Retention and Attainment Across the Disciplines

Ruth Woodfield, University of St Andrews
Key findings from Retention and Attainment Phase 1 Report

Disciplines themselves contribute to, and co-produce, different outcomes for different groups of students

- There are different student bodies within each discipline
- Particular student backgrounds within certain disciplines are linked to heightened levels of vulnerability to lower continuation rates
- Particular student backgrounds within certain disciplines are linked to lower attainment rates
What is it about different disciplines that produce different outcomes?

- They co-produce different outcomes in ways that we are largely ignorant of.
- Part of the HEA’s programme of work in relation to *Retention and Attainment Across the Disciplines* is to start the national conversation about this.
  - Joan O’Mahony organised Phase 2 to begin the process of asking disciplines to start reflecting on the *culture, customs and practices* within their own areas that might result in different outcomes for particular groups of students, as well as different outcomes from other disciplines.
Overview Report

➢ Tried to identify and pull together key ideas from qualitative reports:

➢ Student preparedness for their studies is key – this is especially difficult when students have not studied the discipline before HE

➢ The role of ‘threshold concepts’ in helping student transition to a discipline at HE level

➢ Disciplinary practices around learning and assessment – students need support in relation to these
Thank you
Please feel free to email questions later: rw57@st-andrews.ac.uk
Retention & attainment in veterinary medical education

Elizabeth Jackson

Elizabeth Armitage-Chan

Webinar: Wednesday, 9 March, 2016
Characterising UG veterinary medical education

> Offered at six universities in the UK
> Qualification takes 5 years (6 years at Cambridge) and results in “MRCVS”
> Dominated by female students (~80%)
> Under-presentation of BME students

Career choice
  • Is made at a very early age (as young as 3 years old)
  • Is principally based on wanting to work with animals
  • The unique nature of the human-animal bond

Veterinary medicine courses are associated with a high course content & content overload

Mental health issues are a major concern amongst students and practitioners
Key findings

The development of female students
- Learning styles
- Leadership training

Degree attainment of BME veterinary students needs further exploration

Clinical scholars play a leading role in the mentoring & development of students

High retention rate can be explained by
- Career choice being made from a very early age
- The vocational-nature of the discipline
- The human-animal bond that is unique to the profession
- Students have particularly high levels of motivation and resilience that helps them persist with their education
Key findings

No evidence that male or mature age students are at a disadvantage in final exam or overall course performance.

Veterinary medicine courses are associated with a high course content, which provides anxiety and stress to students.

Retention and attainment information for ‘Gateway’/ widening access students needs development.
Future research questions

> Are distance learning technologies contributing to negative student behaviours and feelings of isolation due to their inherent nature of social disconnect?

> How the issue of BME attainment can be better managed in veterinary medical education?

> Is the human-animal bond a significant factor in the high rate of retention and attainment amongst UG veterinary students?
Recommendations

- Resilience can be taught and is high amongst veterinary students. Other disciplines could benefit from a transfer of veterinary students’ strengths in this area.

- Support initiatives may be usefully focused on students with lower school scores, and those demonstrating a preference for individual learning rather than competency in collaborative learning skills.

- Embed deep learning approaches into veterinary curricula and address content overload.

- Further investigate the uptake and method of use of distance-learning opportunities in the veterinary curriculum, in particular to evaluate whether this has a positive or negative effect on student retention and attainment.
Retention and attainment in Computer Science

Dr Neil Gordon  PFHEA, MBCS, CMALT, PGCHE, PhD, BSc
Department of Computer Science

n.a.gordon@hull.ac.uk

T: 01482 465038

Retention in the Disciplines
Higher Education Academy
9 March 2016; York (Webinar).
Issues

> A popular subject, but apparently performing poorly

> Lack of understanding of what university level Computer Science is and potential mismatch with pre-technical knowledge to transition level material

> Potential lack of community/engagement

> Assessment practices and the students

> Pedagogic approaches and technology solutions
CS is a popular subject

University Applications to Computer Science

At least with males:

Gender Split

Second only to engineering (at 86%) for male dominance

Ranking

Number of applications

Year

Applications

Rank (of 26 disciplines)
Outcomes and retention

Student attainment and retention (Woodfield, 2014)

• Joint second worst subject for awarding good degrees (56% achieving upper degree)
• Worse record for students leaving with no award or a lower award (9% leave with no- or a lower award)

Student employability (Shadbolt review, 2016)

• Worst figures for student employability
Identity and expectations

> Confusion and conflation of ICT ↔ IT ↔ Computing ↔ Computer Science

> Vocational vs Academic

> Different level 2/3 courses and approaches to technical content (esp. programming)

> New Computing at School curriculum will have an impact
Student Syndrome and attainment

> Tendency to procrastinate amongst males

> Poor organisation = late or poor marks

> Worse with subjects that have a lot of coursework i.e. Computer Science
Improving practice

> Improve understanding of the discipline

> Work on the transition: school and college to university

> Improve socialisation/community engagement

> Utilise assessment practices: team work, formative and summative, allow for student syndrome

> Utilise technology (learning analytics) and pedagogy (gamification)
Retention and Attainment in Philosophy and Religious Studies

Successes and challenges for the future

Dr David Mossley
Introduction and overview

- What the statistics show
- Some limitations: disciplinary granularity
- Key data findings
- Some possible influences and views on R&A in PRS
- What we need to know and do
Some limitations: disciplinary granularity (p.4)
Key data findings (pp.5-6)

In the cohort analysed, overall PRS students more likely to:

• Be from socio-economic classification class one or two
• Be from households where one or more parent has a first degree
• Be from white ethnic background (slightly)
• Be from the UK rather than EU or beyond (slightly)
• Study away from home
• Have higher UCAS scores than average (12% with 340 points+ compared with 7%)

BUT
• Have the same distribution as their peers by age, gender split, disability, full-/ part-time split.
Key data findings: retention (p.6)

> Overall comparable with sector, with slightly higher numbers continuing to further study.

**BUT**

> Mature students twice as likely to leave without completion (higher than average)

> Students from black, particularly those identifying as ‘black or black British Caribbean’, ethnic backgrounds much more likely to leave (24% compared with 6% for the ‘white’ group).

> Lower UCAS entry students (under 340) had three times higher leaving rates.

**HOWEVER**

> Non-completion and failing academically given as a reason for leaving less often; ‘other personal’ more often (32% compared with 22% average)
Key data findings: attainment (p.6)

- Upper degree average for all disciplines: 65%
- For PRS: 75%
- PRS students from ONS SEC classes one and two: 80%
- BME students scored lower achievement by significant margins (42% for ‘black or black British African’)

Philosophy and Religious Studies students are more likely to come from white, middle-class, better-educated backgrounds than the average, and are more likely to succeed at the higher attainment levels if they do. PRS students are more likely to give ‘other personal’ reasons for leaving higher education without a degree.
Motivation and goals

> Student retention is closely related to a combination of both motivation and ability (Alarcon and Edwards 2013)

> Investigations in the Humanities have shown that while individual interest plays an important role in students’ commitment to study, it requires a future goal to truly retain student engagement (Mikkonen et al. 2011)

The Journey

The Goal
The journey… (pp.7-10)

> The perception of what PRS disciplines are about

> Threshold concepts:
  - Identification
  - Communication
  - Making clear that troublesome knowledge and ambiguity is fine and part of the process
  - Not always welcome perhaps ...
  - *Views of the self, values and the world are changed*

> Fewer non-white, female role models, especially in philosophy ...

> The role of PRS in the wider world
The context:

“Philosophical questioning arises wherever people are ... students are discovering that philosophy is not an abstract, remote discipline, but one that is woven, as Socrates’ arguments were woven, into the fabric of their daily lives, their discussions of life and death, abortion and revenge, institutional justice and religion. Philosophy breaks out wherever people are encouraged to think for themselves, questioning in a Socratic way ... philosophy supplies something that formerly was lacking – an active control or grasp of questions, the ability to make distinctions, a style of interaction that does not rest on mere assertion and counterassertion – all of which they find important in their lives with themselves and one another.” (Nussbaum 1997. pp. 17-18)
The goal (pp. 10-11)

Role and place of the humanities in a global context

Personal journeys and transformation

The place of higher-level skills:

Carl Gilleard, Chief Executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters said of philosophy in 2009:

“A graduate today can fully expect to still be in the world of work in 2058. The one thing that we can be certain of is that we will be applying skills that we haven't even thought of today. We will have to relearn and relearn and relearn ... Being able to think laterally, having good analytical skills, being an effective communicator – these are the sorts of skills that most good managers would be expected to have. I think employers are beginning to ask, ‘Where are we going to find these skills?’” (Fearn 2009)
What we need to know and do (p.13)

> Gain a better understanding of ‘personal reasons’ for leaving
> Research fully the impact of role models in teaching in the humanities
> Improve communication of ‘troublesome knowledge’ and the personal journey: making it explicit to students less familiar with open debate, dialogue and ambiguity that such change is okay
> Explore more fully the place of PRS in the world and within the students’ worlds
> Move beyond the advertising of *instrumental* PRS skills to the global citizenship of the future with the high level capabilities to succeed *and* to flourish
> Look again at definitions of ‘learning gain’ to ensure that this is captured effectively