Evidence of Research Output and Components of Practice for Project 2 – The Use of Technology to Support Learners

Karen Fitzgibbon
Research Outputs for Project 2 - Use of Technology to Support Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tab No</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Personal Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Fitzgibbon K (2009) First Year Student Experience Wales – A Practice Guide, Higher Education Academy</td>
<td>70%. Leader of HEA First Year Experience Action Set. Created template for case studies, edited and compiled publication, made final design decisions prior to publication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peer Reviewed Conference Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tab No</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Fitzgibbon K (2008) ‘Student Engagement with Social Activities at University’ ESCalate Conference, Stirling University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Fitzgibbon K (2010) The First Year Student Experience in Wales – a collaborative approach, ELFYSE, 23 March, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Invited Seminars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tab No</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Fitzgibbon K ‘Encouraging Attendance’ HaSS Staff Seminar (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Fitzgibbon K Seminar for Law School Staff: Law Student Attendance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Evaluative Framework for Project 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tab No</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Electronic Attendance Monitoring Project: Report of Implementation Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Electronic Attendance Monitoring Project: Interim Project Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Electronic Attendance Monitoring Project: Final Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Final Report for LDG for evaluation of ED/SHC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Student Experience Questionnaire Report 2007-08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Student Experience Questionnaire Report 2008-09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Report of GlamStart Student Experience Simulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Components of Practice Connected to Project 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tab No</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Examples of letters to students from the attendance monitoring system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Early Days Learner Support Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Study Health Check Learner Support Tool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE CHANGING NATURE OF STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCE WITHIN UNIVERSITY

Karen Fitzgibbon and Julie Prior
University of Glamorgan

KAREN FITZGIBBON is a Principal Lecturer in the Centre for Excellence in Learning Teaching at the University of Glamorgan. She has worked in the University for many years in business and education disciplines and delivers staff development in learning, teaching and assessment throughout the University. She is responsible for the university reflecting on academic practice scheme as well as the excellence in learning, teaching and assessment awards. Her research interests include the student experience and student engagement.

JULIE PRIOR currently works as a Senior Lecturer in the Glamorgan Business School, and has worked at the University of Glamorgan since 2001 in a variety of roles combining teaching, student support and research. She was responsible for the set up and management of the new Business School Advice Shop in 2006 and continues to work on new initiatives to improve the student experience. Her research interests include student retention, personal development planning and the student experience.

Correspondence to:
Karen Fitzgibbon
Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
University of Glamorgan
Pontypridd
Wales, UK
CF37 1DL
kfitzgib@glam.ac.uk
THE CHANGING NATURE OF STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCE WITHIN UNIVERSITY

Karen Fitzgibbon and Julie Prior
University of Glamorgan

Abstract

This paper outlines the development of an online learner support tool ‘Early Days’ and the information it subsequently provided into one aspect of the early experiences of students in the case study university. Analysis is based on two years of data that considered the extent of students’ social integration and emerging changes in the nature of their social experiences. Findings indicate that the majority of students enjoy the social side of higher education and feel they have settled into the university, but conversely they are not gaining this social experience through traditional social activities such as clubs and societies. Whilst the data offers a picture of one university, other higher education institutions may be interested in considering whether the changes are replicated in their own institutions. The current trend by the National Union of Students to move away from alcohol-based events suggests that this may be the case. The paper raises the need for further research into the the changing nature of students’ social experience within university and suggests one challenge may be to consider the role of universities in providing students with a blended and positive social experience in the future.

Key words: Social experience, online learner support.

Context

The literature concerning students’ social connection to university is rich and diverse. It includes seminal research into social integration (Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975; Tinto 1982), research concerning social adaptation and social adjustment (Thomas, 2002; Grant-Vallone et al, 2003) and social experiences (Beder, 1997; Archer et al, 2003; Christie et al, 2004; Lim, 2004; Wilcox et al, 2005; Fitzgibbon and Prior, 2007). Whilst it is difficult to find a common definition of the boundaries of the terms used above, there is a sense of shared understanding in much of the literature that social involvement as part of the university experience is of critical importance to student achievement and success. Positive factors in transition into higher education (HE) include successful integration (van Stolk et al, 2007) which can be greatly enhanced by student social engagement. Cossling et al (2008, p173) found that: “Socially and academically engaged students are more likely to remain in higher education and to be successful.” In their study, Rhodes and Nevill (2004) found that the friendliness of other students was a significant factor in satisfaction with university study. Robinson et al (2007, p9) identified a major factor of student support as “friends on the course” and that friendship support was rated above support received from family. The National Audit Office (2007, p46) report into student retention commented that whilst students withdraw for a range of reasons, one of those is the “difficulty in fitting in socially”. In a study considering the influence of personal networks and social support on attainment, Eggens et al (2007) applied multinomial logistic regression analysis to identify a range of factors affecting attainment. They found that: “The extent to which students succeed in integrating…and also the amount of social support received…possibly determines part of their academic success or failure.” (Eggens et al, 2007, p553).

The university at the centre of this case study is a post 1992 institution in the South Wales Valleys (UK). It has a student population of 21,496 and a long tradition of widening access. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2007-
2008 figures for the case study university show 14.2% of students against a benchmark of 12.5% from low-participation neighbourhoods, and 39.6% against 35.9% from socio-economic classifications 4-7 (Hesa, 2008). For universities with significant numbers from widening participation backgrounds, the challenge for students of integrating socially can be very difficult. Such students can experience feelings of being out of place in a university environment (Wilcox et al, 2005), whilst other students who remain at home whilst attending university often experience competing demands from family and already established friendship groups (Richards, 2005). Widening participation students can also be less willing to seek support than those from more traditional backgrounds due to a series of factors including poor self esteem (Grayson et al, 1998) and negative experiences of help seeking in earlier education (Hutchings, 2003).

In seeking to find ways to support students who may be experiencing early difficulties, the authors developed a university-wide online learner support tool named 'Early Days'. Using this innovative tool, students could self-assess their orientation into university in a completely safe (anonymised) environment. Depending on the responses they gave to questions, students would receive information or advice designed to help them settle into university and address areas of concern for themselves. Early Days was designed as a learner support tool; however, a by-product for the institution was that it provided an insight into student perspectives of their experiences at the start of their studies. This paper concerns the development of Early Days and the information it subsequently provided about the patterns of students’ social integration within the university.

**Methods**

**The objective** of Early Days was to provide students with the opportunity to self-assess their orientation and transition into the university. It was designed using the assessment software QuestionMark Perception (QMP), which can deliver a variety of online assessment models with automated feedback. By using QMP to allow students to assess themselves, this flexible software offered a number of important facilities, including online access, filtering out irrelevant questions according to individual student responses, and automated feedback.

The first stage in the development of Early Days was to decide on a range of questions, and this was informed by the Yorke and Longden (2007) study—a major study across 25 institutions into the UK first year HE student experience. The Early Days questions were a mixture of practical ‘do you know how to’ questions and those which encouraged deeper reflection about, for example, students’ motivation and early approaches to their studies. Included were key filtering questions which used student responses to determine the next set of questions to be presented. For example, if a student responded that they did not work during term time, they would not be presented with the remaining employment-related questions.

The second stage was to establish the distinct question sets: (a) those relating to the profile of the respondents such as age, gender, nationality, award and level of study, (b) the main section relating to students’ awareness of university processes and campus facilities, living and socialising, students’ early experiences and their approach to studying in HE, and (c) three open response questions relating to students early general university experience within the first term.

The third stage was to formulate the written feedback that students would receive in response to the option selected for each question in (b) above. It was important to ensure the automated feedback was informative and personally relevant based on the option selected by the students. Early Days is anonymously accessed and completed; it was felt that this would encourage students to be honest in their responses. This was a particularly important consideration because if students gave untrue responses, the feedback received would

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Automated feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I’m having a great time</td>
<td>That’s good to know, but remember to keep the balance right between studying and enjoying yourself!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, it’s not something I’m interested in</td>
<td>That’s ok. For some students the social side of Uni is not so important because they have their own friends locally. Some research has shown though that mixing with other students improves your chances of success, so don’t necessarily rule out joining in!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I want to but I’m not sure where to start</td>
<td>Try having a look at the clubs and societies on campus via the Students’ Union website [web link provided] — it’s a good place to start.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Do you enjoy the social side of higher education?*
not reflect their actual needs. As experienced advisors, the authors were also aware of the way in which voice can influence the success (or otherwise) of the student/advisor conversation and wanted to ensure that students receiving the automated written feedback did not feel they were being judged for their decisions.

Feedback to the ‘do you know’ or ‘how to’ questions was straightforward in that it provided students with information on support services or clarified university processes. For example, in the question ‘Do you know where to go if you have financial problems?’, students are made aware of the Student Money Service within Student Services. Other questions were designed to encourage student reflection, and the feedback in such cases was designed to be positive and encouraging, irrespective of students’ responses. For example, the question in Table 1 ‘Do you enjoy the social side of higher education?’ shows the options available for students to select and, based on the selection, the subsequently automated feedback that would be received.

Whilst primarily aimed as first year students, Early Days is also useful for direct-entry students, such as those participating in an Erasmus or international exchange programme. It was released to students in week six of the first term. The timing was felt to be suitable as students would have had six weeks of early university experience—an appropriate point for them to consider their orientation and familiarity with university facilities and processes. It also acted as a timely reminder of information missed or forgotten since induction. Students could access Early Days via an online link publicised on the student portal, the virtual learning environment (Blackboard) and via email.

**Findings and discussion**

To give some context to the Early Days findings, Table 2 shows the profile of the student respondents to Early Days, alongside the totals for the university population as a whole. The actual numbers of students participating in Early Days was 190 in 2007/8 and 150 in 2008/9. Although the number of students in the sample provides a reasonable data set the fact that it quite closely mirrors the overall university population helps protect the reliability of the conclusions drawn.

The findings and discussion in this section are based on four specific questions in Early Days concerning social integration, and comments relating to social experience from the three open questions. The response rates to each of these questions varied, partly because students could choose not to answer questions, but also because the functionality of QMP allows the filtering out of questions not relevant to all students. Student responses in the following discussion is combined for the two years of data, and the majority of respondents were the target audience of first year students, with 78% in 2007/8 and 82% in 2008/9.

The first question analysed concerned how students felt they were settling in to university and the second, whether they felt part of the university community. The purpose behind these two questions was to encourage students to differentiate between their early experiences of making friends and
settling in and a more developed sense of whether they felt connected to the university. The responses to both questions are given in Table 3 (260 responses) and Table 4 (211 responses).

The majority of students felt settled within the first six weeks of term (Table 3). This contrasts with the next question, because despite students stating they were settled into the university, 40% of students did not feel part of the university community (Table 4). This divergence in views may be explained by the high number of students at the case study university who remain at home for the duration of their studies. Such students are likely to feel more aligned to their already established local communities. Thomas (2002) reports the role of institutional habitus, and the part that social experience plays in students feeling a sense of belonging, noting that students of some institutions show high institutional commitment even before they have actually enrolled.

To understand students’ views and how they engage socially with the university, students were asked the questions: ‘Are you a member of any clubs, societies or formal social groups on campus?’ and ‘Do you enjoy the social side of higher education?’ There were 211 responses to both questions which are shown in Tables 5 and 6. It was interesting to find that despite students being settled into university and, to some extent, feeling part of the community, only 17% had signed up to traditionally popular organised social activities (Table 5). It could be that students had not had the time to join clubs and societies within the first six weeks of term; however, the response in table 5 indicates that this wasn’t the case because 41% stated they were not actually interested in joining any clubs or societies. Such a dramatic decline in participation in traditional social activities compared to the findings of Roberts and Higgins (1992) is an indication of possible changing patterns of students’ social integration with the case study university.

Roberts and Higgins’ (1992) study showed that 69% of first year students were members of a society, and when this was disaggregated by sector, the university figure was actually 87%. One possible explanation provided by Roberts and Higgins was the high number of students living on campus and finding their social networks through clubs and societies. When this is contrasted with the Early Days findings, it suggests a distinct change in the social experience of students at the case study university. Responses to the question shown in Table 6 demonstrate that 29% of students were not actually interested in the social side of HE. Low participation in organised social activities on campus may be explained by the high proportion of commuting students who live at home within the local area, and maintain already established social networks. A contributing factor may also be that 67% of the Early Days respondents stated that they had to undertake paid employment in order to fund their studies. This would have significantly curtailed the time available for them to engage with social activities on campus.

### Table 3: How do you feel you are settling into university life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response selected</th>
<th>2007-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty well — got some friends and settling in</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really well thanks!</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Do you feel part of the university community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response selected</th>
<th>2007-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, but I’d like to find out more</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I’m not interested in joining any</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: Are you a member of any clubs, societies or formal social groups on campus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response selected</th>
<th>2007-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I’m having a great time</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, it’s not something I’m interested in</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I want to but I’m not sure where to start</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6: Do you enjoy the social side of higher education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response selected</th>
<th>2007-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I’m having a great time</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, it’s not something I’m interested in</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I want to but I’m not sure where to start</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The authors felt it was important to give students the opportunity to articulate their feelings about their early experiences in their own words. Although the open questions did not provide students with feedback, it did provide the space for them to reflect on their early experiences in university. The extent of the mature reflection was evident in a number of responses. An example of one student’s comment was “stress less about assignments and do more for them and properly prepare for examinations. Procrastinate less.” Given that this was only week six of term, and therefore before assessments or examinations, this comment may indicate that Early Days has prompted the student to reflect on their study patterns and to consider how they will change their approach in the future.

The following discussion draws out any comments concerning student social experience that were included in three open questions: ‘What has been the best aspect of your experience so far?’, ‘What has been the worst aspect of your experience so far?’, and ‘If you could make one significant change, what would it be?’. When asked about the best aspect of their experience so far, 44% of students’ comments over the two years related to a positive social experience. This was significant because this was an open response question and students were not restricted in the topic choice of what had constituted the best experience. Examples of students’ comments were: “Living the student life out of my parents’ home”, “Having my own space and meeting a variety of people from different backgrounds”, and “Meeting new friends and talking with the lecturers, they’re quite human after all”. When comparing this with the worst aspect of the student early experience, only 17% of students’ open comments related to social integration. These limited comments generally focused around difficulties settling in after leaving home and struggling to make new friends. In the authors’ experience, students are not proactive about seeking help for such issues and in this way, the support given in the Early Days exercise provides information and guidance to help them through this period of adjustment. The last open question ‘If you could make one significant change to your experience what would it be?’ resulted in only 7% of comments related to social integration. Despite the low number of responses, the comments demonstrated that the Early Days questions appear to have encouraged students’ to be reflective about their early experiences. Examples of the few comments made about social experiences included: “Be more sociable and confident”, “I’d like to move into halls rather than live at home”, and “Start again and make an effort to make more friends”.

Student feedback on the Early Days exercise showed that 92% of students found the exercise useful and the same number found the automated feedback helpful. It had been anticipated that students might use the exercise as a resource-bank of information. However, 93% of students indicated that they had accessed it only once and, given the high satisfaction rates, this was interpreted as the tool was effective in achieving its dual aims of providing information and support. The effectiveness of Early Days in encouraging student reflection was more difficult to determine but student responses in the open comment questions did show evidence of self reflection.

Perhaps for the first time, the Early Days learner support tool has provided the university with reliable data about the student social experience, rather than our perception of that experience. The findings from Early Days indicates that the majority of students were having a positive social experience but this wasn’t being achieved through the expected traditional ways of joining clubs and societies. This raised the question of what activities were contributing to students’ positive social experiences. One possible indicator was uncovered in a survey conducted as part of a university-wide project concerning student expectations in 2007/8. The project included a social networking poll and showed that use of social networking featured heavily in students’ experiences. Students were asked when they accessed social networking sites—63% of 1521 voters said they used them whilst on campus, 14% only used them off campus and 20% didn’t use them at all. Whilst it was not surprising to find such high usage rates of social networking, the authors were surprised by the volume of students accessing social networking from campus. Perhaps, in the world of the digital native, there is a shift in the blend between online and face to face socialising whilst on the university campus. If it is the case that students are seeking more online social interaction, then further research is needed to identify the extent and impact of such a change.

The changing pattern of social experiences described here are drawn from students at one university. An indication that they are not hugely different to the experience in other higher education institutions may be reflected in the changes that the National Union of Students (NUS) are making to their provision across the UK. It was reported in 2008 that several university student union bars had closed their doors, and that others were seeking alternative ways of attracting students—including health clubs and juice bars (Kemp, 2008). In an article summarising changes in NUS provision, Shepherd (2007) found that the NUS made £1.2 million on alcoholic sales ten years ago, and that this has now fallen to £0.6 million. Inclusivity and diversity, as well as a more health conscious student population, have brought changes to alcohol-based activities. One university in the Midlands has converted a disco into an alcohol free social working space where students can hire laptops and work, drink coffee, and
eat sandwiches and snacks (Shepherd, 2007). Combining café culture with suitable working spaces seems to be popular and is seen as less intense than the traditional library environment. There is some evidence that fee paying students expect more from their Student Union than cheap alcohol and rowdy Saturday nights (Kemp, 2008). It would seem therefore that the data provided by the Early Days study is an indicator of a trend (that may be spreading across the UK) towards a need for changes in the provision of social opportunities for students.

**Conclusion**

Data that emerged from a learner support tool suggests there has been a change in the social habits of students at the case study university. Whilst the majority of students enjoy the social side of higher education and feel that they have settled into the university, they are not gaining this social experience through traditional social activities, such as clubs and societies. It may be that the method by which students achieve social integration is not important but nevertheless, it remains important that they are academically and socially integrated in order to persist with their studies. However, further research may confirm the method of social interaction is critical and that the balance between online and face to face social integration does impact on students’ likely success; perhaps there will be a statistically modelled tipping point in such a blend of social engagement.

This research certainly doesn’t provide all the answers but does raise an interesting issue for institutions in the need to understand their students’ social experiences and needs. Perhaps the remaining challenge is to consider the future role of universities in providing students with a positive social experience and whether in the digital age, such a responsibility falls solely on the university in the way that it did in the past. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2002) publication *Responding to Student Expectations* noted:

*It would be unsurprising if university life appeared to a present day first year student as more impersonal, less embracing and required less commitment than it did for students of the past.*

OECD (2002, p77)

In the seven years that have elapsed since this publication, have the digital natives begun to show universities that they can be detached from the university community and yet remain firmly socialised and successful in their studies? If this is the case, the impact on the traditional university community of scholars may be profound.

**References**


Roberts D & Higgins T (1992) Higher education: the student experience—the findings of a research programme into student decision making and consumer satisfaction. Leeds, HEIST.


Wilcox P, Winn S & Fyvie-Gauld M (2005) ‘It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people’: the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education* 30(6), 707-722.

First year student experience Wales
A practice guide

Karen Fitzgibbon
and First Year Experience Wales project group members
# Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................ 2

Index of initiatives ................................................................................................ 4

Initiatives designed to encourage communities of practice
  - Institution-wide ................................................................................................. 6
  - School or faculty-wide .................................................................................. 12
  - Programme, scheme or award level .............................................................. 14

Initiatives designed to encourage student academic engagement
  - Institution-wide ................................................................................................. 18
  - School or faculty-wide .................................................................................. 32
  - Programme, scheme or award level .............................................................. 35
  - Module or subject level .................................................................................. 38

References .......................................................................................................... 40
Introduction

The Higher Education Academy in Wales regularly meets with several consultative groups from the Welsh Higher Education Institutions. At one such group the desire to share current initiatives and practice designed to support the first year experience was voiced. The University of Glamorgan volunteered to coordinate a special interest group and each institution nominated a member of staff to join the project team. The project became known as the First Year Experience Action Set and over the last academic year participants have worked together to bring a collection of initiatives forward for wider dissemination.

The group has also established a wiki (more details are contained later in this publication) which will now become an open access resource for those interested in the first year experience to add their own initiatives and join the lively debates that the group has enjoyed over the last year.

The group hope you find this publication, and the resources on the wiki, useful for enhancing practice concerning the first year student experience.

Overview and aim of the project

The First Year Experience group wanted this publication to be an open and honest review of things that have worked, and things that could have gone better! Our overall aim was to share experiences of developing initiatives designed to support and enhance the first year student experience in Wales and we have benefitted immensely from the very positive approach that all group members took in willingly sharing the good, the bad (and the sometimes ugly) experiences along the way. We see this publication as contributing to the evidence on how to enhance the First Year Experience in UK higher education.

This publication does not aim to cover every first year experience initiative currently underway in Higher Education Institutions in Wales, but to provide a taster of a wide range of initiatives within the institutions – from something working at module level right through to institution-wide initiatives. Of course each of the initiatives could be up (or down) scaled depending on how you want to apply them. Most of the initiatives include a contact name but if a contact name is not shown, then the representative member of the institution will be happy to answer queries. In this way, the group hope to establish a network of shared views about the first year experience throughout Wales and beyond and we hope that you find this publication a useful starting point for that network.

The group received upwards of seventy initiatives and has had to be selective about those offered in this publication. It should not be assumed, therefore, that because we have highlighted an initiative in one institution that similar work is not underway in others – we just had to stop somewhere! It is also true that the initiatives in place to support the first year experience are always growing and it is perhaps inevitable that HEI are developing their work in this area at different rates. The aim of this publication is to offer something for everyone to consider in enhancing the first year experience in higher education.
Why the focus on communities of practice and student academic engagement as the two themes?

It rapidly became clear that the group would need to narrow the focus of their work in order to set achievable outcomes. After some discussion concerning the many facets of student retention and the volume of work being carried out in HEIs throughout Wales to strengthen the first year experience, the group decided to focus on collecting examples of practice which could be related to either of two themes – communities of practice and student academic engagement.

The literature concerning student retention in higher education has for many years acknowledged the importance of academic and social integration in student success. Whilst this is a practice guide, those interested in the literature concerning student retention and in the themes of communities of practice and student engagement may find the following a useful starting point (Beder 1997, Tinto 1997, Rhodes and Nevill 2004, Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld 2005, Crosling, Thomas and Heagney 2008).

It was evident that there were examples of good, innovative and perhaps most importantly, evidence-based practices that were bringing about improvements to the first year experience. Many of those practices involved initiatives designed to make students feel settled and part of the learning community they were joining. Others were focussed on improving student academic engagement.

How to use this guide

The initiatives have been grouped under the two themes and are then presented in the following order:

— Initiatives implemented throughout an institution;
— Initiatives implemented in one School or Faculty;
— Initiatives at programme, scheme or award level;
— Initiatives at module or subject level.

Where appropriate further reading is also suggested.

First Year Experience group members
Aberystwyth – John Powell
Cardiff – Nathan Roberts
Bangor – Sue Niebrzydowski
Glamorgan – Karen Fitzgibbon (Group Leader)
Glyndwr – Bridgett Pugh
Newport – Tony Rucinski
Open University in Wales – Ceri Willoughby
Swansea – Phil Brophy, Sarah Huws-Davies
Trinity – Gwilym Dyfri Jones
UWIC – Nicola Poole

The First Year Experience Wales wiki
http://firstyearexperiencewales.wetpaint.com/

The wiki contains details of the initiatives in this publication, plus some additional material which may be of interest. Each institution has its own page and further contributions are welcome.

During the preparation of the case studies, the wiki was available to group members only, but we are pleased that this will now become an open resource for anyone interested in sharing their practice and enhancing the first year student experience in Wales and beyond.

Acknowledgements

The Group would like to thank Gabriel Jezierski (Senior Advisor for HEA in Wales) for his support of the project, and to acknowledge the commitment of the HEA to promoting good practice in the first year student experience. Each group member has been supported by colleagues within their institutions and the group would like to thank those colleagues for their ongoing commitment. The contributors of the case studies have given their time in preparing the materials displayed in this publication and the group would like to thank them for their generous support. Finally, Karen Fitzgibbon would like to acknowledge the members of the group for the spirit of sharing that each member brought to the group, and for their efforts in bringing together such an impressive range of case studies.
## COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of initiative</th>
<th>Implementation level</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Contributor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-Freshers</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Aberystwyth</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Contact: John Powell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Skills Drop in Advisory Service</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Delyth Murphy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information literacy training</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cathie Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic learning clinic</td>
<td>Programme/Scheme/Award</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kieran Vivian-Byrne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical modelling through group work</td>
<td>Programme/Scheme/Award</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>John Hayward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching community of practice</td>
<td>Programme/Scheme/Award</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dean Parsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student liaison officers</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>Glyndŵr</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bridget Pugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ordinated approach to year one activities</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Richard Clarke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-enrolment social networking using NING</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Allan Theophanides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-enrolment contact with students</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kerry Bellamy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money Doctors Project</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Swansea</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rob Ellis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrivals weekend</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Swansea</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Simon Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshers Helpdesk</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Swansea</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jenni Soper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills Advisors</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Alex Osmond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of initiative</th>
<th>Implementation level</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Contributor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal tutoring – Certificate in Supporting students</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Aberystwyth</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Caryl Davies John Powell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of practice for assessment</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ioan Ap Dewi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer guide scheme</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Kim Davies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of initiative</td>
<td>Implementation level</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Contributor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home students induction</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Fran Tate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio of Academic Skills</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Martha Khan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP for undergraduate students</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Martha Khan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing pastoral support</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Sue Peet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student focus groups on assessment</td>
<td>Programme/Scheme/Award</td>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Claire Wardle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability and Professional Development</td>
<td>Programme/Scheme/Award</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Sam Bairstow Mary Broomfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computerised peer-assessment</td>
<td>Module or subject</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Phil Davies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary buddy system</td>
<td>Programme/Scheme/Award</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>David Byfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GlamStart student simulation</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Martin Lynch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online learner support tools</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Glamorgan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Julie Prior Karen Fitzgibbon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-fresher workshops</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Glyndŵr</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Bridget Pugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer supporters – guides for new students</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Glyndŵr</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bridget Pugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Mechanisms</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Mike Simmons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS text messaging</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Michael Webb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School ethos for first year students</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Gary Pritchard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>Module or subject</td>
<td>Swansea</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Sarah Huws-Davies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life through a lens</td>
<td>Programme/Scheme/Award</td>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Nicola Poole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer mentoring</td>
<td>Programme/Scheme/Award</td>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Nicola Poole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student and Staff expectations project</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Nicola Poole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWIC Diary room</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Nicola Poole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP Using Web 2.0</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Nicola Poole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library induction vodcast</td>
<td>School or Faculty</td>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Nicola Poole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Started Forums</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>The OU in Wales</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ceri Willoughby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers Forums and Wikis</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>The OU in Wales</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ellen Cocking Patrick Kelly Ceri Willoughby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Student Support</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>The OU in Wales</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Ceri Willoughby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library online training</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>The OU in Wales</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Helen Clough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for Study website</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
<td>The OU in Wales</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Ceri Willoughby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initiatives designed to encourage communities of practice

Institution-wide

RE-FRESHERS ABERYSTWYTH

Keywords
community, connection, belonging

Aim
The second term of university can be challenging for some students, with an increase in withdrawals and other social problems. The first term brings a new way of living and many students miss the initial bonding that occurs in the first few weeks as they are still trying to get grips with timetables, campus, moving away from home etc. We highlighted that a month into the first term would be a good time to target students who missed out on the Freshers’ Fayre with a “second bite of the cherry” and an opportunity to ask information and advice – we also decided to use sport and exercise as a way to foster a sense of relatedness to the University through fostering friendship, fun and enjoyment. By being pro-active in addressing issues of loneliness and stress with social and group meetings that did not involve alcohol we hoped that students would gain confidence and a sense of identity with the University by taking part in sport or exercise as a way to foster a sense of relatedness to the University through fostering friendship, fun and enjoyment. By being pro-active in addressing issues of loneliness and stress with social and group meetings that did not involve alcohol we hoped that students would gain confidence and a sense of identity with the University by taking part in sport or exercise, or through a more cognitive approach by introducing relaxation through music and theatre and finally, adding sound nutritional advice e.g. how to cook a meal for £1, for a complete holistic approach.

Description/approach
A “refresher” (as opposed to “freshers”) day was organised at the guild bringing together many university departments to both encourage students to take part in sport or activity, to ask questions or to get students to volunteer their own advice on how to make friends and settle in. Activities included:

- “Having second thoughts?”
- Money doctor
- University Music Centre
- Signpost Mentoring
- Sports Centre
- Stressbuster
- Union Societies/Athletic Union
- Healthy Eating
- Arts Centre
- AHA card
- International buddies
- Three networked computers for students to test their budget and student survival skills
- Prizes for best ideas – a wall of post it notes and winners chosen at the end.

Anticipated outcomes
Reduction in student problems in second term e.g. less stress.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Not sure!

Reflection/impact
Positive feedback from students involved. Beginning of term is really busy and it was good to run this a few weeks in for those who missed the initial sign ups. Also good to connect with other departments. Followed on from the summer Fit and Well Campaign for staff and led to the Fit and Well month for all staff and students in Jan/Feb 09. 10% more students using the Sports Centre than last year.

STUDY SKILLS DROP-IN ADVISORY SERVICE BANGOR

Keywords
support, retention, achieving potential

Aim
The aim of this initiative was to aid retention by providing enhanced study support in the form of a weekly drop-in, confidential advisory service: support being provided in general study skills, mathematics and statistics. This support was and is available through the medium of Welsh and English to all Bangor University students.
**Description/approach**

After piloting different study skills initiatives, a drop-in advisory service for general study skills has been introduced. Demand by colleagues and students quickly led to the establishment of further weekly sessions for support with mathematics and statistics. Based within Lifelong Learning, this service provides weekly, confidential one-to-one support both for students who find academic study skills an initial challenge, as well as those wishing to improve their performance and achieve their potential. Reports are given, as relevant, to the Senior Tutor Group and to the Widening Access and Participation Task Group.

**Anticipated outcomes**

- Increased confidence and self-esteem, thereby promoting retention;
- Improvement in students’ academic study skills and understanding of maths/statistics, leading to improved marks.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

- Student feedback, indicating improved marks and confidence
- Lecturer feedback, indicating improved skills in students.

**Reflection/impact**

Having trialled other study skills options and given the limited resources available, it is felt that the drop-in advisory service is the most efficient and effective method of providing much needed study support to those students who need it. Raising awareness of this service amongst students in schools across the university is a challenge but demand is steadily growing. Colleagues have an important, influential part to play in referring students to the service. Basing the service in Lifelong Learning, where the tutors have much experience in support and teaching study skills, provides an opportunity for students to seek confidential advice from outside the Schools where they are registered.

This confidentiality is important as students are sometimes concerned that, if they are seen to seek help, this will label them as ‘weak’ students. This project adds to students’ empowerment and autonomy as they themselves are able to decide when and how much study support they need.

---

**INFORMATION LITERACY TRAINING CARDIFF**

**Keywords**

information literacy

**Aim**

To develop taught undergraduate and postgraduate students’ information literacy to equip them for academic life. The teaching is tailored to and embedded into the curriculum on a course by course basis and learning opportunities are designed by module leaders in partnership with subject librarians.

**Description/approach**

Subject librarians seek to work with each taught course to deliver not only an orientation to the library and online resources, but to embed the development of information literacy into their studies.

To support tutors and subject librarians as they create information literacy teaching materials, the web-based Information Literacy Resource Bank offers innovative, interactive and interesting learning objects. Each learning object is bite-sized and highly re-usable within any discipline, and most can be adapted for use in both e-learning and printed materials. Interactive exercises, quizzes, cartoons, diagrams, animated sequences and podcasts are all available. Topics include avoiding plagiarism, citing and referencing, evaluating information and search techniques amongst others.

**Anticipated outcomes**

Through embedding the library’s teaching within the academic curriculum, students will better gain an understanding of the kind of information needed for research, be able to locate relevant information appropriate to their discipline and use it with academic integrity to fulfil the outcomes of the programme of study.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

The initiative grows from year to year; with 55% of taught undergraduate and postgraduates now provided with information literacy teaching embedded into their curriculum; an increase from 48% last year and 39% in the previous year. This integrated teaching builds on the orientation to the library and online resources already provided by subject librarians to 93% of students.
**Reflection/impact**

Progress to embed information literacy is dependent on the shared values and successful dialogue between module leader and the relevant subject librarian.

The strategy of integrating information literacy training within the individual programmes requires a wide range of teaching strategies and flexibility in teaching approaches from the subject librarian, and the adaptation of learning outcomes to the needs of the students and programme. Subject librarians need to be supported in this process. Examples of support mechanisms at Cardiff University include the Information Literacy Resource Bank, the Handbook of Information Literacy Teaching (www.cf.ac.uk/insrv/educationandtraining/infolit/hilt) and the sharing of successful lesson materials between subject librarians.

---

**SOCIAL NETWORKING PRE-ENROLMENT USING NING! NEWPORT**

**Keywords**

student expectation, Learning technology, student communication, student engagement, social networking

The University has launched a social network service dedicated to students who have either accepted a place to study, those having applied late through clearing, or those thinking about coming – http://newportstudents.ning.com

The service is a comprehensive social networking facility based on free software available from www.ning.com and was relatively easy to configure and establish in a short period of time.

**Anticipated outcomes**

The aims were to present students prior to attending the University, with an opportunity to become part of the organisation and make friends, meet peers and ask questions well before they arrived physically. The site would allow for individual profiles to be tailored with pictures and information, discrete discussion groups to be established and informal social networks to be formed.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

The first pilot which was not heavily publicised resulted in over 700 new students subscribing and participating actively before the beginning of the new academic session. Along with these students, members of academic and administrative staff along with students’ mentors joined in to develop a plethora of virtual activity and newly formed friendships. Topics discussed and groups formed on subjects ranging from “Which accommodation should I apply for” to course related discussions – and even preferences (or otherwise) for 1980s cartoons!

**Reflection/impact**

To our surprise and delight, the new service saw many users participating (staff and students) who had never previously used a social networking facility. The ease of use, flexibility and dedicated nature of the site seemed to have a lasting appeal – along with the fact that it was predominantly pink! Even so, the site was and is intended as a stepping stone into use of the University’s “main stream” virtual learning facilities including School blogs, wikis, online forums and of course the MLE.

---

**CONTACT WITH STUDENTS PRIOR TO WELCOME WEEK NEWPORT**

**Keywords**

student mentors, pre-enrolment student engagement

**Aim**

To put all pre-enrolled full-time undergraduate students in contact with other students (mentors) prior to enrolment, and thereby smooth the transition into the institution and help manage expectations.

**Description/approach**

Student Mentors currently telephone applicants who have accepted places at the University prior to their attending the campus at the beginning of the first term. This activity is done over the summer months as people accept. Additionally Student Mentors are involved with interview days and a new initiative involving the sending of a congratulations card from the mentors along side any offer letters that go out from Admissions, offering contact with Student Mentors via email if students have queries about anything prior to arrival. Mentors are also active on “Newspace” (see social networking initiative) during the summer.

**Anticipated outcomes**

A friendly contact from somebody who has recently “been there and done that” is intended to give new students...
reassurance from a warm and sympathetic perspective. This in turn is aimed at helping the student to overcome any transitional obstacles as they move into HE and to assist them in what to expect when they arrive and how they can adapt to the new environment.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Several hundred students have been contacted via the mentors’ initiatives mentioned above and, while it is still too early to identify definite trends from statistical information in terms of the influence of this activity over time, feedback from students on the approach of the mentors has been overwhelmingly positive and very well received.

Reflection/impact
With such a diverse student body and a prominent widening access agenda, the initiative is an obvious benefit to any students who may be feeling trepidation or uncertainly over what to expect having accepted a place at University. Importance has been placed on the use of different communication methods and media so as to reach the widest possible audience with the scheme – phone, letter, email and social media.

MONEY DOCTORS
SWANSEA

Keywords
budgeting, debt advice, overdrafts, bank charges, credit cards, statutory student support, financial responsibilities and financial capabilities.

Aim
Swansea University was selected by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) as an ‘Early Developer’ of ‘Money Doctors’, an innovative programme to help students develop money management skills. The programme offers workshop sessions and advice to help students confront debt, take control of their money and plan for the future. Money Doctors now constitutes part of an accredited module in some first year degree programmes within the School of Business and Economics and the School of Arts.

The target audience is university students and young people before they reach University.

Description/approach
— lectures as part of “study skills” modules in Languages and Business schools
— university open days
— events based in University aimed at trying to engage students to think about their finances
— interactive presentations to new and prospective students based within the University or FE colleges or Schools
— 1:2:1 advice sessions, helping students with budgeting or as part of our debt counselling service.

ARRIVALS WEEKEND
SWANSEA

Keywords:
meet and greet; welcome speeches; informal chats; students and parents; information; reassurance; social networking opportunity; orientation; cultural, faith and information stalls; international students welcome event.

Aim
— to welcome new students to the University;
— to provide an opportunity for parents to participate in a welcome event and take a refreshment break before returning home;
— to enable the Vice Chancellor and key University and Students’ Union staff to welcome students and provide key information;
— to provide information, assistance and reassurance to new arrivals;
— to enable new students to meet each other and help them settle in;
— to start the Orientation process for new international students;
— to provide a Civic welcome to new international students.

**Description/approach**

Arrivals events take place on the main campus and in the student village. New students and their parents are invited to take free refreshments and mingle with staff of the University and Students’ Union. Welcome speeches are made by the Vice-Chancellor, Students Union and Athletic Union. Student Services staff are on hand to provide information and advice, a range of information resources are available and on the main site campus tours are offered.

The International Student Advisory Service organises a cultural, faith & information fair and local trips. The weekend culminates in the International Students Welcome Event on Sunday evening. A buffet and cultural entertainment are provided and the evening is hosted by the VC and Lord Mayor of Swansea.

**Anticipated outcomes**

That students settle in more easily and make a smooth transition to studying at Swansea. That anxieties and difficulties are identified and appropriately referred at the earliest opportunity. A range of useful information resources are available. That students identify appropriate sources of support at an early stage.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

Verbal feedback from parents indicates that the event gives them a welcome opportunity to engage with the institution, meet key staff and feel reassured about separating from the young people they will be leaving behind.

**Changes in arrival satisfaction Autumn 2007 to Autumn 2008:**

Most improved elements for arrival satisfaction (improved satisfaction ratings by 5 percentage points or more):

- Other Friends – satisfaction increased by 14.5 percentage points
- Meeting Staff – satisfaction increased by 11.2 percentage points
- Local Orientation – satisfaction increased by 10.4 percentage points
- Welcome – satisfaction increased by 9.1 percentage points
- Registration – satisfaction increased by 7.2 percentage points
- Study Sense – satisfaction increased by 6.7 percentage points
- Finance Office – satisfaction increased by 6.6 percentage points
- Formal Welcome – satisfaction increased by 5.6 percentage points
- Arrival Average – satisfaction increased by 5.7 percentage points

Arrival elements with most reduced levels of satisfaction (reduced satisfaction ratings by 5 percentage points or more):

- Social Activities – satisfaction decreased by 5 percentage points

**FRESHERS’ HELPDESK SWANSEA**

**Keywords**

freshers, arrivals, helpdesk, warm welcome, friendly face, to inform advise and assist, clarification of procedures, campus/library/one-to-one tours, information pick up point – printed and verbal, ‘how do i’ and ‘i where can i’ answers.

**Aim**

To be a very visible presence – being ‘there’ throughout arrivals weekend and Freshers week to welcome all arrivals to Swansea University during the start of term, including new students/parents/friends/relatives who may be bringing new students to join us.

To chat and promote the friendly (and memorable) face of Student Support Services, to alert people to our existence (who we are and what we do) and the availability of our service, through finding satisfactory resolutions to any kind of query face to face, regardless of how great or small the problem may be.

**Description/approach**

A stand in one of the most prominent places in the University, ensuring our presence is seen by as many people as possible both specific visitors to the desk as well as passers by. Maximising the opportunity to publicise our individual support services, their availability and how the services interact and work as a one stop shop (to staff as well as students), through flyers, display boards/posters and exhibition stands.
Information/help desk there to answer any enquiry, manned by Student Support Staff and Student Ambassadors (approx 15) employed and coached by us for specifics and Student Recruitment for more generic University stuff. Frequently asked questions, prepared in advance and provided to Ambassadors as part of preparations.

We contact local organisations/tourist information for ‘free stuff’ that will attract people to the stand but will also be useful to the students, for example Mini Rough Guide to Wales, alternative travel maps (public transport and cycle routes), wall planners incorporating security tips, drink spikys, personal alarms and UV property markers from the Police and related safety partnerships – they also have a friendly approachable uniformed staff presence for a small part of the ten day period.

Specialist training given to staff ambassadors, should it be required. For example relating to disabled student intake if numbers are high for that year – i.e. working with students with visual impairment.

Routes set and speaking notes given for campus and library tours. However, personal ‘one to one’ option available during less busy times i.e. ‘sports’ tours, ‘school’ or ‘course’ specific tours available on request.

A ‘how to do’ of specialist proceedings happening during the course of the week, for example enrolment – enrolment timetables held at the desk containing information of where students need to be and when, guidance on what they will be doing through the process, to ensure they have carried out all stages successfully.

Letting space also works specifically to groups working alongside you i.e. Police and Safety Partnerships.

Welcome Pack; pick up point for Students staying off-campus.

**Anticipated outcomes**

Everyone who encounters the helpdesk and / or its staff achieves a satisfactory response (immediate or possibly delayed for more complex enquiries) to any questions/queries they may have and learns a little about Student Support Services (who we are and what we do).

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

New students returning time after time during the full duration of the ten days, to use and re-use the services of the desk and covering staff, to obtain answers, resolve problems and queries. Students visibly moving around campus, carrying or using our literature to get them around. Students popping back to the desk, speaking with Ambassadors / staff on campus, or popping into the office to say thank you.

**Reflection/impact**

We find staff that manage the desk and new arrivals alike, both make many friends during the week, the feel good factor excellent for the morale of new students, who may not know anyone else on campus - costs nothing, great for morale and no impact on the environment.

Ambassadors receive training / learn skills they can use else where. They get more sociable hours and slightly better rates of pay than most of standard work aimed at students. There is also the possibility of earning themselves recommendations to work events, carry out tasks during the course of the rest of the year:

Lots of tourist information distributed, not only for Swansea but South Wales as a whole.

Police have the opportunity for a face to face welcome – making them more approachable should the need arise.

Student Support Services then have good bank of student ambassadors to call on for future events.

Through the door numbers increase annually and we continue to be a well used, successful department with a great reputation offering an excellent service.
School or faculty-wide

STUDENT LIASON OFFICERS
GLYNDWRR

Keywords
student liaison-tracking and monitoring, student attendance, student progression, advice and support

The role of Student Liaison Officer was initially piloted within the curriculum area for Built Environment in February 2008 as part of the School of Science and Technology. In July 2008 the role was later extended to cover Science and Engineering. Plans are in progress to introduce this initiative into the Schools of Business, and Computing/Computing Technologies.

Aim
The aim of student liaison is to ensure students are monitored for attendance and assignment submission, in order to provide early intervention for those who may be experiencing problems. This role is performed by a student liaison officer who monitors student attendance and assignment submission. The target group is primarily 1st year undergraduates, but second and third year students may be included.

Description/approach
Following successful interview one person was appointed to the role of Student Liaison Officer in February 2008 whose job is to monitor student attendance and contact those who fail to attend lectures or meet assignment deadline dates. The appointed person acts as a liaison between students and academic tutors, and works to ensure that students are referred for the appropriate support, or are able to gain access to tutors in order to obtain academic advice. In summer 2008 the role was expanded to provide a summer support scheme to track and monitor ‘at risk’ students required to re-submit assignments or re-sit exams following June/July assessments boards.

Anticipated outcomes
The anticipated outcomes will be that as a result of regular monitoring and early intervention, there will be an eventual improvement in first year progression, and fewer students having to re-sit assessments. Of those students needing to undertake re-sits it is anticipated that through regular liaison the likelihood of returning to study will increase thus avoiding disillusion and drop out.

Evidence of actual outcomes
The role of student liaison is not as yet well established enough to judge the longer term effects on student progression. Despite this evidence from the extra monitoring and support undertaken during July/August 08 does suggest the role having some impact on at risk students.

Data evidence suggests a correlation between this monitoring role and an increase in students returning following re-sit or repeat year requirements from summer 2008 assessment boards. In September 2008 there appeared to be a 13% increase (as a percentage of enrolments) in this type of student returning to continue into the second year of their course. There also appeared to be a direct correlation between the type of contact and the likelihood of students returning. The student group were monitored, and of those where successful personal contact was made and guidance provided, 85% returned to resume their studies, compared with a 51% return from those students e mailed, and 41% of those who could not be contacted. Longer term evidence of outcomes will continue to be monitored.

Reflection/impact
Within the university the role of Student Liaison is a new organisational development which could serve to bridge a gap in student support. Currently both teaching and administrative staff have to focus on their main role – academics with teaching assessment and research, and administrative staff supporting the clerical and organisational needs within their particular courses. It is felt that the student liaison role gets lost with the consequences of risking early student withdrawal.

Agreement has been reached about the need for a first point of contact for students experiencing difficulties, and once the role of student liaison becomes established it could be subsumed as part of a tutorial system for first year undergraduates. Students would receive the additional advice and guidance needed and the innovation could become vital in improving the student experience as well as impacting directly on student success.

Plans are in place to develop this role further and appoint persons in the areas for Business, and Computing/Communications Technology.
YEAR ONE CO-ORDINATION IN EDUCATION & HUMANITIES USING BLOGS
NEWPORT

Keywords
student expectation, learning technology, blogs, professional practice, reflective learning, student communication, student engagement

Description/approach
New students who attend teaching placements remote from the University are invited to coordinate in the development of online reflective journals (blogs) with the rest of the cohort and members of the academic staff.

Anticipated outcomes
Several weeks away from the University on placement and away from newly found friends and academic support can often be a pressurised and disorientating experience for new teaching students. The aim of this activity was to use learning technologies to maintain the supportive group atmosphere irrespective of geographical divides.

Evidence of actual outcomes
While it was hoped that the online blogs (replacing more conventional hand written reflective journals) would allow all members of the cohort to appreciate that they were not alone in what they were doing, it’s fair to say that nobody on the group really expected the extent of the positive outcome that followed. Many students used the opportunity to share teaching ideas, concerns, seek advice on dealing with difficult situations and generally relished the opportunity to discuss their experiences in real-time. The interaction resulted in some much deeper reflective practice than might otherwise have taken place. The value of the activity can be seen principally in the use of journals as a shared formative learning tool rather than simply as an individual reflection on experience.

Reflection/impact
Use of a relatively simple online tool allowed for the creation of a democratic space which allowed students to share ideas and common experiences in a way that is not normally possible given the constraints of available time together at the University. Students from similar subject backgrounds were also able to share ideas in an ad-hoc and informal way that undoubtedly improved their approach to practice in the classroom.

ACADEMIC SKILLS CLASSES IN THE SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION & HEALTH SCIENCE
UWIC

Keywords
academic skills, first year, foundation year, key skills, study skills, academic style, exam preparation, revision, citation, referencing, giving effective presentations.

How was the initiative introduced
The initiative – lessons on key academic skills – took place across the Schools of Education and Health Sciences in a foundation course involving full and part-time students from both schools and first year Community Education students in the School of Education. The lessons were set up following a fairly standard process.

Aim
The subjects of the lessons were: citation and referencing, giving effective presentations, revision and exam preparation, and academic style. The aim was to raise students’ awareness of the skills levels expected of them in an institute of Higher Education, and to give them confidence in the different skill areas.

The Process
1. Lecturer contacts academic skills team
Meeting takes place to determine how team can meet the desired outcomes e.g. are we solving a learning problem, teaching a new skill, or reinforcing an existing one? Logistical aspects include finding date and suitable place in curriculum (usually within a study/research skills or PDP module).

2. Appropriate format for lessons is discussed/decided, e.g. f2f, e-learning, blended learning
A one off, or a series, as was done for Community Education. Circumstances determined e.g. large lecture hall and large group, studio or classroom space.

3. Planning
What existing material can be used? Lessons are made subject-specific using material provided by Course Programme Leaders (CPLs) e.g. old student work, exam questions; sometimes research is done by team members who are writing material.

Task-based approach nearly always taken, with focus on learners doing guided discovery tasks with feedback after short inputs from instructor. Learners will always take away a completed worksheet for future use: we try not to
provide handouts which are just for reference.

4. Material submitted for verification by CPL.

5. Delivery.

6. Feedback from tutors/students
   This comes in different formats e.g. email, informal focus group.

7. Future action decided
   Decision whether the same lesson will be staged again with next year’s cohort, and what improvements need making to material.

8. Material stored in team document library.

**Description/approach**
The lessons all took the form of one to two hour sessions in which, after short periods of teaching by me, the students were divided into groups, which then completed various tasks. The tasks were all completed on a worksheet, which the students then took away from the session.

**Anticipated outcomes**
An improvement in the quality, and the awareness, of the Academic Skills discussed in the sessions.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
The primary indicator of success was student feedback to tasks within the sessions, which was mostly very positive. Tasks usually became more difficult through the session, and the fact that students still responded well, suggested that their awareness and confidence with the skills were both improving.

**Reflection/impact**
It seems that many students entering University are not fully comfortable with the skills expected of them; whether or not these skills are actually presented to them in face-to-face sessions seems to vary massively from school to school. Awareness of these skills ‘from the ground up’ can’t help but improve performance throughout the degree, as more complex skills (research and critical thinking, for example) become needed. Most students respond very well in the sessions, and this is backed up by evidence from the tutors who ask us to set up these sessions, and who, of course, go on to assess the students’ work.

Programme, scheme or award level

**BSc COUNSELLING AUTHENTIC LEARNING CLINIC**
**GLAMORGAN**

**Keywords**
authentic learning; collaboration; team work; practicum

**Aim**
The aim of the initiative is: ‘To move towards greater ‘embodied’ awareness of ‘counselling’ as a practice within a community of practices’.

**What is an Authentic Learning Clinic?**
An authentic learning clinic is a simulated environment set up for the purpose of offering students an experience of practice which resembles and is isomorphic* with an actual clinical experience.

(*Isomorphism from the Greek isos = equal and morph = form. This means that its parts and processes are similar in form and relation).

**Who is the client?**
The clients are played by students who take on the role (i.e. the sociological part) and the character (i.e. the psychological presentation – or the “mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual” Oxford Dictionary) in practice contexts of their own choosing.

**Does the student use his or her own personal material?**
No.

But the student in role as client draws from their own imaginations and from research, composite stories and personalities for the client they play. The student will create scenarios based on a range of sources. Research in this context might mean case studies in counselling literature of clients presenting with difficulties in relation to particular themes e.g. drug and alcohol misuse; eating problems, relationship difficulties; or stories drawn from art, literature, films and tv; or composites from life experience.
Who is the counsellor?
The counsellor is the student in training practice. Each student will have an opportunity to practice ‘live’ in an Authentic Learning clinic with the benefit of input from their Practice tutor and their team. Each session will be recorded so that the student can analyse their practice in detail after the event.

Are the AlC’s assessed?
No.

The AlC is a learning workshop only. Assessments for practice are carried out within Case Presentations, which take place at key points in the course (midpoint and end of Year One, end of Years Two and Three). However we are hopeful that the AlCs will enhance the ability of the students to complete successful case presentations.

What is the role of the consulting team?
The consulting team works to maximise the learning of the whole group. They are responsible for actively participating with what they are observing through reflections, questions, and suggestions and through making connections with the wider theoretical ideas in the field and their own understanding of the counselling process.

What is the role of the practice tutor?
The practice tutor is responsible for managing the whole learning process in general by providing opportunities for students to participate at a number of different levels in relation to the counselling scenario. This will include improvising coaching opportunities with the key role-takers; using techniques, which will help students, make links between practice and theories.

Anticipated outcomes
1. We expect that students will have a more embodied awareness of counselling as a practice which sits within a community of practices which involve their clients, colleagues and wider significant systems.
2. We expect that students will have developed sufficient skill and confidence through participation in AlCs, to be a ‘competent and safe enough’ practitioner within the training placements which begin in Year Two.
3. We expect that students will have developed awareness, skills and confidence in taking up their roles within practice teams.
4. We expect that students will have a more thorough awareness of the importance of the relationship between theory and practice and greater ability to transfer skills within counselling practices.

Evidence of actual outcomes
We are still in the pilot stage – reflections and evaluations to follow.

At the end of each day students have an opportunity to evaluate their own experience and participation with the following guide questions:

Reflect on your experience of participating in the Learning clinic using the following headings (be specific):
— What theoretical ideas did you notice you and your colleagues practice today? What theoretical ideas will you wish to explore in more depth in order to make more sense of your experience?
— What did you notice in the sessions about how clients and counsellors engaged with one another to develop a therapeutically useful relationship? What evidence of engagement did you see or experience?
— What ethical implications might need to be considered in relation to the sessions? What issues of difference and diversity were most evident to you as active in the sessions e.g. gender, race? How did these show themselves?
— What are the implications for you in what you experienced today in relation to personal self awareness? What implications might this have for your ongoing learning and development?
— What did you notice about how the team worked together today? How might the team continue to develop itself as a practice and learning team?

MATHEMATICAL MODELLING THROUGH GROUP WORK
GLAMORGAN

Keywords
mathematical modelling, team work, problem solving, leadership, communication, self reflection

The module is aimed at first year undergraduate mathematics students. It is designed to help them relate the abstract mathematics of their studies to problems in the real world, to work in teams, and to communicate their results to interested parties. Thus it integrates problem solving, team work, communication and career aspirations.
into one taught module. As such creates a sense of bringing learners together.

**Description/approach**

Students work in teams of four. They are set four problems/ assignments during the year which require a variety of mathematical techniques, data gathering and just general problem solving skills. Typical problems are listed below.

While working on the problem together each student takes it in turns to be leader, secretary, report writer and presenter in addition to trying to solve the problem. Thus after all four problems are complete each student has performed each role once. Thus they get experience of how to interact with others in a team and develop communication, negotiating and leadership skills, and realise the mathematics is not something done in isolation from the world.

Once an assignment has been marked the group then report back on how they believe the marks should be split between them, according to their individual contributions.

To be successful students in each group need to learn to work together and be supportive of each other. The support may be in carrying out individual tasks and reporting back, or it may involve helping others in the group to learn. For example in one of the modelling assignments a significant amount of computer work is involved. The person in the group strongest in computing takes the initiative to help the others in the group to get up to speed in computing. As this always related to work elsewhere in the curriculum there are clear benefits to the other students in terms of the help they receive.

Groups meet twice a week in class time and usually frequently outside. Blackboard is used as a depository of common material and mobile phone and Facebook used for group communication. The groups build strong friendships where people can support each through out the week. Thus learning together is not confined to the classroom but is part of their social life.

At the end of the module the students have to produce a CV and letter of application for sample jobs, referring to their experiences on this module of team work and modelling projects. In addition they have to right short reports on reflecting on their roles as leader, secretary, presenter and how well they worked in groups.

**Sample problems:**

- If you tie a knot in a piece of string how much shorter does it get?
- How fast will the 100 metres sprint ever be run?
- How often do the university’s re-cycling bins need emptying?
- How fast can G block be evacuated when the fire alarm goes off?
- How can you design a depth gauge for oil tankers?
- How far apart should street lamps be?

**Anticipated outcomes**

1. Improved problem solving skills
2. Improved ability to work in groups in a variety of roles
3. The ability to reflect on their newly acquired skills
4. A sense of belonging to the course and to their fellow students
5. The ability to help fellow students academically and socially
6. To be able to receive help
7. To make friends
8. To find ways of learning mathematics through exploration which are different from “watch and repeat” method of worked examples and exercises
9. To more effective in selling themselves to potential employers.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

- 1 and 8 have been seen in their ability to solve problems using a level of mathematics that would not normally be part of their course. Submitted work
- 2 and 3 have been seen in their reported feedback. Submitted work
- 4 has been seen in the current high retention. Only one student has deferred out of 39
- 4 has been seen in the very high module attendance. Class register
- 4 has been seen in the maths work room where students choose to work together on their own initiative. General observation
- 7 has been seen in the high amount of Facebook traffic and general observation of students outside class
- 5 and 6 have been seen in the class group meetings. General observation
- It is hoped 8 will be seen in the marks and pass rate of the other modules
- It is hoped 9 will be seen in the quality of jobs and industrial placements obtained.
Reflection/impact
The initiative was introduced in the last Mathematics programme revalidation, 2008 in the form of the mathematical modelling module. It was warmly supported by the head of division and others on the revalidation team. I was given complete freedom to develop the module and affirmed at every stage. The request for additional class time was also supported immediately. The staff teaching other subjects have been supportive in supplying information about teaching schedules so that the mathematical module could stage assignments to fit the overall curriculum.

The attempt to creating a friendly working environment with a sense of belonging has worked. I clearly expected too much on a first run through though. Details like secretary’s minutes and reflections need clearer aims and marking schemes. As the second term has progressed some of the fun has gone with a sense of “we have seen all this before”. Some ideas are need to induce a sense of variety between the assignments and hence keep the freshness. One of the assignments should include out of building expeditions in order gather data. Perhaps another assignment should be a review of other people’s work.

I totally underestimated the amount of marking and some rationalisation of student deliverables that would be needed. Perhaps the electronic automation of peer group marking and marking of presentations might assist with this.

Description/Approach
A partnership between the University of Glamorgan, RCT Sports Development, Cardiff “Future” Blues Community Rugby and the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) was formed to increase participation in rugby in RCT. Thirteen year one University of Glamorgan students as part of their Rugby Coaching and Performance Foundation Degree, delivered to seven secondary schools and their cluster primary schools (31). The students were empowered to take ownership of coaching within the schools and develop existing school-club links. Students were mentored by a University of Glamorgan WRU Level 3 coach educator and RCT/Cardiff Blues Rugby Development Officers. Teachers within the schools were encouraged to work alongside the students. Coaching was delivered through a combination of school based programmes six “Tag” rugby festivals, Urdd Festivals and pre-junior Rugby World Cup events throughout the year.

Anticipated outcomes
Our intended outcome was to increase the level of the Cardiff Blues “mass participation” targets by 15-20% by delivering quality coaching to a much wider audience than currently existed in the RCT region.

Evidence of actual outcomes
By establishing this community of coaching practice, over 6,000 primary and secondary children, both male and female were delivered to. This has provided a 60% increase in the participation of young children accessing high quality coaching and physical activity through rugby in RCT.

Reflection/impact
The community of coaching practice is addressing numerous policy goals identified through Climbing Higher. This community of coaching practice is clearly providing opportunities for students, young children, mentors and teachers to engage in effective and meaningful learning through participation. The programme will continue to
develop next year with 20–25 new coaches entering the programme and being mentored by the second year coaches.

**Partner profiles**

“This initiative gives students not only the qualifications in Sports Science, but also the tools and the knowledge gained in practical situations”.
John Schropfer, National Community Rugby Coach Education Manager for the Welsh Rugby Union.

“This is a course for aspiring players and coaches who are keen on progressing through respective pathways, giving them options in their professional development. Some players and coaches will not have considered university as an option, but will now be able to gain an internationally recognised qualification, both academically and within coach education. This is a significant move to professionalise coaching within our community.”
Richard Hodges, Cardiff Blues Community & Coach Development Manager.

---

**Initiatives designed to encourage student academic engagement**

---

**Institution-wide**

**PRE-FRESHER WORKSHOPS**

**GLYNDŵR**

**Keywords**
student engagement, study skills, familiarisation, group work, confidence, student bonding

The initiative was originally introduced as part of the learning support available within the remit of student support services. Over the last twelve months the emphasis has moved towards enhancing the first year experience as well as addressing the widening participation agenda and hence improving student retention. Workshops are open to all prospective undergraduates following confirmation of offers, and include a wide range of student groups from Science and Engineering (including EU students) to those intending to follow Art and Design courses.

**Aim**
The aim of the pre-fresher workshops is to provide new students with a positive and welcoming introduction to higher education, and familiarise them with university services and support staff. The key priority is to organise these workshops prior to students starting their chosen programme of study, in order to help identify the skills needed to work at HE level. Of major importance is the fact that participants are able to meet other new students which helps in overcoming first day nerves, and easing the transition into higher education.

The specific target audience is all prospective first year students following confirmation of offers.
**Description/approach**

As the workshops are open to all new students, information together with booking forms are included in the induction pack and distributed from the university admissions office following A-level results. Three one day workshops were held in the last week of August and first two weeks of September 2008 prior to the start of the academic year.

The format for the day workshops included:

**Morning**
- Introductions to key support staff – student services – study skills tutors – library services – student ambassadors
- Icebreaker activities – “Juggling for Students” – enabling students to get to know one another and to consider and prepare for the demands of student life
- Introduction to Information Literacy
- Short campus tour – Q and A session with student ambassadors.

**Afternoon**
- Group work – students divided into groups where they worked on a mini research task involving library research and planning and presenting results to peers using class-based materials
- Presentations – individual groups presented research in their chosen format
- Evaluation and feedback session
- QA with staff members.

**Anticipated outcomes**

By the end of the workshops it is anticipated that students will feel more familiar with the process of studying in higher education and have increased confidence about starting their university degree programmes. Students will have gained insight into university life and started to develop a sense of belonging to Glyndŵr University, thus enabling a successful transition period.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

Completed evaluation forms following the workshops provided a short term measure and evidence of achieving the anticipated outcomes. Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive with all responses circling ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ when asked if the session had helped them gain confidence, made to feel welcome, and provided useful information.

Comments were:

- “staff were friendly and reassuring about starting university”
- “helpful to know what staff were available to help”
- “feel a lot more confident about the 22nd”
- “good to use library and see how it works”
- “the presentation was good-forcing me to interact and gain confidence”

The main aim of the pre-fresher workshops is to enhance the first year experience and subsequently improve student retention. A longer term measure of achieving outcomes is to track student withdrawal and workshop attendance in order to see if there is a correlation between the two factors. It is anticipated that this will be undertaken during May and June 2009 in order to gain a more objective measure about the true impact of pre-fresher workshops.

**Reflection/impact**

Pre-fresher workshops can work on two levels, as an enjoyable one day activity and social event for new students, or as an initiative recognised to support student retention. Feedback forms indicated that the event was both enjoyable for students, as well as having some impact on the transition stage into higher education. Student participation in the workshops promotes empowerment as they instil confidence about starting university life. Observation of the workshop days revealed a strong sense of student engagement, and as the day progressed an increasing sense of relaxing into the university environment. This also had the consequence of some students willing to discuss their own support needs and make early appointments with support services.

There is a need to increase numbers attending the workshops and target the harder to reach students who may not recognise the value of this type of activity. The intention is to provide an extra two workshops in July 2009 in order to widen the net and encourage attendance of students who may not usually attend for this type activity.

Pre-fresher workshops were delivered by the Widening Participation Manager (Student Retention), Student Liaison Officer, and three Study Skills Tutors. Whilst student evaluations were very positive, workshops could be further enhanced through the involvement of 1st year tutors thus enhancing the process of student engagement.
Keywords
peer support, guidance and advice, induction, transition to HE

The initiative was introduced in September 2007 in selected subject areas where staff members felt new students would benefit from being supported by peers. The programme areas involved in Peer Supporting are Sport and Exercise Sciences, Business, Nursing, Science, and International Students.

Aim
The aim of the scheme is to provide peer guidance and support for new students during the initial phase of settling into university life. The main purpose is to support the transition into higher education and provide a positive start to the first year of university study.

Description/approach
The role of a Peer Supporter is to offer support and advice during the initial settling in period for new undergraduates. This period usually last between six to twelve weeks when Peer Supporters will help with induction activities and become an identifiable person for new students to approach.

The role of the Peer Supporter is to:
— provide an early point of student contact for information and advice prior to start;
— act as a guide to new students about all matters relating to enrolment and induction;
— advise new students on facilities at Glyndŵr University and surrounding Wrexham area;
— provide a link between new students and academic tutors;
— give peer advice on effective time management required for studying;
— play an active role during student induction week.

Peer supporters are recruited in May following a series of information talks from the Widening Participation Manager to existing students who may wish to consider themselves for the role. Academic tutors agree the suitability of students for this role.

Qualities recognised in order to fulfil the role are:
— a friendly and outgoing personality
— good communication skills
— reliability
— initiative
— ability to work with people
— capacity for discretion and confidentiality.

A one day training programme is delivered in early September where Peer Supporters undertake communication exercises, group work on case studies and discussion on setting boundaries and ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’. The logistics of induction week are confirmed and Peer Supporters liaise with first year tutors about meeting new students and setting up meeting times and information sessions. The demand for the length of time needed for active support varies between subject areas – the demand for peer support in Business and Sports Science appears less than the period of support needed for nursing students who undertake practice placements six weeks from the start of their programme. A small gratuity for undertaking the role is paid.

The rationale for using peer support is that new students are less likely to feel intimidated by asking for help from existing students rather than academic tutors.

Anticipated outcomes
The anticipated outcome is that new students will experience a smooth transition to higher education through the peer support available, and take a shorter period of time to settle into their programme of study. Consequently new students will be able to focus on their studies earlier, and develop a positive orientation towards successfully completing their first year of study.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Peer support has now been in place for 18 months and feedback from academic tutors is very positive about the use of students for this purpose. There are increasing requests to have more Peer Supporters in place for September 2009. The latest I-grad survey results show very good feedback about the university induction, so the scheme could be deemed to contribute to those successful results and hence resulted in a positive outcome. However, the use of Peer Supporters beyond the first week of a new start is varied (as outlined below) therefore difficult to gauge the impact of this one initiative in isolation.

Reflection/impact
The role of Peer Supporter promotes a sense of empowerment for participating students, contributes towards professional development and can add to work experience CVs. All Peer Supporters through their involvement with
induction activities are able to utilise skills acquired in their time at university, as well as acting as an extra pair of hands for academic tutors. Help and advice is regularly sought by new students during induction week in particular from those supporting International Students. Following the induction phase the impact is more minimal and apart from those students supporting International and Nursing Students, peers supporting other areas reported a sharp drop in the need for contact beyond induction week. No new students attended the drop in support sessions organised for the first four weeks of term in the areas of Business, Sport and Exercise Sciences and Science. Those peers supporting the nursing students however were kept busy beyond induction week providing help and advice to students setting up professional development portfolios, and accessing library information. International students were also provided with Peer Supporters and extensively used, providing back up support with library services, and bringing course related issues to the attention of Programme Leaders.

Overall it is considered that students undertaking the role of Peer Supporter, newly arriving students, and academic tutors alike benefit from the Peer Supporter scheme. This contributes to the overall well being of new students and serves to enhance the first year experience. Consequently plans are in place to extend this role to other curriculum areas for the September 2009 where possible.

---

SMS TEXT MESSAGING
NEWPORT

Keywords
student expectation, Learning technology, student communication

Description/approach
Embedded into the Managed Learning Environment (MLE) is a method whereby academic and administrative staff have the ability to send instant text messages to cohorts of students who have submitted mobile telephone numbers to the University for this purpose. The idea is simply a method of giving students timely access to changes in timetabling or other arrangements that may have occurred without the benefit of prior notice.

Anticipated outcomes
In the event of unplanned or unavoidable short-notice changes to timetabled arrangements, the University wants to be in a position of maintaining excellence in its student experience by enabling students to avoid unnecessary journeys or delays, and delivering up to the minute real-time information directly to the students’ mobile phones or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) devices.

Evidence of actual outcomes
While curriculum changes are avoided wherever possible, sometimes they are inevitable and this can be disruptive – especially for new students. The service though relatively new has proved invaluable in allowing the University to contact students at short notice when these events occur. The student response has been very positive towards the use of such technologies above the old fashioned methods of a notice on the lecture theatre door!

Reflection/impact
This activity has been augmented with other technologies in use within areas of the University such as social networking sites and Twitter as a means of instant message type contact methodologies. The University has been careful to use SMS only for urgent messages so as not to dissuade students from divulging personal contact information of this nature.

---

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ASSESSMENT
BANGOR

Keywords
standardisation, practice experience, assessment

The aim was to enhance our practices by producing a comprehensive code of practice covering assessment. Target all staff and student (undergraduate & postgraduate).

Description/approach
The work was conducted by a working group that reported to the Quality Assurance and Teaching and Learning committees. It conducted a thorough review of assessment practices, taking into account the range of disciplines at the University.

Anticipated outcomes
A Code of Practice was produced and there is evidence of adherence to the code via our QA monitoring processes.
Evidence of actual outcomes
The code is viewed as a valuable document that facilitates rather than restricts initiatives and developments. It was a particular achievement to have a code that has sufficient flexibility to make it applicable throughout the University.

GLAMSTART STUDENT SIMULATION GLAMORGAN

Keywords

game-based learning, GBL, educational multimedia, gaming, simulation, simulation-based learning, induction, role-play, student support

The initiative targeted applicant and enrolled first year students entering the institution.

Description/approach
Students enrolling at the University of Glamorgan are able to access a simulation-game which attempts to synthesise the enrolment information they have received into a single experience. GlamStart offers users a choice of student player to control over a simulated five-day experience. Users are invited to guide their student avatar and attempt to collect points. Points are awarded for behaviours in the academic, social and financial realms which were seen as positive, modelling on behaviours known to foster successful study and life in higher education. These include regular attendance at academic lectures and tutorials, additional study, use of educational resources, as well as the use of leisure and social facilities. Random daily events occur adding or deducting points. The accumulated points totals can be posted on a leader board at the end of a game session and prizes are offered (branded USB memory stick and t-shirts) for posting a score. A simulated campus is available to the students to explore via an interactive map and many university locations can be accessed offering additional information, articles, FAQs and video interviews with students relating their ‘survival stories’.

Anticipated outcomes
By presenting induction information in a simulation game context we anticipated greater engagement with the information. We also anticipated a positive impact on the perception of Glamorgan as a trusted, contemporary and supportive institution.

Evidence of actual outcomes
The project has run for two years and each year we have conducted a questionnaire. The result of the evaluation has shown us that while uptake is lower than expected (around 15%-20% of new students used the game) approval is high amongst those users. Users found the orientation information (via the map) especially useful whilst expressing a preference for the media rich environment offered by the game as a means to receive this kind of induction information to traditional web page and text alone.

Reflection/impact
The innovative aspect of using a simulation game to promote induction information is important and has been recognised by the project winning the National Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) and EDUSERVE Innovation Award 2008.

The development process used on the project was important. The working group steering the project consisted of support staff from a diverse range of departments engaged with the first year experience. This group ensured that the key messages were appropriate and consistent with those of their own section and significantly contributed to the project’s success. There is evidence within our feedback that the experience of using the application has encouraged reflective thinking in many users with respondents reporting that they have reflected on their decision-making and time management as a consequence of using GlamStart.

ONLINE LEARNER SUPPORT TOOLS GLAMORGAN

Keywords

orientation, integration, student retention, student achievement

Description/approach
Two online learner support tools were developed, one for orientation in the first few weeks of term (Early Days) and one later in the academic year to encourage students to assess their motivation levels and extent of their integration with their studies (Study Health Check).

The questions were taken from a range of experienced academic staff and were informed by the Yorke and Longden (2007) First Year Experience Project questionnaire.

The online tools were developed using QuestionMark.
Perception which provided us with an opportunity to give immediate personalised feedback to students.

**Anticipated outcomes**
We want to encourage students to seek support if they feel they would benefit from it, as well as use the tools to provide information which will help assist their orientation to HE and to develop good study habits.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
Approximately 1200 students have accessed the two learner support tools and the data gathered has helped us understand more about how our students integrate with their studies and with the university experience.

**Reflection/impact**
So far, we are delighted with the way students have engaged with the tools. The feedback has been very positive, with just over 80% of respondents saying the exercises have been useful. The level of mature reflection from the students about their own approach to their studies and how this could be improved has been a very positive outcome.

The University’s approach to encouraging innovative use of technology-enhanced learning has certainly helped with this project, as has the support of colleagues in the University’s Learning and Corporate Support Services.

---

**Peer Guide Scheme**

**Bangor**

**Keywords**
students supporting student; institutional wide, high ratio of recruitment and therefore broad support offered

**Aim**
To offer peer support to new students as they make the transition to life in Bangor. The main emphasis is on the welcome period but Peer Guides continue longer if needed.

**Description/approach**
The Peer Guide Scheme has a dual structure in that it is co-ordinated centrally so that it is identified as an institutional wide scheme. The central co-ordinator’s role is to take overall responsibility for the scheme and to ensure a standard of operation across the institution. Screening of applicants, training, and evaluations are undertaken centrally and there is a ceremony every year where the institution shows its appreciation of the Peer Guides’ hard work. All Peer Guides receive a certificate and there is a special award for Peer Guide of the Year.

In addition to this, there is a co-ordinator in every academic school who takes the lead on recruiting the Peer Guides for the school and who allocates duties to the individual Peer Guides once the referencing and training has been successfully completed. This gives the scheme the flexibility to meet the needs of the individual schools.

**Peer Guide activities**
Peer Guides meet and greet new students at the Halls site and organise evening socials for over the Welcome Weekend. They are then on hand throughout Welcome Week in the academic schools making sure the new students find their way about and attend all the sessions they need to. They organise tours, take them to Serendipity (the clubs and societies fair) and offer friendly and informal advice wherever needed. This support also extends to tours of the town and various social events.

After the Welcome Week, Peer Guides are expected to maintain a looser contact with the new students ‘for as long as needed.’ Many new students do not wish to continue but significant numbers are still in contact with their Peer Guides when the annual evaluations are undertaken at the end of the first semester. Throughout, should the new students be experiencing particular problems, the Peer Guides refer them to more professional support.

The Peer Guides also help out at Open Days by again giving tours and a student perspective on life at Bangor.

**Anticipated outcomes**
It is anticipated that the scheme will help to ease the transition process for new students. This in itself is likely to aid retention. The Peer Guides’ involvement at Open Days is also important to recruitment.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
Annual evaluations show a consistently high level of appreciation of the Peer Guides. Although the precise figures do vary slightly from year to year, typically Peer Guides are rated as good or very good by 75% or more of new students. The Peer Guides give support to significant numbers of students who are experiencing problems settling (15%) and or who are thinking of withdrawing (20%) – as said before, they support these students by referring them on. The current evaluations have been altered so that it should be able to identify to whom the new students are referred.
Anecdotal evidence from the comments on the surveys suggest that the Peer Guides are appreciated for the way they make the settling in process easier with many commenting on their friendliness, their willingness to listen and to help where they can. Some go as far as to say that they ‘take away the pain’ of the settling in process and there are occasional comments that people would have left without their Peer Guides’ help. It is also suggested that Peer Guides do make a positive impression at Open Days and that for some the Peer Guide scheme is quite important in their decision to choose Bangor.

**Reflection/impact**
Retention is obviously a complex issue and Peer Guiding is only one aspect of the Bangor experience. Generally Bangor performs well in relation to its benchmark and given the above evaluations it is reasonable to conclude that Peer Guiding is one of the contributory factors. Similarly it is reasonable to conclude that the Peer Guides also aid recruitment.

The success of the scheme depends on support form all levels. The ceremony is supported by senior Management, the Central Co-ordinator is based in the Centre for Careers & Opportunities which is part of Academic Registry and it is expected that every academic school will provide a member of staff to act as the co-ordinator for the school and to undertake the relevant duties. The latter is normally a member of academic staff but it is occasionally a higher level administrator.

**HOME-BASED STUDENTS’ INDUCTION**

**Bangor**

**Keywords**
forming supportive networks; early engagement with the university; fostering a sense of community and identity.

**Aim**
To provide home-based students with an opportunity to engage with the University at an early stage; to help them to establish a sense of identity both with the Institution and with fellow students; to foster and establish networks of support prior to Welcome Week; to overcome fears.

**Description/approach**
We hold a one or two day induction event prior to Welcome Week to which all home based students are invited. Our approach is informal: we aim to give students as much opportunity to meet with fellow new students in their School/Department as possible so that they begin to form supportive networks, and to meet with existing students who are also home based to provide them with hints and tips on being a home student.

We have a full day of activities which are not based on presentations; these include ice breakers; information sessions with fellow students and existing students (peer guides); tours of the University; forming groups studying in the same department with lunch to which members of staff are invited; question and answer sessions; money advice. On the two day induction programme we have also included sessions led by counselling staff ‘home but not alone’ (an initiative following the lead of the Student Retention and Retention (STAR) project) and careers staff.

The Student Union are invited, and last year the event was planned by an existing home based student, using her own experiences to prepare the programme, who, having found the event extremely useful for herself, was anxious to be involved.

**Anticipated outcomes**
A survey of students who had withdrawn, undertaken four years ago, gave us evidence that home based students felt less connected with the University than their peers, and had much less knowledge of the support services and provision (such as study skills provision) available to them. They also seemed to lack supportive networks of fellow students. The programme was devised to address these issues; to aid the formation of supportive networks; to increase knowledge of the University, its facilities and Student Support provision; to reduce anxiety. Although retention rates are not a particular concern for the University, improved retention rates for this group is an anticipated outcome.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
Evaluations have been undertaken each year with much positive feedback; student withdrawal is monitored. Follow-up work is being undertaken this year through focus groups.

Student feedback indicates that valuable friendships and supportive networks have been formed over these days, which have lasted throughout the students’ course. Attendance at further events e.g. mature student sessions has been much higher; knowledge of, and engagement with, student support services such as counselling is higher amongst this group than previously.
Having indicated that home-based students seemed isolated at events during welcome week – academic staff and school administrators report that those who attended the induction have now formed early connections and are more engaged.

Reflection/impact
The pre-entry induction event for home based students has had a significant impact we believe in allaying the fears and anxieties of studying at University for this group of students; who are mainly mature aged students. It has helped them to form supportive networks prior to the start of term, which often last throughout their course; it has had a major impact on their knowledge of the University and its facilities.

PDP FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
BANGOR

Keywords
portfolio, reflection, small group work

Aim
Year 1 student representatives from four different degrees – Sports Science (Outdoor Activities), Sport, Health and Physical Education (SHAPE), Sports Science (SS) and Sport Science and Physical Education SS(PE).

Description/Approach
Participate in University PDP pilot to reflect on current skill set and goals during Semester 1 and 2 with reflection and review after each semester. More information on this initiative can be found on the wiki.

Anticipated outcomes
— to see if skills have improved over the course of the academic year
— compare this University PDP pilot to existing SSHES PDP module.

Evidence of actual outcomes
To be determined at end of academic year.

Reflection/impact
To be determined at end of academic year.

PERSONAL TUTORING – CERTIFICATE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS
ABERYSTWYTH

Keywords
supporting students

Description/Approach
An accredited training programme for non-academic staff members (but open to all staff), in developing good practice in supporting students. Training and development in this area has traditionally been targeted at academic personal tutors or Student Support professionals; however these interventions may not be immediately available to a student facing difficulties.

The ‘Supporting Students’ programme builds on existing best practice and encourages staff to reflect and develop their approaches to supporting the needs of a diverse student population and can be tailored to individual role requirements.

The programme is designed for staff members involved in “student facing” activities. It aims to provide a broad overview of supporting student issues within Aberystwyth University and the higher education sector.

This programme is aligned to the University mission and corporate plan, as well as learning and teaching strategy, and has been informed by sector wide issues such as student support, transition, recruitment and retention.

The programme has been benchmarked against the National Professional Standards Framework and the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) values and has been developed in collaboration with Aberystwyth University’s Student Support Services. The programme is also accredited by Aberystwyth University through the Lifelong Learning Framework. We believe this to be the first formal programme of its kind in the United Kingdom to be aimed at non-academic staff.

Anticipated outcomes
The intention is that on successful completion of the programme, staff will be in a position to understand the wide range of issues that may arise whilst supporting students and be able to refer students to the appropriate intervention service.

Staff will be more aware of students and the issues that may affect their experience at university and recognise the need, where appropriate to support students by
simply listening or by signposting them to an appropriate intervention service.

Evidence of actual outcomes
The programme has only recently begun so actual outcomes cannot yet be confirmed. However, within two days of advertising availability the course had been filled. Within a further few days numbers interested had risen such that we have a waiting list to fill two further courses. This demonstrates the interest from staff in developing and enhancing skills in this area.

STUDENT AND STAFF EXPECTATIONS PROJECT
UWIC
Aim
The aim of this pilot survey was to gather the views of students and staff in relation to student expectations on entry to higher education. To assist UWIC in finding ways to manage expectations and improve the student experience of first year students, which will ultimately impact on levels of student satisfaction.

Description/approach
In November 2008, LTDU conducted a pilot, online, web-based Student Expectations Survey to gain a better understanding of student expectations on arrival in higher education. A parallel survey about the staff perspectives of first year students was also conducted. Questions were identified following desk research into similar surveys conducted elsewhere. Generally, the sets of questions to students and staff focused on the same issues.

The issues focused on:
— pre-entry information
— students’ preparedness and motivation for study
— induction and the first week
— learning and teaching activities during the first eight weeks
— student representation
— identifying factors for a successful first year student experience.

Anticipated outcomes
To generate comparative data relating to students and staff perspectives of learning and teaching issues for first year students.

Evidence of actual outcomes
The student survey gathered a large number of open comments. The qualitative data which has been generated from the survey is to be collated into detailed reports to Schools and Units for further action.

Reflection/impact
The qualitative and quantitative data which has been generated from the surveys will be collated into detailed reports to Schools and Units to help with:
— promoting and facilitating professional developments events on inductions for first year students
— student engagement and influence in action planning. UWIC Students Union and Student Representatives will be involved in discussing the results of the surveys and producing an advice leaflet/web page for new students
— influencing and supporting the work of key institutional working groups (e.g. UWIC’s Week One Welcome Group which schedules a programme of introductory events for first years)
— assisting with accurate marketing of programmes
— influencing awareness of Students Rights, Services and learning support.

UWIC DIARY ROOM
UWIC
Keywords
student voice, student expectations, innovative research method, video clips, staff development
Aim
The diary room concept was introduced in order to combat survey fatigue, to try and encourage more open and detailed responses from students who wouldn’t respond to a traditional survey method. To get students to engage with the evaluation process by using methods that would be familiar to them from areas of modern/pop culture. It was hoped it would produce a high impact method of presenting the results to allow the key findings to stand out. This in turn would allow more specific action plans to be created and the complete buy in by all staff to the issues at hand.
Description/approach
Many forms of communication were used between the University and the students to inform them of the project including the student newspaper ‘Retro’, the use of student ambassadors to hand out flyers on the day of the diary room and to encourage students to enter. The diary room was run on all four campuses (2 days each) and the questions were presented to the students via a laptop interface designed by the Learning Development Officer (Media Specialist). The students were asked 8 questions on areas of current strategic concern e.g. personal tutoring, PDP, assessment and feedback. All students were asked if they would sign a consent form allowing the clips to be used for future Learning and Teaching purposes and whether they wished to enter into a prize draw for £50.

Anticipated outcomes
Fresh way of hearing the student voice, production of visual clips that could be used in a number of different ways for both staff and students, cross campus response.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Over 100 students entered the diary room from a number of different programmes, this produced over 10 hours of recordings to analyse. There have been a number of requests by staff to use the video clips for numerous activities including during induction week as a demonstration of what students can expect. The qualitative comments were commented upon as very useful by programme directors when analysing and redesigning their programmes. The clips have been used as part of staff development discussion sessions.

Reflection/impact
Initially run as a pilot the diary room has run once more and at a different time of year with a different focus to the questions. It has attracted students that we didn’t expect to attract – e.g. international students and has provided a wealth of qualitative data. Promotion and timing were essential to the success of the project as was the clarity of the questions. Throughout the whole process the inclusion of the student bodies and students themselves was key to the success and it is important to remember to close the feedback loop and let those who took part know the outcomes of their efforts. It will continue to run bi-annually alongside other initiatives as long as the students keep entering the diary room. It has also been trialled for staff.

LEARNER SUPPORT FORUMS
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

Keywords
advice, guidance, getting started, organising yourself ready for study

The following discussion forums were offered as pilots designed to find the best model of forums for the future. For example, the getting started and course choice weren’t offered to all students but to students studying particular subject areas.

Getting started forums:
— start studying Social Science or Business
— start studying Science or Technology
— start studying Languages

Forums for students with disabilities:
— organising yourself for study

Keeping up with study forums
— study tips for Arts students

Course choice forums:
— choosing your History course
— choosing your Sociology or Social Policy course

Aim
Forums are available to all registered students, but the ‘Getting Started’ forums are particularly aimed at students on Level 1 courses.

Description/approach
Student Services provide a range of advice forums throughout the year. Most forums run for a month. After this they remain available as read-only forums for approximately a year. Students can post a message only while the forums are open. All forums are moderated by experienced advisers and tutors and students are invited to:

— talk to fellow students
— ask for advice from experienced OU tutors
— find out about the OU community of students and alumni
— learn more about OU online services such as the OU Library.

These are supplemented by a Getting Started website: www.open.ac.uk/learning/induction/undergraduate/index-home.php
Anticipated outcomes
It is hoped that involvement with these forums will encourage students to engage in the process of distance learning from an early stage in their studies. Not only can students benefit from specialist information, advice and guidance from experienced staff acting as moderators, but they can also gain peer support from fellow students.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Over 10,000 students took part in Learner Support forums in 2008. Those who participated valued the help from advisory staff and the support from other students. A sample of students who took part in the forums are being tracked to see if there appears to be any link between participation and course progress.

Reflection/impact
The forums create an environment which empowers the student to ask questions and creates a sense of community and mutual support as students exchange experience and offer practical support to each other.

CAREERS FORUMS AND WIKIS
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

Keywords
forum, career-planning, advice and guidance

Aim
Forums and Wikis are available to all registered students and aim to:
— make careers information, advice and guidance accessible 24/7 to students who are managing their studies alongside busy lives. OU students often work full time and/or manage families and an online forum allows them to ask questions and access the answers at a time that is convenient for them
— encourage students to think about their career options early on in their studies – many students tell us that they wish they had begun their planning earlier
— raise the profile of the Careers Advisory Service.

Description/Approach
An online forum is offered for students to contribute to for one month. It then becomes read-only for a year afterwards. They are always moderated by a qualified Careers Adviser to ensure students are getting the most accurate advice and guidance. Forums are offered in different ways:
— On specific career areas, e.g. entering Teaching or Law
— Using Employers to answer student queries has enabled us to replicate as closely as possible the opportunity to meet employers face to face offered by campus universities and this has proved to be very effective
— Subject based forums have also been offered helping students to see what career options are open to them in a particular subject area. Funding for these has come from the OU PILS CETL (Personalised Integrated Learning Support Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning)
— Wikis on CV Writing and Volunteering have also proved popular and provide the opportunity to link from our website to these resources, making the website more dynamic.

Anticipated outcomes
— Student quick queries are answered more efficiently than they would be if they were to make an appointment. Where appropriate for more complex queries students are referred to the careers adviser in their region or nation centre for a full guidance interview
— Many students tell us that by accessing the forums, they have found answers to both questions they already had and also those they didn’t know they needed to ask
— Content generated can become a resource for future careers publications and web materials.

Evidence of actual outcomes
— Students interacting with Careers Advisers
— Students interacting with other students
— Case studies of students coming back with their ‘success’ stories
— 10,000 students visited forums in 2008
— Over 4400 students visited a forum on Entering Teaching in November 2008
— Runner Up in the ICT award category in 2007 by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
— Students tend to be very positive in their feedback.

Reflection/impact
Participation in the Forums and Wikis has impacted on the OU community in many ways. For example it:
— enabled and empowered students to do their own research and to consider careers early on in their OU study career
— provided good staff development for moderators
— was useful to demonstrate to academic staff the volume and type of careers question their students are asking
— provided an impetus for making employer contacts. Also helps to educate those employers who take part in the forums about our student population
— made Careers Advisory Service more accessible to a diverse student population
— allowed us to provide an ongoing resource for students to access after the forum was closed to further queries
— helped to raise the profile of the service
— paved the way for other areas of Student Services to offer forums to students based on the successes on the careers forums.

### PROACTIVE STUDENT SUPPORT
#### THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

**Keywords**
pro-active student support (pass), welcome, motivation, encouragement, study skills, preparedness for study

**Aim**
Students across the UK identified as ‘vulnerable’ by a University statistical model are targeted for additional support prior to their course starting. Selection criteria include: students on their first OU course, students under 25, students with no previous education qualifications, students in receipt of a financial award. However, in Wales this has been extended to all new students, regardless of whether or not they are deemed ‘vulnerable’.

**Description/approach**
Students who are new to the OU and considered to be ‘vulnerable’ to drop out are given a proactive telephone call to introduce them to Learner Support services and encourage them to think about effective ways to approach the course. Specialist Advisers contact students to give them the opportunity to discuss their motivation for study, any concerns they may have about starting the course and talk them through the VLE system. Questions include:

— Have you received your computer username and password?
— Have you logged on to StudentHome (the Open University’s Virtual Learning Environment)?
— Have you received all your course materials?
— Do you have any specific questions about the IT aspect of your course?
— Can I just check that all the contact details we have for you are correct?
— Is there anything else I can help you with?

This contact acts as an early warning system which allows us to identify any additional needs students may have and also ensures that students engage with the distance learning process from the outset.

At the OU in Wales, we have extended this contact to all new students, regardless of whether or not they are considered to be vulnerable in a bid to increase retention.

**Anticipated outcomes**
Encourages students to think about how they are going to approach their studies early on and prepare them better for studying with the OU. This kind of proactive contact also fosters a relationship with Learner Support which encourages students to get in touch with us if something goes wrong. All of this is designed to increase student retention and progression.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
Since PaSS work was introduced in 2004, student retention has increased by 7% across the Open University as a whole.

At the OU in Wales, retention increased by 3% points between 2003/04 and 2005/06.

**Reflection/impact**
This kind of contact also helps students studying at a distance to feel part of the institution as studying part time at a distance can feel quite lonely.

The aim is to front-load student support to create autonomous learners who are happy to contact the institution as and when problems arise.

---

### LIBRARY ONLINE TRAINING
#### THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

**Keywords**
elluminate, library, online training

**Aim**
To provide an alternative to the face-to-face library induction and training that you would get if you were a student or member of staff at a ‘traditional’ campus-based university.
**Description/approach**

Library Services offers a programme of synchronous online training sessions to all OU staff and students using the web-conferencing tool Elluminate Live!

This programme started in November 2008 and currently consists of the following sessions:

- Student Introduction to Library Services
- Associate Lecturer Introduction to Library Services
- How to find an e-Journal
- How to set up ejournal alerts
- How to social bookmark
- How to find information in Languages
- How to find information in Business and Management.

More sessions are being developed and integrated into the programme.

Since November, 2008 18 sessions have been offered and 109 students and 8 staff have attended. Of the student attendees, 40% are on 1st level courses and over a quarter are new to studying with the Open University.

**Anticipated outcomes**

Students and staff will learn about the resources that we offer via the online library and they will feel more confident using the resources in their studies/course writing/research/teaching.

They will discover the broad range of services that we offer, particularly the SCONUL Access scheme which enables OU students to access other university libraries and borrow books for free. Students and staff also find out about the help and support available to them through the Library Helpdesk.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

91% of student attendees answered ‘Definitely’ to the question ‘Would you recommend this event to a colleague?’

Here are some examples of qualitative feedback from students:

> These tutorials are such an excellent idea – really helpful.

> I just wanted to thank you for conducting this online session. I really enjoyed it and I look forward to participating in future sessions. I now have a better appreciation of the differences between ejournals and databases and how the information is relayed.

> Thank you for the OU library tutorial – I wished it had come sooner as it would have avoided so many frustrating hours spent.

> A clear, concise and friendly delivery ensured that all objectives were achieved and the participants were well motivated to further investigate OU online library services.

> Really important this. All OU students need to get using the Library resources, which are fabulous but I didn’t really know how to access them before.

> This has been very useful - quicker and more interesting than just reading through the guides.

> This should be mandatory training for all new students

I found the session very useful and well worth the hour. Also useful was Steve’s showing us how to apply for library access at local university libraries.

Comment in course forum: “I took a library course yesterday and it was really helpful. You can sign up at the library it is free and it is online I really recommend this it only takes 1 1/2 hours of your time”

We will also be sending out follow-up evaluation forms soon. These forms ask participants to rate the possible impact of the training session and indicate whether they have used any of the resources or services that were mentioned.

**Reflection/impact**

Our time-poor students may not be aware that they have access to an excellent online library because many are not required to engage with it in their courses. These training sessions, as well as raising awareness, also give students the confidence and skills to use online library resources for themselves.

---

**SKILLS FOR OU STUDY WEBSITE**

**THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES**

**Keywords**

study skills, distance learning, confidence-building, managing stress, preparing for exams, using academic English

**Aim**

The aim of this website is to act as a study skills resource for OU students and tutors. All students have access to this, but it is particularly useful for those studying at level 1.
Description/approach

The website (www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy) houses a range of study skills material designed to help students develop study skills in the following areas:

- Assignments
- Revising, exams and assessment
- English for learning
- Developing effective study strategies
- Thinking, reading and taking notes
- Working with others
- Using maths and statistics in your studies.

Students can download copies of these ‘toolkits’ or request hard copies from Student Services. Exercises include ‘writing in your own words’, ‘five steps to better reading’ and English language activities. Students are made aware of the availability of these resources through the learner support team in the Cardiff office, from their online student record pages (known as Student Home) and especially via the induction/preparation sections of their course materials.

Anticipated outcomes

Students are encouraged to use these activities to supplement their learning. Students experiencing difficulties in specific areas are sign posted to these resources by their tutors and Student Services staff.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Students report that they find these resources extremely useful, but no qualitative/quantitative analysis is available.

Reflection/impact

Toolkits are designed as resources for private study. This encourages students to experiment with different study strategies to find out what works best for them and to create autonomous learners.

PEER MENTORING

UWIC

Keywords
peer mentoring, student support, group cohesion

Aim

To develop a system that would provide an extra support for first year students who may have questions about their course and student life in general and create greater cohesion and engagement amongst different years on the programme.

Description/approach

The BSc (Hons) Psychology lecturing team approached the Learning and Teaching Development Unit following a presentation made on the uses of peer mentoring and the issues it could assist with. They have a large first year intake with over 120 students often attending lectures. They wanted to introduce a system that would allow more engagement amongst the students with others on the course both within the 1st year and also second and third years and provide an extra signpost to the support available to students within UWIC. The mentors were all second or third years and underwent an afternoon of training re – communication skills etc. They were all assigned a tutorial group to mentor and met with the students during their second day at University for a question and answer session about student life. The mentors were contactable by email and phone (if the student wished this information to be given out). They were also given a space on the Psychology Discussion Boards within Blackboard where students could ask questions as the term developed. They were also involved in arranging a social event at the start of the year.

Anticipated outcomes

Increased cohesion amongst the new student cohort and an extra port of call for a student if they are having any difficulties with either the academic or social side of university life.

Evidence of actual outcomes

A system has now been set up that can be run year on year that all students can engage with and deals with both social and academic issues. Students felt more able to speak to other members of their course and felt they could ask other students advice when they wouldn’t necessarily speak to a member of staff.

Reflection/impact

It was important to get a balance between a very formal to informal scheme. The students enjoyed meeting the students at the start of the first week to be able to ask them questions lecturers may not be able to answer. The social event also helped the different years to mix. The use of the discussion board was introduced after the pilot stage as the students asked for an area where they could put up questions that could be answered by all students and developed whether it be about a piece of work or where to get help with a problem.
School or faculty-wide

STUDENT SUPPORT MECHANISMS
NEWPORT

Keywords
student expectation, common modules, professional practice and skills

Description/approach
The School of Health and Social Sciences runs core modules for all first year students that cover not only an early introduction to Research (thus introducing students to the wider “story” of Higher Education) but also Skills for Professional Environments – which help new students appreciate the skills that they will need to develop and become successful students and independent learners. Along with this approach, a comprehensive evaluation of the new student experience in week 3 of the first term aims to pick up early indications of difficulty and requirements for further support.

Anticipated outcomes
In an area that has an emphasis on professional practice, students are encouraged at an early stage to place their studies in the context of a wider picture with a view to helping them understand why their courses are structured in the way they are, and how this will help them to progress along their chosen career path.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Student evaluations of the common modules in question have been extremely positive though it is difficult to identify whether engagement levels have increased due to this alone as many positive initiatives are in play simultaneously within the School and University. However, it is fair to say that the third week review has highlighted several cases of additional support that may not have been picked up were the process not in place.

Reflection/impact
Building early confidence for students involved in professional practice related disciplines is very important to ensure satisfaction and progression throughout what are often very demanding programmes. This activity not only achieves this but enables students to become familiar with other students in similar discipline areas.

SCHOOL ETHOS FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS
NEWPORT

Keywords
student expectation, creating community, student communication, student engagement

Description/approach
All new first year students to the Documentary Photography programme are invited to attend an off-campus two night residential orientation and community-building event during the first term.

Anticipated outcomes
The intended result is to generate a group spirit from an early stage as students participate in this prestigious academic programme of study.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Over the last two years of this practice being established, the majority of students on the course have been able to attend (at their own expense) with the result that a close bond has quickly been established between the students with each-other – and with the academic staff who run this often demanding and pressured programme of study.

Reflection/impact
The very nature of this activity has not only aided greatly in the students’ engagement with their studies – but has in itself perpetuated the prestigious perception that accompanies this award winning course. While perhaps not possible with larger cohorts, this approach is seen by all as an excellent means of preparing students to work hard as a group towards a goal of personal and group success and perpetuate the internationally renowned reputation of the programme.

PORTFOLIO OF ACADEMIC SKILLS
BANGOR

Keywords
generic higher education skills

Description/approach
— Small group learning (25) and designed to enhance basic academic skills which are transferable and will support learning skills in other modules
— Linked with JXH1018 module Issues in Sport, Exercise
& Outdoor Activities for workshops on Academic Reading & Writing. Essay topics are available on the wiki — Linked with the Personal Tutor/Mentor System — Module outline is available on the wiki.

**Anticipated outcomes**
- On completion of the module students will have gained an understanding of the academic skills required for a BSc degree
- Identify “at risk” or “high achievers” and refer to appropriate study skills or master classes.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
- Students enjoyed linking Issues module as was related to their degree and not generic so they identified easier with essay topics;
- Some “at risk” students found lectures difficult whereas high achievers felt some classes were too easy so sometimes difficult to find a balance.

**Reflection/impact**
- Sometimes difficult for module tutor to present with variable levels of ability especially if the topic was for only one lecture.

---

**PDP USING WEB 2.0**

**Keywords**
- pdp, vle, student portal, reflection, personal tutor, feedback, e-portfolio

**Aim**
To engage all first year students at the Cardiff School of Sport in a PDP process.

**Description/approach**
All first year students were given instructions on how to create their own PDP Year 1 folder within their student portal site. The students then enabled their personal tutor to have access to this folder. A blog link was then created from Blackboard to their student portal folder which only the personal tutor and student have access to.

Since setting up this folder, all students have been submitting work directly to the student portal folder, including reflections on their University experience. Personal tutors access the individual folders for viewing and also for submitting feedback to each student.

**Anticipated outcomes**
This is the first year that all first year students have created an e-portfolio. The outcome for this portfolio is that all students’ work is directly accessible to their personal tutor and is also an area for personal tutors to provide feedback directly to individual students.

It is also the first initiative to use technology to enhance this process, up until now all portfolios were recorded in paper format.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
This pilot was received well by both students and staff. The overall aim is to expand this model to include all second, third and postgraduate students from the Cardiff School of Sport. The use of a blog connecting with the student portal is a new and successful initiate.

**Reflection/impact**
The student portal enables complete privacy for each individual student. Each student gives permission to their personal tutor to engage in their specific folder. This gives the student full confidence that their information is confidential. This model also provides students with a tool that can be followed throughout their coming years at the University. Upon completion of their course, students will be able to have access to their student account for a further month enabling extra time for saving to another form of storage, the students’ full University experience.

---

**LIBRARY INDUCTION VODCAST**

**Keywords**
- library, induction, youtube

**Aim**
Due to staffing shortages at the time we were aware that our traditional “walk and talk” induction round the library would not be feasible. Also, numbers of attendees had been dropping over the last few years, and less requests were being made by teaching staff for this kind of event. Furthermore we know that at the start of the academic year, Freshers are bombarded with all sorts of information that they quickly become desensitised to.
We decided to keep the “walk and talk”, but condense it and put it online via a link from the Library Homepage to YouTube. We wanted to keep it to 5 minutes maximum as we felt that would be about as long as a student would be prepared to sit in front of a library induction for! And we wanted to cover not only the basic geography of our library, but also all the basic user information: what you need to borrow a book, how to search for one, where to go once you have found it, how many items you can borrow, where to find staff with enquiries, fines(!), etc. By using the basics, prominently it meant the video could also be of some use to students at other sites: the geography would be different, but all the other elements discussed would be exactly the same.

**Description/approach**

We wanted to use one of our Fixed Term Information Assistants to play the role of the “student” as they are typically students themselves that work part time in the library shelving etc. during the evening and weekend opening hours.

This would also allow the student watching to see themselves carrying out the same tasks.

The skeleton of the script was that used previously to carry out the old inductions; marking all the more important and relevant points in order to allow the student to get started in the library. Again we took the decision early on not to include too much in-depth detail about other resources, e-journals, databases etc. This information typically comes at a later date in conjunction with the tutors when the students are beginning to plan for their first assignments – again this was due to keeping to a limited time but also not throwing too much information at the new students too early!

Once we had a draft that covered everything we wanted from a library perspective, we worked with the Learning and Teaching Development Unit’s Ade Clark to turn it into something that would make sense on film. Several more drafts followed, but it was all pretty straightforward. The filming took only one day, with a second day needed for editing, adding music and a few extra shots, and that was it. Uploading the completed film to YouTube was also just as simple. Once you have opened a free account, you can place any films you make there, add your own metadata and descriptions and you are done.

**Anticipated outcomes**

Our initial hope was that more students would see it than would have trooped through our door had we stuck to the old tried and tested physical tour of the library. Anything above that would be a bonus.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

YouTube records all visits and allows visitors to make comments on what they have seen. The video was uploaded in time for the start of the academic year, and by that Christmas, one term, over 1,000 people had visited and watched the video! That was definitely more than would have come through the door to our old inductions. This video was uploaded in September 2007, and we have now received over 4,000 viewings and have been given four stars!

**Reflection/impact**

As with all things it is already a little out of date, and is only available in English. Fortunately the student featured is still working with us and is a Welsh speaker, so some of these hurdles can be overcome. There have also been changes to opening hours (they have now increased) and security (we have new locking systems and cards).

But the basic information is all correct. This was a spur of the moment idea, that not only came to fruition quite easily, but has also proved to be a huge success. All we need to do now is find some time where Ade can come back for a day for us to update and launch “Colchester Ave Library Induction 2.0”.

First year student experience Wales
Programme, Scheme or Award level

EMPLOYABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
GLAMORGAN

Keywords
skills, employability, personal/professional development

Context for the initiative
The initiative is delivered as a module on year one of the Higher National Diploma (HND) and Higher National Certificate (HNC) programmes in the areas of management and business. Its target audiences are thus first year HND/HNC students as new entrants to the HE environment.

Aim
The general aim of the module is to develop key skills underpinning academic study and employability, through further personal and professional development.

Description/approach
The module is very much about students taking control of their own academic development early on, and deciding for themselves which aspects of the study skills that underpin their other subject-specific modules they would wish to develop further, over the course of the year. To support this, the module assesses their entry-level key skills early, through self-diagnostic activities and a 1-2-1 interview, and asks students to identify areas for improvement over the year ahead. The module handbook contains exercises and activities which support and reinforce each week’s skills-based workshop session incrementally as well as providing elements for their developing portfolio, itself assessed as part of assignments 2 and 3. At the end of the module, having completed activities from basic numeracy and communications through to advanced problem-solving, research and creative thinking, students submit a reflective essay considering their development over the year and their future ‘skills plans’ – the emphasis being on continuous professional development. They also attend a final 1-2-1 interview to assess their exit-level skills and motivate them for their second and subsequent years of study, and beyond.

The guiding framework for the module is Kolb’s learning cycle which is directly referred to at the beginning of the workshop programme and underpins the assessment strategy and much of the workshop activity. Learning outcomes are thus about students evidencing their skill development in a number of ways: engaging in individual and group based activities and experiences; the ability to reflect on those experiences; the ability to conclude realistically from reflections; and the ability to plan ahead and practice new skills and behaviours.

Anticipated outcomes
The module is designed to improve the way in which students engage with their own academic and skills development, in this and their other modules, and take ownership of this process. It is anticipated that by the end of the year-long programme, students will have developed a ‘learning mindset’ appropriate to their own context, skills and needs; planning further skills development, for the second year of the programme and beyond, is the major focus of the final assignment.

Evidence of actual outcomes
The nature of this module and its assessment means that evidence of the anticipated outcomes is always a challenge to obtain; the skills being developed throughout the module are both personal and contextual so only the students themselves are fully able to evaluate how effective it has been in achieving its goals, for them as individuals. The indirect impact is likely to be felt in other modules and classes incrementally throughout the year as the students apply in their subject-specific classes the skills they have started to hone during workshop sessions. Quantifying this correlation, in terms of the ‘feed-through’ effect on student grades, remains almost impossible, however it may be possible to infer outcomes from wider programme data.

In the 2007/08 academic year, for the group based at the University of Glamorgan’s Treforest campus, 64 students submitted the first assignment in November and 60 the final assignment in April. The grades for the final assignment in 2007/08 followed a normal distribution, peaking in the 60–69% (merit) range. Of the 60 who submitted their final assignment 54 students (90%) are studying the programme’s second year in 2008/09. Whilst it would clearly be inappropriate to suggest that the students’ ability to progress through their first-year studies was solely the impact of this module, the module team takes great pride in the contribution made to students’ engagement with the academic challenges they will face in their future studies and to their ability to rearrange their own skills priorities accordingly.

Reflection/impact
With each review the module seems well received by the students, at Glamorgan and across the University’s network of Partner FE Colleges where this programme is also taught.
The team-teaching format adopted for large student numbers at Glamorgan, combined with the developing teaching-team approach throughout the Partner College network, makes this an interesting and well-supported module, for all involved. Comments from colleagues about recent changes of assessment weighting to refocus attention on the final reflective discussion and portfolio, in particular, have been very positive.

**Final note:** The module leaders wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of colleagues currently delivering and developing this module within the Partner College network, and to those involved in the creation and development of this course in its earlier incarnations; we would not have been able to develop such a successful initiative without your support.

---

**VOLUNTARY BUDDY SYSTEM**

**GLAMORGAN**

**Keywords**

student support, integration, experience

**Aim**

The voluntary buddy system is targeted at year one chiropractic students and chiropractic foundation (year 0) students.

**Description/approach**

In order to integrate new students within the established chiropractic student body, the Division of Chiropractic has a voluntary system whereby students in year 2 are linked with incoming year 1 students. This system has been very successful and it has been extended to include the year 0 entry the year this course commenced. The Division of Chiropractic provides the administrative support for the scheme, however the year 2 students and the Chiropractic Student Society organise and manage the social events associated with the programme. Feedback from students indicates that this is extremely well received and has been acknowledged as a model of best practice within the University.

**Anticipated outcomes**

The programme was developed to create an additional support mechanism for new chiropractic students (year 0 and year 1) managed by year 2 students and overseen by the Chiropractic Student Society. The anticipated outcomes were to enhance year 0 and 1 students initial integration and communication within a new programme of study in a new environment.

---

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

The Division has received good feedback from both new students and programme organisers directly and via the chiropractic student council which meets once per term.

**Reflection/impact**

This programme represents an attempt to welcome and integrate new students in a professional university based education into the existing student body and provide another level of support as part of their overall experience. This programme personifies and encourages inter-year communication and friendship as the students in the chiropractic programme interact throughout the four year education in many ways associated with learning and assessment. They also develop strong professional bonds that will have benefits in the future after graduation as they embark on their professional career. This programme was also designed to instil confidence early in the educational process.

---

**STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS ON ASSESSMENT**

**CARDIFF**

**Keywords**

assessment, focus groups, engagement

**Description/approach**

In order to find out how assessment is used in the BA degree within the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies (JOMEC) and in particular how assessment is viewed by students in the first year, eight focus groups were carried out in May 2007.

It was found that students enjoyed the process of continuous assessment as it motivated them to work throughout the semester, and that they wanted to be more challenged. Students were found to have a fear of ‘failure’ and could potentially struggle with tasks that require independence as learners.

The essay system of assessment was not seen as being a useful learning tool. There was a desire for more portfolio work and mini-tests. There was also a feeling that the first year needs to carry some weight towards the final degree mark so that students can feel that their work during that time is of importance.

There was a lack of a sense of School identity, with students feeling that they come in, do their work and leave.
There was a desire for earlier feedback so that this could be made use of as a learning tool. Seminar participation was noted as a good practice, as long as it is linked with a good seminar structure. Formative assessment and reading responses were also mentioned by students as ways of engaging with a task, and with each other.

**Anticipated outcomes**
- Changes to First Year curriculum, which did happen. A new module called Media Scholarship was established in September 2008
- A greater understanding at a senior level of the importance of initiatives which created a sense of community within the Schools
- Changes to the induction process. Students now spend more time with their personal tutors in the first week.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
These findings have prompted several changes for first year students within the School. There is an improved induction programme to foster a better sense of belonging to a learning community. More challenging first year modules have been introduced as well as a skills-based Media Scholarship Module, involving a group presentation, reflexive ‘blog’ and a literature review with annotated bibliography and research trail. Further, the introduction of continuing professional development has helped a sense of engagement with the School to develop.

**ENHANCING PASTORAL SUPPORT**
**BANGOR**

**Keywords**
student retention, supportive environment, personal tutor/student communication

**Aim**
The aim of the revisions to our pastoral care scheme was to provide outstanding pastoral care to all of our students (particularly those in year one), to aid retention, and to provide a supportive environment for students throughout their studies.

**Description/approach**
All of our year one students are allocated to a personal tutor who is a dedicated member of the School’s Teaching Team and who is based in the Wheldon Building (the centre for Psychology students). We require all students to meet with their tutors at set times of the year:

- **Year one students** – in Welcome Week; at the start of semester two in order to receive their semester one results, and at the end of the year.
- **Year two and three students** – in week one of semester one, at the start of semester two in order to receive their semester one results, and at the end of the year.
- Students who are in years two and three of their degree are then allocated to a “research active” member of staff as their tutor for the remainder of their studies.

In addition to this, all tutors have access to an online, web-based system, which allows personal tutors to update any mitigating circumstances for their students. These notes are accessible only to the student’s personal tutor, the Senior Tutor and the School’s Student Administrator.

**Anticipated outcomes**
As stated previously, we hoped to help increase student retention and ability.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**
Since we introduced the new system our student retention across all three years of undergraduate study has dramatically increased. In addition, student satisfaction of the pastoral care scheme has also increased.

---

**LIFE THROUGH A LENS – INDUCTION PHOTO PROJECT**
**UWIC**

**Keywords**
photo journal, fresher experience

Two programmes were involved – BSc (Hons) Psychology and BA (Hons) Community Education, based on different campuses – Llandaff and Cyncoed.

**Aim**
The main aim of the project was to gain the views of the first year students as to what was important to them throughout the first 3 weeks of term. What they had liked, disliked and so by understanding more clearly what they considered a negative or positive experience be able to improve that first experience both academically and socially. The aim was to carry this out in a different medium other than survey etc.
Description/approach
The students were all handed a notebook pen and disposable camera and a sheet explaining the project. They were given three weeks to hand back in the completed camera and books. Each time they took a photo they were asked to note down why they had taken the photo and what it meant to them. They were given examples of what they could possibly take photos of in two lists – something that makes you smile and something that annoys or delays you. It was then explained to them what would happen to the pictures and their commentary. Once collected in the photos were processed and paired with the students comments. These were then split into themes and a photo journal produced with these themes as the different chapters showing the pictures and comments of the students.

Anticipated outcomes
Collection of the thoughts and views of students in a different medium, to be able to be presented to future students and to be used with pre-entry students for discussion. A collection of themes that are rated as important by the student not just by staff – both academically and socially.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Production of over 400 photos in a library to choose from regarding first experiences of UWIC. Commentary on what was thought to be positive and negative alongside the pictures. Production of photo journal and posters describing what to expect from the students point of view and what they found important over the first few weeks to be handed out at Freshers Fayre.

Reflection/impact
Most of the students were happy to engage with the project although it did need close monitoring by the Programme Leader for collection of the diary and cameras. The students felt that they could take pictures without worrying what and why they had taken them and provided plenty of commentary to the pictures. They thought it was a nice way of documenting the first three weeks and asked for copies of the photos to be returned to them. There was a balance between academic and social issues and a lot of the students commented on coping with the day to day living experience.

Module or subject level

COMPUTERISED PEER-ASSESSMENT
GLAMORGAN

Keywords
peer-support, peer-assessment, summative, formative

Description/approach
There are often concerns in lecturing first year undergraduate students with regard to their ability to develop an understanding of the subject area and also to develop their presentational skills to the standard expected in higher education. It has been proposed that numerous formative assessments will provide a significant developmental process for them. However, there are two major obstacles that may well have an effect upon the success of this process:

a) students will often not put any effort into formative tasks i.e. no reward;

b) for tutors to provide appropriate developmental feedback is not feasible due to time constraints.

The study described in this initiative made use of student peer assessment/support in an attempt to counter the concerns expressed previously. In a module studying Computer Architecture a possible standard assessment would be: develop an essay that will provide guidelines for a user to purchase an appropriate computer for personal use and permitting Internet access. In order to accomplish this assignment the student may be expected to cover areas such as computer hardware, software and Internet access.

This study made use of such an assignment but broke it down into the three components mentioned previously i.e. essay on hardware, essay on software and also an essay on internet access. This being quite a large class the actual marking and provision of separate feedback by the tutor would have been a significantly onerous task.

It was therefore decided to make use of the CAP (Computerized Peer-Assessment system) as a means of supporting the assessment of each of these three tasks. In this way students with prior experience in the subject area could support those of a limited computing
background. Also these less experienced students would be able to view examples of both good and poor practice of their peers. Having progressed through this process the students were expected as in the past to produce a ‘standard’ essay that covered all areas of the study that would be marked by the tutor. Thus the tutor’s load did not increase, yet the stages of feedback associated with the three tasks could be amalgamated together as a guide for the final submission (it should be noted that any student not presenting an essay for peer-marking would not be permitted to view their peers’ work.

The marks awarded for this assignment constituted 50% of the module’s overall grade. The split of this mark was developed in the ratio of:

— 5% for task one (peer average)
— 5% for task two (peer average)
— 5% for task three (peer average)
— 30% for the essay (tutor generated)
— 5% for performing all three stages of peer-marking/feedback

**Anticipated outcomes**

It was anticipated that the students would develop throughout the progress of the module by acting upon the feedback of their peers. By breaking down the task into three distinct elements then this would allow students of varying strengths to develop a final essay that met the required standards of the module’s assessment.

**Evidence of actual outcomes**

The results from this assignment were very positive with over 90% of the students submitting and peer-marking all three of the preliminary tasks. The students who initially had quite low peer grades for the early task improved throughout the assessment process. The feedback provided by the students was excellent with considerable constructive quality shown. The study ensured that anonymity was present throughout and the students were only allowed to view the feedback not the marks allocated by their peers.

**Reflection/impact**

The students who participated in this study were very supportive of its methods. It developed a ‘group’ togetherness and supported the weaker students at an early stage of their studies both in the subject area and also in their presentational skills. The balance of personal development and summative assessment proposed by this study did not increase the tutor work-load with regard to marking, but permitted the tutor to view the feedback from students to their peers. This in its own way permitted a monitoring of progress of the student as they needed to show subject knowledge themselves in order to evaluate their peers. The feedback provided by the students was significantly more detailed than a tutor would have provided (due to time constraints) and it was pleasing to note how the students increased the quantity of their feedback as the study progressed.

**PEER ASSISTED STUDY SUPPORT (PASS)**

**Keywords**

collaborative learning; personalised learning; social learning communities; study skills; communication and leadership skills; employability; achieving potential; retention; student experience; partnership

**Aim**

— Support the first year student experience through collaborative exploratory discussion
— Enhance the learning experience and Personal Development of PASS Leaders
— Improve academic performance and achievement and increase retention
— Provide an additional mechanism for communication and feedback between teaching staff and students.

**Description/approach**

— Learning enhancement through student to student support scheme
— Trained student PASS Leaders facilitate study sessions for groups of lower year students
— PASS is voluntary and intended to offer a safe, friendly place to help students;
— Enhance their awareness of course direction and expectations
— Content is based on course materials and PASS leaders are engaged in sharing their experiences and facilitating discussion rather than re-teaching the subject.

**Anticipated outcomes**

Institutional and faculty level

— Improving the student experience and academic performance
— Reducing student drop out rates
School and discipline level
- Providing staff with regular and ongoing feedback
- Highlighted as good practice by QAA
- Improves student study skills
- Fostering a spirit of community.

Student level
- Provides support and guidance
- Non-threatening and non-remedial
- Social benefits
- Increased academic confidence
- Improved communication, teamwork, collaborative problem solving & interpersonal skills.

PASS Leaders
- Personal development opportunity;
- Skills development – leadership, communication, teamwork etc.
- Opportunity to reflect, review and re-evaluate
- Increased academic performance
- Recognition and Reward.

Evidence of actual outcomes
Pilot commences in October 2009 and will be monitored in 09/10 culminating in an evaluation at the end of the academic year.

Reflection/impact
Too early to reflect.

References


The Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy supports the sector in providing the best possible learning experience for all students. It does this by:

— providing national leadership in developing and disseminating evidence-informed practice about enhancing the student learning experience
— operating as an independent broker, enabling expertise to be shared across institutions and subject areas
— working at multiple levels, with individual academics, subject communities, departments, faculties and institutions
— working across all parts of the UK, recognising the distinctive policy contexts and priorities of the devolved administrations but also providing opportunities to share expertise among them.

The Academy is an independent organisation funded by grants from the four UK higher education funding bodies, subscriptions from higher education institutions, and grant and contract income for specific initiatives.

www.heacademy.ac.uk

The Higher Education Academy
Innovation Way
York Science Park
Heslington
York YO10 5BR

Tel: +44 (0)1904 717500
Fax: +44 (0)1904 717505

© The Higher Education Academy
October 2009

All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, criticism or review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any other form or by any other means, graphic, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, taping or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing of the publishers.

To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact the Academy.
Get out of MySpace!

Norah Jones¹, Haydn Blackey², Karen Fitzgibbon³, Esyin Chew*

Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, CF37 1DL, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 30 April 2009
Accepted 14 July 2009

Keywords:
Social software
Web 2.0
Technology enhanced learning
Higher education

ABSTRACT

To understand the student experience on social software, the research aims to explore the disruptive nature and opportunity of social networking for higher education. Taking four universities, the research: (1) identifies the distinction between the students’ current usage of social software; (2) reports on the students’ experience on opportunities and challenges of learning with social software; and (3) introduces principles as a guideline in using social software for learning. Quantitative research methods (web-based questionnaires) were incorporated to investigate the pattern of learners’ usage. Qualitative methods (student interviews) were adopted to clarify and further inform this relationship and their attitudes towards social software for learning. The results demonstrate a massive use of educational technology with distinct divide between the learning space and personal space. Student voices reveal that the central problem of such divide is due to the contrast perception and experience of ‘learning/studying and social life’. We argue that online learning and social personas may overlap but that learning needs to be designed so that it addresses the individual preferences to combine or separate the two domains. The paper concludes with a few principles of learning with social software grounded in students’ experience and Vygotsky’s paradigm.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

There are vast opportunities for students, academics and the institutions in using social software for learning, teaching and assessment. Based on different schools of literature reviews, the University of Glamorgan summarises the benefits of how social software enhanced learning and teaching experiences in higher education (refer to Table 1). Dawson (2008) explores and demonstrates the relationship between student’s sense of community and the position within the formed social network. He provides recommendation to educators to embed computer-mediated communications in teaching practices for learner participation and progression in the curriculum. Hrastinski (2009) further asserts that online student participation is a complex process of taking part and maintaining relations with others. Online participation is supported by physical and psychological tools, and is supported by all kinds of engaging activities (p. 78). Social software may provide such a flexible environment for learner participation.

Higher education today seems to highlight the value of the emergence of social software (Dawson, 2006, 2008; Murugesan, 2007). However, the debates on individual privacy (Rosenblum, 2007) and students’ recognition/rejection of social software for learning may increase simultaneously. It is a common practice to provide personal information such as name and email, when a user signs up for social software. Educators and students may have reservation about this basic requirement due to the privacy and data protection issues. Cole (2009) further describes a ‘failed experiment’ that embed social software to support student engagement for a third year undergraduate module. She asserts that social software (e.g. Wikis) is perceived differently in an educational context, compared with ordinary personal usage and this discourages student adoption. Tams (2006) also reports that the students’ self-directed social learning have a limited influence on their self-efficacy. To understand these arguments, an investigation from students’ perspective is necessary. Using the analogy of a student interviewees’ assertion, “get out of MySpace”, the aim of this paper is to explore the disruptive nature and opportunities of social software from students’ experience.
2. Research methods and samples

Adelman, Kemimis, and Jenkins (1980) identifies that case study methodology is able to effectively evaluate the flexibility of reality in the complex educational environments. This study incorporated a single analysis across multiple case studies with qualitative-quantitative interactive continuum methodology (Newman & Benz, 1998; Yin, 2003). Taking four anonymous universities, the research aimed to (1) identify the distinction between the students’ current usage of social software; (2) report on the students’ experience on opportunities and challenges of learning with social software; and (3) introduce principles as a guideline in using social software for learning. Quantitative research methods (online questionnaires on http://www.surveyshare.com) were incorporated to investigate the pattern of students’ usage in four universities. Qualitative methods (interviews) were adopted to clarify and further inform this relationship and their attitudes towards social software for learning. There are 76 responses from the questionnaires and 14 students’ voices from the recorded face-to-face interviews. All interviews lasted between 40 min and 2.5 h. The names of the interviewees as well as the institutions are anonymous due to the consideration of confidentiality and ethics. Tables 2 and 3 present the basic respondents’ profile by gender and general disciplinary background (see Table 4).

Table 1
The benefit of social software for higher education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Academics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Widely spread, easy and free usage without much support from the University</td>
<td>- All students’ benefits listed at the left column</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Enhance communication skills, widening participation and social engagement and collaboration</td>
<td>- More flexible and user friendly than Blackboard in certain way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Encourage peer-support and review</td>
<td>- Stimulate more interesting ideas in teaching and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Create learning interest through community of learning</td>
<td>- Meet individual’s need than services provided internally by the University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Create educational engagement and sense of ownership when the learning process is published on the web. Able to retain access to their work, communication and learning history after they leave the University</td>
<td>- Simple steps to get peers or other researchers to be involve in a research group or the same service for information and media sharing, and opportunities for instant feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutional benefits
- Enhancing blended learning experiences with all the above benefits
- Improving students inductions and retentions

(Blackey & Chew, 2009).

Table 2
Respondents’ profile – gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender: (gender)</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Response ratio (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>59.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Respondents skipped question #2</td>
<td>76 Responses total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Respondents’ profile – faculty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The nature of your faculty: (faculty)</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Response ratio (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science, Engineering or Information Technology</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences, Art, Education, Law, Business and Accountancy</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical, Health or Sport</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Respondents skipped question #3</td>
<td>76 Responses total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Respondents’ profile for face-to-face interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>HEI 1</th>
<th>HEI 2</th>
<th>HEI 3</th>
<th>HEI 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science-based</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science-based</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (N = 14)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Results and discussion

3.1. The students’ current usage of social software and the top reasons of using educational technology for learning

To identify the distinction between the students’ current usage of social software and reasons for using educational technology for learning, two questions were asked to the students: (1) How often do you use the educational technology listed below, within your learning process? (This would include preparing and submitting course work and assessment feedback) (2) What is your reason for using the educational technology mentioned in the previous question?

Not surprisingly, Fig. 1 demonstrates that Power Point and VLE are the most commonly used educational technology in the four higher educational institutions. Most of the student interviewees have registered with several social software such as Facebook, blog and MySpace. However, more than 70% of the respondents rarely or never use social software for learning according to the responses in Fig. 1 (refer to the figures in circle a). This phenomenon demonstrates a clear divide of social software usage for learning purposes and for social life privately. Among the usage of social software for learning, Wikis is in the first rank of all – more than 40% of the respondents always or often use Wikis within the learning process in Fig. 1 (refer to the figures in circle b).

Fig. 2 shows the reasons of why students would like to use educational technology for learning. There is more than 90% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the reasons: (1) enjoy the use of technologies and online activities (refer to the figures in circle c: 94.74%); (2) the need for more communications platform with peers and students (refer to the figures in circle d: 96%) and (3) peer sharing and encouraging (refer to the figures in circle d: 93.34%). Interestingly, the nature of social software fits into these top three reasons of the technology enhanced learning experience. Nevertheless, there is a significant gap if we compared the ‘usage of social software for learning’ to the ‘reasons of using educational technology for learning’. It could be argued that such gap may be caused by the emerging social software that is new to educators. Other factors and issues may also appear to contribute to the obstacle. A further investigation for the challenges and opportunities of learning with social software are necessary.

3.2. The disruption – the challenges and opportunities of social software for learning

There are four main themes emerged from the students’ voices during the interview: (1) the separation of life and studying; (2) originality and copyright issues; (3) sense of information flooded; (4) time constraint based on their disconfirming experiences and (5) lecturers are not up-to-date and may not know how to integrate and make use of social software.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Software</th>
<th>Always (%)</th>
<th>Often (%)</th>
<th>Not Often (%)</th>
<th>Never (%)</th>
<th>N/A (%)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Overhead Projector</td>
<td>18.92% (14)</td>
<td>21.62% (16)</td>
<td>37.84% (26)</td>
<td>16.22% (12)</td>
<td>5.41% (4)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PowerPoint</td>
<td>57.63% (40)</td>
<td>36.84% (26)</td>
<td>9.21% (7)</td>
<td>1.32% (1)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Website</td>
<td>6.33% (4)</td>
<td>25.33% (19)</td>
<td>36.00% (27)</td>
<td>24.00% (16)</td>
<td>9.33% (7)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Assessment System</td>
<td>8.11% (6)</td>
<td>22.31% (17)</td>
<td>29.15% (20)</td>
<td>22.68% (15)</td>
<td>4.00% (3)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Simulation</td>
<td>10.01% (9)</td>
<td>34.73% (26)</td>
<td>41.99% (31)</td>
<td>20.77% (15)</td>
<td>7.70% (7)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Learning Environment (e.g.: Blackboard)</td>
<td>20.27% (15)</td>
<td>37.84% (28)</td>
<td>27.03% (20)</td>
<td>12.16% (9)</td>
<td>2.70% (2)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Forum</td>
<td>6.50% (5)</td>
<td>26.32% (20)</td>
<td>40.79% (28)</td>
<td>20.85% (15)</td>
<td>5.26% (4)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Discussion Board</td>
<td>5.41% (4)</td>
<td>27.03% (20)</td>
<td>36.49% (27)</td>
<td>26.68% (19)</td>
<td>5.41% (4)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Chat Room</td>
<td>12.16% (9)</td>
<td>16.22% (12)</td>
<td>25.68% (19)</td>
<td>40.51% (30)</td>
<td>5.41% (4)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>12.18% (9)</td>
<td>32.43% (24)</td>
<td>44.59% (33)</td>
<td>5.76% (5)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Conference</td>
<td>5.41% (4)</td>
<td>14.86% (11)</td>
<td>28.38% (21)</td>
<td>41.89% (31)</td>
<td>9.46% (7)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-community</td>
<td>10.01% (8)</td>
<td>24.32% (18)</td>
<td>52.70% (39)</td>
<td>12.16% (9)</td>
<td>4.00% (3)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Time Polling System</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>0.01% (1)</td>
<td>55.41% (41)</td>
<td>13.51% (10)</td>
<td>4.00% (3)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich Media Learning Object (e.g.: flash learning object)</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>20.27% (15)</td>
<td>37.84% (26)</td>
<td>32.43% (24)</td>
<td>5.41% (4)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasting</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>2.70% (2)</td>
<td>55.41% (41)</td>
<td>13.51% (10)</td>
<td>4.00% (3)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webquest</td>
<td>4.00% (3)</td>
<td>10.67% (8)</td>
<td>26.67% (20)</td>
<td>46.67% (35)</td>
<td>12.00% (9)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiki</td>
<td>10.00% (8)</td>
<td>21.33% (16)</td>
<td>34.67% (26)</td>
<td>20.00% (15)</td>
<td>4.00% (3)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. The responses of the current usage of social software for learning.
3.2.1. The separation of life and studying

In the context of higher education, there is a general campaign and trend for life-long learning, inquiry-based learning, peer-assisted learning and learning in groups for social constructivists. On the other hand, there is an interesting argument appeared from the students’ voices in this research – they refuse to use social software for learning due to their separation of ‘life’ and studying’ or ‘home’ and ‘lectures’. Learning is a ‘painful’ process where as social life is pleasure to many students. One of them has a strong and disconfirming assertion:

Interviewer: “Do you think that social software can provide a more holistic learning for you if they were embedded in the learning module?”

Student C1: “No! Get out from my space! ... social software is for fun you know, not for study!”

Many educational giants such as Dewey and Vygotsky claim that learning in a social constructive approach and working in group are substantial. One’s knowledge is developmentally constructed in socio-cultural interactions by languages and we cannot separate socio-cultural life and learning according to Vygotsky (Cortazzi & Hall, 1999; Chew, Jones, & Turner, 2008). In reality, students (or even educators) may have a clear divide between “life” and “studying”. A question was asked during the paper’s presentation of the last Computer-assisted Learning Conference (CAL, 2009) – do you normally separate social life and studying/work? More than a half of the audiences’ indicate an affirmative response. We have no intention to involve in the arguments of should we or not to separate social life and studying/working. All individual has different preferences. We would definitely argue that learning and social personas may overlap but that learning needs to be designed so that it addresses the individuals’ preferences to combine or separate the two domains. At this point, we would like to assert that the main disruptive nature of social software for learning is to challenge the divide between social life and higher educational process. It has provided an option of environment for both educators and students to fully make use of the social connection to enhance learning and teaching experience. Social software makes both educators and students to have further connection and communication with each other or with people outside the classroom. However, it is a challenge for educators and students to have a choice to combine or separate learning and social life, either partially or completely.

3.2.2. Originality and copyright issues

There seems to be some confusion over who is the original contributor of an idea that is published on social software such as blogs and Wikis. Students may have difficulties to identify the original sources and make academic references from there. Consider the following voices:

“...it (Wikis or blogs) is easy rather than the official references, only up to a limit I can trust the sources” ~ Student D1.

“...if everybody shared their ideas and who do you pick up which is the originally first voice up about certain topic? You know, and maybe certain ideas you came across from reading, not your personal thoughts, where you got your ideas from and things like that. That would be good to have it without this concern.” ~ Student D5.

Uploading and storing material for learning and teaching purposes to external social software sites is increasingly a common practice within and outside most case studies of the research. However, it is a good practice to verify those published materials on social software sites – to ensure they do not contain material which infringes someone’s copyright (Blackey & Chew, 2009).
3.2.3. Sense of information flooded and time constraint

It is exciting to see the diversity of views and discussions. However, it is not a recent issue with too much information that is available online. Students experience the sense of information flooded and time constraint as described next,

“It is certainly interesting to work with social software...there will be too much information perhaps.” ~ Student D3

“There are too many activities in the university... we are the ‘machine’ of organising / joining activities and the ‘machine’ of doing assignments... Unless you are very free or interested in them, otherwise you already very tired after all sorts of activities. You will have no energy or time to post any notes or join in any online discussion for learning.” ~ Student A2

Some students may not keen in additional “e-tivities” since there are so many physical activities to be involved. Only by individual interest or with extra time availability, students would go further to participate in online activities. In contrast to the massive take-up of certain social software such as Facebook among student cohort, the issue of time-consuming could be related to the attitude of separating social life and learning. Students may perceive Facebook or blog as personal and social pleasure and has nothing to do with the curriculum learning.

Lecturers are not up-to-date and may not know how to integrate and make use of social software

Social software is not the cause of an issue but the lecturer is. Students further expressed their wish list from a pedagogical perspective. For example, students hope their lecturers could teach innovatively, teach with educational passion and keep themselves up-to-date:

“I hope the lecturer can teach other than the conventional way, more things other than the subject area itself. I think many lecturers are not up-to-date!” ~ Student A2

“The problem now is not because of the technology...the problem is the lecturers themselves. The lecturers do not know how to integrate all these. Perhaps the lecturers know how to use them but it is useless if they don’t have passion in education.” ~ Student A1

Other than the challenges discussed above, there are also two main opportunities emerged from the investigations: (1) create community of inquiry that motivate learning experience and (2) independent learning experience for better employability. Social software especially the online communities were mentioned by students:

“...I think that’s actually good in creating a community feeling about learning...they could be more interesting.” ~ Student D5

“Wikipedia is an awesome tool. I use that a lot...as in giving background or giving you an idea and overall view...some of my courses also have programming and software writing, it’s very useful to get into e-community, forums and discuss. Basically you can post a question and they will answer you.” ~ Student D4

“It’s very easy to find information from Wikipedia because everything is there.” ~ Student D5

From the students’ experience, it appears that the “feeling” or sense of community is interesting and motivating. It could be argued that it is worrying about the academic integrity for Wikipedia or getting ‘answer’ from e-forums without further digesting. However, the peer-support from the community is very useful to students learning experience in a social community which they feel belong to.

3.2.4. Independent learning experience for employability

In the study, students highlight how social software enhances their learning experience – that is to promote independent learning for employability, for example:

“...it actually encourages you to find the knowledge by yourselves, not making you so depended to have a person telling you what to do and what to think which is a very important thing out from the university...I feel that one lesson I have learnt in the university is that, we don’t know everything, you go tofind it out yourself, that is something you need in job...I can’t depend on a lecturer or a boss to tell me, just do this and it will works. That’s something that I like Wikipedia, e-learning...have a lot of resources.” ~ Student D4

“I think it can be beneficial...in the real working environment, you have to be more independent. It certainly a strength if you are able to be independent in your work and I think that will be part of your university life.” ~ Student D5

In the past, one may practice the tabula rasa where “students were assumed to be at a blank state – know nothing about the subject; lecturer preaches and students learn solely from the lecturer’s instilling. Students develop knowledge ‘deposited’ by lecturer”. Today, independent learning such as reflective, problem-based and inquiry-based learning is emphasised in higher education. Such skill sets are critical to enhance employability of a student. Table 5 summarise the challenges and opportunities.

Table 5
Summary of findings for research question [2].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social life vs. studying – “Get out of MySpace!”</td>
<td>Create community of inquiry that motivate learning experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time consuming – online/offline activities vs. personal interest</td>
<td>It appears that the “feeling” or sense of community is interesting and motivating. Peer support from the community is very useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers do not know how to integrate and make use of social software vs. students expect for innovative and up-to-date learning and teaching experience</td>
<td>Independent learning experience for employability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual property, originality and copyright issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of information flooded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
alternately to design curriculum-only social interaction within the particular course and time frame (that could possibly divide “life and studying”) – if so, what are the available social software provide such varies and flexible functions?

Vygotsky asserts that the learning process is facilitated by a more-skilled peer or educator through socio-cultural interactions (Cortazzi & Hall, 1999; Jennifer & Monfries, 1995) – the Zone of Proximal Development. Principally we agree with Vygotsky’s claim. Based on the reflection from the research findings, we would further assert that, in higher educational context, both students and educators could also have a choice to either separate them or to combine their life and studying to a certain level (somewhere between X and Y in Fig. 3). We label this choice as the continuum of “socio-learning divide” as depicted next.

Certainly we do not argue that which point at the continuum would provide the better learning experience. This is left to the individual educator or student to decide. Our argument, at this point, in that social software has become part of the social life and educational ecosystem for students. However, how does the current social software design and development being attentive to individual socio-learning divide and supporting them by giving them a choice? We argue that online learning and social personas may overlap but that learning needs to be designed so that it addresses the individual’ preferences to combine or separate the two domains. Above all, how to make the students to believe in this / how to make the lecturers to practice this is a challenge.

4. Social software for learning – the institutional consideration

Cole (2009) discusses a series of insights ‘which help educators to understand the pitfalls of integrating social technologies in educational contexts’ (p. 141). Blackey and Chew (2009) highlight the key issues and considerations for using social software in learning, teaching and assessment based on various schools of literature review. The findings and reflections in this study challenge the current design and development of social software and the educational expectation that students/educators should either combine or separate or social life and studying/working. With the consideration of socio-learning divide, we further suggest a few principles of learning with social software grounded in learners’ experience and Vygotsky’s paradigm. These principles act as a guideline for institutional consideration in using social software for learning:

1. Introduce and integrate community of inquiry (social life + study) in learning enhanced by social software, e.g. UoG Facebook (2009) provides a social group to potential and current students for both learning and social life.
2. Promote independent learning environment with social software, e.g. embed collaborative work using Wikis, reflective blog and discussion forum.
3. Provide more evidence from learner experience and expectation to support the lecturers’ ABC (awareness before change), e.g. consider further institutional research based on student expectation and experience to inform a stronger case for change.
4. Consider Intellectual property, privacy, originality and copyright issue, e.g. Consider to develop an institutional social software policy for learning.
5. Embed social software in learning, teaching and assessment may lead to many opportunities. As such, it is necessary for an university to commit to support academics as follows:
   a. Create the community of inquiry; promote social software for student motivation and engagement, both academically and socially, in the learning process.
   b. Provide support for academics at all stage of social software usage for learning, teaching and assessment.
   c. Evidences from learners’ experiences on social software are pertinent to the policy. This includes specific reference to how social software could contribute to improving learning engagement.
   d. Recognise the socio-learning divide and adopt social software that would support such divide.
   e. Consider a range of principles, considerations and terms of conditions for the usage of social software, and provide related information for a fair boundary in terms of students or academics being neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by the use of social software in education.

5. Conclusions

The study demonstrates a massive use of educational technology such as Power Point, VLE and Wikis with distinct divide between the learning space and personal space in four case studies. We would assert that the nature of social software fits into these top three reasons of the technology enhanced learning experience indicated by students in four institutions. Nevertheless, there is a significant gap if we compared the ‘usage of social software for learning’ to the ‘reasons of using educational technology for learning’. Five main issues derived from students’ voices during the interview: (1) the separation of life and studying; (2) originality and copyright issues; (3) sense of information flooded; (4) time constraint based on their disconfirming experiences and (5) lecturers are not up-to-date and may not know how to integrate and make use of social software. On the other hand, there are two primary benefits and opportunities brought by social software: (1) create community of inquiry that motivates learning experience and (2) independent learning experience for better employability.

Students and educators could also have a choice to either separate or to combine their life and studying to a certain level. We suggest this choice using an analogy of continuum of “socio-learning divide”. The findings illustrate that the central problem of such divide is due to the contrast perception and experience of ‘learning/study and social life’. This gap was further exploited with the influential educational theorist of this learning approach, Vygotsky, who asserts that the learning process is facilitated by more-skilled peer or educator through
socio-cultural interactions (Cortazzi & Hall, 1999; Jennifer & Monfries, 1995). One shall not separate social life and learning according to Vygotsky. We further argue that online learning and social personas may overlap but that learning needs to be designed so that it addresses the individual’s preferences to combine or separate the two domains. The lecturers’ issues (i.e. lecturer is not up-to-date and do not know how to integrate technology with learning and teaching) were highlighted by some students. Social software is not about technology or computer system. It is an ideal that drive the student/educators to reflect their learning and teaching practice. We would urge that educator should be keenly aware of the learner’s personal characteristics and social milieu in addition to the teaching activities, and to design and facilitate such social and cultural experiences.

References


Is it worth it?

An evaluation of a student attendance monitoring initiative

Karen M Fitzgibbon
School of Humanities, Law & Social Sciences
University of Glamorgan
Pontypridd
CF37 1DL
Tel: 01443 482050
Email: kfitzgib@glam.ac.uk

D Julie Prior
School of Technology
University of Glamorgan
Pontypridd
CF37 1DL
Tel: 01443 483657
Email: djprior1@glam.ac.uk
Is it worth it? An evaluation of a student attendance monitoring initiative

Abstract

The University of Glamorgan has a policy of encouraging widening participation. In an effort to support students from non-traditional backgrounds during their first year of study, two projects have been running in the Business School and School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The projects have been set up to monitor student attendance and intervene to support students who show lower than average attendance profiles. The data from the studies is then used to determine students at risk of early withdrawal.

The scope of this paper is to give an overview of the projects involved in this action research, discuss methods of data collection, provide details of the interventions used and offer our conclusions about the value of such a system and whether the perceived link between attendance and student retention was found to be evident.

Students on a variety of Awards from three Academic Subject Categories have been monitored weekly, using two methods of data collection: electronic registers created from paper based registers and electronic swipe cards. The number of students monitored weekly is approximately 1000 across the two Schools.

The two project leaders maintain a system of follow-ups throughout the academic year and liaise with module tutors and students to facilitate high levels of module attendance. The nature of the interventions vary, but the neutral role held by both project leaders is seen as a significant advantage from both student and staff perspectives. Students don't feel 'chased', they feel supported and cared for. Staff are kept aware of individual student issues as appropriate and can therefore target support where it is most needed.

Early indications from the projects demonstrate that there are many benefits of such a system of supportive attendance monitoring, including:

- student motivation to attend seems, on the whole, to be increasing
- staff are very positive about the impact of regular follow-ups on the level of attendance in their classes
- students are, in the main, very positive about the care demonstrated by the interventions
- students at risk of early withdrawal are often able to continue, thus contributing to the improving retention rates of the two Schools
Key words: widening participation, attendance monitoring, student retention

Context

An investigation of the monitoring of student attendance at the University of Glamorgan will be aided by a contextualisation of the University’s student population and its approach to attendance regulations.

The University is a post-1992 HEI recognised for its record of delivering higher education courses to a widening participation population. Many of the students are first generation and or from low participation neighbourhoods. As highlighted by NATFHE (2000, p:1), ‘…there is also clear link between drop-out rates and the numbers of students coming in to higher education from non-traditional HE backgrounds…’

Whilst many courses at the University have attendance requirements, there are no blanket regulations requiring students to attend for a fixed amount of time. Middleton (2002) makes the point that if there are no institution-wide attendance regulations, ‘this being left to module tutors’ there is a ‘strong possibility of conflicting messages presenting themselves to the minds of the students’.

As with many higher education establishments, there is an ongoing debate about the value and appropriateness of student attendance monitoring. Over the three years that the authors have been involved in attendance monitoring, it is fair to say that there has been some resistance to the level of intervention involved in such a hands-on initiative, and some academic staff still hold the ‘sink or swim’ philosophy (Latham & Green, 1997). This in turn is balanced by a number of staff who have been keen to participate, and without whom the data for this study would not have been accessible. Of those who are resistant, some hold the view that monitoring attendance goes beyond the realms of independent learning, seeing it as hand-holding, or being over-protective - a point argued by Cook & Leckey (1999) cited in Richardson (2003). Others were of the
opinion that it is a waste of time and that if students choose not to attend, we should not use scarce staff time and resources chasing them up.

Nevertheless, previous studies have shown that there is much to be gained from monitoring student attendance (Rogers, 2001, Devadoss & Foltz 1996, and Durden et al 1995) and that there is evidence to suggest a link between attendance and achievement. This paper, based on action research, offers an interpretation from data gathered over the last three years and presents an evaluation of the methods used, the student interventions and the impact of these on student retention.

**Overview of the attendance monitoring initiative**

The authors are from different Schools in the University, the Business School (student population approximately 2000) and the School of Humanities, Law & Social Sciences (HLaSS) with a student population of approximately 2500. In an effort to identify the risk factors associated with student retention, comprehensive attendance monitoring systems were established together with a number of other student retention and support initiatives. Data from the attendance monitoring initiative demonstrated that a link existed between students’ attendance and their continuation with their studies.

Attendance monitoring in the Business School is a feature of the work of the Student Achievement Co-ordinator, a dedicated post designed to support first year students on targeted Schemes. In HLaSS, the responsibility for monitoring attendance lies with role of the Advice Shop Manager. The Advice Shop is a ‘one-stop shop’ for student enquiries, academic skills and study advice. Both roles encompass responsibility for initiatives and research affecting student retention and performance.

**Data Collection Methods**
For the first two years of operation, student attendance was monitored by a manual paper based system. This involved the tracking of all level 1 Business Students (approximately 200 in 2001/2 and 190 in 2002/3) across the full diet of first year modules. HLaSS piloted attendance monitoring with level 1 of the History Award in 2001/2 (130 students across 9 modules), and extended this to include the Criminology Award in 2002/3 (tracking a total of 695 students across 10 modules). In the current academic year, this has increased to include 38 modules across the two Schools, with approximately 1000 students being monitored weekly.

At the beginning of each term class registers were produced and distributed to module tutors, who passed them around at tutorials and lectures for students to initial their presence. These registers were then passed back to the Student Achievement Co-ordinator/Advice Shop Manager on a weekly basis; attendance data was entered into a database and used to follow up occurrences of unexplained absence.

The manual collection and recording of attendance was a time consuming exercise, which intensified as other Awards were included in the attendance monitoring process. To address this, in the third year of operation, an electronic swipe card system was piloted with three of the Business Studies groups.

The electronic system required tutors to take a portable swipe unit along to each class. (Portable units were necessary as teaching rooms were spread over the campus). The students then swiped themselves in to each class, using the electronic ID cards issued to them at enrolment. Data from the swipe units was downloaded twice weekly to an Ihistorian database, which was interrogated by the querying tool InfoAgent. Both tutors and students could view differing levels of attendance records and access can be extended (with the student’s permission) to other interested parties, such as employers, sponsors and parents. The aim is to remove the administrative burden of the manual system, while improving the accessibility and quality of attendance data.
Details of the Interventions Used

The range of interventions employed is varied. Once absence is identified, the initial follow up contact is via telephone, with subsequent contact via email. If there is no reply, or no response to a message, a letter is sent. It is important to state here that the nature of the contact is supportive and non-judgemental. This is not a ‘policing’ activity; emphasis is placed on informing students of the options open to them, the support available and the consequences of non-attendance and poor performance. Johnston (2003) corroborates this:

The outcome of attendance monitoring should not be punitive but linked to proactive student support in two ways. Firstly as a marker that the institution cares about the student and secondly to intervene before students’ situations become irretrievable.

There have been instances which the authors have become aware of, where letters sent to absent students have contained language that was more likely to inflame the situation rather than resolve it. Anecdotal evidence gathered during the projects suggests that poor attenders are, in the main, already concerned about their attendance before any contact is made. Thus, when the contact is in the nature of a ‘final warning’, the student is far less likely to return. Students have often stated that after missing several sessions, they are too embarrassed or scared to return. Contact threatening their continuance or achievement in some way only exacerbated the situation and caused further concern, rather than encouraging the student to improve their attendance. It is not suggested that such an outcome is desired by the tutor writing such a letter, but that as Barnett (1992) points out, the nature of communication and language norms between academics has ‘…an intrinsic character of its own…’.

In other words, although the tutor may have thought they were doing the right thing in producing a final warning, this view was borne out of accepted views within their experience. The evidence gathered from the interventions carried out with students
suggests that the opposite is true and that students are much less likely to respond to such a letter.

Once contact is made, students are reassured of the neutrality and supportive emphasis of the follow up. The aim is to establish the reason for the lapse in attendance and to assist the student in their successful return to study. Appropriate advice is given to facilitate this return as well as advice and guidance on the University’s Mitigating Circumstances procedure. For example, ‘catch up plans’ are negotiated with tutors and (if requested) meetings arranged. For cases when more specific or specialist support is required, students are sensitively redirected to the wide network of University support departments.

In a small number of cases, interventions do not garner any response from students and this is often an indicator that the student has ‘unofficially withdrawn’. As Johnston (2003) states “Much drop out takes place silently and we have to ensure that silence is as much a trigger to our support systems as a direct request for help.” More commonly however, making students aware that their absence has been noticed is sufficient to encourage more regular attendance. In HLaSS approximately 45% of students who do not directly respond to the contact actually return to classes and successfully continue with their studies. Offers of follow up appointments to discuss time management, preparation for assessments and so on are well received, with approximately 25% of students taking up appointments.

**Reasons why students don’t attend**

The data gathered concerning reasons why students did not attend was similar for both Schools. The usual issues around short-term sickness are apparent. However, there are a number of cases of serious and ongoing illness such as MS, glandular fever, acute asthma, and so on. HLaSS students often experience issues associated with
mental illness, and conditions such as Asperger's syndrome, and compulsive disorders. The University procedures for Mitigating Circumstances are often called upon to allow students to submit work which has passed the deadline set by the tutor but where illness has affected the student’s ability to submit on time. The Student Services Department will support students with an ongoing illness or specific study need.

A significant proportion of Glamorgan students work part time, and it is not uncommon for part time hours to exceed the recommended Government guidelines contained in the House of Commons report Higher Education: Student Retention (2001) which stated that:

We recommend that higher education institutions should provide guidance to their students that they should not work in paid employment for more than 12 hours a week during term time.

At enrolment for 2003/4, 44% of level 1 Business Studies students stated that they would continue to work part time, with 63% of these students working between 16-20 hours per week. However, this figure is likely to increase substantially during the term, as a further 37% stated that they intended to look for part time employment whilst studying. Unsurprisingly then, many students experience difficulties in managing their employment hours against their study hours, particularly at times when assessments are due. This sometimes leads to students missing classes to make time to complete assessments, a pattern most tutors can identify with from their own experiences of half empty seminar and lecture halls around assessment deadlines.

Kottasz (2003) identifies some significant reasons for non-attendance as 'can get lecture material in other ways….timing of class is a reason to miss a lecture…..working on other assessments.' This would seem to reinforce the need for classes to add value to the student experience. Students are looking for something additional rather than for tutors to replicate the lecture or seminar notes which have been posted on the inter/intranet. However, some students have also alluded to the entertainment value of lecturers themselves as a reason to attend (or not). Cox & Hedge (1981) wrote a guide
for students to help them get the most out of their higher education experience and
they sum up the point as follows:

Bear in mind that higher education is, at least in part, about academic work. How far it is true that your tutors are paid to teach you is a matter of dispute. Do not, however, get the idea that they are there to entertain you; they are not, and it is not surprising that some of them are not good at it.

The impact of timetable structure on attendance is also apparent. In an unpublished study carried out by the University of Glamorgan Learning & Teaching Office, it was found that patterns of attendance over a block of teaching resulted in lower attendance at the first and last contact sessions. Similarly, ‘campus touring’ – travelling between teaching blocks on a single-site campus - resulted in poorer attendance. Devadoss and Foltz (1996) noted that classes outside the hours of 10 – 3 rarely got an attendance of higher than 50%. Anecdotal evidence from the studies under review here also confirm that classes taking place after 3pm show rapid decline in numbers attending, and a similar pattern appeared where students had a large gap between classes.

Interventions designed to support students in achieving a better balance between study, employment, social and domestic commitments have been taken up by some students. In addition, sessions were included during the induction period showing the realities of University study. A number of students get into difficulty because they see their low contact hours (typically twelve hours per week) as the total time required to get a degree, a factor borne out by Collins & Lim (2002)

Students perceive non-contact time as ‘free-time’. There is a general lack of awareness that outside of contact hours, they are meant to engage in independent study, read up for tutorials, prepare assignments etc.

The induction session is designed to raise awareness of the realities of a timetable that requires students to devote on average an additional four or five hours of self study per module. Initial feedback from students has been positive about this, but it is a fine line between raising awareness and making them feel terrified and unable to cope with the
demands of degree study. A further objective of raising awareness of the realities of a higher education study timetable, was to counteract the view of some students who saw the low contact hours as an indicator of how difficult it would be to get a degree, a view shared in a study conducted by Richardson (2003).

Many students arrive at university with little idea of what to expect and consequently they find that they have so few timetabled hours, some may begin to think that achieving a degree can be accomplished with a minimal amount of effort.

Thus, as tempting as it may be to give the message to students that X% attendance is needed to get a B grade, universities may find themselves being pursued through litigation if a student was able to prove they had achieved the stated percentage attendance but attained a D grade. The message to students needs to be that there is value in high and consistent levels of attendance and that this is demonstrable in the marks achieved in assessed work. However, although attendance seems to be linked to performance it is not the only factor in student achievement.

It should also be recognised that some students take a strategic journey through their studies, being cognisant of the fact that level 1 grades on the Awards discussed do not count towards their final degree classification. This often manifests itself in a conscious decision on the part of the student not to attend if they feel they know enough to pass the module, perhaps pointing again to the student compartmentalising their studies into knowledge acquisition rather than understanding the breadth and depth of skill development that helps them make the transition into level two study. There have also been a small number of occurrences when students were steadfast in their decision not to attend classes. In such cases when interventions are continually unsuccessful, more punitive action is considered. As a last resort for excessive and prolonged periods of absence with no submission of assessed work, the decision may be taken to withdraw students.
**Correlation between attendance and achievement**

The literature concerning a link between attendance and achievement is convincing. There are a number of studies (Durden et al 1995, Chan et al 1997, Rodgers 2001) which demonstrate a plausible link between attendance and performance. As a by-product of this action research it seemed apparent that Glamorgan students are also subject to the same link. However, since the study was set up to monitor student attendance, it was clear that neither the statistical robustness nor qualitative research methods framework existed to make publication of these preliminary findings reliable. However, it is hoped that future large scale studies conducted by the authors over the next two academic years, will establish the statistical reliability of a proven link between attendance level and performance.

**Evaluation of the recording and intervention process**

The evaluation of this initiative is primarily focussed on staff and student feedback, and whether the monitoring of student attendance improved overall attendance and withdrawal rates. The methods of data collection are also commented upon.

Overwhelmingly, student feedback on the interventions has been very positive. The students contacted are always appreciative of the communication and are usually impressed that their absence has been noticed; knowing that someone is concerned enough to follow this up makes them feel valued. Since the attendance monitoring and follow up policy has been in place, literally thousands of contacts have been made by telephone, email and letter, and to date there has not been an instance when a student has defensively challenged ‘What’s it got to do with you then?’ Having said that, Law students often ask how you can prove they were not present! This experience is shared by Middleton (2002) ‘…in general students do respond positively to messages they receive concerning attendance.’
This appreciation does not only apply to students who have received direct contact. An unexpected outcome of the process has been unwillingness on the part of students to sign in for absent friends. This was justified by one as ‘we realised that if we signed in for her, she wouldn’t get the support she needs from you, so we stopped doing it.’

During some telephone conversations, once the neutrality and scope of the two roles had been explained, students would frequently impart information that they would be reluctant to share with their tutors. Students are often embarrassed to admit to their tutor that they are struggling with the subject, but will agree to academic support from a third party. Sometimes there are personality issues between tutor and student and sometimes the student expresses concern about the teaching and learning methods used. For example, one module was suffering from particularly poor attendance by a significant number of students. On conducting a straw poll (with the tutor’s consent) the comment was consistently made that the students felt they just did not have a relationship with the tutors. The module was being team-taught and although the students had a timetable of who was teaching them in which weeks, the rota of changing tutors happened on a frequent basis. The overwhelming view of the students was that the tutors changed so many times that there was never the time to build up a working relationship; so they felt adrift, removed and disengaged from the content and the module. These comments were fed back not just to the module tutors, but, with their consent, to the academic field leader. Subsequently the mode of teaching remained team taught, but each tutor taught for a block of weeks before being replaced by a colleague. The students felt much more comfortable with this arrangement, and attendance in the module improved considerably.

In addition to the appreciation of contact, the number of students who have established better patterns of attendance has been high. The students themselves have attributed success in their modules to this turnaround. Interestingly, some students who had a good level of attendance and so were not contacted at all, realised that the registers
were actively used to trigger contact and therefore raised their attendance profile even further.

As the projects have progressed and positive benefits have been realised, there has been a change in attitude of some staff who were previously resistant or hesitant about the attendance monitoring process. Staff feel confident that the time taken in ensuring the registers are completed has direct benefits for the ultimate success of the student cohort. Where previously registers were completed and left in a drawer, now those registers are used in weekly tracking systems. Students know they are supported, even if the offer of direct support is not utilised.

Overall, poor attendance is proving to be a consistent and reliable early warning sign for students at risk of drop-out or failure. Non-attendance is typically one of the first signs of a student's disengagement and when identified quickly enough, the remedial action taken has many positive effects - not least that attendance after follow up contact improves with the majority of students. Many of the problems or issues hindering regular attendance are solvable, but students are not very proactive about seeking support. Also, for students not 'able' rather than not 'choosing' to attend, making staff aware of the student's situation did make their return to the classroom much easier.

The projects identified poor attendance as a risk factor in early withdrawal, and the interventions designed to support students as they improve their attendance has directly attributed to the reduction of withdrawal rates in both Schools, a factor borne out by other studies. Middleton (2002) demonstrated a cut in attrition rates through the use of electronic attendance monitoring. Davies (2001) ‘increased the survival rate from 75% to 100% by … monitoring attendance’.

Despite the time employed to conduct follow ups and to offer additional support to students, the qualitative data gathered as a result of these activities has proved to be invaluable. With experience and a more holistic understanding of why students do not
attend, it has been possible to identify specific times during the year when common issues arise and to identify groups of students more likely to be at risk of drop-out or failure. As the projects have developed, it has been possible to introduce increasingly more targeted initiatives. For example, a rolling programme of late starter events for students who enrol or transfer late onto awards; a Buddy Scheme to tackle early integration and HE transition issues; study skills support for students with non-submissions, fails or low grades in early assessments; progress meetings and revision sessions for students struggling academically.

One unexpected anomaly that the attendance tracking process highlighted was the frequent discrepancy between a student's last date of attendance and their formal withdrawal from the Award; often with a time lapse of weeks, but sometimes months. Clearly, for initiatives to be successful, they need to be in place at times when the student first begins to disengage rather than when the actual decision is made to withdraw.

The manual capture and recording of attendance data, was both time and labour intensive. In addition, there was a need for some tutors to be more diligent in the recording and forwarding of attendance registers, as this delayed the follow up communication for students whose attendance pattern was potentially putting them at risk.

During the first term of operation difficulties were experienced with the electronic reporting system which significantly delayed the receipt of reports indicating student absence, hindering the ability to make timely interventions. However once these teething problems are addressed, it is anticipated that in the future, the use of electronic swipe card systems to monitor student attendance will prove to be a valuable and efficient method of data collection.
Irrespective of the whether the manual or electronic data collection method was employed, the time taken to follow up students with low or sporadic attendance patterns should not be underestimated. In the Business School, 484 contacts were made with level 1 students in 2001/2 and 628 in 2002/3. The actual cohort sizes were approximately 191 and 186 respectively, demonstrating the volume of repeat follow-ups with the same students. The HLaSS pilots varied dramatically, with 130 students tracked throughout the academic year of 2001/2, whereas in 2002/03 the figure rose to 695, making the routine recording of every contact problematic.

Conclusions

Although the level of work associated with such a hands-on model of student tracking is undoubtedly high, the authors feel that it is warranted. Staff and students feel that the model of monitoring attendance is a powerful support mechanism. However, the method of data collection is not the driver of the process. The crucial element is that the data is used to trigger the intervention which facilitates communication with students who are at risk. By using attendance monitoring as a rudimentary first filter to screen for students who need support, it is possible to target limited resources where they are needed most. The authors would go so far as to say, if institutions are looking to reduce student attrition, then attendance monitoring is the first rung on the improved attrition ladder, as the attendance monitoring initiative has contributed to the ongoing reduction in School attrition rates.

Currently, there is no universal attendance policy at the University of Glamorgan, but the benefits of register monitoring and absence follow ups have been clearly identified by both Schools. The success of these projects has resulted in senior staff actively considering attendance monitoring for all first year students across the University.
However, in any study such as this, it is the individuals who count the most. If just one student is retained because he or she feels supported in the struggle to keep up with classes, then this initiative has been a success, and to answer the question in the title, yes, it is worth it.
References


Middleton W [no date] *Good Communications & Student Attendance*. [online] Available at: http://www.spat.ac.uk/STEPS02WM.doc [Accessed 12/9/02]


Richardson (2003) *The Transition to Degree Level Study, University of Central Lancashire*, Learning Development Unit, [online] ILT. Available at www.ilt.ac.uk [Accessed on 10/1/04]
Student Engagement with Social Activities at University

Karen Fitzgibbon
Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching
University of Glamorgan
Social interaction & student retention

‘Beyond the transition to college, persistence entails the incorporation...of the individual as a competent member in the social and intellectual (academic) communities of the college.’ Tinto 1993
‘Socially and academically engaged students are more likely to remain in higher education and to be successful.’
Crosling, Thomas & Heagney (2008)

‘...the presence or lack of social support networks and supportive interactions is a major factor for students in deciding whether to stay or leave.’
Wilcox et al (2005)
Student expectations about social time at University

○ Students:
  - rate good social life as important
  - Expect access to cafes and other social spaces
  - Expect exciting, lively busy social life on campus
  - Paying fees expect more from their SU
  - ‘more partying and not half as much work’
  - Confuse non-contact time with free time
  - Do not always expect to be assessed
‘Early Days’ learner support tool

- Developed as a tool for students to assess their orientation and integration into their University studies

- Optional question completion
‘Do you enjoy the social side of higher education?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I’m having a great time</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not something I’m interested in</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to, but I’m not sure where to start</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are you a member of any of the clubs, societies or social groups on campus

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, but tell me more</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, not interested</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you feel part of the University community?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do you feel you are settling into University life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty well</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really well</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worst aspect of your experience so far in higher education

- Too drunk
- Living with people who aren’t considerate to others
- Having induction in freshers week when my flatmates didn’t so took me longer to fit in with them
- Starting fresh with friendships
- Balancing studies with social life
Best aspect of your experience so far?

- Making new friends
- Cheap beer
- Meeting like-minded people
- I’m making new friends which I was worried about as a mature student
- Meeting new friends and talking with the lecturers, they’re quite human after all
- Living the student life out of my parents’ home
The growth in social networking

- 63% of 1521 voters said they use social networking sites whilst on campus
- 14% off use it off campus
- 20% don’t use it at all
Impact on Student Union provision

- Made 1.2m on alcoholic sales 10 years ago, now fallen to 0.6m
- SU gym membership has risen as more students are leading healthier lifestyles
- Inclusivity and diversity mean changes to alcohol-based activities being the norm
- Fee paying students expect more from their SU
Conclusions

- **Expectation**
  - Expect access to cafes and other social spaces
  - Expect exciting, lively busy social life on campus
  - More partying

- **Experience**
  - Many SUs providing social working spaces
  - Variation in provision of organised social activities
  - Growing population of students not seeking social interaction
• Will the changes in the way students are interacting socially lead to:
  • Greater numbers withdrawing early
  • Or
  • A reconsideration of the impact of social integration on student achievement in the digital age


Wilcox, P., Winn, S., Fyvie-Gauld, M., ‘It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people’: the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol 30 No 5 pp 707-722
Thank you for listening
Any questions?

Karen Fitzgibbon
University of Glamorgan
01443 654446/01443 482050
kfitzgib@glam.ac.uk
Helping students to help themselves

Introduction

Students who enter Higher Education (HE) for the first time are sometimes ill-prepared for the experience and can need a higher level of assistance, and successful student transition into HE is a recognised factor impacting on student retention (van Stolk et al 2007, Wilcox 2005). Information supplied during busy induction periods does not always register with students, and when they encounter a problem or difficulty they have often forgotten the range of help and support available.

Each Faculty at the case study university has a Faculty Advice Centre (FAC) where students are encouraged to go as a first point of contact with any query, concern or issue. The range of queries is vast, and includes questions about physical orientation such as finding lecture halls or seminar rooms, through to serious personal or health issues impacting on study. The volume of visits to the five FACs gives a clear indication of their acceptance and use by students (13,773 visits in 2006-07).

It is also apparent that there are other students who could benefit from support to engage with their studies and yet do not approach advice or support services within the institution. This hard to reach group is not unknown in the literature concerning student support (Tinsley et al 1984, Grayson et al 1998, Robinson et al 2007). Collins & Sims (2006:212) found that ‘the threat of being perceived as less capable than others could cause some students to disengage from the very resources that should be helpful to them.’ As the case study university has a high number of students from a widening participation background it is not unreasonable to see this as a factor affecting why some students are unprepared for HE and unwilling to directly engage with advice and support services, and why others would be unaware of (and perhaps surprised by) the support available to them. (The latest HESA 2005-6 figures for the case study university shows 15.2% of students against a benchmark of 11.7% from low-participation neighbourhoods, and 42.2% against 36.6% from socio-economic classifications 4-7.)

This paper sets out the development of online learner support tools designed to support this group and also demonstrates how student responses have provided a barometer for the student experience.

Methodology

In seeking to find ways to support students who may be experiencing difficulties, but who did not directly access the FACs, the authors developed two separate online learner support tools (‘Early Days’ and ‘Study Health Check’) using QuestionMark Perception (QMP). Both tools provided immediate automated feedback, designed for students to self-assess their orientation and transition into the university. By employing an online approach, students would not have to know who to speak to, or need to explain their circumstances or concerns, but could access information and act on the automated feedback received. In addition, the learner support tools were designed to encourage students to independently reflect on their university experiences, facilitating better understanding of the culture and requirements for successful study in HE.

Fitzgibbon K, & Prior J, University of Glamorgan
The objective of each learner support tool was to provide an opportunity for students to self-assess their level of familiarity with university protocols as well as a range of questions designed to ensure they optimised their studies, by highlighting the importance of consistent attendance, the time they are committing to personal study, and so on. Deciding on the question set was challenging, and this was informed by the Yorke & Longden (2007) study. It was important to ensure that the questions and subsequent feedback would be relevant and beneficial to the students, and achieved a balance between practical ‘do you know how to’ questions, and those which encouraged deeper reflection about for example motivation and study patterns. This led to a filtering of the questions to ensure they added to the overall sense and structure of the exercise.

The next stage was to formulate the feedback that students would receive, which was dependent upon the option selected for each question. It was essential to ensure the automated feedback was informative and personally relevant, and also to find the right ‘tone of voice’. As experienced advisors the authors are aware of the way in which voice can influence the success (or otherwise) of the student/advisor conversation and wanted to ensure that students receiving the automated written feedback did not feel they were being judged for their decisions. In addition, to encourage honest responses students could anonymously access and complete both exercises. This was particularly important because if they gave untrue responses, the feedback would not reflect their actual needs. The feedback was positive and encouraging irrespective of the students’ response. For example in the question ‘How much time have you allocated to prepare for exams?’ options and automated feedback was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Automated feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have any exams</td>
<td>Lucky you! Don’t forget though that planning your time for final coursework or practical assessments is just as important as setting aside revision time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I haven’t set any time aside</td>
<td>You’ll need to prepare in plenty of time to avoid last minute stress caused by cramming. Staying up the night before will mean you are tired in the exam and that will also contribute to a poor performance. Plan your study time effectively and use the study guides for revision tips from the Education Drop in Centres (web link).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve planned a study timetable</td>
<td>Well done, remember to build in some breaks too – keeping the balance right between study and relaxation helps you to learn more effectively and will aid your long term memory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When designing the two exercises, a functionality of QMP was the opportunity to construct the questions into specific blocks. By carefully constructing the question set, it was possible to include questions that forced a jump to the next block dependent on students’ answers. An example of this was the question ‘Do you work in paid employment during term time?’ If students answered ‘no’ then they were not presented with the remaining employment related questions in that block, whereas those that answered ‘yes’ then received questions and feedback to help them manage their work commitments and study time. Each question had a variety of responses and depending on the option answered would determine which automated feedback the student received, and the next question block to be presented.
The two question sets were piloted with a range of colleagues including those in support services and technical services. Their feedback was invaluable and their contribution is gratefully acknowledged.

Both learner support tools were made available to students during the academic year 2007-8, via the student portal and through the virtual learning environment, BlackBoard. ‘Early Days’ was released in the first term and focused on students’ integration into their studies and transitional issues faced when commencing higher education. It was primarily aimed at first year students, but would also be useful for any direct-entry students and those participating in an Erasmus or international exchange programmes. The ‘Study Health Check’ was released in the spring term. It questioned students’ use and understanding of academic resources; how they were coping with the demands of HE and independent study; and the balance they were achieving between socialising, study and other commitments. Study Health Check was suitable for students studying at any level on any year of their course.

Findings

This section contains the interpretation of student responses, and compares findings between Early Days and Study Health Check to a selection of questions. Student participation in both learner support tools is given in Table 1 below. The high number of partial completions is explained by the QMP function of jumping blocks of questions which are not relevant. Hence, some question sets were not presented to students, rather than students opting not to answer them. The following findings include data from partial and full completions.

| Table 1 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                | Early Days      | Study Health Check |
| Total accessing exercise | 737            | 431              |
| Partial completions        | 648            | 327              |
| Total completions          | 89             | 104              |

Profile of participants

The majority (87%) of the respondents who completed Early Days and Study Health Check were undergraduates, studying full time, and showed a similar profile in age, gender and level of study. The respondents’ profile was also comparable with the general profile of students within the case study university, which increases the reliability of the findings. Colleagues in other HE institutions who are interested in the transferability of the tools may find the figures in Tables 2-4 below useful as they show the student profile of the case study university.

| Table 2 |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Age     | Early Days      | Study Health Check | University     |
| Under 21| 38%             | 34%             | 33%             |
| 21-24   | 25%             | 29%             | 23%             |
| 25-29   | 9%              | 15%             | 13%             |
| 30+     | 28%             | 22%             | 31%             |

Fitzgibbon K, & Prior J, University of Glamorgan
As described in the methodology, Early Days was aimed at new students, and this target group were the largest users of the exercise, indeed 78% of students who completed the exercise were in the first year of their programme of study. Study Health Check was designed to be applicable to all students, and although the highest number of respondents were first year students (39%) there was a fair distribution of respondents from other years (second year 29%, third year 26% and other 6%). Whilst the two exercises are anonymous it was possible that some who had tried Early Days and found it beneficial, were encouraged to try Study Health Check when it was released in term two.

There were two key themes within both learner support tools, concerned with students’ academic and social integration into higher education both of which are known contributors to student retention (Tinto 1993, Rhodes & Nevill 2004, Crosling et al 2008). An overview of the analysis for these areas follows.

**Key area 1 – academic integration**

As the Early Days exercise occurred within the first few weeks of term 1, academic related questions were designed to help students identify how well they were settling into their chosen programme of study. The high percentage of positive responses was indicative that things were going well for the majority of students, for example 85% felt they had picked the right course, 85% said they were enjoying their studies, 79% were happy with the choice and number of modules. For those students with negative or uncertain responses, the automated feedback encouraged them to seek guidance and directed them to appropriate support services within the university. Early intervention is crucial at this stage to ensure students make informed decision about whether to leave, transfer or continue with their studies (Fitzgibbon & Prior, 2007).

The Study Health Check exercise occurred during the second term and students were encouraged to consider how well they were progressing and the extent of their academic integration. Responses to this exercise were more mixed, for example 88% of respondents felt they understood assessment requirements and 84% were regularly attending classes. However, 30% felt they were experiencing difficulties in understanding course content and 49% had concerns regarding their performance to date. Again, the automated feedback encouraged students to seek guidance and support if they were concerned, but it also offered tips and advice to ‘help students to help themselves’.

Fitzgibbon K, & Prior J, University of Glamorgan
As some of the questions were replicated in both exercises, it was possible to broadly track the extent of academic integration over both terms. For example, the number of students happy with their choice of modules fell slightly from 79% in Early Days to 73% in Study Health Check, but this could be somewhat anticipated as students gained more insight and experience of the requirements of HE study. Other comparisons however, pointed towards a mismatch between students’ responses and their real appreciation of what was required to facilitate successful university study. For example, 75% of Early Days respondents said they were confident and understood what they needed to do, and the approach to take in order to pass the modules being studied. Yet, in Study Health Check when asked about the amount of self-study time typically given to their studies, only 14% studied over eighteen hours per week (with 48% doing up to six hours and 38% doing between seven and eighteen hours each week). As typical class contact time would be between 12 – 20 hours per week for the case study university, this highlights a significant lack of application to independent study. Given that the figures for Study Health Check are taken from later in the academic year, it is expected for most students to have well-established patterns of self-study. However, it is clear that many students continue to struggle with the nature of autonomous learning and while 83% of students in Study Health Check said they understood why they are required to work independently at university, the evidence demonstrates that this is not something they are putting into practice.

Lack of preparedness is one of the main reasons identified for non-completion and students’ academic transition to HE and their subsequent appreciation and understanding of the need for independent study is well recognised in the retention literature (Cook, 2003; Cook and Leckey, 1999; Richardson, 2003, Yorke, 1999). Another issue raised which requires further investigation is concerned with students’ motivation towards their studies. In Early Days, 32% of students weren’t happy with their level of motivation and this was still high later in their studies with 36% of Study Health Check respondents saying the same. However, factors contributing to students’ lack of independent study may be explained by the number of respondents (96% in both exercises) who stated they found it difficult to balance academic and other commitments. Furthermore 29% of Early Days and 32% of Study Health Check state that the time they need to devote to looking after others was impacting on their studies; and 67% of Early Days and 66% of Study Health Check respondents said they needed to undertake paid employment in order to fund their higher education.

**Key area 2 – social integration**

Student retention literature emphasises the importance of social integration (Beder 1997, Skahill 2002, Eggens et al 2007) so the response as to whether students felt part of the university community is important. 60% of Early Days respondents felt part of the community within the first few weeks of term, but this fell to 44% of Study Health Check respondents later in the academic year. Possible reasons for this include the low membership of Student Union clubs and societies as 39% of Early Days respondents had not joined clubs and societies, but had indicated that they were interested in finding out more about them.

It is possible that such findings would lead to the conclusion that students at the case study university were unhappy, and yet when asked ‘are you enjoying your studies?’ 85% of Early Days respondents said ‘yes’ and this increased to 91% for Study Health Check respondents. A further 64% of Early Days respondents had made friends and settled in well, with a further 25% saying they had settled in very well, indicating that on balance the student experience is positive. It is also apparent that early socialisation is taking place, with 47% of Early Days Fitzgibbon K, & Prior J, University of Glamorgan
respondents confirming that they enjoy the social side of higher education although 33% of respondents indicated that they were not interested socialising. It is possible that this figure is high due to the number of students living at home and relying on previously established social networks. Perhaps a further factor in social integration is the high volume of students using social networking sites. In ‘quick polls’ on the student portal, over 1500 indicated that they use social networking every day on campus, perhaps a reinforcing factor behind why they feel happy and yet make relatively little use of on-campus face to face social facilities.

Conversely, the social aspect of university plays an important in the learner experience because when asked to comment on the best and worst aspect of their experience, 75% of Early Days respondents’ comments concerning social integration were positive. Statements such as ‘making new friends’, and ‘meeting new people’ feature strongly in the qualitative comments.

**Student Feedback**

These learner support tools were well received, with 90% of students for both the Early Days and Study Health Check stating that they had found the exercise useful. In addition, 90% of Early Days and 95% of Study Health Check respondents said that they found the automated feedback helpful. It was anticipated that students may use the online tools as a resource bank of information, but the majority of students (93% Early Days and 86% Study Health Check) only accessed the tools once.

**Conclusions**

By comparing responses to questions which appeared in both exercises, the authors are provided with an opportunity to monitor the health of the overall learner experience. This in turn has facilitated the shaping of the learner experience by giving feedback to other support services and faculty colleagues. Some of the issues highlighted by the exercises identified gaps in students’ knowledge of general university services and facilities. These have relatively simple and straightforward solutions, which could be addressed by offering information and awareness raising events, promotional literature or repeating early induction activities later in the academic year. Other supra-institutional issues, such as the competing demands on students time (because for example of family or employment commitments) would be more challenging to address, but could be supported by having well structured and more condensed timetables, and by making use of a blended learning approach by offering some flexibility through online delivery.

Perhaps the most challenging and complex areas to understand are those, associated with students’ inherent characteristics, such as their personal motivation levels, perceptions, commitment to study etc, and these require additional investigation.

These learner support tools can be seen to have made a contribution to the academic and social integration of students and this is perhaps best illustrated by the response to the question ‘have you considered withdrawing, suspending or transferring from your programme of study?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Early Days</th>
<th>Study Health Check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, and I’d like to talk to someone</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but I’m ok again now</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fitzgibbon K, & Prior J, University of Glamorgan
It is apparent that in providing online support through innovative use of technology, Early Days and Study Health Check are helping students when they face critical concerns about their programme of study. By encouraging them towards sources of help and support, it is possible to provide information and guidance to see them over the ‘bumps in the road’, to the extent that they are able to continue with, and succeed in their educational goals.
References


Fitzgibbon K, & Prior J, University of Glamorgan


Wilcox, P. S. Winn, Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education, Studies in Higher Education 30(6): 707-722.


The authors would like to acknowledge the work of Sue Stocking, Mary Ayre and Leann Davies in the question and feedback construction, and David Lewis for his expert knowledge of, and unending enthusiasm for QMP.

Joint authorship:

Karen Fitzgibbon
Advice Shop Manager and Principal Lecturer
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Glamorgan
kfitzgib@glam.ac.uk

Julie Prior
Advice Shop Manager and Senior Lecturer
Glamorgan Business School
University of Glamorgan
djprior1@glam.ac.uk
The Changing Nature of Student Social Engagement with University

Julie Prior & Karen Fitzgibbon

djprior1@glam.ac.uk / kfitzgib@glam.ac.uk
Session Agenda

• Brief overview of appropriate literature.
• University context.
• Early Days - learner support tool project.
• Findings from two years of Early Days data.
• Project findings versus the literature.
• Discussion - the social experience of students of the future.
Social engagement and student retention

‘Beyond the transition to college, persistence entails the incorporation…of the individual as a competent member in the social and intellectual (academic) communities of the college.’ (Tinto, 1993).
‘Socially and academically engaged students are more likely to remain in higher education and to be successful.’ (Crosling et al, 2008).

‘…the presence or lack of social support networks and supportive interactions is a major factor for students in deciding whether to stay or leave.’ (Wilcox et al, 2005).
University context

21,496 students. Of these:
- 83% on campus,
- 85% undergraduate,
- 54% full time,
- 15% international students,
- 71% from Wales.

Age profile:
- under 21 - 33%,
- 21 – 24 23%,
- 25 – 29 13%,
- 30+ 31%.
Early Days project

• Developed as a tool for students to assess their orientation and integration into University.

• Aimed at first year students.

• Online - released 6 weeks into term 1.

• Optional question completion, with automated and relevant feedback.

• Link to try out Early Days.
Findings from two years of data (2007-8 and 2008-9)

After being at university for 6 weeks, what percentage of student respondents felt they had settled into university life?

- How many think it was more than 50%?
- More than 75%?
What percentage of respondents had joined a club, society or social group on campus?

• How many think it was more than 50%?
• More than 75%?
Do you feel part of the university community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>2007-8</th>
<th>2008-9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Do you enjoy the social side of higher education?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>2007-8</th>
<th>2008-9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I’m having a great time</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, it’s not something I’m interested in</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I want to but I’m not sure where to start</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Best aspect of your university experience so far...

- Living the student life out of my parents’ home
- Having my own space and meeting a variety of people from different backgrounds
- Making new friends and meeting a variety of people from different backgrounds
- Meeting like-minded people
- Cheap beer
- Meeting new friends and talking with the lecturers, they’re quite human after all
Worst aspect of your experience...

Too drunk

Balancing studies with social life

Starting fresh with friendships

Moving away from home

Living with people who aren’t considerate to others

Having induction in freshers week when my flat mates didn’t, so took me longer to fit in with them
Summary of Early Days data

- Reliable data about the student experience, not our *perception* of that experience.
- Students overall are having a positive social experience.
- They are not joining clubs and societies.
- Social interaction continues to be important to them.
- Poor social experiences were infrequently cited in ‘open’ questioning.
The social experience of Glamorgan students (2007-8)

• Student experience survey:
  – 84% of students not participating in National Union of Students (NUS) clubs and societies.

• The growth in social networking:
  – 63% of 1521 voters said they use social networking sites whilst on campus,
  – 14% only use it off campus,
  – 20% don’t use it at all.
Impact on NUS provision in UK

• Made 1.2 million on alcoholic sales 10 years ago, now fallen to 0.6 million.

• Student Union gym membership has risen as more students are leading healthier lifestyles.

• Inclusivity and diversity mean changes to alcohol-based activities being the norm.

• Fee paying students expect more from their Student Union.
Project findings versus the literature

Will changes in the way students are interacting socially lead to:

• Greater numbers withdrawing early?

Or

• A reconsideration of the impact of social integration on student retention in the digital age?
Points for discussion

• What is the future role of universities in providing students with a positive social experience?

• If we fail to do this, what will the consequences be?
References


The First Year Student Experience in Wales – A Collaborative Approach

University of Glamorgan

you live, you learn
Session Agenda

- Introduction to HEA Wales First Year Experience Action Set
- Using a collaborative approach
- Some of the initiatives from 2008-09
- The project in 2009-10
HEA Wales FYE Action Set

• Connection to HEA
• Group formation and representation
• Focus on two themes for 08-09
  – initiatives which build either:
    • academic engagement or
    • communities of practice
A collaborative approach

- Agreement to sharing – appreciative and open enquiry
- Created a wiki
- Shared over 70 initiatives
- Narrowed into 30 case studies for publication
Initiatives to support the themes: communities of practice
Initiatives to support the themes: academic engagement
What next…..?

• The group are continuing for a second year
• Themes for this year are:
  – Innovative assessment practice in the first year
  – Enabling employability through the first year curriculum
Any Questions?

University of Glamorgan
you live, you learn
Encouraging Attendance?

Karen Fitzgibbon
Advice Shop Manager
Agenda

- Why monitor attendance?
- The pilot studies
- Explanation of procedure followed
- Summary of data
- Views of students
- Links to performance
- Links to other studies
- School/Scheme/Field policy of attendance
- Quercus Plus
Why monitor attendance?

- Institutional considerations:
  - HESA returns twice a year
  - Local Authority requirements
  - Hardship fund requirements

- School considerations:
  - Identifying ‘at risk’ groups
  - Reducing attrition rate
Field considerations
- Learning experience
- Overall results
The pilot studies

- First trial - 2001/02 History year one
- Tutors had identified attendance as a problem
- Nine modules took part in the pilot
- Six modules had only partial completion
- Three modules produced reliable data
- Tracked 130 students over the two semesters
This year:

- Criminology
  - Four modules over the first term
  - One tutor didn’t wish to take part
  - Two other module registers were incomplete
  - Remaining module took part weekly
  - Tracked 497 in total over the term (183 weekly)
This year:

- History
  - Six modules all completed regularly
  - Staff had seen the benefits from last year’s pilot
  - Knew the procedure and felt comfortable with the process
  - Tracked 273 students over the first term
Total tracked students

- 456 weekly
- 695 over the term once all registers were received
- 86 ad hoc follow ups from concerned tutors
- Average weekly interventions - 50
Explanation of procedure

- Tutors issued with registers containing all students on module, plus enrolment numbers.
- Tutors requested to complete registers at all contact sessions (by passing around)
- Students required to initial to indicate presence in class
- Tutor to drop register into AS.
- AS enter data and return register
- AS follow up 2 consecutive absences
- AS inform tutors of outcome
Summary of data

History 01/02

- History average weekly attendance
- Module 1: 45% (10 - 11am)
- Module 2: 54% (3 - 5pm)
- Module 3: 63%
Summary of Data

History 02/03

- History average weekly attendance
  - Module 1: 53% (10 - 11)
  - Module 2: 65% (11 - 12)
  - Module 3: 55% (11 - 12)
  - Module 4: 58% (2 - 4)
  - Module 5: 56% (1 - 3)
  - Module 6: 56% (2 - 4)
History - Module 1

No of sessions attended

No of students attending

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

- 12
- 10
- 8
- 6
- 4
- 2
- 0
History - Module 3

No of sessions attended

No of students attending

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

History - Module 3

No of sessions attended

No of students attending
Summary of data
Criminology 02/03

- Criminology average weekly attendance
  - Module 1: 44% (Lec 55% Sem 34%)
    - Lec 1 - 2, Sems 2, 3, 4 & 5pm same day
  - Module 2: 44% (Lec 46% Sem 41%)
    - Lec 9 - 10, Sems 10, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5pm same day
  - Module 3: 51% (Lec 52% Sem 50%)
    - Lec 12 - 1, Sems 1, 2, 3, 4, 5pm same day
**Intervention methods/success**

- The range of follow-up procedures include telephone, email and letter.
- Emails usually receive a response within 24 - 36 hours. Outside of that means no response.
- Letters rarely result in a direct response but commonly result in resuming attendance.
- The tone of any contact is vital to achieving a successful outcome.
- AS neutral position is also important.
Views of students

- Students are always positive in their appreciation of telephone contact.
- Email responses also indicate how pleased the student is to be ‘cared about’.
- Offers of follow-up appointments in the AS to discuss time management are frequently taken up.
Links to performance

- Indicators of performance linked to attendance may be possible. Devadoss & Foltz (1996) found a pattern which suggests a three grade increase for those who attend regularly.

- Results from the first year History modules (3) suggest that 75% attendance is needed to get C3 and above.

- 75% attendance doesn’t prevent students achieving lower grades.

- Further research is needed to corroborate these findings.
Links to other UG studies

- Timing of classes and attendance (David Kernohan Teaching & Learning Office)
  - Patterns of attendance over a block of teaching result in lower attendance at first and last contact sessions
  - ‘Campus touring’ results in poorer attendance
  - Giving students a ‘home’ may increase attendance rates
Other relevant studies

- Kottasz (2003) has undertaken a study of why students attend/don’t attend.

- Significant reasons for non-attendance are:
  - 38% can get lecture material in other ways
  - 50% strongly agree that timing of class is a reason to miss a lecture
  - 61% who miss are working on other assessments
Significant reasons to attend are:

- attendance is vital if I want to get a good grade (97%)
- subject is difficult to learn without guidance (73%)
- genuinely interested in the subject (82%)

Middleton (2002) demonstrates cut in attrition rates through the use of electronic attendance monitoring
Other relevant studies

- Barwuah, Green & Lawson (1997) recommend that college should (give) prompt attention... to non-attendance and the early identification of students who are at risk of dropping out.

- Davies (2000) ‘increased the survival rate from 75% to 100% by ... monitoring attendance.'
School/Scheme/Field Policy

- University attendance regulations state:
  - ‘It is the responsibility of each school to devise appropriate procedures for monitoring attendance & to report on the procedures employed through annual monitoring.’
  - Field Boards are responsible for ensuring the attendance requirements of their modules are complied with.
  - Attendance and individual module/exam registration should be checked at the start/end of the Spring Term.
Quercus Plus

- A.S.A.D.S.R.S
- (All Singing All Dancing Student Record System)
- Will contain a prompt to staff to complete attendance records of classes
- Will automatically generate letters concerning attendance to students
Conclusions

- Attendance is a definite indicator of ‘at risk’ students.
- Further research on this year’s data is required to test link between attendance/performance for HaSS students.
- Modify registers to record Lec/Sem easily.
- Attendance monitoring is a powerful tool in the communication/relationship dynamic between School, tutor and student.
Conclusions continued …

- The School should debate the need for regulations concerning student attendance at School, Scheme and Field level and what it is believed a student gains from attending.
- Students should be given positive motives to attend, not negative ones.
- The Quercus Plus monitoring system should be piloted on one or two Awards to test robustness of the system.
Session Agenda

- Why monitor attendance?
- Use within Faculties
- The electronic system
- What we do with the data
- Stakeholders’ views
- Students’ responses and comments
- Conclusions
Why monitor student attendance?
Context

- Identified need for attendance monitoring

- Three projects, same methodology

  - **HaSS** - been running the system for last 2 years
  - **GBS** - started using the system in December 2006
  - **AT** - began staged introduction in December 2006
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Number of instances</th>
<th>Learning events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Research</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to Criminal J System</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Extremes</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to History</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power, Inequality &amp; Social Structure</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to Social Policy</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts and Contexts</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Poetry</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods in Psychology</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Dev Psychology</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional Law</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law of Contract</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law of Tort</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>Lecture &amp; workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>1495</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glamorgan Business School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award</th>
<th>No of students</th>
<th>Tuts, labs, lectures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HND Bus &amp; Management</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting &amp; Finance</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure, Sport &amp; Tourism</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>286</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total student instances</strong></td>
<td><strong>5434</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Advanced Technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>No of students</th>
<th>Learning events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Built Environment Law</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Development</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>Lecture and tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Resource Engineering</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>Lecture and tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; Business Skills</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Lecture and tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Applications</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Lecture and tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession Development</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Lecture and tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Systems</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>Lecture and tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total student instances</strong></td>
<td><strong>598</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does it work?
# Traffic Light Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week No</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Event</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS1S01 - Lecture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS1S01 - Tutorial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- aleisha acford
- Sergio Acton
- Mohammed Ahmed
- Sami Ahmed
- hassan al-kanim
- yagoub al-sarkal
- Abdullah Albrahim
- Michael Allen
- Christopher Altree
- Hussein Amiri
- sian ash
- Daniel Ashcroft
- rookkiran bahia
- kelly Batley
- Emily Beene

**Dept:** [ALL]  
**Module:** IS1S01-Information Resource Engineering  
**Event:** [ALL]  
**Term:** 08/01/2007  
**Filter:** All Students  
**Wk No:** 0  

Options: Absent, Present, Authorised Absence  
Clear selected cells, Alter Attendance, Logout  

**No. of Students:** 134
### Printed Report

#### Module: IS1S01 - Information Resource Engineering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week No.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali Isho Haftor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergio Acton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammed Ahmed</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sami Ahmed</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassan Al-Karim</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaqub Al-Sarkal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdullah Alkhreim</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Allen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Altree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hussain Amrani</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawaz Amin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Ashcroft</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdullah Alkhreim</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bright</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Breakman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Butler</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Show Totals**

Terms:
- 06/03/2007

Print Report
What we do with the data

- Triggers for
  - Sporadic or low attendance
  - ‘silent students’

- Supportive Interventions
  - Staged follow ups
  - Various methods: email, telephone call, SMS, letter
  - Action plans/progress meetings with students
1. Supportive: concerned you may be falling behind, please make contact to discuss your progress.

2. Letter for interview: obliged to notify relevant authorities, now vital that you come in to discuss your situation without delay.

3. Notice of withdrawal, deadline to respond: following your continued unexplained absence, can only assume you have decided to unofficially withdraw from studies.
Statistics based on HaSS 05-06 pilot

- **Participants:**
  - 736 students issued with fobs
  - 391 students contacted during the project
  - 465 letters sent

- **Responses:** 98%
  - 38% directly to the Advice Shop
  - 60% by returning to class
Stakeholders’ views

- Students
- Academic Staff
- Advice Shop
- Attendance Monitoring System
“Very good idea. I didn’t realise I’d missed so many until I got a letter. Oops”

“I think it’s very good...Forms should be given out to find out why you’ve missed seminars/lectures like in Cardiff. My attendance would be much better.”

“I’ve been here for three years [changed course] and I have noticed that in particular Research Methods classes were significantly fuller with the advent of the oojimaflip!”
“I thought it was pointless – just because I missed a few lectures doesn’t mean I don’t put the work in...”

“I don’t think it has changed my attendance level.”

“It encouraged me to go to lessons – although more so in my lecture where attendance counts as 10% of my grade.”

“It’s good, easier than a register and I attended more.”
Conclusions

- Early warning system to identify:
  - disengagement
  - students at risk of drop out
  - likely poor performance/non progression
  - module problems

- Targeted support

- Improved attendance

- Reasons for non attendance

- Improved retention rates (based on HaSS pilot)
Have your opinions changed?
How does monitoring student attendance contribute to improving student engagement?

Karen Fitzgibbon - HaSS
Julie Prior - GBS
Sue Stocking - AT

CELT Seminar 23 April 2008
Session Agenda

- Background
- The electronic system
- Faculty perspectives
- Outcomes
- Student and lecturer views
- Conclusions
Background

- Three projects, same electronic system and methodology
  - **HaSS** – been running the system for last 2 years
  - **GBS** – started using the system in December 2006
  - **AT** - began staged introduction in December 2006
  - **CCI & HeSaS** – use manual systems
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Student instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psych &amp; Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>1852</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total student</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>711</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award</td>
<td>No of students</td>
<td>Tuts, labs, lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HND Bus &amp; Management</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting &amp; Finance</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure, Sport &amp; Tourism</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>339</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total student instances</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Approx. 3800</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Advanced Technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>No of students</th>
<th>Lectures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computing and Maths</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Tech, Construction &amp; Management</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>561</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total student instances</strong></td>
<td><strong>4000</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does it work?
### Traffic Light Report

**Dept:** [ALL]

**Module:** IS1S01-Information Resource Engineering

**Event:** [ALL]

**Term:** 08/01/2007

**Filter:** All Students

**Wk No:** 0

**Absent** | **Present** | **Authorised Absence**
---|---|---

**Clear selected cells** | **Alter Attendance** | **Logout**

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week No</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Event</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS1S01 - Lecture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS1S01 - Tutorial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**No. of Students:** 134

---

- sleisha acford
- Sergio Acton
- Mohammed Ahmed
- Sami Ahmed
- hassan al-kanan
- yagoub al-sarkal
- Abdullah Alibrahim
- Michael Allen
- Christopher Altree
- Hussein Amiri
- sian ash
- Daniel Ashcroft
- rookkiran bahia
- kelly Batley
- Emily Beoney
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week No.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdiwa Adar</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergio Acetn</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammed Ahmed</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sami Ahmed</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassan al-Karim</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaqoub al-Sarkal</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdullah Alkhrim</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Allen</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Alltree</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hussein Amiri</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammad al-Sheikh</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Ashcroft</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isokan Bahia</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly Batley</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Beenes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bright</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Brookes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Butler</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Print Report
What we do with the data

- Identify poor attenders
- Track attendance levels
- Staged follow ups if low/sporadic attendance
- Encourage engagement with staff and support services
What benefits do you think attendance monitoring offers?
Participant views
Outcomes – faculty perspectives

- AT – use of data
- HaSS – student responses
- GBS – timings of follow ups
  - management information
What the Advice Shop does with the data

- Staged student follow ups
- Methods of contact
- Staged letters (Faculty variations)
- Scale of follow ups
HaSS student responses to follow ups

711 students monitored

- 125 - 1st letters sent
- 20 - 2nd letters
- 4 - 3rd letters

How students respond

- 31% no response but resumed attendance
- 19% in person
- 15% phoned or emailed
- 2% withdrawn as a result of non-attendance
Timing of follow ups

GBS Attendance Follow Ups

No of students

Terms 1 & 2 (2007-8)
Timings by type of follow up

GBS Attendance Actions (2007-8)

Term 1 & 2

Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb
---|-----|-----|-----|-----
Email | Letter | Appointments
Management information

- Tutor access to attendance data
- Module reporting
- Acknowledgement of outstanding attendance
- Research into reasons for non-attendance
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Week 0</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Week 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 1</td>
<td>95.08</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>83.05</td>
<td>79.66</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>72.50</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>44.90</td>
<td>18.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>84.16</td>
<td>87.51</td>
<td>66.414</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>76.53</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>89.26</td>
<td>80.08</td>
<td>78.33</td>
<td>77.93</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>65.07</td>
<td>63.31</td>
<td>64.43</td>
<td>29.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>77.09</td>
<td>65.05</td>
<td>64.01</td>
<td>64.01</td>
<td>72.22</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43.37</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>23.64</td>
<td>54.55</td>
<td>54.55</td>
<td>59.39</td>
<td>60.61</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>57.58</td>
<td>57.58</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>72.24</td>
<td>75.51</td>
<td>75.86</td>
<td>68.18</td>
<td>65.94</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>70.38</td>
<td>64.71</td>
<td>55.25</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>73.12</td>
<td>57.26</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>56.07</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>52.05</td>
<td>56.82</td>
<td>52.27</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>40.34</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>41.12</td>
<td>53.68</td>
<td>48.48</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>44.59</td>
<td>29.87</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 10</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>76.92</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 11</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>85.71</td>
<td>85.71</td>
<td>78.57</td>
<td>78.57</td>
<td>78.57</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>69.23</td>
<td>46.15</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 12</td>
<td>78.57</td>
<td>76.92</td>
<td>92.31</td>
<td>92.31</td>
<td>69.23</td>
<td>76.92</td>
<td>69.23</td>
<td>61.54</td>
<td>69.23</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Weekly Average | 86.83 | 71.32 | 72.48 | 74.81 | 69.14 | 69.43 | 60.64 | 64.09 | 58.61 | 53.64 | 28.76 |
Student feedback

- Survey of 135 respondents
- 110 stated that the system is making a positive difference to attendance
- 107 felt that it was good, very good or excellent
- 23 of 135 had received a letter/attended a follow up interview 21 found it helpful
Student views and comments

- Very good method to force students to come
- I realised I wasn’t going to lectures as much as I should
- Yes have to come in to get marked
- Allows us to get help without asking
- It helps to keep us turning up for lessons
- It made me think more and gave me motivation to go
- Shows me the Uni cares in my participation here and wants to help
Staff feedback

...don't think attendance is any better than previous years but I do think the students are more conscious if they don't attend i.e. it's a decision rather than accidental

Students seem to accept it. It shows that we are interested in them

When I have forgotten to pick it up...students have reminded me - the logging in is something they expect to do now

...we don't get to know the students' names any more

The fact that students know attendance is being monitored...acts as a deterrent to non-attendance
Conclusions

- Early warning system
- Supportive
- ‘Value added’ for students
- Improved understanding of attendance patterns
- Reasons for non attendance
- Future research
Law Student Attendance
What is informing your decision not to attend

- 91% course related
- 9% ill health/family responsibility
What is informing your decision not to attend?

- Make lectures more stimulating
- Poor atmosphere
- Lecturer adds little to notes
- Good attendance/miss around deadlines
- Attend everything except for illness
- Lecturer attendance poor
- Long gaps between classes/one hour in a day
What could be changed about the modules, if anything, to improve attendance?

- Make classes more interactive/more overheads/ppt
- Make attendance count towards grade
- Monitor attendance on every module
- Change timing of classes

The bar chart shows the number of responses for each option.
What do you consider to be the repercussions of non-attendance?

- Reduced quality of work/poor grades
- Lack of notes means struggle to qualify
- Unable to receive important info/clarify problems
- Grave (not so grave for lectures as workshops)
- Fail
- None
- Blank
How do you catch up on work you have missed?

- Copy notes from others: 8
- Use a text book/reading: 6
- Don't: 2
- Blank: 0
What do you feel the benefits of attendance are?

- Learn more: 18
- Benefit from others ideas: 3
- Tips from lecturers: 3
- Pass: 3
- Higher marks: 1
- Legitimate to seek help: 1
What would encourage other students to attend?
Electronic Attendance Monitoring Project

Evaluation Report of Implementation Stage

Introduction

The implementation stage and first two weeks of electronic attendance monitoring have now been completed. This paper presents a short evaluation of those early weeks and gives a summary of the number of students, staff and modules involved together with observations concerning implementation successes and concerns.

Summary of progress

In order to generate accurate class lists paper registers were used for the first 3 weeks of the project. Academic staff were aware of this stage and co-operated well with bringing registers back after classes in order that project staff could begin the process of registering students with key fobs.

The batons went ‘live’ in teaching week four, by which time most students were settled in their module choices, although module changes continued to be made, and some late enrolees or transferring students also needed to be added to the system.

In summary, we now have 736 students enrolled onto fobs across the four Awards taking part in the project - BA History, BSc Psychology, BA English Literature, BSc Criminology. There are 42 members of academic staff involved across 24 modules.

As part of the project design, we chose to include a control group where paper registers would continue to be used. This involves entering data (generated by passing a paper copy of a spreadsheet around each class) for 340 student attendances across lectures and seminars for six modules per week. Six members of academic staff are involved in the control group.

The ultimate aim of the project is to identify quickly those students who are not attending, to follow them up and put in place appropriate support mechanisms. To date, we have been able to contact students who’s attendance is giving cause for concern. So far, three students who were considering withdrawing have been ‘saved’ and will be continuing with their studies. If we are able to prevent a further nine students from withdrawing the project will have paid for itself in terms of fees saved.

Successes of implementation

At the beginning of the project, many negative comments were received from academic staff involved. However, once the batons went live the comments received were all positive, and the continued co-operation of the academic staff involved is considered a major success.
Although the electronic monitoring phase is in its infancy, the anticipated time saving in data entry compared to entering data manually onto spreadsheets has already been realised. The expectation that this would provide us with more time to follow up absent students is proving accurate. An unexpected bonus is that we are able to identify students if they lose their keys with their fob – we received a phone call to say some keys had been handed in with a UniNanny fob and we were able to track the student, phone her and return her keys. She was very appreciative of the service we were able to provide, and particularly the speed of our response.

Due to the limited number of batons we were able to purchase within the project budget, we were concerned that we would encounter logistical difficulties if the batons were not immediately returned after classes. However, in practice, the batons come back faster and more reliably than the paper registers did, and our anticipated difficulties have not materialised. Many staff have commented however, that if such a system were to be rolled out to the whole University, it would be unworkable to have staff collecting and returning batons in the same way as is being done for this project, and that the University would need to consider providing each member of academic staff with their own baton.

**Concerns from the implementation phase**

In the first three weeks, the volume of work generated by maintaining spreadsheet registers as well as registering students for the electronic fobs involved in the project was phenomenal. We underestimated the amount of hours it would take to register students onto fobs, and also underestimated the volume of work needed to establish accurate class lists quickly. A contributory factor to this pressure was the delayed approval for the project which prevented us carrying out the planned preparatory work during the summer.

All of the Awards involved in the trial increased their predicted recruitment targets, meaning we had to respond quickly to an increase of over 250 students who will participate in the project. Although not negative from the University or School’s perspective, the increase was unexpected and caused some problems with the logistics and system permissions which were subsequently overcome.

An unexpected issue involved the number of combined studies and serviced students from other Schools who are involved in the trial. We felt it important to include these groups so as to avoid a situation where some students sitting in a lecture were able to swipe, whilst others were not. However, this has caused us to realise that we need to carefully target the modules involved, particularly where a large percentage of the students in a module are from another School.

If the project were to be extended to next year, or indeed rolled out to the whole University, the summary of issues to be considered for implementation are therefore:

1. Complete as much preparatory work as possible during the summer to register which modules students will take - clearly this is dictated by the number and breadth of option choices.
2. Increase the number of project staff to take account of data entry taking place simultaneously with fob preparation.

3. Build in enough capacity in the number of fobs licensed to allow for fluctuations in late recruitment/clearing.

4. Identify modules to be included carefully, taking account of students from outside the school/faculty.

**Conclusion**

Overall, we have been delighted with the success of the batons and fobs, the reactions from staff and students and the way in which all the project staff (including colleagues from SoTech, ISeLS, the suppliers and HLaSS) have pulled together to make the early weeks a success. The next phase of the project will be reported on in January 2006.

Karen Fitzgibbon - Project Manager
November 2005
Electronic Attendance Monitoring Project

Interim Project Report

Introduction

The successful implementation phase of the above project, reported to CISPG in November 2005, concerned the first five weeks of the project. This paper presents a summary of the remaining period of the first term. In addition, the paper includes a progress report of our experiences mapped against the objectives in the PID.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Classroom Experiences & Logistics

The comments received from the academic staff involved in the trial continue to be positive. We have made adjustments to the baton timetable to allow for ease of movement of the batons between staff/teaching sessions. Tutors have built up familiarity with the equipment and the process and there are several ‘teams’ who now operate the baton between themselves and their classes. However, in other cases the logistics of the batons continues to be a time consuming job, particularly where modules are team taught and the member of staff changes frequently as it is not always easy to identify which member of staff is due to teach a particular session.

Sometimes tutors forget to collect the baton and the administrative assistant to the project (Kate Herridge) has occasionally had to take the baton to classes to ensure we continue to obtain the data. Interestingly, some staff report that if they turn up without the baton the students ask them to get it so that they can record their attendance!

Most students continue to use their fobs to swipe, although it has been necessary to provide the fail safe of a physical register for those who forget or misplace their fob. The vast majority of students regularly use the fob system to record their attendance. There have been three lost fobs and these students have quickly reported the issue and been given a new fob. It was decided for the purposes of this trial not to charge students for additional fobs, but in the event of the project being adopted throughout the University it is expected that losses would be charged to the student concerned.

Extent of follow ups

From the data downloaded at the end of each teaching session we are able to track whether attendance has been satisfactory. Time spent tracking attendance patterns is significant but the system itself is straightforward and user-friendly. If a student misses two consecutive sessions, or shows a pattern of missed classes such as missing the lectures but attending the seminars for example, we contact them - usually by letter, but sometimes by phone or email. To date we have sent 286 letters. It is
important to stress that this contact is supportive and friendly - it is deliberately neither confrontational or judgemental.

Often the student does not contact us directly, but returns to their classes the next week and shows improved attendance for the remainder of the period. In total 107 students (38%) of those contacted have responded directly and many have been given advice over the telephone to help them back into the classroom. Over two thirds of students contacted have resumed their attendance after a single follow up.

Some of the students we have contacted (26 to date) have taken up the invitation to come into the Advice Shop to discuss their attendance and all have voiced their appreciation of the care and concern shown towards them. These students have - in the majority - resumed their studies and many have benefited from the process of applying for mitigating circumstances. At least seven of the students interviewed mentioned that they thought they would have to give up or withdraw from their studies, but with support they are continuing and progressing well.

When a student does not recommence attendance a second follow up is made. In previous years, and in other studies of student attendance at other UK universities, these ‘hard core’ non-attenders are the most difficult group to track and contact. We have had some success with this group in terms of contacting them and hearing their reasons for non-attendance. Some have continuing illness or difficult personal issues which are affecting their attendance, and one has now resumed their studies after advice and contact with their tutors through the Advice Shop. However, some regard lack of attendance as an insignificant problem and are content with the progress they are making.

In the final evaluation report it is hoped that we will be able to provide statistical evidence to show the impact of the intervention on attendance and on the School’s overall retention rate.

Occasionally a student who is missing classes is found to be from another School or taking the Combined Studies degree. This has happened in previous years of attendance monitoring and a network of referral has become established as a result. If the student’s home School has a retention officer they are contacted to raise concern about attendance in the HLaSS module(s) or in the case of Combined Studies students, we contact the Scheme Leader. With the establishment of the new Faculty Advice Shops this referral process will be much improved, and tracking student progress should be more straight-forward for all.

**Modifications to the system**

During the period since implementation, further adaptations to the equipment and software have been requested and provided. Originally, the batons vibrated and beeped. We requested that the beep be removed as it was felt this would be too distracting in large lecture situations.

A further improvement to the system has been the establishment of a further colour code to allow us to show when student absence has been authorised or excused by a
tutor. This has prevented the possibility of students receiving a follow up letter when they had already explained their impending absence to a tutor but the information had not been recorded.

**Progress Measured Against Project Objectives**

Considerable progress has been made towards meeting the objectives of the project. The stated objectives in the PID are:

1. To improve attendance at level 1
2. To direct support to those who are not maintaining a regular attendance pattern
3. To further improve retention within the School
4. To improve progression rates between first and second levels of study

The following summary provides details of progress measured against the objectives:

1. Level 1 attendance has improved so far when measured against the same period in the same modules from the previous academic year (where data is available).
2. The Advice Shop has been able to better identify those students needing support because the electronic system provides the data faster than previously due to the speed with which tutors return the batons and the data download.
3. Several students have reported that they had begun to drift away from their studies and that it was our direct intervention that brought them back into the classroom. We have definite data that we have ‘saved’ a further seven students, which together with the three ‘saved’ in the implementation phase, means we are very close to the project costs being balanced by fees of students who stayed rather than left their studies.
4. At present we do not have the data to demonstrate better progression, but it is expected that we will be able to report on this in the final evaluation report due in June 2006.

**Next Stage of the Project**

For the remaining months of the project we will continue to monitor and support the modules and students involved in the project. We are planning to gather specific feedback from both students and tutors about their perceptions of the equipment, process and system and excerpts from this feedback will be included within the final report.

**Conclusion**

The continuing success of the project is due to the way that tutors, students and project staff (including those from the suppliers and ISeLs) have continued to work together and we look forward to evaluating the data against the success criteria in the final report for CISPG, due in June 2006.

Karen Fitzgibbon - Project Manager
January 2006
Electronic Attendance Monitoring Project

Final Project Report

Introduction

This is the final report of the Electronic Attendance Monitoring Project and will focus on the overall success of the project measured against the objectives and success criteria laid out in the PID.

Classroom Experiences & Logistics

For the remainder of the project period since the interim report in January 2006, the logistics continued to work well. Staff and student familiarity with the equipment lessened the disruption caused, and students continued to remind staff on the rare occasions when the baton was forgotten. Tutor and student views of the equipment and system in use during the project is provided later in this report.

Towards the end of the project, it was necessary to begin the process of collecting the fobs from the students who participated in the project. We had concerns about the volume of fobs that would be returned, but have been pleasantly surprised, with approximately 80% being returned ready for re-programming and use in the next academic year. Arrangements are shortly to be considered to attempt to recover as many of the remaining fobs as possible.

Extent of follow ups

The total number of students contacted during the project was 391 (out of a total of 736 students issued with fobs) with 465 letters being sent. The response rate to these communications was immense, with 98% responding either directly (by telephone etc) or indirectly (by resuming attendance). Of the 98% responding, 38% did so directly either by phone (17%), email (0.3%), or in person to the Advice Shop (20%) Of these respondents (9%) requested an advice interview as opposed to simply providing a reason for their poor attendance.

Through work undertaken in analysing student attrition we know that poor or sporadic attendance is a reliable indicator of risk of withdrawal. As a direct result of the follow ups in this project, the number of students who continued to study far outweighed those who made the decision to withdraw. The majority of students contacted overtly expressed their appreciation of the contact, with many confirming that without the contact from us they would have continued to drift away until they were too far behind to catch up. A note of caution is needed when directly attributing the project with the credit for ‘saving’ such students, as there could be many contributory factors to their continuation. However, as an indication of the success of advice interviews, of the 35 carried out, 28 continued with their studies.
Modifications to the system

Further modifications to the system were carried out during the period January – March and included the exception reports being sorted alphabetically, and the summary screen showing ticks and crosses to help with quick visual reporting. A further development was required to accommodate lost fobs. On several occasions, students who lost fobs were issued with a new fob only to find (and start using) the original fob. We needed to adjust the system so that duplicate fobs for the same student could be recognised in order that attendance was always recorded. The final modification was developed so that anomalous student attendances (i.e. being present in a module they were not registered for) were shown on the front screen of the exception report to allow for quick visual reckoning.

As a direct result of discussions concerning the equipment in use, we also used the system to experiment with assessment submission. Students on two of the largest modules comprising 227 and 178 students respectively were asked to bring their fobs when they submitted their coursework. This allowed us to produce (the same day) an accurate report of those who had failed to submit. These students were then tracked to see if they had applied for mitigating circumstances, had withdrawn or suspended their studies. For those where we had no immediate explanation, a phone call to the student led usually to advice about how to claim mitigating circumstances. The report was then given to the module leaders with the bundle of scripts. We also cross-checked the enrolment numbers of students submitting against the class lists on QP and contacted any students not registered on the module. We are hopeful that such an accurate picture of the class lists, together with those who had submitted (or not) is valuable not just in the immediacy of marking scripts and giving feedback, but also at Field and Award Boards when queries about missing marks may be raised. Tutor feedback about this additional use of the equipment was positive – particularly the details of those who had not submitted work.

Student and Tutor Feedback

Student Views:

The majority of students expressed very positive views about the system, with comments such as:

‘Very good idea. I didn’t realise I’d missed so many until I got a letter. Oops! I would have missed more without the letter. Very helpful’

‘I didn’t have time to answer the follow-up letter. Wish I did now. My commitment has been poor this year, and hopefully attendance will pick up next year. I plan to.’

One student who has been at the University before, made the following observation:

‘I have been here for 3 years, previously as a combined studies student, before changing to BSc Psychology and I have noticed that, in particular, research methods classes were significantly fuller with the advent of the oojimaflip!’
There were, as ever, some conflicting views, but these are in the minority:

‘I thought it was pointless. Just because I missed a few lectures doesn’t mean I don’t put the work in. I have still passed all essays and exams to date.’

‘Probably useful for admin but a bit irritating and pointless for me’

A lot of interest was generated by Ian Mat’s article in Leek during December 05, particularly his reference to the student who thought we were going to chip her! Ultimately, Ian confirmed that many students found the article interesting, and were reassured by the supportive nature of the project.

Tutor Views:

The majority of tutor feedback was positive, with comments such as these being common:

‘I think that the attendance monitoring has probably had a positive effect on attendance on the psychology modules that I have been involved in - particularly methods for some reason’

‘Yes, attendance has improved, and I think the monitoring has helped’

When asked whether the system should be rolled out, and if so should any alterations be made, several tutors confirmed the views expressed in the earlier reports, that each member of staff should receive a baton to prevent the need for collection before every class. One tutor made the following suggestion:

‘I think it should be rolled out from 1st year to final year students (if possible) -as it is a fast and up-to-date way of keeping track of students.’

Interest from other HEIs

As a result of the positive messages coming from staff and students involved with the project, other HEIs have been contacted by the UniNanny team and ten institutions requested further information. Subsequently, three of those institutions invited the UniNanny team to tender for contracts to embed the equipment ready for the new academic year, namely Teesside University, Napier University and Dublin City University. So far, one tender has been successful and the team are currently involved in the installation phase at Napier.
Progress Measured Against Project Objectives

The stated objectives in the PID are:

1. To improve attendance at level 1
2. To direct support to those who are not maintaining a regular attendance pattern
3. To further improve retention within the School
4. To improve progression rates between first and second levels of study

The following summary provides details of success measured against the objectives:

1. Level 1 attendance has improved in most modules when measured against the same modules from the previous academic year (where data is available).
2. The Advice Shop has been able to better identify those students needing support because the electronic system provides the data faster than previously due to the speed with which tutors return the batons and the data download.
3. Several students have reported that they had begun to drift away from their studies and that it was our direct intervention that brought them back into the classroom. We are confident that the project costs have been balanced by fees of retained students who may otherwise have left their studies early.
4. At present we do not have the data to demonstrate better progression, but it is expected that we will be able to identify links between this project and progression once the Award Board results are finalised in the next few weeks.

Conclusions and observations

In conclusion, we have been delighted with the overall success of the project, and are also mindful of the suggested improvements from both staff and students to take into the next phase of the project.

The UniNanny system has been proven to be both time and cost effective when taking into account the speed of follow-ups compared to the paper-based methods of monitoring attendance with large groups of students. The speed of return of the batons - in most cases within an hour of the session finishing, means we have accessed the exception reports for students the same day as they missed the classes, allowing us to follow them up and therefore make a much closer link between action and feedback. The paper based system is slower in several ways - the time taken for a tutor to return the register (often several days and sometimes weeks later) and the time taken to physically enter the data means the immediacy of the follow-up is lost and it is harder to get the student back to study because they have missed far more sessions in the meantime.

Some discussions have raised the issue of swipe card technology, but in the views of the majority of staff and students taking part in the project, the portability of the batons was very highly valued. The UniNanny team are confident that many of the technology-based innovations of the future will be accommodated by their system.
The debate over whether we should monitor attendance at specific learning events as opposed to monitoring whether a student is on campus or not, is ultimately determined by what the information is collected for. In the case of helping and supporting students who are at risk of early withdrawal through non-attendance, and attempting to improve student achievement and progression - the main aims of this project - knowing they were on campus is irrelevant if they are not participating in their classes.

Where do we go from here?

We would like to continue the use of the current system, fobs and batons in HLaSS over the next academic year, although the modules to be monitored may be changed. We would also like to increase the coverage of the system and are currently considering rolling out the trial to include all first year Law students. The funding needed to support the continuation of the current trial, and the further finance needed to allow us to include Law students is approximately £11,000. In simple terms, if the system assisted us in retaining one first year student in the new academic year, it would cover the cost of the maintaining the project for almost 1000 students.

The project team would like to thank the members of CISPG for their support and interest during the first year of the project. The project manager would like to acknowledge with thanks the hard work of the whole project team, including staff from ISeLs, SoTech and HLaSS in making it such a success.

Karen Fitzgibbon - Project Manager
June 2006
Final Report for LDG Project BLF072

Application of Computer-based Self-assessment for Student Orientation and Experience

Number of students involved

In the original project proposal we considered that if 100 students accessed both learner support tools in the first year, this would be a success. As the table below shows, this has been far exceeded.

The questionnaire was designed for students to seek information and exit at any point once they had received the feedback they sought. Consequently the completions show the students who worked through the whole learner support exercise (234) as opposed to partial completions (468).

Students were able to self-select whether they attempted the question, resulting in considerable variance in question completions. The decision not to force students to complete questions they felt were irrelevant to their situation was purposeful in order to avoid misrepresentations in the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner Support Tool</th>
<th>Partial Completions</th>
<th>Completions</th>
<th>Total hits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Days</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Health Check</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures correct as 13 June 2008

Sustained development

Although the project is complete, the learner support tools will continue to be updated and utilised each academic year. The skills and staff development that have taken place with regard to QMP over the period of the project, will enable the Advice Shop Managers to continue with these interventions.

Outcomes and output of the proposed project

The learner support tools have been developed and student use far exceeded initial expectations with 468 using the tools as opposed to the original target of 100 students. As the student evaluation shows below, they found them useful and helpful.

Q: Was this exercise useful?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Early Days (% rounded)</th>
<th>Study Health Check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree/strongly agree</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree/strongly disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Was the feedback you received helpful?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Early Days (%) rounded</th>
<th>Study Health Check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree/strongly agree</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree/strongly disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above figures clearly demonstrate the extent of student engagement with the tools. An unexpected outcome has been the extent of information gathered on the student experience. We have been able to gather data concerning student motivation, transition, use of academic resources, social and academic integration. This has provided a previously unavailable institutional picture of early student integration.

These two learner support tools extended the use of QMP within the University’s blended learning assessment project. They demonstrate how QMP can be used to provide online diagnostics and feedback in a supportive manner. As an online resource, the tools supplement existing learner support and feedback without requiring intensive staff support. The personal element is maintained as feedback is tailored to individual student responses.

**How results of the project will be disseminated**

Indicative results have been disseminated informally to members of CELT, Advice Shop staff, PVC (Academic) PVC (Learning and Student Support) and the Quality Enhancement Committee.

Partial results were presented at the ESCalate (Education Subject Centre) Conference in Stirling University in April 2008.

On completion of further analysis a seminar is planned as part of the CELT seminar series as well as agenda items on Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committees. Further dissemination across UK HEI will be achieved through publication of a joint article.

**Future Development**

A further development requested by the Chair of the Heads of Learning and Teaching Committee, was to develop a student experience questionnaire. It was anticipated that this would complement the Faculty-developed module evaluation questionnaire, and will be designed to enhance the University’s understanding of the student experience. This was completed in time to release to students in May 2008, at the end of the 07/08 academic year. As of 11th June 2008 392 have partially or fully completed the questionnaire.

The intention is to modify the student experience questionnaire for use with students who have withdrawn early from their studies.

The authors both feel confident that QMP could be equally successfully extended into other areas of the Advice Shop work such as a comprehensive student profiling tool.
1. Introduction

The Advice Shop Managers (ASMs) were requested by the Heads of Learning and Teaching (HoLTs) to design and implement a student experience questionnaire which would complement module evaluations. The ASMs subsequently drew up the question set using some of the existent questions from the two learner support tools ‘Early Days’ and ‘Study Health Check’ and informed by Yorke & Longden (2007). The questions were grouped into five sets: profiling (age, gender, full time/part time and so on) enrolment and induction, living and socialising, use of the campus facilities, and overall experience. Questions concerning the academic learning experience were avoided so as not to duplicate module evaluation exercises carried out within the faculties.

The HoLTs had the opportunity to review the questionnaire before it was piloted. The information gathered for this report represents a coarse grain analysis of the responses received from the first year of operation. Further interpretation can be drawn from the responses, but in order to provide timely feedback to HoLTs before the start of the new academic year, this report represents the ‘first cut’ of the data.

2. Method

Once the questions had been confirmed the authors constructed the questionnaire using QuestionMark Perception (QMP). This allowed the questionnaire to be delivered online and also facilitated the speed of analysis. QMP allows questions to be constructed in ‘blocks’ meaning that if students answered ‘no’ to the first question, they would not receive any further questions in that block. This cuts out irrelevant questions, and also ensures that the time taken to complete the questionnaire is optimally used. For this reason the number of responses to each question differs and is given for each question analysed.

The questionnaire was emailed to all students on 23rd May and was closed on 1st July. The majority of participants accessed the questionnaire within the first two weeks.

2.1. Student participation

A total of 996 students accessed the link to the questionnaire. 247 students went no further than clicking on the link. 455 partially completed the questionnaire and there were 294 total completions. The data presented includes partial completions.

Participation exceeded expectations given the time of year, and also the common perception that our students are over-surveyed. However, as can be seen from the numbers completing the exercise both these points were found to be inaccurate on this occasion. A further surprise was in the number of qualitative comments given by respondents. Whilst comments boxes were included in a number of questions, we did not expect the volume of comments received, a further indication of the willingness of our students to respond when their views are sought.

2.2. Profile of students completing questionnaire (percentages rounded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of respondents</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Domicile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 20</td>
<td>Female 47%</td>
<td>UK 72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 24</td>
<td>Male 45%</td>
<td>EU 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>Not answered 8%</td>
<td>International 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not answered 6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Undergraduate 75%</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Postgraduate 19%</td>
<td>1st year 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCI</td>
<td>Not answered 6%</td>
<td>2nd year 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>3rd year 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBS</td>
<td></td>
<td>4th year or more 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HaSS</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not answered 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HeSaS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of study</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the full time students (270 respondents), 52% do not work at all during term time. Of those that work during term time, details of hours worked are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part-time employment during term time - full time students only</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not work</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work 10 hours or less</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work 11 – 20 hours</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work more than 20 hours</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those that do work, 50% of the 124 respondents indicated they work during the day on weekdays, 26% work weekday evenings and 15% work on weekends.

3. Analysis of main themes

3.1. Enrolment and induction

The table below shows the time taken to enrol students (307 respondents). Of these, 35% felt the time taken to enrol was too long, 54% felt it was acceptable and the remainder either did not answer or had no opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time taken to enrol</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30 mins</td>
<td>69 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 1 hour</td>
<td>93 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2 hours</td>
<td>64 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 2 hours</td>
<td>80 (26%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student views of their enrolment experience were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolment experience</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff were helpful and friendly</td>
<td>120 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff were knowledgeable</td>
<td>16 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was straightforward</td>
<td>93 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had problems, but they were dealt with</td>
<td>48 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had problems and it was difficult to resolve them</td>
<td>26 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When invited to comment further about improvements that could be made, issues highlighted by respondents included lack of or poor information, and that the number of staff available should be increased to reduce queues and deal with queries more effectively.

63% of students (306) attended their course induction, 30% said they were unaware of their course induction or that there had not been one. In response to the question ‘how long was your course induction?’ the majority of students (62% of 188) had a one day induction. 18% had a two or three day induction and 20% had an induction lasting four days or longer. When asked whether the induction was ‘too long, too short or just right’ 75% felt it was just right, 15% too long and 10% too short. 97% (of 192) were satisfied with their induction experience overall, and 84% met their lecturers during the induction period.

3.2. Living and socialising

34% of students (304) sampled live on or near campus, 29% live within a 10 mile radius and 34% live more than 10 miles from campus. Of 309 students 32% felt that their accommodation affected their ability to study. Within the comments provided, the most common issues were noise, distraction by others and lack of facilities such as the internet.

When asked for comments about what students most enjoyed about the social side of higher education, 53% (190 respondents) indicated that it was the opportunity to make new friends, meet people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and socialise within their study groups which were the most enjoyable aspects of their experience. 11% of respondents had chosen not to participate in
social activity and the majority of this group were mature and part time students who felt that current social provision did not meet their particular needs, or that socialising was not part of their chosen experience or expectation. 83% of 297 respondents have made some kind of friendship network at University, with 7% saying that it was not important for them to make university friends.

The above analysis indicates that the social side of HE is important to our students and that they are establishing friendships. It is interesting to note therefore that 84% (of 299 respondents) indicated that they do not take part in any University clubs or societies. In addition, 85% do not participate in other Faculty or University activities (i.e those not organised by the SU). However 40% (of 283) have indicated that they would like other organised social opportunities. This makes clear that the social provision currently available does not meet the needs of students in the sample, and several respondents commented about the closure of the SU at Treforest at weekends and the lack of SU at the ATRiuM.

3.2.1. Balancing academic and other commitments

32% of 305 respondents confirmed that they have to give time to look after others (parents, children or partner) and 42% (of 304) found it difficult to balance academic and other commitments, mainly due to part time employment and domestic responsibilities.

63% of students (305) stated that finances had affected their ability to study and of those 33% said the impact was significant. Of the respondents who indicated that they work during term time, 74% (of 136) indicated that they needed this part time employment to help fund their studies.

An additional factor impacting on study concerned health. Of 305 respondents 64% had experienced illness during term time, 47% of whom had experienced illness severe enough to seek medical advice.

3.3. Use of the campus

The following illustrates how the campus feels to students at specific times (respondents could only select a single choice for each row that best described their view). It also shows that 39% of students do not come onto campus at night or at weekends, and 38% of students do not use the campus during vacation periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice that best describes how the campus feels to students at the following times</th>
<th>Busy</th>
<th>Friendly</th>
<th>I feel safe</th>
<th>Lonely</th>
<th>Badly lit</th>
<th>Only partially open</th>
<th>Don't use campus at these times</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the day</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When it is dark (early evening)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 9 pm</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At weekends</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During vacations</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.1. Use of campus during term time

Excluding timetabled classes, during weekdays the distribution of when students (308 respondents) stated they were on campus is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekday use of campus</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daytime (9 am to 6 pm)</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening (6 to 9 pm)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night time (after 9 pm)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only come to campus for timetables classes</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 310 respondents, 30% use the campus at weekends. During term-time, 68% of students (278 respondents) do not use the campus for social activities. Of those that do, the frequency of campus usage is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of days on campus for social activity during term time</th>
<th>No of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days (per week)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>35  13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19  7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12  4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9   3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7   3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1   0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3   1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures show the relatively small number of students engaging in multiple social activities and offer further evidence of the possible mismatch between student expectations and experience of the opportunities for socialising at Glamorgan.

3.3.2. Use of campus during vacations

The table in 2.3 shows, that 38% of students do not come onto campus during vacation periods. Of those that do, (294 respondents) the most popular facility in use is the LRC, possibly being used by students with resit coursework/examinations, or those studying on Fresh Start programmes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of facilities during vacations</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LRC</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering facilities</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Union</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Advice Shop</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackwells</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT labs</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4. Other facilities

When asked if they had used services provided by the Student Union (excluding the bars, food outlets and nightclub) of the 294 respondents, 22% had used other services, but 53% had not and a further 32% said they were not aware of any other services.

When asked whether at least some catering services were available at times students expected them to be, 63% said yes, and 31% said no.

When asked if their had been as many opportunities to participate in sport and exercise as they expected, 28% (of 294) said yes, 32% said no, but 36% stated that they were not interested in these facilities.
3.4.1. Facilities for studying (including exam experience)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Haven't used/needed</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the library resources and services sufficient for your needs?</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been able to access general computing resources when you needed to?</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were no comments made to explain why students may have been dissatisfied with the services, and it is of concern that 9% haven’t felt the need to use the library at all. In the questionnaire next year we will ask supplementary questions to capture reasons why students were dissatisfied.

When asked where they would go to study quietly on their own, the most popular place was at home (57% of 286), with the next most popular place being the LRC (19%). To meet for group work, 39% of students (284) would use the LRC, 23% would go to an empty classroom, 11% would use coffee shop facilities on campus and 11% would go home. Feedback to the Student Expectation Undergraduate Group suggested that students would welcome clear information concerning which classrooms are available for group study. The suggestion that classrooms in buildings close to Halls have some open access study time appears to be reinforced by the respondents to this questionnaire.

When asked about their exam experience, 71% of the 291 respondents had taken examinations as part of their studies. Of these, 78% felt the examination timetable was clear, but 36% felt their concentration had been disturbed during the exam. Qualitative responses concerning how students’ concentration was disturbed were not collected, but will be collected in subsequent questionnaires.

3.5. Overall experience

When asked about their overall experience, 62% (of 320) responses gave a positive response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ overall experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall it’s been great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s been ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed, some ups and some downs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s been disappointing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of qualitative comments are given below:

Even though i [sic] have mixed feelings, overall it has been a pleasant experience as it gave me a greater independence and experience of learning as well as doing a good job in preparing me for the world of work.

I have met some good and interesting people, and I have learned quite a bit throughout my two years of being here. I just hope that the next academic year is more organised in all aspects of teaching and the events that are put on.

It's been tough, fun, stressful, amazing, definatley [sic] a life changing experience....!

When asked about the fit between their expectations and experience (320 respondents) 24% said it was as they expected, 24% it wasn’t what they expected and 46% thought it was a mixture of the two. When invited to make comments about their expectations there was a mix of positive and negative comments concerning their overall experience in relation to facilities, teaching quality and tutor support. Examples of comments are as follows:

I didn't realise just how different it would be from school, and how hard I would have to work. There is no typical student life of just partying continuously, work has to be done in order to succeed.
Inconsistent standards or expectations when it came to marking. Not really any certainty as to what was wanted because the tutors themselves did not apply the same standards.

At first I though [sic] that studying [sic] at University was just like entering in a place without a way out, but I was wrong. It has been the best experience of my life [sic]. Well done. Indeed

When asked if they could make one significant change to their university experience, the majority of comments generally fell into the following areas:

- Teaching quality and feedback
- Student’s own time management, study routines and use of their social time
- University facilities

A selection of the 274 comments follows:

one change would be that some of the tutors/lecturers structure their classes more clearly and have longer office hours in order to help the students who want to learn.

Better guidance on processes - how to hand in assignments, how to lay out assignments. More timely feedback - it has not been within the 20 day period once!

Found a residential area closer to uni. Start my work earlier rather than leaving it last minute. Because of this I don't feel like I'm producing good quality work.

To have done more work on my subject. And gone out and met new people more

Better facilities for non-resident students, especially mature ones.

4. Emerging themes from open comments

Consistent concerns emerging from the open comments made throughout the questionnaire centred on:

- Facilities at the Atrium
- Students’ Union provision
- Teaching quality (classroom experience, module relevance to programme, course organisation)
- Assessment feedback (timeliness of returning assignments and quality of feedback)

It was apparent that where a student had a significant negative experience, this was reflected in their comments throughout the questionnaire.

The comments students made contained many mature, thoughtful and reflective statements about their own contribution to their university experience and these are summarised as follows:

- Mature and part time students’ mindset concerning expectations of their engagement was focussed on learning rather than integrating socially and many voiced subsequent regret that they felt as holding this view had prevented them from getting the most from their university experience
- Students often commented on their lack of preparedness for university with regard to independent learning, and many felt that this hampered their engagement in the early months of their studies.
- Many students reflected on the need for good time management – something they had difficulty with – and a desire to establish effective study routines.
- Students placed a very high value on social engagement both within their cohort and across the general student population. It appears from the responses received that the majority of this is achieved through study networks, rather than facilitated by university provision.

Karen Fitzgibbon & Julie Prior
September 2008

1. Introduction

A report of the findings of the pilot Student Experience Questionnaire conducted in May 2008 was presented to Heads of Learning and Teaching and the Student Lifecycle Group. Both groups confirmed they would like to see the questionnaire repeated in 2008-09 as the data produced was found to be valuable to increasing institutional understanding of the student experience.

2. Method

The questionnaire was delivered through QuestionMark Perception (QMP), using a mix of multiple choice and open comment questions. This allowed the questionnaire to be delivered online and also facilitated the speed of analysis. QMP allows questions to be constructed in ‘blocks’ meaning that if students answered ‘no’ to a key question, they would not receive any further irrelevant questions in that block. For this reason the number of responses to each question differs and is given for each question analysed.

The questionnaire was emailed to all students on 26 May and was closed on 2 July. The timing of the questionnaire was set to coincide with the end of the main examination period and before student results were released.

2.1. Student participation

There were 529 partial completions of which 340 answered all the questions (both are included in the following analysis). Participation exceeded expectations given the time of year, and also the common perception that our students are over-surveyed. Furthermore, as with the responses in 2007-08, students took every opportunity to express their views in open comment questions.

2.2. Profile of students completing questionnaire (percentages rounded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of respondents</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Domicile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 20</td>
<td>Female 45%</td>
<td>UK 74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 24</td>
<td>Male 54%</td>
<td>EU 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>Not disclosed 1%</td>
<td>International 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not answered 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Undergraduate 76%</th>
<th>Postgraduate 23%</th>
<th>Not answered 1%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCI</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Studies</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBS</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HaSS</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HeSaS</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of study</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full time 89%</td>
<td>1st year 48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time 10%</td>
<td>2nd year 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered 1%</td>
<td>3rd year 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th year or more 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not answered 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the full time students (308 respondents), 50% do not work at all during term time. Details of those who did work are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part-time employment during term time - full time students only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work 10 hours or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work 11 – 20 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work more than 20 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the working respondents, 44% (of 134) indicated they work on weekdays during the day, 32% work weekday evenings and 19% work on weekends.

3. Analysis of main themes

3.1. Enrolment and induction

The table below shows the time taken to enrol students (356 respondents). Of these, 30% felt the time taken to enrol was too long, 61% felt it was acceptable (compared with 54% of respondents in 2007-08) and the remainder either did not answer or had no opinion. The most significant improvement has been the fall in the number of students taking over 2 hours to enrol (from 26% to 14%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time taken to enrol</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30 mins</td>
<td>93 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 1 hour</td>
<td>137 38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2 hours</td>
<td>77 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 2 hours</td>
<td>50 14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student views of their enrolment experience were as follows, with the biggest improvement being the number of students who felt their enrolment was straightforward (from 29% to 37%):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolment experience</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff were helpful and friendly</td>
<td>131 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff were knowledgeable</td>
<td>21 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was straightforward</td>
<td>132 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had problems, but they were dealt with</td>
<td>46 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had problems and it was difficult to resolve them</td>
<td>23 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>5 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>353</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, 93% of students were positive about their enrolment experience. 62% of students (222) attended their course induction and 85% (188) met academic staff during this time. However, a further 30% said they were unaware of their course induction or that there had not been one – the same percentage as last year.
3.2. Living and socialising

40% of the students (350) sampled live on or near campus, an increase from the 34% in 2007-08. 30% live within a 10 mile radius and 29% live more than 10 miles from campus (the latter being a fall from the 34% in 2007-08). 32% of students (337) felt that their accommodation affected their ability to study – no change from 2007-08. When asked to comment, students indicated that issues impacting on their studies were inconsiderate flatmates, lack of quiet study space and the time it takes to travel to campus to use the facilities.

There was almost no change in responses concerning friendship groups compared to the previous year, with 83% (348) having established some kind of friendship network at University. A further 9% found it difficult to make friends, and 7% said it was not important to them. The importance of a strong friendship network is further reinforced by students indicating that when they needed support of a personal nature during the academic year, 42% (355) would seek advice from family and friends and a further 17% would seek advice from university friends.

The above analysis indicates that the social side of HE is important to our students and that they are establishing friendships. It is interesting to note therefore that in common with last year, 85% (of 349 respondents) indicated that they do not take part in any University clubs or societies. In addition, 85% do not participate in other Faculty or University activities (ie those not organised by the SU). However 47% (of 345) have indicated that they would like other organised social opportunities – a 7% increase from last year. Clearly the social provision currently available does not meet the needs of students in the sample, and student comments indicating which new clubs and societies they would like will be passed to the SU for consideration.

3.2.1. Balancing academic and other commitments

28% of 344 respondents confirmed that they have to give time to look after others (parents, children or partner) and 45% (of 346) found it difficult to balance academic and other commitments - mainly as a result of part time employment, domestic responsibilities and students’ personal time management.

77% of students (347) stated that finances had affected their ability to study (an 11% increase to the previous year), and of those 29% said the impact was significant (a 4% fall from last year). Of the respondents who indicated that they work during term time, 71% (of 136) indicated that they needed this part time employment to help fund their studies.

An additional factor impacting on students’ study concerned health issues. Of the 345 respondents 65% had experienced illness during term time, 42% of whom had experienced illness severe enough to seek medical advice. These percentages are consistent with 2007-08 and indicate that a continuing policy of mitigating circumstances is warranted.

3.3. Use of the campus

The following illustrates how the campus feels to students at specific times (respondents could only select a single choice for each row that best described their view). It also shows that 31% of students do not come onto campus at night, 39% do
not use the campus at weekends and 37% of students do not use the campus during vacation periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice that best describes how the campus feels to students at the following times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During the day</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When it is dark (early evening)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After 9 pm</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>At weekends</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During vacations</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison with 2007-08, there is a 9% increase in the number of students who think the campus feels busy during the day. The friendliness of the campus has increased by both during the day (4%) and early evening (5%). The most significant change is the number of respondents saying they feel safe after 9pm – from 5% to 20%.

Excluding timetabled classes, during weekdays the distribution of when students (357 respondents) stated they were on campus is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekday use of campus</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daytime (9 am to 6 pm)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening (6 to 9 pm)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night time (after 9 pm)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only come to campus for timetables classes</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 358 respondents, 35% use the campus at weekends – a 5% increase from last year.

3.4. Other facilities

Excluding the bars, food outlets and nightclub, only 18% of the 338 respondents had used other services provided by the Student Union - a fall from 22% last year. In addition to the 49% who had not used any other SU services, a further 32% said they were not aware there were any.

When asked whether at least some catering services were available at times students expected them to be, 75% (of 331) said yes, 22% said no and the remainder did not answer the question. Comments received will be passed to Campus Services for information.

When asked if their had been as many opportunities to participate in sport and exercise as they expected, 21% (of 335) said yes – a fall of 7% from 2007-08, 45% said no (compared to 32% the previous year), but 32% stated that they were not interested in these facilities.
This analysis shows that the majority of students are not engaging with the wider SU services and that the number using those services is declining. Student participation and interest in the opportunity for sport and exercise has also declined.

### 3.4.1. Facilities for studying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Haven’t used/needed</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the library resources and services sufficient for your needs?</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been able to access general computing resources when you needed to?</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number not using the LRCs has risen from 9% to 11% and this remains a concern. Furthermore 67% (of 104) indicated that they use a different library to the campus on which they normally study and open comments suggested that this refers to Atrium students travelling to the Treforest campus to access books and other learning resources. There were several comments regarding the difficulties Atrium students experience in securing appropriate access to texts (both at the Atrium and Treforest campuses) and also the access to computing facilities in the Atrium LRC. Comments provided regarding the LRCs and general computing resources will be passed to LCSS for information and consideration.

When asked where they would go to study quietly on their own, the most popular place was at home (58% of 340), with the next most popular place being the LRC (20%). To meet for group work, 29% of students (338) would use the LRC, 33% would go to an empty classroom (a rise from 23% last year), 11% would use coffee shop facilities on campus and 15% would go home.

### 3.5. Overall experience

When asked about their overall experience, 69% of the 360 responses were positive. There were a number of comments relating to poor experiences including courses issues in general, and the poor facilities and student experience at the Atrium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ overall experience</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall it’s been great</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s been ok</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed, some ups and some downs</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s been disappointing</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was little change in responses between this year and last. When asked about the fit between their expectations and experience (355 respondents) 23% said it was as they expected, 24% it wasn’t what they expected and 51% thought it was a mixture of the two. When invited to make comments about their expectations there was a mix of positive and negative comments, in a similar vein to 2007-08.
3.5.1 One significant change to university experience

When asked if they could make one significant change to their university experience, the most significant categories into which the 300 comments fell were:

- suggested improvements to facilities
- timetabling and course organisation
- suggested changes to elements of the programme or course.

There was a significant increase in negative comments concerning facilities for the Treforest campus. These mainly focused on the cost of catering outlets, lack of IT and printing facilities and suitability of classrooms for teaching. Comments concerning the Atrium included quality, cost and availability of printing and IT facilities; lack of independent study facilities (such as private rehearsal space) and lack of open-access computing facilities. Several commented on the sterile nature of the décor – citing ‘white walls’ not being appropriate for creative students. Other comments were focused on catering provision which was considered to be expensive and not serving food that students wanted. The lack of social space, opportunities for clubs and societies and lack of a students’ union were also commented on.

The table below indicates the number of comments for the same categories in 2007-08, which shows that facilities continue to be an issue. This was one of the top categories last year, and has risen further for both Treforest and the Atrium, with Treforest having the most significant increase (from 24 – 41 comments).

Issues surrounding timetabling and course organisation was a new theme that emerged this year and accounted for a significant number of comments (40). Student comments on suggested programme changes has also increased, and included issues regarding module options and practical experience linked to employment or industry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment category</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvements to the facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atrium</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glyntaf</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treforest</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetabling and course organisation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested programme changes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a very different picture to the responses for the same question last year, as shown in the table below. Of 274 responses the most significant categories concerned teaching quality and feedback, and student’s own time management, study routines and use of social time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment category</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching quality</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ own time management</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.2 Best aspect of university experience

When students were asked what had been the best aspect of their university experience, of the 354 useable comments, the most significant categories were comparable to the comments in 2007-08 and are given below:

- Positive comments relating to the programme of study (23%).
• Making new friends and meeting new people (18%).
• Sense of personal achievement (11%).

4. Conclusion

Only 8% of students found their overall university experience disappointing, indicating that most students had a positive overall experience in 2008-9. The best aspects continue to be the opportunity to study, make new friends and the sense of personal achievement. If students could make one significant change, the majority would improve facilities, make changes to elements of their programme or course, and improve timetabling and course organisation.

Main issues for consideration are:

• There has been an improvement in students’ overall enrolment and induction experience although 30% were unaware of their course induction or did not have one.

• Students were positive overall about the campus environment but there were significant number of comments about the cost of catering services and comments on printing facilities at the Treforest and Atriums campuses.

• There were significant numbers of comments throughout the questionnaire concerning students’ negative experiences at the Atrium campus which impacted on their total experience from classroom facilities through to study spaces, social engagement and LRC provision. Many commented that the Atrium ‘doesn't feel like a university’.

• The social side of higher education continues to be of importance to students, but this is not facilitated through SU provision. As in 2007-08, 85% of students choose not to take part in clubs or societies and a further 47% would like other organised social opportunities not currently provided.

• Excluding the bars/nightclub and food outlets, only 18% of respondents used other services provided by the SU – a fall of 22% from 2007-08. A further 32% were not aware that the SU provided any other services.

• 45% of students (compared to 32% the previous year) said there were not as many opportunities to participate in sport and exercise as they expected. A further 32% stated that they were not interested in these facilities.

• Despite 50% of the student respondents stating that they did not work during term time, they do not appear to utilising their free time to participate in SU clubs and societies or in on sport and exercise activities.

• Financial concerns affected 77% of students an 11% increase over the previous year. Of the students who were working during term time, 71% indicated they needed this paid employment to finance their studies.

Karen Fitzgibbon & Julie Prior
22 August 2009
Report on the GlamStart Student Experience Simulation

Martin Lynch, Karen Fitzgibbon

18/04/08

‘I found it a really unique and entertaining way to be introduced to Uni. life.’

‘Doesn’t make the University look so scary when I first began.’

‘It provides an engaging platform for the almost certainly IT literate society we live in. It also provides a challenge to would-be gamers as well the fact that it makes learning fun, which is something that can usually only be aspired to be achieved.’

Students commenting on the GlamStart project April 2008
# Contents

1. Executive Summary .................................................................................................................. 3
   1.1. Glossary .............................................................................................................................. 3
2. Terms of reference .................................................................................................................... 4
3. Introduction ................................................................................................................................ 5
4. Project Management .................................................................................................................. 7
   4.1. Project Management Team .............................................................................................. 7
   4.2. Project Milestones ............................................................................................................. 8
   4.3. Funding .............................................................................................................................. 8
   4.4. Publicity and dissemination ............................................................................................ 9
5. Evaluation .................................................................................................................................. 11
   5.1. Evaluation Method ........................................................................................................... 11
   5.2. User Data .......................................................................................................................... 11
   5.3. Questionnaire .................................................................................................................. 11
   5.4. Focus groups .................................................................................................................... 12
6. Evaluation Findings ................................................................................................................... 13
   6.1. Usage Statistics ................................................................................................................ 13
   6.2. Survey results – quantitative data .................................................................................... 15
   6.3. Survey results – qualitative data ..................................................................................... 19
   6.4. Learning and the student experience .............................................................................. 20
   6.5. Usability ............................................................................................................................ 22
   6.6. Timing of the intervention ............................................................................................... 24
   6.7. References ....................................................................................................................... 27
   6.8. Potential research questions to emerge from the evaluation .......................................... 28
7. Recommendations .................................................................................................................... 29
8. Appendix .................................................................................................................................. 30
   8.1. Evaluation Questionnaire .............................................................................................. 30
   8.2. Additional features suggested ...................................................................................... 35
1. Executive Summary

- Just over 10% of new starters to the University in September 2007 used GlamStart.
- Students showed high levels of satisfaction with the experience. Users found the information helpful in terms of describing the services offered by the University and in terms of assisting them in orientation.
- The interactive, game-like experience offered within GlamStart has raised awareness of skills such as time management and has encouraged students to reflect on how they spend their time.
- A perceived weakness of the project was the lack of variety of tasks involved in the game-play. This would be addressed in future releases of the project.
- Students feel that they would benefit from accessing the resource before they come to the campus. This would allow them to answer questions, enable them to visualise the experience and get the most out of the induction experience.
- In terms of project management, the involvement of stakeholders from a wide range of university support departments helped to ensure project was successful.

1.1. Glossary

AT — Faculty of Advanced Technology
BUS — Glamorgan Business School
HESAS – Faculty of Health, Sport and Science
HASS — Faculty of Humanities and Social Services
CCI — Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries
CeLL — Centre for Lifelong Learning
eST — eSupport Team
CELT — Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching
QMP — Questionmark Perception – assessment and survey tool
2. Terms of reference

During the course of the Learning Development Group meeting on the 6th December 2006 a discussion was held regarding the potential for broadening the scope and range of multimedia development work which might bring widespread benefit to students of the University of Glamorgan. Accordingly, the eSupport Team was asked to put together proposals for rolling out simulation projects for each faculty as well as a generic title which could be of widespread benefit in the induction process. A report estimating resource implications to support these initiatives was duly sent to the Learning Development Group for consideration at the next meeting (February 2007). Shortly thereafter, the creation of a simulation game which was to contribute to the student induction process was sanctioned.

This is the evaluation report on the simulation game which was created, GlamStart. The report is addressed to the Learning Development Group and Directorate and describes the project’s scope, the process which was adopted and an evaluation of the impact of GlamStart on the students who have used it. The report also includes a number of recommendations on future developments based on the results of the evaluation.
3. Introduction

The process of induction is a challenging one for all concerned. For the institution, the challenge is one of logistics and management, testing the capabilities of the organisation to work across functional areas to deliver a coherent experience — Yorke, M. (1999). For the students experiencing the induction process, this is a time of rapid change and learning when they are required to process a huge amount of information and experience in a short amount of time. For many, this can be an overwhelming experience. Access to practical, accurate and timely support information is essential for all students at this time and the challenge to the project team was to examine whether presenting this information to the student as a web-based simulation game could be beneficial.

The GlamStart project represents a shift in scale of project for the eSupport Team’s Multimedia Development Team and a leap in ambition for the educational simulation work developed over the last three years. Up until this point our projects have been discrete interventions in the academic teaching programme for particular modules. Typically a project team would be small and activity would be tightly focused on the learning objectives to be delivered or supported. The simulation ‘engine’ which was developed 2005/2006 was used to create three applications in the Glamorgan Business School (GBS) in 2005 and HESAS (2006, 2007) but GlamStart had a much bigger scope both in terms of the learning goals as well as the technical functionality required to deliver them.

The potential for educational use offered by these types of rich-media environments has been captured in research in this field which has identified benefits to students in terms of motivation and learning — McFarlane et al (2002), Facer, K. (2004), Kirriemuir, J. & McFarlane, A. (2004), Lynch, M., & Tunstall, R. (2008). Educational institutions which are investing in technology enhanced learning environments need to recognise the role that immersive learning (as exemplified by GlamStart) can play in the mix of technologies. The GlamStart project indicates that game-like and media-rich modes of instruction can be successfully employed to bring benefit to learners seeking information and is an approach
which should be invested in to bring wider benefits to prospective university entrants and learners in general.

Martin Lynch and Karen Fitzgibbon April 2008

Screenshot of the GlamStart application showing main game interface.
4. Project Management

## Project Management Team

In order to manage the project and to maintain involvement of stakeholders, a steering group was established. The GlamStart Steering Group consisted of (in alphabetical order):

- Sue Abbott — Learning Resource Centre representative.
- Karen Fitzgibbon – Principal Lecturer, HASS, CELT and HASS Advice Shop Manager.
- Martin Lynch – Lead Developer.
- Paulette Makepeace – Manager, eSupport Team, Chair of Steering Group.
- Catherine Naamani – CELT project sponsor.
- Alexandra Pearce – eSupport Team Administrator.
- Susanne Smith – Customer Services Manager.
- Sue Stocking — Principal Lecturer, AT and AT Advice Shop Manager.
- Kelly Symonds – Student Services Representative.
- Rachel Thomas – Student’s Union representative.

The steering group met monthly from 26/04/08 until 16/08/08 after which time they met weekly until 13/09/08. The frequency of meetings was increased towards the end of the project in order to manage more rapid development and to try out prototypes of the application. Staff involved in the steering group found the experience to be beneficial as meetings were focused, short (no more than one hour), had a structured agenda and staff were given specific roles and tasks to achieve (such as supplying information to the developers) which helped to create a sense of progress. Staff reported that the experience of being on the group was the first time that they had met and worked with colleagues across the university working in the same area (i.e. student induction) and found the experience an enjoyable and effective one.
4.2. Project

Milestones

March 2007
The lead developer (Martin Lynch) and the CELT sponsor (Catherine Namaani) began establishing the requirements for the project. This process involved identifying and interviewing stakeholders in the induction process. This involved meeting members of staff across the campus as well as holding a focus group with students.

April 2007
A selection was made from this group to form the GlamStart steering group. This group chaired by Paulette Makepeace and administrated by the eSupport team — was to meet monthly and review progress on the project, contribute suggestions, support the project and assist with publicising and disseminating the development. (Appendix 1).

April 2007 – September 2007
GlamStart was developed over the next six months by the eST Multimedia Development Team. GlamStart went live 25th September 2007 with user data collected from this point onwards.

March 2008 – April 2008
Questionnaire developed using QMP and released to 400 users of GlamStart. Results analysed for themes and focus groups conducted. Data gathered and evaluation report written.

4.3. Funding

- £1,320 was approved from the First Experience group towards the costs of promotion;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Cost (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed posters</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>£360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer mats</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>£229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fridge Magnets</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>£231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• T-shirts and USB sticks paid for out of the fund generated by a Learning and Teaching Office Innovation Grant 2005.
• Printing voucher prize incentives provided from a fund of £300 provided by LCSS Department.

4.4. Publicity and dissemination

The GlamStart project was promoted in the following ways:
• 10,000 A5 leaflets and 40 A3 Posters produced.
• 150 fridge magnets placed on all fridges of UoG Halls of Residence.
• 3,000 promotional beer mats printed and distributed in the Students’ Union.
• 2,000 promotional GlamStart pens included in fresher’s fair goodie bags.
• GlamStart promoted at the fresher’s fair.
• GlamStart promoted as part of the Advice Shop Staff greeting to students within their faculty induction.
• GlamStart presentation made available to faculty staff to be included in faculty induction events
• GlamStart promoted via an article in The Western Mail 5th October 2007.
• A link to GlamStart provided on the Blackboard home page and from the Getting Started section of Glamlife.
• GlamStart advert included in the rotating adverts on plasma screens across the campus.
• A monthly ‘find the hidden coin’ competition held on the first of each month to increase usage. Printing vouchers worth £30 given to the first person to find the coin.
• GlamStart T-shirts are designed and printed and given as prizes.
• GlamStart promoted during key lectures across all faculties.
5. Evaluation

The evaluation aims were:

- to assess whether the project had added value to the student experience;
- to evaluate the product; and
- an examination of the timing of the intervention.

5.1. Evaluation Method

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the project, the evaluation sought to collect rich and reliable data. The evaluation, therefore, used a combination of user data, results from a questionnaire sent out to users of the system and transcripts of focus group interviews with participants.

5.2. User Data

Users are authenticated (students use their enrolment number) when they log into the system, as a result of this authentication, course details and other information can be derived — data thereafter can be gathered by database queries.

5.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed as an online survey using Questionmark Perception (QMP) and delivered during March and early April 2008 (six months after the launch of GlamStart). Links to the questionnaire were sent to the 399 students who had used the application.

To encourage a good return rate (and in keeping with recent approaches to gathering feedback from students) students who completed the questionnaire were given a USB stick. The questionnaire returned 59 replies (15% of our users).
The questionnaire was a fairly representative sample of the total. Slightly more females than males replied and the proportion of AT students was slightly larger than expected from our sample – otherwise the faculty breakdown was in proportion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>All GlamStart users</th>
<th>Questionnaire sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>52% (209)</td>
<td>47% (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>48% (190)</td>
<td>53% (31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>All GlamStart users</th>
<th>Questionnaire sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>20% (80)</td>
<td>26% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HASS</td>
<td>26% (105)</td>
<td>24% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUS</td>
<td>22% (86)</td>
<td>22% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESAS</td>
<td>16% (64)</td>
<td>15% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCI</td>
<td>9% (35)</td>
<td>13% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELL</td>
<td>7% (29)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4. Focus groups

All students were invited via e-mail to attend a focus group (various dates were offered and this was advertised on Glamlife). Students were offered a payment of £10 cash for participation in the events (paid for out of the fund generated by a Learning and Teaching Office Innovation Grant 2005) and a cap of ten students per focus group was imposed. Despite this, attendance at these events was poor which was partially explained by the timing of the focus groups which were held during the week of 07/04/08, the first week of the Summer term, when the majority of students begin exam revision. A total of five students were interviewed.
6. Evaluation Findings

6.1. Usage

Statistics

Overall usage figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GlamStart usage between 25th September 2007 and 14th April 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique users of GlamStart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GlamStart games created (unique game sessions which students can return to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page Requests (obtained from web logs – and is a count of the number of times a link to GlamStart was clicked)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'New Starters’ from Sept 2007 (all undergraduate, postgraduate full and part-time students) excluding franchise or partner colleges and non-degree students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of new starters to the University using GlamStart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures obtained from Academic Registry Unit, April 2008.

These figures indicate that students have played multiple games and returned to those games several times. The feedback from the questionnaire and our focus groups indicate that students have been returning to find specific information.

Breakdown by faculty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Number of users</th>
<th>As % of total users of GlamStart</th>
<th>All students enrolled in faculty†</th>
<th>Faculty students as a % of all new UoG students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HASS</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUS</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESAS</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCI</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELL</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Undergraduate, postgraduate full and part-time students excluding franchise or partner colleges and non-degree students — figures obtained from Academic Registry Unit April 2008.

Scores Posted

Within the GlamStart game, points are awarded or deducted for decisions made. These points are accrued at the end of the game to form a score for each game. Users are
presented with a choice as to whether they wish to post a score on a leader board and whether they wish to do so anonymously.

A relatively small number of scores were posted during the period under investigation and had the following distribution;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of posted scores</th>
<th>52</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores posted by men</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores posted by women</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures for scores posted by males and scores posted by females is counter intuitive given a common perception that males may be more likely to engage in competitive score posting with respect to computer games. When seen with the game usage figures, however, it seems more likely that as females are more likely to play numerous times and that posting a score is the final act in the game, then perhaps more females than males play to conclusion.

**Number of Games played by gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of games played</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students playing only 1 game</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students playing 2 games</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students playing 3 games</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students playing more than 3 games</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of students</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This leads to another interesting finding in that males and females seem to be employing different strategies when it comes to using this resource. More males have used it overall, but females tend to use it more intensively. Whether this can be attributed to differing strategies with regard to seeking support or playing computer games is outwith the scope of this evaluation.
6.2. Survey results – quantitative data

The following section examines the results from questions which prompted a quantitative result.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 5 — Which of the following raised your awareness of the game? Select all those which apply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Link on Glamlife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster or leaflet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link on Blackboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being told by teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional GlamStart pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fridge magnets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being told by Advice Shop staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer mat in the Students’ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being told by other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Glamlife was seen by our users as being the most effective way of raising awareness while the pens, beer mats and fridge magnets were of low effectiveness. If the link on Glamlife is taken out of the equation, then the role that teaching staff played is within the next the largest cluster. This is encouraging as it indicates that the resource was promoted and supported by teaching staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 6 — What influenced your decision to try out GlamStart? Select those which apply.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to know more about the University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to win a prize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people told me it was useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was looking for specific information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that ‘curiosity’ is the most commonly chosen reason to investigate GlamStart in the first instance. This suggests that the novel aspect of presenting a game rather than web pages appeals to many students. The qualitative feedback from our
survey and focus groups indicated that once in, students returned to the resource to find specific information and found it to be a useful and helpful resource in this respect.

**Question 7 — Where did you access GlamStart?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 8 — How many times would you say you have visited GlamStart? Select all that apply.**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 times</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 times</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15 times</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20 times</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 10 — When you have used GlamStart, on average how long did you use it for?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About 30 mins</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 15 mins</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 mins – 1 hour</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 hour</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Total     | 99% (rounding error)

**Question 12 — Do you plan to use GlamStart again?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even six months after enrolment, half the students in our sample tell us they will use the application again. This reinforces the suggestion that while curiosity and imaginative engagement attracts students towards the resource, the information and the format are seen as being of value beyond induction.
Question 14 — Think about what you have learnt from using GlamStart and look at the following statements. Select all those that you agree with.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found out where things are</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found out about campus services</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It made me think how to spend my time</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found out about the first year experience</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 15** — Please rate the following features of GlamStart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>I like this a lot</th>
<th>I like this</th>
<th>Total positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>I don’t like this</th>
<th>I don’t like this a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Map</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Content (for example the FAQ text)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The game itself – collecting points and posting scores</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video content</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web links</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The answers to questions 14 and 15 show us that while orientation using the map receives high rates of approval and is perhaps a predictable outcome, a positive and exciting outcome is the opportunity to reflect that contact with GlamStart has created for some users.

Encouraging the users to think about how to spend their time was engineered into the application by the use of the game play and video content and it seems from the high proportion of students selecting these options that this aim was achieved. It seems that this affective change has been brought about by the game challenges of including reward mechanisms of points for positive behaviour and introducing time management challenges and is an exciting and positive outcome.
Question 19 – At what stage do you think it would be useful for students to access a resource similar to this? Rank the following in terms of how much you agree that an application like GlamStart would be useful for the following stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Total positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about coming to University</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before applying to Glamorgan</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just before coming to Glamorgan</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once enrolled at Glamorgan</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note the cluster of positive feedback about all the options but the option to have access to the application just before coming to Glamorgan is the most ‘strongly agreed’, with the option to get access to the application while thinking about coming to University the most ‘agreed’ upon. Having used the application, students ‘strongly agree’ that GlamStart is a useful asset to have once enrolled at Glamorgan.
6.3. Survey results – qualitative data

The qualitative data gleaned from our survey was subjected to frequency analysis to reveal underlying themes. These themes were explored further in the focus group sessions. The themes fell into the following categories which matched our evaluation aims:

- Issues surrounding learning and the student experience.
- Issues surrounding usability and the application itself.
- Issues surrounding the timing of the intervention.
- Evaluative comments of a general nature.
- Suggestions for improvements.

The frequency analysis showed the following distribution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning and the student experience</td>
<td>79 positive comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues around game play and the application itself</td>
<td>50 positive comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing – when students think they should access a resource such as this</td>
<td>Thinking about coming to University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 positive comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 positive general comments on this theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General comments</td>
<td>36 positive comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.4. Learning and the student experience

Students gave overwhelmingly positive feedback concerning not only what they had learnt from GlamStart but also the experience of learning using the application. Given the project’s aim of assisting in the student induction experience this can be considered a major success:

‘As a fresher it was a good way of knowing about the various aspects that contribute to life at University.’

‘GlamStart acted as a tour guide for all available services & there[sic] locations, during my first couple of weeks I found this information invaluable.’

The inclusion of an interactive map, which identified faculties and details of the campus structure, was appreciated and assisted in orientation for the early days on site, and even when accessing from off-campus locations.

‘The map was very helpful and from this I was able to understand where the buildings in the Uni were.’

Students reported discovering useful information about campus services and information and even welcomed the opportunity to ‘meet’ the Dean of their faculty. A common feeling was that while the information was not new – much of the information in GlamStart had been covered elsewhere – it was nevertheless reassuring and provided a consistent message to our new students.

As discussed earlier, one of the exciting outcomes has been the affective changes that exposure to the application has brought about. Students have reflected on a range of issues introduced in the game. For example, the issue of time management (a critical learning skill for students) was introduced into the game via a game reward system. Students are awarded or deducted points for attending or failing to attend timetabled lectures. Students reported benefiting from this element:
'I learned time management. Now I can plan the things prior to the start of the day and execute the day as I want it to be.'

'The carefully structured time allocated to each activity was very useful in learning to plan my daily schedule.'

'The time keeping in the game. If you do not do something on time, then you have points taken from you. This is quite effective, because it makes you aware of what University[sic] is like also.'

'Thinking about it now maybe I should have learnt more about time management given the rush of course works I have outstanding.'

Additionally, there is evidence that the role-play aspect of the experience was appreciated by students:

'It helped me see what kind of student I would be if I took different routes'

'I liked the fact it gave you choices for different situations, and then explained what would happen and how long each one took.'

A clear theme emerging from the feedback is that of students enjoying the experience of learning using an interactive and game-like approach:

'The game is more fun than reading pages, and is more likely to “sink in”'

'It is more enjoyable and can take in more information from the interactive use of glam start.'

'It’s more enjoyable and easier than searching websites which can be really hard sometimes.'

'It is interactive and more interesting[sic] to be able to play whilst learning as such as opposed to having to go through several web pages.'

This has come up a number of times in evaluating previous game simulations at UOG and is a phenomenon discussed extensively in the research literature. This ‘learning-by-doing’ is an approach that interactive computer (and non-computer) simulations are well suited to and has a wide scope for application in vocational courses and others which contain a
strong practical element. The majority of the students sampled indicated that they had enjoyed using GlamStart and reported a positive, fun experience that was easy to use and understand. Students identified that the game concept was interesting, gave choices and explained impacts and was supported by evidence from real student experiences. An unexpected reported benefit was that using GlamStart contributed to enhanced IT skills and memory.

**6.5. Usability**

Overall, students reported that the application was easy to use and understand, looked good, it was felt it to be enjoyably interactive, interesting to use and they welcomed the opportunity to try something new and innovative.

‘Interactive, nice design, multimedia content.’

‘It’s interactive and is therefore not boring and is simple to use.’

‘The appearance of the game was very appealing.’

‘It’s very innovative and for me means that our GLAM UNI is ready for 21st century. Please improve it!’

‘Easy to navigate your way round. I wanted to know about the LRC and could find it straight away.’

**Need to improve the game aspect**

The GlamStart application attempts to be two things: an interactive information resource and an educational game. The feedback indicates that the first aim has been successful with the majority of users reporting that they have benefited from learning using the application. A weakness of the current application, however, is in the limited complexity of the game play aspect of the project. While students report learning from the elements included, and it seems that the overall concept is approved of, work still needs to be done in creating a good game.

‘GlamStart is really good and helpful. however, with limited possibilities[sic] of things you can do.’
'It became boring with time. Same activities and there was no end.'

'There isn’t much variation in the game, the reason why it gets boring after a while.'

'I couldn’t find the goals/objectives of the game (besides knowing the university), so it became boring soon.'

While these feelings are in the minority, this is an important issue which needs to be considered carefully for the next iteration of the application and a challenging one to get right. If the technique of learning through engaging imaginative involvement can be perfected, the user’s attention can be focused on themes which are congruent with those of the institution – creating motivated, resourceful learners capable of maximising the benefits offered to them during the time they have at university.

While the collecting of points seems to have worked for some as a motivational element, the scoring aspect of the game did not seem to be a major driver for the majority of students playing the game; this is confirmed by the lower-than-expected number of students who have published their scores (52 = 13% of users). Present in the feedback, however, are many good ideas on how to improve/develop GlamStart (see appendix).
6.6. Timing of the intervention

A strongly emerging theme in the feedback related to issues surrounding the point in time that students were given access to this resource. Students were explicitly asked about this issue but it also emerged spontaneously through the results of questionnaire and focus groups. The rationale at the outset of the project was that replicating the induction information which new students receive in a digital, interactive format would bring benefits.

While an interactive simulation such as GlamStart may offer a more interesting path to information, it can also provide an opportunity for people to consider their intentions in a risk-free way. This engagement in a ‘let’s pretend’ exercise enables the user to examine potential outcomes of different scenarios and thereby challenge assumptions. While the evaluation has found evidence that this aspect has been appreciated by students using the application after arrival, most consider that they would prefer access to GlamStart before they come to the University. Alongside the perceived benefits of early access to information, maps and other data, students who are about to enter University life can prepare by using GlamStart to try out different decision-making strategies and reflect on their intended course of action.

Many students felt that they benefited from having access to the resource after enrolment given that it provides information and orientation support. There is evidence that it also acts to ‘normalise’ the experience of starting at the University:

‘Doesn’t make the university look so scary when I first began.’

‘I wasn’t feeling very settled, but from learning that I wasn’t the only person who felt like that it put my mind at rest.’

‘It helps students know what to expect from the university so it’s a useful tool to have when thinking about coming to Glamorgan or just as soon as they arrive.’
'It was really useful to read about feelings of other first-year students. It helped me to prepare myself for the university.'

There were some, however, who felt they were too busy to use the resource due to the pressure of coursework:

‘At first I was unsure on how to play it but I do enjoy playing it but at present have loads of course works so I don’t have time.’

‘I haven’t had enough time to access it as I have assignments to be in.’

And for others, the intervention has been one that was useful at a certain point but is one they no longer need:

‘...I no longer need to indulge in the simulation as I am living the day to day activities in real time.’

‘I have gained the information that I was looking for on there.’

While many in our sample consider that the resource is a useful addition to the range of support information supplied to students on arrival at the University, the majority of students in our feedback both from the questionnaire and the focus group sessions believe that it would have been more beneficial if students had been offered this prior to arriving at Glamorgan:

‘For anyone thinking about coming to the university, it is a good way for them to learn about things and know their way around the campus before getting here.’

‘As students should know as much as they can about the university before attending in order to make their entrance [sic] into university as easy as possible.’

We examined this theme in more detail in the focus groups where students were able to explain the advantages they perceived in providing the resource at this point. Significantly, most of the students interviewed were international students and they identified practical advantages in presenting induction information in this way:
“Even before coming here, I think the best time to use it would have been before arriving just to … really... for the students who were here for the International welcome week it wasn’t a problem because there are people to help them going here, going there going to the enrolment or the library or whatever but those who arrived a bit later for whatever reasons, they were on their own so for them I think it could be really useful to be able to use GlamStart before coming here.”
Extract from interview with student, April 2008.

“I think it is a very good idea to create some sort of simulation for starting, but I think it would be much better if the whole GlamStart was put on Glamlife website to be accessible for everyone not only for the students who have already arrived and pretty much know a lot about the university but it would probably be more useful for people who are either thinking about applying to come here or are somewhere in the middle of the application process because they don’t actually… before applying I had very little information and, of course, letters arrived and I talked to people and I started gathering the information I needed but accessing GlamStart I think would have been quite useful”
Extract from interview with student, April 2008.

‘If I had gone through GlamStart from home it would have been easier for me to ask more informed questions when I got here to say, yeah GlamStart said this building is here, is that true or what – I’ve used GlamStart and I’ve used the Opac video, so I have more questions to ask as opposed to it just being totally new.’
Extract from interview with student, April 2008.

‘At home I would have had more time to go through GlamStart, you know, it’s like a virtual environment so it’s like a mini University, you know, so familiarising myself with the buildings that I need to, you know would have been beneficial because, doing GlamStart during induction week, there are so many other activities going on at that time as well, so it’s hard to focus on one, but if I had done that from home, in the weeks that I had before coming to school, it would have been easier for me to go through all the activities, you know and familiarise myself with the University as a whole.”
Extract from interview with student, April 2008.

As can be seen from these quotes, a pre-arrival offering would be of general benefit to all students but would be of particular benefit to international students who are faced with the challenge not only of adopting to a new culture within the UK but also to a UK learning culture where active participation and independent thinking are perhaps different to the learning cultures found elsewhere.
On a note of interest, this demand for a fresh approach to the provision of information for prospective international students was the reason that the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) announced a call for expressions of interest to be submitted for the creation of a web-based game to assist international students in the induction process. Unfortunately, although short listed and highly praised, a bid submitted by Glamorgan was unsuccessful (Dec 2007).

6.7. References

http://www.nestafuturelab.org/research/discuss/02discuss01.htm

http://www.futurelab.org.uk/download/pdfs/research/lit_reviews/Games_Review1.pdf


6.8. Potential research questions to emerge from the evaluation

- To what extent does gender play a role in the way that students use GlamStart in particular and student support systems in general?
- What happens when ‘digital natives’ grow up? Do adults who have been exposed to immersive, interactive computer environments from a young age process information in a different way from those who have not?
- Examine the function and role of intention in role-play simulations.
- Are there effective modes of learning found in computer games which can be employed in other information systems?
- An examination of creative collaborations between technology developers and teaching staff - is a new professional group emerging?
- Does the use of a simulation format affect ability to memorise information and advice?
7. Recommendations

We recommend that the Learning and Teaching Development Group sanction the submitted business development plan which seeks to continue the development and maintenance of the GlamStart project:

- Production of a pre-enrolment version of GlamStart. This would need to take into account the suggestions and feedback concerning gameplay, content and choice suggested in this report. A choice within the application between “GlamStart – orientation mode” and “GlamStart – challenge mode” would provide flexibility for the end user and would allow us to focus our resources more successfully.
- A steering group to be drawn up with stakeholders to include representatives of student recruitment and marketing as well as many of the staff who worked on the post-enrolment version in order to develop themes and content specific to these students.
- A full content review of the existing simulation.
- The interactive map should be created as a stand-alone offering which could be included, without authentication, in numerous web locations.
8. Appendix

8.1. Evaluation

Questionnaire

1 What is your gender?
Male □ Female □ Not disclosed □

2 Where are you from?
I am a UK student □ I am an EU student □ I am an overseas student □

3 What is your mode of study?
Full time □ Part time □

4 Which Faculty are you studying in?
Cardiff School of Creative Industries □ Advanced Technology □
Business School □ Humanities and Social Science □
Health Sport and Science □ I study in a Partner College □
I study a University of Glamorgan course in a Further Education College □
I don’t know □

5 Which of the following raised your awareness of the game?
Select those which apply
Publicity leaflet □
Beermat in the Students Union □
Fridge Magnet in University Halls of Residence □
GlamStart Pen □
I heard about it from friends □
I was told about it by teaching staff □
I was told about it by Advice Shop Staff □
I followed a link on GlamLife □
I followed a link on Blackboard □
Other (please specify) ;
Please type your answer here

6 What influenced your decision to try out GlamStart?
I wanted to know more about the University □
I was looking for something specific □
I was curious □
I wanted to win a prize □
Other people had told me it was useful □
Other □ Please type your answer here

7 Where have you accessed GlamStart?
Home □  On Campus/at college □
Other Please type your answer here

8 How many times would you say you have visited GlamStart?
1-5 times □ 5-10 times □ 10-15 times □ 15-20 times □
9 If you have used GlamStart a few times can you tell us in what way your reasons for using it have changed over time?
Please type your answer here

10 When you have used GlamStart, on average how long did you use it for?
Less than 15 minutes □  About 30 mins □  30 mins - hour □  More than 1 hour □

11 Did you post a high score?
Yes/No
Please explain why you did or did not;
Please type your answer here

12 Do you intend to use GlamStart again? Y/N
Please explain why;
Please type your answer here

13 Was there anything that prevented you from using GlamStart?
Please type your answer here

14 Think about what you have learnt from using GlamStart and look at the following statements. Select all those that you agree with.
I found out more about where things are on campus □
I found out more about the first year student experience □
I found out about campus services □
It made me think about how to spend my time □
Please explain your answer;
Please type your answer here

15 Please rate the following features of GlamStart in terms of their usefulness to you;
1 = I like this a lot  2 = I like this  3 = Neutral
4 = I don’t like this  5 = I don’t like this a lot

Video content 1 2 3 4 5
Text content 1 2 3 4 5
Web links 1 2 3 4 5
Interactive map 1 2 3 4 5
The game – collecting points and posting scores1 2 3 4 5

Please tell us about your answer or give other aspects not listed
Please type your answer here

16 Please tell us about anything else you found useful about GlamStart?
Please type your answer here

17 Please explain what you think the advantages and disadvantages are of offering information as a simulation game like GlamStart, rather than a series of web pages?
Please type your answer here

18 What other information would you find useful in a simulation game format?
19 At what stage do you think it would be useful for students to access a resource similar to this? Rank the following in terms of how much you agree that an application like GlamStart would be useful for the following stages.

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree

Thinking about coming to University  1 2 3 4 5
Pre-application to Glamorgan  1 2 3 4 5
Pre-arrival at Glamorgan  1 2 3 4 5
Once enrolled at Glamorgan  1 2 3 4 5

Please explain your answer

20 What could we do to improve GlamStart?

Please type your answer here

21 Do you have any further comments about the GlamStart simulation?

Please type your answer here
8.2. Additional features suggested

The game developers asked for student feedback on improvements that should be considered for the simulation and future iterations. These have been drawn together and are presented as a series of points:

**General System Requirements**

- More in-depth information, possibly including contact details to make it easier to find out more information from linked areas.
- Enable the users the option to play a shorter game, which takes less time.
- Improve the game; make it more interesting, with more variation in the days, have more activities on the game, innovate the whole game and "make it older".
- Improve the graphics and interactions, provide more links and add some special tasks to it to make it more challenging.
- The game principle is good but needs to update, add new or expanded content and more scenarios for the game with more decision making potential. Make the game progress with the student through the year.
- More control over the character; for example, when to go out socialising, rather than it happening automatically; allow the students to design their own virtual characters.
- The walk cycles need improving with more animation and better movement etc. making it less robotic, more of a game.
- More levels and harder levels.
- Develop the ability to spend the points earned so as to buy from the shop etc.
- Add extra ways of gaining points and more prizes.

**Event Details**

- Enrolment procedures and specific information once available; e.g. enrolment dates.
Add another aspect of the GlamStart site that could encourage people to enrol at the university.

Test/Exam procedures and dates.

Incorporate Student’s Union events and other social activities into the existing simulation.

Student tariffs for nightclubs etc.

Add a few sporting activities.

**Academic details**

- Handy to have a map, e.g., when you click on Ely block, for it to display a map of Ely block including all the room numbers.
- Maybe real views of lecture theatres and inside views of other types of rooms, maps of the different buildings.
- More information about Cardiff campus and better access for students from ATRiuM!
- To include the individual’s course and more about the academic side of studies; course information.
- To have the game built around your course; e.g. type in your module codes, and it could perhaps highlight the buildings you’d be using.
- Tips for essay, assessment and dissertation writing.
- Revision techniques available around exam time.
- Include the locality information in the game so the people living outside of university would get some useful information and more details of moving around Wales.

**Resource details**

- Information about how to use the library in a more effective way.
- A small chat/forum between the users; interaction with other students.

**Accessibility**
- Make it easier to access.
- Look at internet speed up in halls and internet connection at home.
Dear

As you are aware, one or more of the modules you are studying are monitored for attendance. Over the last few weeks, your attendance pattern has given cause for concern.

There are of course many reasons why you may not have attended. Perhaps you have been ill and have not informed anyone, maybe you have transferred from the module to another and not informed the tutor. It is also possible that you are unhappy with your own level of attendance and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the matter. You may feel you have a valid reason for your absence, and would like to discuss making a claim for mitigating circumstances, or wish to find out more about this process.

I would like to discuss your attendance with you. Please contact me on 01443 483499 (Monday to Friday 9 - 4) and we can arrange a time to meet.

Many studies have been conducted which demonstrate a clear link between attendance and ultimate performance in higher education, I hope that by discussing your own attendance pattern, we can support you in achieving your academic goals.

Yours sincerely

Karen M Fitzgibbon
Principal Lecturer
Advice Shop Manager
Dear 

Further to my recent letter, I note that you have not resumed your attendance. 

Both your tutors and I are concerned about this. I would ask that you contact me urgently to advise me of your current situation. The University is obliged to inform your Local Authority of poor attendance and this can affect your financial support so it is vital that you contact us.

Our aim in following up students who are not attending is not to penalise or discipline, but to support you in the pursuit of your academic goals, and attendance is undeniably linked to successful study. You can telephone and leave a message on 01443 482050, or you may prefer to call into the Advice Shop on the ground floor of Forest Hall. We are open in term and holiday time from 9 – 4 Monday to Friday. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Karen M Fitzgibbon 
Advice Shop Manager 
Principal Lecturer
Dear

You will have been aware that your attendance at classes has been monitored during this term. As a result, we are able to track students who would benefit from support, and also to identify those that achieve a high level of attendance.

I have been informed that in one or more of your modules this term you have achieved an outstanding attendance rate. I am delighted to hear of such commitment from our students and would like to thank you for the contribution you have made not only to your fellow students’ learning experience, but to the wider academic community.

Achieving such an excellent standard of attendance demonstrates commitment, tenacity and a level of personal skills concerning time management and motivation that are to be commended.

May I take this opportunity to wish you and your family Seasons Greetings. I look forward to hearing of your continued success with your academic studies in the New Year.

Yours sincerely

Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Early Days Learner Support Tool

A copy of the Early Days learner support tool is available to be viewed and tried at

https://formative.glam.ac.uk/q4/open.dll?SESSION=6276987372269288&NAME=ExternalED20082009&Group=ADVICESHOP
Study Health Check Learner Support Tool

A copy of the Study Health Check learner support tool is available to be viewed and tried at

https://formative.glam.ac.uk/q4/open.dll?SESSION=9133322565603332&NAME=ExternalSHC20082009&Group=ADVICESHOP