

nus charter on

ACADEMIC SUPPORT



national union of students

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Academic support is vital to give students the confidence to continue with their studies in difficult times.

Over the last three years, the **Paul Hamlyn Foundation** and **HEFCE** have been conducting research into institutions' support mechanisms by working with a number of institutions to develop and evaluate their academic support packages.

Their research, entitled '*What Works? Student Retention and Success*', suggests that academic support is most effective when the process:

- **Nurtures supportive peer relations**
- **Fosters meaningful interaction between staff and students**
- **Develops students' knowledge, confidence and identity as successful higher education learners**
- **Encourages in-depth engagement by being relevant to students' interests and future goals**

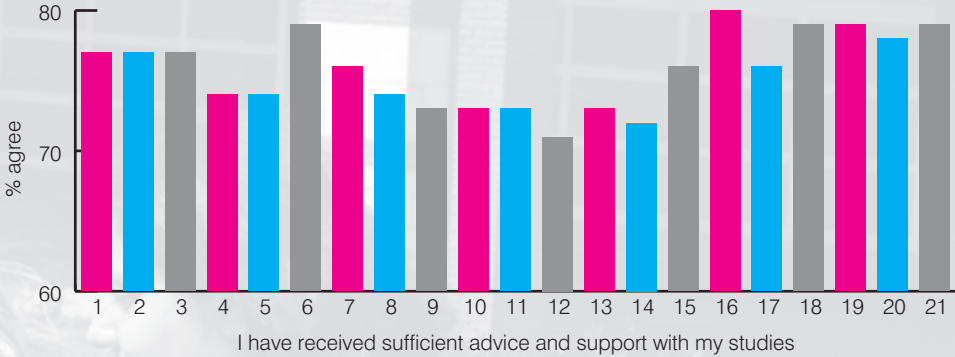
The 'What Works?' programme also suggests that, in order to achieve these outcomes, academic support activities should be underpinned by 10 principles which include:

- **Flexibility**
- **Transparency**
- **Timeliness**
- **Relevance**

Fundamentally, for students to succeed institutions need to encourage and facilitate partnerships between staff and students which outlines responsibilities for academic success.

To read the full report, which includes a number of case studies, visit www.actiononaccess.org/retention

For academic support to work in the best interests of students, there needs to be a balance between what central university services provide for students and what faculties can offer in terms of subject specific support. What is vital is that all staff are aware of what support is available for students so that they can easily signpost students to services they may need to seek.

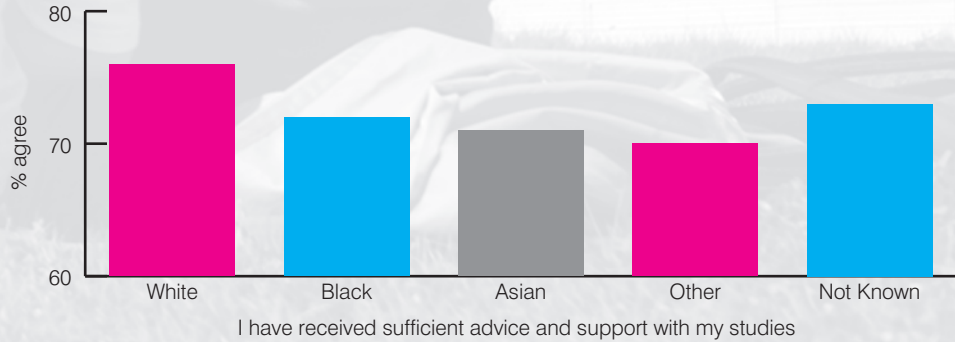


Source: National Student Survey 2011

Key:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 Medicine and Dentistry | 9 Engineering and Technology | 15 Languages |
| 2 Subjects allied to Medicine | 10 Architecture, Building and Planning | 16 Historical and Philosophical studies |
| 3 Biological Sciences | 11 Social studies | 17 Creative Arts and Design |
| 4 Veterinary Sciences | 12 Law | 18 Education |
| 5 Agriculture and related subjects | 13 Business and Administrative studies | 19 Combined |
| 6 Physical Sciences | 14 Mass Communications and Documentation | 20 Initial Teacher Training |
| 7 Mathematical Sciences | | 21 Geographical Studies |
| 8 Computer Science | | |

It is also interesting to note that there are major differences in satisfaction for students of different ethnicities as shown in the 2011 National Student Survey results.



Source: National Student Survey 2011

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1 PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS SHOULD BE GIVEN INFORMATION ABOUT ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROVISION

Students must be given the opportunity to find out what support options are in place for them before applying to a university. This will help them to make an informed decision about whether an institution meets their support needs. This is especially important for disabled, international, and non-traditional students who will have very specific support needs.

2 INDUCTION SHOULD BE AN ONGOING PROCESS THROUGHOUT A STUDENT'S TIME AT UNIVERSITY

Students are often loaded with information about the institution at the start of their course. This means messages regarding support and guidance can get lost in the excitement of starting a new course. Students are often unaware of what they should know in relation to their study skills, so an extended induction process is required to ensure that key messages get through. This should not be limited to the first year. Students go through a different learning journey during each academic year, which often presents assessment, personal and academic problems. Students should be made aware of continuing support in place to help them with these new challenges.

3 PEER MENTORING SCHEMES SHOULD BE USED AS A MORE ACCESSIBLE SUPPORT MECHANISM

New students enjoy the informality of peer mentoring, and the mentors themselves gain a lot of useful knowledge and experience. Some institutions have run successful peer mentoring at each point of the student lifecycle, from application to graduation. Peer support schemes can be run face to face, by text, or online, and by matching similar students together, can enable students to integrate into university life more quickly.

4 STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO INDEPENDENT ADVICE AND SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THEIR STUDIES

As well as providing academic and personal support for students, institutions should help students' unions to provide independent advice and guidance. When students go through difficulties, they often feel that if they tell the institution about it they will be penalised in some way. If these students can seek independent support from students' unions, discontinuation of their studies can be prevented.

5 INSTITUTIONS SHOULD TAKE A PERSONALISED APPROACH TO MONITORING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC INTERACTIONS

Repeat non-attendance of scheduled activity and little or no contact with academic or administrative staff could indicate that a student is going through a difficult time. If this is noticed early, institutions can intervene to make sure the student is supported through their issues. By taking a personalised approach, they will be able to tailor their support to the individual needs of students.

6 STUDENTS SHOULD BE SUPPORTED TO HELP THEM TO IDENTIFY THEIR SKILLS GAPS

This includes, but is not limited to: ensuring the formative and summarised feedback they receive on their work includes areas for academic skills improvement; awareness of what academic integrity is, in order to ensure they do not accidentally plagiarise or mis-reference; and having access to the learning outcomes and marking criteria early in the assessment process, so that they can evaluate their own skills gaps.

7 STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT MENTOR TO HELP HIGHLIGHT AREAS FOR ACADEMIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENTS

Students should be in regular contact with an academic about their academic support needs. All too often, institutions place an emphasis on personal and professional development during one to one tutorials and do not give students appropriate support to help them to identify the academic skills they should develop in order to improve their grades.

8 STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES WHICH MEET THEIR NEEDS

Many students decide to work in groups in order to explore their subject in greater detail. Institutions should provide more informal spaces with integrated technology, where students can work together without disturbing, or being disturbed, by others. These more informal rooms will help them to be academically stimulated by working with others, and will help foster a sense of belonging within a support group.

9 STUDENT MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SHOULD BE USED TO ENSURE RETENTION AND SATISFACTION

Information about progression, retention and satisfaction should be used to develop policies and practices regarding student support in individual faculties. Institutions should also make sure they conduct exit interviews with students who decide to leave their course, in order to evaluate current support practices.

10 SUPPORT, AND RECOGNITION, SHOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR THOSE WHO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO STUDENTS

There are many people who provide support to students, from central student services, academics and library staff to students themselves. Institutions should give these people time and resources to develop their skills as a mentor, and should give them the space to discuss the challenges they face. This will not only ensure that they feel that their contributions make a difference, but also help institutions to develop their support practices by sharing best practice across the institution and highlighting any development needs.

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