# Retention Project 2021-22: Term 2 Report Faculty of Engineering and Science

## Executive Summary

The Retention Project delivers a peer-led check-in call for all undergraduate and postgraduate students. Since term 2 the project has provided more targeted support to students who are not engaging with their studies and have been escalated through the Student Engagement Policy. The project also prioritised calls to students from APP demographics and calls to Ukrainian and Russian students during the current conflict. Overall, the project made 22,146 calls in term 2 completing check-ins with 2,905 students. 473 of these students were referred for additional support and linked in with appropriate services. Table 1 provides a breakdown of calls by these groups for the Faculty of Engineering and Science (FES) in comparison to the whole University:

| | Overall | | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | | PGR | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **UoG** | **FES** | **UoG** | **FES** | **UoG** | **FES** | **UoG** | **FES** | **UoG** | **FES** | **UoG** | **FES** |
| **Total calls** | 22,146 | 3,438 | 1,974 (FES) | | | | 1,257 (FES) | | | | | 207 |
| **Calls completed** | 2,905 | 1,029 | 1,859 | 570 | 285 | 56 | 440 | 248 | 167 | 84 | 158 | 71 |
| **Escalations** | 473 | 169 | | | | | | | | | | |

**Table 1. Breakdown of calls by student demographic**

During the phone call, students are asked about their programme experience, loneliness, engagement in extra-curricular activities, other pressures being faced and awareness of University and SU services. If students are not aware of the latter, additional information is provided during the call. If the student raises an issue that cannot be resolved during the call, the issue is escalated to the Student Engagement Team for onward referral to the relevant service/contact. Of the 1,029 completed calls to FES students, 169 students (16%) required an onward referral to resolve their issue which equals the University average. The most common referrals were to Student Finance and the GSU Advice Service. Of the 1,029 FES students who completed a Retention call, only 10 had withdrawn, and 5 had interrupted by the end of term 2.

# Taught Students

## Programme experience

Callers asked students how they found their programme and coded the answers as either positive, neutral or negative (Table 2). The majority of students described their experience as positive with PGT students rating their experience better than UG students. Around a quarter of students was not aware of who their Personal Tutor is, this figure was higher for students who had missed classes and above the University average (Table 3).

| | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Positive** | 65% | 66% | 74% | 70% | 77% | 82% | 84% | 87% |
| **Neutral** | 27% | 27% | 21% | 23% | 18% | 15% | 11% | 12% |
| **Negative** | 8% | 6% | 5% | 7% | 6% | 3% | 4% | 1% |

**Table 2. Programme experience by taught demographic**

## Personal Tutor

| | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Yes and we have met** | 57% | 53% | 68% | 60% | 51% | 42% | 49% | 37% |
| **Yes but we haven't met** | 24% | 22% | 18% | 22% | 24% | 28% | 31% | 37% |
| **No, I don't know** | 19% | 25% | 14% | 18% | 25% | 30% | 19% | 25% |

**Table 3. Do you know who your Personal Tutor is?**

## Positive comments

Students commended:

- Informative and engaging tutorials and lectures
- Supportive and helpful tutors, good communication
- Improved experience compared to previous year

## Areas for improvement

Students highlighted the following challenges:
- Assessment deadline bunching
- Assessment feedback not received within 15 days
- Issues with attendance recording
- In-person exams for non-final year students unexpected
- Quality of blended delivery, difficult to follow for online students, mix of online and in-person classes not welcomed
- Not all staff responsive to student emails
- Level of support from staff not consistent
- Timetabling: long gaps between classes or no gaps at all
- Class rooms overcrowded
- Cancellation of classes without prior notice or cover
- Personal issues impacting on students that staff not always aware of (e.g. caring responsibilities, part-time work, health issues, financial issues)

## Reasons for not attending classes

Students who were called due to having received a notification in line with the Student Engagement Policy were asked why they did not attend their class. The most common reasons cited were;

- Illness without submitting apologies (38%)
- Attended online, did not know they had to attend in person (15%)
- Attended but did not tap in/not recorded by staff (12%)
- Class time clashes with other commitments (caring responsibilities, work etc.) (8%)

These are comparable to the top four reasons across the University. Students also cited:

- Financial issues meaning the student had to work or could not afford transport to university
- Mental Health
- Timetable issues
- Bereavement

## Interruptions and Withdrawal

Students were asked whether they were considering withdrawing from or interrupting their studies (Table 4) and linked in with the appropriate support if needed.

|  | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Yes** | 5% | 5% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2% | 1% | 0% |
| **No** | 95% | 95% | 97% | 98% | 98% | 98% | 99% | 100% |

**Table 4. Considering withdrawal or interruption**

## Loneliness

Students were asked whether they felt lonely and how often this was the case (Table 5).

|  | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Never** | 75% | 76% | 82% | 80% | 86% | 87% | 86% | 82% |
| **Monthly** | 9% | 9% | 9% | 7% | 4% | 3% | 7% | 8% |
| **Less than monthly** | 5% | 5% | 3% | 6% | 3% | 4% | 2% | 2% |
| **Weekly** | 8% | 9% | 5% | 6% | 6% | 5% | 4% | 5% |
| **Daily** | 3% | 1% | 1% | 2% | 1% | 1% | 2% | 2% |

**Table 5. Frequency of feeling lonely**

Students that did not feel lonely cited their friends at university as one of the key reasons. Students that felt lonely noted the following challenges:

- Difficult for commuter students to make connections and engage in extra-curricular activities
- Difficult for part-time students to make connections
- Work commitments take priority
- Gaps in timetable, unsure how/where to best spend this time
- Homesickness (International students)
- Impact of Covid-19 and online study

- Lack of social opportunities

Students who expressed loneliness were signposted to GSU activities and events if they were not already aware (Table 6).

| | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Yes** | 29% | 28% | 29% | 25% | 19% | 16% | 26% | 30% |
| **No** | 71% | 72% | 71% | 75% | 81% | 84% | 74% | 70% |

**Table 6. Are you involved in any GSU activity?**

## Pressures

Students were asked whether they had any financial concerns (Table 7) and what additional pressures they were facing.

| | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Yes** | 21% | 20% | 19% | 20% | 22% | 19% | 22% | 23% |
| **No** | 79% | 80% | 81% | 80% | 78% | 81% | 78% | 77% |

**Table 7. Do you have any fees or finance concerns?**

The most common pressures highlighted by students were:

- Part-time/full-time work (7%)
- Cost of living (6%)
- Commuting/Travel cost (6%)
- Kids/Caring Responsibilities (2%)

These are comparable to the top reasons across the University. Students also cited:

- Academic pressure
- Mental and Physical Health
- Tuition fee payments (particularly for international students who would prefer to pay in more than two instalments)
- Housing/Halls incl. homelessness
- Family matters

Students particularly highlighted challenges around the impact of commuting to University:

- Increase in travel cost
- Length of commute
- Difficulty of balancing commute with work/caring commitments and timetable
- Medway bus timetable and cost

Many students noted that while they wished to attend classes and engage fully with their studies, their caring and work commitments prevented them from doing so highlighting that they would not be able to afford their studies without working either part-time or full-time.

## Awareness of Support Services

Students were asked whether they were aware of key university and SU support services and provided with additional information on how to access these. Most students were aware of central University services (Tables 8-9); just over half of the students were aware of the GSU Advice Service (Table 10).

|  | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Yes, I've used them** | 28% | 25% | 32% | 29% | 37% | 36% | 35% | 33% |
| **Yes but I've not used them** | 43% | 40% | 49% | 48% | 41% | 40% | 39% | 35% |
| **No** | 29% | 35% | 19% | 23% | 22% | 25% | 26% | 32% |

**Table 8. Academic Support Team**

|  | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Yes, I've used them** | 22% | 24% | 22% | 25% | 18% | 18% | 22% | 24% |
| **Yes but I've not used them** | 60% | 59% | 60% | 54% | 58% | 59% | 55% | 54% |
| **No** | 18% | 18% | 17% | 21% | 23% | 23% | 23% | 23% |

**Table 9. Wellbeing Service**

|  | UG non-attendance | | UG APP | | PGT non-attendance | | PGT APP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES | UoG | FES |
| **Yes, I've used them** | 14% | 19% | 16% | 16% | 17% | 15% | 17% | 19% |
| **Yes but I've not used them** | 42% | 36% | 36% | 32% | 40% | 43% | 36% | 31% |
| **No** | 44% | 45% | 48% | 52% | 44% | 42% | 47% | 50% |

**Table 10. GSU Advice Service**

# Postgraduate Research Students

Out of the 158 completed calls to PGR students, 71 were made to FES students.

## Research experience

Callers asked students how they found their research experience and coded the answers as either positive, neutral or negative (Table 11).

|  | UoG | FES |
|---|---|---|
| **Positive** | 73% | 76% |
| **Neutral** | 22% | 21% |
| **Negative** | 5% | 3% |

**Table 11. Research experience**

### Positive comments

Students commended:

- Supportive supervisory teams
- Improved experience this year now that contact with other PGR students is possible again

### Areas for improvement

Students highlighted the following challenges:

- RETI training and requirements can be difficult to navigate
- Not enough networking opportunities with other PGR students

## Interruptions and Withdrawal

Students were asked whether they were considering withdrawing from or interrupting their studies (Table 12) and linked in with the appropriate support if needed.

|  | UoG | FES |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 8% | 8% |
| **No** | 92% | 92% |

**Table 12. PGR Withdrawals and Interruptions**

Of the 6 students indicating they were considering withdrawal or interruption, only 1 had withdrawn, and 1 had interrupted by the end of term 2.

## Loneliness

Students were asked whether they felt lonely and how often this was the case (Table 13).

|  | UoG | FES |
|---|---|---|
| Never | 73% | 76% |
| Monthly | 11% | 7% |
| Less than monthly | 6% | 4% |
| Weekly | 8% | 8% |
| Daily | 3% | 4% |

**Table 13. How often do you feel lonely at University?**

54/71 students did never feel lonely citing their friends and supportive supervisory teams as key reasons. Students that felt lonely noted the following challenges:

- Research experience is a lonely experience
- Lack of contact with supervisory team
- Lack of contact with other PGR students
- Lack of communal and office space on campus

Students who expressed loneliness were signposted to GSU activities and the Doctoral Society if they were not already aware of these (Table 14).

|  | UoG | FES |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 39% | 43% |
| **No** | 61% | 57% |

**Table 14. Are you involved in any GSU activity?**

## Pressures

Students were asked whether they had any financial concerns (Table 15) and what additional pressures they were facing.

|  | UoG | FES |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 23% | 25% |
| **No** | 77% | 75% |

**Table 15. Do you have any fees or finance concerns?**

Only 18/71 students commented they were experiencing other pressures noting the following reasons:

- Cost of living
- Impact of Covid-19
- Caring responsibilities

## Awareness of Support Services

Students were asked whether they were aware of key university and SU support services and provided with additional information on how to access these. Most students were aware of RETI (Table 16) and the Wellbeing Service (Table 17). Less than half of the students were aware of the GSU Advice Service which is lower than the University average (Table 18).

|  | UoG | FES |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes, I've used them** | 67% | 63% |
| **Yes, but I've not used them** | 25% | 25% |
| **No** | 8% | 11% |

**Table 16. RETI**

|  | UoG | FES |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes, I've used them** | 18% | 18% |
| **Yes, but I've not used them** | 73% | 73% |
| **No** | 9% | 8% |

**Table 17. Wellbeing Service**

|  | UoG | FES |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes, I've used them** | 11% | 10% |
| **Yes, but I've not used them** | 42% | 35% |
| **No** | 47% | 55% |

**Table 18. GSU Advice Service**