

What Works? Student Retention & Success



Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change

York St John University
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By Dr Robert Wilsmore

What Works? Student Retention & Success is a Paul Hamlyn Foundation initiative working with the Higher Education Academy, Action on Access and 13 UK universities. The second phase (What Works?2) builds on the first phase of the initiative (What Works?1). What Works?1 culminated in the report: Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change (Thomas 2012).

Institutional Description and National Context

York St John took its official university title in 2006 having developed from humble beginnings in 1841 as the York Training School by the Diocesan Boards of Education, Ripon and for York, St Johns College, when it enrolled its first and only (at that time) student. It is centrally located in the heart of York near to the Minster and most of the delivery takes place on its elegant and beautifully kept campus. Our graduation takes place in the Minister where our Degrees are conferred by the Chancellor, the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu. Our foundation as a church college is still pervasive and has matured to encompass all faiths and none, and has community and ethical concerns at the heart of its beliefs; Our University Student Charter states that everyone in the York St John community is expected to 'challenge exclusion and prejudice in all forms' (Student Charter 2016). As staff we hold this belief central to our sense of belonging to the York St John community and we continually strive to develop this value in our students.

To give an idea of our size, the student population was measured in 2014-15 as 6,522 (on campus) students. Together with its comparatively small size as a university and its coherent single-site location there is a strong sense of community, familiarity and friendliness that comes with everything, and everyone, being in close contact. Given the small size of the university in a national (and international) market place of much larger competitors, YSJSU in the 2015 to 2020 Strategic Plan (YSJSU Strategic Plan 2015-20) set out Our Vision to 'be the best of England's small universities'. Our strategy to achieve this vision is based on excelling in the areas of Quality, Community, Resilience and Growth and these headings are delineated through more detailed characteristics'; for example the Quality Key Performance Indicators (KPI) include a 'Personal and collaborative student experience' and 'Support services that empower students to thrive'. These KPIs are measured through a range of quantitative metrics such as NSS and UKES data, and also through qualitative feedback from student forums and evaluation mechanisms (including module and programme evaluations, UKES surveys etc.).

The University recognizes that it has unique selling points (USP) based on its size, its beautiful campus in the centre of a flourishing tourist destination and its friendly community feel; we aim is to inspire our students and staff to reach their full potential, advance knowledge, and make a positive contribution to the world. Our values are that we are an inclusive, innovative, transformative and ambitious community with a strong sense of belonging. Hence, with the emphasis on community and belonging, we are proud to be part of this HEA project. But we also wish to alter the perception that we are a 'teacher training college'; a perception that is still held locally and nationally according to our own surveys and market research. Since attaining university status in 2006 our research profile has grown significantly and, although we may not yet be in serious competition with Russell Group universities and the likes, as a post-92 University we have ambitions to become known for

our research and for research-led teaching and we have made significant strides towards achieving this. We are still proud of our teaching and education programmes at YSJU but we are aware that broadening our national profile is taking longer to alter than we would like. In terms of positioning ourselves in the national market place, YSJU emphasizes its student focus, its caring nature *and* its rigorous, up-to-date, research-led teaching. Being small and friendly is only part of our appeal, we also emphasize the currency of our teaching and our research.

Context data

Internal and external contexts can be shown through various metrics gathered institutionally and at national level. For example the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES), published in August 2015, has YSJU placed as equal 47 (with 16 other institutions) on its 'overall satisfaction' league table with regard to NSS. The Guardian University league tables put us in 89th position in 2015, 107th in 2016, and 104th in 2017 rankings. With the Teaching Excellent Framework (TEF) currently under development, statistics with regard to university positions are speculative and hence can only be considered as rough indicators. However the first indications for YSJU are good, with the THES report 'The mock TEF table' (THES 2016) putting our benchmark TEF ranking as 34th out of 120. Although only an encouraging sign rather than an actual ranking at the moment, we feel that our strong focus on learning and the student experience, as exemplified by our engagement with HEA projects, is beginning to be recognised.

Our own data collection on demographic information shows that (using records since 2013) approximately 80% of our students come from the North of England, predominantly with Yorkshire postcodes and from the North East 'corridor'. This figure has remained consistent with only small percentage changes each year. The gender split (at June 2016) is 4,158 female and 2,096 male giving an approximately 2:1 female to male ratio. BME figures for 2015/16 are 834 out of 6,254 students which is around the 13% mark, and increasing diversity remains an ambition for us. Those 'Known to Have a Disability' are (in 2015-16) 799 out of 6,254 students, again around the 13% mark. Age on entry in the 17- 24yrs category is 4,919 out of 6254, about 79% of our students. Our average Tariff Points on Entry (TPE) fluctuates around about the 300 mark: 296 in 2013-14, 300 in 2014-15, and 305 in 2015-16. Classification data of 1st and 2:1 achievements shows fluctuation over the past five years for the university as a whole, at between 59% and 65.4%. During this time, of the programmes involved in this study, OT has fluctuated between 53.7% and 70%, Sports programmes between 41.5% and 49.2%, and Theatre between 59.6% and 72.7%. The deviation from University averages, particularly emphasized in sports programme achievements, is one of the drivers for our involvement in this project.

Project team

The academic leadership has had significant changes since the start of the project. Ably led from the start by the Associate Dean for Quality in Health & Life Sciences, Dr Michelle Jones, and with significant involvement from Head of Student Services, Anthony Payne, the project management suffered from the departure of both members of staff during the course

of the project who went on to take up other opportunities at UK HE institutions. The project began in a cohesive way with regular strategic meetings and evaluative sessions (under a title of 'S4S' – Support for Success) but this approach was challenged as time went on. Once the project was set up and running following team meetings in the first year it tended to operate at programme level where the activities were taking place and there was less attention paid to regrouping and to sharing ideas and evaluations at the strategic overview level. The group reconvened in the third year of the project to begin to draw together conclusions towards the submission of the final report. One of our lessons learnt is that the project should have had established roles rather than named individuals so that these could have been assumed as staff left.

The core members of the team were:

Dr Michelle Jones	Associate Dean Quality – Health and Life Sciences
Dr Robert Wilsmore	Associate Dean Quality – Arts
Anthony Payne	Head of Student Experience
Karen Wilson	Senior Lecturer in Occupational therapy (OT discipline lead)
Andrew Buckton	Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Science (Sports discipline lead)
David Richmond	Senior Teaching Enhancement Fellow, Faculty of Arts (Theatre lead)
Andrew Fearn	Director of Strategy & Planning
Caitlin Rushby	Institutional Data and Planning Officer
Alison Rigg	Administrative support

Disciplines involved in this project

At the time of the project the University consisted of three Faculties: Arts, Education & Theology, Health & Life Sciences, plus a Business School. At time of writing however we are in the process of moving to a Schools based system and removing the faculty structures in order to respond to the changing picture in higher education as noted in the recent Department for Business Innovation & Skills report paper of May 2016 (BIS report 2016). The disciplines participating in this study were drawn from Arts and Health & Life Sciences and these were:

- Occupational Therapy (BHSc Occupational Therapy);
- Sport (BSc Sports Science programmes);
- Theatre (BA Theatre programmes).

Historically, two of these programmes (Sports and Theatre) have had variable retention rates and with staff already engaged in developing support systems and inclusive activates to help increase retention they were selected for inclusion in this study. Occupation Therapy has relatively good retention and has already developed activities that we wished to include in this study and to test as methods for 'good practice' to be used across the university.

Programme retention data (noted in more detail later in this report) shows tendencies in the areas of Sport and Theatre to have first year withdrawal rates that are higher than the

University averages. Our perception (or at least our hypothesis) was that these areas also tended to attract students that preferred *doing* to *studying* and hence were more challenged by the academic study in their first year and more likely to withdraw as a result. Through the course of this study, and through our own internal evaluation, this does not appear to be substantiated. The evidence from our Student Engagement Survey (SES) and its successor (UKES) suggests that students are not put off by the academic challenge; if anything, the surveys are showing that they do not feel academically challenged enough and potentially we might consider an approach that increases the academic challenge as a way to increase retention. However, the drivers at the start of this project came from strong SES data that showed a potential correlation between student engagement and student retention and achievement, and given the retention experiences of Sport and Theatre in particular it was appropriate to use these programmes as case studies for engagement through embracing an enhanced approach to academic tutorials and peer support.

Discipline Methods and Evaluation Strategies

The three disciplines identified areas and activities tested by the project are, in brief:

OT	Development of an induction programme supporting transition;
Sport	Academic tutorial system centred on a student e-portfolio system;
Theatre	Mainstreaming academic tutorials and group formation activities.

Interventions were selected according to programme needs and these have developed over time and over the course of this project. Following the initial strategic meetings the three discipline and project leaders met on an- ad hoc basis, normally to co-ordinate timelines and consider project management issues rather than sharing evaluations of activities unfortunately, although that stage is underway with regard to institutional recommendations at the close of this project. Towards the end of the project we were able to secure administrative support to help disseminate and collate papers and the What Works? surveys.

The specific methods and findings for each discipline may be read in the accompanying case studies of this report:

- Facilitating an effective transition for Level 4 students into the Occupational Therapy degree programme at York St John University.
- Academic Tutor delivery on Sport related programmes in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at York St John University.
- Retention and Success activities in Theatre programmes in the Faculty of Arts, at York St John University.

As the project developed, the first aim for the institution was to develop an ‘S4S’ (Support for Success) framework that would encompass lessons learnt from the participants in this project as well as bringing in other aspects of ‘What Works?’.

This has recently emerged as a draft framework at our university Enhancement and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) as a document entitled **‘Curriculum for Student Success’**. The main development here has been to combine aspects of the Belonging Project with a move towards identifying Graduate Attributes for University programmes and drawing on other established retention and success activities. In this way the ‘end’ of the student journey (achieving the attributes and the award) is tied to the start of their journey through the support mechanisms developed from projects such as this.

Although the ‘Curriculum for Student Success’ has moved from the original aims of the ‘S4S’ proposal it is a natural evolution of the project. It is still somewhat off completion prior to implementation but it does stand as a tangible output of this HEA project and our institutional commitment to Belonging as a route towards Retention and Success.

In brief the discipline projects were as follows:

Occupational Therapy

OT developed an ‘Induction programme supporting transition’ that recognises the barriers to retention and success that are due to the transition from outside university through to a confident sense of coping and belonging upon becoming a student. A number of structured initiatives have been implemented to provide a coherent approach to this, facilitating an effective transition:

- **Vertical Peer activity:** Sharing experiences of Level 4; Question time facilitated by Level 5 students;
- **Accessing learning resources;**
- **Developing learning and scholarship skills** on a professional degree programme (including information searching, academic writing, interpretation of assessments, referencing correctly);
- **Developing an identity** as a health care professional (developing their e-portfolio, professional identity and enhancing their online presence);
- **Student Society membership:** the College of Occupational Therapists and Occupational Therapy Society.
- **Leadership and self-management skills** with the focus upon developing skills for working effectively and efficiently alongside others, e.g. professional and ethical approaches in working with service users, carers and teams.

Drawing on staff perceptions and experiences in the discipline and research showing that HEIs lack engagement in preparing incoming students for significant changes in academic, social and personal adjustment (Lowe and Cooke 2003) the OT team also drew on the ‘student voice’ from Level 5 students on the programme which brought out familiar comments such as: “There is a large gap in preparation for university life” and “I did not feel prepared at all for university... [which] caused me a lot of anxiety”.

Evaluation was carried out via group discussions with student representatives resulting in positive comments such as: “*The induction programme was explicit to our learning for 1st year. I think it made students a lot more confident to share opinions with their peers and ask questions regarding academic work*”. In general, the comment that it had ‘built confidence’ was a regular phrase used in feedback. Evaluation also took place via metrics with regards to withdrawal and achievement (discussed in the following sections), UKES and NSS data etc.

Future implementation. The qualitative data, as exemplified in student comments above, tends to show a greater benefit than the quantitative data (see impact data), but the perceived benefits by the students is significant enough to continue to build the enhanced induction programme into the course structure. As withdrawal rates are normally well below the University average it is perhaps significant that there is little change that can be perceived in terms of retention or indeed of achieved grades. However, engagement factors and belonging are of value in themselves. Given that the measured outcomes (withdrawal and achievement) are certainly no worse, then continued implementation should be an improvement to student experience rather than a detriment.

Sports

Sports programmes focused on mainstreaming Academic tutorials and bringing them into the programme of study so that they are on an ‘opt out’ basis rather than an ad-hoc and seemingly ‘not very relevant’ casual tutorial system:

- Incorporate **Academic Tutorial system** within the Personal and Professional Development module;
- Link tutorials to **e-portfolio** and **assessment**;
- Academic tutorials are put on the student’s **timetable**;
- **On-line** groups linked to tutorial activity and peer support.

Sports have a higher than University average withdrawal rate, hence their inclusion in the project was functional with regard to increasing retention as well as improving the student experience. The team identified their particular focus as being the mainstreaming of academic tutorials with a particular use of an e-portfolio system (Mahara in this case) to support the student’s development. As noted in the case study, the implementation of the e-portfolio has been significant and provides a programme level context for the student experience, as well as facilitating a resource for reflection and development of learning aligned with QAA (2009) guidance on personal development planning. The online groups (or potential communities of practice) complement current delivery arrangements whereby students are timetabled for weekly group Academic Tutorial meetings (1 hour). Additional responsive support continues to be offered via the individual tutorials (using the YSJU Tutorial Booker system).

Evaluation was carried out through the tracking of Mahara and on-line community activity. For example, Moodle functions enable staff to track student engagement with on-line functions. Although the data from this had not been formally collected (quantitatively) enabling us to make a comparison with engagement before the implementation of these mainstreamed tutorials and e-portfolios, anecdotally there is an observable increase in engagement. With issues of staff availability affecting the collection of this type of data formal evaluation has come through the What Works? survey responses and withdrawal and achievement data. Staff capacity to engage in substantially rigorous research methodology to give quantity data to provide reliable results was not available. However the observational reports are still of significance.

Theatre

Theatre have seen the original plan develop from mainstreaming Academic Tutorials with regards to the structuring of these being embedded in the programme to also include the embedding of group formation activity and increasing parent and carer support. Gains here include:

- **Scheduled tutorials** that are on staff and student timetables;
- **Structured academic tutorials** that are developing a tutorial ‘curriculum’, as opposed to merely asking ‘how are you doing?’
- **Bonding activities.** Greater recognition of an holistic approach to the student experience e.g. bonding activities such as early trips in the first year, the ‘**Family & Friends events**’ to inform significant others in the students’ lives which means that the fears they raise at home are more easily addressed as the significant others are better informed.

As with Sport, Theatre have a higher than University average withdrawal rate and their inclusion in the project is also with regard to increasing retention as well as improving the student experience; this differentiates these two disciplines from OT which seeks to further develop practices that are already in progress.

Theatre at YSJU is steeped in philosophy and identity studies. Traditionally it has taken Level 5 students to Auschwitz and Birkenau every year as part of the performance module ‘Artist as Witness’. Understanding identity and group belonging is a central tenet of the programme as is demonstrated in the quote in the Theatre case study by one of our most famous ‘local’ academics Zygmunt Bauman:

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other’s presence.

(Bauman 2012)

The primary focus, to begin with, was to mainstream academic tutorials. These were put on the timetable as opposed to being ad-hoc arrangements and a curriculum put in place that sat with the academic year; that is, content was structured around what was most needed at the time: referencing skills, how to engage with written feedback, managing workloads etc. Prior to this system comparison is anecdotal; the perception is that attendance significantly improved at tutorials since mainstreaming was introduced. **Evaluative** feedback from students indicates the placing of tutorials on their timetable means that they are more likely to attend than if they need to be pro-active in arranging tutorials themselves (such as via our e-tutorial booking system) or if they are arranged ad-hoc with the tutor.

It was early attendance at HEA events on this project that encouraged a wider use of interventions within the Theatre team. Group trips, such as the life changing experience of visiting concentration camps in Poland, had always been an important aspect of group bonding and identity and these were enhanced to include early activities such as a local three night trip early on in Level 4. Beyond this, the team took hold of the idea of communicating with family and friends to help those close to the students understand what support was on offer. This 'Family & Friends' event is now firmly established at the point when students arrive to take up accommodation in York (although all students' family and friends are invited, as many live locally in their family homes). Given students often express their worries to family first, this intervention is designed to help families to help their children and wards by encouraging them to seek the support that is available at the university. We have no quantitative data to support any effect of this at present. However we have observed that the more we 'advertise' this session to family and friends, the greater the attendance at these sessions becomes.

Impact data

The data used here is drawn from University systems and from What Works? analysis of University data and surveys. Although it is the same system that provides much of the data presented for use in the HEA project analysis with regard to student records, the data sets used here include other information, such as is drawn from the Student Engagement Survey (SES), and will combine certain student groups (such as collating programme pathways into one body of data) and hence may show different results to those produced by the HEA.

In the early stages of the data analysis for this project we used data collected from the SES that had been carried out over four years and submitted by Level 4 and 5 students. Level 6 were not included as the NSS data was used from those cohorts for analysis. Our SES data showed that those students who considered themselves to have **good relationships** with staff and other students also showed that they considered themselves to have achieved **good grades** and **good levels of satisfaction**. Conversely, the data showed that students who did not consider them-selves to have good relationships also considered themselves to have fared worse on their programmes. Although we could not make a direct correlation between these statistics it was encouraging enough to suggest a potential link between 'relationships & belonging' to 'retention & success' and to follow this through.

SES data remained consistent in responses over the period and the institution decided not to continue with it. In its place we have used the United Kingdom Engagement Survey (UKES)

survey. However, the SES survey gave data on whether students had ‘considered leaving’ whereas the UKES does not have as direct a question about engagement levels. We have also recently invested institutionally in a Data Analysis & Intelligence System (DAISY) which has data on retention and completion.

The following data drawn from DAISY related to comparatives months, hence the information relates to information for each year at June 1st (which is the data available from DAISY at time of writing).

Withdrawal rate of first year undergraduates (university):

Academic year	Total cohort	Total cumulative withdrawals	% withdrawal
2015/16	1,548	94	6.1
2014/15	1,836	88	4.8
2013/14	1,872	105	5.6
2012/13	1,674	74	4.4
2011/12	1,671	90	5.4

Although it appears that the withdrawal rate has gone up in 15/16, we think this is due to better management of our ‘Presumed Withdrawn’ system that has meant that students are officially withdrawn earlier in the year rather than this only being recognised later on. The positive, we hope, is that our earlier recognition of ‘at risk’ students allows us to help some of those that might previously have been non-attenders and whose lack of engagement was not picked up early enough and hence may have become withdrawals at the end of the year.

The figures for **Theatre** do not show a consistent pattern. The observation for 2013/14 is that this cohort was more ‘unsettled’ than most and hence a critical mass ‘knock-on’ effect seems to have occurred; the difference in cohort size between 2013/14 and 2014/15 makes the comparison less valid, nonetheless the trend since 2011/12 seems to be an increase in withdrawal. The fluctuation in cohort sizes may skew any observable pattern, for example cohort sizes and percentages may vary however in terms of actual number the modal average is clearly 3 withdrawals a year (with 7 for 13/14 being the odd one out).

Theatre:

Academic year	Total cohort	Total cumulative withdrawals	% withdrawal
2014/15	27	3	11.1
2013/14	55	7	12.7
2012/13	39	3	7.7
2011/12	54	3	5.6

[Figures at June 1st of each year]

Occupation Therapy have a consistent withdrawal figure with a considerable fall in 2014/15 which appears to be maintained this year; although it is difficult to attribute this to the R&T

project we hope that it is a contributing factor. Sample size (cohort size) is more consistent than with Theatre and it shows a continued pattern of good retention (with one exceptionally good year in 14/15). As OT were already implementing some established R&S activities it is hard to conclude any particular impact of these, other than it would be wise to continue on the basis that it appears to be working and 'if it isn't broke, don't fix it'.

Academic year	Total cohort	Total cumulative withdrawals	% withdrawal
2015/16	113	4	3.5
2014/15	117	1	0.9
2013/14	111	6	5.4
2012/13	112	4	3.6
2011/12	108	6	5.6

[Figures at June 1st of each year]

Sports Science have a number of programmes, the table below is for Sports Science: Injury Management, Injury Rehab, Performance Conditioning, and Exercise Practice, which again shows an inconsistent pattern. Although difficult to correlate, potentially changes in management in the year 2015/16 may have had an impact on retention. Like OT cohort sizes are generally stable but the withdrawals seem to fluctuate without obvious pattern.

Academic year	Total cohort	Total cumulative withdrawals	% withdrawal
2015/16	73	8	11
2014/15	76	4	5.3
2013/14	74	6	8.1
2012/13	61	1	1.6
2011/12	70	7	10

[Figures at June 1st of each year]

WW Data (retention and achievement) Progression Analysis (at March '16)

Data released from the HEA (March 2016) compares years where interventions took place and a single year (2012 entry) prior to interventions taking place as a helpful benchmark.

With regards to comparing 'success' (96+ credits achieved as a criteria) of students in each year the picture does not show a particular trend. At **Level 4** Theatre, success varies between the highest of 85% and lowest of 75%, which is the highest percentage variation between the three programmes. But with a small cohort, small changes have a greater impact on the percentage change; also, the most successful year was the cohort *before*

interventions began. Occupational Therapy moves between 91% and 86% success rates but with both the highest and lowest results occurring in the years where intervention was in place. Sports Science has the smallest percentage variation moving between 87% and 84% and again, both the high and low points are in the years where intervention takes place.

With regards to average marks, the picture is similarly mixed. At **Level 4** in Theatre the average marks move between 59.3% and 60.0%, with the higher percentages occurring in the years where intervention is in place although the 0.7% difference is not particularly significant given the relatively low cohort sizes (between 26 and 50). Occupational Therapy, with cohorts ranging between 95 and 110, show averages between 58.8% and 56.7%; the variance of 2.1% might potentially be attributed to more students staying and achieving who might have left (i.e. some students with low marks have stayed rather than leaving and hence their 'lower' marks are included and so the lower average is not necessarily a negative), however the results in this case state that the lowest average marks occurred in a year of intervention and in the year of lowest retention. Sports Science average marks range from 60.1% to 54.8% with cohorts of between 54 up to 94 (interestingly the cohorts of 54 and 94 both achieved the same average of 54.8%). The year with the highest average was also the cohort with the greatest retention.

Given the above data and analyses it is not possible to conclude that there is strong evidence to suggest that the activities put in place have had a beneficial impact on retention and success.

WW Demographics Data (Belonging, Engagement and Self-confidence)

In contrast to the inconclusive evidence from the internal data presented above, there are **very clear** patterns emerging from the data with regards to results from the What Works? surveys (March 16) when comparing YSJU students with the figures for all institutions.

Compared to all institutions, using Level 4 data, our students consider themselves to have:

- **Higher Engagement;**
- **Higher Belonging;**
- **Lower Self-Confidence.**

For example:

Of the 18 demographic categories (9 pairs of binaries) only 4 sections differ from this norm and all of these (with one exception which may be due to its small sample size) are with regard to Engagement which is lower in the categories of 25+, Other (non-white British), not British, and Domiciled outside UK. These results that fall outside of the norm suggest there may be a particular issue or issues that require further investigation of these category results.

Level 4 What Works?: Overall demographic cuts (data at March 2016)

Under 20	N	Mean	20+	N	Mean
Engagement	1834	3.76	Engagement	786	3.96
Belonging	1834	4.06	Belonging	786	4.07

Self-confidence	1834	3.53	Self-confidence	786	3.52
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Level 4 York St John: Overall demographic cuts

Under 20	N	Mean	20+	N	Mean
Engagement	87	3.87	Engagement	45	4.02
Belonging	87	4.37	Belonging	45	4.14
Self-confidence	87	3.38	Self-confidence	45	3.25

The data for Level 5 shows the **same** pattern with the same 4 out of 18 demographic cuts falling outside the norm for YSJU, although with slight variations in which quality differs (i.e. the 25+ section shows higher self-confidence rather than lower engagement).

We might conclude from this that our students consider themselves to be engaged with their programmes and that they have a strong sense of belonging but feel less self-confident.

We might then begin to ask if there is a relationship or causal effect between them, for example, in making them feel comfortable within the community are we inadvertently making them more reliant on that community and hence less able to step confidently outside of it? Or is it the nature of students that come to YSJU that they do not feel confident with regard to going to a large university in a big city and hence are attracted to us, and hence they already lack self-confidence prior to joining us? This is not something we can factually conclude but it is the type of question that we might now go about answering in order to help build self-confidence in our students.

The results that sit outside of YSJU norms are in the categories of 25+ and non-British, non-white British, and non-UK domiciled which suggest the University has more work to do in order to address the sense of engagement, belonging and self-confidence in students in these categories. However, we also need to take into account the low sample size collected in the data, with the mean averages being drawn from sets of 11 at most and 7 at the least which may skew the results. That said, we should not ignore the fact that the relatively low numbers of students in these categories may be directly related to issues that may arise from being 'minority' groups (i.e. by definition they are smaller in number). As a University that is proud of its inclusivity we should not ignore the findings on the basis of the data set being small in these cases.

Recent Update: Since the March 2016 report a more recent report from HEA received in June 2016, that we are just beginning to analyse, shows that the above findings remain. On early analysis the only significant difference appears to be a slight drop in 'Male's belonging' which now falls below the What Works? overall figure, although this is a very small point drop for Year 3 2016 Males of 0.02 below the average, however this particular group also show lower than average engagement by 0.06 points, and are less self-confident (as is expected from earlier patterns) by 0.05 points).

Changes implemented at the institutional level

As it stands at the time of writing (June 2016), the University's Enhancement and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) has considered a preliminary paper entitled '**What Works?**: **Retention and Success Activities at YSJU**'. This paper captures activities included in this HEA project and many others that have been collated from other activities occurring in the University, including those in programmes, run centrally, and by the Student Union etc. This is the first time all of these activities have been drawn together and, whilst we await the findings of the completed HEA research, we are able to make decisions on a more strategic basis with regard to retention and success activities.

As mentioned above, the University is beginning to feed the project strategies and operations into the wider approach to learning at YSJU. The two main committees that deal with Quality and Enhancement (QSC and ESEC) are both considering the curriculum for success agenda and we can report a completed action from the committees that activities are to be considered at the early stages for programme validation for embedment in programmes, all indications are that there is a willingness to move towards a more holistic, all-encompassing approach to the student experience and student learning. It chimes with our aims and with our own perception that as a 'small' university we can get to know our students and foster stronger relations than perhaps much larger universities are able to where cohort sizes may present greater problems in achieving that sense of close community.

Changes implemented at the discipline level and impact

The interventions are centred on tutorials; in Health & Life Sciences these include peer mentoring as well as building academic tutorials into the mainstream of the student curriculum. Essentially there is no 'opt out' mechanism (other than students not turning up) but early results show that there is a marked difference in attendance with regard to tutorials being on timetables as compared to the more typical ad-hoc arrangements made with tutors, for example where students can elect to book a tutorial (and hence 'opt in') via an e-booker system.

We do have some useful data available this year through UKES which includes questions in the following domains: Course challenge, critical thinking, engagement with research enquiry, interaction with staff, learning with others, reflecting and connecting, skills development, staff-student partnerships.

Picking out key questions relating to staff and student relationships (keeping in line with our original impetus for engaging with this project) the following two question responses are highlighted here:

- Have you discussed your academic performance and/or feedback with teaching staff?
- Have you contributed to a joint community of staff and students?

For Theatre (16 respondents from years 1 and 2)

Have you discussed your academic performance and/or feedback with teaching staff?

Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often
7%	33%	40%	20%

Have you contributed to a joint community of staff and students?

Never	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
0%	19%	13%	38%	31%

For Sports Science programmes (35 respondents)

Have you discussed your academic performance and/or feedback with teaching staff?

Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often
17%	63%	17%	3%

Have you contributed to a joint community of staff and students?

Never	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
0%	19%	13%	38%	31%

For OT programmes (80 respondents)

Have you discussed your academic performance and/or feedback with teaching staff?

Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often
13%	58%	26%	4%

Have you contributed to a joint community of staff and students?

Never	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
0%	31%	43%	16%	10%

As this is the first year of using UKES data we have no comparison but we will start the data analysis year-on-year from this point onwards. Current data seems to infer that Theatre students consider themselves to be more engaged with staff and the community with higher scores in the 'Often', 'Very often', 'Quite a bit', and 'Very much' categories than both OT and Sports, though this does not correlate with the retention figures shown earlier in the report.

The Level 6 data drawn from the NSS is significant this year as the students on these programmes will have been first years at the early stages of the project when we began to implement 'What Works?' ideas into the curriculum structure. All three participating disciplines have seen an increase in Q22 from the previous year, which is encouraging.

The availability of data for evidence, analysis, and decision making at YSJU is strong; the data that is presented here demonstrates that **we do not have a clear picture** with regard to how interventions are or are not impacting on retention and success, much as we would like that to be the case. Our belief that many of these activities 'are the right thing to do' is perceptual rather than statistically proven.

Sustainability

At programme level there seems to be a general feeling that the interventions are having a positive impact and as such will continue beyond the duration of the study. At institutional level we hope to see the ‘Curriculum for Student Success’ be firmed up and agreed through our committee mechanisms and thus then become the learning experience for future students. Sustainability will only come through embedding activity into early planning of curriculum and resource management, it cannot be an ‘invisible extra’.

Conclusions

As stated in the section on progression data analysis: **it is not possible to conclude that there is strong evidence to suggest that the activities put in place for this study have had a beneficial impact on retention and success.**

But that is not to say, as an institution, that we do not believe that activities of the types undertaken hold little value. Although we may not, at this stage, be able to provide data that would firmly back a claim that implementation would be beneficial, the feedback from students and staff suggests that they are valued. As such, the University will look to make decisions on balancing resources and directives with regard to efficacy.

Statistical data is mixed and yet there are a number of indicators (SES, UKES, NSS) that suggest retention, success and student satisfaction are improving. Either way the future outcome looks promising as we build a sense of belonging with both staff and students.

The What Works? survey data offers a positive conclusion for YSJU in that: **We might conclude that our students consider themselves to be engaged with their programmes and that they have a strong sense of belonging although they feel less self-confident than students in other HEIs.**

From this we need to consider further action that may help to raise the self-confidence of our students. We also note that we need to consider how we respond to the lower than average results in the categories of 25+ and non-British, non-white British, and non-UK domiciled.

In evaluating the data and evidence before us that results in the above conclusions, we note that, for our institution at least, **there is no noticeable correlation between students being engaged and belonging with improved retention and success.**

Through the ‘logic chain’ process we can see the consequential occurrence of **behavioural change** (step 2) and a **sense of belonging** (step 3) from **activity delivered** (step 1). This can be suggested, rather than concluded, from comparing SES data with What Works? data on engagement (as we are aware that the two measurement systems are not identical, hence the data comparison cannot be conclusive). However, as retention does not seem to have consistently improved across the disciplines we have to question, for us at least, whether **improved retention and success** (step 4) can arise as a consequence of students **being engaged and that they ‘belong’** (step 3).

Conclusions from disciplines:

OT

- Embedding academic tutoring within key modules has been confusing to both staff and students.

- A timetabling schedule that supports an induction phase, academic tutoring and end of year evaluation in each module is central to the aim of building successful transitions.
- Collaboration between staff and students will be essential during this period of change and development towards an integrated system.

Sport

- Students are guaranteed protected (timetabled) regular access to relevant tutor and peer support.
- The underlying principles have shifted the historical focus of academic tutoring from a predominantly remedial or reactive aspect of the student experience to a more inclusive and developmental feature.
- Attendance issues can have potentially damaging effects on the perceived value of the meetings.

Theatre

- Never underestimate the resistance to change within an academic community.
- Never presume that because we have support structures in place that they will be accessed by or for the students who require such support.

Key findings

Academic tutorials:

- Require a functional and flexible curriculum;
- Should be built into programme development at the earliest opportunity;
- Should be on student and staff timetables;
- Are inclusive and proactive;
- Need to have their status raised amongst staff as well as students (by showing its efficacy).

Challenges

As mentioned earlier in this report one of the challenges in sustaining this longitudinal study has been a change in staffing. With the original lead academic (Dr Michelle Jones) moving institution and changes to staff involved in and leading the programme discipline areas it has challenged our ability to maintain full engagement and to sustain continuity. In a sense that will also be true of institutional implementations that may result from this study. An early lesson is that change has to be built into the system as in the long term it cannot stand up on local knowledge and individual commitment alone. As an institution we are looking forward to the publication of the overall project findings so that we have an evidence base from which to continue to develop our support mechanisms with regard to student retention and success.

Implications

Whilst we have drawn our own conclusions from the three disciplines that appear to have positive effects, it is clear that whatever the activity might be that may be appropriate for a programme it needs to be built into the curriculum at an early stage. As so often happens, these activities appear as appendages to a programme once it has been approved or validated and so maintains a relatively lowly status in relation to the module delivery. This needs to be reassessed. The implication is that the status of such activities needs to be present at the point of programme design and hence should be a part of the curriculum design and programme structure at an early point in the development of any programme and we have successfully agreed this course of action at our ESEC committee (May 16.) With this as part of the infrastructure it will also need to be included in operational considerations such as the timetabling of rooms and staff and students, library resources, staff time allocation systems, and validated contact hours for academic tutorials etc. This approach will help to ensure that such activities are well balanced with other more ‘traditional’ concerns such as content delivery. Indeed it should come to a point where there is no such binary in operation between academic study and retention and success activity.

Next steps for the university

- The findings of these projects and the HEA project report are presented to University committees (QSC and ESEC) and are used as a basis for developing university wide activities;
- The University undertakes careful analysis of the evidence in order to make informed decisions with regard to what activities may be considered as ‘good practice’;
- Programme structures and validation documents and processes include consideration of retention and success activities at an early stage so that they are built into (and hence mainstreamed in) the programme at the point of curriculum design and delivery planning;
- Consider how we improve **self-confidence** in all our students;
- Consider if the data set sample in the categories of 25+ and non-British, non-white British, and non-UK domiciled is significant enough to take further action on how we improve **engagement, belonging and self-confidence** in our students.

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