

Retention Project

Term 2 Summary
2023/24

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greenwich
students'
union

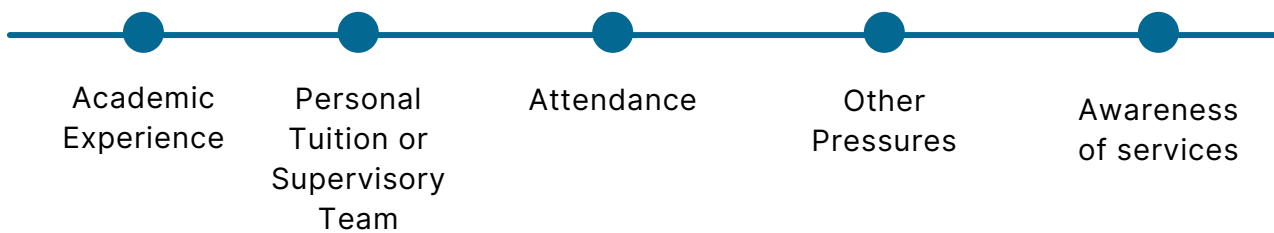
Retention Project

What do we talk to students about?

Our student callers have a 1-1 structured conversation asking students about their experience at Greenwich and reminding them of the support available.

We make it clear we're calling from the SU, that we hold their confidentiality unless they consent for us to share information and that students can be open with us about issues they are facing.

During the calls we ask questions around the following:



If at any stage during the call we identify an additional support need we'll ask the student for permission to refer their case to the relevant service

Who we called

We prioritise calling students who are most at risk of being withdrawn due to nonattendance and students at risk of withdrawing or interrupting themselves.

- January starters
- Students on courses with a large awarding gap
- Students not in attendance
- PGR students

This term we changed our focus from the number of calls made to increasing the quality of the calls made. This meant that we made less calls, however callers were encouraged to spend more time with each student to delve into their experiences. As a result, we have more case studies throughout this report than in previous reports.

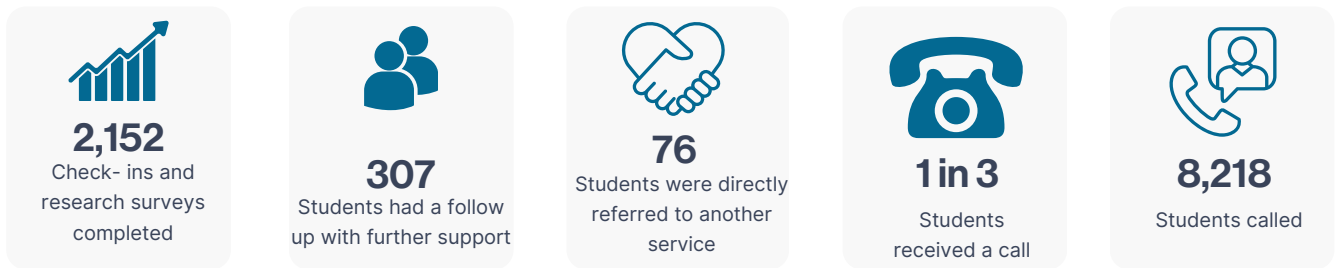
We also had some technical issues to work through this term. This means that some data has been lost regarding how many individual calls were made, and therefore We are very grateful to have had our computers replaced, which means that we are in an excellent position going forward to avoid any further technical problems.

'This term we have seen a higher number of students giving positive feedback about the phone calls from GSU, and wanting to follow up with GSU. We have seen improved feedback from Steph regarding the follow-up of these calls and this has alerted us to student issues we were otherwise unaware of.'

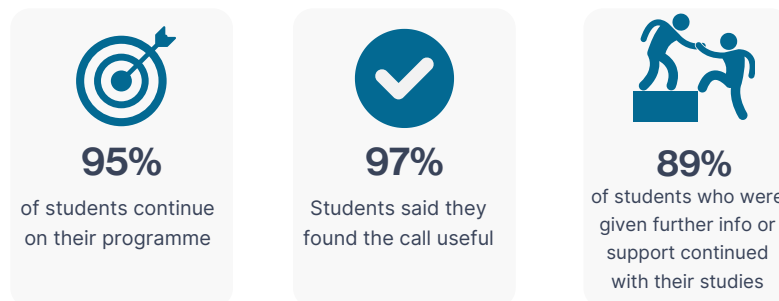
Feedback from a Retention and & Success Officer

Executive Summary

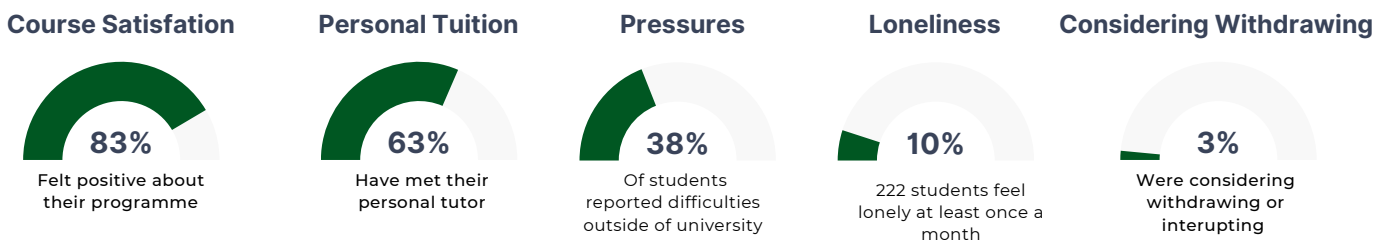
KPI overview



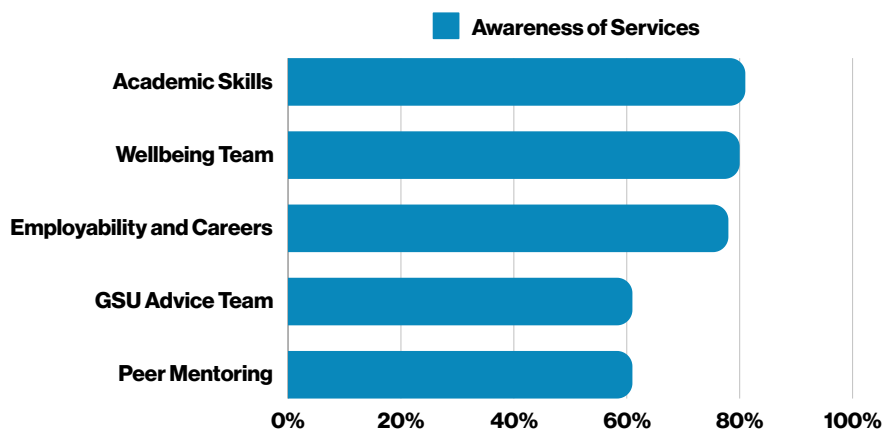
Our Impact



What are students saying?



Support Service Awareness



Term 2 Project Overview

This report gives a summary of the key findings, themes and recommendations from the Retention calling project in term 2 of 2023/24.

Who we call

- January starters
- Students on courses with a large awarding gap
- Students not in attendance
- PGR students

These groups are therefore over-represented in the findings below.

Inclusivity Research Project

This term we partnered with the GSU Voice and Rep team to work on their inclusivity research project. Our calls called 281 individual students and completed 553 surveys regarding modules with a significant awarding gap. The Voice and Rep team have then included this data in their research for this project.

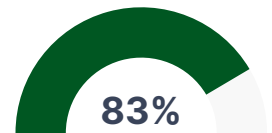
Course Satisfaction

83% of students felt positively towards their course and only 3% negatively, with the remaining 14% offering a neutral response.

74% of students who felt positively towards their course cited 'quality of teaching' as one of the reasons. This was the most frequently given response. The area that drew the most negative response was 'timetabling' - 10% of all respondents said they were unhappy with timetabling on their course.

For example, students reported timetables changing at short notice which then disrupted childcare arrangements, some students reported not having timetable access or having large gaps in their timetables.

Overseas students also ranked greater course satisfaction (87%) than their home counterparts (80%).



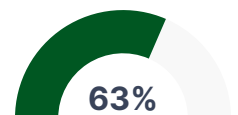
Felt positive about their programme

I really like the program, it's a good experience, the course is diverse and interesting.

1st year Computing and Mathematical Science student

Personal Tutoring

63% of all students know and have met their personal tutor and 17% know, but have not met them.



Have met their personal tutor

Personal Tuition Feedback

The 19% of students who do not know who their personal tutor is are told on the call who they are.

GSU more generally has fed back on the personal tuition review being conducted across the university.

Linking students with support

We aim to link students with the right support at the right time.

We believe if we support students with the underlying issues they are facing they will be more likely to continue on their course of study.

This is why we prioritise making contact with students who are likely to be withdrawn because of poor attendance or who we know are more likely to withdraw because of their personal circumstances.

This term we also saw a difference in the amount of information given about a student's situation and so we were able to more accurately refer students on. We also developed our relationships and referral pathways with different university services so that holistic support can be offered as efficiently as possible. This included a training session for our student-staff callers, led by the Student Finance Manager.



307

Students had a follow up with further support

Direct Referrals to other services

76 students were referred for support to another university service who aim to follow up with the student as soon as possible.



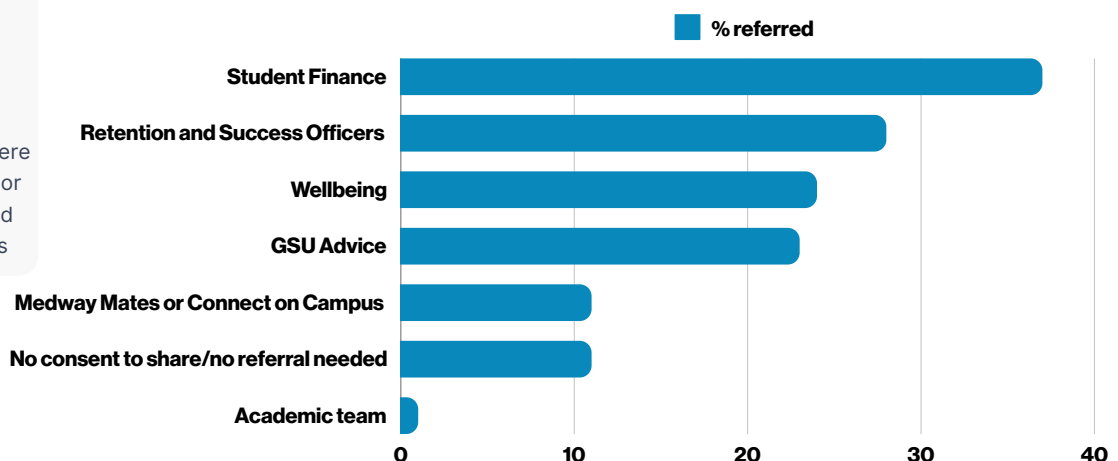
76

Students had a direct referral made to another service



89%

of students who were given further info or support continued with their studies



Case Study - a joined up approach

The student was referred to several support services due to reporting loneliness, considering withdrawing, financial difficulties and some academic struggles. This included the Medway Mates scheme - Erika, who runs this scheme, met up with the student, talked them through the peer support offered and made an additional referral to the GSU Advice team. The student was offered a personalised experience of support, and may not have reached out proactively, as they were feeling very overwhelmed.

In addition to those students who were directly referred for support, 231 students told us about financial concerns, social support, and course issues. We send these students additional information in support packs.

Case Study - an atypical student using the university support

We spoke to a student who was in 60s and at university, studying an undergrad degree for the first time. The student spoke about feeling initially upset about getting some low grades, but is utilising the library team to learn how to improve. They also spoke about feeling different from younger classmates, and therefore sometimes feeling lonely. The student particularly praised the Student Centre for their support, and felt satisfied with the university services.



155

students told us they were concerned about their finances, and were sent a finance support pack



98

students told us they felt lonely, and were sent a social support pack



31

students told us they were struggling with their course, and were sent a course support pack

“I am just grateful - there is a lot of information on the packs that I was unaware of.”

Business undergraduate student

The finance support pack includes information on ways to access cheaper food shopping, such as Too Good To Go or local community pantries, the free breakfasts and dinners provided by GSU on campus, university hardship funds and bursaries, budgeting tips and the opportunity to get a free Totum card.

The social support pack includes information on the Global English courses, Vygo (the peer mentoring app), GSU's buddy schemes, a downloadable calendar and colouring pages and information on GSU societies.

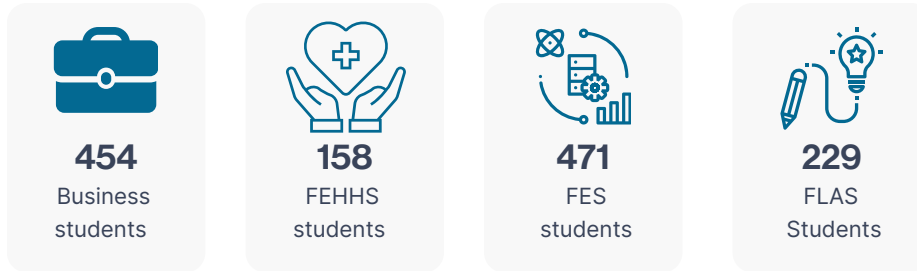
The course support pack includes information on the interruption and withdrawal process, how to contact your personal tutor, financial, academic and wellbeing support and information for international students on the visa implications of interrupting or withdrawing from their studies.

“[The call gave me an] understanding of Greenwich policies, processes and practices for students. In addition to asking question to gain knowledge of my specific situation, the caller gave me information about the Greenwich Inclusion Plan, which I found out about through the GSU survey. I was advised to call back if I did not hear from the disability services. This has been completed now and I have my GIP.

Feedback from a FEHHS postgraduate research student

Absences

1,312 students who completed the survey were called due to non-engagement across the faculties.



The most frequent reason for non attendance cited was due to illness (36%) and the second was personal circumstances, including bereavement and family issues (20%). Other reasons include QR code issues, delayed arrival and class times clashing with other responsibilities, such as childcare or paid work.

Case study - offering a space to talk and be heard

Increasing our focus on the quality of calls, rather than the quantity of calls has enabled us to offer students more time and attention, even if there is no further support needed. For example, one of our callers had a 45 minute call with a student who had recently undergone surgery. The student appreciated having the time and space to talk about their experience and how it had impacted them, and they did not need or want a further referral. This one-off, proactive support may reduce pressure on other university support services.

Continuation Rate

95% of all students called continued on their programme.

These were broadly consistent across faculties with FEHHS had the highest continuation rate and the Business school had the lowest.



95%

Of students called continue on their programme

Faculty	Continuation %
Faculty of Education, Health and Human Science	98%
Greenwich Business School	93%
Faculty of Engineering and Science	96%
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science	94%

Those considering withdrawing or interrupting

47 students told us they were considering withdrawing or interrupting. Of these 47, 27 continued on their studies.

41 were home students, 6 were international students. 42 were UG students, 5 were PGT students.

All students who are considering withdrawing or interrupting receive follow-up support including signposting to Retention and Success Officers, their personal tutors and to any other additional support tailored to their situation.



47

Students told us they were considering withdrawing

11

withdrew (or were withdrawn) from their studies

9

interrupted their studies

27

students continued on their studies

Approx
£280,150

of fee income retained this term*

Approx
£761,900

of fee income retained so far this year

*2 x PG home, 21 x UG home, 2 x PG Overseas, 2 x UG Overseas

Co-Curricular Experience

Loneliness

193 students we spoke to reported feeling lonely in Term 2 equating to 10% of respondents, 3% more than Term 1 2023/24. This suggests that student loneliness may increase in Term 2, and we can speculate that this may be due to a reduction in organised activity or some students not feeling like they have found their friends within Term 1.

Of those who did report loneliness, the majority (48%) reported feeling lonely on a weekly basis. 63% of those who feel lonely are home students. 48% said their loneliness stemmed from difficulty making friends, 18% didn't feel they had enough time and 13% mentioned homesickness or adjusting to the move to university. 11% cited mental or physical health reasons for their loneliness.

Cost of Living Concerns

15% of students are concerned about supporting themselves financially or paying their fees.

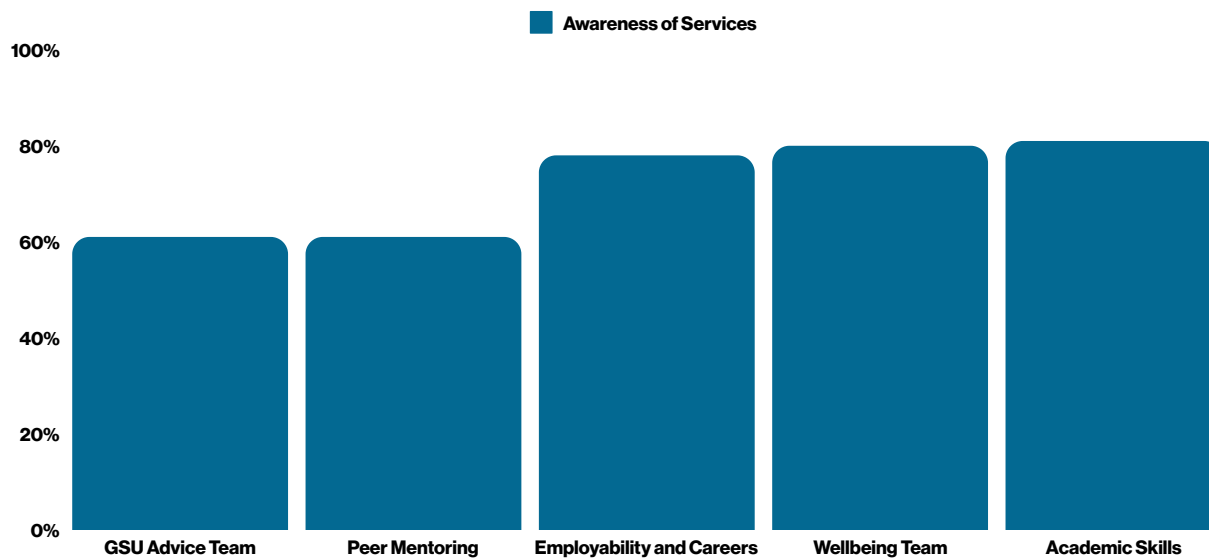
Of those students concerned about their finances and fees, 50% identified financial pressures affecting their studies, such as cost of living, commuting and travel or work commitments.

Commuting and travel came up as a consistent concern. This was spread fairly consistently across all campuses, and consisted of comments regarding the Medway bus, parking issues and students who live far from campus.

Support Service Awareness

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

All students called were reminded about the support that these teams offer, and many students commented at the end of the call regarding how useful it is to be given this information.



Recommendations

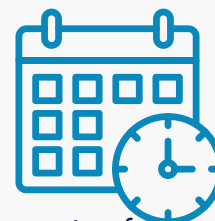
The recommendations made here stem from the conversations had with students and the themes that emerged. It is proposed that these are reviewed by university services, faculties and the GSU.

Timetabling

The issue: Timetabling has been a recurrent theme again this term

Students said: Timetables can be sporadic which result in frequent journeys to campus and difficulty with balancing other commitments. There have also been reports of last-minute timetable changes and overcrowded teaching spaces.

The Retention Project recommends: Coordination across faculties and programmes to ensure that, from the beginning of the year, there are as few issues as possible. As suggested last year, flexibility for students to change seminar groups to ensure they are convenient for students is recommended, although initially arranging timetables carefully may limit disruption for both students and teaching staff of mid-term changes.



Retention Project Support Packs

The issue: Low open rate of the additional information sent by the Retention Project.

Retention Project response: We are still working on alternative ways of communicating with students and working alongside our comms team to find a good solution.



Placement issues

The issue: Students who have a placement as part of their course are reporting issues with finding placements or being supported whilst on them.

Students said: Placements were hard to find for those who have to find them independently. FEHHS students say that there are some difficulties with placement organisation, including only receiving placements a week before starting. We have also heard stories from students who have struggled on placements and not felt supported by the university, particularly on education courses.

The Retention Project recommends: Ensure that students know who to contact for support with finding placements (if needed) and are given enough support to find them. Strengthen the processes for students reporting difficulties on placements so that they can be supported through any issues. Look into organisation of placements and how this can be improved.



Commuting between campuses



The issue: Medway buses to Greenwich and Avery Hill were oversubscribed at the beginning of the year, resulting in students being unable to commute to their classes, difficulty integrating into the student community and increased stress levels. The price of the buses can also be detrimental to students.

Students said: They were getting stranded and missing lectures. They had to book the buses weeks in advance (an issue when combined with changing timetables) and the buses are very expensive.

The Retention Project recommends: As much as possible, provision should be accounted for at the beginning of term to limit impact on students. We also recommend a reconsideration of the price of the Medway buses.

Spreading payments for international student fees

The issue: A recurring theme in the Retention calls and the GSU Advice Service is international students asking for payment plans, although they do not meet the University of Greenwich criteria for a payment plan.



Students said: They felt the payment plan was too harsh, worry about paying fees was impacting on their ability to study and the Student Finance team were very slow to respond to emails and queries. Students reported feeling very stressed and worried about finances and visas.

The Retention Project recommends: Additional fee payment installments could be offered to all self-funding students. Other London universities already offer this - for example, Goldsmiths College offers three or five payment installments, UCL, LSE and London South Bank University offer three installments. These do not include the initial deposit that international students are required to pay. We believe this could significantly reduce the number of students contacting the GSU Advice Service and the Student Finance team to request payment plans, as well as addressing the stress and detriment that students report.

Term 3

In Term 3, we will be calling in a new priority order:

1. April starters
2. Students not in attendance
3. PGT students at dissertation stage
4. Interrupting students: w/c 3rd June
5. Students resitting over summer: 8th-26th July

These calls will take place from the 7th May to 26th July.

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

Want to make a referral?

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 reports will be available soon on the GSU website:
<https://www.greenwichsu.co.uk/gsuhub/wrproject/>

Any questions or specific data requests please contact Steph Scott,
Retention and Insights manager on s.e.scott@greenwich.ac.uk