

Strategy

Higher Education Retention Strategy

2015 - 18

Higher Education Directorate



Document approved by:					
HEDMT	Student Engagement	HEBS	HE CPD	HEMT	CMT
	26/3/15	2/6/15	14/7/15		
REVIEW DATE: 01/05/2018					

Background and Context

Background and National Context

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) identify that only 1 in 12 students (8%) leave higher education within their first year of study. However, further research carried out by the Academy determined that between 33%-42% of students consider withdrawing, and that there are a number of triggers that contribute to student insecurity in the early stages of their experience. High rates of withdrawal and low rates of satisfaction may have reputational, economic, ethical and legal implications for universities and colleges, as well as personal and financial disadvantages for individuals.

In the study carried out by the HEA (2012) *What Works?*, it was determined that at the heart of retention and success is a strong sense of belonging in Higher Education (HE) for all students which is the result of engagement in its broadest form.

The 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.

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

- B2 Recruitment, Selection and Admissions to Higher Education
- B3 Learning and Teaching
- B4 Enabling Student Development and Achievement
- B5 Student Engagement
- Part C Information about Higher Education Provision

As student engagement has been identified as critical to retention the expectation in regards to it is that:

“Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience”.

Purpose & Scope

Weston College 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 the College in meeting students' expectations to support them to realise academic success, as stated in the college HE Mission Statement **"To deliver an outstanding higher education experience, enabling success and inspiring ambition"**.

This strategy sets out the College's commitment to supporting retention and ensuring continuation rates are high. The strategy applies to all students regardless of age, mode of study, programme or the university partner they are linked to.

Link to HE Strategy

Weston College's Higher Education Strategic Plan was created in collaboration with students, partner universities, staff and senior / corporate management to ensure the student experience is central to the College's provision of higher education.

The College regards any learner that does not remain on their course and meet the award expectation a potential waste of personal talent that impacts personally, nationally and institutionally. The College has therefore set specific aims, within the HE strategy, focused on enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and supporting the student from the start of their journey right up to their successful academic completion, as listed below:

- To develop and deliver sustainable, high quality higher education which reflects the needs of students, employers, partner universities, and both the local and national economy
- To focus on the student experience and to ensure that it continues to be positive and varied. To enhance the student experience through acting on student feedback and increased student engagement
- To focus on graduate employability and the development of those skills needed to ensure that individuals are ready and able to enter the world of work or self-employment
- To continue to support the widening participation agenda by providing increased opportunities for a wider range of students to participate in HE programmes.

The Key Performance Indicators relating to these aims and which will assess the effectiveness of this strategy are:

- NSS overall satisfaction to be in the top quartile for FECs by 2016-17

- The NSS satisfaction for “The teaching on my course” to be in the top quartile of HECs by 2016-17
- Continuation rate from year 1 to year 2 to be higher than national average for mature entrants to HE

Principles

With student belonging and engagement at the forefront of the Retention Strategy, the College has identified, through statistical feedback collected from students and student services, significant periods in the student journey directly affecting retention. The College 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

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

The College 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 Higher Education 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, raising awareness of the College higher education culture with an aim to promote a shared sense of belonging before a course commences.

The College 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 HE life, and building an early culture with staff and fellow students including:

- Summer School Programmes
- Open Events
- Tasters days
- Orientation days
- Targeted marketing events

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

The College 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.

The College 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 1). All students are issued with a copy of the HE Student Charter and "Supporting Your Success" Booklet to outline the College'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 "HE:LP" (Higher Education Library Plus) 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. The College therefore hold early questionnaires and surveys empowering the students to feedback their experiences on the induction process, prompting improvements for the future.

A peer-mentoring scheme is in place, returning students take an active role in supporting new students making the transition into university life. It enables students to make connections and build friendships prior to starting to create sense of belonging and integrate into university life more effectively.

The College aims to maintain effective communication with current students and actively re-induct them upon re-joining the college. Contact is maintained via social media sites, a welcome back talk is held and course specific re-

induction activities, often involving new students. Returning students are also invited to attend freshers' social events.

Engagement in Academic Life

Student engagement is paramount at the College and the commitment to this can be evidenced in the HE Student Engagement Strategy.

The College recognises that students need to develop a sense of belonging and engage in what they are studying, encompassing academic content, course delivery, interpersonal relationships and vocational relevance.

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 vocational aspects in all our provision from work placements, work-based learning experience, industry guest speakers and industry specific student visits.

The College ensures clarity for students regarding assessment expectations/outcomes by implementing guaranteed levels of information (GLI's) on assignment briefs and feedback promoting 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 learners and learning styles, a range of teaching and assessment methods are provided to cater for diverse learner needs. (See Learning and Teaching Strategy for more information)

Support and Tutoring

The College 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 outlines the Colleges 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, discussions focused and key areas are covered. (Refer to policy 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.

Central Support Services

The HE Directorate provides a one-stop shop approach to student support via the Higher Education Academic Registry Team (HEART). Working across both 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
- Student finance
- Accommodation
- Academic support
- Mitigating / Extenuating Circumstances

In addition the College provides specialist staff who provide additional services, these include:

- Confidential counselling
- Specialist support
- Medical and health care support
- Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG)
- Drugs and alcohol awareness

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

Attendance & Achievement

Weston College implements a proactive approach to retention, therefore considers attendance and achievement to be a trigger for disengagement. The College recognises the importance of attendance and expects 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 College benchmark of 90%, there are a range of "triggers" in place to intervene, namely:

Stage	Trigger	Action
1	Two consecutive days absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Coordinator alerted • Email sent to student • Programme Coordinator contacts the student
2	Two consecutive weeks absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal email sent to student • Programme Coordinator alerted • Member of HEART team contacts the student • 1-2-1 tutorial with programme manager
3	Attendance falls below 90%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Attendance letter sent home (Appendix 2) • Meeting with member of HEART team • Discussion of student contract
4	Continued absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal meeting with HEART team • Have you withdrawn letter sent home (Appendix 3) informing student that the university will be contacted stating inactivity of student

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 day opportunity for student to contact HEART team before withdrawal
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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 / extenuating circumstances they would be invited to attend a meeting, normally with their personal tutor or programme coordinator, and a member of the HEART team. 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.

Student Involvement & Engagement

Weston College 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 a number of opportunities for students to get involved. (Further details are outlined in the HE Student Engagement Strategy.)

Each course elects student representatives from each year group to express the views of their group. These students attend Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLC) to review course-specific academic issues, and the Student Forum, which focuses on the student experience and the cross-College 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 Engagement Officer along with other student representatives take on these roles.

Weston College undertakes 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 SSLCs being an update on actions from previous meetings; Peer Press (student newsletter) produced termly; "Student Voice" pages within the HE Student Zone on Moodle.

Enrolled students can also become Freshers Angels, Student Ambassadors, Peer Mentors and Events Coordinators in order to play an active role in

enhancing the student experience and supporting peers to transition and integrate into HE studies / student life.

Review

The strategy will be reviewed every 3 years with the next formal review in 2018.



Induction Checklist

New Students

General Induction:

- Weston College Enrolment Completed
- Registration with Partner University completed
- QuickScan Completed (First Years / New Students only)
- Ensure all students have had a copy of the Supporting Your Success booklet / Student Charter
- Introduction to HE Student Services (especially HEART Room 615 / A125a)
- Library induction (Both Weston College & Introduce accessing books / journals etc from HEI)
- College Tour (including Toilet Facilities / Eating Facilities / Student areas)
- Fire & Emergency evacuation procedures
- Student Voice - Student Reps / SSLC's / Student Forums / Election of Student Representatives
- Disciplinary procedure
- Complaints Policy & Procedure

Course Related Induction:

- Opportunity to meet students in other years of programme
- Higher Education Term Dates (Course Specific)
- Course / Module Handbooks issued

- Programme content, structure and staff
- Pastoral / Tutorial arrangements
- Identify Personal Tutor for current academic year
- Agreed method of communication with students e.g. Moodle / Facebook etc
- Timetable / Modules explained
- Rooms / practical workshops
- Reading List, equipment required, field trips etc
- Assessment Methods / Schedule
- Feedback / Turnaround times on work
- Explanation of 2nd Marking / Moderation etc
- Consequences of non / late submittal
- Extenuating / Mitigating Circumstances & Extensions (where appropriate)
- Briefing regarding work placements
- Study Skills / HELP
- Introduction to Moodle / relevant VLE's
- English & Maths Qualifications
- Health & Safety (First Aid, accident reporting, safety precautions applicable to course, late / holiday working smoking, personal vehicles / parking, personal property, litter,)



Induction Checklist

Returning Students

General Induction:

- Weston College Enrolment Completed
- Registration with Partner University completed
- Ensure all students have had a copy of the Supporting Your Success booklet / Student Charter
- Re-cap on HE Student Services (especially HEART Room 615 / A125a)
- Re-introduction to the Library (including accessing books / journals etc from HEI)
- Fire & Emergency evacuation procedures
- Student Voice - Student Reps / SSLC's / Student Forums / Election of Student Representatives
- Disciplinary procedure
- Complaints Policy & Procedure

Course Related Induction:

- Opportunity to meet students in other years of programme (first years and top-up students)
- Higher Education Term Dates (Course Specific)
- Course / Module Handbooks issued
- Programme content, structure and staff
- Pastoral / Tutorial arrangements

- Identify Personal Tutor for current academic year
- Reiterate method of communication with students e.g. Moodle / Facebook etc
- Timetable / Modules explained
- Rooms / practical workshops
- Reading List, equipment required, field trips etc
- Assessment Methods / Schedule
- Confirm Feedback / Turnaround times on work
- Confirm arrangements of 2nd Marking / Moderation etc
- Consequences of non / late submittal
- Extenuating / Mitigating Circumstances & Extensions (where appropriate)
- Briefing regarding work placements
- Study Skills / HELP
- Confirm use of Moodle / relevant VLE's
- English & Maths Qualifications
- Health & Safety (First Aid, accident reporting, safety precautions applicable to course, late / holiday working smoking, personal vehicles / parking, personal property, litter,)

Appendix 2

Low Attendance Letter

<Name>
<Address>
<Address>
<Postcode>

<Date>

Dear <Name>

WS Number: <123456>

We are aware that you have not been in regular attendance on your course at Weston College 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 arrange to come in 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@weston.ac.uk or telephone 01937 411 403.

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 the college can help.

Student Support Services

At Weston College, 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.

Confidential and non-judgmental welfare and counselling support is available at Weston College 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 College.

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, at both campuses, room 615 at Knightstone and A125a at University Campus. 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.weston.ac.uk/what-can-i-study/university-level-courses/he-student-support>

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

At Weston College 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 learning mentors 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/ 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/ 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.

Tuition Fees

Even though you have not been attending regularly, you are still registered as a student at the College, and therefore liable for the full tuition fee. If your registration status changes, your liability for fees may be adjusted. If you have decided to withdraw the sooner you let us know in writing the less fee liability you will have.

What to do next

Please keep HE Unit/Your tutor informed of your situation and what you are intending to do by contacting us on; he.unit@weston.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 four weeks we will contact your University about our concerns or you may receive more communication.

Yours sincerely

Sadie Skellon
Assistant Director HE: Academic Registry

Appendix 3

Have you withdrawn letter

<Name>
<Address>
<Address>
<Address>
<Address>
<Postcode>

<Date>

Dear <Name>

WS Number: <123456>

We have noticed that you have not been in regular attendance on your course at Weston College. 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 contact us, or complete the attached form immediately. Please can I remind you we have comprehensive welfare and support services available for you, should you be experiencing any difficulties; we're available daily at both campuses, room 615 at Knightstone and A125a at University Campus, please don't hesitate to contact us if we can 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/ 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.

If we do not hear from you within four weeks from date of this letter, I regret you will be deemed withdrawn from your course here and your funding provider (eg Student Finance England / LEA / 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 the office on 01934 411 403.

Yours sincerely

Sadie Skellon
Assistant Director HE: Academic Registry

Useful Documents

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

What Works? Student Retention and Success

Weston College Guaranteed Tutorial Entitlement Policy & Procedure

Weston College Student Engagement Strategy

Weston College Learning & Teaching Strategy

UWE Student Engagement Framework