

What Works? Student Retention & Success



Briefing report on the *What works? Student retention and success change programme*, December 2013

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Introduction

The Higher Education Academy and Action on Access are pleased to be delivering Phase two of the *What works? Student retention and success change programme*. The programme was launched in September 2012, and participating institutions first met together in January 2013. This Briefing report has been prepared at the end of the first year to provide an overview of the programme, progress by the participating teams and to identify emerging themes from the programme. It provides:

- An overview of the findings from phase 1 of the programme.
- Summary information about phase 2 of the programme including details about the participating higher education institutions.
- A discussion about institutional commitment to change, and the types of changes that are taking place at the institutional level.
- Details about the changes to learning and teaching that are being implemented in specific programmes of study.
- A discussion about the process of change, based on the early experiences of the participating institutions.
- Conclusions about the programme so far, including learning for institutions.

This report will be of interest to colleagues in higher education institutions who are planning to implement change to improve student engagement, students' sense of belonging, and retention and success.

What works? Student retention and success programme (Phase 1: 2008-11)

Between 2008-11 the Higher Education Council for England (HEFCE) and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation funded the *What works? Student retention and success programme* (see <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/what-works-retention>). This £1 million programme provided funding to seven teams to identify and evaluate effective approaches to improving student retention and success. The meta-analysis and synthesis of the seven projects formed the basis of the final publication¹.

The 22 institutions participating in Phase 1 examined alternative approaches using a range of methods. Their findings and conclusions were remarkably consistent. At the heart of successful retention and success is a strong sense of belonging in HE for all students. This is most effectively promoted through mainstream activities that all students participate in. The academic sphere is the most important site for creating the type of participation that

¹ Thomas, L. (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

engenders a sense of belonging. Our evidence finds that academic programmes and high-quality student-centred learning and teaching are a primary focus for effective student retention and success. Students are most likely to feel they belong, first and foremost, to their programme of study, while such feelings generally decrease at departmental, school and institutional levels. Analysis of effective approaches employed by the institutions to improving retention and success demonstrate that student belonging is achieved through:

- Supportive peer relations
- Meaningful interaction between staff and students
- Developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners
- An HE experience relevant to students' interests and future goals

The Phase I *What Works?* projects examined various interventions and approaches to improving student retention and success. What became clear was that the exact type of intervention or approach is less important than either the way it is delivered and/or its intended outcomes. All interventions or activities should aim to enhance student belonging, and should be planned and informed by the following principles:

- **Mainstream:** interventions and approaches to improve student retention and success should as far as possible be embedded into mainstream provision to ensure all students participate and benefit from them. This will improve the retention of some students and contribute to maximising the success of all. An opt-out rather than opt-in approach should be the norm (i.e. where all students participate unless they choose not to, rather than them having to choose to participate). Particular attention should be paid to students who opt out or who fail to engage, and additional support provided if necessary.
- **Proactive and developmental:** activities should proactively seek to engage students and develop their capacity to do so, rather than waiting for a crisis to occur, and/or more confident students to take up opportunities. Students who most need support are the least likely to come forward voluntarily. If students have to opt in it is important to render transparent the ways in which students can and should engage (and why).
- **Relevant:** activities need to be informative, useful and relevant to students' current academic interests and future aspirations; the potential benefits of engaging should be explicit.
- **Well timed and appropriate media:** early engagement is essential to student retention and success. Information may be better delivered via a range of media, as students' learning styles and needs will differ from each other and over time.
- **Collaborative:** activities should encourage collaboration and engagement with fellow students and members of staff.
- **Monitored:** the extent and quality of students' engagement should be monitored, and where there is evidence of low levels of engagement follow-up action should be taken.

Phase I found that although the focus of efforts to improve student retention and success needs to be on academic programmes, this should be promoted and facilitated at the institutional-level. This will involve the review of relevant policies, processes and procedures, and working in partnership with others across the institution. Phase one of the *What works?* programme identified the following issues that are likely to be significant at institutional level:

1. The commitment to a culture of belonging should be explicit through institutional leadership in internal and external discourses and documentation such as the strategic plan, website, prospectus and all policies.
2. Nurturing belonging and improving retention and success should be a **priority for all staff** as a significant minority of students think about leaving, and changes need to be mainstreamed to maximise the success of all students.
3. **Staff capacity** to nurture a culture of belonging needs to be developed. Staff-related policies should address the following issues:
 - Staff **accountability** for retention and success in their areas
 - **Recognition** of staff professionalism and contributions to improve retention and success in terms of time and expertise
 - Access to **support and development** resources as necessary
 - Appropriate **reward** for staff who improve learning and teaching to engage and retain more students in higher education and maximise the success of all students. This should be recognised through progression and promotion frameworks.
4. **Student capacity** to engage and belong must be developed early through:
 - Clear expectations, purpose and value of engaging and belonging
 - Development of **skills** to engage
 - Providing **opportunities** for interaction and engagement that all can participate in.
5. High-quality **institutional data** should be available and used to identify departments, programmes and modules with higher rates of withdrawal, non-progression and non-completion.
6. Systems need to be in place to **monitor student behaviour**, particularly participation and performance, to identify students at risk of withdrawing, rather than only relying on entry qualifications or other student entry characteristics. Action must be taken when at-risk behaviour is observed.
7. Work should be undertaken in partnership with staff and students to review data and experience about student belonging, retention and success.
8. Change should be implemented across the student lifecycle and throughout the institution at all levels, and its impact evaluated.

What works? Student retention and success change programme (Phase 2: 2012-15)

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation provided additional funding to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Action on Access to develop, deliver and evaluate Phase 2 of the *What works?* programme, focusing on implementing change in higher education institutions between 2012/13 and 2014/15 (see http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/PHF/retention_and_success_change_programme_2012-2015). This approach to change builds on previous change programmes facilitated by the HEA and a similar programme delivered by Action on Access for HEFCE in 2007-8.

The aim of the change programme is to work with higher education institutions to implement changes to improve student engagement, belonging, retention and success. The changes are informed by learning from the *What works?* Programme, and focus on both the institutional level, and changes in three academic programmes in each higher education institution. The second aim of the programme is to evaluate the process and impact of change to extend and improve the evidence base about effective ways of improving student

retention and success. More specifically, the *What works?* Student retention and success change programme has the following objectives:

- Use the learning from the *What works?* programme, institutional data and institutional review to identify strengths and challenges and priorities for change at the strategic and course/programme level (2012-13).
- Improve the strategic approach to improving the engagement, belonging, retention and success of students (2012-13 onwards).
- Implement or enhance specific interventions in the areas of induction, active learning and co-curricular activities in three selected discipline areas (2013-14 onwards).
- Evaluate the impact of the changes in both formative and summative ways, drawing on naturally occurring institutional data, bespoke student surveys and qualitative methods such as telephone or face-to-face interviews with staff and students (On-going).

The student retention and success change programme involves meetings, institutional visits, events, residentials and access to tools and resources to support the institutional teams. The programme is taking place over three academic years 2012/13- 2014/15, and additional data to inform the evaluation will be collected in 2015-16. The programme will undertake on-going dissemination, with a final report and event in 2016.

The participating institutions

This section of the report provides information about the institutions participating in the change programme, their aims and objectives, and the ways in which their contexts have shaped their priorities and approaches to change. Further details are also available from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/PHF/retention_and_success_change_programme_2012-2015.

The programme attracted interest from a wide range of institutions, and this is reflected in those selected to participate. Initially 16 institutions were chosen, and there are currently 13 institutions progressing into the second year of the programme. This includes nine English institutions, two Scottish institutions, one Welsh and one Northern Irish institution. Two institutions are mainly selective, while the remainder are largely recruiting and/or inclusive. One institution is 'ancient' and a member of the Russell Group, two are referred to as plate glass universities, six are post-1992 universities, while an additional three institutions can be described as recently created universities.

All of the institutions are committed to working within the aims and objectives of the *What works?* Student retention and success change programme, and this is reflected in their overarching aims.

All of the participating institutions have identified the improvement of student retention and/or success as a priority for them. For some institutions this is in the context of being 'widening access' institutions, while for others it is part of their commitment to expand diversity and improve the outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many however have also identified specific challenges/issues which they wish to address, which are largely informed by their institutional context. For example, this includes recognition that large numbers of students are in paid employment – which may affect their ability to engage;

retention and completion of students on combined honours courses, or who move between full and part time modes of study; improving retention on programmes that are recruiting well; and improving the retention of students with particular characteristics.

Institutional context and priorities also shapes the approaches that some institutions plan to adopt as part of their approach to change. For example:

- To develop and improve student engagement through developing a stronger, more equal partnership with the Students' Union.
- Embedding inclusive advising standards which are implemented in each academic area to provide a mechanism for students to engage with staff and their academic programme.
- To work to develop the graduate attributes of all students to create belonging through a relevant HE experience.
- By setting retention targets for all academic areas across the institution that staff and managers are required to engage with and meet.
- Developing a new learning and teaching strategy with prioritises student engagement, belonging, retention and success. This aims to increase awareness of the importance of these issues and the priority attached to them by the institution.
- Using professional development and the UK Professional Standards Framework to provide recognition for staff to develop their capacity, and to recognise expertise in this area.
- Developing the academic leadership and change management capacity of academic staff (e.g. programme leaders) to engage other academic colleagues and implement change in their areas.
- Systematically develop a more co-ordinated approach to retention and success by joining up services and interventions across the institution.

Irrespective of institutional priorities and approaches, each institution has undertaken to work in at least three discipline areas in one of our pre-determined themes (induction, active learning, personal tutoring or peer mentoring) (see Table 1 in section 3 of this report).

Strategic enablers

Institutional commitment

A particular feature of this programme was a concerted effort to secure senior management awareness of and commitment to the principles and the process of change. In Phase 2, this was addressed in the following ways:

- A launch event in September 2012 clarified and emphasised the requirements of participating in the programme very clear.
- The guidance documentation explained the importance of institutional commitment and laid out the institutional requirements.
- The core team at each institution needed to include a senior member of staff.
- The Vice-Chancellor or Principal of successful institutions were written to informing them that their institution had been selected to participate in the programme, what it would involve, and institutional requirements. VCs and principals were required to send back a signed letter of acceptance.

- At the institutional visits to teams which took place between March and May 2013 senior managers were invited to participate, and usually did.
- In the reports submitted to the HEA at the end of July 2013 institutions were required to re-state their commitment to the requirements of the programme.
- For all institutions whose participation in the second and third year was approved (based on their plans) a letter was sent to the VC or principal.

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the majority of teams are confident that they have senior management support for this work.

Institutional level priorities and how they were agreed

All institutions have had high level input into their plans for the change programme. These inputs were provided either directly by a senior manager sitting as a member of the core team or more typically by those on the core team reporting to senior staff and representing strategic work across the institution. The resulting plans therefore reflect current and future institutional level priorities, and institutions have located their work within institutional strategies and policies (such as learning, teaching and assessment; student experience; staff reward and recognition; Access Agreement).

Institutions are engaging with or using these strategies in different ways. Some are piloting the implementation of strategies through the change programme with planned dissemination events and a planned roll out programme. Others are utilising the Change programme to inform the development of the strategies with formal reporting mechanisms to appropriate committees.

Current work and future plans

Many institutions are explicitly drawing together and combining aspects of these strategies as part of their action plans. This is most visible in the plans of institutions that recognise institutional priorities in four areas: staff development; curriculum development; policies and procedures (such as admissions, data management systems, student support); and student engagement. One institution referred to them as the key “pillars” which in combination will contribute to bringing about successful interventions at the discipline level.

Staff development

For some institutions, one of their priorities is to bring about a “cultural change” with staff, to ensure that they “believe promoting student retention is important and valuable”. Other institutions prioritise the “buy-in” of staff as a priority. Indeed one of the attractions of the programme for many institutions is to see how discipline interventions can best be supported and then to “roll-out” this model of support across the university or college. The Change Programme aids this as it promotes a link between institutional and discipline action plans.

All institutions refer to staff development or continuing professional development (CPD) as a way of supporting staff. Some of this work is happening in a customised way i.e. just for those involved in disciplines involved in this programme. When this occurs it has resulted in a very sharp focus on planned interventions. Other institutions have a programme of CPD, most notably for middle ranking academic staff, into which issues such as leadership, change management and recognition are discussed. One institution is concentrating on the

induction and teaching observation of part-time staff as the key to addressing issues around the quality of student academic engagement and personal tutoring. Other institutions, particularly those introducing changes in curriculum delivery and assessment are drawing upon central staff, often in educational development units, to work with the discipline staff on the implementation of the intervention.

Whichever model of staff development is being used, all institutions recognise the importance of the providing motivation and support for the discipline leaders and their colleagues. In this respect many institutions are looking to link their implementation of the UK Professional Standards Framework with their approach to recognition, reward, staff development and CPD in supporting discipline teams on the change programme.

Curriculum development

For some institutions there are particular aspects of curriculum development which are the priority for improving the engagement, belonging, retention and success of students. One institution - building on research into assessment practice – is using the programme as a “pedagogic change carrier”. In this institution, there is a very close relationship between the central project team and the disciplines as the two parties focus on assessment in unison. Other institutions are supporting disciplines in a less direct way. A number of disciplines have decided that due to local circumstances and context, there is a need for structural changes in the curriculum to facilitate, for example, the introduction of common thematic modules across all years, or the introduction of Personal Development Planning. In these circumstances, the discipline teams are working to address particular local contexts which hamper belonging and engagement. For some institutions the support and encouragement provided for discipline teams in curriculum and co-curriculum development will result in a framework which can be used to “bridge the gap between policy and practice”.

Availability and use of data

The majority of institutions recognised the challenges in making student data available to subject/programme managers in an appropriate and timely manner. The issues of collecting, making available and using data are present in nearly every institutional action plan at least to some extent. This includes both the processes by which the data will be gathered and presented and also the way that discipline managers can be supported to understand and make use of it. Institutions are addressing this by bringing in changes to policies and procedures and also prioritising staff development, often as a key part of middle and senior management training. For many institutions the appropriate use of this data will be a key tactic for involving staff in designing, delivering and evaluating change in their learning environment.

Student engagement

All institutions are involving students and their representatives in their central project teams. For some institutions, this change programme is a key development in their student engagement strategy with many building on partnership work with the Student Union and linking to other student-led activity. Here, the student voice is paramount and is being used to facilitate the development of strategy. In others, students act in an advisory capacity at both institutional and discipline level. It is apparent that all institutions are building on the step-change that has occurred in the past few years with regard to the recognition of the student voice. For many institutions this has led to viewing students as partners in a variety of ways and at different levels.

Expected outcomes

All of these approaches are intended to improve student engagement, belonging, retention and attainment. In addition, institutions have described other outcomes they expect their actions to deliver, such as:

- The engagement of a wide range of academic and support staff and the adoption of good practice from the project as evidenced in validations and course reviews
- More consistent use of data identified in programme level annual monitoring, learning and teaching action plans and annual review processes
- Increased take-up of staff development courses and improved feedback
- Evidence of leadership, innovation and inspiration, based in academic rigour and integrity
- Student data regularly reviewed by Heads and course leaders
- Improved provision of information for current and potential students
- Collaborative working with a strong sense of professionalism, community and staff and student collegiality
- A new institutional strategy that encompasses student success and retention
- The implementation of a new approach for recognising and tracking “at-risk” students
- Adoption of the new advising role by academic staff and student attendance at planned meetings in groups, virtually or face to face.

Changes to learning and teaching in the disciplines

A central finding of the *What works?* Phase I was the importance of learning and teaching and engagement in the academic sphere. Therefore all the participating institutions have identified at least three discipline areas and programmes to work with, to implement specific change in the areas of induction, active learning or co-curricular interventions (either personal tutoring or peer mentoring).

Institutions, disciplines and thematic focus

The current breakdown of disciplines and themes is shown in Table I below.

Table I: Disciplines and themes

• Induction	• Active learning	• Co-curricular
Built environment x 2 Business Management Criminology Drama Education Law Life Sciences Management Media x 2 Radiography Social Sciences Sports Science x2	Built environment Business Management Computer Science x 2 Creative Technologies Engineering Life Sciences Media Sports Science Textile and Design Working with Children, Young People and Families	Business x 2 Combined studies Education Engineering x 3 Life Sciences Media Music Music technology x 2 Occupational Therapy Psychology Radiography Sports Science Theatre Working with Children, Young People and Families
15	11	18

How disciplines and programmes were selected

Each institution selected three courses in which to implement interventions (one university subsequently increased this number). Institutions describe a range of reasons for their choice, which can be grouped into student characteristics; course retention rates; course attainment rates; and organisational issues impacting negatively on retention and success.

Thematic priorities and interventions

All institutions were asked to implement or enhance specific interventions in the areas of induction, active learning and co-curricular activities in three selected discipline areas (2013-14 onwards). Discipline teams were invited to attend thematic workshops in April and May 2013, and to plan an intervention to be piloted in 2013/14.

Induction

The aim of the induction interventions is to move away from simply information giving towards a more engaging approach with an explicit academic purpose. Interactive and collaborative activities should be designed to enable students to get to know other students and members of the academic team and to develop an understanding of the programme they are joining. The interventions should be designed in-line with the *What works?* principles and with the aim of improving student engagement and belonging. The discipline teams have identified a range of interventions. In summary there is an emphasis on induction designed and delivered by course teams rather than central units, and thus programmes with a more explicit academic purpose, induction programmes that start earlier (pre-entry) and last longer, activities to develop a community by promoting engagement with the new cohort and existing cohorts, activities to promote students meeting and getting to know academic staff and monitoring attendance of students at induction activities.

Active learning

The aim of active learning interventions is to move towards more student-centred, collaborative learning, with real-world relevance, which prioritise students engaging with staff, peers, and the subject. In addition the learning should incorporate the development of skills and capacities to be an effective learner in the discipline, and be relevant to the current interests and future aspirations of students. The interventions should be designed in-line with the *What works?* principles and with the aim of improving student engagement and belonging. In summary, there is less emphasis on changing learning and teaching towards, for example, group working, and more emphasis on the inclusion of additional elements to improve transparency, develop skills, promote collaboration and develop students understanding and expectations about future opportunities

Co-curricular activities

The aim of co-curricular activities is to embed or align personal tutoring (or academic advising), or peer mentoring with the academic programme. These activities, when they are aligned with the academic programme, provide a bridge to facilitate engagement and belonging, and a vehicle for developing skills and understanding about the discipline of study and future possibilities. The emphasis is on these activities taking place within the discipline context, rather than separately as extra-curricular activities do, and to be opt-out rather than opt in. The interventions should be designed in-line with the *What works?* principles and with the aim of improving student engagement and belonging. The interventions identified by discipline teams move towards more proactive approaches to personal tutoring/advising

which have more explicit goals about developing students understanding within the discipline context. They also include peer mentoring and other social activities that are organised by the programme team and designed to develop students sense of belonging and capacity to be effective learners.

Process of change

The *What works? Student retention and success change programme* extends over a three-year period of implementation. The evaluation process will extend beyond the three year implementation period, to enable us to include data from 2014/15 in the final analysis. This timeframe is important for a number of reasons. Firstly it will allow us to explore the full impact of interventions on not just level 4 retention, but progression and degree completion (for the majority of full time students in English, Welsh and Northern Irish institutions, who do not take any time out). Secondly, it recognises the time required to plan and implement institutional change - and for the impact to be observed and/or measured. Thirdly, it has enabled institutions to operate at both strategic and discipline levels, and to make greater use of institutional data to review priority areas for change. Finally, it is anticipated that the longer time period will increase the number and scale of changes made, and contribute to sustainability.

The process of change will be researched more fully over the course of the three years of the programme. The next section considers the ways in which core and discipline teams are working together; the successes and challenges to date; and initial thoughts about sustainability.

Working together

A challenge for all change programmes working across the institution is how to actively involve all the relevant parties. This challenge is very real in this programme, as institutions have a core team, plus three discipline teams. The core teams are required to consist of: a project manager, an institutional senior manager, an academic member of staff, a data expert, and a student or student representative. The three disciplines teams each need a team leader and two other academic colleagues, they are also encouraged to include student representative. The rationale here is related to the different loci of interventions – at the institutional level and in three academic programmes. This makes the process of working together worthy of exploration, especially because some project managers expressed a lack of clarity about their roles, and effective ways of working with disciplines. At this stage we identify how core teams are working with discipline teams (see table 2 below).

Table 2: Approaches for working with discipline teams

Clear role and communication strategy	Provision of support	Collaborative working and sharing and good practice	Using data
Designated a particular member of the core team to be the link person with each discipline team.	Played a trouble-shooting role.	Workshop to engage staff, exchange ideas and generate plans.	Use of institutional data to identify specific programme teams to work with.
Student representative working with each discipline team.	Provided the discipline teams with reflective feedback from the core team.	Used the programme reporting template to engage discipline team and develop action and evaluation plans.	Explored alternative ways of presenting granular data to discipline teams.
Scheduled regular meetings between core team and discipline teams.	Mentors for discipline teams	Celebrated the success of individuals and teams.	
		Created a virtual space for sharing ideas and resources.	

Successes, challenges and risks

Institutions were asked to identify specific successes, challenges and risks in their work to date, and as they move forward.

Successes

- Support from senior staff. In the majority of institutions the teams feel well supported by the senior staff in the institution. At the start up meeting, very few people volunteered to participate in the session designed to promote the project to senior colleagues. It is widely believed that senior staff are only too aware of the importance of student retention and success, and will do much to support colleagues who are working to make improvements. One team specifically noted the value of the support they have received from senior staff and from the teaching and learning committee.
- Engagement of core and discipline teams. A couple of institutions commented on the success they have had in engaging the discipline teams, and the commitment and enthusiasm across the core and discipline teams involved in the work.
- Use of evidence. One institution reported success in using institutional research evidence and evidence from *What works?* to inform developments; while another had been successful in finding new ways of reporting granular data to support colleagues across the institution to make greater use of the data. Another institution reported success in terms

of wider engagement in the qualitative research being undertaken as part of the *What works? Student retention and success change programme*.

Challenges

Some issues are within the control of the institution, and (potentially) solvable. Some challenges are at the level of the change programme itself, and have or will be addressed. Other challenges are external, so cannot be changed, but within institutions and the teams, solutions or work rounds can be sought.

Institutional challenges

- **Staff engagement.** The most commonly cited institutional challenge is related to staff engagement. This is echoed by people's concerns at the Start up meeting, and in the list of issues people wanted to be addressed in the Progress meeting in September 2013. In some cases this is due to staff changes, and in some institutions the challenge is specifically related to conflicting priorities. Two institutions make specific reference to the challenges involved in working across two or more sites. Two institutions comment on the challenges associated with a change in senior manager, and the impact this has on staff engagement - one of these feels that senior staff and organisational changes have made colleagues resistant to change, especially when it is perceived to be top down.
- One institution provided a more specific example of conflicting priorities, in terms of aligning strategies and HEA activities, particularly as they are engaged in more than one change programme and in the accreditation of professional development programme.
- **Institutional data.** While only one institution identifies a specific challenge relating to institutional data – in particular that the central data system is difficult to access – the majority of teams are addressing issues related to the nature and availability of institutional data as part of their strategic level changes.
- The geographical and cultural challenges of work across split sites not only impacts on staff engagement, but on communication and the effectiveness of the core team. One institution is making use of Share Point to assist with communication issues.
- **Student engagement.** Interestingly, only one institution has identified engaging students in the process of change as difficult.

External challenges

Two specific external challenges were noted. First the duration of courses in Scotland. This is a challenge for two institutions in particular, and also affects programmes with part-time students, and students who take a year out. We hope there may be potential to extend the evaluation over a slightly longer time. Second, major national changes to the delivery of education in one of the discipline areas was also identified as a challenge. It is interesting to note that no institution raised any particular concern related to the increased student fees, and variable fee regimes between countries.

Risks

Many of the risks about the future implementation of the change programme are connected to the challenges experienced to date, such as staff engagement; evaluation; personnel and organisational change; and student profile.

Initial thoughts about sustainability

Institutions were asked provide an overview of how they are working to improve the sustainability of their changes and interventions. The majority of institutional teams have given thought to the issue of sustainability. Approaches identified include embedding the work into future strategy or policy documents or into institutional services; involving further discipline teams who will be incentivised through key performance indicators and development funding; rolling out good practice via staff development; and disseminating outcomes through for example learning and teaching conferences.

The different facets of sustainability, and approaches to sustainability will be addressed in subsequent meetings with institutional teams to help maximise the impact of the programme on students and institutions.

Conclusions

To conclude this report we have identified the key learning points for institutions and policy makers. Learning for the programme partners has also been identified and used to inform the ongoing development of the programme and its evaluation.

Learning for institutions

There are potentially many things that institutions might learn from the early stages of this programme.

- Different approaches are emerging with regard to the extent to which change is 'top down' or 'bottom up'. It may be that effective change management combines these two approaches. This is something we will explore further in the contextual evaluation, but institutions may find it useful to reflect on their own approach, and whether there are any advantages to introducing additional approaches too.
- Two institutions have utilised funding, for example from their Access Agreement or an internal teaching development fund, to support discipline teams to implement activities to improve student engagement. This may be an approach others wish to explore.
- Some institutions have used existing research evidence, while others are generating further evidence through this programme. This can be useful in encouraging others to engage.
- There seem to be particular benefits to having a senior manager actively contributing to the work of the core team, both in terms of efficacy in implementing change, and in connecting the change programme to other priorities in the institution.
- One team identified resistance to centrally orchestrated change; this may be more widespread, and raises issues of how the wider institution can be involved in change from the outset to try to reduce or avoid this problem. One team made use of a stakeholder analysis to support this process.
- Engaging staff across the institution is challenging, particularly if there is more than one site. Electronic solutions, such as SharePoint, can be used to help people feel more engaged and aware of the programme.

Learning for policy makers

At this stage in the programme there is limited learning for policy makers, but a few issues are worth noting, and they will be explored further as the programme progresses.

- Evaluation is challenging for educational programmes, but the mixed methods approach, utilising common and tailored data collection appears to be robust at this stage. The logical sequence approach we have developed to support institutions to create their own is proving to be useful, and with support greater understanding is emerging. Measuring student engagement is, however, challenging.
- The importance of research, data and other evidence to inform the process of change should not be underestimated, particularly in academic institutions.
- Staff engagement is an on-going challenge, and this points to the significance of issues relating to staff reward. There is increased discussion about the teaching qualifications of HE staff, but far less about how the wide range of contributions that staff make to HEIs are recognised and rewarded.
- This programme has been used effectively by a number of institutions to contribute to work delivered as part of the Access Agreement (England) or their Outcome Agreement (Scotland).
- There is still a need for a wider debate about the how we define 'student success' and how to address differential attainment between student groups and between institutions.