

# SEDA Spring Conference 2024



**Session Title:** Post-Pandemic Student Retention in Higher Education – Lessons Learned and Ways Forward

**Session Type:** Research paper (20 mins plus questions)

**Main presenter(s):** Jamie James, University of South Wales

**Co presenter(s):** Mark Davies, University of South Wales

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**Session Summary:** Our paper, 'The Range and Impact of Student Retention Interventions at the University of South Wales,' will outline a number of interventions undertaken at the University of South Wales to respond to a rise in student attrition. It will present the initial indicators of impact as well as presenting an evaluative outline of some of the advantages and disadvantages of the approaches, based on what we found out during their initial implementation.

**Session Outline:** The paper will commence with a contextual description to explain the rise in student attrition experienced at the University of South Wales in the academic year 2021-22. Using the available literature and frameworks on student retention and persistence (Tinto 1993, Rhodes and Nevill 2004, Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980) we will present a series of interventions related to three domains, to respond to increased attrition:

- Our regulatory framework.
- Student support interventions.
- Our workforce.

We will show how the literature highlights the barriers to attainment (WECD 2020, Jerrim 2021, Bolton and Lewis, 2023), and explore how interventions were implemented. Discussion will focus on the short-term impact and initial lessons learned, as well as the implications for learning and teaching.

Interventions discussed will include the formation of a university-wide 'Retention Taskforce' and will explain how this facilitated intensive interventions at pace to reduce attrition. There will be a focus on enabling data-informed decision making at all levels in the institution, regular and

rapid review to respond to circumstances as they arose and interventions called, 'Assessment Bootcamps', which were introduced to support students with gaps in their assessment profile. We will share details of a pilot of in-year retrieval and the introduction of new, non-academic posts - Subject Support Officers - which have all contributed to efforts to reduce student withdrawal or discontinuation. Key to this will be an identification of the main reasons for student attrition, how this relates to the literature and to the prevailing social context, outlining trends that affect the wider higher education sector, as well as outlining lines of enquiry based on our learning, current projects and possible future interventions.

**References:** Bolton, P. & Lewis, J. (2023). 'Equality of Access and Outcomes in Higher Education in England', House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9195/> (Accessed 11 June 2023).

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Pascarella, E.T. & Terenzini, P.T. (1980). 'Predicting Freshman Persistence and Voluntary Dropout Decisions from a Theoretical Model', *The Journal of Higher Education*, 51(1), pp.60-75.

Rhodes, C. & Nevill, A. (2004). 'Academic and Social Integration in Higher Education: A survey of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within a first-year education studies cohort at a new university', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28(2), pp.179-193.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving Early, Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Warwick Economics & Development Limited (2020). 'Evaluation of the OfS Addressing Barriers to Student Success Programme: Summative Evaluation Final Report'. WECD/Office for Students. Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/summative-evaluation-of-ofs-abss-programme/> (Accessed 11 June 2023).