



St Mary's University, Twickenham

## Student Retention Strategy 2018/19 – 2021/22

### Executive Summary

- This Strategy builds on previous strategies relating to student retention to set out a clear vision of how the University will address the issue of student retention over the next 4 years (i.e. from 2018/19 to 2021/22). It summarises those initiatives which are already in train, and those which will be implemented in the future.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> year retention rate at St Mary's (i.e. the % of students who progress to the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of their programme) has lagged behind the UK average, reaching 9.7% in 2016/17. Student withdrawals in the 1<sup>st</sup> year peaked in 2017/18 at 18%, whilst the compound figure (all UG levels) also peaked at 10%.
- In 2017/18 only 10 programmes (8 of which were in SHAS) accounted for 44.9% of student withdrawals. A snap shot taken in Jan 2019 shows that 11 programmes (including the Foundation Year) account for 42.7% of attrition. Attrition is therefore concentrated within a relatively small suite of UG and PGT programmes – it is not, therefore, a systemic problem.
- There is clear evidence that the University has 'gained traction' on this issue during 2018/19, with snapshots taken in Dec 2018 and Jan 2019 showing significant improvements in retention rates across all types of programmes and at all levels. The University is therefore 'on course' for a significantly improved compound retention figure and improved figures at UG and PGT levels in 2018/19.
- The 'retention gap' between white students on the one hand and black and Asian students on the other narrowed in 2017/18 compared to previous years, but will remain a key priority for the University as it develops and rolls-out a new Curriculum Framework which will be built on a foundation of 'inclusive' programme design, teaching and pedagogical practices.
- In 2017/18 ten of the top 13 programmes with the highest attrition rates were in SHAS, but figures for Jan 2019 show that attrition is evenly balanced between the two Faculties.
- The Strategy is characterised by a holistic approach that is aimed at benefitting the experience of all our students rather than a particular sub-set of students, thereby ensuring improved retention across all types of programmes, and for all types of students.
- The University has acted on data analytics to put in place rapid in-year interventions (e.g. *Are You Resit Ready?*, and an 'Exam Replacement Strategy' in a small number of SHAS modules) in order to enhance support for reassessment and create a more 'level playing field' for students.
- The Strategy is underpinned by structural changes (including the creation of CTESS and key senior roles such as the Faculty Associate Dean for Student Experience, and Dean of Learning & Teaching) to drive a more strategic approach to retention, and rapidly improving data from the Strategic Planning Office.
- The Strategy has strong senior management support and requires active participation by all members of the Senior Management Team.
- CTESS will play a key role in coordinating the implementation of the Strategy, but Faculties and other central services will be key in its implementation, and effective cross-University liaison and collegial working will be crucial to its success. The impact of the Strategy will be closely monitored by the Academic Development Committee (ADC), Academic Board (AB) and the University's Board of Governors.
- The University will be commissioning an expert external consultant from within the UK HE sector to carry-out an independent external evaluation and impact analysis of its Retention Strategy during 2018/19, and beyond.

### Content Summary

Section	Page
Introduction	1
Why is student retention important?	2
Context	3

Student withdrawals in 2017/18	9
Retention and student demographic groups	10
A 'holistic' approach that benefits all our students	13
Structural change focused on driving an embedded and systematic approach	13
The Foundation Year Programme	14
Corporate KPI Targets	15
TEF: Year 4 Metrics Data	15
TEF: Our Split Metrics	16
Understanding our students better	16
Why Do St Mary's Students Leave?	17
Commuter students	17
Towards a 'Sticky Campus'	20
Be Your Borough: Commuter Students Initiative (SMSU)	21
A new St Mary's Curriculum Framework focused on retention	21
The 'mindful university'	22
Rapid 'in-year' interventions to address student retention	23
What work is being done already?	25
Retention Action Plan for the Future (February 2019 –July 2021)	29
Illustrative overview of the timing of actions to enhance retention	34
<b>Appendix A: Student withdrawals by programme 2017/18</b>	<b>36-39</b>

## Introduction

St Mary's University recognises the importance of ensuring that it maximises the retention of its students at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. This Strategy sets out how the University intends to address this issue. Retention is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon with a one word answer—"belonging." A person will stay in a community of which they feel a part; they will leave a community of which they do not feel a part. The complexity lies in understanding what *makes* a student feel part of a community, and how to help those who do not feel they belong to become meaningfully integrated into the life of an institution. This integration has to work on two levels. The academic level: grade performance, leading to academic self-esteem, which results in subject satisfaction. And the personal level: personal development; identification with the norms and values of the Institution; socialization. The scholarly literature on the subject points in the same direction as professional experience and anecdotal evidence. **Where a student feels a sense of belonging and achievement, she or he is less likely to discontinue their studies.**<sup>1</sup> An effective retention strategy requires a programme of actions that fosters a sense of social belonging across the institution. The key theme of this document, then, is the creation of a *student-centred university for the twenty-first century*. This document articulates the lessons learned around retention activities which were summarised in its Retention Strategy of November 2017, and builds on this by setting out a clear

<sup>1</sup> See section 1.3.4, Thomas, L et al, *What Works? Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change What Works? Student Retention & Success Programme. Final Report*. See: <https://www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Full-report-Final.pdf>

vision of the changes/actions the University will take to address student retention (i.e. continuation and completion) at an institutional level over the short, medium and long term.

### Why is student retention important?

Student retention is important for a number of reasons, including:

1. **Students.** It is important for students – most of whom have taken out large student loans and incur considerable additional costs to engage with their chosen degree programme – to complete their studies successfully. Research shows that students who withdraw prematurely from their degree are worse off (both in terms of finance and career progression) than if they had not started a degree programme at all. For us, this is the single most important justification for improving our retention performance – we care passionately about the success of our students and want to see as many as possible complete their chosen degrees because this is what is likely to facilitate their successful progression into an exciting graduate career, and to enhance their life chances.
2. **Teaching Excellence Framework.** Student retention (completion) is a key metric in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The TEF has rapidly become a key measure of ‘quality’ of teaching in the sector, and early evidence suggests that (like league table rankings) TEF ratings are fast becoming a key reference point for students when deciding which university to apply to.
3. **Financial stability.** Student retention, and consequent retention of student fee income, is critical to the financial sustainability of the University. Our relatively high reliance on student fees (compared to income from other streams) means that fluctuations in retention can and do have a direct impact on the University’s ability to manage the balance between its income and expenditure.
4. **Sector Regulator.** Student success is a key priority of the Office for Students which came into existence in April 2018. The OfS interprets student success as we might define ‘student attainment’ – i.e. the extent to which students engage successfully with their chosen programme and exit with a positive degree outcome.
5. **League tables.** Student retention (or completion) is a key metric that feeds into university league tables (e.g. Complete University Guide & The Times Good University Guide both draw on HESA completion data) and therefore influences the universities ranking against its competitors. Experience suggests that enhanced ranking in league tables has a significant reputational benefit and influences student decision-making (especially though not exclusively during clearing). League tables also influence graduate recruiters, with research indicating that 25% of them draw on league tables to influence their choices of which Universities to target for graduate recruitment.<sup>2</sup> This means they have a direct bearing on DHLE performance.

### Context

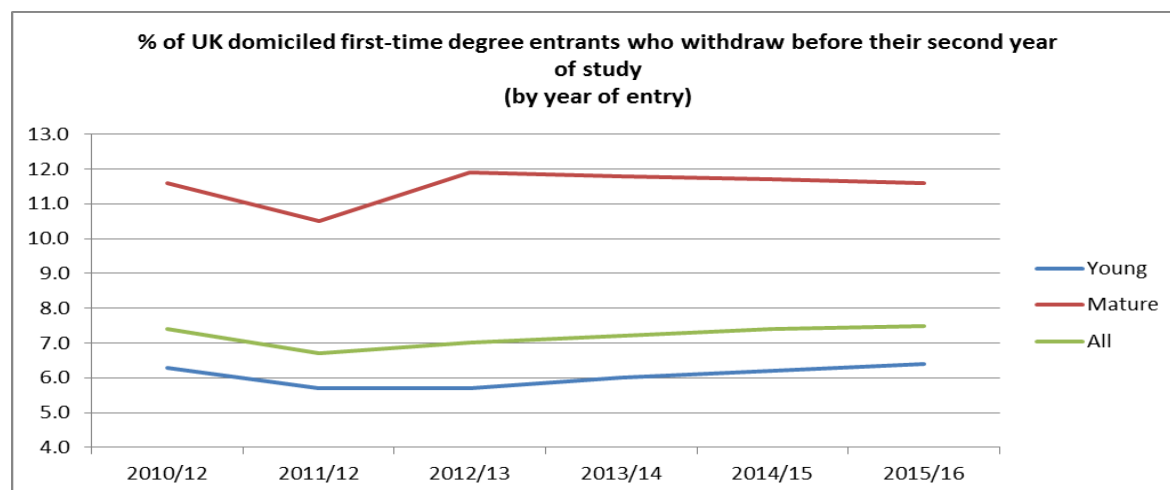
The University of St Mary’s has seen major improvements in external measures of its performance and quality as a higher Education provider. For example, its ranking in league tables has been transformed over the past 2 years, rising by 25 places to its highest ever position in the Guardian University Guide in 2018, and by 17 places in the Complete University Guide. The Sunday Times League Table has ranked St Mary’s 12<sup>th</sup> in London and 77<sup>th</sup> nationally, a rise of 22 places from the table published in 2017. Data released from the 2018 National Student Survey (NSS) saw overall student satisfaction at St Mary’s University, Twickenham rise to 88%, the highest rated amongst institutions with university-status in London, and in the top 20 nationally. The Good University Guide found that the NSS ranked St Mary’s ranked as no 1 in London for Student Experience and Teaching Excellence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> HEFCE (2006) *Needs of employers and related organisations for information about quality and standards of higher education*, report by University of Sussex School of Education. See: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/24523/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/news/2018/09/good-university-guide>

We are proud of these enhancements in our rankings, and of the world class student experience we offer to our students, but we also recognise that there is considerable scope to improve our performance in other areas. One such area is that relating to student retention.

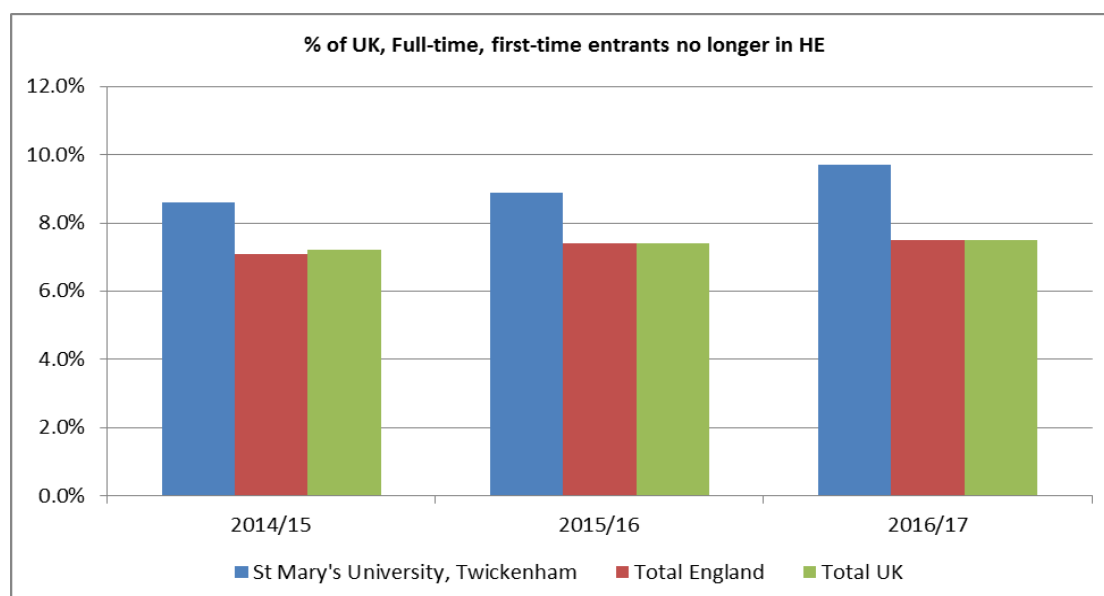
Continuation data at a national level (**See Chart 1**) shows that withdrawal rates for young entrants have been rising from 2011/12 to 2015/16, whilst that of mature students has been declining. Withdrawal rates for all students combined have risen during this period from 6.7% to 7.5%.



**Chart 1**

Percentage of UK first-time degree entrants who withdraw before their second year of study (HESA)

The most recent comparative data (HESA) indicates that the percentage of first-time entrants who withdraw during their first year has been higher at St Mary's compared to the English and UK averages (**See Chart 2**) reaching a high of 9.7% in 2016/17 compared a sector norm of 7.5%.



**Chart 2**

Percentage of UK, full-time entrants no longer in HE (HESA)

Despite coordinated efforts to drive down attrition rates, attrition rates have continued to rise over the past 5 years as is shown in the table below (**See Table 1**). Please note that unlike the HESA non-continuation measure, these figures include those who withdrew prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> December in their

first year. The data reveals that student attrition reached a 'peak' in 2017/18 with the percentage of withdrawn students higher at all undergraduate levels (Level 4, 5 and 6).

Level	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (to date)
L4	11.7	12.4	15.3	18.0	5.6
L5	5.6	4.9	3.0	7.2	1.0
L6	2.7	2.3	0.8	5.1	0.4

**Table 1**

Attrition figures by Stage of Study (Undergraduate) for Levels 4, 5 & 6 as at 15/01/2019

A more detailed breakdown of retention/withdrawal for our undergraduate programmes is provided below (**See Table 2**). This includes data on withdrawals for our Foundation Year programme (Level 0) and a compound figure which combines data for all UG levels. The compound figure indicates that despite relatively consistent withdrawal rates between 2014/15 and 2016/17, a spike in withdrawals to 10% occurred in 2017/18.<sup>4</sup> Table 2 also includes data on withdrawals in the current academic year (2018/19) based on figures available on 15 January 2019. Table 3 provides a comparative 'snapshot' of student withdrawals, with data from mid-January 2018, compared with that from mid-January 2019. Although there is a small increase in withdrawals (around 1%) on the first year of our Foundation degree programmes we would draw attention to the very significant reduction we have seen in student withdrawals in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of our Foundation degree programmes, from 8.1% to only 2%. If this progress is maintained through the remainder of the academic year to June 2019, we will see a significant improvement in completion rates compared to last year.

		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018 (to date)	
Programme Type	Aos Period	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn
UnderGrad	Compound	93.0%	7.0%	93.1%	6.9%	93.2%	6.8%	90.0%	10.0%	97.7%	2.3%

		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018 (to date)	
Programme Type	Aos Period	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn
UnderGrad	Y0							72.7%	27.3%	95.6%	4.4%
	Y1	88.3%	11.7%	87.6%	12.4%	84.7%	15.3%	82.0%	18.0%	94.4%	5.6%
	Y2	94.4%	5.6%	95.1%	4.9%	97.0%	3.0%	92.8%	7.2%	99.0%	1.0%
	Y3	97.3%	2.7%	97.7%	2.3%	99.2%	0.8%	94.9%	5.1%	99.6%	0.4%
	Y4	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

**Table 2**

<sup>4</sup> This figure is likely to have been inflated slightly by a change in the way in which withdrawals were recorded by the University

Detailed breakdown of withdrawal rates including 'compound' rates and Level 0, 4, 5 & 6 withdrawals.  
Retention figures as at 15/01/2019.

Level of Study	Snapshot data in January 2018		Snapshot data in January 2019		Snapshot data in February 2019	
	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn
Foundation 1	94.7	5.3	93.8	6.2	93.8	6.3
Foundation 2	91.9	8.1	98.0	2.0	99.0	1.0
UG Level 0	91.2	8.8	95.6	4.4	95.0	5.0
UG Level 4	93.5	6.5	94.8	5.2	93.9	6.1
UG Level 5	96.2	3.8	99.2	0.8	98.5	1.5
UG Level 6	98.6	1.4	99.6	0.4	99.4	0.6
PGT Taught (Level 7)	96.9	3.1	97.7	2.4	97.8	2.3

**Table 3**

Snapshot comparison of student withdrawals at mid-January 2018, compared to mid-January 2019.  
Retention figures as at 15/01/2019.

**Table 3** also reveals clear evidence that the University is gaining 'traction' on student retention in 2018/19 across our 3-year BA/BSc degree programmes, and at all stages or levels of study. Withdrawal rates on our Foundation Year programme has been halved, and improvements are also notable at level 4 (1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate), and levels 5 and 6. We have also seen a marked improvement in retention on our taught post-graduate programmes at this stage in the academic year. Again, if this progress is maintained during the remainder of the academic year (i.e. to June 2019) we will see a significant increase in the proportion of student who progress successfully to the next stage of study and those who successfully complete their degrees with us.

The tables below (**See Table 4**) show data on withdrawal for our Foundation Degree students, or 'Other UG' as they are classified in TEF terminology. This shows that student withdrawals are significantly higher than those for our 3-year UG BA/BSc programmes. It also shows that withdrawal is particularly associated with the first year of these 2-year programmes. The compound withdrawal rate has remained stable at c.21.5% for the past three years. We recognise that this is unsatisfactory and details are set-out later in this Strategy in terms of how we are addressing this already in 2018/19, and how we intend to do so over the next 3 years to 2021/22.

		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Programme Type	Aos Period	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn
Foundation degrees	Compound	89.1%	10.9%	78.5%	21.5%	78.7%	21.3%	78.5%	21.5%	95.6%	4.4%

		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Programme Type	Aos Period	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn

Foundation degrees	Y1	84.0%	16.0%	73.3%	26.7%	70.5%	29.5%	76.3%	23.7%	93.8%	6.2%
	Y2	96.8%	3.2%	86.2%	13.8%	92.8%	7.2%	80.5%	19.5%	98.0%	2.0%

**Table 4**

Detailed breakdown of withdrawal rates on Foundation Degree programmes over the past 4 years, and also including withdrawals during the current academic year. Retention figures as at 15/01/2019.

In the table below (**See Table 5**) we provide data on student withdrawals on our post-graduate taught Masters programmes and PGCE programmes. The attrition rate has varied somewhat over the past 4 years with a 'high' of 8.3% in 2014/15 and a low of 6.4% in 2015/16. Last year's attrition rate was 7.3%, which was a significant reduction on the previous year.

		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Programme Type	Aos Period	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn
Postgraduate Taught	Compound	91.7%	8.3%	93.6%	6.4%	89.3%	10.7%	92.7%	7.3%	96.8%	3.2%

		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Programme Type	Aos Period	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn
PGCE	Compound	95.1%	4.9%	96.1%	3.9%	90.6%	9.4%	93.1%	6.9%	97.2%	2.8%

**Table 5**

Detailed breakdown of withdrawal rates on PGCE and Master's programmes over the past 4 years, and also including withdrawals during the current academic year. Retention figures as at 15/01/2019.

The withdrawal rates for PGCE students peaked in 2016/17 at 9.4% but also saw a significant reduction last academic year (2017/18) to 6.9%.

As mentioned above, the compound withdrawal figures for our Foundation degrees has remained relatively stable over the past few years (at about 21.5%). We recognise that this is not acceptable and that a step-change is required in our approach to enhancing retention on these programmes. Last year's withdrawal rates (2017/18) were also disappointing for our 3-Year undergraduate degrees, with a compound figure of 10%. However, there is clear evidence (**See Table 3**) of progress in terms of the retention 'picture' in January 2019, compared with January 2018. Retention rates are improved for all of our programme types, and all stages of study, with sole exception of Foundation Year 1, which has seen a small increase. We believe that measures which were put in place last year and also during the first half of the current academic year are now beginning to show real and demonstrable signs of 'impact' as measured by the January 2019 'snapshot'. This is extremely encouraging and we believe that the measures which will be actioned in the spring semester 2019, and in subsequent academic years (which are set out in the Action Plan below) will be effective in maintaining this progress.

The most recent Retention data produced by our Strategic Planning Office in February, showing withdrawal rates at the end of January 2019 have revealed further evidence of progress. The report shows comparisons with the picture this time last year (January 2018). There is tangible evidence that we are gaining traction on the issue of student retention across all areas of the University, and



that our 'attrition' figures are being managed downwards. Our core UG programmes had lost 150 students by this time last year; that figure is now 83. The number of withdrawn students on Foundation Degrees (FDs) has been halved compared to the picture last year. On year 2 of the Foundation Degrees the attrition was 6% in January 2018; it is now only 1%. A small reduction can also be seen for Year 1 of the FDs. There has been a significant improvement in post-graduate withdrawals, down from 53 last year to 39 students this year. Foundation Year withdrawals are also down from 9.1% in January 2018 to only 5% in January 2019. Looking across all programmes, at this time last year 224 had withdrawn by this point in the year. This year only 138 students have withdrawn. This means we have 86 more students with us than if the figures had not shifted. Every single type of programme (i.e. Undergraduate, post-graduate taught, foundation year and foundation degrees) is doing better than this time last year. Whilst we recognise that we have 3 months until most teaching ends in May/June 2019, if this progress is maintained the University will have achieved a significant improvement in retention overall in 2018/19.

### Where is student attrition focused?

The February Report on Retention suggests that withdrawals are focused in particular areas. If we exclude the Foundation Year programmes in each of our Faculties, and focus on mainstream Undergraduate programmes (including Foundation Degrees) we find that 7 UG programmes account for 21.9% of attrition. If we consider all taught provision (excluding the Foundation Year) 10 programmes account for 35.5% of attrition. If we include the Foundation Year, we find that 11 programmes account for 42.7% of attrition. In terms of the current picture of attrition in each Faculty, we find that 6 SHAS programmes account for 17.6% of all withdrawals, and one EHSS programme accounts 4.3% of all withdrawals. The same six SHAS programmes account for 30.1% of UG withdrawals.

Student attrition in our two Faculties (SHAS and EHSS) overall - when measured in 'heads' - is as follows (See Table 6):

Areas of attrition	Numbers	Numbers (UG & PGT Combined)
UG Heads (SHAS)	48	66
PG Heads (SHAS)	18	
UG Heads (EHSS)	47	68
PG Heads (EHSS)	21	
UG Heads (IoT)	4	4
PG Heads (IoT)	0	
	138	138

**Table 6**

Student withdrawals measured as 'heads' in our two academic Faculties (SHAS & EHSS).

This reveals a very even picture in terms of the levels of attrition at UG and PGT level overall, with numbers of withdrawn UG and PG students very similar in both Faculties. Attrition is not, therefore, focused primarily in one Faculty of the University – the numbers of withdrawn students in SHAS and EHSS are almost identical.

The majority of programmes in both Faculties and the Institute of Theology have only 1 or 2 withdrawn students. In the Institute of Theology, for example, there are only 4 students withdrawn in total across Foundation Degree and BA Degree programmes. Even though the Institute currently has 72 students on its post-graduate taught programmes, none have withdrawn. This is a very



pleasing level of retention. Only 3 programmes (PGCEs and Masters in Strength & Conditioning) account for nearly half of withdrawals at PGT level.

Undergraduate Attrition (Excluding FY) Blue = EHSS Yellow = SHAS

Areas of highest attrition	4 or more students withdrawn	Percentage of cohort withdrawn	Percentage of University withdrawals (138)	Percentage of UG withdrawals (83)
BAITT Primary (Yr 3)	6	6.2%	4.3%	7.2%
Fd in Football Education, Coaching & Development (Yr1)	5	16.7%	3.6%	6.0%
Applied Physics (Yr1)	4	30.8%	2.8%	4.8%
Sports Rehabilitation (Yr1)	4	5.9%	2.8%	4.8%
Physical & Sport Education (Yr1)_	4	7.1%	2.8%	4.8%
Psychology (Yr1)	4	7.1%	2.8%	4.8%
Strength & Conditioning	4	6.1%	2.8%	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>21.9%</b>	<b>37.3%</b>

Post-graduate Attrition (Masters + PGCE) Blue = EHSS Yellow = SHAS

Areas of highest attrition	4 or more students withdrawn	Percentage of cohort withdrawn	Percentage of University withdrawals (138)	Percentage of PGT withdrawals (39)
PGCE Primary	6	2.7%	4.3%	15.3%
PGCE Secondary	6	2.9%	4.3%	15.3%
Masters in Strength & Conditioning	6	2.1%	4.3%	15.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>46.1%</b>

**Table 7**

Student withdrawals by 'heads' and measured as a percentage of the total student cohort

**University Levels Statistics (Attrition)**

For the 10 separate UG and PGT programmes highlighted in the tables above, the totals are as follows (See Table 8):

<b>Totals (UG + PGT)</b>	<b>49 (out of 137)</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>35.5%</b>	<b>N/A</b>
--------------------------	------------------------	------------	--------------	------------

If we add attrition on the **Foundation Year** (In SHAS & EHSS), the following totals apply:

<b>Totals (UG + PGT)</b>	<b>59 (out of 137)</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>42.7%</b>	<b>N/A</b>
--------------------------	------------------------	------------	--------------	------------

**Table 8**

## Student withdrawals at University Level

The picture so far in 2018/19 is therefore positive; figures compare favourably with the picture this time last year. There is evidence that initiatives and interventions that were initiated in 2017/18, and those that were implemented in 2018/19, may be having a positive effect in ALL types of programmes in ALL parts of the University. However, it is recognized that this is a mid-year 'snapshot' and that the full impact of these interventions will not be clear until the beginning of the next academic year (i.e. following confirmation of the outcomes of appeals and reassessment).

## Student withdrawals in 2017/18

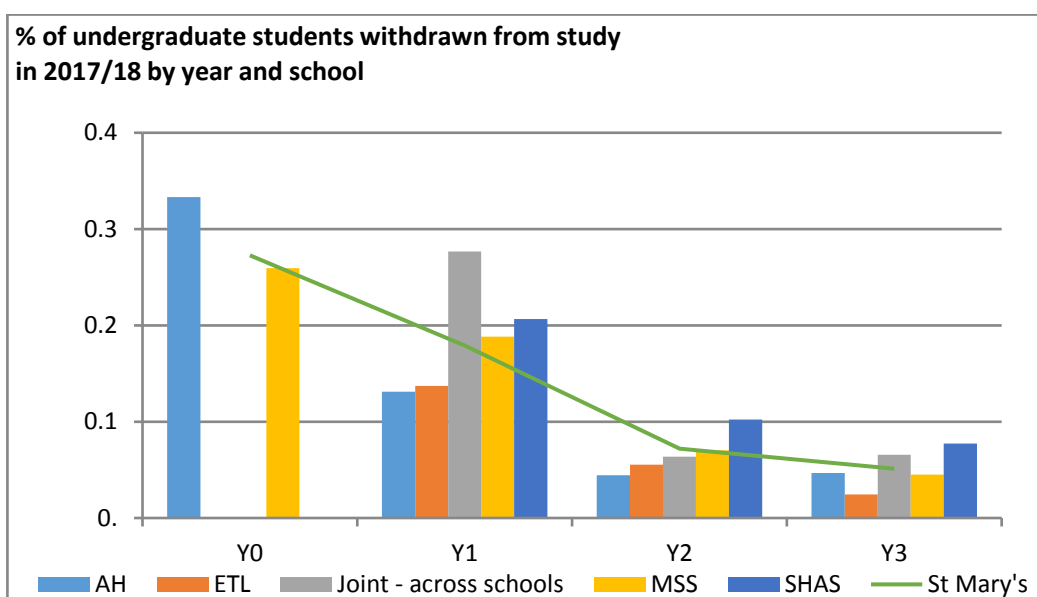
In 2017/18 the University saw its highest levels of withdrawals, but there were some variations in terms of where these were concentrated. In the table below (See Table 9 & Chart 3), the School of SHAS accounted for the highest withdrawal rates for 1<sup>st</sup> year Foundation degrees and 1<sup>st</sup> year, 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate BA/BSc degrees. Attrition on 1 year post-graduate programmes was highest in the School of MSS.

School	FdnY1	FdnY2	UGY0	UGY1	UGY2	UGY3	PGTY1	PGTY1 PT	PGT Y2P	PGTY3P	PGTY4P
AH			33.33%	13.11%	4.42%	4.68%	5.65%	14.29%	6.67%		
ETL	13.95%	16.44%		13.71%	5.53%	2.43%	6.70%	5.21%	4.10%	2.41%	
Joint degrees				27.66%	6.38%	6.58%					
MSS		21.43%	25.93%	18.84%	7.02%	4.50%	8.89%	33.33%	8.33%		
SHAS	37.50%	10.42%		20.66%	10.22%	7.73%	9.29%	19.67%	7.41%	3.57%	2.86%
St Mary's	22.96%	15.44%	27.27%	17.90%	7.19%	5.12%	7.16%	11.36%	5.28%	2.99%	2.86%

Table 9

Student withdrawals by School and by type of programme 2017/18.

Note: The Schools in this table pre-date the restructuring of the University into two Faculties.



**Chart 3**

Chart showing student withdrawals by School and by type of programme 2017/18.

Note: The Schools in this table pre-date the restructuring of the University into two Faculties.

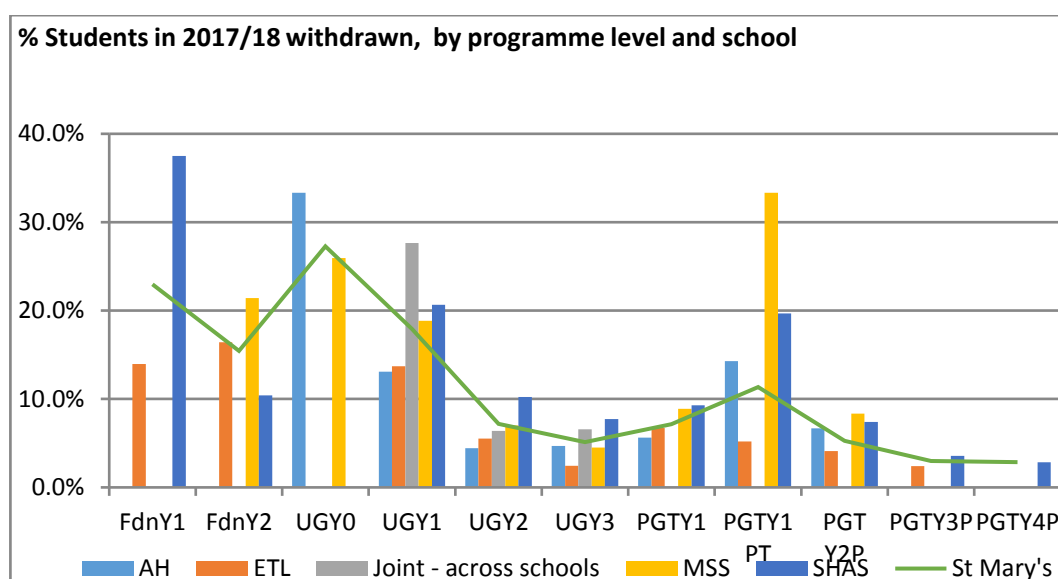
**Chart 4**

Chart showing percentage of students withdrawn in 2017/18 by School and type of programme

### Retention and student demographic groups

As identified in previous sections, withdrawals on Foundation degree programmes tends to be higher than on other programmes at St Mary's. Most of the Foundation degree students are located in the Faculty of Sport Health and Applied Science (SHAS). IN recognition of this, SHAS has initiated a range of enhancements to address retention not just on these programmes but across its portfolio of UG programmes. These include:

1. Introduction of Academic Behavioural Confidence quiz this year to ascertain areas where we could work with students to improve their academic confidence.
2. Attendance monitoring with students being contacted if not attending .
3. Personal Tutors / teaching staff liaising with Student wellbeing and other relevant support staff e.g. learning development lecturers.
4. Within two of the three Departments SHAS are trialing an enhanced personal tutor system which facilitates more frequent meetings with personal tutees.
5. Introduction of personal timetables for students
6. Staff email reply – maximum 48 hours turnaround
7. Induction processes geared to ensuring students develop a sense of belonging
8. Prompt assessment feedback (within 3 weeks of submission)
9. Improvement of feedback to help progression with future assessments – 3 clear action points identified for the individual student
10. Early resit opportunities and extra help sessions for failed work
11. Removal of level 4 semester 1 examinations.
12. Reviewing the volume of assessments in the forthcoming validation processes.

The table below (**See Table 12**) shows the withdrawal rates for broad ethnic groupings by level of study. At the Undergraduate level, white students have consistently had the lowest withdrawal rates compared to other ethnic groupings. Minority Ethnic students tend to have the highest withdrawal rates but they are also one of the smallest ethnic groupings at St Mary's. Asian students have had higher withdrawal rates than white students in all 3 years shown below, but the 'gap' between the

two groups narrowed considerably in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17. Black students have consistently had higher withdrawal rates than both White and Asian students, with the withdrawal rate of black students over twice that of white students in 2016/17. Last year, however, the gap narrowed slightly. We recognise that, along with improving the attainment of black students compared to other groups, we also need to address this difference in retention. In terms of PGCE students, the withdrawal rates among other ethnicities do not seem markedly different from white students who form the majority ethnic group, although it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions due to the small numbers of non-white students.

		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
		Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn
UnderGrad	Asian	93.5% 287	6.5% 20	93.1% 310	6.9% 23	91.2% 269	8.8% 26
	Black	91.8% 368	8.2% 33	87.8% 404	12.2% 56	83.8% 342	16.2% 66
	Gypsy or Traveller	100.0% 1		66.7% 2	33.3% 1	100.0% 2	
	Minority Ethnic	90.4% 85	9.6% 9	84.3% 86	15.7% 16	84.8% 78	15.2% 14
	Mixed	91.5% 225	8.5% 21	92.6% 237	7.4% 19	88.9% 209	11.1% 26
	Unknown	81.6% 40	18.4% 9	91.3% 42	8.7% 4	74.5% 35	25.5% 12
	White	93.9% 2,431	6.1% 157	94.6% 2,474	5.4% 141	91.8% 2,249	8.2% 200
PGCE	Asian	94.3% 33	5.7% 2	92.1% 35	7.9% 3	95.6% 43	4.4% 2
	Black	100.0% 11		86.4% 19	13.6% 3	88.9% 24	11.1% 3
	Minority Ethnic	100.0% 6		62.5% 5	37.5% 3	91.7% 11	8.3% 1
	Mixed	100.0% 20		90.0% 18	10.0% 2	88.2% 15	11.8% 2
	Unknown	66.7% 4	33.3% 2	60.0% 3	40.0% 2	88.9% 8	11.1% 1
	White	96.0% 315	4.0% 13	91.7% 319	8.3% 29	93.2% 302	6.8% 22

**Table 12**

Withdrawal rates by ethnic group 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18<sup>5</sup>

Across all ethnic groupings students are considerably less likely to withdraw as they progress through their degree, although white students consistently have lower withdrawal rates across all years than students of other ethnicities. The exception is Asian students in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year, who withdraw very infrequently.

<sup>5</sup> The use of the phrase “gypsy or traveller” in this table is taken directly from HESA – this is not a categorization of the University’s choosing.

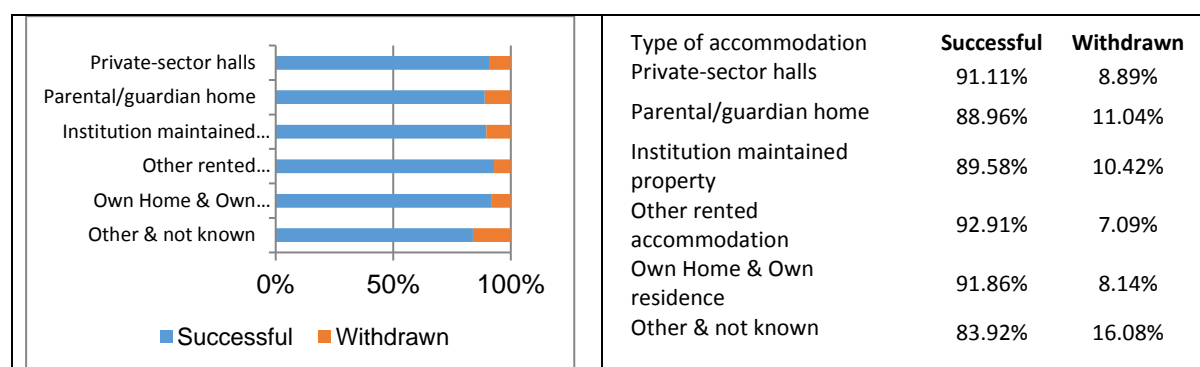
			2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
			Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn	Successful	Withdrawn
UnderGrad	Asian	Y0					75.0% 3	25.0% 1
		Y1	88.3% 121	11.7% 16	84.2% 101	15.8% 19	81.3% 61	18.7% 14
		Y2	96.8% 92	3.2% 3	96.8% 121	3.2% 4	94.9% 93	5.1% 5
		Y3	98.6% 71	1.4% 1	100.0% 83		94.8% 110	5.2% 6
		Y4	100.0% 3		100.0% 5		100.0% 2	
	Black	Y0					66.7% 4	33.3% 2
		Y1	82.4% 131	17.6% 28	76.2% 144	23.8% 45	73.3% 96	26.7% 35
		Y2	96.4% 133	3.6% 5	94.2% 129	5.8% 8	89.1% 123	10.9% 15
		Y3	100.0% 103		97.8% 131	2.2% 3	89.4% 118	10.6% 14
		Y4	100.0% 1				100.0% 1	
	Gypsy or Traveller	Y1	100.0% 1		50.0% 1	50.0% 1		
		Y2			100.0% 1		100.0% 1	
		Y3					100.0% 1	
	Minority Ethnic	Y0					100.0% 2	
		Y1	83.3% 30	16.7% 6	70.8% 34	29.2% 14	75.8% 25	24.2% 8
		Y2	93.8% 30	6.3% 2	96.2% 25	3.8% 1	87.1% 27	12.9% 4
		Y3	96.2% 25	3.8% 1	96.4% 27	3.6% 1	92.3% 24	7.7% 2
	Mixed	Y0					50.0% 2	50.0% 2
		Y1	85.6% 77	14.4% 13	85.4% 82	14.6% 14	84.1% 58	15.9% 11
		Y2	96.2% 76	3.8% 3	96.3% 79	3.7% 3	90.7% 78	9.3% 8
		Y3	93.4% 71	6.6% 5	97.4% 75	2.6% 2	93.4% 71	6.6% 5
		Y4	100.0% 1		100.0% 1			
	Unknown	Y0					100.0% 1	
		Y1	50.0% 9	50.0% 9	75.0% 12	25.0% 4	54.2% 13	45.8% 11
		Y2	100.0% 20		100.0% 10		100.0% 8	
		Y3	100.0% 11		100.0% 20		92.9% 13	7.1% 1
	White	Y0					71.4% 10	28.6% 4
		Y1	89.5% 848	10.5% 99	87.3% 801	12.7% 117	85.2% 649	14.8% 113
		Y2	95.1% 780	4.9% 40	97.6% 816	2.4% 20	93.8% 744	6.2% 49
		Y3	97.8% 790	2.2% 18	99.5% 839	0.5% 4	96.0% 822	4.0% 34
		Y4	100.0% 13		100.0% 18		100.0% 24	

**Table 13**  
Student withdrawals by ethnic groupings and undergraduate levels of study

Black students have the highest withdrawal rates at each level of study, with the sole exception of Minority ethnic students who in 2017/18 had a slightly higher withdrawal rate in Year 2. The withdrawal rates of Asian students in 2017/18 are not very different to that of White students. In fact the number of withdrawals of Asian students in Year 2 is lower than for White students. The

data suggests that in terms of withdrawals, the levels are highest generally for Black and Minority ethnic students and the University's strategy on retention is aimed at addressing this via the creation of a more inclusive learning environment, which is discussed in greater detail in the next section of this Strategy document.

If one considers withdrawal figures in relation to the accommodation lived-in by our students we can see that those living in their own home and private sector halls have the lowest withdrawal rates. These students are likely to have greater personal financial resources or come from more advantaged backgrounds which may be a factor in influencing low withdrawal rates. The highest withdrawal rates are for those living in the parental home or properties maintained by the University. These are likely to be lower-cost options and therefore withdrawal may reflect socio-economic backgrounds.



### A 'holistic' approach that benefits all our students

In this Strategy we set-out how we intend to achieve continued improvements in the retention of our students at undergraduate and post-graduate level. Whilst we recognise that some programmes had particularly high attrition rates in 2017/18 (e.g. the Foundation degree programmes), our approach in this Strategy is not to put in place limited or targeted interventions focused on the needs of just this constituency of 'Other UG' students. In a similar vein we have not invested in resources or interventions that will only benefit or impact on part-time students. We believe that we have an obligation to improve the student experience and to build enhancements that benefit all of our students and this is the defining feature of our long-term strategy as set out in the document.

We have chosen therefore, to take a more holistic and integrated approach in which the emphasis is on taking actions, introducing enhancements, initiating interventions and improving processes that will be beneficial for all of our students at St Mary's regardless of their background or the programme they are studying on, which we believe will drive enhancements in retention across all programmes and all stages of study over the next 4 years. An excellent example of this is our commitment to developing a new Curriculum Framework at St Mary's. The 1<sup>st</sup> iteration of the Framework has already been subject to extensive consultations and Iteration 2 is now in place and will be subject to further consultations with our students, our staff, our alumni and employers. We aim to have a finalised version of the UG Framework approved by our Board of Governors by June 2019, and a new Framework for our taught post-graduate programmes will build on this, and will be developed during 2019/20. This holistic, strategic approach to enhancement will drive a major step-change in the adoption of 'high-impact' and inclusive pedagogies and improvements in pre-arrival orientation and post-arrival academic and social induction that evidence in the sector shows can drive major improvements in student engagement and retention. There are early signs that this holistic institutional-level approach to enhancement is already paying dividends in terms of the January 2019 'snapshot' retention data (compared with January 2018).

### Structural change focused on driving an embedded and systematic approach

Our commitment to improving the student experience is reflected in recent structural changes to the University which were enacted during the 2017/18 academic year. The University initiated a major, 'once-in-a-generation' restructuring which saw our 4 existing schools of study reconfigured into two larger and more sustainable Faculties. Governance structures were streamlined as part of this restructuring thereby ensuring enhanced reporting and monitoring of institutional performance – including that with regard to student retention. New 'Faculty Deans' and 'Associate Dean for Student Experience' roles were created, with latter, especially, focused on driving and coordinating Faculty-level actions and enhancements in student retention, student engagement, success and progression.

In addition, as part of the restructuring of the University, a new Dean of Learning and Teaching role was established. Our inaugural Dean of Learning & Teaching is Dr Adam Longcroft. Dr Longcroft has led, with the support of the University, the creation of a new *Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success (CTESS)*, which has rapidly become a powerful and influential agent of change, providing strong and coordinated University-level leadership of enhancement across many areas, including the development of the Curriculum Framework referred to above, and a range of interventions focused, for example, on improving the support for students at reassessment, improved procedures for identifying and supporting 'students at risk' and designing new course design and approval processes (Validation and Re-Validation) which place greater emphasis on addressing key metrics like retention, student satisfaction and student outcomes. CTESS has been a critical factor in re-energising a strategic approach to enhancing retention and as can be seen in the Action Plan below, will play a crucial role in providing leadership and coordination of the retention-focused enhancements at St Mary's over the next 4 years of this Strategy.

Despite the changes outlined above, we recognise that maintaining a healthy Staff-Student Ratio (SSR) is important in ensuring that students receive the high level of support they deserve. Our SSR has not been adversely affected by the restructuring process since reductions in staff numbers have been accompanied by a reduction in overall student numbers.

### **The Foundation Year Programme**

Our commitment to a strategic and integrated approach to enhancing the retention of our students is reflected in the University's creation of a Foundation Year programme. The purpose of the Foundation Year is to recruit students at Level 0 who either have failed to gain the UCAS tariff they needed for direct entry to a 3-Year BA/BSc, or those who feel they need to develop their experience of study at HE level before progressing to a 3-Year degree. Its objective is to ensure that our level 0 students are better equipped to cope with the challenges they will encounter at level 4, and to enhance their retention, and their successful progression to levels 5/6. The Foundation Year Programme was validated in July 2017. In the first academic year, there were three pathways. These attracted 30 students recruited solely through Clearing:

- Humanities
- Psychology
- Business Management

The ethos of the Programme is embedded in 'belonging' and 'confidence' developed through a combination of pastoral and pedagogical practice which not only instils trust between the lecturer and the student but establishes the lecturer as a supportive and approachable point of contact.

The student-centred approach offers:

- weekly tutorials
- enhanced support
- intensive communication – sometimes daily meetings/discussions with students
- strict monitoring of attendance
- continuous assessment of student progression and engagement



This has been achieved partly by the innovative use of social media ('WhatsApp') as a mode of communication which students feel comfortable with and that ensures retention through instilling feelings of belonging and confidence; and encouraging peer engagement. Private 'WhatsApp' messaging enables the PDs and lecturers to reinforce the ethos of compulsory attendance and the expectation of engagement and participation. The ethos developed by the PDs has been disseminated amongst the growing team of FY lecturers through Away Days, and the Foundation Year motto '*Learning to Belong*' encompasses not only the expectations of the teaching staff upon the student, but the expectations that the students should place upon the lecturers and Programme Directors. The Foundation Year recruited 100 students in September 2018 and retention rates (as indicated in the January 2019 'snapshot' (See Table 3) indicates extremely high rates of student retention at this stage. CTESS served as 'incubator' for the Foundation Year during 2017/18 and the programme, now firmly established, has recently transitioned into the two Faculties. We have ambitious plans for the future growth of the Foundation Year and we believe that it will have a very significant positive impact on the retention of our students at levels 4 and beyond over the duration of this Retention Strategy.

### Corporate KPI Targets

The University's Senior Management Team and Board of Governors have agreed a set of critical KPIs which will take us through to the end of our **Vision 2025** Corporate Plan<sup>6</sup> in 2025/6. This includes a commitment to reduce student attrition and enhance completion rates. We have committed to an overall reduction across all our UG/PGT programmes to a compound figure of 8% attrition (92% completion) by 2020/21 and 6% attrition (94% completion) by 2025/26. The University is drawing on its own data (provided via our Strategic Planning Office) and data available to us from the Office for Students (e.g. our Year 4 TEF Metrics Data) to identify areas where additional focus, resource and action is required with regard to student retention.

### TEF: Year 4 Metrics Data

Our Year 4 TEF Metrics (provided in Nov 2018) have been a useful reference point. The Core Metrics on 'continuation' are positive in the sense that they are not the subject of one or more negative flags. Our only negative flags are for assessment & feedback metric (NSS).<sup>7</sup> We have one positive flag on 'highly skilled employment', and we have a double positive flagged on the supplementary LEO earnings metric. However, we are in the bottom 10% of absolute performance on part-time continuation. The part-time student continuation % figure for St Mary's is **56.3%** compared to a benchmark figure of 64.5%.

This shows that whilst our continuation rates overall are not as good as we would like them to be, we will need to pay particular attention to the continuation of our **part-time students**, and the programmes in which they are located. There are 350 part-time students (heads) spread across different programmes and across our two Faculties, and they constitute 9% of the student body. Calculated as FTE the figures are 222 students and 6%.

We are aware that a relatively high proportion of the part-time students at St Mary's are categorised as 'Other UG'. Moreover, 41% of the part-time headcount is 'other UG' compared to only 5% of the full-time headcount. The 'Other UG' category relates to our Foundation degree students, who have higher withdrawal rates than students on 3-year BA/BSc degree programmes.

Subject(s)	Head count	% of p/t student body
Subjects allied to medicine	22	5%
Sport & exercise sciences	100	29%

<sup>6</sup> Vision 2025. St Mary's University, Twickenham. See: <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/about/vision-2025/vision-2025.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> St Mary's University, Twickenham. TEF Year 4 Data.

Psychology	10	3%
Geography and environmental sciences	5	1%
Sociology & social policy	5	1%
Law	10	2%
Business management	15	4%
Communication & media	5	1%
English	5	2%
History & archaeology	5	1%
Philosophy and religious studies	65	19%
Creative arts	5	1%
Education & teaching	105	31%
Total	357	100%

**Table 2**

The location of our part-time students at St Mary's by subject, and their proportion(s) of the overall part-time student body. Source: TEF Year 4 Metrics Data

### TEF: Our Split Metrics

These reveal some valuable nuances in the headline Core Metrics data. For example, the split metrics reveal that our continuation figure of **90.5%** is 0.1% above that of our benchmark institutions in the sector (90.4%). Continuation data is the subject of a positive flag in relation to Polar 1 & 2, which means that our performance in ensuring the continuation of students from low participation neighbourhoods is significantly stronger than our benchmark. None of the other data splits (e.g. age, ethnicity, disability) are the subject of positive or negative flags in relation to continuation. This suggests that we are comparable to our direct competitors in terms of our continuation (retention) rates across all the splits, and that we compare particularly favourably on Polar 1 & 2.

However, this is not good enough. We are ambitious and are aspirational and are committed to achieving a 'Gold' rating in a future iteration of the TEF. If we are to succeed in achieving this ambition, we will need to improve our continuation performance faster than our benchmark group of universities and gain positive flags – or preferably double positive flags – for our continuation metrics. If we can achieve our corporate KPI goal of achieving a 92% compound continuation figure by 2020/21, and 94% by 2025/6, we believe that this will ensure that our continuation metrics attract positive flags, thereby increasing significantly the likelihood of a gold rating in TEF 2020/21.

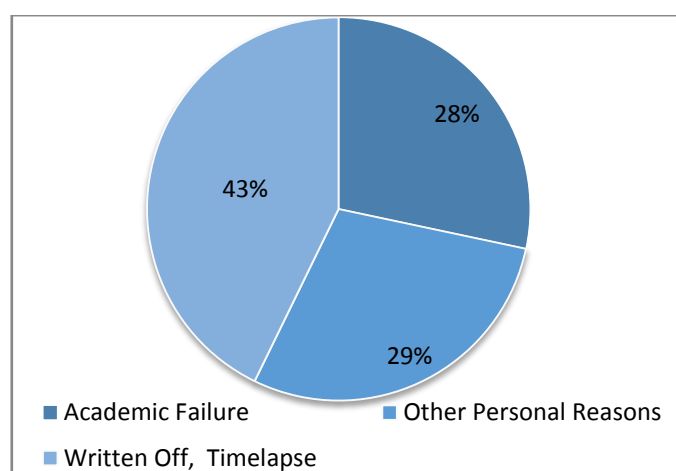
### Understanding our students better

We are committed to understanding our student body better and using this information to drive enhancements in retention. This is why we have invested in an enhanced '*Student Attendance Monitoring System*' (based around CELCAT), which is already providing dramatically improved insights into levels of student engagement across programmes, and it is why we have recently also developed a new '*Policy on Students at Risk*', which will draw on a range of data (including attendance data) to identify students deemed to be at heightened risk of withdrawal or under-performance, and to then ensure that effective interventions and support are actioned to ensure that any issues impacting on engagement or attainment are understood and addressed. Our concern about student continuation has also been the key driver of the development of a new *Personal Tutor Dashboard* (£100k investment in 2018/19) which will dramatically improve the information and data

available to Personal Tutors about the engagement and attainment of their tutees, and enable them to support the needs of their tutees in a much more timely and effective way. Our existing Student Information System is old and in need of replacement. It places huge constraints on our ability to extract useful data that might inform future strategies around retention. Our commitment to the retention of our students has also been instrumental in the decision to invest over £3 million (over a three year period) in a new '*Student Information and Tracking System*' (SITS). This will enable the university to draw upon and utilise educational analytics and engagement and performance data more quickly, and in more sophisticated ways, to support the continuation of all of our students.

### Why Do St Mary's Students Leave?

We do not currently have a large amount of high-quality qualitative data on the reasons students give for leaving St Mary's. However, during 2017/18 the data we do hold suggests that academic failure accounts for 28% of withdrawals with personal reasons accounts for 29%.



**Chart 5**  
Reasons for withdrawal 2017/18

However, we cannot disambiguate between those who left for reasons of pastoral concern and those who voluntarily withdrew following poor academic performance. Similarly, we cannot disaggregate those students whose academic failure in 2017/18 was due to personal and pastoral challenges that may not have been addressed adequately by the University. We recognise that we need to gather more reliable and nuanced data on the reasons for withdrawal. In order to gain improved insights, from the start of 2018/19 academic year we have initiated a procedure by which withdrawing students are invited to attend an exit interview either with their Personal Tutor or their Programme Director. This data will be subject to detailed analysis and the findings will be reported via our Academic Development Committee and Academic Board.

### Commuter students

One of the areas we are determined to understand better is that of the needs of our commuter students. We need to develop better insights into the challenges they face, and to develop more nuanced insights into the differences within this large body of students that create different pressures and challenges for each sub-group. Those who drive more than an hour or more to our campus (perhaps living 30-40 miles away) will, after all, be dealing with different challenges to those who travel in by bus from the local area (i.e. within a 5 mile radius) in a 15 minute journey. What we do know is that the proportion of our students who are classified by HESA as 'commuters' has grown over the past few years, just as it has across the sector. Over a 20+ year period, the % of commuter students in the sector has grown from around 8% to around **25%** (according to Sutton Trust). However, a recent HEPI report published in December 2018, placed St Mary's in the 'Top 20' of UK

universities in terms of the proportion of students who live in the parental home (42%), rather than in rented accommodation with other students on or off campus.<sup>8</sup>

Provider name	Parental/guardian home	
Newman University	1,170	64.5%
City, University of London	3,655	63.9%
Glasgow Caledonian University	6,290	60.1%
The University of the West of Scotland	5,750	57.8%
Scotland's Rural College	690	53.6%
The University of Wolverhampton	6,575	53.4%
Middlesex University	5,440	53.1%
The University of Westminster	5,365	52.7%
Ravensbourne	1,040	52.6%
The University of Bradford	3,475	52.5%
The University of Sunderland	3,545	49.6%
University of the Highlands and Islands	2,470	48.8%
Queen Mary University of London	4,435	47.1%
The University of East London	3,765	44.1%
University of the West of England, Bristol	7,130	43.9%
Birmingham City University	6,635	42.8%
Staffordshire University	3,520	41.9%
St Mary's University, Twickenham	1,475	41.8%
Teesside University	3,665	41.4%
University College Birmingham	1,250	41.2%

Source: HESA Student Record [2015-16]. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited.  
Excludes providers with under 1000 UK undergraduate full-person equivalent.

**Table 3**

*Top 20 UK universities by proportion of students living in the parental/guardian home*

This is a major seismic sectoral shift, and not one - argue the authors - that Universities have yet succeeded in responding to in terms of ensuring that the needs of commuter students are fully addressed. The authors of this report have highlighted the fact that "There is evidence to suggest that commuter students have poorer outcomes and are less engaged and satisfied with their academic experience".<sup>9</sup>

The taxonomy of commuter types on p.11 of this report (see below) provides a simple way of establishing the level of 'risk'. The likelihood is that most of our commuter students at St Mary's would fall into the bottom right box in the illustration below - i.e. higher risk.

	Close to place of study	Distant from place of study
Cohabit with other students	<b>'Typical' residential student</b> Higher social engagement potential Lower travel disruption potential	<b>'Social' commuter student</b> Higher social engagement potential Higher travel disruption potential
Lives alone or cohabits with non-students (eg parents, family etc)	<b>'Home' commuter student</b> Medium / lower social engagement potential Lower travel disruption potential	<b>'Higher-risk' commuter student</b> Lower social engagement potential Higher travel disruption potential

<sup>8</sup> HEPI Report No.114, *Homeward Bound: Defining, understanding and aiding 'commuter students'*. See: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/12/13/homeward-bound-defining-understanding-aiding-commuter-students/>

<sup>9</sup> HEPI Report No.114, *Homeward Bound: Defining, understanding and aiding 'commuter students'*. p.6. See: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/12/13/homeward-bound-defining-understanding-aiding-commuter-students/>

**Table 4**  
*A taxonomy of commuting students by level of 'risk'*

What is now becoming abundantly clear from the research in the sector is that commuter students, face challenges that campus-based students do not. It is therefore important that we change how we structure our learning environment to accommodate their needs.

The authors of this report have set out some key recommendations as to how universities can and should provide a more supportive environment that maximises their opportunities to engage successfully with higher education.

1	Making induction more Commuter friendly (e.g. 'Living at Home' pre-programme residential experiences on campus).	We will be offering a similar programme for our commuter students from Sept 2019 onwards. The impact will be carefully evaluated to determine its impact on retention. We aim to attract 30 students onto the residential (as a pilot) in Sept 2019, with subsequent cohorts of 50 and 70 in 2020 and 2021 respectively.
2	Developing a better definition of 'commuting students' and developing better insights into their diversity, their behaviours (e.g. engagement), their study 'experience' and outcomes.	We will be initiating a project during 2019/20 in collaboration with the SMSU to develop better insights into the make-up of our commuter study cohort, and their perceived needs. This will produce valuable data that can inform future retention initiatives focused on the needs of this constituency. This project will begin in Sept 2019, and will be the subject of a summative report to our Academic Board by January 2020. Actions/recommendations will be implemented during Feb-July 2020 so they are in place in time for the start of the new academic year 2020/21.
3	Providing better information to commuting students on travel options.	We will be reviewing and updating (and enhancing) the information and guidance we provide to commuter students on SimmSpace (our student-facing intranet). New information will be in place by Sept 2019.
4	Making timetables coherent and user-friendly/convenient for Commuter students - e.g. avoiding requiring students to travel in for one educational event.	Understanding which programmes have the highest proportion of commuter students is our first priority. We will then use this information to target the production of more commuter-friendly timetables. Further work will also be done to ensure the earlier release of timetables to aid advance planning by commuter students.
5	Providing dedicated quiet spaces and dedicated study spaces for Commuters.	Steps are already in train to provide a dedicated space for commuting students.
6	Valuing students who live in local area as a tie/link to the wider local community.	The SMSU's ' <i>Be Your Borough initiative</i> ' launched in July 2018 (and funded by the University) addresses this by utilising local student ambassador champions to coordinate St Mary's events a series of our neighbouring boroughs. The project will be evaluated at the end of its first year of operation to determine its impact on the retention of students from our local boroughs.

**Table 5**

Summary of key recommendations from a 2018 HEPI Report on 'Commuter Students' and How St Mary's is addressing them. Source: HEPI Report No.114, *Homeward Bound: Defining, understanding and aiding 'commuter students'*.p.6. See: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/12/13/homeward-bound-defining-understanding-aiding-commuter-students/>

Although not included in the study summarised above, one might also add a 7<sup>th</sup> point to the list in Students tend to engage more effectively and are more highly motivated when they can see the 'point' of the learning or can see how the assessment they are doing is 'authentic' and related closely to knowledge or skills they are likely to have to apply in their chosen careers. Research confirms that commuter students frequently have to make 'value' judgments about whether it is worth travelling for 2 hours to attend a taught session (a commitment of time and financial resource). Content and assessment must, therefore, be informed by 'relevance', and must be 'authentic' in their design. If students understand in advance the value of attending a session in terms of the wider impact on their learning or eventual career preparedness, they are more likely to prioritise attendance over other priorities.

### **Towards a 'Sticky Campus'?**

Programmes are the most easily measured aspect of student engagement, and the data points to a concentration of challenges in specific programmes. However, it is also important to consider the University-wide experience. For example, learning provision (library resources and opening times), university-managed accommodation (costing/condition) and issues, which impact commuting students in disproportionate ways (timetable changes, university-wide communication, price structures in the Refectory).

The University should remain alive to low-level concerns in the student experience which aggregate into more significant dissatisfaction. One key initiative being undertaken in parts of the sector (Abertay University, the University of Manchester and, Staffordshire University) has been that of the 'sticky campus'—the campus that students, once in, wish to remain in. By creating a sticky campus, a University can make itself more attractive for academic work and social events, with a particular benefit for the outcomes of commuter students.

In order to promote the 'sticky campus' at St Mary's we have made a number of changes that will – we hope – encourage more of our students, especially our commuting students, to spend more of their time on our campus. This includes:

1. Identifying and refurbishing a dedicated study space for our commuter students - This is currently being refurbished by our Estates service with study facilities, comfortable lounge-style seating and basic kitchenette facilities so that they have a place other than the Library or Café's (which require purchases) where they can relax, read, work on the work stations or have a snack or hot drink. This space will be open to students by April 2019.
2. Improvements to the Library – a comprehensive programme of Library refurbishment was completed towards the end of the 2017/18 academic year, which has seen the introduction of a comfortable, high-quality space with enhanced seating and study pods. This newly refurbished space is now much more welcoming and pleasant for students and is being very intensively utilised by students.
3. A Timetable Working Group was established in 2017/18 to coordinate improvements in timetabling across the University. The timetable for spring semester was made available to students much earlier than previously (on 7 Dec), and this group is now working towards a much earlier release of the autumn 2019 timetable in July 2019 – well in advance of most other Universities in the sector. Efforts are being made to avoid single events being timetabled in any one day, with contiguous blocks of timetabled sessions scheduled wherever possible so as to minimise repeat journeys for our commuter students, and maximise the time they spend on our campus when they are here.



4. SMSU events – The SMSU has recognised that evening events are not always accessible to commuter or part-time students and has increased its provision of day-time activities and events on campus in 2018/19.<sup>10</sup>
5. Further improvements to the centre of the campus are included in our Estates Plan for 2018/19. It will include the ‘Student Heart’ project which is essentially joining together the four buildings that face onto the playing field on campus as social/living/learning spaces to give students a place to go when they are on site and foster the inclusivity and friendliness at the heart of what we offer.

### **Be Your Borough: Commuter Students Initiative (SMSU)**

The research in the sector on student retention shows very clearly that a key element in maintaining high levels of retention is ensuring that students develop early-on a ‘sense of belonging’ and also positive, supportive ‘relationships’ either with other students or staff (or both). This is (arguably) just as important for commuter students as it is for students living on our campus or very close by. But strategies that rely on commuter students engaging with events or ‘activities’ on campus simply exacerbate the challenges for commuters since they have to make repeated journeys to engage with them. Here at St Mary’s we believe that we must meet our commuter students ‘half-way’ by supporting interventions and activities that are based where THEY live. We know that a significant number of students come from neighbouring boroughs such as Hounslow and Isleworth. We have therefore funded an innovative new initiative by our Students Union called ‘*Be Your Borough*’ during 2017/18. When looking at the attrition rates of students that have to travel in for times equal to or greater than 30 minutes, we see that there are areas of London that we need to pay more attention to. Hounslow has a large population of St Mary’s students (201 in 2016/17) and had a retention dropout rate of over 10%. Areas such as Croydon had an attrition rate of 17.2%.

Be Your Borough utilises a community-based rep scheme that helps the Union to engage with students that are normally not engaged. The SMSU are running activities all over London and taking St Mary’s Students’ Union to the boroughs that our students live in – taking away the ideology that the community is solely based in our campus in Twickenham. Already, the project is creating organic groups that belong to St Mary’s but are groups of students in their own communities where they feel more of an infinity to. This exciting project promises to provide the SMSU and the University with much-improved insights into how a sense of St Mary’s identity and ‘community belonging’ can be fostered outside the campus of the University.

### **A new St Mary’s Curriculum Framework focused on retention**

We realise that this requires a more fundamental step-change in our use of HE pedagogies. This is why we are committed to designing and implementing a new Curriculum Framework. The 1<sup>st</sup> iteration of our new framework was the subject of extensive consultation with students and staff between October and December 2018. The 2<sup>nd</sup> iteration of the Curriculum Framework was circulated to staff and students in January 2019. It includes a strong focus on inclusive pedagogies and draws extensively on research in the sector that relates to this theme. The 2<sup>nd</sup> iteration will be the subject of further consultations with students, staff, our alumni and employer representatives between January and March 2019.

This is important for several reasons. Firstly, the nature of our student body has changed over the past 5 years, with an increasing proportion of students coming from widening participation backgrounds, including mature students, students from Polar 1 & 2 (low participation) geographical neighbourhoods, students with disabilities and care leavers. 57% of our students now fall within the OfS’s WP categories. The design, delivery and assessment of our programmes needs to reflect this changing composition of our student body, and needs to focus on the students we have, rather than the students we used to have, or would like to have. Secondly, the OfS and, in particular, the Director of Fair Access is increasingly focused not just on ‘access’ to HE, but the success of WP

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.stmaryssu.co.uk/>



students whilst they are with us, and their progression of our students into well-paid graduate careers (or further HE study). In our recent Access & Participation plan to the OfS we have committed to addressing our BAME attainment gap which stood at 20% in 2016/17 in terms of the difference in the proportion (%) of black/white students with a good honours outcome. Our goal is to close this gap by 2022/23 (i.e. over the next five years). Third, inclusion is one of our core values at St Mary's. Our Curriculum Framework will need to promote the development of a 'more level playing field' that ensures that all of our students have equal opportunities to engage effectively and to succeed in achieving their potential. Fourth, inclusive approaches to programme design, module content, teaching and assessment are also those which the research in the sector clearly demonstrates inform high levels of student retention.

Essentially it means that our new Framework is based upon a bedrock of inclusive practice.

Including:

1. Inclusive content
2. Inclusive pedagogies
3. Inclusive assessment and
4. Inclusive induction.

Inclusive approaches are key to ensuring that the attainment (and therefore successful progression and retention) of all our students is maximised.

So far work on the Curriculum Framework has focused on our undergraduate programmes, but consultations on a parallel Framework for our post-graduate (Masters) programmes will begin in April 2019. This will have the same emphasis on embedding inclusive approaches to programme design, pedagogical practice and assessment focused on maximising the retention of all students.

### The 'mindful university'

One recent development in the sector is the emergence of the 'Mindful University' which provides a welcoming and supportive environment for new students (especially those from BME and WP backgrounds) that enables them to flourish and develop personally, and succeed in their studies. The focus of a recent HEPI report authored by Anthony Seldon and Alan Martin is on creating "a culture in which students and staff can develop capacities to meet adversities so that problems are less likely to manifest themselves in the first place".<sup>11</sup> The HEPI report identifies ways in which mindfulness can be emphasised both for students and for staff, and also provides a checklist of things that can be done to manage student transitions more effectively. Some of these actions focus on institutional level changes, but some may be influenced by course leaders, module leaders and individual lecturers. The table below summarises the main recommendations of the report by Seldon and Martin and explains how we are addressing these areas.

Establish early contact with students prior to arrival.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effective use of the pre-arrival period to develop a sense of belonging and to build student confidence is a key focus of our new Curriculum Framework.</li> <li>• The Inductions &amp; Transitions Enhancement Strategy Board (chaired by the Dean of Learning &amp; Teaching) will be focusing on initiatives that help to build relationships between students and between students and our staff before the start of the autumn semester.</li> <li>• We will also be piloting the use of pre-arrival skills audits and micro formative assessments that enable students to evaluate their own preparedness for study, and to help our staff to identify early-on any learning support that students may need, resulting in rapid interventions/support.</li> </ul>
---	---

<sup>11</sup> Seldon, A & Martin, A., (2018) *The Positive and Mindful University*, HEP Occasional Paper No.18. See: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Hepi-The-Positive-and-Mindful-University-Paper-18-Embargoed-until-21st-Sept.pdf>

Establish a system of student mentoring so new students' transition can be aided by other students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>St Mary's established a new Personal Tutor system in 2016, which is now in place for all UG and PGT (Masters) students. In autumn 2018 our Faculty of Sport, Health &amp; Exercise Science piloted on 3 programmes a more intensive personal tutoring system which integrates more regular mandatory one-to-ones and small group sessions. This will be evaluated in June/July 2019 for possible wider roll-out in 2019/20.</li> </ul>
Mandate regular meetings between personal tutors and their advisees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These are mandated within our Personal Tutor Policy. Programme Directors are responsible for monitoring the effective implementation of the Policy within their programmes, and Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring &amp; monitoring departmental compliance. Faculty's monitor its operation via Faculty Academic Development Committees.</li> </ul>
Introduce a matriculation activity - where new arrivals are inducted into the ethos and expectations of the university and have briefing on mindfulness, resilience and wellbeing etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>St Mary's already operates a Welcome Week programme which focuses on both the academic and social integration of our new students into our community. The St Mary's Student Union has coordinated briefings for all students that focus on aspects of mindfulness, resilience and wellbeing. Our Wellbeing Service (part of Student Services) is prominently 'flagged' during Welcome Week programmes.</li> </ul>
Get to know your students as individuals, and valuing them as such.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are fortunate to have relatively small cohorts on many of our programmes at St Mary's, which means that our staff get to know our students very quickly as individuals, with specific needs etc.</li> </ul>
Use students as leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have a student mentoring system at St Mary's which is well established and coordinate by staff in our Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success (CTESS). The impact of this scheme is monitored and thoroughly evaluated on an annual basis.</li> </ul>
Encourage healthy lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our Student Union promotes highly lifestyles via its own programme of events and workshops. The SMSU's future 'Plan' includes supporting student welfare and wellbeing as a key priority. The SIMMS Mental Health Campaign is already underway and has the strong support of the University.</li> </ul>

### Rapid 'in-year' interventions to address student retention

The University has recognised that when data clearly shows that its practices are in some way disadvantaging a particular group of students or placing unnecessary barriers in their path, that it has a moral obligation not just to act to address any disadvantage, but to be 'fleet of foot' and to act fast – in-year – to address issues before they impact on current students. The University can identify two examples where action has been taken in-year to remove a potential disadvantage and to facilitate both enhanced fairness and equality of opportunity and to improve retention.

#### *Are You Resit Ready?*

The first relates to students referred to reassessment. In April 2018 an analysis of our existing arrangements for providing support for students who had to undertake Summer 'resit' exams (July) suggested that, in fact, existing support was neither consistent, or in some cases of high quality, therefore placing students at a heightened risk of failure (again) at their 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt. The newly created Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success (CTESS) took the lead on coordinating (very rapidly) a new initiative called *Are You Resit Ready?*, which provided a centralised programme (18/19 June 2018) with high levels of input from colleagues in our central services (e.g. the Library and Registry, and Student Services) and the Students Union. It also entailed individual module

convenors providing bespoke support for their resit students. *Are You Resit Ready?* was underpinned by four key principles:

- Academic Success
- Confidence Building
- Belief and Investment in students
- Community Building

To ensure student wellbeing throughout *Resit Ready* and to help provide the attending students with ongoing support, various community building and social events were planned to ensure that *Resit Ready* was enjoyable. This 'pilot' intervention will be repeated with a target of 40 attendees in June 2019, with number targets growing to 50 and 60 in 2020 and 2021. The majority of students who attended this pilot programme passed their resits and feedback from students on its value was positive. The speed at which CTESS coordinated this initiative demonstrated the energy that this new Centre will bring in future to our retention-focused interventions and activities. The *Are You Resit Ready?* initiative illustrates our commitment, and our focus (referred to previously) on putting in place enhancements that benefit all our students.

### *Exam Replacement Intervention*

As previously highlighted, our retention strategy is focused on building enhancements that benefit all students and not just small constituencies or sub-groups. However, whilst we believe that this integrated, holistic approach is the most effective way of enhancing retention on all our programmes, we also recognise that sometimes it is and will continue to be necessary to act on data which suggests that a particular category of students may be unfairly disadvantaged by existing approaches to teaching or assessment. An example of the latter is provided below in an intervention focused on examinations.

The second in-year intervention relates to examinations and our BTEC students. As part of our continued drive to enhance the student experience we have been focused increasingly on ensuring that our decisions at St Mary's are evidence informed, and driven by the increasingly impressive data analyses that are provided by the Strategic Planning Office. In October 2018 data reports from colleagues in the Strategic Planning Office revealed an 'odd' dichotomy between the exam outcomes of students in the 1<sup>st</sup> year who accessed St Mary's via A Levels on the one hand, and via BTEC Diplomas on the other. The data revealed that one of the main factors that impacts on our BTEC students' ability to progress effectively to Level 5 is the presence of examinations as a form of assessment at Level 4. At St Mary's a high proportion of students (especially on programmes in our Faculty of Sport, Health and Applied Sciences, and to a lesser extent in the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences) have accessed our degrees via BTEC Diploma routes. The latter are primarily assessed via coursework assessments rather than exams. BTEC students often lack the academic 'capital' and prior recent experience of examinations to enable them to cope effectively with this kind of assessment. Our Student Union President campaigned to remove winter examinations for the reasons explained above. She felt passionately that examinations were unfair and created unnecessary obstacles to student success and was voted into her post on this basis.

If we take our BTEC student body, in 2017/18, **29.20%** of BTEC students who attempted an exam failed at least one, compared with only **9.97%** for students who entered via A Level routes. If we consider students who passed all exams, the figure for A level students was 89.05%, whilst that for BTEC students was considerably lower at 68.37%. If we look again at modules with an exam component, and consider the difference between students' performance in exams, versus their performance in coursework components, we find that the exam mark for all students tends to be lower, which acts as a 'drag' on module average marks. In the Faculty of Sport, Health and Applied Science, in modules with an exam, the average exam mark was lower than the average coursework mark in 22 out of 37 modules. In 6 of these cases, the exam mark was more than 5 percentage points lower than that for the coursework element, and in one case the difference was more than 17 percentage points.

Academic Strategy Executive, and the Academic Development Committee highlighted three key issues that we needed to address:

1. We are utilising exams on too many modules at Level 4.
2. The over-utilisation of examinations is having a disproportionately adverse impact on BTEC students.
3. We are setting examinations at the wrong time of year. Our winter exams, set in January, come after a vacation period when many students will have had little choice but to spend 4 weeks or more in paid work trying to earn sufficient funds to see them through the spring semester. Winter exams should therefore be deleted in future – a strategy which has the strong support of our Students Union President.

With these points in mind a ‘pilot’ Exam Replacement Intervention was put into action which focused on those exams that exist at Level 4, and in particular, those which sat within autumn semester modules. Following consultation with our students and our external examiners, existing level 4 exams were replaced with alternative assessments where it was possible to do so without impacting on quality/rigour, or placing PSRB accreditation requirements/compliance at risk. Student were given the option of opting-out, and doing the exam if they wished. About 40 chose to do so out of a total of 315. The impact of this in-year intervention will be fully evaluated in April/May 2019 with a report to Academic Board in June 2019.

### What work is being done already?

Much excellent and frequently innovative work is currently being undertaken during 2018/19 to improve retention across the University. A brief summary of some of the initiatives and enhancements focused on building student retention is provided below:

Enhancement	Objective	Leadership/Coordination
Transition into university		
<b>1. Student Induction &amp; Transitions Enhancement Strategy Board.</b> This Board has cross-University membership and coordinates the work of 6 separate work streams focused on enhancing key aspects of induction and transitions. Chaired by Dean of L&T.	This Board’s objective is to enhance the effective integration of students at UG and PGT level into their university studies at St Mary’s and to enhance their preparedness for the challenges that will face them, regardless of whether they are new or returning students.	CTESS Faculties Services
<b>2. Pre-arrival induction and welcome-focused activities</b> - Programmes in EHSS are already increasingly engaging with pre-induction activities, following and adapting the “Are You Ready?” model developed in Drama. Pre-arrival activities are also in place in SHAS.	Build an early sense of commitment and belonging. Effective, regular communication, through various means, facilitates the transition to HE, and is also strategically key for recruitment, as some students may otherwise be tempted to “trade up” during the clearing period.	Faculties

<p>3. Our <b>Welcome Week</b> programme, including aspects of academic and social induction, have been improved with CTESS providing a key coordinating role in ensuring that centralised and local-level activities or events are properly integrated.</p>	<p>Enhanced induction into university study, and enhanced sense of belonging.</p> <p>The SMSU has been involved in a delivery of a series of cross-service briefings for students providing a much more joined-up provision of information for our new Level 3 (Foundation) and Level 4 students. Welcome Week now provides a strong combination of academic and social orientation activities, including team-building events etc.</p>	CTESS
<p>4. The <b>Transitions Peer Mentoring Programme</b> runs with four programmes: Business Management, Physical and Sport Education, Sport Rehabilitation and Psychology, with one LDL in CTESS coordinating each scheme. For mentees, the focus is on providing a visible framework during transition to support the whole cohort of first year students in forming friendships and managing their studies, with a specific emphasis on approaches to reading. They also draw on their first year experience to inform their mentees about the value placed on reading in HE and provide practical support, for example, effective use of MyModules.</p>	<p>Improved early integration into university life, enhancement of social networks (i.e. social capital) and improved sense of belonging.</p> <p>Enhanced preparedness for the challenges of university study and improved subsequent academic performance (success).</p> <p>Feedback from mentees in 2017/18 was extremely positive and indicated that the scheme had fulfilled its primary goals. 80% of mentees had used services associated with overcoming risk factors, 75% valued the scheme, over 80% felt the reading advice received by mentors was helpful, and 100% would recommend it to other students.</p>	CTESS
<p>5. <b>Get Set for Success</b>, a 2-day programme focused on supporting WP students to transition speedily into the University, has run successfully each September prior to Welcome Week. It ran with 80 students on 3-4 September 2018. A comprehensive programme, it draws together staff from CTESS, Students Services, Registry, Library, the Faculties and SMSU to provide a multi-dimensional confidence building experience that also builds a strong sense of belonging to the University</p>	<p>Evaluation of past years' (2013-2017) data showed that participants had significantly higher levels of confidence after the programme than before, looking at general and academic confidence. This shows that the programme has an established impact on students' confidence levels and meets its main aim. In two of the past three years, students who have engaged with GSFS have a significantly lower withdrawal rate than other WP students who did not attend, and the wider Level 4 student cohort.</p>	CTESS
Student support		

6. Our <b>Personal Tutor Policy</b> has been phased in over the past three years and now extends to all students at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Enhanced training is being provided for our Personal Tutors to ensure that they are properly supported in their role.	More students will benefit from having a personal tutor in 2018/19. Improved practice by Personal Tutors and enhanced 'referral' to central sources (i.e. sources of support). Earlier interventions aimed at supporting students at risk of under-performance or withdrawal.	CTESS
<b>7. Learning Development Lecturers</b> (LDLs) provide one-to-one support for students, and small group sessions, along with 'embedded session' on modules on topics like Time Management and Critical Reading/Writing skills. LDLs have been assigned to support programme teams in 2018/19 whose programmes had the highest levels of student attrition in 2017/18.	Improved student support – especially for WP students and those most in need of remedial guidance and advice about study skills and strategies. Improved retention on 15 programmes with the highest student attrition rates.	CTESS
<b>8. English language support</b> is provided to students whose first language is not English. This is coordinated by CTESS.	Improved language support improves quality of student work, which improves academic performance and success – improved continuation and retention.	CTESS
<b>9. Students at Risk Procedure</b> – focused on drawing on existing data sources (e.g. attendance, no-submission, student failure) to alert Personal Tutors to high risk tutees who may be at risk of under-performance or withdrawal. Procedure will be considered by Academic Board for formal approval in Jan 2019.	Improved provision of timely information to Personal Tutors to enable them to identify rapidly students who are 'at risk' on basis of 'behavioural characteristics' (e.g. attendance), attainment (e.g. failure, reassessment) and involvement in a process (e.g. Leave of absence, plagiarism hearing, Fitness for study process etc).	CTESS – process development and approval  Faculties – Implementation/m onitoring impact
<b>10. Personal Tutor Dashboard.</b> This new online platform/tool currently in development will provide a major improvement in the provision of information to Personal Tutors	Dashboard will enhance the opportunities for Personal Tutors to support student retention (e.g. via improved flow of information with tutees) and to intervene when necessary to support students/refer to central services.	CTESS – development of dashboard and implementation of tool. Faculties – utilisation by PTs
<b>11. Leap Forward to Level 4</b> An intensive 2-day programme to support the progression of Foundation Year Programme (Level 3) students into Level 4 programmes	Ran for the first time as a 'pilot' in June 2018. To be repeated in June 2019.	CTESS led pilot Faculties to lead implementation in 2019.
Assessment		

<b>12.Improvement of assessment briefs.</b> A project is already well-advanced to review and improve our assessment 'briefs' at St Mary's to ensure that the information provided to students about the expectations and parameters of their assessments are clearer. This builds on work done previously in 2017/18	Production of a Handbook for Assessment Briefs that provides academic staff with detailed guidance on how to maximise the effectiveness of their briefs. Evidence from projects in other HEIs shows enhancements to assessment briefs can have a significant impact on retention and closing of attainment gaps.	CTESS
<b>13.Are You Resit Ready?</b> Intensive 2-day 'bootcamp' for reassessment students coordinated centrally by CTESS but involving input from central services (e.g. Library, Registry, Student Services) and Faculties.	Ran for first time as a pilot in June 2018.	CTESS
Administrative/process/systems improvements		
<b>14.Registration processes,</b> and the process by which students can access their accommodation, have been streamlined, making them much more user-friendly and efficient.	Removal of unnecessary barriers to rapid integration into university of life. Improved sense of 'welcome' and positive feelings about arriving at university. Enhanced sense of a high quality initial experience.	Registry
<b>15.Our withdrawal process</b> has been modified so that an 'exit conversation' is arranged with each student, either with their Programme Director or Personal Tutor.	Improved understanding of why our students leave. The reasons for withdrawal are being recorded in greater detail than ever before, thereby providing enhanced insights into the 'causes' of withdrawal, and creating opportunities to address some of these factors in the future, thereby reducing the likelihood of withdrawal.	Faculties (collecting) Registry (reporting)
<b>16.CTESS RAG Ratings</b> for all programmes during the Validation/Re-Validation process. These will require programme teams to address metrics which have poor ratings (including retention) and attainment gaps. RAG Rating have been approved and will become a key aspect of our new Validation procedures.	Forensic focus on retention and vehicle for capturing innovative practice. Innovative ideas/interventions will be closely monitored via RAG Rating Process by Dean of L&T, who will disseminate good practice and, where justified, require changes to reflect good practice.	CTESS (Dean)
Retention-focused pedagogies		



<p><b>17.Improved dissemination of retention-focused academic practice.</b>CTESS has worked with our Faculties to put in place a series of <i>‘Teaching Excellence Showcase Seminars’</i> which have the aim of disseminating best practice and practice which has proven to be effective in supporting student retention. A series of six seminars will run between November 2018 and July 2019.</p>	<p>Improved awareness and adoption of academic pedagogical practices based on ‘proven’ models that work. Drawing on our own examples of excellence and using these to drive improved pedagogies across all programmes.</p>	<p>CTESS</p>
<p><b>18.Improved data provided to programme teams</b> to drive improved retention. Programme teams are being provided with details data on their retention (and other metrics) as part of the Programme Review process and are setting-out detailed action plans as to how they intend to address any concerns around retention rates.</p>	<p>Targeted interventions by programme teams is likely to address the specific factors contributing to premature withdrawal at programme level. The impact of the action plans will be closely monitored during subsequent Programme Approval processes.</p>	<p>Strategic Planning Office Faculties</p>
Curriculum design		
<p><b>19.Introduction of a new Curriculum Framework for UG programmes.</b> A key aspect of our long-term, 4 year Retention Strategy to 2021/22. It will take 4 years to re-validate all programmes so that they are compliant with the Framework, and then to implement a phased introduction (e.g. Validation 2019/20, Level 4 compliant in 2020/21, Level 5 compliant in 2021/22, level 6 compliant in 2022/23</p>	<p>1<sup>st</sup> Iteration consultations completed. Consultation on 2<sup>nd</sup> Iteration of Curriculum Framework proposals will span period Jan-March 2019. Agreed Framework in place by June 2019. Implementation will cover the 4 years of this Retention Strategy (i.e. 2018/19 – 2021/22.</p>	<p>CTESS</p>
<p><b>20. Foundation Year programme.</b> The Foundation Year was launched in September 2017 with a cohort of 30 students and in September 2018 began its 2<sup>nd</sup> year of delivery with 100 students. The FY has recently transitioned into the Faculties and ambitious plans for its future growth are in development.</p>	<p>The FY programme is a major, strategic initiative aimed at providing a supportive and student-centred route into HE at level 0, and at enhancing student retention at level 4, and beyond.</p>	<p>Faculties</p>

### Retention Action Plan for the Future (February 2019 –July 2021)

Initiative	How we will support this objective	Leadership	Metric(s)
Retention-focused pedagogies			

<b>1.Disseminating and embedding best practice.</b> Drawing on examples from St Mary's and elsewhere in the sector in curriculum/course design and inclusive HE practices – in particular those that relate to pedagogy and assessment/feedback.	Building inclusive practice will be key to reducing attrition, and closing student attainment gaps. CTESS will work with Faculties, Professional Services including Human Resources, Student Services, the SMSU and others to develop appropriate CPD in pursuance of this aim over the duration of this Retention Strategy. This will include an enhanced programme of CPD for academic staff, annual Festival of Learning & Teaching and a series of Learning & Teaching 'Showcase' events, flagging innovation and best practice.	CTESS, working with Faculties and Services	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion) Teaching Quality <b>NSS</b> Qs 1-4 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7 Assessment & feedback <b>NSS</b> Qs 8-11 Academic Support <b>NSS</b> Qs 12-14
<b>2.Enhancement of the PG Cert Academic Practice</b> to drive better integration of inclusive 'Powerful pedagogies' contained in the Curriculum Framework	CTESS has taken over the management and delivery of the Pg Cert AP from the School of Education for 2018/19. CTESS staff will work with colleagues from across the two new faculties to enhance the development of training/guidance on inclusive, retention-focused pedagogies and teaching interventions.	CTESS, working with staff in Faculties.	<b>Student retention</b> (completion) Teaching Quality <b>NSS</b> Qs 1-4 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7 Assessment & feedback <b>NSS</b> Qs 8-11 Academic Support NSS Qs 12-14
<b>3.Enhanced use of online Apps</b> to build belonging, community, engagement, attainment and retention	Leaders of Foundation Year will lead a 'WhatsApp Roadshow' which will share the results of pioneering work and use of WhatsApp within the Foundation Year programme, which has achieved high levels of retention with a relatively low tariff cohort.	Faculties	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Academic Support <b>NSS</b> Qs 12-14
4.The University's annual <b>Teaching and Learning Festival</b> will maintain a strong focus on promoting retention-focused practices	TESS will coordinate the development of a Learning and Teaching Festival annually during the period covered by this Retention Strategy.	CTESS	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Teaching Quality <b>NSS</b> Qs 1-4 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7 Assessment & feedback <b>NSS</b> Qs 8-11
Administrative/process/systems improvements			
<b>5.SMT members will be allocated a 'Meet a senior leader' slot</b> to which all students will be invited. (Roughly monthly sequence). This will provide SMT members with	CTESS will coordinate. Provides an additional point of contact which students can use to raise issues or communicate concerns that could have an impact on retention. Meetings to take place roughly once a month.	CTESS working with secretary of SMT. Implement 2019/20	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  <b>NSS</b> Scores

opportunities to meet face to face with students and will provide an additional route for two-way feedback.			
<b>6.Enhanced programme Validation/Re-validation Process</b>	CTESS will undertake a comprehensive review of the Validation/Re-Validation policy and processes. RAG rating system will focus on addressing any weaknesses in student retention metrics.	CTESS has led the development of a revised Process. It will continue to monitor and keep under review implementation over the period covered by this Retention Strategy.	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  <b>DLHE 1 &amp; 2 % Scores</b>  Teaching Quality <b>NSS</b> Qs 1-4 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7 Assessment & feedback <b>NSS</b> Qs 8-11 Academic Support <b>NSS</b> Qs 12-14
<b>7.Personal Tutor Dashboard</b>	CTESS will work with Faculties to monitor the effective implementation and impact of the Personal Tutor Dashboard during initial roll-out in 2019, and thereafter in each academic year over the duration of this Strategy.	CTESS	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Academic Support <b>NSS</b> Qs 12-14
<b>8.Development of SRS (SITS)</b>	The University has invested over £3 million in the development (with Tribal) of a SITS student record system. Consequent improvements to students experience, and the Universities ability to draw on educational data to drive improved data-driven decision-making and enhancements – e.g. with regard to retention.	CTESS	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Organisation & management <b>NSS</b> Qs 15-17
<b>9.Support for students at risk.</b> The University is currently developing a robust process for identifying, monitoring and supporting 'students' at risk' of withdrawal or underperformance.	CTESS will work closely with Faculties, Registry Services, Student Services, students and others to put in place a new system that enables the University to identify students deemed to be 'at risk' and to put in place interventions to support them. The objective is to reduce student attrition and enhance student success and progression.	CTESS, working with staff in Faculties, Services and SMSU.  Operational implementation will be led by Faculties.	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Academic Support <b>NSS</b> Qs 12-14
<b>Student induction &amp; transitions</b>			
<b>10.Enhanced Student Induction/Transitions</b>	The Dean of L&T will chair the Student Induction & Transitions Enhancement Board during 2018/19 (working closely with the Student Engagement and Retention Officer) to coordinate student induction (for all UG and PGT students) in Sep 2019, and each autumn for the	CTESS, working with Faculties, Services and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Teaching Quality <b>NSS</b> Qs 1-4

	remainder of the period covered by this Retention Strategy.		Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7 Academic Support <b>NSS</b> Qs 12-14
<b>11. Get Set for Success for be expanded</b>	Get Set for Success to be expanded in Sept 2019.	CTESS, working with Faculties, Services and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Assessment & feedback <b>NSS</b> Qs 8-11
<b>12. 'Leap-forward to level 4' Summer Residential for Foundation Year students</b>	This ran successfully as a pilot in June 2018. FY leads to coordinate delivery of this initiative in June 2019, and in subsequent years of this Retention Strategy.	Faculties	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Academic Support <b>NSS</b> Qs 12-14 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7
<b>13. Transitions Peer Mentoring programme</b>	CTESS will coordinate, in partnership with Faculties, the extended use of peer mentoring, focused on improving student integration, belonging and retention, and also the development of mentor's transferrable skills.	CTESS, working with staff in Faculties, Services and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Student outcomes <b>DLHE</b> 1 & 2 % scores
Widening participation & closure of attainment gaps			
<b>14. WP Strategy Implementation</b>	CTESS will coordinate the delivery of the University's Access Agreement in 2018/19-2021/22 focused on enhancing access, success and progression of WP target groups. It will undertake the monitoring of Access Agreements & future Access & Participation Plan and coordinate implementation of a WP Strategy Board and associated work streams to ensure effective delivery of goals and milestones set out in both.	CTESS, working with Services and Faculties, and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)
<b>15. Equality &amp; Inclusion Committee (Students)</b>	The Dean of L&T will Chair the Equality & Inclusion Committee (Students), with Head of WP as Vice-Chair and operational lead. Focus on how to create a more inclusive learning environment that promotes positive outcomes for all students, including BAME students, and closing of attainment gaps. Improved retention of BAME groups.	CTESS, working with Faculties, Services and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion) <b>BAME Attainment Gap</b> (Good honours outcomes)
Assessment			
<b>16. Institution-wide review of assessment &amp; feedback</b>	Working with Faculties and Institutes, CTESS will coordinate a review focused on enhancing the University's NSS scores for assessment & feedback. This will	CTESS, working with staff in Faculties, and Services, and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)

	include undertaking work on the volume of assessment, the types of assessment (e.g. the use of examinations), inclusive assessment, and the enhancement of feedback practices including assessment 'briefs'. Deadline for completion July 2019.		<b>NSS Qs 5-7</b> Assessment & feedback
<b>17. Enhancement of the PG Cert Academic Practice</b> to drive better integration of inclusive and retention-focused assessment practice(s).	CTESS has taken over the management and delivery of the Pg Cert AP from the School of Education for 2018/19. CTESS staff will work with colleagues from across the two new faculties to enhance the development of training/guidance on inclusive, retention-focused assessment practices.	CTESS, working with staff in Faculties.	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion) Teaching Quality <b>NSS</b> Qs 1-4 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7 Assessment & feedback <b>NSS</b> Qs 8-11 Academic Support NSS Qs 12-14
<b>18. Are you Resit Ready?</b> Summer residential for resit students.	Working with Faculties and Services, CTESS will coordinate planning and delivery of this event in June 2019, and in subsequent years of this Retention Strategy.	CTESS, working with staff in Faculties, Services and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Academic Support <b>NSS</b> Qs 12-14 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7 Assessment & feedback <b>NSS</b> Qs 8-11
Learning Environment			
<b>19. Lecture Capture</b>	The University has established a Lecture Capture Project Board and a Project Working Group to oversee the development of a Learning (Lecture) Capture Solution for a 'pilot' roll-out in 2019/20, and wider implementation from 2020/21-2021/22.	CTESS, working with Services and Faculties and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Teaching Quality <b>NSS</b> Qs 1-4 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7
<b>The University will adopt a 'student voting' (Polling) software solution</b>	CTESS will coordinate research aimed at identifying an appropriate polling system for use by St Mary's during 2018/19, with a view to roll-out of a solution on a pilot basis in 2019-20.	CTESS, working with staff in Faculties, Services and SMSU	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Teaching Quality <b>NSS</b> Qs 1-4 Learning Opportunities <b>NSS</b> Qs 5-7
Curriculum design (Masters)			

<b>20.The Development of a 'St Mary's Curriculum Framework' for PGT (Masters Programmes)</b>	CTESS will coordinate the development of a new PGT curriculum framework, and will make the necessary arrangements to ensure that appropriate consultations are in place with students, and staff. The framework consultations will start in Oct 2019. A new Framework approved by Board of Governors by May 2020.	CTESS, working with staff in Faculties, Services and SMSU, + employers and alumni.	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)  Student outcomes <b>DLHE 1 &amp; 2 % Scores</b> <b>Teaching Quality NSS</b> <b>Qs 1-4</b> <b>Learning Opportunities</b> <b>NSS Qs 5-7</b> <b>Assessment &amp; feedback</b> <b>NSS Qs 8-11</b> <b>Academic Support</b> <b>NSS Qs 12-14</b>
<b>21. Foundation Year Programme</b>	New pathways have already been developed for the FY for 2019/20 and further pathways will come on stream in 2020/21. The Foundation Year will continue to play a key role in driving-up student retention over the life of this Strategy.	Faculties	<b>Student retention</b> (Continuation & Completion)

### Illustrative overview of the timing of actions to enhance retention

The table below provides what we hope is a useful graphic summary of the short, medium and long-term initiatives that characterise this Strategy

<b>Short-term</b>	2018/19 academic year
<b>Medium term</b>	2019/20 academic year
<b>Long term</b>	2020/21 Academic year + 2021/22 Academic year

### Initiatives already underway Sept 2018-Jan 2019

N°	Actions/Interventions	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
<b>Initiatives already underway Sept 2018-Jan 2019</b>				
1	WP Strategy Board			
2	Pre-arrival induction		Ongoing improvements	
3	Welcome week		Ongoing improvements	
4	Transitions mentoring programme		Repeat/grow programme	
5	Get Set for Success		Repeat programme	

6	Personal tutor policy (policy & training updated)		Routine application	
7	Learning development lecturers		Routine application	
8	English language support		Repeat programme	
9	Students at risk procedure		Routine application	
10	Personal Tutor Dashboard		Routine usage	
11	Leap forward to Level 4		Repeat programme	
12	Enhancement of assessment briefs		Disseminate/Adopt	
13	Resit Ready		Repeat programme	
14	Registration			
15	Withdrawal			
16	Implementation of RAG Ratings		Routine application	
17	Improved training re academic practice		Ongoing improvements	
18	Improvements in data from Strategic Planning Office		Ongoing improvements	
19	Development of Curriculum Framework for UG programmes		Validations	Delivery

### Retention Action Plan for the Future (Feb 2019 –July 2022)

Nº	Actions/Interventions	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
<b>Retention Action Plan for the Future (Feb 2019 –July 2022)</b>				
1	Dissemination of best practice in L&T			
2	Enhancement of Pg Cert AP (Pedagogies)			
3	Online 'Apps' to support retention			
4	Teaching & Learning Festival			
5	SLT/SMT members assigned to programmes			
6	Enhanced Validation/Re-Validation		Routine implementation	
7	Personal Tutor Dashboard			
8	Student record system			
9	Students at Risk procedure			
10	Enhanced induction & transitions support			
11	Get Set for Success			
12	Leap forward to Level 4			



13	Peer mentoring programme			
14	WP Strategy implementation			
15	Closing attainment gaps			
16	Review of assessment & feedback		Routine implementation	
17	Enhancement of Pg Cert AP (Assessment)			
18	Resit Ready			
19	Lecture capture solution			
20	Curriculum Framework' for PGT (Masters) Programmes			Validations + delivery

**Appendix A: Withdrawal Rates by Programme 2017/18**

Quartile	No.	Course Name		Successful	W/D	Grand Total	W/D %
		Grand Total		5047	532	5579	9.54%
A	1	Sport Science Single Hons		328	53	381	13.91%
	2	Sport Rehab Single Hons		219	28	247	11.34%
	3	Masters in Strength and Conditioning		276	26	302	8.61%
	4	Phys & Sport Edu Single Hons		218	26	244	10.66%
B	5	Education and Social Science Single Hons		150	25	175	14.29%
	6	Strength and Conditioning Single Honours		160	24	184	13.04%
	7	Psychology Single Hons		131	17	148	11.49%
	8	BAITT Primary Education (3 Year)		353	15	368	4.08%
	9	Nutrition Single Hons.		87	13	100	13.00%
	10	Foundation Degree - Health & Fitness		27	12	39	30.77%
	11	Foundation Degree - Sports Coaching		46	11	57	19.30%
	12	Sports Coaching Science Single Honours		69	11	80	13.75%
	13	Business Management Single Hons		132	10	142	7.04%
C	14	Criminology and Sociology		50	9	59	15.25%
	15	Foundation Degree In Youth Ministry		8	9	17	52.94%
	16	Leading Innovation & Change		168	9	177	5.08%
	17	PGCE Primary with QTS Full Time		156	9	165	5.45%
	18	MSc Sport Rehabilitation (Pre-Registration)		44	8	52	15.38%
	19	Foundation Degree - Psychology & Counselling		22	7	29	24.14%
	20	Foundation Degree in Football Education, Coaching and Development		22	7	29	24.14%
	21	Sports Management		40	7	47	14.89%
	22	BA Acting		63	6	69	8.70%
	23	Charity Management		23	6	29	20.69%
	24	English Single Hons		44	6	50	12.00%
	25	Foundation Degree Education In Context		98	6	104	5.77%
	26	Law Single Hons		138	6	144	4.17%
	27	Philosophy Single Honours		28	6	34	17.65%
	28	Applied Physics		22	5	27	18.52%
	29	Health and Exercise Science Single Honours		31	5	36	13.89%

	30	MSc Human Nutrition		28	5	33	15.15%
	31	PGCE Secondary Mathematics with QTS		27	5	32	15.63%
	32	Theology, Religion, and Ethics Single Hons		65	5	70	7.14%
	33	Tourism Management Single Honours		38	5	43	11.63%
	34	Business Law and Business Management		19	4	23	17.39%
D	35	Legal Studies Single Hons		5	4	9	44.44%
	36	MSc Applied Sports Nutrition		27	4	31	12.90%
	37	Bioethics and Medical Law		37	3	40	7.50%
	38	Catholic School Leadership		157	3	160	1.88%
	39	Geography Single Hons		24	3	27	11.11%
	40	Law with Criminology (Single Honours)		17	3	20	15.00%
	41	MA International Sports Journalism		5	3	8	37.50%
	42	Media Arts and Film & Screen Media		12	3	15	20.00%
	43	Media Arts Single Honours		44	3	47	6.38%
	44	MSc Nutrition and Genetics		9	3	12	25.00%
	45	PGCE Primary with QTS Part-Time (Core)		49	3	52	5.77%
	46	Phys & Sport Edu and Sport Science		8	3	11	27.27%
	47	Applied Sport and Exercise Physiology		26	2	28	7.14%
	48	BA Business Management with Foundation Year		5	2	7	28.57%
	49	Drama & Theatre Arts Single Hons		98	2	100	2.00%
	50	Foundation Degree in Practitioners in Healthcare Ethics, Theology and Care		7	2	9	22.22%
	51	History Single Hons		70	2	72	2.78%
	52	International Business Management		8	2	10	20.00%
	53	MA in Creating Writing: First Novel		26	2	28	7.14%
	54	MA in Education, Culture & Society		7	2	9	22.22%
	55	MA in Education: Pedagogy		38	2	40	5.00%
	56	Nutrition and Sport Science		17	2	19	10.53%
	57	PfCE Secondary Mathematics with QTS			2	2	100.00%
	58	PGCE Primary with QTS Full Time - PE Specialism		33	2	35	5.71%
	59	PGCE Secondary Biology with QTS		11	2	13	15.38%
	60	PGCE Secondary Chemistry with QTS		6	2	8	25.00%

61	Phys & Sport Edu and Hlth & Exercise		3	2	5	40.00%
62	Primary Education (Work-Based Route)		10	2	12	16.67%
63	Psychology (with foundation year) (Hons)		7	2	9	22.22%
64	Psychology and Sport Science		5	2	7	28.57%
65	Psychology with Nutrition		2	2	4	50.00%
66	Sports Coaching Science Single Honours - Post Foundation		13	2	15	13.33%
67	Applied Sport Psychology		25	1	26	3.85%
68	BA Business Management and Finance with Foundation Year		1	1	2	50.00%
69	BA International Business Management with Foundation Year		1	1	2	50.00%
70	BA Sports Management with Foundation Year		5	1	6	16.67%
71	Business Law and Philosophy		3	1	4	25.00%
72	Business Management and Entrepreneurship		8	1	9	11.11%
73	Business Management and Psychology		2	1	3	33.33%
74	Drama & Applied Theatre Single Hons		21	1	22	4.55%
75	Education and Social Science and History		2	1	3	33.33%
76	Education and Social Science and Theology & RS		2	1	3	33.33%
77	English and Film & Screen Media		2	1	3	33.33%
78	English and History		7	1	8	12.50%
79	English and Media Arts		1	1	2	50.00%
80	English and Philosophy		4	1	5	20.00%
81	English and Prof Crtve Wrtng		11	1	12	8.33%
82	English Literature (with foundation year) (Hons)			1	1	100.00%
83	Health and Exercise Science Single Honours - Post Foundation		12	1	13	7.69%
84	History (with foundation year) (Hons)		2	1	3	33.33%
85	History and Media Arts		1	1	2	50.00%
86	History and Theology & RS		3	1	4	25.00%
87	History with Education and Social Science			1	1	100.00%
88	Hlth, Exercise & Physical Activity and Nutrition		10	1	11	9.09%
89	Irish Studies		2	1	3	33.33%

90	MA Academic Practice (Higher Education)		13	1	14	7.14%
91	MA Human Trafficking, Migration and Organised Crime		10	1	11	9.09%
92	MA in Education, Pedagogical Leadership in Physical Education and Sport		19	1	20	5.00%
93	MA in Theology		16	1	17	5.88%
94	MA Public History		14	1	15	6.67%
95	Master of Arts Sports Journalism		30	1	31	3.23%
96	Media Arts and Sport Science		1	1	2	50.00%
97	MSc International Business Management		5	1	6	16.67%
98	Nutrition and Psychology		1	1	2	50.00%
99	Nutrition with Hlth, Exercise & Physical Activity		1	1	2	50.00%
100	PfCE Primary with QTS Full-Time		3	1	4	25.00%
101	PfCE Secondary Biology with QTS		2	1	3	33.33%
102	PfCE Secondary Religious Education with QTS		1	1	2	50.00%
103	PGCE Secondary Modern Languages with QTS		31	1	32	3.13%
104	PGCE Secondary Physics with QTS		8	1	9	11.11%
105	Phys & Sport Edu and Education and Social Science		1	1	2	50.00%
106	Phys & Sport Edu and Sociology			1	1	100.00%
107	Phys & Sport Edu with Geography		4	1	5	20.00%
108	Prof Crtve Wrtng and Film & Screen Media		13	1	14	7.14%
109	Prof Crtve Wrtng Single Hons.		44	1	45	2.22%
110	Psychology with Philosophy			1	1	100.00%
111	Psychology with Sociology		1	1	2	50.00%
112	Sociology Single Hons		26	1	27	3.70%
113	Sport Rehabilitation Single Hons (Forces)			1	1	100.00%
114	Technical Theatre (Fast Track)		12	1	13	7.69%