

# USER

## UNDERSTANDING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & RETENTION



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Applied Psychology

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### Presenters:

Dr Clare Glennan: Recruitment

Dr Leanne Etheridge: L4 Engagement

Dr Dan Heggs: Assessment

Dr Jenny Mercer: Term Time Employment

Alison Walker: Placement Perspectives



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# Reaching Out into Communities First

Dr Clare Glennan



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# WIDENING PARTICIPATION – DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY



## Foundation Year

- Social Sciences
- (Health Sciences)



## Outreach

- Psychology
- Youth and Community



## Communities First

- Welsh Government Tackling Poverty Programme.  
most disadvantaged people in the most deprived areas



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# Reaching Out into Communities First Study



## Focus Groups

- Current Outreach
- Ex-Outreach Foundation Year – Summer



## Learner Journey

- Previous educational experience
- Expectations & Experiences



## Thematic Analysis

- Braun and Clarke 2010



# Initial Findings

## Combined Model



The journey of the Older learners/ Non-traditional students



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# Powerless

“ I suppose I was deprived uh- well definitely deprived of education. I was told when I was allowed to go to secondary school certainly, and when I wasn't going- I had to travel um to my high school which meant bus fare and what not. And um (.) if for whatever reason my mother give me the bus fare I would go to school...and if she didn't I didn't go to school” (FY-C)



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# Growing confidence

Speaking in a lecture room- I wouldn't have done a year ago. But because certain things have grabbed me I don't even- I had forgotten that was an issue for me. It really has kind of- it's brought me right out of myself I feel more at ease with myself. So much more at ease. My confidence has risen. Um (.) and so it's opened up those aspirations that I didn't realise I had for so so long. It's all positive in that aspect definitely. (FY-C)



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# Powerful – Not Quite there Yet!

And I was like, "Okay, wow" you know one minute I'm doing a community thing and the next minute I'm sitting in-around people that can do this- and I'm thinking "ahh I can't do this". But, it was like "oh my god" so I was just rolling with it I suppose (FY-C)

I didn't think I would have a chance of completing the year- if I did complete the year I'd be very happy and grateful and that's it cause- after being out of education- well not taking an exam in 40 something years- and not doing very well and school any way I was average, umm (.) I (.) I still doubt very much that I've got what it takes to actually get any type of degree (FY-B)



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# Threat to WP initiatives in Wales



Powerful:  
Welsh Government



Powerless:  
HEIs & Students

# “Oh I only need 40%, I’ll be fine”: Experiences and perceptions of the first year at university

**Dr Leanne Etheridge**

*“Without a successful first step into the world of higher education, a second step may never exist”*

(Cook and Leckey, 1999, p. 157)



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# METHOD

- Using data regarding grades and attendance two particular groups of students were targeted for involvement in focus groups
  - Poor attendance and lower grades
  - Consistent attendance and higher grades
- Two focus groups
  - James, Samantha and Jade were poor attendees
  - Jasmine, Katie and Tom were regular attendees
- Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)



# OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Themes:

- First year as not important
- Engagement with others
- Engagement and passion of staff
- Discussion based learning
- (Mis)Use of Technology



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# FIRST YEAR AS NOT IMPORTANT

Katie: *“Yeah, because I was going to say, the fact that we came in and they were like this year doesn’t count, some people were like I won’t bother, I only need 40% so I’ll just do a bit of revision the night before and I’ll be fine”*



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# FIRST YEAR AS NOT IMPORTANT

Sarah: *So I definitely think the next year... it seems more important to me, it seems like more of a thing and that we're going to get our grades and that they are going to be counted towards our degree. Because I want to get a good degree, I don't want to waste the next two years...*

James: *Absolutely.*

Sarah: *...and get a 2:2 or whatever. I want to get 2:1 at least*



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# WHAT CAN WE TAKE FROM THIS?

- Need to ensure that the first year counts
  - Socially, psychologically and academically
- Previous discussions of the flexibility and/or inappropriateness of current UK degree classification algorithms do not question the inclusion of first year grades (Lewis, 2004; Yorke et al. 2004)
  - Degree classification system has been referred to as “no longer fit for purpose” (Burgess Group, 2007)
- However, there is some evidence that inclusion of first year grades in a GPA system may be of benefit (Higher Education Academy, 2015)
  - Inclusion of the HEAR



# Evaluating EMA: Staff and Student Perspectives

Dr Dan Heggs



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# EMA AND BSc (HONS) PSYCHOLOGY

Using eSubmission since 2006 where the focus was on plagiarism detection and academic integrity

2013/2014 Department of Applied Psychology completed a pilot study for EMA

2014/2015 BSc (Hons) adopted EMA using TII/GradeMark

2015/2016 Moodle transition ...



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# EMA EVALUATION

Staff interviews: 9 members of staff

Student Interviews: 3 students from each level of the programme

Interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2010)



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# STAFF THEMES

## The Old Way vs. New Way

“I don’t think it’s changed particularly but I have been more aware of the types of feedback I’m giving in comments.” (S9: 15 - 22)

“The advantages for me are I don’t have to take a pile of stuff home, there’s no risk of losing it” (S3: 168 – 174)

## Consider for Student Point of View

“I would suspect one of the big differences is that you don’t have to queue at i-zone or you don’t have to be on campus so it’s much cleaner and quicker and more accessible for students” (S2: 121 – 124)

“That’s the only thing, and the only other thing is sometimes if I’m worried about a student’s work I will kind of ask them to come and see me in order to collect it so there’s that personal interaction” (S6: 129 – 137)



# STUDENT THEMES

## Electronic Marking: The wide benefits vs. Minor practical drawbacks

“Yeah, I think it also cuts away the whole situation of queuing and having to print stuff off and... well that even eliminates the fact of having to top up your card to print maybe” (L41: 72-77)

“Like if you had the assignment on paper you might lose it or you don’t know where it is, it’s all on your computer so if you’re doing another assignment where you’re looking at the feedback from the previous one it’s just you can go and see it at any time” (L62: 215-218)

“I find it easy to navigate and it doesn’t appear on my iPhone, which is a shame, if they could sort turn it in so I could load it... you know I can load up turn it in on my iPhone and the mark at the top right is cut out so it doesn’t...” (L51: 101-110)



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# STUDENT THEMES 2

## Perceived Variability in Lecturer standards vs. Stringent Student Expectations

“Yeah. Because again, it depends on the lecturer, some put more comments than the others, some just a lack of, so you’re just kind of floating around thinking well what am I doing wrong or... not even wrong just not enough of” (L52: 138-144)

“Yeah and I think especially when you’ve put a lot of work into something and you think it was pretty good and then you get it back it was like 62 and you’re like oh, why, I spent ages doing that so you just want to know. And I think a lot of my... well my two housemates we feel the same way, like we’ve all said like it would be nice to have a bit more this is for next time, do this and you can take that on board and use that” (L62: 245-251)



# STUDENT THEMES 3

## Students use of feedback

“I’m... see I’m a very interactive person, I would much rather have somebody sit in front of me and say they don’t like me than to go away and not say about it. So it doesn’t matter what the feedback is for me, I’d much rather have it out there in front of me.” (L42: 56-62)

“To be brutally honest it depends on the score that I’ve been given. So if I’m happy with the score that I’ve been given then I generally just do a quick skim through of what’s written on the right hand bar and then that’s generally about it.” (L42: 30-38)



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# EMA CONCLUSION

Adopting EMA is a positive step for students (and staff)

eFeedback has highlighted how students use feedback in different ways

Expectations of grades and how to improve on their work

Expectations of engagement with staff

Expectations of consistency in marking



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# TERM-TIME EMPLOYMENT: A GOOD THING

- ✓ improved job prospects (Watt, 2002)
- ✓ greater financial security (Gellner, 2012)
- ✓ enhance self confidence, self esteem, self worth (Laura, 2010)
- ✓ paid work during term time can facilitate a more meaningful HE experience (Cheng & Alcantara, 2007)







## TERM TIME EMPLOYMENT: NOT SO GOOD

academic achievement diminished  
(e.g. Humphrey, 2006)

miss lectures; can't attend all timetabled classes  
(Robotham, 2011)

being employed significantly increased chances of attrition  
(Gilardi & Gugliementi, 2011)

higher levels of stress and anxiety exhibited  
(Monsley, Vandehey & Diehoff, 2013)



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# EXPERIENCING TERM-TIME EMPLOYMENT AS A NON-TRADITIONAL AGED UNIVERSITY STUDENT: A WELSH STUDY.

N=14 > 25 y/olds

3 Welsh universities

A range of hours work



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Maintaining financial security and quality of life

Academic Limitations

Pushing oneself to succeed

Social lives and relationships challenged

The positive outcomes of employment



Pushing oneself to  
succeed

Standards Maturity  
Strategies  
Motivations  
Pushing Coping  
Succeed Coffee  
Sleep



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Social lives and  
relationships  
challenged

Sacrifice Relationship  
Devotion  
Partner Challenge  
Dissolution Domestic  
Struggle



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Well-being of students?

Potentially eroding the principles educators desire?

Essential for facilitating social capital & graduate careers?

Do HEI's need to be more flexible?

What does the term “full-time student” actually mean?



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**Mercer, J, Clay, J & Etheridge, L (2016)**  
Experiencing term-time employment as a non-traditional aged university student: a Welsh study.

***Research in Post-Compulsory Education***  
Published online first DOI:  
10.1080/13596748.2016.1195168.



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# THREAT TO EDUCATION AS WE KNOW IT...



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# Understanding Student Engagement and Retention (USER) research group



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