

# Student Retention Symposium 2024: illuminating student success through dialogue – “it’s good to talk”

14 May 2024, theStudio Birmingham

## Session abstracts

### Session 1, 10:05-10:45

#### Session 1.1a

##### Preparing students for success

Natalia Hill, Glodean Bedward, Jodie Flavell, University of Wolverhampton

*Oral presentation*

Student success is often influenced by their understanding and preparation of their course. Engaging applicants fully as part of the recruitment process is key to managing expectations and ensuring that potential barriers are fully considered, and resistant capital begins to form. Acculturation and the development of an academic identity need to start to be embedded before students enrol to help them succeed. How does engaging applicants with pre-session work and mandatory activities develop their confidence and competence to succeed?

#### Session 1.1b

##### Joining the Dots: The Importance of University Transition for Establishing Student Belonging

Rima Bist, The Brilliant Club

*Oral presentation*

Disadvantage does not disappear when a student arrives at university. In this session, The Brilliant Club explains why a good transition process is essential to establish the sense of belonging and academic confidence needed for less advantaged students to succeed at university. The charity shares their insights and learnings from their first year of running their university transition programme, Join the Dots, which brings schools and colleges together with universities to develop a network of support for students during the transition to university.

### Session 2, 11:15 - 12:00

#### Session 2.1

##### Why are students not attending in-person classes post-COVID-19? An explorative discussion of best practice in supporting student engagement.

Tania Struetzel, Solent University, Colum Mackey, University of Greenwich/Greenwich Students' Union, Conor Naughton, Jess Walker, Phil Kynaston, Nottingham Trent University and Students' Union, Tom Lowe, Rebecca Adams University of Portsmouth and Students' Union

*Workshop*

In 2023, a consortium of three post-92 universities and Students' Unions came together to address the urgency in student engagement with timetabled on-campus classes. Following a literature review and research with student representatives, this workshop will both facilitate a structured discussion and share outcomes of the cross-institutional research study with more than 40 Student Academic Representatives and enable delegates to share and develop practical solutions for their local contexts.

## Session 2.2

### Building belonging and mattering into the student experience to enhance student success

Prof Rebecca Hodgson, Katie Jackson, University of Manchester  
*Workshop*

'Mattering' in higher education can be defined as approaches and interventions which show that the university cares, and that students matter as individuals. Universities have a responsibility to support all students as effectively as possible: their mental health and wellbeing, their experience, and their outcomes; to create the conditions for all students to be able to learn and achieve their potential. This requires the effective design, management, and organisation of programmes and the wider student experience, utilising compassionate and inclusive approaches which embed mattering, thus supporting all students to thrive. This practical workshop will use a research-based framework and evidence informed recommendations to provide an 'on the ground' practical exploration of 'things that work' in terms of creating a positive experience for students, providing participants with tools to enhance student experience and success.

## Session 3, 12:45 - 13:30

### Session 3.1

#### Student Engagement in Access and Participation - Building a Framework

Dr Antony Aleksiev, University of West London/SEER  
*Workshop*

Involving students in co-production and decision-making as part of their learning and wider student experience is necessary for developing and enhancing student agency. It is even more important in the context of widening participation where decisions, policies, and practices have a direct impact on student access, retention, and success, and the student voice.

Evaluating the engagement of students in access and participation activity however lacks a conceptual framework.

This workshop will involve you in a conversation about a possible framework that guides student engagement in deciding, implementing, and evaluating HEIs' promotion of access and participation.

### Session 3.2

#### Take a walk in my shoes: Reverse Mentoring Pilot

Lucy Gault, Queen's University Belfast  
*Workshop*

Take a walk in my shoes – establishing space for dialogue by flipping the mentoring relationship. This session will explore the implementation of a Reverse Mentoring Pilot at Queen's University Belfast. Where students are empowered to mentor senior staff, provide their unique insights to help staff better understand the issues affecting the day-to-day lives of our students – and to help them do something about it!

This session will detail the process from pilot development, to implementation, to evaluation, and recommendations for next steps, providing support for colleagues wishing to run a similar project.

## Session 4, 13:30 - 14:30

### Session 4.1a

#### **Devolving Your Data: How Faculty-led Student Voice Could Be The Answer To Low Institutional Response Rates**

**George Aird, Edge Hill University**

*Oral Presentation*

What next for student voice surveys? This talk proposes that a wealth of positive outcomes can be achieved through devolved approaches to student voice, striking a balance between giving departments more autonomy while also maintaining the ability to collect reliable, shareable, and reportable data.

The talk will demonstrate how Edge Hill University's Faculty of Education have re-shaped their 'Big Conversation' exercise through the use of Power Bi, fortnightly data analysis, and engagement with the Students' Union, showing how in-house data expertise, alignment with regulatory conditions, and a broader understanding of what 'quality' means has contributed to a more impactful dialogue with students.

### Session 4.1b

#### **ACU Thrive - A distinctive commencing student delivery model**

**Prof Anthony Whitty, Australian Catholic University**

*Oral Presentation*

ACU Thrive is a unique approach to your first year at university which prioritizes student success every step of the way. It ensures students have the opportunity to thrive in all aspects of their transition into higher education, including how they learn, where they learn and how they make meaningful connections with the ACU community. Was an award-winning model at the recent QS Reimagine Education Awards  
<https://www.acu.edu.au/student-life/acu-thrive>

### Session 4.1c

#### **HELP - A Multi-Platform Study Skills Programme**

**Sue Meehan, Jolanta Petraityte, South East Technological University**

*Oral Presentation*

Higher education institutions must support students in developing effective study skills. While embedding such skills in the curriculum is ideal, it's often impractical due to time and resource constraints. To bridge the gap, SETU developed HELP (the Higher Education Learner Programme), consulting students extensively. The result? A comprehensive, multi-platform resource co-created with students, demystifying higher education and fostering a sense of community. New entrants benefit from shared experiences and solutions proposed by their peers, enhancing engagement with study skills resources. This collaborative effort addresses the challenge of reaching students and ensuring their readiness for higher-level studies.

### Session 4.2a

#### **Supporting academic continuation through pastoral care initiatives: A case study from History, Politics and Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University.**

**Joanne Smith, Dr Keith Crome, Manchester Metropolitan University**

*Oral Presentation*

This presentation explores the structural initiatives by which level four undergraduate continuation rates on philosophy programmes in the department of History, Politics and

Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University went from failing to outstanding in one academic year. It provides an evaluation of the ways in which existing best practice was shared and how pedagogically informed training sessions provided opportunities for colleagues to work collaboratively. This resulted in successful interventions in the student journey and in particular to supporting students who were deemed to be at risk of academic failure.

#### **Session 4.2b**

##### **Motivation to learn for international students**

**Felicia Tick, BPP University**

*Oral Presentation*

One of the main challenges faced by educators is motivating students to learn. Motivation can be defined as an internal construct or drive which guides, changes or maintains goals and sustains engagement in certain activities. Motivation is a dynamic construct and has been proven to have direct and indirect impact on learning.

To effectively engage international students, it is important to understand what drives them to undertake a PG degree in the UK. Whether students are extrinsically or intrinsically motivated, lecturers can influence student motivation through their learning environment.

#### **Session 4.2c**

##### **A tutorial framework that treats students as individuals, not as a metric**

**Dr Katie Solomon, University of Exeter**

*Oral Presentation*

The University of Exeter's Biosciences department addresses equity in student academic outcomes through a tutorial system that recognizes students as individuals. This offers continuous assessment of students ever changing aspirations, challenges, and motivations. The tutorial system provides personalized support, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting competence and confidence. Tutors follow a structured schedule of themed tutorials, enabling real-time interventions to positively impact students' academic paths. Senior Tutors regularly monitor engagement metrics, so early identification of struggling students occurs, leading to tailored support frameworks in collaboration with university services, enhancing students' sense of belonging and academic growth.

### **Session 5, 15:00 -15:45**

#### **Session 5.1a**

##### **Supporting Positive Outcomes for Contextual Offer Students – Early Intervention**

**Lynda Jones, Dr Mark Davies, University of South Wales**

*Oral presentation*

The University of South Wales (USW) are supporting positive outcomes for students who have received a contextual admission offer. Contextual offers widen access to Higher Education (HE), however, typically little follow up support is provided (Budd, 2017). Here we showcase an initiative where trained staff meet with students during their first six weeks of term to assess their preparedness for transition to HE. Using an approach grounded in Social Prescribing, a 'What Matters' conversation is employed to surface specific challenges. A solution is then co-productively developed with the student, leveraging a range of assets (support services) within the university.

### **Session 5.1b**

#### **Practical top tips for staff to grow in confidence in the area of encouraging belonging and connection, when working with online distance students**

Jenny Crow, University of Glasgow

*Oral presentation*

Practical top tips for staff to grow in confidence in the area of encouraging belonging and connection, when working with online distance students. This session will share student feedback gathered from postgraduate online distance students, through online interviews, at the University of Glasgow in the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences, obtained as part of a PhD research project. Additionally, we will consider, how this feedback can be incorporated into practice at your institution. As part of this session, there will be an interactive element, where you can reflect on your own practice, share, and hear from other attendees.

### **Session 5.2a**

#### **5.2a Compassion in Ubuntu: Supporting Student's Sense of Belonging**

Erin King, Siliba Sibanda, Canterbury Christ Church University

*Oral presentation*

Social Work England (SWE) requires higher education providers to ensure students develop the required behaviours, skills, knowledge and understanding to meet professional standards (SWE, 2021). At Canterbury Christ Church University, the introduction of a Conditions of Success Student Charter has supported students in identifying the learning environment they need to help them develop a sense of belonging and succeed in their degree. As relational pedagogy is important to the social work professional journey, the Charter builds on the core principles of Ubuntu and compassionate pedagogy and has supported student retention in the BA (Hons) Social Work course.

### **Session 5.2b**

#### **Student empowerment through coaching in tutorials: the impact of a university-wide culture change**

Dr Melanie Pope, University of Derby

*Oral presentation*

Coaching approaches have been explicitly embedded in tutorials at the University of Derby tutorials since 2019, so that students use the talking opportunity that tutorials present as a personalised yet supported 'thinking space' to articulate reflections on their programme-wide progress, and aspirations into employability and/or entrepreneurship or further study. This presentation shares the positive impact of coaching approaches on students through university-wide culture change in tutoring philosophy and practices, revealing how facilitating 'time to think' in the student experience through conversation can be transformative for student confidence and success.