

Learning and Teaching Board

Staff Engagement

Following an initial discussion at the Learning and Teaching Board Away Day on 7 March 2017, this paper provides a summary of various suggestions for student engagement and for creating a sense of belonging for students, with a particular focus on opportunities for establishing connections with members of academic staff.

Schools and relevant Professional Services are invited to discuss with their colleagues the various suggestions, with a view to identifying and agreeing particular actions to progress.

Background and Context

Heriot-Watt University

In NSS2015 and NSS2016, staff availability, helpfulness, skill in teaching and engagement with students had been raised as issues by students; similar issues had been raised in PTES 2016 (insufficient contact time was also highlighted by PG students).

HE Sector

In the wider UK context, research by the HE Academy has shown that student engagement – with their own studies, with staff and their peers – is key to meeting expectations and success. HEA's UK Engagement Survey 2016 concluded that students engage least of all with staff, but identify engagement with staff as having strong link to positive outcomes.

The HE Academy's 2012 publication *What Works? Student Success and Retention* highlighted that a key success factor in improving retention is belonging, which is in turn a result of engagement and of cultivating a relationship with students. Engagement beyond the classroom is seen as critical, with key areas being transition and support systems. Some institutions have focused on a particular theme as the focal point for creating a sense of community and belonging, eg developing employability and other skills: citizenship, volunteering.

HEIs which have taken seen an improvement in retention as a results of focused action highlight that the there is no single, silver bullet to address retention, but the most significant contributing factors are in relation to "people": support for students at pre-entry, first year and throughout their studies, with staff being supportive and engaged, and multiple points for students to engage and make connections. In summary, in every case, the actions they had taken might have been different, but the success of every one of them was based on establishing a solid, trust-based relationship between staff and students, ie engagement and person-to-person contact are key.

Personal Tutors are seen as critical: they need to be enthusiastic and supportive, establishing a bond and building trust with students. The role of Professional Services is likewise key, with collaborations between learning and teaching and student support services in engagement initiatives.

In addition, the UK Government's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is bringing engagement with and support from staff to the fore, as "academic support" as one of the key areas for evaluation.

Suggestions for Engagement and Belonging

The following slides are taken from a presentation provided by Dr Hugh Mannerings, Academic Lead for Retention and Student Success at the HE Academy, on *Developing Institutional-Level Strategies to Enhance Student Engagement* (provided at the Westminster Briefing session on *Improving Student Retention and Success in Higher Education*, 16 February 2017). **The presentation is on the Learning and Teaching Board SharePoint site (see under 5 April 2017 meeting and Student Retention Speaker Sliders) at:**

<https://intranet.hw.ac.uk/ps/registry/ar/lt/LTB%20Meeting%20Papers/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

A key question was posed in the presentation: what contributes to a sense of belonging and how can we get students engaged and how can academics and Professional Services collaborate in this?

What contributes to a sense of belonging?

- > Early, pre-course interactions
- > Staff knowing student names
- > Staff knowing something about each student
- > Building social capital
- > Academic field day / residential trips
- > Student engagement in University community
- > Early academic success
- > Quality of the learning environment
- > Development of course identity
e.g. t-shirts/hoodies
- > Volunteering
- > Social media engagement
- > Celebrating Success
- > Quality of the learning environment
- > Supporting good 'student causes'
- > Staff sharing their experiences
- > Showcase student work
- > Add humour to teaching
- > Design freedom of choice into assessment
- > Give positive feedback
- > Respect and value difference

Ways to get students engaged

- > Use technology apps (e.g. PollEv/Padlet)
- > Ask if they understand
- > Ask them to help record ideas
- > Use media to explain concepts/ideas
- > Give students a problem to solve
- > Ask students to help you
- > Ask a challenging question that takes several steps to solve
- > Find out what excites them
- > Put students into random groups
- > Let them set the rules
- > Play games – related to the subject
- > Do field trips
- > Set Quizzes
- > Send students off to research topics
- > Guest Lectures (internal/external)

While the above actions could be taken forward by individuals or groups, “celebrating success” was seen as a key action across all three levels: strategic/institutional, programme and individual.

| Strategic Level | Programme Level | Individual Level |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| > Celebrate success | > Celebrate success | > Celebrate success |
| > Outstanding Basics | > Good course structure / information | > Invest time in students |
| > Investment in tools / resources | > Curriculum (trips) | > Good feedback |
| > Staff development | > Build course identity | > Volunteer with students |
| > Data Management | > Students As Partners | > Share experiences |
| > KPIs | > Student wellbeing | > Student wellbeing |
| > Attendance Monitoring | > Good Assessment | > Play games.... |
| > Connected services | • Assessment literacy | > Digital literacy |
| | > Personal/Academic Tutoring | |

| Strategic Level | Programme Level | Individual Level |
|---|---|--|
| > Use PDRs to set targets | > Support pedagogic Innovation | > Take risks in teaching practice |
| > Make Teaching Practice a key priority (TQ's) • HEPI/HEA report | > Manage expectations | > Take risks in assessment design |
| > Develop academic promotion opportunities | > Use social media to celebrate staff success | > Ask students for feedback |
| > Transparency of Data • Attainment gaps • No of 1 st 's etc • Demographics | > Mentoring Programmes | > Use Social media to celebrate students success |
| > Whole uni activities | > Online submissions | > Mark assignments by the deadline |
| | > No Lectures..... | > Good VLE content |
| | > Consistent VLE format | > Develop confidence |
| | > Discuss data | |