

Student Experience Policy and Procedures



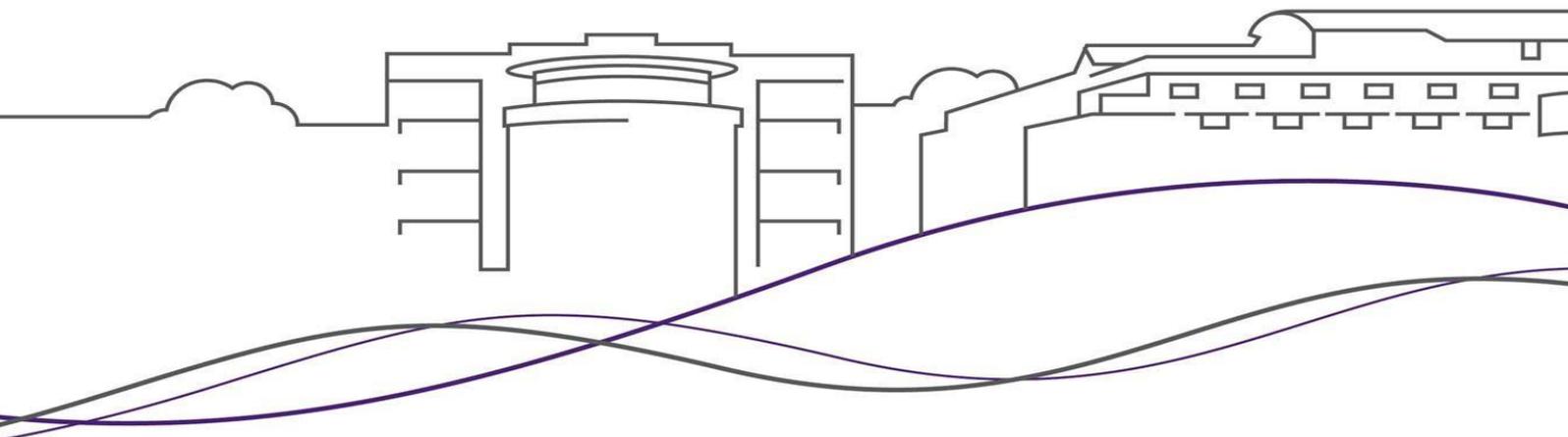
UNIVERSITY
CENTRE
SOUTH DEVON



HIGHER EDUCATION

HE STUDENT RETENTION STRATEGY (HEFSPPC2)

2017-19



Student Retention Strategy

Contents

1. Background and Context	2
Background and National Context	2
Purpose & Scope	3
2. Link to HE Strategy	3
3. Principles	4
Pre-entry	5
Induction, Re-induction and Early Engagement	6
Engagement in Academic Life	7
Support and Tutoring	7
Tutorial Support	8
Higher Education Support Services	8
Attendance & Achievement	9
Student Involvement & Engagement	10
Appendix 1a	12
Appendix 1b	14
Appendix 2	16

Document Approved by: HE Strategy	Date of Approval: 5th May 2017
Review by: HE Recruitment and Retention Group	Review Date: 28th April 2017
Date of Implementation: 1st July 2017	CPD to support Implementation: 11th July 2017
Version: 1	Author: A Wilson

1. Background and Context

Background and National Context

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) identify that only 1 in 12 students (8%) leave higher education within their first year of study. However, further research carried out by the Academy determined that between 33%-42% of students consider withdrawing, and that there are a number of triggers that contribute to student insecurity in the early stages of their experience. High rates of withdrawal and low rates of satisfaction may have reputational, economic, ethical and legal implications for universities and colleges, as well as personal and financial disadvantages for individuals.

In the study carried out by the HEA (2012) What Works?, it was determined that at the heart of retention and success is a strong sense of belonging in Higher Education (HE) for all students which is the result of engagement in its broadest form.

The Retention Strategy therefore aims to develop a culture focusing on two main elements: student belonging and student engagement. Engagement is seen as central to creating a deep sense of belonging, and while this is wider than the concept outlined within the UK Quality Code it is clearly aligned to it.

The UK Quality Code sets out the Expectations that all HE providers are required to meet. The expectations in regards to student retention are embedded throughout the QAA standards, and this Strategy has specifically reflected on the following chapters:

- B2 Recruitment, Selection and Admissions to Higher Education
- B3 Learning and Teaching
- B4 Enabling Student Development and Achievement
- B5 Student Engagement
- Part C Information about Higher Education Provision

As student engagement has been identified as critical to retention the expectation in regards to it is that:

“Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience”.

Purpose & Scope

South Devon College is committed to ensuring the high quality of its higher education provision and supporting students to achieve. The Retention Strategy provides a demonstration of the commitment of the College in meeting students' expectations to support them to realise academic success.

This strategy sets out the College's commitment to supporting retention and ensuring continuation rates are high. The strategy applies to all students regardless of age, mode of study or programme.

2. Link to HE Strategy

South Devon College's HE Strategy is created in collaboration with students, staff and senior management and Governors to ensure the student experience is central to the College's provision of HE.

The College regards any learner that does not remain on their course and meet the award expectation a potential waste of personal talent that impacts personally, nationally and institutionally. The College has therefore set specific aims, within the HE strategy, focused on enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and supporting the student from the start of their journey right up to their successful academic completion, as listed below:

- To work in collaboration with students in developing learning and assessment approaches that meets and enhances students opportunities
- To strengthen support for HE students, before, during and after they graduate
- To monitor students' attendance and achievement, and implement strategies to support students at risk
- To support all students, with specific awareness of non-traditional HE students with academic development, within and outside of their formal teaching environments.
- To provide a supportive tutorial structure
- To work within a annually updated admissions policy for Higher Education which supports the enrolment of students who are able to complete their programme of study
- Working with Office for fair Access, to develop a coherent strategic approach for widening access, supporting students success and increasing progression activity

The Key Performance Indicators relating to these aims and which will assess the effectiveness of this strategy are:

- NSS overall satisfaction to be in the top quartile for FECs

- The NSS satisfaction for “The teaching on my course” to be in the top quartile of HECs by 2016-17
- Continuation rate from year 1 to year 2 to be higher than national average for mature entrants to HE

3. Principles

With student belonging and engagement at the forefront of the Retention Strategy, the College has identified, through statistical feedback collected from students and student services, significant periods in the student journey directly affecting retention. The College takes a proactive approach to retention seeking to actively engage students, rather than reacting to crisis, through identifying the following triggers:

Pre-entry - information, advice and guidance and early engagement

Induction, re-induction and early engagement - defined as engaging the students at the first possible instance and maintaining this throughout the student lifecycle, nurturing a sense of belonging

Engagement in academic life - defined as establishing student belonging through positive interactions with course content, class, tutors, work-based learning opportunities, assessment methods and feedback

Support and tutoring - defined as creating meaningful relationships with the course and support team, nurturing the student to maximise their potential and reach their academic aspirations.

Student involvement and engagement - defined as nurturing a sense of belonging through a student centric approach, incorporating transparency with strategic decisions and student involvement at all levels. Proactively acting upon the student voice and offering feedback opportunities, empowering student representatives and promoting a respectful and reciprocated team ethos between staff and students.

Pre-entry

The College is committed to assuring that the information provided to students is of high quality “fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy”. Of particular concern is that pre-entry information enables students to make informed decisions regarding the programmes of academic study they want to pursue. If students receive appropriate Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and have a clear understanding of their chosen programme of study they are more likely to remain on the programme and be successful.

This is achieved through a variety of means including a regularly updated website, which includes student handbooks to provide detailed information on the content and assessment of the programme. In addition a bespoke HE Prospectus and supplementary booklets provide additional information on the specifics of course provision, support and facilities.

In order to enhance and promote early engagement, all prospective students receive regular communication, raising awareness of the College HE culture with an aim to promote a shared sense of belonging before a course commences.

The College offers a range of support services ensuring that prospective students receive guidance covering academic, social and financial dimensions of their choices.

In addition there are informative pre-induction events aimed at supporting student transition into HE life, and building an early culture with staff and fellow students including:

- Prepare for HE Workshops in the Summer
- Open Events
- Tasters days
- Applicant Events
- Targeted marketing events
- Disability disclosure engagement

Students and family members have the opportunity to talk with course specialists providing detailed information on course requirements and expectations. This includes evidence of prior assessment standards, assessment expectations, course content, pastoral care and prospective timetables.

Induction, Re-induction and Early Engagement

The College considers the induction process paramount to early engagement, and essential in developing a sense of belonging both in university life and academic provision.

An effective induction allows students to make friends, get to know the academic staff, and develop academic skills. In addition having a good understanding of institutional processes and expectations supports students to be successful.

The College incorporates all these elements into the induction process, in that it provides opportunities and support to students to engage in all aspects of student life, through institution-led social events, course-specific induction and integration to university partner provision and involvement.

A standardised approach ensures all students receive equal exposure to all aspects of student life through a bespoke Induction Checklist (Appendix 1). All students are issued with a copy of the HE Student Charter and “Supporting Your Success” document to outline the College’s expectations of students, how to access the various support services available and how students can get more involved if they wish to.

The importance of developing a sense of belonging not only within HE life, but also within the academic setting is acknowledged. Programme teams host course-specific inductions and social events incorporating new students, existing students and the course delivery team.

The importance of early engagement and developing a culture of the student being equal partners within the quality processes is recognised. The College therefore hold early questionnaires and surveys empowering the students to feedback their experiences on the induction process, prompting improvements for the future.

A peer-mentoring scheme is in place, returning students take an active role in supporting new students making the transition into university life. It enables students to make connections and build friendships prior to starting to create sense of belonging and integrate into university life more effectively.

The College aims to maintain effective communication with current students and actively re-induct them upon re-joining the college. Contact is maintained via social media sites, a welcome back talk is held and course specific re-

induction activities, often involving new students. Returning students are also invited to attend fresher's social events.

Engagement in Academic Life

Student engagement is paramount at the College and the commitment to this can be evidenced in the HE Student Engagement Framework.

The College recognises that students need to develop a sense of belonging and engage in what they are studying, encompassing academic content, course delivery, interpersonal relationships and vocational relevance.

Courses are specifically designed, with input from students and employers, to ensure students relate to their studies and find the course content meaningful.

Programme teams ensure vocational aspects in all our provision from work placements, work-based learning experience, industry guest speakers and industry specific student visits.

The College ensures clarity for students regarding assessment expectations/outcomes by implementing guaranteed levels of information on assignment briefs and feedback promoting a transparent approach to assessment.

Robust feedback structures are implemented to ensure that student work is marked, moderated and feedback within a set timeframe highlighting any need for academic support and providing developmental feedback.

To support all learners and learning styles, a range of teaching and assessment methods are provided to cater for diverse learner needs.

Support and Tutoring

The College recognises the importance of detecting signs of early disengagement or academic problems, and has therefore implemented robust tutorial and support structures to meet student needs.

Tutorial Support

The Tutorial Commitment outlines the Colleges commitment to provide all students with a comprehensive tutorial support programme. All students are assigned a personal tutor at the start of the academic year and will receive a minimum of three formal personal one2one tutorials which will be recorded appropriately in LEAP. In addition students will have informal tutorials with module tutors. This enables academic progress and professional development to be monitored, concerns to be discussed as well as achievements highlighted and strengths developed.

Higher Education Support Services

The HE Team provides a one-stop shop approach to student support via the 'I Need Support Request' form as a Googledoc which responses are centrally managed and allocated to provide the support required including:

- Wellbeing
- Support with a disability
- Academic development
- Finance
- Extenuating Circumstances
- Research and data analysis
- Moodle, Plymouth Portal and Turnitin
- Referencing
- Employability

In addition the College provides specialist staff who provide additional services, these include:

- Confidential counselling
- Medical and health care support
- Drugs and alcohol awareness

These services are well advertised to students through a variety of means in an attempt to reduce feelings of isolation and ensure students receive the support they need to enable them to progress and complete their studies.

Attendance & Achievement

South Devon College implements a proactive approach to retention, therefore considers attendance and achievement to be a trigger for disengagement. The College recognises the importance of attendance and expects students to achieve, at a minimum, 85% attendance to their programme commitments.

If the attendance of a student falls below, or displays signs that they may fall below the College benchmark of 85%, there are a range of “triggers” in place to intervene, namely:

Stage	Trigger	Action
1	Two consecutive days absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal tutor alerted • Email sent to student by personal tutor
2	Two consecutive weeks absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal email sent to student • Programme Coordinator alerted • Member of Support and Wellbeing contacts student • 1-2-1 tutorial with Personal Tutor
3	Attendance falls below 85%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Attendance letter sent home (Appendix 2) • Meeting with member of Support and Wellbeing
4	Continued absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal meeting with Higher Education Lead or SHS • stating inactivity of student

If a student is not achieving the expected level and does not pass more than one piece of work in an academic year without staff being aware of any extenuating circumstances they would be invited to attend a meeting, normally with their personal tutor or programme coordinator/HE Lead, and a member Support and Wellbeing Team. This is intended to be a supportive meeting to determine if any additional help should be offered to the student and will review personal and academic support systems.

Student Involvement & Engagement

South Devon College is committed to listening to, and engaging with, all students. Students and staff are 'partners in learning', based on mutual respect and drawing on the knowledge and experience of everyone, to continually enhance the student experience. This is for mutual benefit and contributes to creating a HE culture, identity and student sense of belonging. There are a number of opportunities for students to get involved. (Further details are outlined in the HE Student Engagement Strategy.)

Each course elects student representatives from each year group to express the views of their group. These Programme Committee Meetings set out to review course-specific academic issues, and the Student Forum, which focuses on the student experience and the cross-College issues.

There is student representation on all key decision-making committees at all levels within the organisation to ensure that student opinions and views are presented, listened to and actioned where appropriate. The Lead Student Representative along with other student representatives take on these roles.

South Devon College undertakes to ensure that students are kept fully informed of the outcomes of their involvement, activity and feedback. This is done through a range of methods including the first agenda item on all PCM being an update on actions from previous meetings

Enrolled students can also become Student Ambassadors and Peer Mentors,

Enhancing the student experience and supporting peers to transition and integrate into HE studies / student life.

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Appendix 1a

Two week Induction Checklist - New Students

General Induction:

- South Devon College Enrolment Completed
- Plymouth University Card Request Completed
- Ensure all students have had a copy of the Higher Education Charter and Directed to 'Supporting your Success'
- Introduction to HE Student Services via Welcome Speech
- Library induction booked with Lauren Dommatt
- Tutorial workshops booked with Lauren Dommatt
- College Tour (including Toilet Facilities / Eating Facilities / Student areas)
- Fire & Emergency evacuation procedures
- Student Voice - Course Reps / Student Forums / Election of Student Representatives (likely completed by HE Lead in first two weeks)
- Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure, Fitness to Study Procedure and Complaints Procedure (likely completed by HE Lead in first two weeks)

Course Related Induction:

- Opportunity to meet students in other years of programme
- Higher Education Term Dates (Course Specific)
- SDC Higher Education Handbook / Module Guides issued

- Programme content, structure and staff
- Pastoral / Tutorial arrangements
- Identify Personal Tutor for current academic year
- Agreed method of communication with students e.g. Moodle / Facebook etc
- Timetable / Modules explained
- Rooms / practical workshops
- Reading List, equipment required, field trips etc
- Assessment Methods / Schedule
- Feedback / Turnaround times on work
- Explanation of Moderation process and External Examiner Arrangements
- Consequences of non / late submittal
- Extenuating Circumstances
- Briefing regarding work placements (if required)
- Study Skills
- Introduction to Moodle / relevant VLE's
- English & Maths Qualifications
- Health & Safety (First Aid, accident reporting, safety precautions applicable to course, late / holiday working smoking, personal vehicles / parking, personal property, litter,)

Appendix 1b

Induction Checklist - Returning Students

General Induction:

- South Devon College Enrolment Completed
- Plymouth University ID card Request Completed
- Ensure all students have had a copy of the Student Charter
- Re-cap on HE Student Services
- Re-introduction to the Library (including accessing books / journals etc from HEI)
- Fire & Emergency evacuation procedures
- Student Voice - Student Reps / Student Forums / Election of Student Representatives
- Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure, Fitness to Study Procedure and Complaints Procedure (likely completed by HE Lead in first two weeks)

Course Related Induction:

- Opportunity to meet students in other years of programme (first years and top-up students)
- Higher Education Term Dates (Course Specific)
- Higher Education Student Handbook / Module Handbooks issued
- Programme content, structure and staff
- Pastoral / Tutorial arrangements

- Identify Personal Tutor for current academic year
- Reiterate method of communication with students e.g. Moodle / Email
- Timetable / Modules explained
- Rooms / practical workshops
- Reading List, equipment required, field trips etc
- Assessment Methods / Schedule
- Confirm Feedback / Turnaround times on work
- Confirm arrangements Marking/Moderation External Examiner
- Consequences of non / late submittal
- Extenuating Circumstances
- Briefing regarding work placements
- Study Skills
- Confirm use of Moodle / relevant VLE's
- English & Maths Qualifications
- Health & Safety (First Aid, accident reporting, safety precautions applicable to course, late / holiday working smoking, personal vehicles / parking, personal property, litter,)

Appendix 2

Low Attendance Letter

<Name>
<Address>
<Address>
<Postcode>

<Date>

Dear <Name>

Number: <123456>

We are aware that you have not been in regular attendance on your Programme at South Devon College and hope that we will be able to provide you with the right support and guidance to ensure that you are able to successfully complete your course.

If you are experiencing any difficulties that are impacting on your studies, it is important that you contact us as there are lots of ways in which the college can help.

Student Support Services

At South Devon College, we aim to provide you with as much support as possible to ensure you make the most of your studies and fulfil your potential. Whether you're seeking help with finance, additional study skills, support, childcare, have health concerns or would like to discuss personal issues in a private and relaxed environment, there is always someone available to talk to.

Confidential and non-judgmental welfare and counselling support is available at South Devon College and can be accessed by all registered students. We want to see you succeed and we can support you through those unexpected problems that can sometimes affect your performance at College.

The Support and Wellbeing Team offers the opportunity to access information, advice and guidance on a wide range of issues which may impact on your studies. Students are able to talk about concerns such as homelessness, emotional health, course/college concerns, relationships, finance, alcohol and drugs.

Further information can be found on our website or you can contact the Student Support Service all details can be found on our website:

Your handbooks available in your VLE will provide you with further information regarding course requirements or you can make an appointment to see your tutor.

At South Devon College we believe that the student comes first, so we are proud to provide a number of ways in which learners can receive support for their studies.

Extenuating Circumstances

If you experience something outside of your control that affects your ability to sit an exam or submit a piece of coursework, then you may be eligible to apply for Extenuating circumstances. We can help you go through the necessary forms and advise you of any evidence you will need to help you with your application.

Tuition Fees

Even though you have not been attending regularly, you are still registered as a student at the College, and therefore liable for the full tuition fee. If your registration status changes, your liability for fees may be adjusted. If you have decided to withdraw the sooner you let us know in writing the less fee liability you will have.

What to do next

Please keep HE Module/Your tutor informed of your situation and what you are intending to do by contacting us on; %%%/%%%

Yours sincerely