

# 21<sup>st</sup> International Conference on First Year Experience Dublin, Ireland 23-26 June 2008

## Guiding lights: Enhancing student retention through student support and student ambassadors

21st International FYE Conference  
Dublin 23-26 June 2008

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## Why is retention an issue ?

- Performance indicator for institutions
- Widening participation
- Government target to bear down on non-completion (Department for Education and Skills, 2002: 14)
- Expansion of higher education
- Student success



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## What does the literature tell us?

- National Audit Office 2007
- House of Commons 2008
- Student experience (Tinto 2002, Yorke and Thomas 2003)
- Role of Teaching and Learning to improve student retention in HE (Crosling et al 2008)
- Process of establishing friendship networks (Thomas 2002, Wilcox et al 2005)



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## Understanding the needs of a changing student population

- Annual retention report
- Information for prospective students
- Resources for students and staff
- Clear strategic commitment to retention



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## Survey early leavers

- Withdrawal survey
- Annual report
- Student Support and Guidance tutors
- Retention research in Schools



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## Support through academic provision

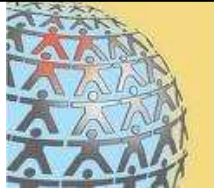
- Personal Development Planning **studentprofile**
- Training and support for Personal Tutors
- Student Support and Guidance Tutors to complement personal tutoring
- Specialist support services



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## Share good practice



- Institutional Retention Review Group
- Retention conference for staff
- Knowledge exchange with external experts
- SSGT and student support network
- 'On the right path' website

<http://student.brighton.ac.uk/thinkingofleaving/>



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## Retention interventions at the University of Brighton

- Student Support and Guidance Tutor (SSGT)
- The Chelsea School model (SSGT and Student Ambassadors)



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## Aims of the Student Support and Guidance Tutor (SSGT) Project

- To improve retention of level 1 students
- Research factors affecting withdrawal in this student group
- To identify learning and teaching strategies to enhance student retention

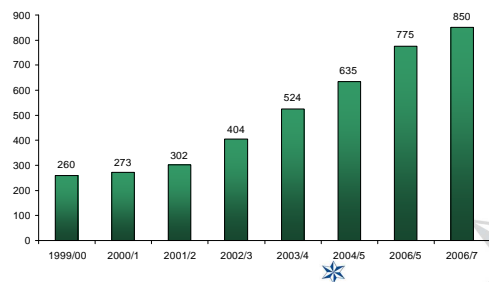
### Two strands

- Student Support
- Research into the first year student experience



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## Student numbers in SASS



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## Student Support



- Appointment of a part-time Student Support and Guidance Tutor (SSGT)
- SSGT provides a first point of contact for level 1 students
- SSGT sends text message to all first year students at key times



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## Student Support and Guidance Tutor (SSGT)

- SSGT is introduced to level 1 students on the first day of term in Induction Week
- Provides a confidential drop-in and appointment service
- Responds to student questions via email/phone/text messaging
- SSGT follows-up level 1 students whose attendance is poor or who fail to submit assessed work
- Refers students to Student Services or Academic Staff if necessary
- Complements Personal Tutoring



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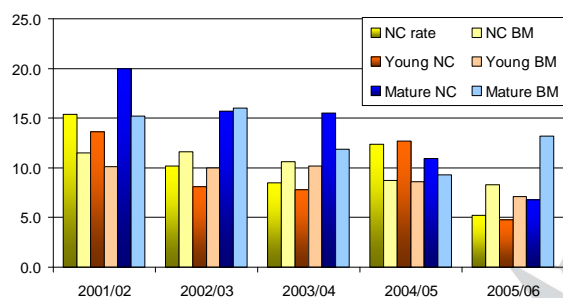
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## Issues Raised by students

- Financial Issues
- Personal problems
- Course related worries: study skills, regulations and procedures
- Withdrawal, intermission, course transfer
- Health problems
- Accommodation
- Disabilities



## L1 non-continuation rates School of Applied Social Science



## Quotes from Students

*"I don't think I would have done half the things I have done now, if she [the SSGT] hadn't like told me they were there."  
(Male, 22)*

*"She [the SSGT] just told me what I needed to do and where I needed to go, it was fine."  
(Female, 23)*



*"It has been very, very helpful knowing that there is someone. I don't know, she [the SSGT] just seems like a bridge between the university and the students not just like a part in the university, just somewhere in between."  
(Male, stayed, aged 20)*

*"I think it was quite a positive discussion that we had and she [the SSGT] went around all of my options to see whether, almost to see whether I was making the right decision or not and then she helped me in what I had to do after that."  
(Female, withdrew, aged 19)*

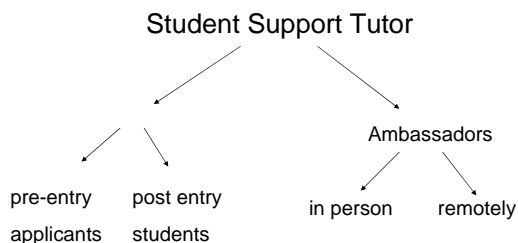


## SSGT roll-out

- Ongoing liaison with SSGTs in involved schools
- Links to other support networks within the university (Student Services, Student Union)
- Information exchange
- Training



## Chelsea School model



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- “Make as much information as possible available”
- “Engage with students before they actually arrive”
- “Adopt a welcoming attitude to students”
- “Advise students according to the students’ best interests, not the institution’s”

Yorke, M & B. Longden (2004) *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education. Chpt 10: Promoting student success.* Pg134-137. Open University Press, England



Sport and Exercise Science  
Sport Journalism  
Sport and Leisure Management  
Sport Studies  
P.E. QTS

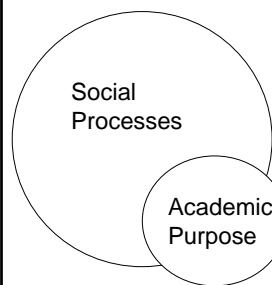
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## Purpose

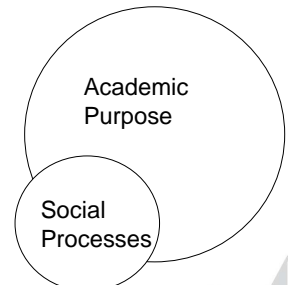
To improve conversion rates and retention through a co-ordinated scheme of advice and support from pre-entry to end of year one



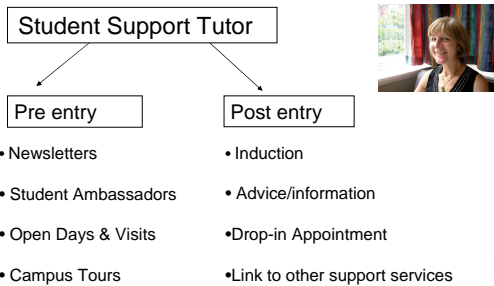
## Pre-entry



## Post-entry



## The Model



- Newsletters
- Student Ambassadors
- Open Days & Visits
- Campus Tours
- Parents
- Induction
- Advice/information
- Drop-in Appointment
- Link to other support services



Chelsea School Newsletter

Sport Journalism celebration top accreditation

Chelsea receive accolade

Rugby boys fly to victory

Diary of a leisure placement

Skills, the skills and

Sport studies

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## Student Ambassadors



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## Benefits of Ambassadors

- Harness applicants' interest in current student views
- Offer more targeted and relevant information
- Increase conversion of applicants
- Enrol students who are better informed about their choice of University/Course

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## The Student Ambassadors

### In person

- Open days (2 University 25 School)
- Campus tours
- Occasional external visits
- Induction
- Student question time

### Remotely

- Newsletter input
- Email contact with applicants

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## Evaluation of pre-entry role

Chelsea Applications Data July 2007

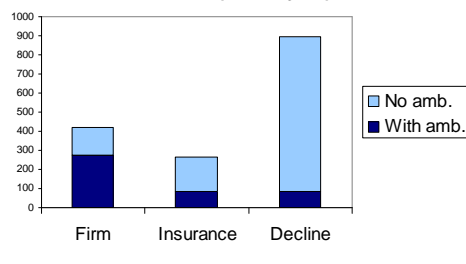
Total offers 1513 Expected firms @ 17% = 252

444 students requested email contact from a student ambassador

	Ambassador contact	No ambassador contact
Firm 421	274 (65%)	147 (35%)
Insurance 266	86 (32%)	180 (68%)
Declined 896	84 (9.4%)	812 (90.6%)

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Ambassador contact and application status (2007 cycle)



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## Evaluation of pre-entry role

"...thanks to Rachel the 2nd year ambassador who gave my son and I a very professional and informative tour, especially as we arrived a half hour late..."  
(from a mother)

"...My son had his sights set on another uni but having spoken with 'real' students he wants to come to Brighton...."  
(from a father)

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## Evaluation of pre-entry role

"...I'm an international student...how do I go about choosing fall courses?...term dates/exam dates...my mom needs to book flights..." (USA applicant)

"...inspiring...it has given me motivation to succeed..." (Sport and Exercise Science applicant)

"...I wasn't going to come to the Open Day but the newsletter encouraged me to attend and I love it!..." (Sport and Exercise Science applicant)

"...it felt like I was there already..." (Sport and Leisure applicant)



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## Working well

- Recruitment of ambassadors
- Ambassador commitment
- Feedback from applicants, parents, admission staff
- Input into newsletter
- Familiarity with Student Support Tutor when new students arrive
- Student 'question time'
- Parent 'question time'



## Working less well

- Formalisation of ambassador role very time consuming
- Stopping casual use of ambassadors
- Shifting inward-looking control by courses to a School perspective



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## The next steps

- Mainstream into School admissions and support structure
- Senior ambassadors
- Tracking students who opted for an ambassador (current first year)
- University transitions project to track students from point of application through the first year
- More external visits



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## Conclusion

### Successful first phase

- Applicant and parent satisfaction
- Improvement in retention and conversion rate indicated

### Key features

- Ambassadors & newsletters to achieve familiarity with the School community from the applicants' perspectives
- Student support tutor to manage links and provide a known face for subsequent support



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## Future

- Continuous evaluation of SSGT and Chelsea School model
- Roll out SSGT to all schools and Partner Colleges
- Improve advice on perspective students
- Develop cross-school retention and transition research



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## Contacts

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