

What Works? Student Retention & Success



Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change

University of South Wales
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Description of the institution and its disciplines to provide contextual overview

Core Team Members: Haydn Blackey (Project Manager), Karen Fitzgibbon (Project Leader), Jo Smedley (Data Expert), Sue Stocking (Discipline Lead, Computing), Julie Prior (Discipline Lead, Business), Georg Boenn (Discipline Lead, Music Technology) and Ellen Jones (USW Students' Union Vice President).

The three discipline teams ('What Works' theme indicated in brackets) comprised the following members:

Business (Induction): Julie Prior (Lead), Jo Higgins, Louise Edwards, Jo Jones, Lesley Long.
Computing (Active Learning): Sue Stocking (Lead), Keith Norris, Gaylor Boobyer, Carey Freeman.

Music Technology (Co-curricular): Georg Boenn (Lead), Andrew Gwilliam, Gill Edwards-Randle.

During the first year of the project, the University underwent a programme of significant change with the merger of two institutions, the University of Wales, Newport and the University of Glamorgan, to form the University of South Wales. At the point of submission to the 'What Works' programme the merger was in planning so the decision was made to ensure that two of the disciplines involved in the programme in which the two former institutions had courses. In addition, the disciplines chosen to participate were selected based on retention issues of a long-standing nature. The project team's thinking was that the project could act as a positive enabler in the newly -formed institution, offering the opportunity for staff to come together over a common theme. This experience is discussed in more detail in one of the USW case studies (The project as an enabler of change).

The project could have been impacted by the change of role of the Project Leader, Dr. Karen Fitzgibbon, who ceased to work for the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching and became Head of Student Experience within the Faculty of Business and Society. However, with the agreement of the Faculty Karen was able to retain her role as the Project Manager for the life of the project.

The initial student member of the project team (Sarah Valkenborghs) was a sabbatical officer of the USW Students' Union who had completed her term of office during the project. Her replacement as sabbatical officer (Ellen Rose Jones) joined the team and made a significant contribution to the outcomes of the project.

The national context for HE in Wales has been a mixed one. During the time of the project, there has been a period of merger activity instigated by the Welsh Government leading not only to the emergence of USW from the merger of the University of Wales, Newport and the University of Glamorgan but also the merger of the University of Wales, Trinity St David with Swansea Metropolitan University and a strategic alliance between Aberystwyth and Bangor universities.

During the period of the project, the Welsh Government has introduced a fee grant for Welsh and EU domiciled students studying in Wales, and for Welsh domiciled students studying in other parts of the UK. This arrangement caps the amount eligible students pay to the pre-fee regime amount (increased by inflation). The impact of this funding has been to substantially

reduce the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales' resource base meaning project based funding, and learning, teaching and widening access institutional support has now ceased.

Impact data

Commentary by USW

The programme of activities carried out under the auspices of the Student Retention and Success (SR&S) project at USW has been evaluated each year using the approach recommended by Professor Liz Thomas. This evaluative framework¹ has been effective and useful in determining the impact of USW's initiatives.

The evaluative data from the USW activities has been usefully correlated with the statistical data provided by Professor Mantz Yorke. Comparing data for the cohort across the two years and four survey points, the institutional data for belongingness, engagement and self-confidence have increased as the cohort progressed.

Planning for and implementing change

The disciplines in the USW project are Business and Management; Computing and Music Technology. They were selected because they have significant student numbers and lower than average retention and completion rates. The discipline areas were selected to represent three of the four faculties at the University, enabling the programme to impact widely across the institution.

The choice of the interventions employed by the disciplines was informed by:

- outcomes of the first What Works project
- discussions within the project team both at meetings in the University and at the project meetings organised by the What Works team.
- discussions at discipline team level

The full participation of the Students' Union Vice President in the project ensured a 360 degree discussion and led to some innovative methods of engaging the staff of the institution with the discussion and debate around student retention and belonging.

The discipline leads, supported by the project leader, worked extremely well together. Full project team meetings were held once a term, chaired by the project manager, and these were largely used to share practice and update on progress against the planned actions by all members of the team. The project manager was able to identify institutional resource to support the work of the disciplinary teams during each year of the project. Information concerning survey instruments, implementation and data reporting were shared by email from the project leader. The discipline leads met with their teams regularly to discuss the

¹ The Evaluative Framework comprised the following stages:

- Planned activity
- Activity output
- Change in behaviour or attitudes – indicator and progress towards this.
- Contribution to engagement and belonging – nature of change and evidence
- Other evidence of impact, including unintended consequences.

interventions and ongoing updates regarding student retention and belonging during the academic year.

USW case studies supporting this topic:

- i. Students as co-contributors (Students' Union)
- ii. The project as an enabler of change (Institutional)

Evaluation strategy

The institution agreed its evaluation approach and strategy with the 'What Works' evaluation team at an early visit. The institution adopted an overall impact evaluation approach to help determine the extent to which the various institutional and disciplinary actions led the institution in the desired direction as outlined in the project vision. This has enabled the institution to judge whether the various changes have had a broadly positive, neutral or negative effect.

Within this strategic framework the detailed evaluation was aligned with the specific actions to be undertaken at institutional/strategic level. The alignment led us to focus on a mixed methodology of evaluation drawing on both qualitative and quantitative methods in the following areas:

- Evaluation of retention and belonging approaches with a staff attitudes survey around belonging.
- Evaluation of the student activities via a poll mediated through the Students' Union
- Evaluation of the impact of the course leaders' forum.
- Evaluation of the dates of interventions with learners to identify if this is happening earlier as a result of activity monitoring.
- Evaluation and review of the predictive model, to look at the fit of the data with the model to seek ways of improving its use.

In evaluating the disciplinary actions the approaches undertaken were as follows:

Computing

- Online student evaluation of induction.
- Module evaluation of programming module, plus focus groups to explore the effectiveness of the module on the student learning experience.
- Qualitative and quantitative review of the learners' use of RFID tracking.
- Student interviews to support evaluation of knowledge acquisition via the use of RFID tracking.

Business

- Online student profile forms to be given out at induction, capturing student expectations, background, 'preparedness for HE'.
- Student evaluation questionnaires and focus groups in week 2 about student induction experiences.

- Focus groups at the end of term 1 (December) to identify first term student experiences. Fortnightly liaison meetings between the Course Leader and Course Representatives to provide opportunities for action at significant points.

Music Technology

- Questionnaires given to students at the end of each co-curricular activity.
- Module leaders and tutors to monitor student progression, engagement with the module, and action on non-submissions as early as possible.
- Early interventions will be discussed and coordinated by the Course Leader and module teams throughout the year.

Changes implemented at the institutional level

Strategy development

Strategic development has included the work to embed meaningful discussion of student retention at the highest level of the University – Academic Board. The data expert to the project prepares termly reports (in consultation with the Faculties) to engage the University Executive (comprising VC, DVC, PVCs, Deans etc) with the published data. Deans are able to engage in dialogue regarding the position within their Faculty including discussion of planned or current interventions which are supporting improvements in retention. This experience is discussed in more detail in one of the USW case studies (Data which informs strategic development).

Staff development, recognition and reward

The project has reaffirmed the direction in which the University has developed in its Staff development, recognition and reward for learning and teaching. This is strongly embedded at the University. There is career development route to Chair/Reader of Learning and Teaching and an HEA accredited CPD Scheme for Learning and Teaching comprising two taught courses (online and face to face delivery) and professional development routes to Associate Fellow, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow. Each of the teams participating in the project have seen success in applications for HEA Fellowship with two of the discipline leaders obtaining Senior Fellow status and the Project Manager and Senior Academic Representative achieving Principal Fellow. Currently the student member of the project is preparing an application for Associate Fellow. The Project Leader has been supported in applying for a Chair of Learning and Teaching using the project as one of the pieces of evidence for impact.

Curriculum development

Strategic change in curriculum development informed by the SR&S project has included a thorough revision of the institutional Curriculum Design Guide informed by the principles of belonging and engagement. The review was led by the project leader. This has also led to the development of an integrated Academic Plan which has embedded belonging and engagement as key features of the institutional strategic development in learning, teaching and assessment. Out of the Academic Plan has emerged an Academic Blueprint for Undergraduate courses which articulates operational principles to embed course identity, student belonging and success as well as immersive approaches to new student engagement.

A review of all of the institution's academic portfolio has been undertaken to ensure that it provides Inspiring, Creative, Responsive, Professional – programmes, partnerships, people and place.

Availability and use of data

During the period of the project the University has undergone a programme of change as a result of merger. This has resulted in business process review and implementation of leaner processes to enable more effective sharing of information and understanding.

The project has enabled a focus on aligning the retention and success data across USW drawing together the legacy systems of the two former institutions to ensure parity of data for all students and decision making which is better informed. The data has been shared with Course Leaders through the Course Leaders Forum. The new guidance for Course Leaders makes clear that analysis and use of data at course level is a critical part of the role.

The three disciplines involved in the project have been used as a pilot group for the development of the institutional activity monitoring output and have informed the early developments in an institutional predictive modelling approach.

Student engagement

The project has been successful in engaging students with its process and themes. The key role of the Students' Union Vice-President(s) in linking the project team to the Students' Union and its Academic Manifesto and campaigns has enabled a number of initiatives to be embedded in both the institution and the Students' Union. The student led staff development arranged by the project leader as a way of engaging students and staff with the retention and success agenda were well received and provided real impact to engage the wider communities in the agenda.

As a direct outcome of the project the Students' Union developed a "Don't drop-out, drop-in" campaign which has been very effective. The Students' Union have acknowledged the contribution of the project, especially the role of the project leader, in supporting this development.

In the context of belonging and success the University and the Students' Union has reviewed its course representative and student voice representative provision to better align the roles and to make clear the link between representation, belonging and engagement.

Changes implemented at the discipline level and impact

Description of interventions and evidence of impact collected:

Discipline: Business			Theme: Induction	
Planned activity	Activity output	Change in behaviour or attitudes – indicator and progress towards this.	Contribution to engagement and belonging – nature of change and evidence	Other evidence of impact, including unintended consequences.
Enhanced one week induction programme	Lots of team-building, getting to know you activities. Involvement from the SU.	<p>Engender 'belonging' to Business School and Course. Students had more opportunities to interact with peers and staff.</p> <p>Attendance was monitored at induction sessions. Staff conducted focus groups in early weeks of term to identify good and less good activities from student perspective. Students were very positive about the interactive nature of the induction – particularly the team building activities.</p>	There was an improvement in student attendance and engagement during induction. Staff emphasised the importance that they attached to the activities that the students were experiencing and this helped students appreciate and understand the relevance and importance of the induction to their first year studies. Staff reported good tutorial group cohesion in the first taught sessions.	For the activities, students were allocated to groups that they would then remain in for their timetabled tutorials and workshops for the first year.
Pre-entry business task	This activity was not actioned as a result of staff role changes associated with the institutional merger. The impact of the activity not running was seen as minimal as the induction			The point of this planned activity was to engage students over the summer period. Once the team recognised this activity was not possible, an alternative format for engaging

	<p>activities above had been significantly strengthened.</p> <p>Monthly webinars to prospective students were conducted in place of the pre-entry task.</p>			<p>students before enrolment was used.</p> <p>Hour-long webinars were offered monthly to all applicants. At the webinars, students can ask any questions about the USW Business experience, and members of the academic staff team delivering the course are present to answer the queries.</p>
<p>Social activities built into term 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disco/dance class/staff disk jockey • Off campus trip • End of term celebration 	<p>A trip to Alton Towers proved very popular attended by 95% of the first year cohort. Second and final year students also participated in the trip to provide an opportunity for cross-year integration.</p> <p>The planned social events had limited interest as students were more interested in socialising in small tutorial groups and arranged their own activities.</p>	<p>More opportunities for students to interact with each other and with staff, and 2nd and 3rd years on the same course. Students feeling much more closely connected to their course in terms of identity. Sense of belonging to the Business community stronger and thus more committed to getting through difficult times</p>	<p>Greater student belonging and community development in Business discipline. A greater sense of cross-year integration that continued after the trip.</p>	<p>Following the success of the cross-year integration, the HRM course has actively, with the support of the Course Leader, has developed a distinct course-based identity rather than a year-group identity. The students have therefore become the support network for each other.</p>
<p>Student Profiling</p>	<p>In depth profiling information about each student in the cohort was collected on entry through the completion of an online questionnaire, during induction week. The</p>	<p>The Course Leader was provided with an overview of the cohort in terms of past educational experience, demographic information, student self-assessed level</p>	<p>Profiling undertaken and target support offered during the first term, covering generic study skills for HE and 'transition' issues, such as independent study, time</p>	

	survey analysis is automated within QuestionMark Perception.	of study skills and so on. Data analysis will lead to the tailoring of support for students on a cohort and individual basis	management, etc. Practical Advice on Study Skills (PASS) sessions were timetabled for one hour every week in term one and provided customised support for students at a discipline level. Student feedback was very positive and reflected that students enjoyed working together to enhance their confidence around their approach to academic enquiry. Data suggests a positive upward trend for Business courses.	
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Discipline: Computing			Theme: Active learning	
Planned activity	Activity output	Change in behaviour or attitudes – indicator and progress towards this.	Contribution to engagement and belonging – nature of change and evidence	Other evidence of impact, including unintended consequences.
Team building in Induction	Induction activities took place for all first year Computing students. Team building activities were also offered with approximately 75% of students engaging in these extra activities.	Feedback from students who participated in the extra-curricular induction and team building activities confirmed that the teams that developed as part of the induction activities were maintained throughout the first year of the course. The majority of	The disciplinary team have noted an improvement in engagement with the course and course-based active learning activities have also been well attended. This has led to improvements in retention – the number of withdrawing from the programmes offering	It was interesting to see that teams developed across the discipline and not only within the distinctive awards.

	environments and a sense of belonging to each individual course	students reported a feeling of engagement and belonging to their course.	induction activities fell from 5.03% in 2012-13 to 3.65% in 2013-14.	
Introduced the new 10 credit module covering the concepts of programming.	Tutorial groups were established and delivered by members of staff who performed the role of personal tutors for the students in their group. This improved student support through the establishment of a student-tutor relationship.	Student feedback and results demonstrated that students had performed very well in the module and had transferred their disciplinary knowledge into the modules coming later in their first year curriculum. Attendance in the module was very high and student feedback suggests that they valued the opportunity to work in small groups with the benefit of a close working relationship with their personal tutor.	Within the module, attendance and engagement was excellent. This led to improvements in achievement in the programming subject area and the course overall. 95% of the students passed at the first attempt. Of the failed students 1% did not engage with the module.	The team have identified an optimum number for the small group teaching that impacts on the sustainability of the relationship with the personal tutor. Student groups up to 15 maintained a close working relationship whereas larger groups did not sustain this relationship.
Explore the use of QR codes for elements of learning	This activity did not take place, but the team instigated a RFID (Radio Frequency IDentification) system to monitor learner engagement on all first year Computing modules.	Results of the attendance monitoring system showed that attendance within the first term greatly increased over previous years. (Previous years had used an attendance system but it was not as sophisticated or robust as the RFID development).	Students appreciated the contact they received when they were followed up to offer support for their learning engagement. The evidence from the system is that students who received follow up support resumed attendance at classes and continued to engage.	Staff teaching on the Computing programmes reported a very positive experience from engaging with the system, in particular receiving regular updates on student engagement and attendance.

Planned activity	Activity output	Change in behaviour or attitudes – indicator and progress towards this.	Contribution to engagement and belonging – nature of change and evidence	Other evidence of impact, including unintended consequences.
Students visit to Rockfield Studios in Monmouthshire	Twenty students attended a practical learning experience related to music recording sessions taking place in a professional recording studio. Studio Engineers and the Studio Manager talked to the students and shared their expertise about the nature of the industry.	Enhanced understanding of the links between theory and practice when viewed through a real-time studio experience. Student feedback about the Rockfield Studio visit was very positive.	Increased awareness of professional best practices, and increased sense of belonging to the course as well as a stronger sense of identity as music and sound technologists.	Students and staff felt the visit brought all elements of modular learning together and that student understanding of the whole discipline was strengthened. Identification that first year students would benefit from a talk by the Rockfield Manager at induction.
Students being offered co-curricular courses, for example in audio software programming	Take up of co-curricular activities and student feedback on the value of those activities was positive. Sound Technology students were invited to live sound gigs on Wednesday afternoons in the Atrium (Cardiff Campus) to practise their skills and increase understanding.	Students get the opportunity to gain extra knowledge and skills supporting their learning and increasing their chances for the job market. Student feedback was positive and the regularity of these co-curricular opportunities was seen as a strength.	Students felt they had broadened their horizons and skills related to the software-based technologies used in recording studios. Increased sense of belonging and support	Second year students have established a new Electronics Society with the support of the Students' Union. This is a thriving society and reflects the sense of increased belonging and identity that students have expressed.
Students being offered industry approved certification for a particular software package, e.g. Apple Logic and Avid ProTools	Twenty students have successfully achieved certification in Apple Logic, and ten have completed the Avid ProTool certificate.	Additional support was provided for students to gain industry accredited certification and enhance their chances on the job market. Students who completed the additional certificates see themselves as having an advantage in	Increased awareness of industry demands for specific software skills. Increased sense of belonging and further support for student career development.	Students will be encouraged to suggest additional industry certification with a view to this being considered by the course team for inclusion in 2014-15.

		the job market and are positive about the opportunities this brings them.		
Detect students 'at risk' early in the year by increasing efforts to monitor attendance, monitor failed assignments and non-submissions. Pro-active tutoring in order get students back on track	Monitor student activity and engagement. Make sure interventions are timely and practical steps are offered to get students on track.	Reduce the number of students dropping out and failing modules. Monitor successful completion of assessments/attendance in year rather than waiting for the end of the year.	<p>Student retention for the whole cohort has increased from 10.4% in 2012-13 to 8% in 2013-14. In terms of the number progressing from year 2 to year 3 (the known point of poor retention for this discipline) 100% of students have progressed in 2013-14.</p> <p>The picture of clean passes at first sitting is more mixed than previous years. It has improved for Music Tech (from 60% in 2012-13 to 79%), but there were more resits this year for Sound Tech. It is felt that this is partly attributable to the number of students staying on the course who may previously have given up and is seen as a part of the positive picture of belonging.</p>	<p>Second year students are noticeably happier compared with previous years. Measures of engagement include increased attendance and better performance.</p> <p>Third year students have feedback that they see the second year as an important milestone in preparing them for final year completion. The course team have considered ways of enhancing the learning and teaching model adopted for Year 2 and this features in their plans for the next year of the project.</p>

The USW case studies of effective working are:

- I. Student Profiling (Business)
- II. Critical Review of Induction (Business)
- III. The pre-entry task for Business students (Business)
- IV. Bringing a focus on programming to all students (Computing)
- V. Engagement of the team (Computing)
- VI. Creation of a student community (Music Technology)

Commentary about impact and learning about effective practice in the disciplines

Each of the disciplines evidenced the impact of their engagement with 'What Works' and these are captured in detail in the annual project reports which have been submitted to the HEA/Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The project took a focussed approach to the disciplinary interventions and maintained the focus of these throughout the three years of the project. This has enabled the project to monitor and evaluate the impact of the interventions longitudinally during the project. The exemplars developed have gone on to influence decision-making about institutional wide activities in belonging and engagement.

The learning about effective practice in the disciplinary context are explored in the Case Studies outlined above, they include examples of successful planned intervention as well as examples of emergent approaches which proved to have significant impact. These include the development of RFID use in classroom engagement rather than the use of QR codes in Computing and the development of weekly pre-entry webinars rather than the pre-enrolment tasks planned in Business.

Sustainability

The 'What Works' programme has had a positive effect on the institutional development of approaches to retention, belonging, progression and achievement which will have continued impact. Building on the project outcomes the institutional approaches to retention have been reviewed and a renewed focus on student belonging has become part of the Institutional Academic Plan and the regular reporting on student engagement, belonging and success at Academic Board.

Further progress on embedding the outcomes of the project at institutional level have included the development of an Immersive Learning project across all faculties which will build on the project outcomes, beyond the three disciplines, to improve engagement and belonging for all new students at the University.

At disciplinary level the embedding has led to a new engagement of staff with this critical area. Programme teams developed their work around the project themes and each of them saw a blossoming of commitment to the approach to student engagement from the project. Within each of the faculties involved in the project the programme teams became champions who are impacting on the practice of colleagues in different disciplines leading to sustainable developments in belonging and engagement.

The legacy of the project is an on-going engagement at discipline and institutional level focussed on the student experience from the perspective of engagement, belonging and success. The future sustainability of the learning from the project is embedded in institutional strategic thinking around student engagement modelled in the Academic Plan and Academic Blueprint.

Conclusions

Summary of successes and challenges

As evidenced throughout the report that Student Success and Retention project at the University of South Wales has been extremely successful. Given the challenging context of merger and major changes in the Welsh HE environment it has been significant to see that whatever factors are occurring nationally and institutionally, at the level of the disciplines real change can be facilitated by teams of staff and students working together to achieve their shared outcomes of belonging, retention and success.

Drawing together impact and learning, and reflection on the process

The evidence of the impact of the project at institutional and disciplinary level is articulated in detail throughout the report. As ever in such a project many of the anticipated outcomes were effectively achieved but some of the key learning came from elements of the project which emerged incidentally through the teams focussing on the needs of learners and pre-entry students. This mix of deliberate and emergent impact evidences the lived nature of the project which embedded its practice at institutional and disciplinary level and has already informed further developments including the Immersive Learning project across all disciplines.

In reflection the project, though time consuming during a period of immense change, has proven an effective way to make a significant impact on the experience of potential and new students in their engagement and participation at the University leading to enhanced belonging and success.

Implications

Engagement with the Students' Union and with institutional senior management as project partners from the inception of the project has been key to its success. This approach has assured that the project has become embedded into institutional life through both staff and students. Future projects will build on this experience to inform the direction and approach to change.

Next steps

The institution has already begun to take next steps to build on the project through the development of an Immersive Learning Project which builds on the 'What Works' project by ensuring senior management partnership and full engagement with and from the student body. The evidence of the impact of the 'What Works' project is seen in its influence on the development and delivery of the Immersive Learning project which is being led by a student.

Appendix – Case studies & Lessons Learnt

1. Case Study Title: Data which informs strategic development Authors: Professor Jo Smedley, Dr Karen Fitzgibbon, Haydn Blackey, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

Improved data on progression, retention and success is critical to effective institutional decision making. Quality data informs dialogue and debate between various parts of the institution and its students leading to better understanding and decision making.

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

The What works? Student retention and success change programme approach was closely aligned with the institutional strategic focus on learning and teaching enhancement. The project contributed to a clearer strategic development which included the work of embedding meaningful discussion of student retention at the highest level of the University – Academic Board. This was achieved by improving the quality of, and understanding about, the retention, progression and success data.

While the institution had long provided data reports to senior management and Academic Board these had been focussed on raw data rather than an analysis of what impacts student engagement and retention. The project led to a review of the data provided to Academic Board and the development of a shared understanding of the impact of belonging on student retention. This has informed several key elements of institution-wide activity. Examples include the recognition of a need for clear and consistent use of data provided to appropriate staff at key moments in the academic year to inform strategic decision making.

The data expert to the project prepared termly reports (in consultation with the Faculties) to engage the University Executive (comprising VC, DVC, PVCs, Deans etc) with the published data. Deans are able to engage in dialogue regarding the position within their Faculty including discussion of planned or current interventions which are supporting improvements in retention. This change of focus came about due to the What works? Student retention and success change programme initiative identifying the key data gaps for staff in the three disciplines. Staff across the three disciplines took part in a retention and success review, led by the project data expert, which focussed on the key information needed to inform action at course, subject, School, Faculty and institutional level. The outcome of the review was the development of a data visualisation tool which enhanced the clarity and understanding of the way retention and success data is reported within the institution.

Academic Board has noted in its minutes that the quality of debate around issues of retention, progression and success has been significantly improved since the new data reporting structure was introduced. While the initial reports focussed on the three What works? Student retention and success change programme disciplines this has subsequently been implemented across all disciplinary areas. The data reports include explicit reference to belonging, engagement and self-confidence, key themes which emerged from the first phase of the What works? Student retention and success change programme initiative, as they have become a significant influence on institutional understanding and action which enhances student achievement at the University of South Wales.

The attempt to ensure consistency and validity of data across the institution proved challenging. The data was held in multiple sources as there was no agreed 'single source of truth'. Having identified the relevant data that was required lengthy conversations took place with data holders at Faculty and institutional level until a consistent and reliable approach was developed. This work led to the data expert engaging with multiple stakeholders to ensure a common source of data and agreed reporting approaches which would benefit first the project and then the institution.

Buy-in to improved data on belonging, engagement and self-confidence by a senior member of executive (the DVC) provided a mandate to the data expert to overcome some of the resistance to change identified in pockets of the institution. Without senior management buy-in it would not have been possible to develop the quality and availability of the data in a timely manner.

Evidence of impact

Evidence of how the case study intervention was successful.

The Data approaches which were adopted as an outcome of the project continue to inform strategic decision making at institutional and faculty level. The initial developments have enabled a base set of data for longitudinal reporting on performance at institution, faculty, school and course level.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

The 'intervention' changed attitudes through better data reporting, awareness and understanding. This has led to positive action being undertaken in an evidenced based approach, rather than an assumptive position informing decision making.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

The 'intervention' has an indirect impact on student success as it has informed better evidenced based decision making. The outcome of such decision making has included adopting Belonging as a key theme of the Academic Plan and ensuring that all undergraduate courses have a six week immersive learning period at the beginning of the first and final years.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

The minutes of Academic Board and faculty based committees have been reviewed to identify the increase engagement at the meetings with retention, success, belonging and self-confidence. The data quality has directly impacted on the confidence with which discussions at such meetings takes place, so they have become a more regular feature of academic life.

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The Students' Union developed a 'Belonging' project through their 'students as change agents' programme using the data sources as a key contributor to the decisions on the areas upon which to focus their effort.

Sustainability

The data reporting and the associated discussions have now become embedded in institutional processes. The measures of success inform strategic reporting against the Academic Plan targets and the institutional Key Performance Indicators.

Lessons learnt

What lessons can be extracted from this case study that your institution and other institutions could learn from?

The importance of a reliable single source to high quality data that can inform decision making at multiple levels within an institution is a critical success factor to managing change in student experience of belonging and success.

This Case Study outlines a significant institutional change which has already had an impact on student retention at the University of South Wales. Using the data across the institution in addition to focussing on the What works? Student retention and success change programme courses have shown the effectiveness of the interventions at course level and has allowed the institution to prioritise the successful outcomes in its long term strategic planning.

2. Case study Title – Profiling Business Students

Author: Julie Prior, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

The rationale for the case study is to evidence the effectiveness of the use of student profiling in supporting first year students to ensure engagement and belonging.

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

Evidence from four years of previous work on student data for first year Business students undertaken by the team before they engaged with the What works? Student retention and success change programme had identified the need to link the data already gathered with a process for ensuring personal tutors were able to intervene in a timely manner to support students.

The Business discipline had developed and implemented a tool for personal student profiling in order to better understand the nature of the student cohort and the individual needs of the learners. The online profiler (developed by the Discipline Lead) is completed by all new students during enrolment week. It has been designed to address the broader issues of student life at University not merely those relating to academic aptitude. The profiler comprises questions including previous educational experiences, personal circumstances and caring responsibilities as well as living arrangements i.e. commuting, living in halls, living in student accommodation off campus, length of journey to University and so on. Previous work on retention and attainment had evidenced that commuting students and students with caring responsibilities could be more at risk of non-completion than other student groups (often called traditional students, but not in a USW context where non-traditional students outnumber traditional students by 3:1).

From the start of the What works? Student retention and success change programme project and informed by the outcomes of Phase one of the What works? Student retention and success change programme the discipline team identified that the profiler could be enhanced through the integration of engagement, self-confidence and belonging measures alongside the existing data gathering. The profiler was redesigned to take account of these measures and used to inform dialogue between learners and personal tutors. The profile data was provided to personal tutors to enable them to have conversations with students that are meaningful and informed by the individual context of the student, not merely a 'How are you' conversation.

As an outcome of the project the students have identified on-going benefit from the opportunity to assess their skills at the beginning of their course and for issues of engagement, belonging and self-confidence to be explicitly addressed in the review with their personal tutor which provides support at various key points during their first year of study. One of the most significant elements of the profiler from a student perspective is the ability for them to rate their skills at the very start of their studies and monitor their progress and development throughout the course of study.

Evidence of impact

Evidence of how the case study intervention was successful.

The student feedback on their engagement with personal tutors has improved since the profiler was amended to take account of engagement, belonging and self-confidence.

The data from the What works? Student retention and success change programme survey of the first two years of operation saw an increase in each of the three measures, the Business students having a better rate of satisfaction with belonging, self-confidence and engagement than students from the same backgrounds in other disciplines.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

Staff have identified that they did not fully understand the complexity of the student experience for their students. The profiler identified the wide range of students from multiple complex backgrounds within the course. Without this data staff could have defaulted to a view that all students have similar background and experience.

Students identified that the use of the profiler provided them with the ability to rate their skills at the very start of their studies and monitor their progress and development throughout the course of study. Students felt this was highly beneficial and helped them engage with the course and their tutors during the most challenging periods of study.

Students noted that they benefitted from a better understanding of their personal learning characteristics which enabled them to 'play to their strengths' in their learning engagement.

How and how much did it contribute to students' confidence, engagement and belonging?

Student belonging was enhanced by an increased sense that the personal tutor knew and cared about their context and individual progress, making them feel part of a learning community.

Self-confidence increased because students were able to understand how they learned and used that understanding to enhance their academic performance.

Engagement was at the heart of the intervention as the profiler led to better knowledge and understanding of the learner, both by personal tutors and by the learners themselves.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

As each cohort of students is so distinctive in this area it is difficult to make a claim of improvement based only on this intervention as students were also subject to other What works? Student retention and success change programme related interventions e.g. pre-entry webinars and enhanced induction. However student feedback has been consistent in identifying their personal benefit from knowing their skills and development needs at an early stage, and from an awareness that staff were informing their learning and teaching practice based on real student data, not a guess at the student body profile.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

The evaluation indicators include progression, retention and achievement data for year one all of which increased during the operation of the profiler.

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The use of the profiler led to a significant change in the personal tutor conversations with students. While the project had focussed on the nature of the data and how it would help students in their self-understanding it also helped staff plan cohort and individual interventions to support students.

Sustainability

The intervention is completely sustainable as it is delivered using the institutional assessment tool – QuestionMark Perception. Now the question set has been developed it can be reused for each cohort and integrated into other courses.

Lessons learnt

The use of data to plan interventions is a clear lesson from this project. The data focussed on by the project team is specific to an institution like USW with a high mix of students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Other institutions with similar student profiles will find the profiler useful in their context.

3. Case study Title – Critical review of induction for Business Students

Authors: Lesley Long, Julie Prior, Helen Stacey, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

The rationale for the case study is to outline the impact of a review of induction on the student engagement, belonging and success in the Business discipline.

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

The Business discipline had used first year student induction as an information sharing exercise providing students with the details of the things they would study, the processes they needed to be aware of and log-in details for IT and Library service with the course really beginning in the first week of term.

In engaging with the What works? Student retention and success change programme, informed by the Phase One outcomes, the team identified the lack of focus on engagement and belonging during the course induction. The team, working closely with the discipline lead and informed by the institutional What works? Student retention and success change programme team, realised that an information based induction would not engage students and that some of the early departure of students within the discipline was being caused by the students not feeling as if they belonged to the course or that their transition from school/college to Higher Education was addressed early in the course.

The discipline team took the opportunity and time provided by engagement with the What works? Student retention and success change programme away days to undertake a critical review of the induction programme which led to a complete reinvention of the induction and early weeks of the course.

The discipline team redeveloped induction to take account of the principals of Phase One of the 'What works? Student retention and success change programme and built into the course opportunities to highlight belonging and engagement with students at an early stage. This led to a move from information sharing to belonging and socialisation as the primary objective of the induction and early years' experience.

At the heart of the reinvented induction experience was a greater opportunity for staff and students to engage socially, in addition to engaging with the disciplinary context. The induction now includes a visit to a local bowling arena in the first week, to allow social networks to form for a group of students who are largely not living in campus accommodation. The social groups developed during induction then become the tutorial groups for the rest of the course, ensuring a sense of belonging. Social events are also built into the course during the year including visits to the Harry Potter Experience, Alton Towers and the Doctor Who exhibition.

Each of the social events, while a good in their own right, are underpinned by academic and theoretical connections e.g. Marketing students look at the marketing of the attraction, HR students look at the people approaches and characteristics of the workforce, Supply Chain students consider the logistics of the attractions, Accounting students look at the financial resources and management of the attractions and generic business students look at the

strategic direction of the organisations and their business development. Thus each visit is followed up by classroom interaction to bring the theoretical and the practical elements of the visit together. The knowledge and experience gained informs the assessment of the learners in the first term.

As a result of the energy generated by the critical review of induction and early experience conversations also began about the potential for restructuring the business courses in the light of the changes. This ultimately led to a total review and revalidation of the entire undergraduate and postgraduate provision in the School informed by the example of good practice developed by the discipline team through the What works? Student retention and success change programme.

Evidence of impact

Evidence of how the case study intervention was successful.

The data from the What works? Student retention and success change programme survey of the first two years of the new induction process saw an increase in each of the three measures, the Business students having a better rate of satisfaction with belonging, self-confidence and engagement than students from the same backgrounds in other disciplines.

The new induction also led to a significant improvement in the number of students who completed the first term. In previous years this was a high risk period for attrition for the course, and this was addressed by the intervention. Retention and progression at the end of year one also improved.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

The intervention completely revised the attitudes of learners who immediately become immersed in the subject as well as being socialised into the year group. The sense of community and belonging developed through induction had a positive effect throughout the year of study and into future years of the course.

Staff attitudes moved from a 'Why are they leaving?' perspective to one which saw the staff role as crucial to engaging students in a sense of belonging and community. The effectiveness of the intervention has led to significant changes elsewhere in the course and beyond in the whole of the Business School.

How and how much did it contribute to students' confidence, engagement and belonging?

The belonging of students to the course was the major impact of the intervention. Students came to know their fellow students and staff early in the course which gave them a sense of engagement. The fact that the cohort is largely a commuting cohort of students, means that informal interaction does not occur as it might in a cohort resident on campus. This belonging engendered early in the year led to a wider engagement of learners with each other, the academic team and the discipline. The enhanced engagement led to a positive development of self-confidence as students became aware of each other's skills and knowledge and could grow from interacting with the wider disciplinary team.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

The evidence from progression, retention and attainment statistics shows a significant increase in students' success since the beginning of the intervention.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

The evaluation indicators include progression, retention and achievement data for year one all of which increased since the critical review of induction.

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The review of the entire business curriculum in the School emerged from the evidence of the impact of student engagement and belonging on student achievement. The design of the new undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum was underpinned by the outcome of this initiative and the wider What works? Student retention and success change programme.

Sustainability

The intervention has been embedded both throughout the course and across the School curriculum. Its sustainability is assured due to this level of embedding.

Lessons learnt

The key lesson is that students from disparate backgrounds who often do not live near the institution need a way of socialising which is not that traditionally adopted in Higher Education. Once this key lesson was recognised the intervention design related to the disciplinary context, but could be adapted to other disciplines.

4. Case Study Title: Pre-entry Webinars for Business Students

Author: Julie Prior, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

To share the development of a new approach to supporting pre-entry undergraduate business students at the University of South Wales

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

An intervention originally planned as part of the What works? Student retention and success change programme by the Business course team was to develop pre-entry tasks for new undergraduate business students to complete prior to enrolment. It was envisaged that these tasks would be used during induction to provide early feedback, highlight potential areas of support and engage students with the processes associated with assessment submission and return very early during their studies. This approach informed by phase one of the What works? Student retention and success change programme would enable closer engagement with students in induction and focus on ensuring that students felt that they belonged not just to the University, but to the subject and the course.

Changing structures caused by the creation of the new University through merger meant that a reduced staff resource was available to the team at a time when they were required to deliver the course across two campuses while ensuring the quality of the student experience remained high. This led to a review of the resources which could support pre-entry students and a realisation that undertaking assessment of pre-entry tasks in the first week of indication would not be possible given student numbers. The team, wanting to ensure that the delivered on the What works? Student retention and success change programme project commitment reviewed alternative approaches for pre-entry engagement and agreed them with the core project team

To deliver the new approach the team worked closely with colleagues from the University's Marketing & Student Recruitment department to establish a weekly pre-entry webinar for all prospective business undergraduate students including potential and confirmed applicants. The business course team worked together to develop a roster to take each session. Prospective students were able to raise a wide range of queries and concerns and receive an immediate response. In addition prospective students could request guidance about any aspect of the course or University life. Course issues received an immediate response and wider issues were, where necessary, referred to the appropriate part of the institution.

The outcome of the webinars was a sense of community among students and with academics that was apparent from the moment the students came onto campus. In the very early days of study, students immediately felt welcomed and a sense of belonging because they engaged with the staff they had previously met through the webinars. Students said that this gave them a sense of already having connections with staff that facilitated a quick and smooth transition into University and established strong bonds of belonging and engagement.

Evidence of impact

Evidence of how the case study intervention was successful.

The feedback from first year new arrivals was that they already felt part of the community of the course by the time that they arrived. Having had the opportunity to engage with staff and fellow students before their arrival, this specific connection with the staff were highlighted by the students as an example of good practice. Each student indicated that 'knowing' a staff member from the online interaction enabled them to make direct contact when they needed to with a person they knew, helping them to smooth the process of transition and the potential bumps along the way.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

The intervention changed attitudes for staff and students. Students had a closer relationship with and confidence in the staff from the moment of arrival. Staff felt a closer connection with students had been achieved than in previous years through the early interaction.

How and how much did it contribute to students' confidence, engagement and belonging?

The intervention had a direct impact on the students' sense of belonging to the course and University. This sense of belonging has subsequently impacted on their confidence and engagement with staff and fellow learners.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

Retention, progression and attainment increased for the first year group that participated in the intervention. A larger number of students returning to year 2 than in previous years is further evidence of the success students achieved through the intervention.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

Methods to evaluate the change included:

- Student feedback through focus groups
- Staff feedback at Course meetings
- Student retention and achievement data
- Discussion and dialogue with the institutional project team including feedback on the approach from other disciplines

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The intervention itself was an unintended consequence of the inability to deliver the pre-entry task that had been originally planned. On reflection the personal nature of pre-entry webinars seem to have had a more effective and sustained impact than would have been achieved by the pre-entry task.

Sustainability

The pre-entry webinar has been so successful that its sustainability is seen as a key element of future learning and teaching enhancement at the institution.

The Course Team have agreed to continue the pre-entry webinars for all future operations of the course. The Faculty Management Team has determined that all undergraduate courses within the School adopt this approach for future entry.

Lessons learnt

What lessons can be extracted from this case study that your institution and/or other institutions could learn from?

The case study shows that early staff interaction with students using technology has proved to be such an effective way to develop opportunities for engagement and belonging that it is being adopted across the institution. It would be easy to adapt this process to any institutional context or discipline, based on our evidence this would be a strongly recommended approach. One of the advantages of the approach is that it is resource light compared to other pre-entry activities.

5. Case study Title – Bringing a focus on programming to all Computing students

Author: Sue Stocking, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

The rationale for the case study is to evidence an effective approach to dealing with challenging threshold concepts within the Computer Science discipline. The Case outlines an approach to ensure early student engagement with and understanding of the challenging concepts.

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

As a discipline computing often attracts students who are excited by the outputs of software and do not always realise the challenges that creating such software entails. Programming has long been a 'killer' module for first year students of Computer Science and the Computing disciplinary team decided to focus on this element of the course as a way of increasing student engagement and self-confidence early in their period of study.

Computer programming is one of the core subjects of computer science. For many students learning programming is a difficult, daunting and intimidating experience. Many first year programming students get discouraged early due to the large number of errors and difficulties faced in learning programming skills. Yet programming skills are an essential requirement of all computer science degrees.

To address the challenge of programming as an early topic with the student learning experience the Computing discipline team developed a short introductory programming module delivered in an intensive manner during the first term. The module, called 'Procedural Programming' was designed using examples of good practice in immersive learning which the team used to inform their developments. The target was for all first year students to improve their engagement and understanding of programming as an incentive to engage with the rest of their first year students. The importance of programming to other elements of the degree course has in the past led to students struggling not just with programming but with other elements of study. The new module addressed these issues before students needed to engage with programming in the other element of the first year.

Given the nature of the learning in programming; attendance was a key measure of engagement and success. The team were successful in an application for institutional resources to develop a pilot attendance system using RFID technology and a smart chip included in the student enrolment card. Students are registered as attending by walking into the computer labs, an approach which is seen as having an advantage over other approaches (physical or technological) where students have to 'log-in' to be registered.

The results and feedback from the staff and students have been positive. The attendance rates have improved and the pass rate for the module is significantly better than in predecessor modules. Evidence of the impact of the module has been seen in the completion and retention data at course level.

Evidence of impact

Evidence of how the case study intervention was successful.

Attendance rates made a significant increase during the operation of the programming module. Student outcomes improved and this had a knock on effect of increased attendance and performance across the other modules during the first year. This led to an increase in performance across modules and progression from year one to year two.

The impact made in the first year of operation led the Computing Science degree to adopt this approach as standard.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

The intervention had a significant impact on student attitudes. Whereas programming was consistently the least well received element of the course, following the intervention the module received highly positive student evaluation, increasing student belonging and self-confidence.

How and how much did it contribute to students' confidence, engagement and belonging?

The early engagement between the course team, the module team and the learners led to a large increase in students' self-confidence and belonging with the course. It enabled learners to get an early sense of achievement which fed into their engagement and belonging with the rest of their studies.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

The intervention made a significant impact on student success, both at the level of the challenging concepts associated with programming and at the level of the course.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

The indicators have been module evaluation, course representation feedback, Course Board reports, progression and achievement data and student surveys. Feedback from staff on the course not involved in the module development has been very positive as they have seen the impact the early immersive engagement has had on the learners.

Impacts on the learners were measured through belonging and satisfaction surveys and progression and attainment data.

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The approach to attendance monitoring piloted by the team in this module has been rolled out to two other faculties with positive results.

Sustainability

The intervention by its nature has been sustainable as it was rooted in the culture and practice of the course. The module has been embedded into the course structure and has continued to be delivered in subsequent years.

The RFID attendance system had initial set-up costs, but the chips are now automatically built in to student enrolment cards. The approach has been adopted in the other modules on the course and in other Faculties at the University.

Lessons learnt

The lessons learnt from the development of the programming module is an example of the way challenging threshold concepts should be addressed at an early stage in a discipline. The development of immersive approaches to such concepts has made a significant impact on learners and their engagement with not just the module but the course

The approach to attendance monitoring which was adopted does not rely on students logging-in or checking-in but registers them based on their enrolment cards which are also used as access cards for the University campus. This approach has significantly improved the quality of the attendance data. Staff are now not required to record attendance manually or to wait while 100+ students swipe their registration devices.

6. Case study Title – Engagement of the Computing Discipline Team

Author: Sue Stocking, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

The rationale for the case study is to share the impact of effective team working to deliver enhancements in student belonging, retention and success.

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

Managing change in Higher Education can be a challenging process. Within the Computing discipline at the University of South Wales significant changes, including integration of team members from the two previous institutions, had led to a need to reform and refocus the work of the team in delivering a high quality student experience in the first year of the degree.

As a discipline computing often attracts students who are excited by the outputs of software and do not always realise the challenges that creating such software entails. Programming has long been a 'killer' module for first year students of Computer Science and the new team decided to focus on this element of the course as a way of increasing student engagement and self-confidence early in their period of study.

The Computing discipline team working on the What works? Student retention and success change programme was a new team that had not previously worked together. The team comprised the team leader, two first year tutors and a part-time lecturer who is researching into student retention as part of her PhD. From the start the team engaged with each other around their commitment to supporting student belonging, retention and success. Each team member played a key role in the creation and organisation of the new activities, communication with the other tutors and interaction with students.

The team approach was evidenced by their involvement in the active learning through the module, the induction activities held and the residential event facilitated by the HEA/Paul Hamlyn Foundation. As a result the team leader achieved recognition as a Senior Fellow of the HEA and the other team members all achieved Fellowship of the HEA. One of the team has built on the project outcomes to secure an institutional innovation grant in learning and teaching and another one has used the project related work to gain a Faculty award for innovative assessment and feedback as part of the institutional Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment Awards.

The effective leadership of the team provided a vision and set of values which inspired the team to work effectively from a student focussed perspective. The team leader discovered that empowering colleagues to take leadership of aspects of the range of interventions allowed them to flourish as individuals as well as develop a collaborative culture within the whole team. The challenge of multiple campuses and two distinct cultures were overcome by open discussion which focussed on the benefits to the learners rather than the past experience of the team members. Staff who had worked in HE for over 20 years and described their previous engagement as 'just doing my job' became engaged in the process leading to them rethinking their approach to learning and teaching and achieving institutional recognition for their achievements.

Evidence of impact

Evidence of how the case study intervention was successful.

The evidence of the effectiveness of the intervention can be shown in the on-going working relationship within the team which has developed a culture of continuous improvement. Even though the team leader has subsequently retired the team continues to take a student-focused approach to their developments and have shared their approach with other institutional colleagues.

The impact of the intervention on students has been evidenced through the belonging survey and through the successful outcomes of student progression and achievement at the end of year one.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

The intervention significantly changed the culture and working practices of the team. While the team might have been characterised in the past as having a subject/module focus to their delivery, since the intervention they have become a student-focused collaborative course team. The team can readily evidence the significant impact this change has had upon their team working, their individual practice and their learners' performance.

How and how much did it contribute to students' confidence, engagement and belonging?

The development of a focussed approach on course design has had a significance impact on the students' engagement with the course and sense of belonging within the course. The course teams enhanced working relationship has been communicated to the students by lived example rather than by words and has led to a much richer experience for students who now realise they belong as members of the course community.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

Student performance and progression in year one have shown real improvement. Student satisfaction with the course and student feedback on their sense of belonging have all significantly increased since the change of working practice.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

There were implicit indicators of a higher performing team, including non-team members asking the team which had changed to make them so committed to what they do. Explicit indicators include team members' achievements as Senior Fellows, Fellows, winners of excellence in learning and teaching awards and successful bids for funding to support innovations in learning and teaching.

Impacts on the learners were measured through belonging and satisfaction surveys and progression and attainment data.

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The team began their work focussed on the outcomes of building active learning into their curriculum; however the major impact on the team was a new way of collaborative working which has proved successful and sustainable.

Sustainability

The impact of new ways of working by the team has become embedded in practice. The fact that the approach has survived the departure through retirement of the team leader is evidence that the team will continue to work in this way. This significant cultural change in the team will now be replicated even when new members join the team. Other teams, seeing the impact the new way of working is having have already begun to develop approaches within their own teams.

Lessons learnt

Work which begins as a project initiative can have significant positive contributions on the wider working of the team. The team's ability to get away from the institution and engage with the What works? Student retention and success change programme provided a spur to change their working practices in a positive and effective manner.

All institutions should be able to learn from the approach in this case study. It shows the value of externally facing projects to act as a catalyst of change within an institution and course team.

7. Case study Title – Creation of a student community in Music Technology

Authors: Dr Georg Boenn, Andrew Gwilliam, Gill Edwards-Randle, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

The rationale for the case study is to demonstrate an approach to engaging students across all three years of a course into a student community.

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

The Music Technology discipline team noted at the beginning of the project that issues with retention for their students were more likely to occur between year 2 and 3, rather than during year 1 which is more common in other disciplines. Having discussed this with students who return in year 3, as well as some of those who had left, the team began to hypothesise that the barrier was students who had learnt technical skills at year 1 and 2 did not understand the value of year 3 to them as Music Technologists. Having identified this the team used the opportunity of a What works? Student retention and success change programme discipline meeting, facilitated by Paul Hamlyn/HEA to begin to explore the possible methods to address the barriers. The outcome of these discussions informed by others in related disciplines was to identify that the building of a learning community at course level would enhanced the engagement of students at each level of the course.

At the start of the intervention the team were aware that there was little by way of interaction between the year groups. Once this issue was surfaced with the students it became clear that second and third year students were full of potential advice and guidance for the earlier years that would be beneficial to all groups. The team set about arranging a series of interventions designed to encourage and facilitate learning and communication between the year groups. For example, second year students talked to first year students about the way that different modules at level 4 facilitated the move into specialist options at level 5. Third year students talked to second years about the value-added nature of experiences in the final year of study that enabled the second year students to see the benefit of continuing into the final year. The course team worked closely with employers and through direct employer/student engagement, students were able to identify the value of completing the course prior to seeking employment. The employers proved well placed to articulate the benefit of the final year of study and facilitate student placements during the year to enhance the learning experience. The methods used saw astounding results. NSS scores went up, and progression and retention between year 2 and year 3 (the traditional hot spot for these courses) went from 70% to 100% in two years.

Evidence of impact

The evidence for the success of the case study was multiple.

- The lack of progression between year 2 and 3, a long standing problem, disappeared.
- Student satisfaction in the National Student Survey increased.
- Course evaluation for years 1 and 2 proved positive.
- Student engagement with the course team and with other students increased.
- Attainment and successful degree outcomes increased.
- Employer engagement led to the course having a much richer learning experience.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

The intervention had a significant impact on both staff and student attitudes. The intervention led to the course team thinking about the entire course not just discrete elements of learning. Staff began to see the course as a holistic learning experience, rather than being focussed on their module specialisms. The impact of the course design had led to a gap between the learning in each year. The intervention led to clearer sign posting by staff of the link between the various elements of the course.

Students' attitudes changed as they began to see their fellow learners at different levels as part of their learning community. The formal links between years were supported by a range of informal engagements led by the students themselves.

How and how much did it contribute to students' confidence, engagement and belonging?

The sense of belonging to the course and to each other was something that emerged from the intervention. Student confidence and engagement had not been a factor, but the sense of belonging to a course which included all three years of study was something that came about through the intervention.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

The intervention had a significant impact on the successful completion of the degree on which the students enrolled. Rather than a significant drop between year 2 and year 3, every student completed the course. The good-honours for the course increased significantly in the two years since the intervention was implemented – from 58% with 2.1s and above to 72%.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

The evaluation indicators include progression, retention and achievement data; the National Student Survey satisfaction rates; increased student engagement with and positive feedback via Course Evaluation.

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The engagement with employers which had been previously been through formal channels had not been part of the initial plan to engage the learner communities, but it became clear as the intervention progressed that an employer voice in the student engagement would reinforce the messages being given from one year group to another.

The project had started by focussing on co-curricular elements including recognition for practice based engagement with the discipline in informal settings. The course-wide view did not emerge until conversation took place with students to discover the reason for the disconnect between years 2 and 3.

Sustainability

The intervention involved a change of philosophy and practice rather than a resource intensive intervention around specific actions. As such as long as the culture of the course is replicated when new members join the team then the intervention will remain part of the effective operation practice of the course.

The risk to sustainability would be a major change to the course team without the successful lived experience being successfully inculcated. The course leader has left the University since the project was completed, but the course team continue to adopt this approach.

Lessons learnt

This case study evidences the importance of course teams having the space and opportunity to reflect together on the course experience. Without the opportunity facilitated by the project the team might have developed a wide range of interventions but not addressed the central problem of the course which was about the team and the students' philosophy of course belonging.

The case study provides examples of a wide range of specific interventions, but without a change of philosophy these might not have proved successful.

8. Case Study Title: Students as co-contributors

Authors: Ellen Rose Jones, University of South Wales Students' Union, Dr Karen Fitzgibbon, Haydn Blackey, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

This case study supports the project teams' contention that students need to be co-contributors to a project focussed on student experience. The University had previous experience of working with student representation and students as partners but saw the project as an opportunity of increased engagement between the institution and the Students' Union by enabling the Students' Union to be full contributors to the project's development and delivery.

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

From the beginning of the project students were full participants in the project development and outcomes. The Students' Union Vice President was a full member of the Core Team and liaised closely with student representatives at faculty and course level. The project became the priority item for hand-over between SU Vice Presidents at the end of their term of office, as the Union officers recognised how important continuity of representation was to ensuring the project was not only informed by students but led and delivered by them.

The full participation of the SU Vice President at the What works? Student retention and success change programme national initiation meetings led to a much richer programme of activity for the project at USW than if the activities had only been staff-led. The insight from a student perspective constantly challenged the core team to move beyond its assumptions and address the needs of students today.

The SU Vice-President's involvement also led to developments with the Students' Union with an SU campaign called "Don't drop out, Drop in" - a SU led campaign aimed at retaining students through sabbatical support - being developed to align SU activity with the What works? Student retention and success change programme. Student engagement with the campaign was significant with the SU having the largest number of students engaging with any of their campaigns involved with "Don't drop out, Drop in".

The experience of the SU Vice-President and the "Don't drop out, Drop in" campaign led to the development of student-led staff development sessions around induction and retention. The approach of having students presenting to academics had a strong impact, with academic colleagues realising that their own students views were being reflected through the students presenting the seminars. The academics who might not have accepted such views if presented by educational developers or other colleagues were particularly responsive to the student perspective on the issues of belonging, engagement and self-confidence.

Students were also engaged in supporting the project by leading change initiatives. The participation continued throughout the 3 years and is key to our overall success within the project.

Evidence of impact

Evidence of how the case study intervention was successful.

The impact of students as co-contributors to the project was significant in that it enabled a strong flow of information and ideas between the Students' Union, the student body and the University. The full participation of the SU Vice President at the What works? Student retention and success change programme national initiation meetings led to a much richer programme of activity for the project at the institution.

The "Don't drop out, Drop in" campaign was a flagship example of the students contribution to the project; similar approaches have subsequently been developed at other SUs within Wales via the NUS network.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

The 'intervention' changed attitudes both for learners and staff. The student buy-in to the What works? Student retention and success change programme philosophy led to a great focus on learning, teaching and the student experience within the SU. While Students' Unions can often focus on social and welfare issues the "Don't drop out, Drop in" campaign focussed on the learning needs and the educational development opportunities for learners. It led the USW SU to develop its own Academic Manifesto which has formed the basis for on-going relationships between the SU and the University. Since the project the SU has continued to be a partner in the development of institutional strategies and projects which focus on the students' learning and on the educational dimension of student life alongside the sustained focus on social and welfare aspects of the student journey.

How and how much did it contribute to students' confidence, engagement and belonging?

The 'intervention' had a multi-layered contribution to student confidence, engagement and belonging.

At one level the SU Vice Presidents, over the three years period, were enabled to develop their own knowledge and skills to support the students they represented in the University structure through an insight into student retention and success issues that would not have occurred in the ordinary course of a SU Vice President's role. In one case this led to the Vice-President working in an international role supporting learners in Higher Education and undertaking a PhD, in the other case the Vice President used her experience to position herself successfully to become SU President. In this case the SU President has now brought new approaches to the role of the SU with a stronger focus on the students' educational perspective by restructuring the roles of the existing Vice Presidents.

On another level the student leadership of initiatives to support belonging retention and success have positively contributed to engagement with a wider range of SU officers than would previously have been the case. SU officers are now regularly engaged in initiatives which contribute to the student experience and support student development.

A further consequence of the 'intervention' is the direct contributions the SU and other students have had on their fellow students in enhancing the awareness of belonging, engagement and self-confidence. The students involved in delivering the student led staff seminars have feedback the impact of direct interaction with academics and other staff on their self-esteem.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

The engagement of students with both the “Don’t drop out, Drop in” campaign and the student led staff seminars ensured heightened student engagement which has led to increased student progression and achievement across the subjects involved.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

The engagement with the “Don’t drop out, Drop in” campaign was monitored and reported through SU and University channels. The impact of the student led staff seminars was reported through staff feedback on the effectiveness of the seminars and their impact on practice.

The SU annual report evaluated the range of initiatives and concluded that they had made a significant impact on the student experience and the engagement of the SU with educational matters. The Student Submission for the QAA Institutional Review also highlighted the role of What works? Student retention and success change programme in improving student engagement, belonging and self-confidence.

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The principle of student co-creation and co-contribution has been espoused by the University for a number of years. However evidence of its success as an approach was not as explicit on other projects as it has been for What works? Student retention and success change programme. The unintended consequence has been to review student contributions at all levels of the institution and to restructure both the Students’ Union and the Representation scheme to better focus on student issues in learning, teaching and belonging.

Sustainability

The success of the student led staff seminars approach has been taken forward in a number of other areas of the University. For example the Head of Student Counselling has used the approach as a way of enhancing staff understanding of the pressures and challenges faced by students during the study. Students and staff are constantly highlighting opportunities for further uses of this approach across the University.

The “Don’t drop out, Drop in” campaign has become part of normal SU business.

The students as contributors approach to projects has been embedded in the University culture.

Lessons learnt

The key lesson from the Case Study is the impact and value of students as co-contributors, this has informed all further developments at the University.

The feedback on the USW SU Vice-President’s contribution to national project meetings was highlighted by other institutions involved in the project who recognised the value of such a strong student engagement with the project. Two project teams specifically feedback that they would adopt this approach in their own institutional context in future projects.

9. Case Study Title: The project as an enabler of change

Authors: Haydn Blackey, Dr Karen Fitzgibbon, University of South Wales

Rationale for the case study

During the first year of the project, the University underwent a programme of significant change with the merger of two institutions, the University of Wales, Newport and the University of Glamorgan, to form the University of South Wales. This Case Study outlines the way the project acted as an enabler supporting change at an institutional level.

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

“To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” (Newman , 1845). In many circumstances change is seen as something to be feared or something to be avoided, but change is also opportunity and as Newman suggests is the only way to flourish and to grow.

The What works? Student retention and success change programme at the University of South Wales is an example of taking the opportunity to use the project as an enabler, so that change was not a barrier but an energiser for action.

The project application was made when the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales Newport were two separate organisations working towards merger which led to the creation of the University of South Wales. It would have been possible to put all projects on hold until the impact of the merger on structures and roles was complete. However the project team saw the opportunity to use the project as one of the drivers of change and in submitting the application made clear that two of the selected disciplines were represented in both merging institutions, so that discipline level teams would work across the two former institutions in the same way as the core team.

Very explicitly the project saw its role as establishing a unifying vision for belonging, retention and student success for the new institution at an institutional level, while building up resilience in team working at disciplinary levels. By the time the project began formal merger had taken place, but structural changes would take another 18 months to become resolved. In the context of massive internal changes the project provided a clear direction to inform institutional policy decisions and to effect change on the ground.

From the start of the project the project team ensured that the Students' Union, which also merged, would be a key part of the team. So that as the project developed it not only weathered change but used change as a means of establishing staff and student values around belonging, retention and success into the institutional culture.

The project team were: Haydn Blackey (Project Manager), Karen Fitzgibbon (Project Leader), Jo Smedley (Data Expert), Sue Stocking (Discipline Lead, Computing), Julie Prior (Discipline Lead, Business), Georg Boenn (Discipline Lead, Music Technology) and Ellen Jones (USW Students' Union Vice President).

Evidence of impact

Evidence of how the case study intervention was successful.

The impact of the project has been seen in new institutional developments which build on the pioneering work, with the institution committing to a Strategic Excellence Initiative in Immersive Learning from the beginning of academic year 15-16.

How much did the 'intervention' change attitudes?

The 'intervention' changed attitudes at a critical time for the new university. By focussing on the student experience, retention, success and belonging, the core and disciplinary teams avoided all nugatory discussion about previous institutional practice and 'norms'. This avoided focus on the difference between approaches and instead concentrated on the learner experience across the chosen courses on multiple campuses of the new university. This had the helpful effect of bringing teams together around a shared aim benefitting the whole institution rather than its component parts. The meaningful interaction between staff led to positive student outcomes and moved the agenda from reminiscences of the past to delivering future goals for the university.

How and how much did it contribute to students' confidence, engagement and belonging?

This 'intervention' contributed to the student sense of belonging by having a clear focus on USW's provision drawing together students who had previously studied at, or enrolled in, one of the predecessor institutions.

How and how much did it contribute to improving student success?

As an enabler of positive change, the 'intervention' meant that the momentum was maintained in terms of providing a positive student experience from the moment that merger took place, rather than a hiatus emerging from the potential for decision-paralysis after merger. This was evidenced by increased student progression and attainment.

What indicators and methods did you use to evaluate the change?

While the 'intervention' was, by its nature, difficult to evaluate quantitatively, the on-going impact working as close cross-institutional teams has continued to effect the operation of the courses since the end of the project. The core team and the discipline teams worked closely together as a community of practice and even without the formal structure of the project have continued to share their experience of student engagement, belonging and success in the on-going life of the University. The teams have been used as a reference group by senior management when reviewing new approaches to student belonging and engagement.

What were the unintended consequences (positive or negative)?

The project focussed on the phase 1 themes from the What works? Student retention and success change programme however the timely nature of the project had significant beneficial effects supporting the change associated with merger. The project allowed for creative development without the need to constantly go back to 'war stories' of the previous institutions' styles and approaches.

Sustainability

The core and disciplinary teams are being used as reference points for new developments in belonging, success and self-confidence. The interventions which emerged from the disciplinary teams have informed practice across the institution, far beyond the original discipline. These practices have now become embedded as the University has moved beyond merger and is looking to the future of its identity as a major leader in Higher Education across Wales and beyond. What was innovative practice as part of the project has become normal practice and is informing the development of the institutions new Student Experience strategy which will develop the future direction in this area informed by the outcomes of the project.

Lessons learnt

What lessons can be extracted from this case study that your institution and other institutions could learn from?

The case study evidences the usefulness of a project based approach to enabling change in Higher Education. While the specific circumstances of merger may not be replicated in other institutions the case study offers important lessons on how bringing teams out of their day to day work in silos to take an institutional view impacts on the institution and its courses. The need for regular reporting and feedback as part of the project has significantly impacted on the outcomes as staff prioritised the project over the other pressures in a busy academic life.

Newman, J. H. (2012). *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Oxford Press:Oxford. Chapter 1, Section 1, Part 7

Reflections and lessons learnt: Discipline Team Engagement

Rationale

This report focuses on the comparative experience of two discipline teams working in very different ways to achieve the outcomes of the What works? Student retention and success change programme. It highlights the role of the team leader and team dynamics on delivering effective change.

Description

The issue

The issue for the What works? Student retention and success change programme was variation of experience between different discipline teams across the project. In particular the significant variance between one team which grew together as a group to effectively take ownership of their project from the discipline lead and another team which remained reliant on the discipline lead which led to the disciplines project becoming overly dependent on one person rather than being embedded by the team.

Why was it problematic

The reliance of one What works? Student retention and success change programme disciplinary team on the discipline lead had the impact of reducing the effectiveness of the team's project due to a lack of collaborative creative thinking and idea generation within the team. While the project was successfully achieved, the comparison between the impact of another team which worked in a collaborative way was evidenced by the outcomes. The collaborative team built on the original plans and moulded and developed the thinking in response to their experience and the students' needs. The less effective team simply delivered on the project outcomes without any sense of innovation or new thinking informing what could have been a potentially effective new way of working.

After the What works? Student retention and success change programme came to an end the collaborative team has continued to work together to deliver effective outcomes, new ideas, and new interventions even after the retirement of the disciplinary lead. The less effective team has moved back into routine modes of practice within the energy and forward thinking of the other team. The disciplinary lead continues to promote the interventions and ensures they are delivered, but this is 'heavy lifting' in comparison to the working practice of the collaborative team.

How did you try to address it? Why did this not work?

The disciplinary lead for the less effective team met with the What works? Student retention and success change programme steering group to raise the concerns about the engagement of the team. The disciplinary lead followed up this discussion by detailed conversations with the lead of the collaborative team to seek to understand, and transfer, the knowledge and experience of the effective working in that team.

Even with the disciplinary lead's learning from the other team the interventions adopted did not produce a change in the working relationships of the team. This appears to be an indication that the personalities of the team and the culture of the department had a bigger effect on team dynamics than simply adopting strategies that had been effective for another disciplinary team.

Lessons learnt

What we have learnt from these experiences.

The lessons learnt from this experience during the What works? Student retention and success change programme has implications for any educational intervention as good practice and modelling of good practice might still not work in a specific culture context especially in a culture which is risk averse and responds better to command and control than discursive approaches to development.

What would you do differently in the future?

If the differences between the team cultures had been identified earlier in the institutional What works? Student retention and success change programme more focussed support could have been provided to the disciplinary lead by the project manager and project lead. Such support could have taken the form of a more focussed reflection on team working as an explicit element of the initial project development through the use of creative and collaborative approaches to idea exchange using team building exercises as part of the disciplinary team development.

What we would advise other institutions to do about this issue.

The lessons we have learnt about early intervention to ensure effective team working as a key factor in participative development of project initiatives in What works? Student retention and success change programme and other educational developments can be applied in any institutional context. Departmental and team culture should be considered early on in any development of similar projects or programmes. The use of team role profile analysis tools would provide a useful route in to preparing teams for engagement with such programmes.