



The Applicant Experience Strategy: Transition

(to be considered in addition to SPA's definition document www.spa.ac.uk/applicant-experience)

In June 2009, SPA published its [definition of the applicant experience](#) and has developed a [strategy map](#) based on that definition. The applicant experience encompasses all the opportunities or points of interaction between higher education and a potential student. Such experience affects whether or not an individual becomes a higher education student, and indeed whether or not an individual chooses to apply to higher education in the first place. SPA believes that a good applicant experience is the precursor to the whole student experience and should smooth transition and aid retention. SPA has used four key stages to outline the processes involved in an applicant experience strategy:



Papers on the pre-application, application and post-application stages, along with summary recommendations, have already been published and are available on our website (www.spa.ac.uk/applicant-experience). This paper details the **transition stage** and considers how approaches in higher education engagement with applicants in preparing them for commencement of higher education life may influence their successful student experience.

Transition

The transition stage covers all post-confirmation activities, from the point an applicant's place has been confirmed through to the commencement of higher education studies. This may cover a number of months or even over a year for deferred applicants, but in some instances acceptance, enrolment and commencement may all be in the same day. It will unfortunately include accepted applicants who never commence their studies at their chosen institution, either through unexpected barriers pre-enrolment or through voluntary de-selection by the applicant. The quality of interaction between institution and applicant will shape this transition and should seek to minimise non-commencement. However, interaction throughout the previous stages of the applicant experience will have been vital in the early identification of institution barriers or applicant concerns towards de-selection.

Transition does not stop the moment an applicant enrolls; it continues well into the first year and potentially beyond as each individual student adjusts to the higher education environment. However, as the legal status of a 'student' is different to that of an 'applicant', and as different regulations apply, the applicant's experience in transition hands over to the student's experience at the point of enrolment.

Good practice

Significant research into transition has already produced a wide range of good practice recommendations and it is not our intent to replicate that work. Anyone unfamiliar with existing student experience and transition good practice may find the following links a useful start:

- The Higher Education Academy's retention and success resource
 - www.heacademy.ac.uk/retention-and-success
- QAA Scotland's enhancement theme project, 'Transition during the first year'
 - www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/projectNine.asp
- UCL's Transition Programme
 - www.ucl.ac.uk/transition/
- JISCmail forum on retention, created by Action on Access
 - www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=STUDENT-RETENTION-AND-SUCCESS

The need for engagement

Despite significant research in this area, increased institution attention to transition strategies and improved awareness of issues affecting student retention, the main reasons for voluntary withdrawal have changed little over the years. The National Audit Office reports (2007¹ and 2002²) highlighted students of similar types are not evenly distributed across the sector, and those less likely to continue may in part be a reflection of the practices of the institutions that tend to recruit those students as well as reflecting the characteristics of the students themselves. Many students leave for a combination of reasons, but the most common reasons for voluntary withdrawal cited in the National Audit Office reports were:

- personal reasons
 - including homesickness (especially among young women and students from rural areas) and domestic obligations (e.g. childcare or elder care)
- lack of integration
 - including absence of positive ties and cultural isolation (especially among students from deprived areas)
- dissatisfaction with course/institution
 - including course not leading to the professional accreditation sought
- lack of preparedness
 - including unexpected course content, lack of appropriate study skills and late application for Disabled Students' Allowance
- wrong choice of course
 - including not enough research of choices, channelling into inappropriate subjects (especially working class men) and lack of information about higher education (especially students from disadvantaged areas)
- financial reasons
 - including limited funds and fear of debt, unrealistic lifestyle expectations
- to take up a more attractive opportunity
 - including late realisation of academic interests or career goals.

The report *Rethinking working-class 'drop out' from higher education* published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Quinn et al 2005³) found that choosing the wrong course was given as the main reason for leaving by many of those involved in their research, “Leaving through a prospectus with no real sense of what they should be looking for ... with little guidance from family, university or schools.”

More needs to be done to address these causes before a student commences studies. There is no benefit to either the applicant or institution in accepting someone who then drops out before or after enrolling because of an issue that could have been identified and addressed beforehand. In order to provide better pre-entry engagement there needs to be a shift away from the passive mentality of making information, advice and guidance available without knowing how or even if it's used, towards a more interactive and targeted approach of *informing*, *advising* and *guiding* potential applicants. Such an approach requires greater integration of practice and more co-ordinated use of the large volumes of applicant and student data available internally and externally.

Identifying Engagement

Engagement has been considered across three broad categories in all stages of SPA's applicant experience: direct; indirect and non-engagement. Understanding the type and extent of engagement experienced by an institution's own applicants, students and alumni may prove valuable in improving commencement and retention rates and should aid institutions in redirecting admissions resources where they are most effective:

- **direct engagement**
(where an institution has an identified interaction with a specific accepted applicant)
- **indirect engagement**
(where an institution publishes generic information that is accessed by an accepted applicant or where information is sent via an intermediary)
- **non-engagement**
(where an accepted applicant does not access any further information from an institution).

In most cases within the transition stage, engagement will focus on preparation for joining the institution and starting the chosen higher education study. Some engagement may therefore come from areas of the institution other than admissions and there is a risk of duplication, conflicting messages and other inefficient use of resources. These could result in an HEI spending more time and money than needed and may actually result in impairing conversion (particularly if mixed messages cause confusion or excessive correspondence becomes viewed as 'junk mail'). Co-ordinated engagement across all concerned parties within an institution is a foundation to a good applicant experience. Plotting the potential points of interaction against the whole admissions process should help identify the most appropriate times for engagement to suit such different purposes (keeping in mind that some needs may be best met by engagement pre-application). [Flowcharts](#) to aid such identification are available on the SPA website.

Direct and Indirect Engagement

Much engagement between confirmation and enrolment may be indirect, via an institution's website/portal or via an intermediary, such as UCAS. This may be particularly true for conveying standard information across all new entrants (e.g. student regulations; joining instructions; fees details), where indirect engagement may be a more efficient method. However, even for the apparently most straightforward of transitions, institutions should always be mindful of the potential for individual exceptions or queries and ensure that methods for direct engagement are readily accessible. Any automated engagement systems in particular (e.g. CRM software) should include help text, signposting and routes to experts that will allow applicants to interact, if necessary outside of the automated system, rather than just receive what someone else thinks each individual needs. Consider the risk of disengagement if an applicant can't find what he or she is looking for.

The type of engagement chosen should be one that best fits the needs or intended purpose behind such needs, as determined by strategic and operational aims. SPA's example model for determining appropriate engagement provided in the [post application stage pdf](#) may also provide a useful tool for considering appropriate engagement in the transition stage.

Engagement to reduce non-commencement and improve retention

It is important to identify the risks of accepted applicants not starting or dropping out shortly after starting their studies at your institution. The most common reasons for voluntary withdrawal cited in the National Audit Office reports constitute a reasonably evidenced set of causes to target. Engagement should be tailored to most effectively address each risk and may need to vary to be most suited to different social, cultural or economic groups, particularly if certain groups have been identified to be at greater risk. Individual applicants may have several issues, so may be at risk of dropping out for more than one reason. The table below provides some considerations for mitigating the risks against each of the reasons cited by the National Audit Office, some of which (e.g. mentoring; pre-sessional events) may be applied to several risks at once.

Many risks will relate to specific academic concerns and direct or indirect engagement with academic staff responsible for the chosen course will provide the most relevant source of support for such concerns. Many applicants may not have engaged with academic staff during the post-application stage, so interaction during transition may be especially important. Student support, welfare and counselling services are another vital source of expertise in ensuring a smooth transition to higher education. However, it must be remembered that their core duty is to students, so if such support is extended to accepted applicants outside of term time, opening times and staff cover must be in place. It is also important all admissions staff, including any temporary staff used during Clearing, are trained to identify when to refer an applicant to an academic, student service or other appropriate expert. Any ill-informed or inaccurate advice, no matter how well meaning, over the transition stage can have a detrimental affect on an accepted applicant's retention and success.

Occasionally, regardless of engagement activities throughout previous stages of the applicant experience, some accepted applicants will legitimately conclude that they have not made the most suitable match of course, institution and/or career path. A student in unsuitable study is not in anyone's interests and it is far better for an institution to address such concerns pre-entry than have a dissatisfied student withdraw post-entry. It is important to support accepted applicants in making the best choice and it is responsible for an institution to ensure accepted applicants considering

change are doing so for the right reasons. Be as flexible as possible if an applicant realises the course isn't right for him or her, and consider any alternatives that may be more suitable. This may be needed more where there are several courses offered across similar subject areas that have distinct differences in the detail of module provision, assessment, mode of study, etc., where there is a wide range of combinations (e.g. joint honours; major/minors), or when an applicant has been accepted through Clearing and not benefited from the institution's normal post-application engagement. However, if it is not possible to change an accepted course, be clear in feedback about the legitimate reasons why (e.g. requirements to succeed on course; course full; fairness and consistency with other applicants not accepted onto that course), as they will help the applicant make an informed decision on what to do next. Many accepted applicants who do not commence studies on their original choice at your institution may be able to return at a later date, so be clear about their options and routes to re-entry (e.g. deferral; foundation course; further level three qualifications; work experience; financial assistance).

The reasons for voluntary withdrawal cited in the National Audit Office reports are general; there will undoubtedly be different or additional reasons that are specific to each HEI, campus, mode of study, or course, and different reasons depending on different applicant groups within those institution-specific variables. Identify and seek to address such specific reasons by tailoring engagement to their different needs. Surveying late withdrawals, releases, no-shows and drop-outs will help understand specific reasons and identify trends. Some engagement to mitigate risk may be offered to all accepted applicants, although analysing non-commencement and drop-out against contextual data on applicants may help target engagement to those most at risk. Institutions should also consider what impact any changes made in admissions policies/practices may have on retention (e.g. new entry qualifications accepted; more non-traditional entrants; different interview practice; higher fees and any applicant anticipation of bursaries). Several institutions already have long-standing good practice in supporting transition based on specific retention issues. UCLan's Flying Start Project is one such example where initiatives to address one specific target group have been so successful they have been rolled out to other accepted applicants. More information on Flying Start is provided as a case study at the end of this document.

Engagement considerations to reduce common causes of non-commencement and improve retention

(N.B. these are example considerations and are in no way an exhaustive list – institutions should consider their individual circumstances, causes specific to their own institution and what resources, existing and new, they can direct to the issues)

NAO most common reasons for voluntary withdrawal	examples	engagement considerations
personal reasons	homesickness (especially among young women and students from rural areas) and domestic obligations (e.g. childcare or elder care)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Target additional engagement aimed at young women, students from rural areas and those with dependents. ▪ Highlight support facilities available that address concerns (e.g. secure accommodation; family accommodation; orientation activities). ▪ Ensure academic staff are sensitive to such concerns, so that allowances can be made whenever possible (e.g. unexpected/short-notice absence; extenuating circumstances for late submission of work) and that students are made aware of such allowances. ▪ Connect targeted applicants to student mentors with similar backgrounds/experiences (potentially through e-mentoring pre-entry). ▪ Provide timetables and workload expectations well in advance, so other obligations can be planned. ▪ Invite targeted applicants to events (residential and non-residential) to improve familiarisation ahead of main induction activity. ▪ Make financial support available to minimise fears of the cost of short home visits.
lack of integration	absence of positive ties and cultural isolation (especially among students from deprived areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connect targeted applicants to student mentors with similar backgrounds/experiences (potentially through e-mentoring pre-entry). ▪ Highlight student societies and any local attractions with similar cultural links. ▪ Notify Students' Union of any changing trends in new student backgrounds/cultures; if there are no existing representative societies or groups, help the Students' Union establish one (possibly with set-up costs or awareness event).
dissatisfaction with course/institution	course not leading to the professional accreditation sought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure any professional body accreditation and career/progression routes are clearly highlighted (ideally in the post-application stage if not earlier), and highlight courses that may be commonly misconstrued as having accreditation (e.g. a joint honours law degree

		<p>that doesn't contain all pre-requisite components to satisfy the Law Society). If such a course does not have accreditation, illustrate the additional routes that can be taken to attain professional recognition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be prepared to offer alternatives (e.g. foundation pathway; deferred entry) where possible to redirect applicants onto their preferred accredited course.
lack of preparedness	unexpected course content, lack of appropriate study skills and late application for Disabled Students' Allowance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure course content is clearly available and easy to access well before a student starts. ▪ If any diagnostic assessment of study skills (e.g. maths competency) was undertaken as part of the admissions process, ensure they are followed up with additional pre-sessional and in-sessional support. Pre-sessional events should be free, or at least subsidised for the most financially disadvantaged, and could include a range of support and familiarisation aids to ease transition. Such support should be rolled out and made available to all accepted applicants, to help any not previously identified as needing/wanting it. ▪ Ensure all accepted applicants with a disclosed disability are fully aware of the process for claiming Disabled Students' Allowance and offer support for any who are uncertain of their eligibility. Highlight the availability and benefits of Disabled Students' Allowance to all accepted applicants, as a number may not have disclosed.
wrong choice of course	not enough research of choices, channelling into inappropriate subjects (especially working class men) and lack of information about higher education (especially students from disadvantaged areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ideally, selection and engagement in the post-application stage (if not earlier) should focus on ensuring an accurate match between applicant and course. Have additional reasonable measures in place in transition, particularly for groups where disadvantage has been identified (e.g. working class men and students from disadvantaged areas). This may be needed more where there is provision of similar subject areas that have distinct differences in the detail of module provision, assessment, mode of study, etc., where there is a wide range of combinations (e.g. joint honours; major/minors), or when an applicant has been accepted through Clearing and not benefited from the institution's normal post-application engagement. ▪ Be prepared to offer a more appropriate alternative, where possible and practical. This may be easier where the move is within a similar study area and where target entry numbers can readily be transferred between courses. ▪ Invite targeted applicants to events (residential and non-residential) to improve

		<p>familiarisation ahead of main induction activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connect targeted applicants to student mentors with similar backgrounds/experiences (potentially through e-mentoring pre-entry).
financial reasons	limited funds and fear of debt, unrealistic lifestyle expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clearly convey all financial information to accepted applicants, including fees, accommodation costs, living costs, and publicise where financial advice can be accessed. ▪ Allow any payments to be broken down into smaller, regular instalments whenever possible and always have alternative payment methods available to those most in need. ▪ Make sure that all bursary and scholarship information is clear and easily accessible to ensure no accepted applicant has false expectations. If there are a limited number of bursaries available based on residual household income, but more accepted applicants meeting the eligibility threshold (e.g. below £25,000), criteria for selecting entitlement must be transparent and applied consistently. Have additional support and advice in place for those eligible who do not receive such bursaries. ▪ Make financial support available, including hardship funds. Identify where new students are most likely to spend their money and consider whether agreements can be reached to provide special offers, vouchers or other savings, particularly for identified target groups. ▪ Connect accepted applicants to student mentors with similar backgrounds/experiences (potentially through e-mentoring pre-entry) and/or moderate a social network site that allows them to share money concerns with peers.
to take up a more attractive opportunity	late realisation of academic interests or career goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide information on adjustment, withdrawing and being released into Clearing. Ensure all admissions staff are aware of the institution's policies and that they handle requests sensitively and promptly. Due care should be taken to ensure accepted applicants are making the right choice for themselves and they must be forewarned of any action that would result in the irrevocable cancellation of their accepted place. ▪ Make additional careers advice available to accepted applicants considering alternatives during the transition stage. ▪ Be mindful that the applicant may be taking up a new opportunity for a limited duration and may seek to re-engage in later years. Signpost routes back into your institution or back into HE generally.

Non-Engagement

Non-engagement should be very rare in the transition stage. It would be extremely unusual for an institution not to seek any further interaction after accepting an applicant. Because of its rarity, any non-engagement should be viewed with suspicion and investigated thoroughly as it may indicate a problem that needs to be resolved.

Situations where an institution does not engage with an accepted applicant would include errors in the admissions process (e.g. misplacement of a paper application; incorrect input on the electronic application record; failed transmission to UCAS or other intermediary) that may affect an individual potential student or if left unchecked result in a systemic problem and a significant loss of potential students.

Situations where an accepted applicant does not engage with the institution (e.g. no response to pre-enrolment requests; failure to submit certificates or other requested information; failure to arrive at designated induction meeting) may indicate the applicant does not intend to or is not able to attend the institution, in which case it would be in the institution's interests to clarify the situation and ensure admissions statistics are as accurate as possible. However, it is also possible that there is a problem with the channels of communication, in terms of either misinterpretation or lack of receipt by the applicant. Again, it would be in the institution's interests to clarify the situation if at all possible and correct any confusing information or communication failures.

In the vast majority of situations, any period of non-engagement is likely to trigger an attempt to re-engage, even if it is just to formally close the record. An institution that has not heard back from an accepted applicant is likely to chase that applicant for a response. Similarly, an applicant who still intends studying at an institution is likely to contact that institution if he/she has not heard anything. Complete inaction, therefore, is not justifiable, but it should never be assumed that the other party will reinitiate contact.

Continued research

SPA will continue to develop understanding of the positive interactions and practice that make up a good applicant experience. This understanding will be further developed, considering best practice in a fully integrated strategic approach that ensures admissions practice nurtures the student experience.

We are keen to hear from higher education or from education support organisations that work closely with higher education (e.g. on widening participation/access/retention) about activities that enrich the applicant experience. If you would like to share any examples of good practice within admissions or of integrated working between staff responsible for different stages, please contact Dan Shaffer, Senior Project Officer at SPA (d.shaffer@spa.ac.uk).

Dan Shaffer

SPA

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References

1. National Audit Office (2007). *Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education*. London: TSO
2. National Audit Office (2002). *Improving student achievement in English higher education*. London: TSO
3. Quinn, J., Thomas, L., Slack, K., Casey, L., Thexton, W. and Noble, J. (2005). *Rethinking working-class 'drop out' from higher education*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation /York Publishing Services Ltd

Case Study: Flying Start at University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)

Aiding Student Transition through Summer Events & Induction Dr Vikki Cook – Flying Start Project Coordinator

Introduction

Flying Start is a student-centred project, which derives its focus directly from the University's mission: in promoting access and widening participation the University is aware that its student population is diverse and in many ways non-traditional. Flying Start strives, therefore, to always treat each student as an individual and to provide support that meets each person's needs.

Flying Start began in 1999 as a pilot study, which adopted an early intervention strategy to combat high levels of attrition amongst Advanced GNVQ students entering UCLan. This proved so successful, that 2002-3 saw the Project being broadened to enable all students with a confirmed conditional or unconditional place, regardless of entry qualification, to engage with Flying Start. Ten years on, Flying Start continues to go from strength to strength.

The Project has two main strands: firstly, as an early intervention strategy that invites prospective UCLan students to attend a free pre-enrolment residential or non-residential 'event'; the second, begun in 2008, to encourage the 'embedding' of key elements of the Flying Start events across UCLan, within Induction and beyond. The Project is specifically designed to support retention and reduce levels of attrition amongst students at UCLan. In 2011 Flying Start offered three 3-day residential events and one three-day non-residential event, with a total of 600 residential places and 75 non-residential places. The 'embedding' strand of the Project was started through the launch of a 'Flying Start Induction Pack', which went out to all course tutors and the involvement of Flying Start Project Staff and Student Mentors in a number of Induction Activities.

Description

Flying Start aims to better prepare students for living and studying in Preston and at UCLan, as well as providing them with additional support networks of academic and pastoral care. Invitations for the summer events are sent out to prospective students in conjunction with the University's Admissions process, and since 2009 students have been able to self-refer via an online application form on the website; tutors are also able to refer students directly to the Project.

The residential events are extremely popular and always over-subscribed, however, they tend to appeal largely to school-leavers. Therefore, in 2007 it was decided to add the option of a 'non-residential' event, for under-represented categories such as mature students, working students and students with families.

Each event is designed to provide students with: campus and city orientation; knowledge of commonly used University 'jargon'; academic skills (e.g. Critical Thinking & Referencing); help developing the life skills needed when living and studying away from home (e.g. budgeting & time-management); where to go for help and support; and, above all, a social network before they enrol upon their course of study. Accommodation is provided free of charge by the University for the residential events, and there is a programme of free social activities (including a barbeque) in the

evenings. A free lunch is provided each day on the non-residential events and students are encouraged to meet up together after the day's sessions.

The programme is delivered using a Lecture/Seminar format. The lectures and presentations are given in a large lecture theatre to the whole student cohort by academics and support staff from across the University. These are designed to be relevant and interactive to ensure maximum engagement with the students. Research shows that successful students are "experts" at being students and are, therefore, best placed to help novice students in the transition towards becoming experts themselves. Flying Start employs 25 successful second and third year UCLan students as Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) 'Mentors', whose role is to deliver the seminar sessions, and offer informal, friendly advice from their own experience. Mentors work in pairs for the seminars, taking groups of between 20 and 30 students who are grouped dependant on age, course or area for each different session. Changing the students' groups in this way enables them to mix with as many different people as possible, thereby offering the maximum opportunity for the formation of social networks. A great deal of emphasis is placed on seminar sessions being highly interactive, and Mentors use activities that are designed to 'break the ice' and facilitate this social-bonding process.

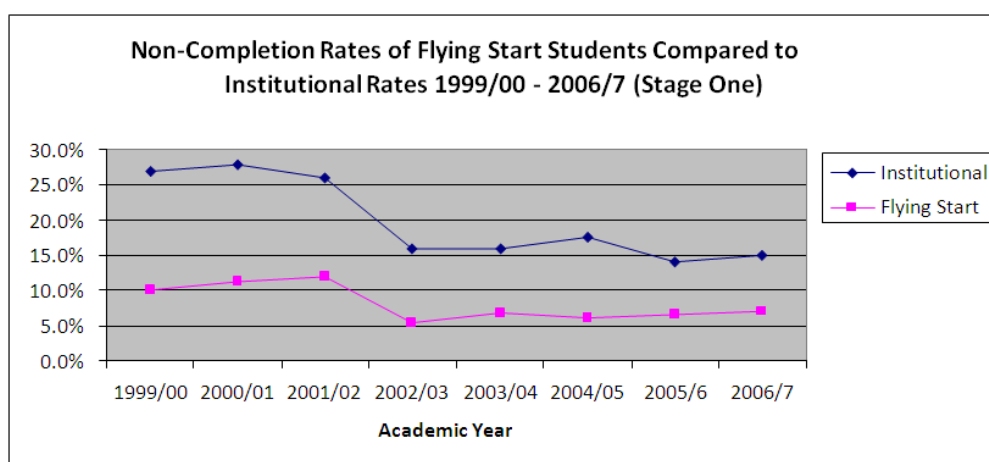
In order to ensure a high-calibre of "expert" students to act as Flying Start PAL-Mentors, there is a rigorous recruitment procedure that utilises the University's standard HR processes. Applicants must fill out the full University Staff Application Form and, if shortlisted, undertake an interview process that involves giving a presentation, one-to-one questions with the interview panel, and a further group assessment of team-working and facilitation skills. Mentors are also selected with a view to representing as many Schools as possible from across the University, as well as being representative of the student body in terms of diversity, including age, gender and ethnicity. Each year, the Flying Start Mentor Team consists of around two-thirds of the previous year's "experienced" Mentors, and around a third of "new" Mentors. These student Mentors are all trained together for four days in all aspects of the delivery and facilitation of the group sessions, and are given full training and up-to-date information regarding the support available at UCLan. It is important to train both experienced and new Mentors together, as this approach mirrors the Peer-Mentoring used by the Project itself, and exemplifies the way in which PAL works for the students and Mentors. Experienced Mentors are encouraged to take part in facilitating the sessions for the new Mentors, and there is intensive use of "team-building" techniques, in order to form a strong bond between the group each year.

Feedback shows that attendance on a Flying Start event, prior to starting at UCLan, clearly inculcates a sense of 'belonging' to the University. In 2011 Flying Start set up its own 'official' Facebook page, which has proved very popular and offers a useful way of answering students' questions prior to arrival. Many of the students who attend Flying Start go on to create their own groups on social networking sites such as 'Facebook', and Flying Start students seem to identify themselves more closely with UCLan before they commence their studies. This in turn leads to students becoming more closely involved in University life when they start their degree and encourages a sense of collegiality, which enhances their motivation and commitment and thus has an effect on rates of attrition.

As the Project has become more substantially embedded within UCLan, Flying Start students and PAL Mentors have become a key resource, providing motivated and enthusiastic role-models across the University. Many of these students have gone on to become 'Course Representatives', and 'M

and M Mentors', thus offering practical support in terms of retention. Flying Start PAL Mentors have gone on to be employed at UCLan as 'Student Ambassadors', 'Student Liaison Officers', 'Student Interns' and some, having completed their degrees, now work in key areas of Student Services and Support. The expansion of the Project into using Flying Start PAL Mentors to work within Induction and the first year is continuing to grow; results so far have been encouraging, with tutors reporting higher student engagement, lower numbers of referrals and fewer drop-outs in the courses concerned.

UCLan is clearly in the forefront with regard to Widening Participation, and research into the background of Flying Start students shows that on average at least 80 percent each year are "first-generation", having no family experience in Higher Education to draw on. The institution's overall non-completion rate for year one has decreased significantly over recent years, however, the attrition rate for Flying Start students continues to consistently average around half that of UCLan students as a whole.



Beneficiary citations

Cat Race was a student on Flying Start, is an ex-Flying Start Mentor and now a Graduate in Web & Multi-Media, she says that: *“Flying Start is probably the most beneficial thing I participated in as a student. . . [it] taught me that everyone is an individual, has their own problems and insecurities and we are all here to support each other, acting as a positive influence. The nature of Flying Start, introducing new students to uni life and helping them to face and overcome the potential problems in their path, initiates a sense of understanding and united team ethos within the group of mentors; all with the same goal of passing on our experiences. As a dyslexic and hard of hearing student myself, I found being in the company of such understanding people uplifting, giving me the confidence to continue being pro-active within the university without allowing my disabilities to prohibit me from being involved. I can say with assurance I am a much more confident person now and I believe Flying Start was the catalyst for this.”*

We receive an overwhelming amount of positive student feedback – here is a very small sample:

“Flying start Mentors made the trip. The way they interacted in a professional manner during the day, and then socialised with the students of an evening was fantastic. The experience really made me feel like UCLan is the place I want to spend the next 3 years of my life.”

"All the Mentors were ace. Not scared any more!"

"I feel much better equipped to start Uni as a mature student. Mentors are all very knowledgeable and helpful"

"Thank you to all the Mentors for being really friendly and nice, and also for being there to help no matter what the problem was. Flying Start has been amazing!"

"The basic outline of the summer school is very thorough and positive, but what really enhances it is the work of the Mentors who are really good at complimenting the summer school and making you feel comfortable."

"Being a mature student I was quite worried about meeting new people and making new friends, but through attending the Flying Start Programme that has been made a very easy and worry free transition for me."

It is important to note that Flying Start does not only benefit those students who actually attend an event, as the following student's comments show:

"I came to university as a reluctant student who had decided before even moving to university that I was going to give up before the Christmas holidays. However, my plans soon changed after moving to Preston and meeting my fantastic flatmates. I was fortunate enough to have four people in my flat that had all been on the Flying Start summer schools. Because of their experiences of the University and the knowledge they had acquired about the University and Preston as a city, they were better prepared for the start of their university lives than I was and were able to help me in so many different ways.

If it were not for my flatmates and the things they did on Flying Start I would not have settled into university and would have moved back home to my 9-5 job, never stopping to think about returning to education. Because of the impact Flying Start had on my flatmates, and indirectly on me, I applied as a volunteer M and M Mentor at the beginning of my second year and have just completed my first summer as a Flying Start Mentor. I think I am an example of how Flying Start can have a positive impact on someone's life even if they haven't been through the scheme themselves."

www.uclan.ac.uk/study/flying_start