



**Retention Strategy
2021-2024**

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This Policy applies to University Centre Weston (UCW) and meets the requirements of the Office for Students (OfS), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and the Revised UK Quality Code. Where required guidance from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) will be observed.

1 BACKGROUND AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)'s annual data releases on non-continuation indicate that the number of students leaving study before completing their programme across the UK has been continuing on an upward trend for the past few years. In 2018-19 (the latest year published data is available) 6.7% of students in the UK did not complete the HE course they enrolled upon.

There are many reasons that students may not complete their studies and previous research by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) found that 33-42% of students consider withdrawing at some stage. HESA data reveals clear increases in the likelihood of non-continuation where students are male, come from POLAR quintile 1 postcodes, are of Black or Mixed ethnicity or report a disability without receiving Disabled Students' Allowance. High rates of withdrawal carry reputational, ethical, financial, and legal consequences for higher education providers and can seriously disadvantage students.

Building on the HEA's *What Works?* (2012) report that suggested a strong sense of belonging in higher education is key in encouraging and facilitating continuation, the follow-up report *What Works? 2* (2017) surveyed students and found that "non-white students and students with higher levels of 'adverse circumstances' (especially travelling to study) have lower levels of belongingness – and this largely corresponds to national evidence about student characteristics associated with lower rates of retention and attainment."

This Retention Strategy therefore aims to develop a culture focusing on two main elements: student belonging and student engagement. Engagement is seen as central to creating a deep sense of belonging, and while this is wider than the concept outlined within the UK Quality Code it is clearly aligned to it.

This Strategy meets the following areas of both the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2018) and the Office for Students Regulatory framework for higher education in England (2018).

UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2018) – Student Engagement

The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education sets out Expectations that all higher education (HE) providers are required to meet. The expectations regarding student retention are embedded throughout the QAA standards, and this Strategy has specifically reflected on the following practices:

- The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.
- The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.
- The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.
- The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance, and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

Office for Students - Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England (2018)

Condition B1 – The provider must deliver well designed courses that provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

Condition B2 - The provider must provide all students, from admission through to completion, with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

Condition B5: The provider must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) at Level 4 or higher.

This strategy has been developed in collaboration between students and staff in agreeing the content, devising and writing of the document.

Retention and Continuation is a key issue within UCW; data is analysed against the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) benchmark metrics. These are incorporated within the UCW's Higher Education Strategic Plan and UCW is required to report to the Office for Students (OfS) activities undertaken to improve retention.

2 PURPOSE & SCOPE

University Centre Weston (UCW) is committed to ensuring the high quality of its higher education provision and supporting students to achieve. The Retention Strategy provides a demonstration of the commitment of UCW in meeting students' expectations to support them to realise academic success, as stated in the UCW's Mission Statement; **"To deliver an outstanding higher education experience, enabling success and inspiring ambition"**.

This Strategy sets out UCW's commitment to supporting retention and ensuring continuation rates are high. It applies to all students (and degree apprentices) regardless of age, mode of study, programme, or the university partner they are linked to.

2.1 Scope

The UCW Retention Strategy applies to all students on HE programmes that are delivered by UCW. Currently, UCW delivers HE programmes validated by the following awarding organisations:

- Bath Spa University (BSU)
- Hartpury University
- Pearson
- University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE), including degree apprenticeships

With student belonging and engagement at the forefront of the Retention Strategy, UCW has identified through statistical feedback collected from students, significant periods in the student journey directly affecting retention. UCW takes a proactive approach to retention, seeking to actively engage students rather than reacting to crisis, through identifying the following triggers:

Pre-entry – information, advice and guidance and early engagement.

Induction, re-induction and early engagement – defined as engaging the students at the first possible instance and maintaining this throughout the student lifecycle, nurturing a sense of belonging and community.

Engagement in academic life – defined as establishing student belonging through positive interactions with course content, class, tutors, work-based learning opportunities, assessment methods and feedback.

Support and tutoring – defined as creating meaningful relationships with the course and support team, nurturing the student to maximise their potential and reach their academic aspirations.

Student involvement and engagement – defined as nurturing a sense of belonging through a student centric approach, incorporating transparency with strategic decisions and student involvement at all levels. Proactively acting upon the student voice and offering feedback opportunities, empowering student representatives, and promoting a respectful and reciprocated team ethos between staff and students.

Pre-Entry

UCW is committed to assuring that the information provided to students is of high quality, 'fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy'. Of particular concern is that pre-entry information enables students to make informed decisions regarding the programmes of academic study they want to pursue. If students receive appropriate Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and have a clear understanding of their chosen programme of study, they are more likely to remain on the programme and be successful.

This is achieved through a variety of means including a regularly updated website, which includes student handbooks to provide detailed information on the content and assessment of the programme. In addition, a bespoke UCW Prospectus and supplementary booklets provide additional information on the specifics of course provision, support and facilities.

In order to enhance and promote early engagement, all prospective students receive regular communication in a variety of ways, raising awareness of the UCW community with an aim to promote a shared sense of belonging before a course commences.

UCW offers a range of support services ensuring that prospective students receive guidance covering academic, social and financial dimensions of their choices.

In addition, there are informative pre-induction events aimed at supporting student transition into university life, and building an early culture with staff and fellow students including:

- Head Start Summer School
- Open days
- Targeted marketing events
- Phone calls with lecturers and support staff.

Students and family members have the opportunity to talk with course specialists providing detailed information on course requirements and expectations. This includes evidence of prior assessment standards, assessment expectations, course content, pastoral care and prospective timetables.

Induction, Re-induction and Early Engagement

UCW considers the induction process paramount to early engagement, and essential in developing a sense of belonging both in university life and academic provision. An effective induction allows students to make friends, get to know the academic staff, and develop academic skills. In addition, having a good understanding of institutional processes and expectations supports students to be successful.

UCW incorporates all these elements into the induction process, in that it provides opportunities and support to students to engage in all aspects of student life, through institution-led social events, course-specific induction and integration to university partner provision and involvement.

A standardised approach ensures all students receive equal exposure to all aspects of student life through a bespoke Induction Checklist (Appendix 7.1). All students are issued with a copy of the HE Student Charter and “Supporting Your Success” booklet to outline UCW’s expectations of students, how to access the various support services available and how students can get more involved if they wish to.

The importance of developing a sense of belonging not only within HE life, but also within the academic setting is acknowledged. Programme teams host course-specific inductions and social events incorporating new students, existing students and the course delivery team. Academic support systems such as ‘HELP’ (Higher Education Library Plus) and the Academic Development Team are promoted, and the importance of pastoral care discussed.

The importance of early engagement and developing a culture of the student being equal partners within the quality processes is recognised. UCW therefore hold early questionnaires and surveys empowering the students to feedback their experiences on the induction process, prompting improvements for the future.

UCW aims to maintain effective communication with current students and actively re-induct them when they enrol upon subsequent years of study. Contact is maintained via social media sites, a welcome back talk is held and course specific re-induction activities, often involving new students, take place at the start of term. Returning students are also invited to attend freshers’ social events.

Engagement in Academic Life

Student engagement is paramount at UCW and the commitment to this can be evidenced in the UCW Student Engagement Strategy. There is a recognition that students need to develop a sense of belonging and engage with their studies. Courses are specifically designed, with input from students and employers, to ensure students relate to their studies and find the course content meaningful.

Programme teams ensure that there is industry relevant content in the curriculum, ranging from work placements, work-based learning experience, industry guest speakers and industry specific student visits.

UCW ensures that there is clarity for students regarding assessment expectations and outcomes by implementing guaranteed levels of information (GLI’s) on assignment briefs and feedback; this ensures that there is a transparent approach to assessment.

Robust feedback structures are implemented to ensure that student work is marked, second-marked and feedback within a set timeframe, highlighting any need for academic support and providing developmental feedback.

To support all students and their learning styles, a range of teaching and assessment methods are provided to cater for diverse learner needs. (Please refer to the UCW Learning and Teaching Strategy for more information).

Support and Tutoring

UCW recognises the importance of detecting signs of early disengagement or academic problems and has therefore implemented robust tutorial and support structures to meet student needs.

Tutorial Support

The Guaranteed Tutorial Entitlement Policy and Procedure outlines UCW's commitment to provide all students with a comprehensive tutorial support programme. All students are assigned a personal tutor at the start of the academic year and will receive a minimum of three formal personal tutorials which will be recorded appropriately. Templates are provided to ensure tutorials are developmental and key areas are covered (please refer to UCW Guaranteed Tutorial Entitlement Policy & Procedure for more information and template examples). In addition, students will have informal tutorials with module tutors. This enables academic progress and professional development to be monitored, concerns to be discussed as well as achievements highlighted, and strengths developed.

Student Support

UCW provides a one-stop shop approach to student support via the Higher Education Academic Registry Team (HEART). Working across all campuses the team deliver extensive student-centred support services that offer advice and guidance to help students through all aspects of their student journey, especially unexpected difficulties, including:

- Personal welfare support
- Mental Health support
- Counselling referrals
- Student finance
- Accommodation
- Academic support
- Mitigating / Extenuating Circumstances
- Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG)

These services are well advertised to students through a variety of means to reduce feelings of isolation and ensure students receive the support they need to enable them to progress and complete their studies.

Attendance and Achievement: Undergraduate Students

UCW implements a proactive approach to retention and considers attendance and achievement to be a trigger for disengagement. UCW expects undergraduate students to achieve, at a minimum, 90% attendance to their programme commitments.

If the attendance of a student falls below, or displays signs that they may fall below, the expectation of 90%, there are a range of interventions that will take place.

Should there be consecutive unexplained absence then the student may be required to attend a tutorial with the Programme Coordinator and/or Personal Tutor and HEART. This meeting will be informal and will allow a discussion regarding attendance and any additional support requirements.

Should the absence continue then the student will be required to attend a formal meeting with the Programme Coordinator and HEART and the implications of not attending will be discussed, along with any additional support requirements.

In addition to any tutorials and meetings, students will also be contacted via email regarding attendance concerns. Should the attendance get to a concerning level then an automatic email will be sent by HEART (Appendix 7.2). This email is supportive and encourages the student to discuss any issues they may have and highlights the support available at UCW.

Should the absence continue then, in addition to any tutorials and meetings, the student will be sent a 'Have you Withdrawn' email or letter (Appendix 7.3). This communication informs the student that the partner university will be contacted regarding their lack of attendance and engagement with their course. The student has two weeks to respond to HEART before they are withdrawn from their course and the funding provider (the Student Loan Company) are informed.

In addition to concerns regarding attendance, if a student is not achieving the expected level and does not pass more than one piece of work in an academic year (without staff being aware of any mitigating or extenuating circumstances) they would be invited to attend a progression meeting, normally with the Programme Coordinator and a member of HEART. This is intended to be a supportive meeting to determine if any additional help should be offered to the student and will review personal and academic support systems. Should there be concerns regarding a student's fitness in terms of their health, and thus their ability to complete their course, it may be appropriate to consider the concerns under the Fitness to Study or the Fitness to Practise Policy. Please refer to these individual policies for further information and guidance.

If there are concerns regarding academic achievement or attendance and the student has a declared learning difference, disability or mental health condition, then it may be appropriate to involve the student's parents or carers in any discussions or tutorials regarding academic progression. Written consent would usually be required from the student to allow contact with parents or carers, but in some circumstances it may be appropriate to make contact with parents or carers without such written consent, for example, if the student is not engaging with the course team or the HEART/ support team and there are concerns for the student's wellbeing, academic achievement, or progression. This is primarily to determine if any additional help or support should be offered to the student and will involve a review of personal and academic support systems already in place.

Attendance and Achievement: Higher and Degree Apprentices

The expectation regarding attendance for Higher and Degree Apprentices is different, with an expectation of 100% attendance. This expectation is a requirement of the employer and UCW and is clearly set out in the apprenticeship contractual agreement. UCW is required to share information with employers regarding the attendance of students studying upon a Higher or Degree Apprenticeship.

If there are concerns regarding attendance, or the student is not achieving the expected level then they would be invited into a progression meeting, normally with the Programme Coordinator, a member of the Apprenticeship team and a member of HEART. It may be necessary to involve the employer in these meetings and the student will be encouraged to share any issues they may be having with their employer. It may be necessary to submit application for mitigating or extenuating circumstances, along with a review of personal and academic support systems and the conditions of the apprenticeship.

Student Involvement and Engagement

UCW is committed to listening to and engaging with all students. Students and staff are 'partners in learning', based on mutual respect and drawing on the knowledge and experience of everyone, to continually enhance the student experience. This is for mutual benefit and contributes to creating a HE culture, identity and student sense of belonging. There are several opportunities for students to get involved (further details are outlined in the UCW Student Engagement Strategy).

Each course elects student representatives from each year group to express the views of their group. These students attend Programme Team Meetings to review course-specific academic issues, and the Student Representative Committee, which focuses on the student experience and cross-UCW issues. There is student representation on all key decision-making committees at all levels within the organisation to ensure that student opinions and views are presented, listened to and actioned where appropriate. The Student Experience and Engagement Manager, along with other student representatives, take on these roles.

UCW aims to ensure that students are kept fully informed of the outcomes of their involvement, activity and feedback. This is done through a range of methods including the first agenda item on all Student and Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) being an update on actions from previous meetings and on the 'Student Voice' pages within the HE Student Zone. Enrolled students can also become Freshers Angels and Student Ambassadors in order to play an active role in enhancing the student experience and supporting peers to transition and integrate into HE studies / student life.

3 STUDENT TRANSFER ARRANGEMENTS

UCW understands that it can take time to settle into university life, and that sometimes students decide that they want to transfer to another course at UCW or to a different course at an alternative university. As this is a big decision, HEART will offer to meet with students in this situation. This meeting aims to support the student in taking their next steps and can provide practical advice and guidance on how to choose a different course or university.

UCW will try to accommodate any student who wishes to transfer internally. A member of HEART will discuss the options available, this will be determined by the stage in the academic year, whether any modules have been completed and the similarity between the programmes / learning outcomes. HEART will check the student meets the entry requirements and the appropriate stage for them to transfer onto. Students may be required to undertake an audition or interview with a member of academic staff.

For those students who wish to transfer to an alternative institution a member of HEART can help the student to obtain a transcript of any credits achieved to date and provide support with a transfer application. Students will also be offered guidance in navigating through the Student Finance process for transfers if they are transferring to an alternative institution. A member of HEART will ensure that the student has a clear idea of any fees that they have incurred to date and make sure that the correct procedures are followed to ensure that no unnecessary fees are charged.

4 DEFINITIONS

The following definitions provide clarification of key terms used in this Strategy and their relevance to its implementation.

- **Awarding Organisation:** The academic organisation responsible for the approval of courses and awarding of qualifications, where delivery is by UCW.
- **Expectations:** Statements in the UK Quality Code that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other and what the general public can therefore expect of them.
- **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ):** A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA maintains the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualifications Frameworks).
- **Pearson:** The awarding body for academic and vocational qualifications, including BTEC and Higher National Diplomas.
- **Practices:** Effective ways of working that underpin the delivery of expectations. These include:
 - **Core practices** that must be demonstrated by all UK higher education providers as part of assuring their standards and quality.
 - **Common practices** focus on enhancement and are applied by providers in line with their missions, their regulatory context and the needs of their students.
- **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA):** The Quality Assurance Agency is the official body designated by the Office of Students to monitor and review the quality and academic standards of higher education provision across the UK.
- **UK Quality Code for Higher Education:** UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet. It was developed with the Higher Education community and is owned, maintained and published by QAA.

5 RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

6 USEFUL DOCUMENTS

UCW Complaints Procedure
UCW Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2021-24
UCW Get Involved booklet
UCW Supporting your Success booklet
UCW Student Charter
UCW Fitness to Study Policy
UCW Fitness to Practice Policy
UCW Strategic Plan

7 APPENDICES

- 7.1 Induction Checklist – New and Returning Students
- 7.2 Automated Low Attendance Email (sent by HEART)

Appendix 7.1



Induction Checklist – New Students

FIRST YEARS			
Task	Who to Complete	How to Complete	Complete
UCW Enrolment <i>(must be completed prior to the start of term)</i>	Students <i>HEART to monitor and offer support</i>	Online	
Partner University Registration	Students <i>HEART to offer support</i>	Online	
Supporting your Success Booklet	HEART	Students will be emailed this prior to the start of term	
UCW IT Account Details <i>(along with WS email address)</i>	HEART	Students will be emailed this prior to the start of term	
UCW Term Dates	HEART	Students will be emailed this prior to the start of term	
Quicksan	HEART	During Induction Week	
Medical Details Uploaded	HEART	During Induction Week	
Introduction to HEART	HEART	During Induction Week	
Introduction to HE.LP	Academic Development Team	During Induction Week	
Meet UCW Library Team	Library Co-ordinators	During Induction Week	
Collect ID Badge	HEART	During Induction Week	
Clarify with students about their learning environment – IT/Software/Space	HEART	Students asked to complete a survey prior to the start of term	
English & Maths Qualifications	HEART	During Induction Week	
Agreed method of communication with students	Course Teams	During Induction Week	
Set Expectations for Teams messages	Course Teams	During Induction Week	
Quick Welcome Meeting on Course Teams Page	Course Teams	Invite students to this meeting via WS email	
Timetable explained and issued	Course Teams	During Induction Week	
Meeting with other students in Yr1/2/3	Course Teams	During Induction Week	



Induction Checklist – Returning Students

RETURNING STUDENTS			
Task	Who to Complete	How to Complete	Complete
UCW Enrolment <i>(must be completed prior to the start of term)</i>	Students <i>HEART to monitor and offer support</i>	Online	
Partner University Registration	Students <i>HEART to offer support</i>	Online	
Supporting your Success Booklet	HEART	Students will be emailed this prior to the start of term	
UCW Term Dates	HEART	Students will be emailed this prior to the start of term	
Re-introduction to HEART	HEART	During Induction Week	
Re-introduction to HE.LP	Academic Development Team	During Induction Week	
Update Medical Information	HEART	During Induction Week	
Collect ID Badge	HEART	During Induction Week	
Clarify with students about their learning environment – IT/Software/Space	HEART	During Induction Week	
Welcome back to Year 2/3	Course Teams	During Induction Week	
Timetable explained and issued	Course Teams	During Induction Week	
Meeting with other students in Yr1/2/3	Course Teams	During Induction Week	

Appendix 7.2

Example of attendance email sent by HEART (automated).

Dear XXX

We are aware that you have not been in regular attendance on your course at University Centre Weston and hope that we will be able to provide you with the right support and guidance to ensure that you are able to successfully complete your course.

If you are thinking of leaving or are concerned you are on the wrong programme; please do let us know and we can discuss this with you. We can explore alternative options and ensure you can make an informed decision knowing the implications of the choices you make. To make an appointment please email mycourse@ucw.ac.uk or telephone 01934 411 768.

If you are experiencing any difficulties that are impacting on your studies, it is important that you contact us as there are lots of ways in which UCW can help.

Student Support Services

At UCW, we aim to provide you with as much support as possible to ensure you make the most of your studies and fulfil your potential. Whether you're seeking help with finance, additional study skills, support, childcare, have health concerns or would like to discuss personal issues in a private and relaxed environment, there is always someone available to talk to in the HE Academic Registry Team (HEART).

Confidential and non-judgmental welfare and counselling support is available at UCW and can be accessed by all registered students. We want to see you succeed and we can support you through those unexpected problems that can sometimes affect your performance at university.

Welfare offers the opportunity to access information, advice, and guidance on a wide range of issues which may impact on your studies. Students are able to talk about concerns such as homelessness, emotional health, course/college concerns, relationships, finance, alcohol and drugs.

We are available daily, on a drop-in or bookable basis, in room 017 at Winter Gardens and we can refer you to other specialists if appropriate.

Further information can be found on our website or you can contact the Student Support Service all details can be found on our website:

<http://www.ucw.ac.uk/students/support/>

Your handbooks will provide you with further information regarding course requirements or you can make an appointment to see your tutor.

At UCW we believe that the student comes first, so we are proud to provide a number of ways in which learners can receive support for their studies. As part of LibraryPlus, our friendly and helpful Academic Development Team are here to help you maximise your potential. They can work with you on a one-to-one basis, in small groups, or with your whole class on live projects and assignments. These study skills sessions will support you at whatever level you need, whether it's getting back into learning after a break, or stretching into the next level.

Mitigating or Extenuating Circumstances

If you experience something outside of your control that affects your ability to sit an exam or submit a piece of coursework, then you may be eligible to apply for Mitigating or Extenuating Circumstances or a five working day extension. We can help you go through the necessary forms and advise you of any evidence you will need to help you with your application.

Tuition Fees

Even though you have not been attending regularly, you are still registered as a student at UCW, and therefore liable for the full tuition fee. If your registration status changes, your liability for fees may be

adjusted. If you are not in attendance, or engaging with your learning on your course, we are obliged to inform the Student Loan Company that you have withdrawn. This may affect your Maintenance Loan (if you are in receipt of one) so it is important that you do get in touch with us.

What to do next

Please keep HEART informed of your situation and what you are intending to do by contacting us on 01934 411 768 or mycourse@ucw.ac.uk.

You are reminded that attendance is a requirement of your registration.

If we do not hear from you or see any change in your attendance within two weeks you may receive more communication.

Kind Regards

HEART

Appendix 7.3

Example of 'Have you Withdrawn' communication sent by HEART.

Dear XX

We have noticed that you have not been in regular attendance on your course at UCW. We believe that your attendance is now at level which is of great concern and will be having a detrimental effect on your studies/ability to successfully complete your programme.

If you are experiencing any difficulties with your studies, please can I ask that you contact us immediately. UCW has comprehensive welfare, wellbeing, and support services available and should you be experiencing any difficulties; we're available daily and will support you in any way we can.

If you experience something outside of your control that affects your ability to sit an exam or submit a piece of coursework, then you may be eligible to apply for Mitigating or Extenuating Circumstances. We can help you go through the necessary forms and advise you of any evidence you will need to help you with your application.

As in our previous communication with you, we are obliged to inform the Student Loan Company that you have withdrawn if you are not attending or engaging with your course. Therefore, if we do not hear from you within two weeks from date of this email, then you will be deemed as withdrawn from your course at UCW and your funding provider (e.g. Student Finance England /Employer) will be informed if applicable.

I should advise you that as a result of your withdrawal, any unpaid fees may become payable in full immediately. If you have any queries regarding your fees, please contact HEART on 01934 411768.

We really do hope that we can support you in continuing with your studies; please do contact HEART should you wish to discuss the contents of this email.

Yours sincerely,

XXXX
HE Academic Registrar