Success means different things to different students. It is a complex challenge for all of us in the sector to help students achieve that success, but it is essential that we do so: helping students to transform their lives through higher education is what we are here to do.

But the diversity of the student body and its expectations means that trying to pin down a watertight definition of ‘student success’ is a reductive exercise.

At a practical level, however, institutional Strategic Plans and learning and teaching (L&T) strategies are the embodiment of how to achieve student success. Any review of such plans and L&T strategies across mission groups shows some common themes, among them employability, widening participation issues, and a focus on assessment, retention, attainment and progression.

The most effective ones are inspirational and visionary, nudging institutions towards the future and reflecting the continuing benefits of higher education to those who take part in it.

With an increasing global focus on teaching excellence and at a time of intense development in the policy landscape in the UK, including a Teaching Excellence Framework round the corner in England and continuing policy initiatives elsewhere in the UK such as the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland, institutions also want to be sure that they are meeting the demands of public measures that will differentiate their value. These currently include targets for National Student Survey scores and returns for the Destination of Leavers in HE annual report, as well as compliance with Government guidance such as that issued to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) demanding that universities do more to boost social mobility and raise aspirations among disadvantaged groups. Institutions will also want to evidence broader brush aspirations such as embedding employability into curricula, optimising student transition and increasing student retention.

For the past year, the HEA has been working through its Strategic Enhancement Programmes to help address priorities in institutional strategies and thereby to transform departments, services, individuals – and the lives of students. The HEA frameWORKS series was piloted through these programmes and this work is now being taken forward by the HEA.

Each of the six thematic frameworks provides a structure for HEIs to review and enhance their policy and practice in key strategic areas. They have been created in response to, and in collaboration with the sector, drawing on the scholarly research and practice accumulated by the HEA over the past decade and the knowledge and expertise of HE practitioners and professionals. They provide a way of benchmarking or evidencing performance, progress and impact over time and/or relative to others. Each focuses on at least one area of strategic importance to any institution: assessment; employability; student engagement; access, retention, attainment and progression; flexible learning, and internationalisation.

Aside from their inclusion in institutional strategies, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that these are areas of critical importance:

- While satisfaction scores for assessment in the National Student Survey went up from 72% to 73% in 2015, this area continues to attract lower scores than any other in the survey.
• More than 8% of undergraduates drop out in their first year of study. This costs universities around £33,000 per student and costs students lost time, money (spent or borrowed), and the devastating confidence knock from failing. (The Guardian Higher Education Network, 30 June 2015).

• The biggest differences in degree attainment are found according to ethnic background. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) notes that there remains a considerable gap between the proportion of white British students receiving first class or upper second class degrees compared to UK-domiciled students from minority ethnic groups (ECU website).

• In the HEA’s UK Engagement Survey 2015, when asked about their skills development, students reported the most development for two fundamental skills in HE: becoming an independent learner and thinking critically and analytically. The lowest development was reported for acquiring employability skills and being an informed and active citizen.

An overarching framework – the Student Success Framework – has been designed to draw together and integrate the six separate thematic frameworks into one holistic and comprehensive approach. It helps institutions decide which strategic priority or priorities to focus on. It also provides a way of benchmarking or evidencing performance, progress and impact over time and relative to others, and offers prompts for bringing together particular stakeholder groups in strategic priorities such as student retention rates that impact upon student success within and beyond HE, including industry.

There is much for the sector to build on as we move forward in a year of great change in higher education. According to last year’s HEA/HEPI Student Academic Experience Survey, 87% of students are very or fairly satisfied with their course. But we must continue to keep listening to what students tell us they need from their time in higher education: what they need to be successful. It is what we are here for.
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Thank you for downloading our Enhancing student success in higher education white paper. This paper has been written to support institutions, faculties and departments address key priorities for learning and teaching in higher education. We hope you enjoy reading it and find it useful.

Please let us know what you think by emailing us at consultancy@heacademy.ac.uk or via Twitter @HEAcademy
What is student success in HE and who is it for?

For institutions and related HE bodies, the frameWORKS series:
- provides a way of benchmarking or evidencing performance, progress and impact over time or relative to others;
- enables a consistent organisation-wide approach, owned and developed locally by programme or service teams facilitating engagement;
- offers prompts for bringing together, or engaging, particular stakeholder groups in strategic priorities that impact upon student success within and beyond HE, including industry;
- informs planning, review, validation, accreditation and programme approval processes;
- shapes and inspires continuous development;
- presents a structure for communicating and marketing existing work, progress and impact, nationally and internationally.

For students’ unions, associations and guilds, the frameWORKS series:
- indicates the areas of learning, teaching and organisational development in which students can engage in the enhancement of quality and student success;
- promotes a shared sense of responsibility, engagement and ownership for learning and success between institutions and students through and beyond HE;
- encourages access to opportunities for students to extend and develop personal skills, knowledge and experience, new ways of working, learning and thinking in HE.

For staff, the frameWORKS series:
- offers a structure for enhancing the quality of students’ learning experience throughout the academic lifecycle, shaping effective curriculum and assessment design;
- encourages reciprocal and collaborative ways of working (locally, nationally and globally) in the delivery and enhancement of the curriculum, learning and teaching and professional development;
- offers processes to learn from, contribute to and influence learning, teaching and research, assisting academic advancement and sustainability.

What represents success for one student may not be for another. Individuals will have different motivations for, and experiences of, studying in HE and thus will want (as well as take) different things from the experience.
This framework addresses six strategic areas of priority for learning and teaching in HE, presented in the diagram below. All six are directed towards the achievement of student success – which is what all involved in HE are striving for. These are depicted in the middle of the diagram to bring them together.

The six priorities addressed with the HEA frameWORKS series each contribute to student success. Individually, the frameworks aim to achieve the following outcomes:

**Transforming assessment in HE**
To maximise student learning from both the process and products of assessment within academic, discipline and professional communities.

**Flexible learning in HE**
To offer choice in how, what, when and where students learn through flexibility in the pace, place and mode of delivery.

**Internationalising HE**
To prepare graduates to live in and contribute responsibly to a globally inter-connected society.

**Embedding employability in HE**
To enable successful transitions and contributions for students throughout HE and beyond, benefitting them, their communities and the economy.

**Student access, retention, attainment and progression in HE**
To foster a culture that promotes and enables the full and equitable participation of all students to, through and beyond HE.

**Student engagement through partnership**
To commit to developing open, constructive and continuous dialogue between students and staff, among students, and between institutions and their students’ unions, associations or guilds.

Each of these areas of work has the potential to impact on a number of metrics, for example, National Student Satisfaction Survey, Destination of Leavers in Higher Education and student access, progression and success (supplied to the Office for Fair Access).
More than 8% of undergraduates drop out in their first year of study. If an undergraduate drops out of study in their first year it costs the university around £33,000.

HEA frameworks individually and collectively have an impact upon student success by influencing:

**HE curricula**
The content, design, delivery and documenting of the formal and/or informal curricula.

**Learning environments**
The design and provision of formal and/or informal learning spaces and resources.

**Learning communities**
Widening and engaging staff and students in professional, academic and discipline communities.

**Teaching quality**
The quality of design, delivery or evaluation of teaching as core to the enhancement of any theme or discipline.
The Higher Education Academy recognises that there are processes and outcomes common to the effective implementation and achievement of these priority areas. Thus, two outer circles address the operational aspects of achieving student success – the first one, as presented on this page, encompasses key principles or ways of working.

The frameworks individually and collectively promote the following guiding principles for practice:

**Collaboration**
Working in partnership with all stakeholders internally and externally throughout the process to engender shared ownership and responsibility.

**Interconnectivity**
Making connections between people, disciplines and activity locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

**Flexibility**
Creating structures, systems and approaches that are agile and responsive to changing needs and requirements.

**Inclusivity**
Enabling the full and equitable participation of all students and staff through proactively developing inclusive approaches, values and knowledge.

According to the Equality Challenge Unit, BME students are more likely to drop out of HE, with those completing their degree far less likely to obtain a first class or upper second class degree.
The second of the outer circles encompasses a series of operational commitments embodied within the institutional culture. Achieving student success is dependent on a culture in which there is continual critique, evaluation, and the development of policy that directly links to practice.

The frameworks individually and collectively promote a regard for:

**Leadership of learning and teaching**
Committing and organising resources towards the achievement of a common vision and outcomes.

**Shared responsibility**
Providing clearly defined responsibilities for staff and students, given all have a key role to play in learning and teaching and thus contribute to student success.

**Continual development**
Investing in ongoing and collaborative learning processes for staff and students, to facilitate engagement, reflection, planning, application and recording, and thus optimise policy, practice and future impact.

The frameWORKS series provides a universal reference point for reviewing and enhancing policy and practice, covering key priority areas that impact upon the quality of learning and teaching excellence.

**Holistic approaches**
Taking account of the inter-connectivities within and across the institution, faculties, departments, services, people and curricula, throughout the academic lifecycle, and for all stakeholders.

**Scholarship and evidence**
Utilising underpinning pedagogical research and relevant institutional data.

**Evaluation and impact**
Developing and embedding the means of establishing learning gain and the impact of all teaching activity on student success.
Take the next step in enhancing student success at your institution.

Email us at consultancy@heacademy.ac.uk
Visit www.heacademy.ac.uk/transform
or call us on +44 (0)1904 717 550

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