

## **M Yorke and B Longden 'The first-year experience in higher education in the UK: report on phase 1 of a project funded by the Higher Education Academy' (February 2007)**

Summary by: Dr Laura Hodsdon (May 2009)

### **Overview**

Findings from phase 1 of the project suggest that two strong influences from withdrawal from university are worry over finances and the quality of prior information about the HEI and the degree programme, whilst making friends and aspects of teaching were the most dominant aspects of a positive student experience.

### **Aims and background**

Previous research (Yorke et al 1997) has shown that poor programme choice, financial stress, and aspects of the student experience are the three most commonly cited reasons for students' non-completion of their courses. Since funding and top-up fees have changed the nature of HE, this project aims to ascertain if the reasons cited have changed, and also to explore further those aspects of the student experience which have an influence on retention.

### **Method**

The project studied 25 HEIs spanning a wide range of institutional types in nine different subject areas (Subjects allied to Medicine; Biological Sciences; Psychology; Computer Science; Engineering and Technology; Social Studies' Business and Administration' Humanities' Creative Arts and Design). It is in two phases: (i) a survey of full-time first-year students during term 2 regarding their perceptions of their experience as students; (ii) a survey of those students recorded as not continuing their studies in their original institution, in order to ascertain their reasons for discontinuing.

### **Findings**

- Overall, perceptions of the student experience were positive, with most respondents finding their teaching supportive; if there is any weakness it is in the area of feedback, with issues of detail and promptness (pg 9).
- Financial worries and low prior knowledge of the HEI or degree programme are areas of particular concern (pp 12-13).



- The majority of respondents saw their degree leading to a graduate-level job (pg 13).
- Analysis by sub-type suggests little variation between gender, socio-economic status, institution-type, prior experience of HE, ethnicity and domicile; but greater variation by subject area and age (pp 14-26).
- Common themes were identified between this study and a similar one carried out by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CHSE) at the University of Melbourne, Australia in 2005 (pp 28-31).
- Qualitative analysis showed that best first year experiences involved making new friends and aspects of teaching; the worst areas were workload and time management, with some also citing homesickness (pp 35-8).