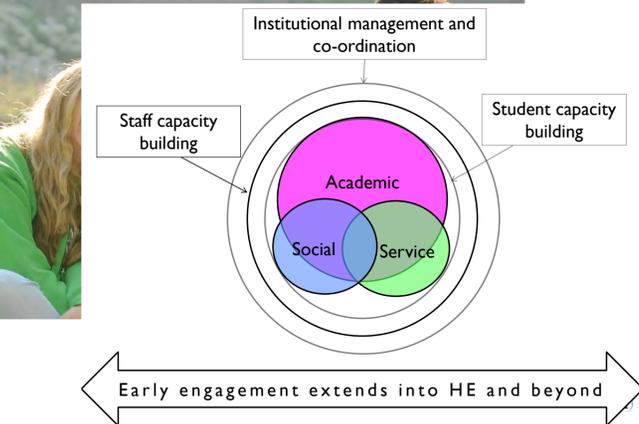


Developing new partnerships to support innovations in the first year student experience

What Works? Student Retention & Success



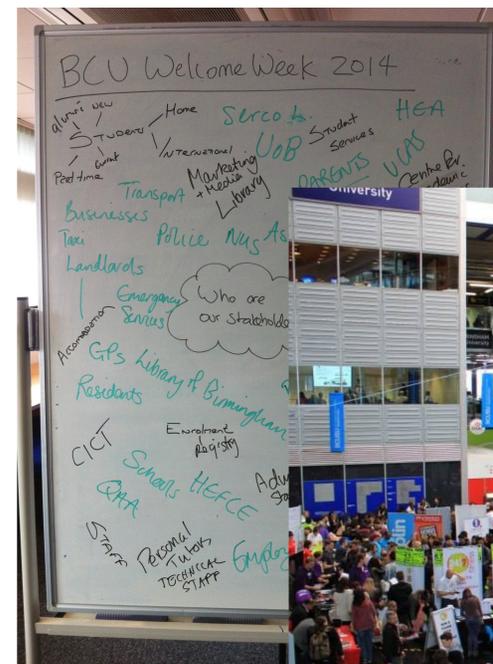
Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: a summary of findings and recommendations from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme



Vision

The University and Students' Union (SU) will work in partnership to create a greater feeling of student belonging within the learning community. This encompasses a focus upon not only academic life at university, but also social and pastoral elements.

The approach will target prospective and current students and will weave both SU and academic inputs through the transition into and through the first year experience. This will provide students with a multiplicity of avenues for support and guidance, establishing 'early alert systems' to trigger proactive support mechanisms. We believe this joined up approach will ensure a smoother and more successful transition that leads to greater student and organisational success. We will draw upon our partners to inform these developments and seek to learn from and share our experiences.



BCUSU



Students as Partners in Redesigning the First Year Experience - an insight from the UK

The What Works: Student Retention and Success initiative (Thomas 2012) tasks participating UK Universities to:

- improve the strategic approach to the engagement, belonging, retention and success of students;
- implement or enhance specific interventions in the areas of induction, active learning and co-curricular activities in three selected discipline areas;
- evaluate the impact in both formative and summative ways.

Birmingham City University (BCU) has a first year institutional retention rate of 92%, for its 3 year undergraduate degrees, which is in line with many UK Universities. However, hidden within that figure are some programs with less impressive figures. Those programs became the focus of the change initiative.

Within the UK, BCU has a reputation for its student engagement work and the ethos of 'students as partners'. As a result the institutional approach to redesigning the first year programs had to feature significantly the student voice. Each program area identified students who would work with faculty to reshape the first year experience. Three half day workshops were provided to enable the space and time for thought and process to be shaped and programs were encouraged to work collaboratively and share ideas.

The three program areas selected were Media, Radiology and the Built Environment.



Year 2 of What Works Student Retention and Success

We are now in the second year of the What Works approach at Birmingham City University and the success of the initiative has seen it become established across the University beyond the need for mere compliance. The three programs, their results and the stories they have told, have now established the change initiative as a success. Beyond that, an ethos has been established within the change initiative around the co-design of curriculum with students.

At a local level this has meant that four additional programs, including the three largest programs in the University, have now signed up to participate in the second phase of our internal What Works initiative. The challenge of scale on programs like law and nursing is interesting and may well raise different challenges.

The second phase of interventions will build upon our learning with Program Directors from phase one helping to mentor those starting phase two. In addition, in March we will be bringing all the program teams from both phases together to seek to identify any institutional learning that can be garnered from the What Works initiative. Often single program teams feel powerless to intervene on an institutional level, but the voice of seven teams arguing for a change may be more persuasive and have greater impact.

In addition, the University is to undertake an institutional review of its first year provision with senior management discussions now taking place around the introduction of core modules on each of the three years of our undergraduate programs around transition and employability.





Media saw a 7% improvement in first year student retention through:

- . New e-learning preparation package pre-transition with on-line mentoring support
- . Creation of Student Success Advisers to identify and support at risk students
- . Developing new Personal Tutor system

Built Environment saw a small improvement in retention:

- . Pre-induction buddy system
- . Stronger identity and belonging—societies/hoodies etc
- . Comms : good news through social media enhanced

Radiology saw a static retention rate, but more satisfied students:

- . Students help redesign recruitment process
- . Pre-arrival postcards and communications enhanced
- . Picnics and tea parties to build community
- . Vertical mentoring throughout year groups (1,2 & 3)

Institutional response:

- . Review of FYE and development of core module(s)
- . Student Success Advisers adopted across University
- . New MEd module on FYE as part of staff development
- . Enhanced Personal Tutoring systems

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