Induction Tutoring Report

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The primacy of effective stage 1 induction to UCA has been pinpointed in the UCA Student Success Strategy's goals (hereafter SSS, please refer to appendix 1) and the discursive activities of the Retention Working Group (hereafter RWG, please refer to appendix 2) in spring 2016, in the context of more general student engagement strategies engendering a community feeling. It is a snapshot of the nature and impacts of 2016 induction that this report seeks to present, through qualitative research with course leaders across the University, with a particular focus on tutoring practices.

Review of Literature:

The SSS and the RWG identify a number of factors around the efficacy of strategies designed to promote retention, factors which are well-represented in the pedagogic literature.

a) Staged contact during interruption developing into carefully managed return
b) Managing expectations of the course, campus and geographical location at outreach/interview
c) Incentivising attendance, persistence *and* engagement as opposed to penalising via non-attendance policy
d) Positive visibility and coherence of course identity across units e.g. Contextual Studies
e) Increased awareness of student mental health and promotion of holistic wellbeing as part of pastoral care

Crucial amongst the many approaches to theorising retention strategies has been the observation that better understandings of the processes precipitating students' decision to leave HE do not necessarily translate into a concomitant grasp of the institutional actions needed to retain these learners (Tinto, 2010). Historically, pedagogic theories on retention are grounded in a retrospective analysis of the particular characteristics of students who withdraw from studies, such as their

background and reasons given for leaving the course (Trotter, 2014). Insightful exceptions to this are Dobele et al's longitudinal study of institutions' "at risk" schemes' success rates (2013) and Gray et al's work on identifying students at risk of failing through profiling techniques (2016). Floud's emphasis on background characteristics of non-completing student recruits at the expense of an interrogation of institutional culture is also noteworthy (2003). Perhaps stemming from this somewhat remedial approach, there has been little consensus among scholars as to improvement strategies.

One of the overarching proposals has been the amelioration of the integration of students into the social and academic fabric of the university (Tinto, 1982; Tinto, 1987; Johnson, 1994; Milem & Berger, 1997; Kuh et al, 2008;)). Based upon research into the primacy of "belongingness" Yorke evaluates the potential of a student survey to identify "changes over time in students' sense of belonging" and self-confidence (2016).

Much of the literature pays particular attention to the role played by students' engagement in securing progression (Coates, 2005; Krause & Coates, 2008), and as a key predictor of academic achievement and persistence (Maguire et al, 2016). In distinction, Haggis problematises institutions' customer-service focus upon "meeting learner needs" to increase engagement in an increasingly marketised HE environment (2006), Zepke similarly questions the neoliberal instrumentalisation of knowledge in a "performance" culture (2014) and goes further to advocate challenging this context to pursue social justice (2015). From the perspective of LGBT [sic] learners' integration, Ellis has expressed concern at their lack of inclusion in retention strategies which target other "widening participation" groups (Ellis, 2009: 4). Similarly, Forsyth and Furlong consider the barriers to integration for students in terms of cultural and social capital (2003) but McKay and Devlin challenge assumptions around low socio-economic background learners' who they, in fact, evaluate as demonstrating "high levels of determination and academic skills […] actively seek[ing] high standards in their studies" (2016: 7). While Trowler (2010) highlights Krause's identification (2005) of a contradiction in international students' intense engagement, according to orthodox measures, simultaneous to feeling overwhelmed and alienated by institutional procedures. Additionally, MacDonald emphasises the culture shock experienced by some international learners when attempting to integrate into UK HE

expectations (2014), issues echoed by Zhai (2004). The deficit view of International students' impact upon institutions is problematised by Lillyman and Bennett who argue for institutional planning, support and understanding following a social model (2014). Unsurprisingly, much of the literature cites attendance as a key factor in retention (Bowen et al, 2005). Inconsistent attendance has been closely linked to withdrawal from studies (Christenson et al, 2001; Fitzgibbon & Prior, 2003); this has been approached quantitively (Gracia and Jenkins 2002; Trotter and Roberts 2006; McCluckie, 2014) and indeed qualitatively through Bowen et al's advocacy of digital collection techniques to increase the timeliness, relevance and richness of the data collected and the flexibility of the collection techniques themselves (2005). Of particular interest is their finding that learners' express strong preferences both for the institutional collection of attendance data and action upon unsatisfactory attendance.

However, the assumption of a direct relationship between attendance and engagement needs to be qualified by research into alternatives to face-to-face teaching, for example, Yeung et al's investigation of the correlation between attendance and tutors' use of digitally recorded lectures (2016).

With the aim of integrating students academically, and otherwise, the potentials of personal tutoring have been investigated through multiple angles; with focused guidelines for content and purpose of tutorials particularly for students in the protected characteristics (Yorke & Thomas, 2003); as complementary to lectures to personalise learning (Anderson, 2005); for discovery of students' personal barriers (Gutteridge, 2001); to support pastoral needs (Laws & Fiedler, 2010; 2012; 2013) and from the perspective of questioning the efficacy and contemporary relevance of 'office hours' systems (Behren, 2013; Joyce, 2017).

In line with this, the opportunities for peer tutoring have been weighed up in relation to: academic effectiveness (Topping, 1996); trends in peer learning such as social and emotional gains (Topping, 2005); improving students' success (Chester et al, 2013; Uzuner Yurt & Aktas, 2016); improving course persistence (Batz et al, 2015); mentoring in campus residences and student organisations (Magolda, 2005).

Based upon research into the primacy of "belongingness" Yorke evaluates the potential of a student survey to identify "changes over time in students' sense of belonging" and self-confidence (2016). Although tangential to this HE research, Rogers' investigation into FE pastoral mentoring in relation to retention nevertheless highlights what is valuable to uncertain and under-confident students who would otherwise not reach HE (2009).

In relation to the retention potentials of the above strategies, it is interesting to note Krause's utmost concern for those students who fail to engage with any available opportunities for support, academic or peer tutoring in a timely manner leading to chronic disengagement: "These are the students for whom inertia and failure to act may ultimately result in failure to persist and succeed" (2005). Rientes places the responsibility for monitoring this engagement squarely with the "good" tutor, who should "continually see[s] if students are paying attention" (Rienties in Havergal, 2016).

Some of the benefits of personal and peer tutoring are relatable to those of team-based learning, which has been found to increase engagement in the social sciences and humanities (Sweet & Michaelsen, 2012) for example marketing (Chad, 2012);

Methodology

> *"Universities are investing a lot of money in trying to reduce the dropout rate and can quite accurately predict dropout [rates] now, but we need to know why people are dropping out and at what point they lose interest. This is strongly related to emotions, so being able to predict earlier when students are thinking about quitting could be a more useful approach for learning analytics".* Rienties, B. cited in THE, (2016).

Research in the HE education sector clearly highlights points at which first year students are most at risk of disengaging or withdrawing from their course.

- The autumn term is critical for establishing the practices and expectations of courses, and is the point at which new students are most likely to question and perhaps lose confidence in their own abilities and their decision to study. It is vital, therefore, that we engage our students in supportive 1-2-1 and peer discussions so as to offer guidance and support for their learning.
- Particular attention should focus on any formative and summative assessment points during the first term as, not surprisingly, performance in assessment is often one the most motivating, and therefore potentially demotivating factors in the engagements of new students.
- Crucially we need course teams to strategically manage activities and expectations around Christmas break, another critical moment of the first year experience, so as to ensure students are motivated and engaged to return to their studies in the new year. (University for the Creative Arts, 2017)

To support this, the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) have initiated an Induction Tutoring programme which is funded by the university and supported by each course. This report focuses specifically on student retention, attrition and withdrawal. In line with UCA's SSS goals (UCA, 2016), the intention is that the following points are to be imbedded on initiating study at UCA, with the allocation of £26,256 provided to support Induction Tutoring in 2016/2017 (figure kindly provided by Sarah Jeans, Head of School, School of Film, Media, and Performing Arts, UCA Farnham).

1) To support students in their preparation to study.
2) To provide an effective induction and welcome to UCA, its campuses and facilities.

3) To provide comprehensive information and guidance about courses and learning support services.

4) To enhance and monitor student engagement with their learning and assessment.

5) To prepare students for transition and progression.

6) To foster and enhance a sense of community and belonging in the student experience.

7) To enhance that all regulations and processes support student admission, retention, and achievement UCA, (June, 2016)

This research project began in June 2017 and ran until September 2017. The research was gathered and disseminated by Lynda Fitzwater and Katie Allder; both lecturers on the Fashion Promotion and Imaging course at UCA in Epsom. Sampling: initial approach was to all course leaders at UCA, after which convenience sampling and purposive sampling (Ilker et al, 2016; Maaruf, 2016) was carried out to follow up with the intention of increasing and diversifying the responses.

The methodology for this research is to collect data through qualitative methods. Responses to the research questions were collected in the form of email replies and semi-structured interviews (please see appendix 3 for the consent form) to explore issues around tutorial practice and retention. Fifteen participants' contributions, in the form of emails and interview transcripts, were analysed using thematic analysis.

The data was collected by compiling an initial list of answers. These answers were then categorised into relevant 'issues'. This type of data collection is supported by Hickman who states that "Analysis becomes a search for pattern, a striving for workable categories from which new perspectives emerge as the interpretation process" (ibid, 1981: cited in Bharunthram and Clarence, 2015:47). In our analysis, we were looking particularly for emerging issues which formed patterns across all courses in issues with retention and withdrawal.

The project was woven around the summer holidays of the academic year 2016/2017. This was the most self-explanatory time of year for the research to take place as it allowed tutors time to reflect on their student cohorts and what interventions to induction worked and didn't work, whilst also planning for the 2017/2018 intake in September. Course leaders across all UCA campuses were sent an initial email with two main questions. They were invited to respond to the project with further, more

tailored questions being asked depending on the response, some course leaders then involved their lecturer colleagues to contribute specialised responses. The initial research questions were:

1) How is tutorial support for stage one students working on your course?
2) How do you experience this as linked to retention, attrition and withdrawal?

The qualitative data was collected through the initial email to 42 participants; each participant was a course leader at UCA and therefore most knowledgeable about the course as a whole to answer the questions fairly. Where needed, specific tutors were copied into correspondence from course leaders to provide more in-depth analysis. For those who responded to the original call for participation, some further questions were asked depending on the type of responses provided. Out of the 42 initial enquiries, we had a total of 17 participants, of which 14 were active and 2 of these were very active in their responses providing information via email and on the phone.

Due to the opinion based nature of the responses, it would have limited the analysis to gather data from a quantitative perspective. After reviewing the responses from the series of initial questions, specific trends were identified in that many courses indeed implemented strategies to combat retention and withdrawal. We were looking specifically at the data which related to the ways in which, and indeed the level of success of, the ways in which participating tutors and courses imbedded certain processes into the first semester to combat ever-increasing issues with retention and withdrawal. Clear patterns emerged in that certain issues did seem to be specifically problematic during the first semester of the first term, in the majority, this was due to one of four major factors:

- Student confidence – students who entered Year One at UCA straight from A-Level rather than from FdA clearly found it difficult and lacked confidence in their ability.
- Mental health and anxiety
- Financial reasons
- Lack of student community

"For a significant proportion of students who report mental health issues, these problems can make even day-to-day tasks difficult. Nearly half (47%) [of students] say that they have trouble completing some daily tasks and a further 4%

say they cannot complete even simple tasks" Aronin and Smith, cited in YouGov, (2016).

An interesting contradiction raised through the research was that some courses noted a hugely varying sense of understanding of student satisfaction with the course. When asked face-to-face students would give one response (often positive), but when asked the same question through the National Student Survey (NSS), students would give a very different (and often more honest) response.

Limitations to the research occurred through the timing of the study. We didn't have as many responses as we would have liked to get a much broader understanding of the issues across the institutional a whole due to the research being undertaken through the summer holidays. This meant most members of staff were on annual leave. Ideally, the research team would have met face-to-face with all course leaders across campus to interview them, but this was not possible.

All appropriate ethical guidelines were adhered to through this study. Informed consent was gained from all participants in the study who were interviewed. All usual ethical considerations were reviewed. All names have been anonymised for confidentiality. Considering the qualitative nature of this inquiry, this section is presented in a combined form. The experiences and viewpoints contributed by respondents will be considered alongside relevant literature with a view to evidencing their links to underlying themes.

Findings

The findings will be split into two evaluative parts reflective of the two questions asked of the participants. Overall, UCA allocated a total sum of £26,256 on Induction

Tutoring across all three schools; out of this £26,256, £17,870 was used (UCA, 2017) The breakdown of how this was used can be seen in *Fig 1* below.

School	Budget	Spend
School of Communication Design	£7,913	£2,234
School of Fine Art and Photography	£6,530	£6,514
School of Film Media and Performing Arts	£11,813	£9,122
Total	**£26,256**	**£17,870**

(*Fig 1*) An illustration of spending budgets across three schools at UCA (ibid, 2017).

Research question 1: How is tutorial support for stage one students working on your course?

We firstly sought Course Leaders' and lecturers' views/insights on the issue of how they feel tutorial support for level 4 students is working or otherwise on their course, within the context of retention. One of the main themes that emerged in the interpretations that participants put forward for this was the relative value and practicalities of pastoral vs academic tutorials. Price et al's research into the importance placed upon pastoral contact with tutors helped us interpret the data (2007). Responses to our first question can be categorised into three (?) areas: the importance of tutors getting to know students early on and the role of the tutorial within this (1); the differing potentials and problematics of pastoral vs academic tutorials (2); students' issues that emerge during tutorialing (3).

1) Several CLs strongly indicated the value of "getting to know students", to "know them well", and for this to develop early on during induction or shortly afterwards. This preventative timing somewhat reflects Milne et al's successful results in predicting failing students by analysing "online behaviour in week one" of their degree (2012). Similarly, Arnold and Pistilli (2012) advocated identifying students in week two according to VLE use combined with data on prior academic performance and demographics. A particularly interesting observation from a lecturer was that early tutorial contact guards against students developing "negative thoughts" at the

daunting start of their degree. Additionally, this early opportunity to speak individually encouraged students to feel comfortable with their tutors. Students were asked "what their own goals for study are" which very favourably reflects the advice from scholars of deep and surface learning (Marton & Saljo, 1976; Tait, 2009) about engaging the student in a critically questioning of what they are getting out of their approach to learning.

2) Some respondents felt this kind of knowledge and familiarity was best achieved through scheduled pastoral tutorials, others suggested that this kind of one-to-one relationship could be better fostered through informal contact, "day-to-day passing", in the base studio (if indeed the course was assigned a room for that purpose). Of course, this facility depends upon the cohort size. It should be noted that dedicated physical space has been theorised as highly influential on learners' motivations and feelings of self-esteem (John & Creighton, 2013).

A good example of the scheduled approach is a case in which all level 4 students meet a member of the course team one-to-one for 20 minutes during induction week, to initiate the personalised learning on this degree. Where similar scheduled academic tutorial schemes were badly attended later in the term, some strategic decisions were taken to specifically target the opportunity towards students of concern. This reflects Dobele et al's research on the success of "at risk" schemes targeting mentoring opportunities towards students to reduce attrition (2013) and Gray et al's advocacy of early identification and profiling of students at risk of failing (2016). Interestingly, one of the respondents commented that informal "tutorials" with students who were barely attending were often much more productive than formally scheduled tutorials. These informal meetings were "proactively" requested by the student themselves, often because they were facing very major personal issues. The literature on legitimate peripheral attendance reflects this approach of facilitating meaningful engagement rather than merely regular attendance (Lave and Wenger, 1991; John & Creighton, 2013).

Going forward, this course will also adopt the tactic of emphasising a clear definition between compulsory and informal sessions, which links with Behren's comments on the problematics and potential anachronism of the facility of 'office hours' for a generation of "digital natives" (2013).

Several respondents commented upon the problematics of using pastoral tutorials to "track" students through the academic year. One course will trial a dedicated staff member for pastoral tutorials. Other courses saw this issue in terms of the increase in cohort sizes making it difficult to monitor students of concern, for example: "if there were fewer students a dedicated accessible file could be kept updated on each student". In this particular case, such a file would facilitate the handover of important information, whereas this has historically been achieved through time-consuming emailing. On another course, the Course leader keeps track of students' attendance and engagement on an individual basis, calls them in for attendance meetings.

An interesting feature emerged about the potential of the mitigating circumstances process to bring to light struggling students: staff were able to identify and support some students suffering from low confidence and isolation such that the intervention "turned individuals around".

Something of a divide emerged between perceptions of the value of the pastoral tutorial and that of the academic tutorial, in which specific project work/skills are discussed.

Low attendance at pastoral tutorials can be a problem, and it is thought to relate to the lack of focus in these sessions upon a specific assessment task or deadline, reflecting much research on strategic learners' behaviour (Marton & Saljo, 1976; Atherton, 2009; Tait, 2009) in comparison to the way academic tutorials are approached. Concomitantly, respondents hypothesised that students decide to miss particular academic tutorial points because they have not completed (enough of) the work assigned and would like to avoid negative judgement for this lack. For example, one approach is to require students to bring an element of the brief each week to break down the workload. Anderson's research on how students approach tutorials is relevant here, he advocates facilitating a "deep approach to learning" by encouraging students to see the tutor as a "knowledgeable chairman [sic]" rather than passively as an "expert authority" who will tell them their work is right or wrong (2014).

Reflecting Fitzgibbon and Prior's research into students' expectations (2003) and Bowen et al's (2005), several of the respondents believed inconsistent attendance is the most important feature to monitor to know where to target retention strategies.

Another issue relating to the value of the pastoral tutorial is some tutors' concern with the potential for highly personal and emotional topics to emerge in this setting when

students are "near breaking point". This situation been extensively researched by Laws and Fiedler (2010, 2012, 2013) who found that "academic staff declared the existence of boundaries when dealing with students whereby they would not act as counsellors because they were not qualified to do so" (Laws & Fiedler in Laws & Fiedler, 2012: 799) and that "the management of emotions in face-to-face encounters was stressful" (Laws & Fiedler, 2012: 796).

Institutional organised training and support are advocated by McFarlane's research into the confidence and competence of personal tutors (2016). Indeed, it was commented by a respondent that "role of the academic staff as personal tutors is not recognised institutionally, especially as pastoral tutorials may not appear on the official academic calendar. This is felt to widen the gap between the help afforded to students when they see a counsellor and the advice given by studio tutors. Walsh et al advocated the importance of academic tutors having a full understanding of the support services available to establish a robust signposting system (2009).

Experiences of the academic tutorial

Some concern was expressed that timetabling tutorials a long while in advance could build up unnecessary anxiety for some students, thus speaking informally and directly to students as and when there is a project-related difficulty was found to be more successful, reflecting Joyce's narrative research on her own complex experience of tutoring (2017).

However, for students going through a mental health issue more frequently scheduled academic tutorials were found to be helpful; to, for example, maintain a good level of confidence amongst anxious students as well as break down tasks step-by-step. This links to Stallman and King's research on the "Learning Thermometer" which is a web-based diagnostic survey tool repeated 4 times per semester to monitor and boost students' wellbeing (2016). It was also felt that strategic timing of academic tutorials can be beneficial if they are sandwiched between pastoral tutorials and are scheduled ahead of the internal student survey.

Similar to the point above about academic tutorials being missed to avoid unfavourable judgement, some students find these face-to-face meetings to pressurising to deal with emotionally and prefer to stay in the more anonymous environment of the library, it was felt that these students are avoiding facing their fears and the commitment of regular studio practice.

3) Similarly to the above point about tutors sometimes feeling reluctant to elicit difficult issues from students, it should be highlighted that respondents largely felt that pastoral tutorials had a strong potential for complex issues to emerge but that this was a strength of the student-tutor relationship.

A wide variety of shorter-term issues and longer-term difficult situations emerged from one-to-one tutorials that the responding Course Leaders had been conducting with students over the past year.

These include: homesickness, isolation, commuting costs/long distances, pregnancy, child-care, visa hold ups/expiry, living in poverty, precarious accommodation, precarious/demanding employment, caring for a long-term sick relative, sudden family illness/death requiring national/international travel/relocation, car accident, or being the victim of crime.

Undoubtedly, one of the main conversation points in tutorials appears to be students' feelings around mental health, this is perhaps not unexpected given that this issue has been widely discussed in formal and informal settings here at UCA for at least the last two years.

Mental illness has been foregrounded in the responses to the research questions. In the form of anxiety, it is centred around the logistical issues of living life as an HE student, such as judging the academic workload alongside paid employment and ongoing family commitments, feeling overwhelmed struggling with time management was a key theme. This closely reflects Aronin and Smith's research into the recent context (2016). However, there were also a very wide variety of other types and consequences of mental illness featured in Course Leaders' experience of students' challenges recently. These include eating disorders, trauma, borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, distress and disruption causes by changes to medication, and indeed the difficulty of accessing health services.

It was felt that mental health issues definitely emerged through tutorials, as well as through other techniques of monitoring students' engagement such as reading blogs, attendance, participation in group work and seminars.

A separate issue relating to the content of tutorials was the positive use of ongoing sessions to support neurodiverse students, such as those with autism or asbergers; in

these cases flexible tutorial arrangements which reflects Gobbo and Shmulsky's advocacy of "building of academic strategies for success that support students who are in the process of identity development" (2016).

Research question 2: How do you experience this as linked to retention, attrition and withdrawal?

When we sought Course Leaders' and Lecturers' viewpoints on the issue of how the experience of tutorial support at stage one is linked to retention, attrition and withdrawal, two of the main observations that emerged can be categorised into two overriding themes: confidence (1) - mainly twofold; with ongoing issues with confidence levels, student expectations and ability to undertake an undergraduate degree, specifically a "downshift in confidence due to a sector-wide swing in demographic to a less-confident intake, coupled with (speculation) a more zeitgeistian rise in anxieties and confidence issues in teen and pre-teen groups as a whole". Mental health issues (2) and undiagnosed students support needs such as illness, pregnancy, parental responsibility, financial issues, amongst others were another factor for withdrawal, with a number of participants highlighting this as an issue, 'Most withdrawals are due to mental health issues and 'fitness to study' issues, course team discussed this in depth, stating that this decision [to withdraw] was always made after a tutorial with me as year co-ordinator, and plenty of advice and guidance was given'. Although investigated through this research, these two issues emerge as a subject that would indeed be worthy of further, more in-depth study. A third theme of peer mentoring (3) was also raised in some cases as a potential solution to retention and withdrawal at stage one.

It is also worth noting that participants' responses were supported by a largely universal views suggesting the institutional support structure simply is not there to provide the pastoral support students in the first semester of the first year (and beyond) increasingly needed. Participants raised concerns about their lack of time and perceived deficit of knowledge as 'counsellors' to provide the students what they need, to the level they need. The concern amongst staff of lack of pastoral infrastructure supported by Laws and Fiedler who state that "academic staff declared the existence of boundaries" in cases of dealing with students' pastoral needs which require qualified support (2012: 799). A small number of participants supported this

further by reporting that in the contexts retention strategies there needs to be an institution-wide acknowledgement in the increasing demand for extra pastoral support. This was supported by a number of participants who have stated "When a student is struggling on a course […] I will approach them myself and we will have a tutorial and follow up and try to solve the problem, how to renegade, schemes of work etc – these students tend to stay", however it is "possible for a student leaving to take up a lot of time and effort from the course team and Head of School in an effort to retain them" and another stating "very lengthy chats were needed to persuade them to stay". However, several did state that they felt that extra tutorials would not have prevented their withdrawing students from coming to that decision, one, in particular, stated "most students thinking of leaving have already discussed it with family before approaching course leader, often set on the decision" and another who commented "students who are having doubts about a course they are on (…) will tend to come and speak with me early, and then we talk about their options. These students usually end up leaving. Usually".

Confidence levels (1) in some cohorts of incoming stage one students have become increasingly low over recent years. This is seemingly having an effect on retention, attrition and withdrawal to a clear degree. Lowe and Cook observed that "student study habits formed in secondary school persist to the end of the first semester of university life. Such a conclusion indicates that students are not bridging the gap between school and university quickly and effectively" (2010). Indeed it was noted by participants that there was a discernible difference between students joining the institution straight from A-level, and those who had undertaken a Foundation course; the success rates of the latter student cohort were greater. A number of the participants had highlighted a particular need to intervene at an early stage of the first year to combat issues with confidence, and bridging the gap between school, further and higher education to enhance retention. One participant mentioned that retention issues with students who have joined the course from clearing were at their highest on this particular course, and that one of the ways they introduced the extra support for students' needs was specifically through combatting issues with time keeping. The participant mentioned offering pastoral care for students, allowing them at this stage to pick up on any additional requirements for LSA support. One of the noticeable outcomes of these pastoral tutorials, additional to LSA support was an apparent issue with time management. For these students, in addition to introducing

a number of visual time keeping strategies (such as gant charts, pie charts and mini personal planners) this participant mentioned that they "will also provide students with a list of 'mini' formative deadlines to help them break down the project into smaller manageable chunks" and "Students with anxiety and mental health issues value tasks broken down into smaller steps and benefit from more frequent tutorials to maintain their confidence during the first term particularly". This is supported by Gray et al, who note the importance of early identification by profiling students at risk of failing (2016). Similarly, again we can relate this back to Yorke's research into 'belongingness' which evaluates the potential to identify "changes over time in students' sense of belonging" and self-confidence (2016). When we look at Yorke's survey results for this study, it is clear that the findings show institutions' widespread downshift in confidence levels. One participant said that "reducing the number of non submits will reduce the number of resits/withdrawals". Participants also noted that we should not always encourage students to stay on a course that isn't right for them, stating that in some cases "leaving was the right decision […] we should have their best interests at heart", another stating "In all cases, I am confident that the individual student made the right decision which was in their own best interests".

Lecturers on one course attempted to combat withdrawal by introducing a "Book of Truth", but found problems in using it, due to inconsistencies in record-keeping between staff. The Book of Truth was a physical record used by staff in an academic office setting, to document the learning journey and profile of the student and any academic issues which might affect their ability to succeed or stay on the course, overseen by the first year tutor. Due to lack of consistency with teaching staff, however, the piloting of this book did not work as the lecturer had hoped. The intention of the Book of Truth was "to have a central repository of information on the students which we keep in the staff-room and can consult when necessary. This is to help avoid some of the time-consuming emails which keep flying around, when one of the tutors has a query- or the course leader needs information. The purpose is to promote student and retention combat withdrawal".

Mental health and personal issues (2) were the other overriding factor cited in student retention, attrition and withdrawal. One of the reasonings behind this issue being raised as a concern by a few participants when questioned in more detail, was a "lack of clarity on role boundaries around promotion of students' well-being [was] not clearly defined". Historically, institutions' delay in responding to the mental health

needs of students combined with the "increasing expectations of academics' performance monitoring has lead staff to avoid deep investment in their students' well-being" (Laws and Fielder, 2012). This, combined with a general feeling of overwhelming numbers of students with mental health and other issues solidifies lecturers' own anxieties on when to intervene, how to intervene and who to direct students to who are at risk of withdrawal. One participant noted that early intervention best resolves students' difficulties; another "The role of academic staff as personal tutors is not recognised and there seems to be a gap between the academic conversation and seeing a councillor which urgently needs to be provided for!". This is furthermore supported by Laws and Fielder who state that "students are in need of psychological support, but pastoral care remains ill-defined despite enduring expectations held by university administrators" (2012). Participants in the research stressed that staff motivation is diminished by time spent with students in need of emotional support in order to be able to stay in higher education, time which is not acknowledged in workloads. Participants mentioned having a good rapport with Student Services; especially the September intake, was an essential and indeed successful tool to both alleviate the strains of this level of support on their role, and to provide the increasing support students seemingly need.

> "Staff require ongoing professional development on the nature of MH problems among students. There is a need for specific orientation programs that better define pastoral care and identify support services for staff and students. […] Workload allocations must include 'emotion work', and mental health professionals must be employed to improve intervention and support not only for students but also for University staff" (Laws and Fiedler, 2012)

It should be noted that only one participant expressly mentioned the mental health first aid (MHFA) course which is available to full-time, pro-rata and sessional staff. This course addresses exactly the kinds of anxieties and uncertainties felt by participants so it can be reasonably envisaged that increased promotion or and participation in the MHFA training would go a long way to addressing many of these concerns Similarly, Rogers' (2009) investigations into pastoral mentoring in relation to retention looked at the importance of consistency and availability. In Rogers' research students were asked what support would be of most benefit to them. The consensus was that support needed to be consistent and readily available; something students at UCA often mention when asked for course feedback. In support of this, it was suggested by another participant that UCA makes a move to creating a space for

positive learning, akin to that of the collaborative learning spaces where students can interact with each other (for example the newly created shared space at Epsom for Fashion Promotion and Imaging students and Graphic Design students); thus creating a social constructive learning space where collaborative work can be shared, knowledge can be discursive and friendships can grow, promoting informal peer tutoring (Vygotsky, 1978). With better defined pastoral care roles, academics can more effectively balance their workloads (Laws and Fielder, 2012).

A small number of participants in the research observed that retention was particularly improved when peer support was introduced at an early stage of the course. One participant discussed the important addition of peer mentoring on their first year students and to promote the tracking of failing students. The introduction of peer mentoring to tackle issues of retention and withdrawal are supported by Hill and Reddy (2007) who "propose that peer mentoring may also be a means of transmitting the values and ethics which reflect academic and personal integrity and underpin professional and graduate integrity" (98). Hill and Reddy's qualitative research examined students expectations and subsequent experience of an undergraduate mentoring scheme. This research showed the value of peer mentoring at university entry and seeing a noticeable shift in responsibility for learning (often a type of learning that is unfamiliar to many first year students), independence, and an increased sociocultural competence and interpersonal skills needed to adapt to this new framework of learning (Hill and Reddy, 2007). The research also noted the opportunity to interact with family, friends and daily support from school was not there as stage one students are used to, and that peer mentoring indeed aided this transition in many positive ways stating that "The role of the mentor is not to take the place of formal university support services but to be a guide to them and other aspects of university life" (98). As well as easing this difficult transition into university life and reducing negative behaviour such as withdrawal, peer mentoring may also play a proportionate role in "positive educational behaviours" (99). Ultimately, Boylan asserts: "Students need some peer interaction with students of similar experiences" (2002).

Conclusion and recommendations

With discussions of retention data and strategies so firmly on the HE agenda, research has shown the trends identified above by looking to the structural processes which underpin non-completion. Especially important here have been the links between non-completion and major changes in higher education. Through this research, these factors are apparent. There are two broad approaches which merit attention. First, retention and withdrawal issues are attributed to the expansion in higher education: successive Governments' participation targets have brought in students from a more diverse range of backgrounds, with non-standard qualifications and lower grades, some of whom struggle with the cultural shift in degree-level education (Christie et al., 2007). One participant noted that

> "I would suggest that we need to understand the massive ruptures in the landscape of HE in which a push for university attendance combined with a huge fee-hike and austerity measures has led to the majority of our students (who are incredibly mixed background) having to work to support themselves, and often other family members".

In this instance, withdrawal has often been 'blamed' on the attributes of the students, who are regarded as being poorly prepared for higher education and/or lacking in motivation and academic ability. An alternative interpretation blames universities for "failing to put into place inclusive policies and additional support services needed to help all students achieve their potential in a business context where they are actively marketed to" (Christie et al, 2007: 619). As an institution, we need to support these shifts in the higher education landscape, and the research has shown the demand and need for additional pastoral care and support and training for lecturers to provide for the increasing demand for combatting issues with retention, attrition and withdrawal. This, in addition to "getting to know your students quickly as being the key to retention, through regular conversations in the classroom and day-to-day passing" are all essential for students' retention with increasing student confidence, mental health and financial issues. Hockings et al assert that it is very difficult to reach all students in one group, stating that "[u]niversity teachers […] rarely get to know about the lives, backgrounds and interests of individuals within large groups" (2009: 490). The need for a more imbedded pastoral infrastructure can clearly be seen through the respondents' often detailed participation in the study. In addition to this,

extended LSA support with clearer communication between LSA and Student Support Services and courses UCA campus-wide may alleviate issues with student retention, attrition and withdrawal.

The Learning and Teaching research project called 'Undergraduate Retention and a Engagement at UCA: The First Year Experience' was initiated in November 2016 (Barratt, 2016). It launched with a series of recommendations around priorities for development and change at strategic, course and programme levels. These recommendations include; "developing an area of the UCA website specifically for family and friends" and "implementing initiatives early in the student journey". This project has also included recommendations for "valuing and strengthening good practice across the university in terms of retention", such as "setting up a hub for sharing good practices across courses and schools", which would include "facilitating exchanges between academics and those involved with other university-wide initiatives", (such as widening participation, Student Support and LSA, and extra budget and training for pastoral support (Barratt, 2016).

These objectives can also be supported by more substantive trials of peer mentoring. The piloting of an 'Induction app' for international students at the University of Worcester promotes peer interaction, mentoring and encourages the sense of 'belonging' Yorke discusses ahead of embarking on such a shift in learning and experience for incoming students (2016). Good instruction promotes retention, as do programs that provide a supportive learning environment, such as learning communities (Trowler, 2010).

While this research has sought and succeeded in bringing to light the climate around retention and tutoring at UCA it should be noted that interviews can be less significant than the noting of events, sentiments, intuitions, and chats in the corridor (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clough, 2002).

Recommendations:
- More substantive and consistent pre-enrolment strategy of staged contact between the course and the firm-accepts
- Re-launch induction tutoring as a funded project for level 4, term 1; provide guidelines for timing
- Raise awareness of the MHFA's benefits and power to build capacity alongside guidance on the academic pastoral role

- Scoping to identify potential co-working studios (e.g. Epsom's FPI/GRD) or other enhanced social spaces

- Peer tutoring trials for level 4

- Develop an 'at risk' profiling strategy to target support towards students who may withdraw; make better use of existing networks

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Appendix 1

Student Success Strategy

Strategic goals:

Goal 1:   To support students in their preparation for study at UCA

Goal 2:   To provide an effective induction and welcome to UCA, its campuses and facilities

Goal 3:   To provide comprehensive information and guidance about courses and learning support services

Goal 4:   To enhance and monitor student engagement with their learning and assessment

Goal 5:   To prepare students for transition and progression

Goal 6:   To foster and enhance a sense of community and belonging in the student experience

Goal 7:   To ensure that all regulations and processes support student admission, retention, progression and achievement

Appendix 2

Retention Working Group notes

The group met on 16 May 2016 at 2pm in Rochester room 204-R.

Remit

The group was an *ad hoc* working group of AQC set up specifically to consider issues around retention, using case studies for three courses which were a good representative spread across both Faculties, different levels and with the highest volume of non-returners (as defined below):

- BA (Hons) Fashion Media Promotion (12 non returners at level 4)
- BA (Hons) Computer Animation Arts (6 non-returners across levels 5 and 6)
- MA Photography (3 non-returners which represents one-third of the PGT non-returners)

The focus of the group was to discuss what strategies colleagues have in place around retention, and any strategies which have been trialled without success in the past. The group acknowledged that retention issues could not be solved through implementation of a University-wide strategy, and it was preferable to note a number of options which might work for different courses.

Membership

Chair	Executive Dean Learning, Teaching & Research	Prof. Trevor Keeble
HoS from school not represented by the Case Studies	Head of School, Architecture	Allan Atlee
Course Leaders represented by the Case Studies	BA (Hons) Fashion Media Promotion BA (Hons) Computer Animation Arts MA Photography	Sheelagh Wright Phil Gomm Heike Lowenstein
Student Services Representative	Student Wellbeing Manager	Matt Stinson
Head of QAE/nominee	Head of Quality Assurance & Enhancement	Michelle Howe
Nominees of Chair	Learning Enhancement and support manager (Disability and SpLD)	Sharon Hocking

	Learning Enhancement and Support Manager	John Sutter
Clerk	Senior Quality Manager/Clerk to AQC	Aimee Clark

Papers circulated to the above group:

1. AQC paper which instigated this group (AQC-21-16, *Modelling of Attrition Data by course*)
2. Most recent AAM reports for the named courses in the case study (containing 3 years' worth of data)
3. Individual Withdrawal forms for students on courses in the case study
4. Tariff, Retention, Classification Analysis at course level (due to be received by the League Table Working Group)

<u>Focus of discussions</u>

Groups of non-returning students who do not fit a neurodiverse profile.

Periodically, courses may experience withdrawing or non-returning students who leave for a variety of different reasons, not related to the course but could be attributed to a very diverse set of personal circumstances. This was the case for the CAA course in the data this year.

Interruption and Withdrawal

Whilst this could be considered the 'best' option for students, during the period of interruption the course would not necessarily be in touch with the student. The chances of success for those returning from interruption are generally considered to be slim. However, the CAA course could demonstrate that most students who interrupted did return at a later date. Staged contact whilst on interruption and to manage student return was fundamental in using interruption as a strategy to improve retention.

Interruption can also become a deferral of the decision to withdraw, and therefore those interruptions which had a purposefulness could be much more successful, as could managing students' perceptions about their periods of leave from the course – some students may see that they fail the year if they take a period of interruption and therefore need a strategic and supportive reason for their being interrupted, and the ability to return. It was noted that the 'Fitness to Study' procedure could be useful to implement when unsure about a student's readiness to return to University, but it was most successful where it was implemented to enable students to remain.

(Academic Board would be receiving a proposal to change the policy and re-focus it as a 'Support to Study Procedure'.

The group wondered if it would be feasible to implement a four-week window where students register their intent to withdraw then ask them to stay for four weeks.

Non-engagement and non-attendance

There was potential for staff and students to be confused about the differences between the non-engagement and non-attendance policies and procedures of the University. For 16/17, the non-engagement policy was being removed as focus should be on non-attendance. However, Course Leaders at the group considered the non-engagement policy to be most useful to them. This was because the non-attendance policy could be 'reset' following a period of non-attendance for 10 consecutive days; students could then return for a minimal amount of time and not attend for a further 10 consecutive days.

Whilst it was not permissible to penalise students in assessment for non-attendance, some successful examples of measures to improve and retain engagement included:

- using a blog as an assessable measure of engagement;
- PDP at formative review at each mid-point of units;
- Adopting a 'pick and mix' approach in Stage 1 instead of all units being compulsory and the stage being broad where students may be less able to find their personal interests and strengths;
- Use of group projects to encourage students to understand what their part of the group work was, and to work alongside peers which could introduce some pressure to keep up and attend;
- Use of reflective summaries on group work;
- Offering alternative forms of assessment, particularly for the dissertation.

Student Satisfaction

Members of the group felt that high student satisfaction was achieved where a course had an identity and were content with the environment, which was often of high importance to them.

However satisfaction levels and retention levels did not always add up, and specific strategies around retention were far more effective.

Strategies around retention

The group listed some examples of strategies which contributed to better retention:

- Placing staff who could offer help in libraries to ensure they are visible to students;
- Contextual studies becoming more specific to courses and embedded;
- Interviewing students about their experience of failure;
- Year tutorship or personal tutorship being in place to ensure a level of pastoral care at both UG and PGT study – particularly successful where there is a broad range of intake;
- Managing expectations of the course at interview stage;
- Course Leader interrogation of and responsibility for retention data, and follow-up actions for anything they can be in control of, including use of 'shadow' data for retention which would indicate where it was more successful;
- Encouragement to use the available exit interviews (although attendance cannot be enforced);
- More encouragement of students to go to LSS if they are thinking of withdrawing;
- Management of stressors – e.g. setting hand-in deadlines at 4pm rather than 10am to allow students to firefight; acknowledging that de-stressing creative students heading into the creative industries could support them in their preparation for work;
- Enhancing students' understanding of their own behaviours around mental health e.g. defining origins of their stress or anxiety.

Key messages from this group

It was clear that many courses at UCA were doing all they could to answer their retention issues. A number of models could be adopted including that from the HEA, and better use of data could be key. Courses could also consider that leaving UCA might be the right outcome for some students, having weighed up why it is that the student cannot cope with the course, or the course cannot cope with the student.

The group would recommend the examples above to courses across UCA looking to improve retention, and more generally recommends increasing engagement and supporting the first year experience and first year tutors as a priority.

Appendix 3

Interview Participation Form

What is the purpose of the interview?

Your interview forms part of a small scale research project investigating the views of academic staff on induction tutoring, specifically, how tutorial support is working for stage one students on each course, and how is this tutorial support linked to issues with retention, attrition and withdrawal.

Please read each of the statements below carefully and acknowledge your consent to participate by signing the form below.

Right to withdraw

I understand that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I am free to withdraw at any stage and do not have to disclose why. I understand that if I do not wish to answer a particular question I am free to decline.

Data and Identity Protection

I understand that my interview responses will be anonymised and held in the strictest confidence. My identity will not be disclosed and I will not be identities or identifiable in findings. I agree that my name can be substituted by a pseudonym if necessary.

I agree for this interview to be recorded using a digital audio device if necessary. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my written permission, and that no one beside the researchers will be allowed access to the original recording.

I understand that all data will be stored in a secure place and that the original recording will be destroyed once the research has been completed.

I agree that all data will be kept in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act (1998) and will only be used for further research purposes such as publications related to this study after its completion.

Direct Quotations

I agree to be quoted directly, though anonymously, and that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

Future Contact

I understand that I am able to contact the researchers with any questions or concerns that I may have in further.

Informed Consent

I have read and fully understood all of the points stated above and I confirm that I am willing to participate in this interview.

Participant Name	Signature	Date
Researcher Name	Signature	Date