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Student Retention at Heriot-Watt

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LEADERS IN IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS

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Student Retention at Heriot-Watt

- Context
- Promoting retention at Heriot-Watt
- Mainstream and targeted approaches
- Identification of at risk students: characteristics and behaviour
- Obstacles
- Questions for discussion

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Retention: Context

- A third of students consider leaving early
- A minority who consider leaving will leave
- At Heriot-Watt roughly one in ten students will have left a year after entry.
- For some students, leaving is the right decision. Part of the individual learner journey
- Retention not “solved” by recruiting “better” students.
- Institutional activity, practices, environment and culture can make a difference to student retention.

Promoting Retention at Heriot-Watt

- Mainstream and Targeted Approaches

- Mainstream: for everyone
- Targeted: initiatives for those (self) identified as at risk of leaving

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Mainstream

Induction: interactive, promoting academic and social integration, building community, social identity and supportive social network.

Personal tutoring: first point of contact for advice, guidance and referral on academic and non-academic matters.

Targeted

- Thinking of Leaving (self-referral)
- “At risk” students (identification and intervention)

Identification of At Risk Students

Two approaches:

- Student characteristics
- Student behaviour

Characteristics Associated With Being At Risk

- Mature students
- Male students
- SIMD20/40
- Commuting students
- Students with caring responsibilities
- Students in STEM subjects

Characteristics

- Deficit model of students with certain characteristics.
- Characteristics are not predictors.
- Student behaviour more useful indicator

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Behaviours Associated with Risk

- Non-attendance
- Non-submission of assessment
- Non-responsiveness to emails
- Pattern of their digital footprint, such as VLE or swipe card usage
- Non-engagement with personal tutor
- Poor assessment results

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Obstacles to promoting retention

- Finding an early and reliable at risk indicator (semester one results are too late)
- Consistency of personal tutoring
- Obstacles to self-referral

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Questions

- What other measures would promote retention?

- How can these obstacles to promoting student retention be overcome?
  - Finding an early and reliable at risk indicator
  - Consistency of Personal Tutoring
  - Obstacles to self-referral

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Suggestions for Future Development

- Pre-entry preparation and engagement
- Longitudinal induction
- Common standard of personal tutoring (The Personal Tutor Handbook)
- Promotion of integration in learning and teaching
- Peer mentoring/buddying for all
- A culture where seeking help is accepted
- Early identification of at risk students