

Developing and supporting the curriculum

Student Retention and Progression after Early Intervention in Year 1
Student Support Services
Heriot Watt University

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2	Key words: Enhancement, Retention, Progression, Systematic Approach, Pastoral, Academic
3	Overview: This project will have an immediate impact on the way we assess students at risk, and our knowledge of how effectively we equip them with 'the skills and qualities necessary to succeed'. It will also impact upon the way we advise staff on how to improve student learning in this area, and how they can enhance the student experience by referring on to the right person.
4	Background/context: In January 2007 Student Support and Accommodation (SSA) and the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS) launched a pilot project to address concerns about student retention and the progression of first year students in the School. A group of 33 students were identified as being at risk and they were then contacted by staff from SSA. Of these students 80% took up the offer of support from SSA. By the point that they were contacted by SSA, the students in question had already been offered opportunities to speak to academic mentors and had not taken these up. Initial findings indicate that 70% of those who engaged in the pilot (i.e. maintained contact with SSA) successfully progressed (some through repeat year or a fresh start).
5	Activities/example of practice (you might also like to include an account of activity to date): To date, the extended research is still in the progress of being gathered. The identification of suitable and applicable students has been time consuming, but this was essential to allow, as far as possible, a fair comparison to pilot study. - Joint working relationship with EPS & SSA in research gathering - Student Union involved, allowing independent evaluation and developing partner working relationship - The project is directly related to enhancing the student learning experience by improving our knowledge of how we can assist student to succeed on their programme. - Feedback from students on the pilot study reported that the support made a difference for them in helping them through the year, addressing problems in their lives, knowing where to go for help and they particularly highlighted the value of forming a connection with the University. - The latter aspect has been identified in existing research as a significant factor in student retention.
6	Key points including challenges: Key points - 80% of students who were offered support in the pilot study took up that offer - 70% of students who engaged in the pilot study successfully progressed

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	- To determine the long term effect of the work related to the 1st Year retention study carried out in 2007/08 and establish whether the provision of targeted support to those students most at risk of withdrawal has had a positive impact on student retention, and improved the student experience for those students. - To contribute to our knowledge of the effectiveness of the different interventions employed. - To assess the long term effect of these interventions on student retention. - To study the frequency of intervention required to have an impact on retention. - To review the impact of the interventions on the specific factors the students mentioned affecting academic progress and motivation Challenges - ensuring appropriate data protection was in place (due to cross-department and partner involvement) - timescale, due to staffing requirements - accessing material from an earlier records system
7	Sharing good practice: The original project involved close working and cooperation with a range of staff in EPS, and this follow on study will once again require engagement from both EPS and SSA staff who have not previously worked together, for effective completion. The project will provide knowledge and information that has not been generated previously with the University, and which will be suitable for presentation to other institutions.
8	Where to next: This work will now been taken forward by the Student Induction and Transition Office, which the University has funded to enable a more strategic and evidence based approach to student retention, progression and transition issues. Contact: Keith MacAskill, Student Induction and Transition Manager: K.MacAskill@hw.ac.uk.
9	Additional information: N/A at this moment.