group and the programmes chosen formed discipline teams. A member of the steering group acted as the formal link between both teams and as part of that role specifically worked across the three discipline groups and with the team leaders.

In September 2013 the discipline teams introduced the PPACT standard to year one as part of programme induction, using the academic advising standard as the main intervention. Preliminary advising meetings with students were scheduled during the first three weeks of Trimester A, and follow up meetings in Trimester B and C.

Collectively the teams used a range of advising approaches in year one and each discipline adopted and adapted the model to fit with their student needs. Early in the planning process the teams took the decision to explore group advising in first year as a positive pedagogical choice and not a last resort. This approach was used, in particular, with 250 Business students. They experienced large group meetings and also meetings in smaller seminar groups of 20. Across the three discipline groups academic advising sessions were offered to students as one-to-one and online meetings, and as drop in sessions as well as larger group meetings.

In Life Sciences the existing academic advising process was integrated with standard forms and supporting paperwork. First year students were introduced to academic advising at induction and then every student was given two further one-to-one appointments with their named academic adviser. The approach also included an introduction to a careers portfolio that will run through the four years of the programme.

Engineering students (direct entry to 3rd year) were introduced to academic advising at induction; a process to help students become more familiar with GCU facilities, staff, software, module and module team expectations. Staff related this to student expectations and misconceptions which the module teams were aware of from previous years. This early intervention was designed to help relieve some potential fears about the transition to HE from the college sector. Two group advising sessions were provided in October and March.

The third discipline was Business with approximately 250 UG first year students, a significant number of which were international students. The challenge faced by this team was in delivering the new PPACT standard with named academic advisers to such a large number of students.

The approach from this programme team was to take the opportunity of a programme review to develop and implement a core “spine” through the programme with a set of three linked core modules, one at each level of the first 3 years, focusing on Employability (level 1), Enterprise (level 2) and Entrepreneurship (level 3) with a key component of reflection built in to each level. The academic advising sessions were embedded in the level one module and there were three timetabled large group sessions with the whole cohort in September,
November and February. In addition students were offered on-line and drop-in advising sessions. A good level of attendance at these sessions was reported by staff with increased contact with academic advisers and decreased emails about problems (notably the issues covered in large sessions) being flagged up as a positive change.

Students were invited to communicate via email on issues and advisers used email and seminar activities on the module as a method of signposting students to relevant support initiatives. Students reported that they valued having a named adviser, especially those entering directly from school and who had moved away from home.

The discipline team met face to face in a variety of forums: at specific team meetings, at project meetings in house and as part of the wider HEA project team, via online project updates and provided peer support network across the discipline team. In informal meeting with the discipline lead, the programme teams discussed emerging issues and problems and shared initial impressions of operationalizing the PPACT standard within their programme.

The small number of students in Life Sciences meant that academic advising was mostly provided by the programme leader and initial evaluation showed that the majority of students reported feeling engaged and belonging. They discussed value of friends, interaction with staff, developing skills to work collaboratively and curriculum being more relevant to their interests.

In Engineering there was some evidence that the group approach in October was well received by students who indicated that they were pleased to be able to work in collaboration with the programme leader to address problems and at the same time develop more opportunities for personal meetings and personal development for example, with support in CV preparation. The academic advising team comprised of academics who were key stakeholders on the programme in order to maintain care, consistency and control. This appears to have had a positive influence on the students' sense of belongingness and self-confidence as the student group realised that the programme team was dedicated to the success of the group as a whole and the success of the students foremost in their thoughts.

In Business the initial impressions were that that the academic advising elements of the module were promoting deeper student reflection on experience and facilitating discussions on career planning, both key skills linked to the underpinning agenda of developing employability at level one on the programme. The use of group approaches to academic advising was well received with students commenting on the value of building peer networks in their first few weeks in the university. During seminar activities and in the large group academic advising sessions students covered topics on progression, dealing with feedback, employability, learning techniques and personal and professional development. Data on the impact of this approach to developing employability skills was gathered from module evaluation, and from focus groups.

**Evidence of impact**

In the first year of the project, an early impact evaluation of the new academic advising system was undertaken across the University seeking the views of both students and staff. Programme Teams were approached and asked to discuss the new approach at team meetings and in classroom settings with their students. The GCUSA (Glasgow Caledonian University Students’ Association) collected views from a wide range of individual students. The evaluation was also informed by face to face meetings at both School and Departmental level and staff feedback from their experience of implementing the new advising standard throughout session 2013/14.
The findings of the 2014 institutional ‘early impact’ evaluation were discussed at individual meetings with the discipline team leads to allow them to reflect on and benchmark their discipline findings against the main evaluation in preparation for Year 2/3.

Discipline teams collected data through interviews and focus groups with students and recording both the making and keeping of appointments. The implementation strategy for introducing academic advising differed in each discipline group but each group used the GCU PPACT Standard to encourage student involvement in the process and to take responsibility for their own learning early on in their studies. With a strong focus on employability, the coherent and co-ordinated approach developed in the standard enabled the students to develop reflective thinking and writing skills, to work collaboratively and to identify key areas for personal development.

The findings of the 2014 institutional ‘early impact’ evaluation were discussed at individual meetings with the discipline team leads to allow them to reflect on and benchmark their discipline findings against the main evaluation in preparation for Year 2/3. It was noted by discipline teams that the academic advising appeared to have more impact at undergraduate level. In this respect, the standard PPACT paperwork and forms were identified as suitable for undergraduate level but that they needed to be revised to encompass the academic advising requirements of the more complex employability experiences and diverse range of students on taught post-graduate programmes.

In year 2/3 of the project, and based on evaluation undertaken with staff and students, the embedded approach to academic advising was implemented. In Business the discipline team continued with the PPACT Standard embedded in a new employability module (now undertaken by all undergraduate Business students). In Life Sciences the discipline team rolled out the Standard as part of the new embedded Careers portfolio and in Engineering the standard was embedded in the Professional Orientation and Practice (PoP) module.

As part of a UK wide study organised by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation students from Business, Life Sciences and Engineering consented to take part in Belongingness survey. The discipline leads administered he questionnaire twice a year, over a two year period from 2013-2015.

The following table presents a two year comparison across all programmes and shows that there was an overall increase in the scores on the scales of Belongingness, Engagement and Self-confidence over the period, with the figures on a par with the sector.

**Two Year Comparison (All GCU Programmes)**

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belongingness</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most obvious example at GCU was demonstrated by the Business discipline. This cohort year on year consistently demonstrated a ‘better’ rate of ‘success/progression’.
They were however the largest cohort and the group least defined by age and sex. The other cohorts were too small to consider separately.

Business had originally been chosen to participate in the ‘What Works?’ Student Retention and Success Change Programme (Phase 2) because of a (then) dip in academic progression rates from year 1 to year 2. It was hoped that changing the focus and delivery of academic advising could influence the progression rates. Figures for 14/15 show a 5% increase in the progression rate for the cohort selected. Although no direct comparison can be made between these 2 years due to other variables, such as changes in the programme structure and changes in numbers entering the programme, analysis of the survey show promising results in the each of the categories as demonstrated below.

**Changes in scores for Business students 2013-2015**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belongingness</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>+13</td>
<td>+18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>+17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>+13</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All scores on these categories have increased over the period from 13-14 to 14-15. The change on the scale of belongingness in GCU over the two years is broadly in line with the sector, with engagement and self-confidence both showing a greater positive change than the sector generally. In respect of responses from business students in GCU, there appears to be a noticeable increase in the scales on all three elements of belongingness, engagement and self-confidence.

Notwithstanding the point made above about the difficulties in making direct comparisons between the 2 years, the figures for the business group are encouraging. Extended analysis of the continuing academic advising approach, it is hoped, will provide further evidence of the impact of the intervention.

The findings of the discipline evaluation and the impact of the new PPACT Standard aligned to the ‘What Works?’ Student Retention and Success Change Programme (Phase 2) criteria are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘What works’ focus</th>
<th>Key findings and impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>• Students value having a named advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal meetings encourage a focussed approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Group advising supports the development of peer networks and increases a sense of belonging in beginning students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interventions that build peer networks are highly rated by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• An increased sense of belonging reported in students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Confidence**

- Students report being more confident about approaching a named advisor
- Enhanced student/staff communication
- A familiar advisor, early intervention by staff and students increased willingness to signal for help
- School leavers value the use of group approaches
- Group advising promotes team working skills
- Individual and group meetings help to increase personal confidence

**Engagement**

- Advising can promote reflection on learning
- Online advising can lead to increased uptake
- Employability is becoming a strong area of focus
- Embedding the process into a Module or Portfolio promotes sustainability, increases relevance and clarifies the purpose of advising
- A minority of students report a lack of a lack of interest in having an advisor or engaging in the process
- Academic advising is now part of Programme induction
- One to one meetings promote forward planning

Academic advising contributes to the university employability agenda, integrates with the Feedback for Future Learning Policy and has informed strategy and policy development; specifically; the GCU Strategy for Learning (SfL), the Student Experience Framework (SFL) and the university student engagement (Engage18).

Evidence of engagement by Business students in the academic advising processes emerged from the reflective accounts produced by students at end of the module. Key themes from the first year of the module (using this approach to academic advising) would suggest that there has been an increased interest and awareness in career planning and in identifying exchange opportunities including internship and international placements. During the year a range of events were offered as part of the employability core. Students were invited to attend a masterclass given by successful entrepreneurs; student attendance was particularly encouraging.

As a result of this new process in year one, students engaged in career development pursuits such as job evaluation and accessed career support services from the beginning of their programme. The services reported an increased level of interest from students in their first year of study.

Not all students were aware of the named standard (PPACT), but most were aware of the new academic advising process, and were more confident about raising problems and issues with their named adviser in seminars and also about contacting the adviser outwith scheduled classes. This would indicate increasing trust and stronger relationships with academic advisers.

There was rich evidence of students feeling engaged and expressing a sense of belonging linked to the programme, the university and specifically to the Business module. This demonstrates that the approach to embedded academic advising has had a positive impact on students taking responsibility for their own learning.

Students show increasing responsiveness to the employability activities which the team believe were enhanced by being embedded in the programme and not “bolted-on”.

18 [http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/)
Team working, time-management and planning for personal and professional development were all cited by students as being of value. Some international students away from home for the first time commented that early team working activities helped them to make friends early on in their course and feel “at home” in the university. Increased confidence around communicating in English was also mentioned by some international students as a result of team working activities. Gaining confidence to deal with fears and challenges of studying in a new county was also mentioned.

Several students highlighted the way that they were able to take their new skills from the employability module and use them in other new first year modules. The focus on team-working and finding the “courage” to speak out in class was highlighted by students as particularly valuable skills to include in their future studies. Increased awareness of the skills employers were looking for was a recurring theme, as was the transfer of learning from the academic advising activities into other parts of the programme and into employment. This demonstrates that the intervention has had an impact on developing knowledge, confidence and identity of these students as successful HE learners.
Sustainability

Academic Advising is often seen as an activity that is added on and something extra which students and staff have to do. Our experience in working in discipline teams has demonstrated the need to embed new ways of working within existing organisational structures, and that this approach is of paramount importance to the acceptance, sustainability and normalisation of academic practice development, particularly in relation to academic advising. If this is not ‘planned in’ at the beginning, initiatives remain as short term projects without a defined exit or adoption strategy.

There is emerging evidence that programme teams across the University are incorporating the PPACT standard into the curriculum, within a personal development module or as part of CPD portfolio development. Discipline Leads are established as the 'go to' people for advising advice and guidance in Schools and Departments and have been invaluable in their support of peers.

Lessons learnt

It is difficult to evaluate the contribution that initiatives such as academic advising and student engagement models make to the overall retention and success targets of an organisation within the life of a project. Evaluation is likely to be qualitative, use an eclectic approach and draw data from a range of sources. Quantitative approaches should be undertaken as longitudinal studies over a period of years to establish (or not) direct correlation between the initiatives and relevant KPIs.

The PPACT Standard is being implemented by academic staff across the institution and academic advisers are generally supportive and well regarded by their students. One key learning point from this case study is that there is value in the discipline approach to initiatives such as the PPACT standard we used. Academic and support staff in discipline areas hold extensive and significant programme and discipline specific knowledge which should not be overlooked.

There is evidence that students are engaging; however more can be done to raise awareness of the value of academic advising generally. Standardisation of the policy and guidance on academic advising, whilst it is a valuable and welcome development at institutional level, needs to be flexible and adaptable if it is to be successfully and sustainably embedded. A standard approach to something as personal as academic advising needs the discipline input to make it work. The next step will be to develop the documentation further to respond to individual and programme needs.
References


Student Engagement at Glasgow Caledonian University

Lesley McAleavy (Lead author: Lesley.McAleavy@gcu.ac.uk) and Professor Nicky Andrew

Rationale for the case study

Student engagement in the UK is driven by theQuality Assurance Agency (QAA), Higher Education Academy (HEA) and, in Scotland, by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland).

In Scotland, a partnership rather than consumerist model is and remains a key driver for higher education (HE) development. The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) (2003) is moving the sector towards an enhanced student experience, characterised by demonstrable engagement with institutional learning, teaching and quality processes. The QEF prioritises a culture of institutional enhancement and student involvement; institutions are expected to evidence this as a core function of the QAA cycle of Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR). It is likely, therefore, that student engagement in both academic and co-curricular spheres, evidenced through the centrality of the student experience, will continue to influence the sector-wide quality enhancement agenda for the foreseeable future (QAA 2014a).

Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching in HE is described by Healey et al (2014) as an important 21st century challenge. The majority of UK universities recognise this and are moving from a position of student engagement as a comparative novelty, towards that of serious institutional commitment (Thomas 2012). The National Union of Students (NUS) advocates that universities should now consider partnership working with students to be the norm and not an 'add on' activity (NUS 2014). Successful student engagement is central to transition, retention and success; students are viewed increasingly as co-producers and co-creators of knowledge rather than just 'end stage' recipients.

In 2014, a team at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) implemented an approach that aims to enhance the student experience through a visible, integrated and sustainable institutional model of student engagement and partnership working (Engage19). This case study draws on two years of development to showcase how Engage supports undergraduate student engagement and partnership working into and within HE. It reflects on lessons learned from participation in the What Works? Student retention and success change programme and articulates the way forward for sustainable, embedded student engagement and partnership working at GCU.

19 http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/
Description/discussion of the intervention or change initiative and successful aspects

Student Engagement at GCU: Developing a Model and Infrastructure

In 2014/15, GCU established a new student engagement project called Engage. Engage represents a partnership between the University and Students’ Association (SA); activity is supported by a small team based across GCU LEAD (Centre for Learning Enhancement and Academic Development) and the Student Experience Directorate. Engage builds upon the learning and outputs gained from participation in the What Works? Student retention and success change programme (2012-2015), and supports the development and embedding of successful cross-university enhancement activities such as Feedback for Future Learning\(^{20}\) and Academic Advising\(^{21}\).

The original aim of Engage was to work with the SA to establish an infrastructure for and introduce a visible, integrated and embedded model of cross-University student engagement and partnership working, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Student Engagement (Engage) Model**

This integrated model of student engagement and partnership working draws on a broad range of literature including the NUS/HEA Student Engagement Toolkit (2011), Healey et al (2014), Trowler (2010) and Thomas (2012). It is underpinned by the sparqs Student Engagement Framework (2011) and QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Internally, it aligns with GCU Strategy 2020\(^{22}\), contributing to the University’s Common Good mission and Strategic Indicator to ‘achieve excellent student satisfaction’. It reflects the key priorities of the University’s Student Experience Framework (SEF)\(^{23}\) and has an enhanced focus within the refreshed GCU Strategy for Learning (SfL)\(^{24}\).

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20 [http://www.gcu.ac.uk/futurelearning/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/futurelearning/)
21 [http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/academicadvising/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/academicadvising/)
22 [http://www.gcu.ac.uk/strategy2020/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/strategy2020/)
23 [http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/studentexperienceframework/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/studentexperienceframework/)
24 [http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/strategyforlearning/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/yourlearningexperience/strategyforlearning/)
In line with the SfL, Engage reflects the need to develop the capacity and confidence of students to act as co-creators and co-producers, and not just ‘end stage’ recipients of knowledge. Engage, therefore, has two dimensions:

- Engaging students in their own learning (with a focus on Feedback and Academic Advising)
- Engaging students in shaping the learning and teaching experience at GCU

The Engage project is underpinned by crossover and parallel working amongst students, academics, professional support staff, managers and senior managers.

**Student Engagement in Practice**

In the first year of implementation, the student engagement (SE) infrastructure at GCU was underpinned by the development of a SE website as a student facing guide on ‘how to engage’ at GCU.

Other key activities included the establishment of a new Student Action Group for Engagement (SAGE), in partnership with the SA. SAGE is a student-led network designed to enable genuine student participation in learning, teaching and quality enhancement, and with the wider student experience. Chaired by the Vice President Education, SAGE works closely with two staff networks: Learning Teaching and Quality Enhancement Network (LTQEN) and the Student Experience Forum (SEF). Representatives from SAGE, LTQEN and SEF work together on short-life projects aimed at enhancing the student experience. This can range from joint participation in one-off events to the creation of longer-term working groups. The aim is that, over time, SAGE will become a valuable mechanism for students to work with appropriate staff to influence developments that impact on their learning experience, whether related to high level policy, or day to day activity.

A major project for SAGE members in 2014/15 was the co-creation and co-delivery of the GCU Student Experience Summit. This is an annual event at GCU, where staff and students come together to discuss key issues surrounding the University’s commitment to deliver a ‘truly outstanding’ student experience. The third annual Student Experience Summit, *Partnerships in practice – enhancing student employability at GCU*, took place on Wednesday 25 February 2015, with over 70 delegates in attendance. The planning group comprised an even mix of students and staff and the day itself was student-led with staff taking a supporting role. The summit was chaired by the Student President and each discussion topic was introduced by a student representative who also facilitated a round-table discussion throughout the day. Students provided a range of media services to support the event, including photography, filming and managing social media outputs. The event was well attended and positively evaluated by staff and students; having students involved at all stages of design and delivery led to increased student engagement and a more vibrant, successful summit on the day.

Ensuring sustainability is crucial to the success of Engage and the team are working with colleagues across the University to ensure that activities are aligned to strategic priorities and embedded within existing structures wherever possible. This has included aligning work closely with the national focus of the QAA Enhancement Theme25. Enhancement Themes form part of the QEF in Scotland; collectively the sector agrees on a specific theme for development over a designated period of time, encouraging institutions, staff and students to work together to enhance the learning experience in this area. The QAA Enhancement Themes promote collective development of new ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.

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25 [http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/)
A GCU Enhancement Theme Institutional Team has been established to coordinate activities across the University in relation to the current theme of Student Transitions (2014-17). This group includes representation from the Engage team. In 2014/15, Enhancement Themes funding was allocated to support the delivery of transitions-focused SAGE projects, and to support engagement with the GCU Student Experience Summit. In addition, it funded and supported a number of GCU Enhancement Theme Scholar Projects: innovative learning and teaching enhancement projects with a focus on transitions in, through or out of HE. Scholars can be based in academic schools and/or professional services departments, undertaking action research projects aimed at enhancing the student experience in their own area. Reflecting the University’s focus of working in partnership with students, a criterion for selection was that projects must be co-developed and/or co-delivered with student partners. This work will be evaluated and will help to inform the future development of student engagement and partnership working at GCU.

Dissemination and External Collaboration
Papers, workshops and posters showcasing Engage activity have been presented by staff and students at a number of conferences and events, including: the sparqs National Conference (May 2015); International Enhancement Themes Conference (June 2015); GCU Celebration of Learning and Teaching (June 2015); MEDAWEL international visit to GCU (June 2015); and CRLL Conference (September 2015). This has generated external interest in the GCU approach to student engagement and discussions have taken place with a number of institutions to share practice and explore possible partnership working in the future.

Participation in the What Works? Student retention and success change programme has been highly beneficial in terms of fostering collaboration externally. In particular, colleagues from Birmingham City University have provided invaluable advice and support, undertaking a ‘critical friend’ role and sharing good practice and lessons learned from their own student engagement activities. This has allowed GCU to learn from an institution with a reputation for excellence in student engagement, leading to ongoing collaboration and discussion of potential future projects.
Evidence of impact

Although Engage is a new project, the work builds on the learning and outputs gained from successful cross-university enhancement activities such as Feedback for Future Learning and the PPACT Standard of Academic Advising. Engage represents the integration of institution-wide, programme and school-level interventions designed to promote student engagement with the academic sphere.

In its first year of implementation, Engage was received positively by staff and students across GCU. A broad range of staff participated in student/staff working groups, reflecting a high level of buy-in from colleagues from across the institution. Likewise, engagement and feedback from SA staff and officers indicates that the partnership is perceived as valuable: Engage staff now represent the University on a number of SA steering groups and positive, collegiate working relationships have been established.

Engage has also been recognised externally, suggesting that the work is beginning to impact on the student experience. Student engagement was identified as an area of good practice in the GCU 2015 ELIR Technical Report\(^\text{26}\), which stated that:

“The Engage initiative, a cross-university initiative led jointly by the GCU Learning Enhancement and Academic Development department (GCU LEAD) and the Student Experience Directorate and working in partnership with the Students’ Association is key to the University’s successful strategy implementation” (QAA 2015 p5).

Engage was recognised at the sparqs National Conference in May 2015, receiving a Student Engagement Award for Category 1: A new initiative established by a students’ association in partnership with their university which has made the most impact on the enhancement of the student experience.

The early success of Engage is largely due to the establishment of strong working relationships between and among academics, professional services staff and students. Michael Stephenson, Student President, describes one of the key benefits of Engage as:

“By empowering students and staff to work together as partners, Engage provides a platform that will allow students to mould the future of GCU and ensure they are at the heart of that process\(^\text{27}\).”

Sustainability

Sustainability of student engagement is crucial and, as such, the work of Engage is included in the GCU Outcome Agreement\(^\text{28}\) with the Scottish Funding Council for 2015/16 in relation to ‘Reducing barriers to retention’:

‘GCU has a number of key initiatives which focus on supporting retention and student success, including:


\(^{27}\) [http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/engage/)

\(^{28}\) [http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Funding_Outcome_Agreements_2015-16/Glasgow_Caledonian_University_Outcome_Agreement_2015-16.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Funding_Outcome_Agreements_2015-16/Glasgow_Caledonian_University_Outcome_Agreement_2015-16.pdf)
- **A new University Engage Initiative explicitly focuses on enhancing student engagement in collaboration with students, providing a range of opportunities for students to influence their learning experience within their own academic programme and with University-wide activities and processes** (p7).

Moving forward, the team will continue to facilitate and develop opportunities for students to engage in their own learning, and in learning, teaching and quality enhancement at an institutional level. This includes supporting the mainstreaming of student engagement across schools and departments to embed and sustain participation and partnership within core academic activity and professional functions. It also includes support for, and promotion of, student participation in academic quality enhancement in line with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the SFC and ongoing sector development around the Teaching Excellence Framework.

The team will continue to develop a robust evidence base to inform the development of student engagement activity at GCU, including monitoring and evaluating its impact. Collectively the literature, policy and sector-wide drivers described in this case study underpin and are embedded within the Engage model and will strengthen any resultant activities. GCU is working towards a sustainable, integrated, embedded model of student engagement and partnership working; the student experience is at the centre of university activity and will continue to inform all areas of future development.

**Lessons learnt**

The first year of implementation of Engage has reinforced that student engagement cannot be an ‘add-on’: to be successful, it must be an embedded, sustainable and core aspect of all activity across the institution. Fostering a culture of student engagement and partnership working requires the buy-in and commitment of senior manager, academics, professional staff and students; in particular, enabling genuine staff/student partnerships is key.

At GCU, the Engage team have worked closely with colleagues across the University, SA and externally to develop a range of opportunities for students to engage in their own learning, and in shaping learning, teaching and quality enhancement at an institutional level. This includes participation in one-off events (including student consultations and conferences) to active involvement in longer term working groups. Feedback from students suggests that this spectrum of engagement is crucial, allowing students to tailor their level of involvement to their own needs and other commitments.

By aligning student engagement activity to sector-wide and institutional priority areas, the Engage team hope to encourage and enable the continued participation of staff, students and Full Time Officers. It is intended that, over time, student engagement will increasingly be viewed as ‘everybody’s business’ and a core aspect of GCU institutional culture.
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heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Engagement_through_partnership.pdf


Rationale for the Case Study

This College Connect Strategy is one good example of the way in which the University is constantly seeking ways to enable individuals to embrace new opportunities for study regardless of their background, as we deliver our social mission, to work for the common good.

Professor Pamela Gillies CBE
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

The College Connect Strategy 2013-2020 heralds an exciting and innovative development for Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and its relationship with its partner colleges and students. The Strategy is designed to promote and support widening participation across the Scottish Higher Education sector through increasing the number of students progressing to degree-level study from college.

College Connect consists of two main strands of work, both of which are informed by a robust evidence base and evaluation strategy, namely:

- Supporting the student experience of articulation; and
- Strategic and operational partnerships with colleges.

Description/Discussion of the Intervention or Change Initiative and Successful Aspects

Background
In June 2013 the Scottish Government’s Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill was approved. One of the central proposals of the Act is to establish a joined-up system that enables learners to readily move between the college and university sectors, especially articulating from Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/Ds) directly into the second and third years of a degree programme. However, articulation between these sectors has not been without its challenges with students often facing difficulties adapting to the different approaches to learning, teaching and assessment from that which they experienced at college. In particular, the shift to an increased expectation of ‘independent learning’ is often accompanied with a decrease in the amount of support that they may have previously received.
The vehicle employed by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to support and develop articulation has been the Articulation Hubs. The SFC established the Hubs in 2008 and initially funded them for a period of five years at the cost of £3 million per annum. The Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership (GGAP), which is based at GCU, established a number of strands of work, such as the Partnership Projects strand through which they funded 30 collaborative college-university projects between 2008-10. GGAP also funded work in the areas of student engagement and support and research and the models developed by GGAP provided the foundations for GCU’s College Connect Strategy.

The Articulation Hub funding was originally conceived as a five-year initiative which was to end in July 2013. As such, during Session 2012-13 GCU began to develop an institutional strategy to support articulation. This strategy built on models of articulation, CPD and partnership working developed by GGAP but also involved consulting with key internal and external stakeholders in respect of the University’s future strategic direction and Session 2013-14 witnessed the launch of the College Connect Strategy 2013-2020.

The ‘What Works?’ project highlighted a number of principals by which student retention initiatives should be informed, stating that they should be: mainstreamed; proactive and developmental; relevant; well-timed and delivered via the appropriate media; collaborative; and monitored (Thomas 2012: 6). All of which are central to the College Connect Strategy. College Connect has been informed by and builds on a number of projects and models that have been developed by the University. However, what marks it as different is that it is a highly collaborative strategy which has been mainstreamed into the University support systems. It is proactive, in that it is not based on a deficit model and central to the design of the Academy is the Student Development Roadmap which outlines the student journey from entry and college, through to graduation and beyond. All the activities are timely and relevant and a blended learning approach has been adopted to include a mixture of on college, on campus and online activities. Finally, a robust evaluation and monitoring strategy will measure its impact and success, and inform the continued development of College Connect.

Enhancing the Student Experience

College Connect adopts a longitudinal development model of student support which is located in both the academic and social spheres and has a number of key objectives, including:

- To provide student with timely Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to raise their aspirations in respect of progressing to degree-level study and support informed decision-making;
- To support college students to develop a sense of belonging to, and identity with, the University prior to entry;
- To support students to develop the academic skills required for successful degree-level study;
- To support their journey through degree-level study and raise aspirations post-graduation; and
- To increase the progression and retention of articulating students.

The flagship activity for enhancing the student experience is the College Connect Academy, the aim of which is to provide timely, relevant and focused interventions to ensure that college students applying to GCU have the resources to gain the maximum benefit from their studies. The Academy provides college students the opportunity to take part in an exciting programme of pre-entry engagement and transition activities, including masterclasses, online learning resources and mentoring support.
Information, Advice and Guidance

The provision of pre-entry IAG has been noted as being of central importance to students transitional experiences (Briggs et al 2012, Ingram and Gallacher 2013, Lowe and Cook 2003, Wilcox et al 2005) and this constitutes the first stage of the College Connect Academy. This is delivered by the College Connect Outreach team who go out to the colleges and speak to college classes about the pathways available to them. The benefit of this approach is that through working with discrete cohorts the IAG provided can be tailored to the groups, thus ensuring that it is both timely and relevant. In support of this face-to-face work the University has also developed the College Connect website which provides an online one-stop IAG shop and includes a Pathfinder Tool which lists all the GCU degree programme to which HNs can articulate.

Sense of Belonging and Identity

‘What Works?’ argues that ‘at the heart of successful retention and success is a strong sense of belonging’ (Thomas 2012: 6), the development of which is central to the ethos of College Connect. As such, upon receipt of an offer of a place from the University all HN students have the opportunity to become College Connect Members. College Connect membership carries a number of benefits for students and students receive a GCU Student ID Card which enables them to access all the University facilities, including the library and the virtual learning environment, GCU Learn. This enables college students to access all the same facilities as matriculated students giving them the identity of a GCU student prior to entry. To further support the development of a sense of belonging the Academy provides a wide range of pre-entry activities designed to familiarise them with the University, such as ‘Get Connected’ days, ‘Day in the Life’ events and Masterclasses.

Academic Preparedness

As articulating students are entering degree programmes at an advanced level, it is of central importance to their performance and progression that they are prepared as possible for the learning, teaching and assessment methods they will encounter at university. The ‘Day in the Life’ events provide students the opportunity to attend a lecture and a seminar and College Connect membership enables them to access a number of online learning resources via the University’s VLE GCU Learn. In addition, the Outreach Team delivers a comprehensive academic study skills programme as part of their transition activities and students also have the opportunity to attend Skills ‘Boot camps’ and HN-specific induction events.

Progression and Retention

One of the measures of success of the College Connect Strategy is to increase the progression and retention of articulating students. Therefore, the support provided by College Connect does not end at the point of entry but rather dovetails into the University systems. Students are introduced to these services through their participation in the Academy and by virtue of their College Connect membership. These include on-course support, much of which has been developed through the work College Connect undertakes with staff, the University’s Learning Development Centres, which are based in the GCU Academic Schools and provide academic support for students and staff alike, and central support schemes such as the Mentoring and Peer Support (MaPS) programme.

Enhancing Partnership Working for Articulation

‘What Works?’ argues that in order to support student retention and success institutions need to ‘nurture a culture of belonging within the academic and social community’ (Thomas 2012: 10) and that the commitment to develop such an institutional culture needs to be taken at both strategic and operational staff levels. Students articulating from college not only have to adapt to different learning, teaching and assessment methods but many are non-traditional students who have followed non-linear educational journeys.
As such, it is vital to their transition, retention and success that they encounter not only a welcoming and inclusive environment but one that understands their educational journeys. College Connect build on the models developed by the GGAP, especially in respect of models of partnership working and staff development. The lessons learned from the first phase of GGAP was that for partnership working to be successful it needs to be undertaken at both strategic and operational levels and a model to encompass both was subsequently developed.

Strategic Partnerships
One of the largest partnership projects undertaken through GGAP was the development of a Strategic Institutional Partnership model. The decision was taken to develop the model and pilot it with City of Glasgow College, GCU’s closest partner college and the college from which it receives the highest number of articulating students. A Strategic Partnership Joint Working Group was established which included representation at Vice-Principal level from both institutions and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in February 2012. The partnership included commitment to joint planning, the development of new articulation routes and transition support. The success of the strategic partnership was quickly evident through an increase in student numbers and an enhanced transition experience. The model now forms an integral part of the partnership strand and has recently been extended to the other colleges in the Glasgow Region, namely: Glasgow Clyde and Glasgow Kelvin Colleges.

Operational Partnerships
College Connect’s flagship operational model of partnership working is the College University Subject Partnerships (CUSPs). Drawing on Wenger’s (1998) model of Communities of Practice the first CUSP was established in nursing in 2010 when lecturing staff from the University and the degree programme partner colleges came together to discuss a wide range of issues relating to their subject area including: curriculum gaps between the degree programme and its feeder HN; the differences in learning, teaching and assessment methods between the institutions; and subject-specific transition issues. Members of the Nursing CUSP found their participation extremely beneficial and it was concluded that the CUSP’s ‘primary objective of raising awareness of the range of teaching and learning was achieved’ (Mayne et al 2013: 11).

Due to the positive feedback from the Nursing CUSP the decision was taken to extend the model to other subject areas that admitted articulating students and a large number of CUSPs were established in diverse subject areas such as: Social Sciences; Engineering; Life Sciences; and the Built Environment. The membership was also extended to include the Scottish Qualifications Authority who design and accredit HNs. In addition to the awareness raising undertaken through the CUSPs, the decision was taken to make funding available for the CUSPs to undertake small-scale projects pertinent to their area and a wide-range of projects were undertaken including curriculum mapping and transition support projects. The membership of the CUSPs was once again extended to include employers, but although the membership has been extended beyond subject-specialist lecturing staff the model remains rooted in that of a Community of Practice.

Evidence of Impact

*The College believes that the College Connect Academy will contribute further to embedding clear learner pathways from HN provision to degree programmes which is central to Scottish Government post-16 education policy.*

Alan Sherry, Principal

Glasgow Kelvin College
Since its inception College Connect has had a highly positive impact in respect of enhancing the student and staff experience of articulation at GCU. A large number of students are enjoying an improved student experience with a significant increase in students participating in the UCAS and Transition workshops during Session 2014-15.
The Academy also encompasses a wide range of subject-specific activities. The Glasgow School for Business and Society piloted the ‘Day in the Life’ event in Session 2013-14 with social science students from partner colleges being given the opportunity to experience the day in the life of a GCU social science student. 93 per cent of attendees surveyed rated the event as Excellent or Very Good, with 100 per cent stating that they would recommend it to a friend. The Academy has now extended this event to all programmes within the School, including Business, Fashion Marketing and Accountancy.

Mathematics has long been acknowledged as a possible barrier to articulation in the area of Engineering. Therefore, in addition to running a Maths Summer School, the School of Engineering and Built Environment is developing an innovative e-learning maths package for the College Connect Academy which will be made available to college students via open source platforms. University skills days, including CISCO labs and Arduino Programming, are also available.

The strategy not only supports the transition into GCU, but also through and beyond and to support the aim of raising aspirations post-graduation College Connect is addressing Careers and Employability articulation. To launch this strand of work a Careers and Employability Summit was held in December 2014 which was attended by careers experts from GCU and its partner colleges. This has acted as a springboard for further joint working and a Careers CUSP has now been established.

**Sustainability**

*The Students’ Association views College Connect as an important strategy to support the ‘common good’ and we have been proud to work in partnership with the team to support our articulating students.*

**John Gaugan, Vice President Education**

Glasgow Caledonian University Students’ Association

Gale and Parker (2012) have noted that there has historically been a strong link between transition and induction in the literature. This in turn impacts on practice and has led to transition support focussing on entry into university. However, College Connect draws on recent interpretations of transition which now view transition as a continuous process that occurs throughout the student lifecycle (Healy *et al* 2014, Hussey and Smith 2010, Thomas 2012, Thomas *et al* 2015, Trowler 2010) and thus provides transition support from pre-entry through to graduation.

In keeping with the principals identified by Thomas (2012), College Connect activities are grounded within the academic sphere and focus on building confidence, a sense of belonging within GCU and student engagement. Given that the students that articulate to GCU enter their degree programmes directly into second and third year it is vital that these built at the pre-entry stage to support a smooth transition into GCU and provide a springboard for future success. As stated above, College Connect builds upon the models developed by GGAP which have now been mainstreamed into the University’s support systems.

The mission of Glasgow Caledonian University is ‘for the common good’ and we have a long and proud history of successful partnership working with the college sector. This reflects our commitment to widening participation and the College Connect Strategy marks the next stage of this work. The articulation landscape is a fluid one but we are confident that the innovative holistic approach taken by College Connect provides a sustainable infrastructure that can adapt to an ever-changing landscape and ensure that our articulating students continue to achieve and maximise their potential.
Lessons Learnt

Many of the lessons learnt through both GGAP and College Connect echo those found by What Works? One of the key lessons has been the importance of strategic institutional support and the work of College Connect is underpinned by key strategic and operational partnerships.

Thomas (2012) also notes the benefits of early engagement with students and College Connect starts working with students to build confidence and a sense of belonging in the early stages of their college courses. Finally, ‘What Works?’ notes the key role that data has in supporting student retention and success and in addition to the student-facing and the strategic and operational partnership activity, College Connect has a robust research and evaluation strand to support the ongoing development of the Academy.

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