Retention Project

Term 3 Summary

The Faculty of Engineering and Science

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greenwich students' union

Executive Summary (FES)

1,217
Check- ins completed

266
Non-engagement checks completed

6,305
Students called

127
Referrals made for support

This report gives a summary into the key findings, themes and recommendations from the Retention calling project. In term 3, 6,305 FES students were called; 51% of these were UG, 46% PGT and 3% PGR. 52% were overseas registered students.

Students were called in the following priority order:
- April starters
- Students not in attendance
- Interrupting students
- Remaining student cohorts

These groups are therefore over-represented in the below.

Escalations

Overall, 127 students were referred for support to University services.

Of FES students who were referred for further support, 55% of escalations needed support regarding financial issues, 28% needed support with academic issues, such as EC claims and 14% needed support with their mental health.

Academic Experience

Course Satisfaction
77% of FES students felt positively towards their course and only 1% negatively, with the remaining 21% offering a neutral response.

The majority of positive comments about courses were regarding the quality of teaching, followed by teaching spaces and timetabling.

Overseas students also ranked greater course satisfaction (84%) than their home counterparts (66%).

Academic relationships
54% of FES students have met their personal tutor and 21% know of, but are yet to meet, their personal tutor. 12% did not know who their personal tutor was, and were directed to where to find out this information.

Absences
100 students were called regarding non-engagement with the course. The most frequent reason for non attendance cited this term came under the "other" options (71%). A large number of these were students who had an issue with the online quizzes during the summer months.

8% of students cited illness as their reason for non-attendance.

Withdrawal/ Interruptions
Just over 1% of students in FES were considering withdrawing or interrupting from their course. 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.

Co-Curricular Experience

Belonging
Students were asked if they ever feel lonely during their time at University. 7% of FES students reported feeling lonely. Of these 17% reported feeling lonely on a weekly basis. 62% of those who felt lonely were overseas students.

Financial
14% of FES students expressed concerns about their finances or ability to pay fees. Of these 75% were overseas students and 62% were postgraduate students.

Other Pressures

59% of FES students reported no pressures on their university experience. Of those who did report other pressures 34% cited finances or the cost of living as being experienced as a pressure on their studies.

Service usage

During the calls, students are asked if they are aware of and have used, the following services. Below indicates awareness levels within FES for taught and research students:

- **Peer mentoring:**

Used (4%), Aware, not used (27%), Not used or aware (49%)

- **GSU Activity**

Used (14%), Aware, not used (40%), Not used or aware (33%)

- **Academic Skills**

Used (24%), Aware, not used (47%), Not used or aware (17%)

- **Employability and careers**

Used (21%), Aware, not used (46%), Not used or aware (20%)

- **Wellbeing team**

Used (8%), Aware, not used (53%), Not used or aware (25%)

- **GSU advice team**

Used (8%), Aware, not used (43%), Not used or aware (34%)

All who are not aware of services or have not used them, are given information and details on how to access them.

97% of students called found the call useful.

Breakdown by School

Computing and Mathematical Science - 488 students
72% of students spoken to from the School of Computing and Mathematical Science felt positively about the quality of teaching on their course. 53% knew and had met their personal tutor, and 20% knew but had not met them. 7% reported feeling lonely at university and 15% reported feeling worried about finances and paying fees.

Engineering - 396 students
76% of students spoken to from the School of Engineering felt positively about the quality of teaching on their course. 49% knew and had met their personal tutor, and 25% knew but had not met them. 6% reported feeling lonely at university and 14% reported feeling worried about finances and paying fees.

Science - 244 students
74% of students spoken to from the School of Science felt positively about the quality of teaching on their course. 61% knew and had met their personal tutor, and 20% knew but had not met them. 7% reported feeling lonely at university and 14% reported feeling worried about finances and paying fees.

Medway School of Pharmacy - 53 students
60% of students spoken to from the Medway School of Pharmacy felt positively about the quality of teaching on their course. 51% knew and had met their personal tutor, and 15% knew but had not met them. 4% reported feeling lonely at university and 13% reported feeling worried about finances and paying fees.

Natural Resources Institute - 49 students
80% of students spoken to from the Natural Resources Institute felt positively about the quality of teaching on their course. 76% knew and had met their personal tutor, and 20% knew but had not met them. 10% reported feeling lonely at university and 14% reported feeling worried about finances and paying fees.

Recommendations (from the Retention Project Annual Review 22-23)

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

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. Students are telling us that they are not getting responses to queries. Particularly, we have found that this worsens during times of crisis where students are more dependent upon essential University services. In these cases, it is advisable to have temporary staff respond to generic queries to enable more complex cases to be handled efficiently.

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.

Fee repayments

A large number of overseas students have experienced difficulty due to the current model for fee repayments. Some students also report great distress at the communication that they receive in regards to outstanding payments. It is recommended to increase the number of repayment options and to ensure continued support for those who experience administrative barriers from their home countries to access funds.

Personal Tutoring

The data tells us that there is still a significant shortfall of students who know and engage with their personal tutor. It is recommended that the current model for enabling students to find them is reviewed alongside continued development sessions for tutors to support students and engage with them.

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.