# CETL Briefing Papers: Student Monitoring

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### Aims of the Initiative

The CETL initiatives addressed in the SAS CETL have been centred primarily on several of the issues around supporting and enabling the development and achievement of students.  The main themes have been *tracking and monitoring* to promote retention and progression, *PDP, ePortfolios and study skills* to support student development and *accessibility* to ensure equality of access and support diversity.  In the first years of the CETL, work was done to develop and promote effective strategies around these themes, but it was always recognised within the SAS group, that they would be best addressed through an  accessible integrated approach which is embedded into School operational systems and practices.

### Description of the Initiative

When we accept students on awards we do so in the belief that they *want*  to study at the University of Wolverhampton, that they can *benefit* from such study and that they are *able* to study.  We should therefore be concerned at any apparent change in this situation and should investigate it without any preconceptions of how problems might have arisen and initiate appropriate interventions.  The move up to study in HE can bring many differing problems and pressures, both personal and academic, and we should not assume that non-attendance necessarily signifies disengagement. In addition to these important moral arguments and quality issues which support the concept of tracking and monitoring, there are also persuasive economic considerations.  Poor attendance and associated failure to complete assessments can lead to students not progressing or to dropping out altogether. This can have serious financial implications for Schools, often measurable in terms of staff posts. Thus the investment of relatively small amounts of staff time in directly addressing this issue, through tracking students and monitoring attendance, will more than pay for itself.

Tracking and monitoring aims to identify students who are encountering difficulties in engaging effectively with their studies and to facilitate the provision of positive intervention and support for these students.

*How does tracking and monitoring work?*
The four components of a tracking and monitoring system are:

i. Measures of student engagement
  a Student attendance on core modules
- Maintain a student database for each core module based on the eVision module registration data; actual student engagement with the module can also be used as a proxy check for eVision registration.
-  Module staff use attendance sheets pulled off eVision for students to sign, in each and every class.
- Attendances are recorded on the database. Fields can be so presence is the default entry therefore *only absences* need to be

entered. Once set up, this can be done in only a few minutes, even for large modules.

b   Engagement with module WOLF topics

c   Submission of assignments (assumes a submission deadline early in module)

d   Performance on assignments

e   Attendance at Personal Tutor (PT) meetings
  - School-wide protocol for PTs to schedule meetings with students
  - Meetings scheduled for critical times in semester e.g. welcome week, 2-3 weeks into semester, end of semester.

f   Other measures appropriate to local situation in Schools

ii      'At risk' thresholds

These need to be appropriate for the selected measure of engagement e.g.
  o  Student attendance on core modules – non-attendance for 2 consecutive weeks triggers contacting of student [*c.f.*1a above].
  o  Attendance at Personal Tutor meetings - non-attendance or failure to make an appointment for meeting at any of the scheduled times triggers contacting of student [*c.f.*1e above].
  o  Where Schools adopt the strategy of facilitating the booking of meetings with staff (other than PT) by students (e.g. email, SAMS etc.) non-attendance at a pre-determined number of such student-arranged meetings (e.g. 3), should be considered to be an 'at-risk' indicator.

iii     Procedure for contacting 'at risk' students

a   This must be very prompt to be effective

b   Appropriate person could be:
  - Appointed tracking and monitoring officer, e.g. Demonstrator
  - Student Support Office(r)
  - Personal Tutor
  - Module leader

c   Formal contact should be made by letter, although additional contact by other means could be less impersonal and therefore more beneficial e.g.
  - Email
  - Phone
  - SMS message

d   Where the Personal Tutor is not the intitiating individual, they need to be copied into all communications.

iv      Implementation of appropriate interventions

e   Protocol needs to be established

f   Appropriate person could be anyone from 3b, but PT most likely to be appropriate.

g   Potential interventions could take the form of one or more from:
  - Discussion with PT
  - Referral to School student support services
  - Support from Module Leader
  - Referral to School Special Needs Tutor
  - Referral to University student support services
  - Follow-up meeting(s) with PT

## Evaluation and impact of the Initiative

A number of outcomes were found relating to tracking and monitoring within the school. These are detailed below:

a. Where students responded to the invitation to a meeting with the Coordinator a range of non-academic problems emerged. Referral to School and University support services mitigated these problems, with subsequent academic benefit to the student.
b. In other cases, knowing that performance and attendance were being monitored, with subsequent meetings with the Coordinator, was enough to motivate 'at risk' students.
c. The greatest loss occurred amongst those students who ignored invitations to meetings with the Coordinator, Year Tutors etc.
d. The unique relationship between students and the Coordinator, and his commitment, were found to be critical. The Coordinator was the first port of call to address any organisational, administrative or any other problem, so a meeting with him carried no particular significance or stigma.

A direct causal link between the implementation of tracking and monitoring and the retention and progression of students in SAS can not be argued. However, these measures will have some positive impact on the possibility of students at risk continuing at the university. As below, on the whole retention and progression in the subject areas where monitoring and tracking was implemented is higher than the average within the school.

**Retention and Progression in SAS from 2004 - 2009**

|  | | 04/05 | 05/06 | 06/07 | 07/08 | 08/09 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **RETENTION** | | | | | | |
| All SAS | % | **89** | **93** | **92** | **90** | **92** |
| N | | 467 | 469 | 453 | 497 | 462 |
| Geog. & Env.Science | % | **89** | **91** | **94** | **91** | **93** |
| N | | 55 | 36 | 32 | 34 | 30 |
| Pharm + Forensic Sci. | % | **90** | **93** | **89** | **86** | **86** |
| N | | 70 | 80 | 93 | 101 | 70 |
| **PROGRESSION** | | | | | | |
| All SAS | % | **83** | **80** | **78** | **81** | **84** |
| N | | 414 | 436 | 416 | 447 | 423 |
| Geog. & Env.Science | % | **88** | **85** | **93** | **97** | **89** |
| N | | 49 | 33 | 30 | 31 | 28 |
| Pharm + Forensic Sci. | % | **79** | **77** | **75** | **84** | **82** |
| n | | 63 | 74 | 83 | 87 | 60 |

Raw data are from SITS based on year end confirmed figures, courtesy of Jonathan Spooner, and refer only to Level 1 students.

*Retention* describes full-time and part-time students who are 'completed, able to proceed, repeat or transfer'.

*Progression* describes full-time and part-time students able to proceed, and is expressed as a percentage of retention.

The *Geography and Environmental Science (GES)* cohorts have been selected as they have been the subject of the intensive tracking and monitoring system which contributed to the inclusion of SAS in the CETL bid.

The *Pharmacology, Pharmaceutical Science and Forensic Science (PPS&FS)* cohorts have been included as the major awards for which AB1011 is a core module. NB Pharmacy students are not included here.

*Retention*

In 2004/05 before the start of the CETL period, retention figures across the School were fairly similar. GES students were benefitting from a self-contained tracking and monitoring system with personal interventions as necessary from a designated demonstrator. This was shown over the preceding years to be highly effective, but resource intensive. At this time, other students in the School were subject to a more patchy personal support system, but did have the benefit of developing some measure of independence through access to a 'module supermarket' and a preliminary version of a Student Support Portal on WOLF.

At the start of the CETL period in 2005/06, two initiatives coincide with an increase in retention across the whole of SAS from 89% in 04/05 to 93% in 05/06. One is the implementation by the CETL team of a fully operational Student Support Portal on WOLF – a comprehensive one-stop-shop for personal support, access to School systems and links to University sources of information and support. The second is the opening of a School-wide Student Support Office which operated a version of the tracking and monitoring system found to be effective in GES. This increase in retention was sustained over the following years, except in PPS&FS which declined over the same period. This decline may reflect the particular expectations of these students. Many of the PPS students hoped to be able to transfer to the professional Pharmacy award, but found it very difficult and competitive. For the FS students, there may have been a mis-match between the expectations raised by TV programmes and the reality and rigours of academic scientific study.

*Progression*

For SAS as a whole, progression dropped over the first two CETL years and then rose again to end a little higher than it started. This suggests that the support measures in the School were keeping struggling students in the system, but were not equipping them sufficiently to be independent learners. This was particularly noticeable in the PPS&FS cohorts of students. A sharp rise in progression for these cohorts, and to a lesser extent across the whole School, coincides with the implementation in 2007/08 of a CETL-led School-wide Personal and Study Skills module, AB1011, which uses the ePortfolio and encourages reflection and self-managed learning, besides supporting study skills development.

## Policy Implications

Stakeholders

- A willingness to divert Demonstrator time away from teaching is necessary.
- Collating attendance is necessary and aversion and embarrassment of doing this needs to be tackled
- A culture that understands the necessity to dedicate resources to the retention of students who were perceived to be disengaged is cruical to the success of this work

- **SmartCards** The University Project to issue SmartCards to students provides a way forward for tracking and monitoring, addressing many of the resource issues which deterred its wider adoption.  A pilot study, partially funded by the CETL and CeLT (now ILE), was designed in collaboration with SLS and with the support of the Academic Registrar.  This involved the use of card readers placed outside lecture rooms (SLS) or portable readers passed round classes (SAS) with attendance data subsequently downloaded into SITS and reports based on predetermined threshold levels for students 'at risk' (as outlined above) automatically sent to Personal Tutors.

HE Sector
- The team has worked with School Management to develop an integrated approach to student support and management within a modern blended learning environment.  Three key elements of the model can be broadly grouped into **People, Electronic systems** and **Processes** which underpin the three routes which support students.  The **Tracking** route is where the actual 'performance' of the student in terms of attendance and achievement is monitored and from where intervention can be initiated; the **Learner Development** route provides the student with access to on-line support information to enable them to find the solution to their problems or queries; the **Accessibility and SEN** route provides for the specific needs of Special Needs students where these are already known. These routes are not mutually exclusive and it is possible for students to engage with all of them during the course of their studies.
- When tracking and monitoring is part of an integrated system of student support and development embedded in School and University operational systems and processes, it becomes a mainstream activity with which all members of staff can engage and from which all students benefit. This leads to greater consistency of provision and increased opportunities for linking synergystically with other enhancement practices.

## International Market:

The constraints being placed by HM Government on international students entering the UK on Student visas and the need to check and monitor their attendance etc. and then to notify the Home Office 'if they drop off the radar' suggest that a precise tracking and audit system is a *sine qua non.*

The consequences of 'losing' such students could be far reaching both in terms of the University reputation and potential penalties. On the other hand such tracking and monitoring can be shown as a positive system for supporting students and their progression which could prove an attractive feature to their home funding sources

## Business Case
- In approximately 200 words, briefly discuss the business case for this project. You may wish to consider:
    - **Tracking and Monitoring**
        i. **Opportunity:** Monitoring attendance and performance provides early warning of students at risk enabling critical interventions, for example through the Personal Tutor system, to support retention and progression.  It also provides a cross-

checking mechanism to ensure that systems information is correct.

ii. **Risk analysis of not continuing the programme:** There are cost implications associated with not tracking and monitoring student attendance and performance. Inaccurate systems information can lead to 'ghost' students and there is risk of genuine students dropping out or underperforming. Underperformance can then lead to failure of students to progress and/or achieve to their potential. This then has knock-on effects to degree classification and employability, particularly for professionally accredited degrees where not only students may be at risk, but also the University's reputation and the continued accreditation of the degrees.

**Resource implications of the programme:** The cost of not continuing tracking and monitoring of student attendance and performance lies principally in potential loss of revenue from either individual students or entire cohorts should professional accreditation be withdrawn through low student attainment. The cost of continuing (or initiating for other Schools) is difficult to quantify as most of these ideas have been implemented through embedding in the School's student management and support operating infrastructure.

o **B. Smartcards to support Tracking and Monitoring**

i. **Opportunity:** Smartcards would enable a fully integrated electronic system for tracking and monitoring attendance which would provide a direct means of ensuring the accuracy of data on University and School systems. Such a system would support efficient use of staff time and also provide a means of tracking and monitoring patterns of usage of rooms and other facilities to inform efficient future planning based on student choice within a modern blended learning environment.

ii. **Risk analysis of not implementing the programme:** The lack of systematic data collection on attendance reduces confidence in the reliability of data which underpins both statutory responsibilities for monitoring the engagement of international students and HEFCE returns. It also undermines the ability of the School to support students and hence their progression at all levels.

iii. **Resource implications of the programme:** Smartcards need to be issued to all students and card readers to be installed in appropriate locations at each campus. The on-going concentration of students at the two principal campuses increases the need to identify both their presence and location in terms of both security and fire safety. Currently University students are issued with both an identity card and another 'printer card'. Replacing these with a single Smartcard would reduce issue costs.

**Expert Contacts and Links**

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**References**

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