

Retention Project

Term 1 Summary

The Faculty of
Liberal Arts and
Sciences

2022



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greenwich
students'
union

Executive Summary (FLAS)

430

Check-ins completed

217

Non-engagement checks completed

1,581

Calls made

21

Referrals made for immediate support

This report gives a summary into the key findings, themes and recommendations from the Retention calling project. In term 1, 25% of all UG and PGT were called at least once and 34% of FLAS Students. 94% of these were UG and 90% home students.

Students were called in the following priority order:

1. First year students: International students, Returning Interrupting students, Repeating students
2. Students not in attendance from w/c 24th October
3. POLAR Q1 first year students
4. NSS taskforce programmes final year students
5. International students before Christmas
6. Remaining student cohorts

These groups are therefore over-represented in the below.

Escalations

Overall, 121 students were referred for support to university services. Most of the escalations came from FES and FEHHS, both at 36 followed by Business at 27 and FLAS at 21. 76 based at the Greenwich campus, 30 at Avery Hill and 17 at Medway.

Of FLAS students, most referrals were to 'information on student finance' (5) followed by Retention and success officer referrals (5) and 'other' (8). The latter were mostly compromised of registration issues.

Academic Experience

Course Satisfaction

87% of FLAS students felt positively towards their course and only 4% negatively, with the remaining 10% offering a neutral response. This is slightly above the overall average of 84%.

79% of FLAS students that felt positively towards their course cited 'quality of teaching' as one of the reasons. This was the most frequently given response.

Overseas students also ranked greater course satisfaction (98%) than their home counterparts (85%).

Personal Tutoring

52% of all students know and have met their personal tutor and 29% know, but have not met them. Comparatively, 49% of FLAS students have met them and 32% know of, but are yet to meet, their personal tutor.

Absences

272 non-engagement calls were made to 217 students across the faculty. The most frequent reason for non attendance cited was due to illness (45%). Other significant and reoccurring reasons are family circumstances (loss or caring) and work commitments.

Withdrawal/ Interruptions

97% of FLAS students were not considering withdrawing or interrupting at the point of contact compared to 96% overall. Of those considering in FLAS, 69% are stage 1 students. All students that reported considering these options, were referred to the Retention and success officers and were provided with additional resources and support by GSU.

Of all students called across term 1, 95% are continuing into term 2. Compared to 20/21, this marks a rise in progression rates across UOG from 93% in line with the national average of 95% for UK HE providers (HESA, 2022)[1].

[1] HESA (2022) Non-continuation: UK Performance Indicators. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation>, 17 March 2022.

Across the faculties, these figures remain consistent with this increase:

Faculty	% Continuation
Greenwich Business School	94%
Faculty of Education, Health and Human Science	96%
Faculty of Engineering and Science	93%
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science	97%

If measured against a similar post-92 HE provider in London, Anglia Ruskin University, whose most recent data in 20/21 has a 90% continuation rate, we can see that the retention interventions in place are driving continuation rates higher. UOG continues to see this marked increase but more so for those in receipt of the project check in.

During the check in call, students are asked if they are considering withdrawing or interrupting. Of those who suggested that they were, only 31% did not continue in their studies. Figures here are small and therefore require a mindful analysis, but indicate a positive trend across the faculties:

Faculty	Response	% Continuation
Greenwich Business School	18	94%
Faculty of Education, Health and Human Science	26	96%
Faculty of Engineering and Science	27	93%
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science	14	97%

Despite the modest sample, inferences can be made that the retention call intervention has impacted these students' decision. Of those referred to the project by the Retention and Success officers for non-engagement, 89% have continued their studies. This average is largely impacted by the Faculty of Engineering and Science:

Faculty	% Continuation
Greenwich Business School	88%
Faculty of Education, Health and Human Science	93%
Faculty of Engineering and Science	86%
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science	95%

Likewise, 89% of those called who were flagged to the calling project as stage 1 of the engagement policy, re-engaged with their studies before a final withdrawal warning of stage 3, was issued. As such, the check in calls was a key part of preventing at risk students of being withdrawn due to lack of engagement coupled with the University response. Overall, demonstrating a successful continued collaboration of services.

Co-Curricular Experience

Belonging

Students were asked if they ever feel lonely during their time at university. 12% of all students reported feeling lonely and 17% of FLAS. Of these, the majority (44%) reported feeling lonely on a weekly basis closely followed by daily (33%). 92% of those who feel lonely are home students.

Financial

23% of FLAS students are concerned about supporting themselves financially or paying their fees which is slightly lower than 25% of all students called.

Of those, 57% identified pressures that were impacting their studies. These include the cost of living crisis (45%), commuting and travel costs (29%) and work commitments (36%).

Other Pressures

68% of students in the faculty reported no pressures on their university experience compared to 67% overall. Of the other 32%, the three most commonly reported were:

- Cost of living (23%)
- Travel/ commuting (21%)
- Work commitments (27%)

Service usage

During the calls, students are asked if they are aware of and have used, the following services:

- Peer mentoring
- GSU Activity
- Employability and careers
- Wellbeing team
- GSU advice team

8 FLAS students called were unaware of any of the services listed and 4 had used all of the above. None of the latter group were experiencing loneliness and all were positive about their course. All who are not aware of services or have not used them, are given information and details on how to access them.

Recommendations

The recommendations made here stem from the conversations had with students and the themes that emerged. It is proposed that these are reviewed by university services, faculties and the GSU.

Timetabling

Students are reporting sporadic timetables which result in frequent journeys to campus and difficulty with balancing other commitments. This causes financial hardship and lack of engagement with scheduled teaching. Flexibility at a local level to change lectures and seminar groups where possible and later in the term would be beneficial for the most affected. This is particularly pertinent for FLAS students whom reported a higher feeling of pressure on their experiences than average.

Intermediate Support

Currently, follow up support from the project comes via 121 escalations if referred and a catch all email for those spoken to. Mid level resource is needed for those who indicate certain challenges via the call i.e. intention to withdraw/ interrupt, financial hardship and loneliness. Difficulties like these are not complex enough for direct referral but are higher risk than the general student population to receive a list of resources alone. Going forward, GSU will follow up with these students to provide this intermediary support. However, for FLAS students, where the consideration of withdrawal/ interruption is higher than average, these students would also benefit from an intervening conversation with their personal tutor.

Query response rates

We know that competing demands can result in difficulty in responding to queries within a few days. Beyond more resource need, a triaging system would be useful to ensure urgent queries are picked up in a reasonable timeframe. Currently students told us that some queries go unanswered or there are long delays in responses.

Deadlines and Assessments

Stress from deadlines and assessments is impacting students. We suggest reducing assessment clusters at key points of the year. Allied to this, increased use of alternative assessments i.e.

presentations, reports where appropriate to reduce essay strain. A toolkit of 'inclusive assessments' for academic colleagues to easily implement, whilst still meeting learning objectives, would be an impactful resource for this.

Lecture space

Reports of overcrowded teaching spaces result in disengaged learners and in extreme cases, students being turned away or lectures being moved online last minute. It is recommended that students can opt for online/ in person or blended for large modules where overcrowding is a likelihood. Giving students the power to control their studies would help with aforementioned timetabling issues and limited teaching space.

Cost of living support

Despite the existing hardship funds, students report needing quicker, short-term support for shortfalls in bills and other essential expenditures. Students report being unable to access funds immediately when needed. More flexibility would be beneficial for more students in need to gain access. The welcome introduction of alternative study provisions for students with long-term disability could be extended to students with severe financial hardship. This student group is vulnerable to disengagement due to the need to work more hours and the travel costs to get to campus. Even short term allowances for those in need would give vulnerable students the flexibility to balance work and study, other commitments and reduce unnecessary expense. Finally, the consideration of financial hardship as grounds for an EC claim. Students in this position are most likely to have immovable commitments and stress.

Work/ Study balance

As outlined above, students increasingly report the need to prioritise work over study. Once again, short term financial support is recommended alongside Employability and careers service workshops embedded in the curriculum to help students obtain higher paid work whilst studying allowing a reduction in working hours. More so, a review into where more student-staff could be used in the university and GSU with good pay and flexible hours around studies. More details will be provided in the cost of living report.

Loneliness

FLAS students report a higher than average feeling of loneliness. It is recommended that more social events aimed at these students are organised by the faculty and GSU. Particularly, activities allied to large modules and school events which would increase attendance. Personal tutors can also encourage Whatsapp, Vygo, student societies or other closed networking groups for students to allow them to socialise with their peers.

Term 2

Based upon lessons learnt from the previous term, we will introduce digital support packs for those in need of intermediate support i.e. those at risk of interrupting/ withdrawing, having severe financial difficulties and those who are lonely. These packs will include resources and practical support i.e. budget planners, event invitations and coffee vouchers for GSU campus shops. This will be accompanied by a referral to personal tutors, requesting for them to reach out to the affected student for support.

We will also be calling in a new priority order:

1. January starters
2. UGIC students
3. Students not in attendance
4. PGR students
5. Remaining student cohorts

These calls will take place from the 30th January through to 6th April.

As before, we will be reactive to any local or global events that may make students vulnerable to dis-engagement from their studies and will prioritise checking in with them where needed.

We will also check in with any students that staff have concerns for. Staff can refer a student for a check in call via email at gsu-retention@greenwich.ac.uk.

Full breakdown of data by cohort, stage and priority group available on request to E.Pleasant@gre.ac.uk