Policy and Procedures Retention Strategy

2018 – 21

UCW | UNIVERSITY CENTRE WESTON

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Background and Context

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 four years. For example, 6.6% of students who started their studies in 2011/12 did not complete their programme and this figure increased to 7.4% for those that commenced their studies in 2014/15.

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.

The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education sets out 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 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.

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 (2017-20) and UCW is required to report to the Office for Students (OfS) activities undertaken to improve retention.

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. The strategy applies to all students regardless of age, mode of study, programme or the university partner they are linked to.

Link to the UCW Higher Education Strategic Plan

UCW'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 UCW's provision of higher education.

UCW regards any student that does not remain on their course and meet the award expectation, a potential waste of personal talent that impacts personally, nationally and institutionally. UCW has therefore set specific aims, within the Strategic Plan, 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 provide a positive, vibrant student experience characterised by excellence in learning and teaching, and by a supportive, nurturing learning environment.
- To engage with the widening participation agenda and successfully recruit non-traditional or disadvantaged students by making higher education accessible to them.
- To focus on employability and nurture resilient, self-assured individuals with graduate attributes who demonstrate the skills to enter employment, self-employment, as well as enterprise and innovation.

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 sector-wide by 2019-20.
- The NSS satisfaction for "The teaching on my course" to be in the top quartile sector-wide by 2019-20.
- NSS satisfaction for "Assessment and feedback" to maintain the top quartile sector-wide by 2019-20.
- NSS satisfaction for "Academic support" to maintain the top quartile sector-wide by 2019-20.
- Continuation rate from year one to year two to be higher than the national benchmark for college higher education overall, and in each category.

Principles

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.

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
- 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

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 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) 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. 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.

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 fedback 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 / Personal Circumstances
- Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG)

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: 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 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 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 four 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 / personal 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 polices for further information and guidance.

If there are concerns regarding academic achievement or attendance and the student has a declared learning difficulty or disability, 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 & Achievement: Higher and Degree Apprentices

The expectation regarding attendance for Higher and Degree Apprentices are different, with an expectation of 100% attendance. This expectation is a requirement of the employer and UCW and is clearly set out in the 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 / personal circumstances, along with a review of personal and academic support systems and the conditions of the apprenticeship.

Student Involvement & 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 a number of 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 Officer, 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, 'Student Voice' pages within the HE Student Zone on Moodle and Teams, and via Social Media. Enrolled students can also become Freshers Angels, Student Ambassadors and Peer Mentors in order to play an active role in enhancing the student experience and supporting peers to transition and integrate into HE studies / student life.

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 university to study on a different course. 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. 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. 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.

Review

The strategy will be reviewed every 3 years with the next formal review in 2021.

Induction Checklist
New Students

General Induction:
☐ UCW Enrolment Completed
☐ Registration with Partner University completed
☐ QuickScan Completed (First Years / New Students only)
☐ Medical information on EILP completed
☐ Ensure all students have had a copy of the Supporting Your Success booklet / Student Charter
☐ Introduction to HEART
☐ Library induction (Both UCW and introduce accessing books / journals etc from partner HEI)
☐ Work placement training complete
☐ UCW tour (including Toilet Facilities / Eating Facilities / Common Room / Winter Gardens)
☐ Fire & Emergency evacuation procedures
☐ Student Voice – Student Reps / SSLC's / Student Representative Committees / Election of Student Representatives
☐ UCW Policies (especially the UCW Student Code of Conduct/UCW Drugs and Alcohol Policy)
☐ Complaints Policy & Procedure

Course Related Induction:
☐ Opportunity to meet students in other years of programme
☐ UCW 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
- ☐ Personal / Mitigating Circumstances & Extensions (where appropriate)
- ☐ Briefing regarding work placements
- ☐ Study Skills / HELP
- ☐ Introduction to Moodle / relevant VLE's / Digital literacy
- ☐ 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 1b

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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
- ☐ Medical information on EILP completed
- ☐ Re-cap on HEART
- ☐ 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
- ☐ UCW Policies (especially the UCW Student Code of Conduct)
- ☐ Complaints Policy & Procedure

Course Related Induction:
- ☐ Opportunity to meet students in other years of programme (first years and top-up students)
- ☐ UCW 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
- [ ] Introduction to Moodle / relevant VLE's / Digital literacy
- [ ] English & Maths Qualifications
- [ ] Health & Safety (First Aid, accident reporting, safety precautions applicable to course, late / holiday working, smoking, personal vehicles / parking, personal property, litter)

Automated Low Attendance Email (sent by HEART)

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 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@ucw.ac.uk or telephone 01934 422 776.

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 A125a at Loxton 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.ucw.ac.uk/students/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 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 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/ Personal 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/Personal 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 have decided to withdraw you will need to let us know in writing to reduce the fee liability you will have.

What to do next
Please keep HEART/your tutor informed of your situation and what you are intending to do by contacting us on 01934 422 776 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 4 weeks we will contact your University about our concerns or you may receive more communication.

Kind Regards

HEART

Have you Withdrawn Letter/Email

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/ Personal 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 at UCW 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
UCW Guaranteed Tutorial Entitlement Policy & Procedure
UCW Student Engagement Strategy
UCW Learning & Teaching Strategy
UWE Student Engagement Framework
The Higher Education Strategic Plan 2017-2020
UCW Fitness to Study Policy
UCW Fitness to Practise Policy