

GSU Retention Service

2023/24 Annual
Summary

Steph Scott
Retention and Insights
Manager
s.e.scott@greenwich.ac.uk

greenwich
students'
union

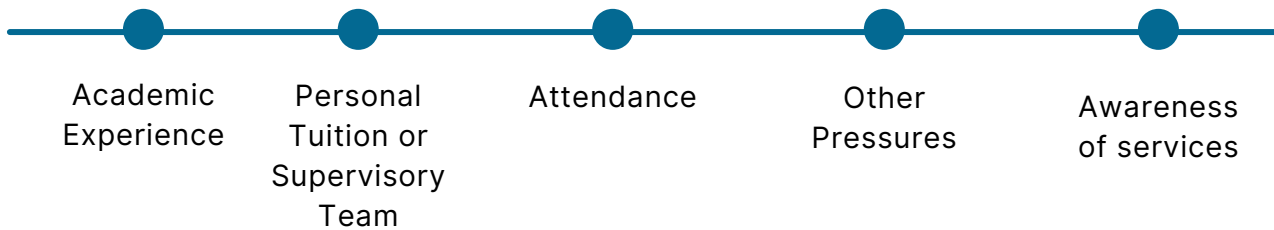
Retention Service

What do we talk to students about?

Our student callers have a 1-1 structured conversation asking students about their experience at Greenwich and reminding them of the support available.

We make it clear we're calling from the SU, that we hold their confidentiality unless they consent for us to share information and that students can be open with us about issues they are facing.

During the calls we ask questions around the following:

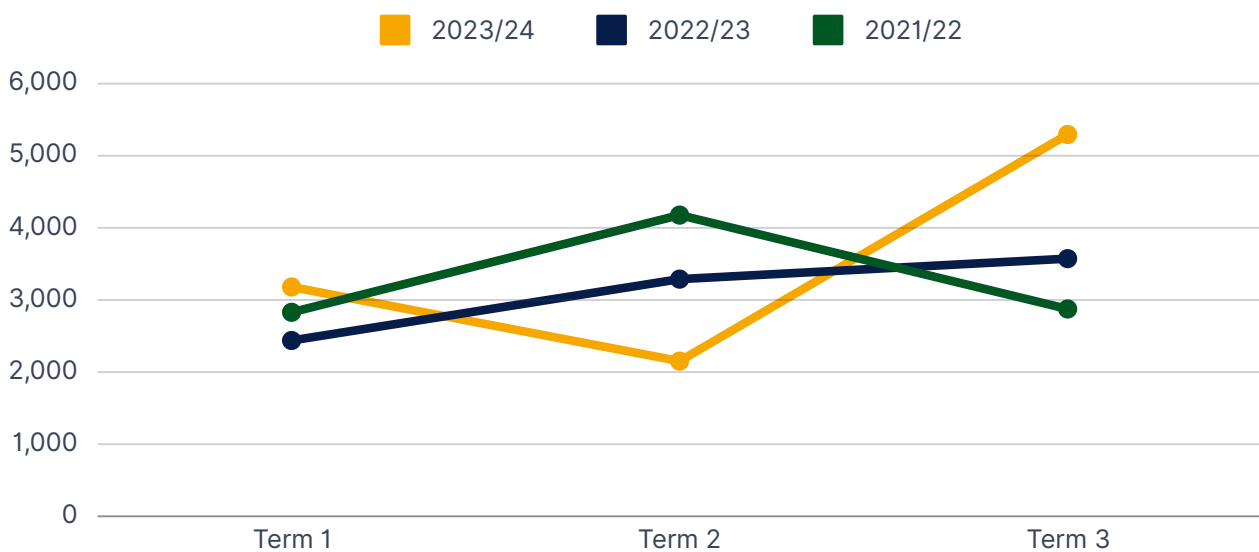


↳ If at any stage during the call we identify an additional support need we'll ask the student for permission to refer their case to the relevant service

Number of calls made

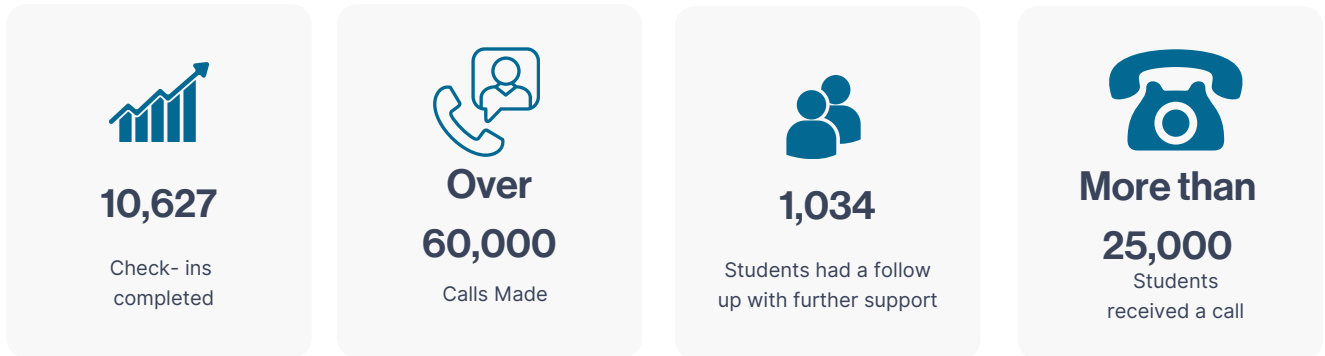
We completed calls to 10,627 students this year, which is the most calls that have been completed in an academic year since the start of the calling service.

Below is a graph showing completed calls per term over the past 3 years.

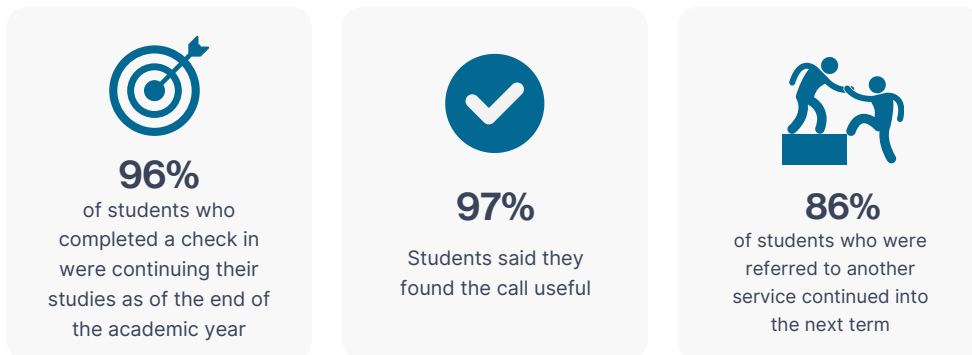


Executive Summary

Annual KPI overview



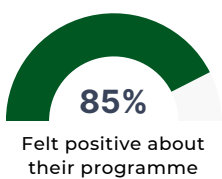
Our Impact



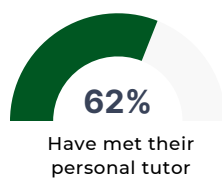
What did students tell us?

These figures are an average taken from the percentages from each term.

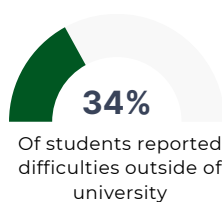
Course Satisfaction



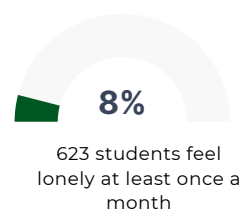
Personal Tuition



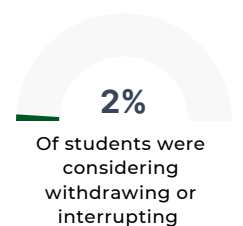
Pressures



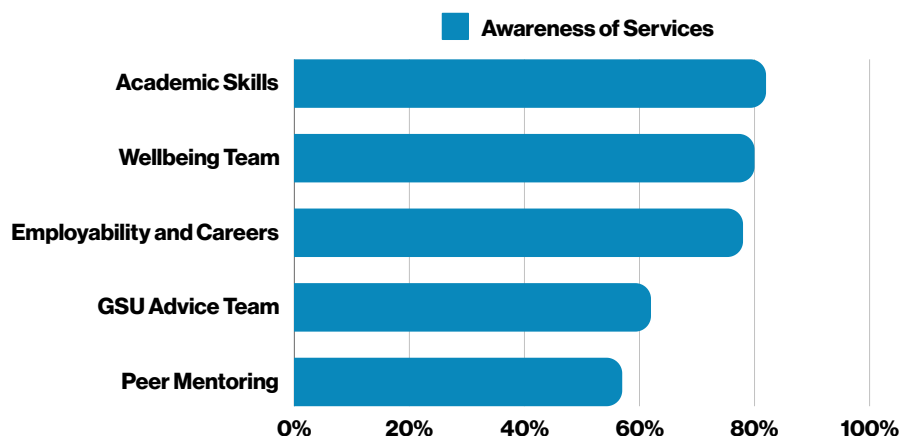
Loneliness



Considering Withdrawing



Support Service Awareness



2023-24 Data Overview

This report gives a summary of the key findings, themes and recommendations from the Retention calling service in the academic year 2023/24.

Who we called

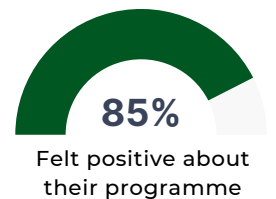
- 1st year international students
- Returning interrupting & repeating students
- Students flagged for non-attendance
- April starters
- Students not in attendance
- PGT students at dissertation stage
- January starters
- Students not in attendance
- PGR students
- Students on courses with a large awarding gap
- Final-years on NSS taskforce programmes
- POLAR Q1 first year students
- Interrupting students: w/c 3rd June
- Students resitting over summer: 8th-26th July
- Student Reps Offboarding calls
- Bangladeshi students
- Remaining student cohorts

These groups are therefore over-represented in the findings below.

Analysis of General Check In Calls

Course Satisfaction

85% of students felt positively towards their course and only 2% negatively, with the remaining 13% offering a neutral response.



74% of students cited 'quality of teaching' as a positive aspect of their course, and this was the most frequently given response over the year. The area that consistently drew the most negative response was 'timetabling', due to big gaps in timetables, short notice changes and a lack of flexibility with timetabling. Students over the year spoke about the impact this has on their commuting costs, childcare arrangements and their ability to work alongside their studies.

Overseas students also ranked greater course satisfaction (87%) than their home counterparts (82%).

Personal Tutoring

62% of all students know and have met their personal tutor and 18% know, but have not met them.



Next term we will be asking follow up questions regarding the quality of support students have received from their personal tutors.

Co-Curricular Experience

Loneliness

623 students we spoke to reported feeling lonely over the 2023/24 academic year equating to 6% of respondents, 4% less than in 2022/23. Of those who did report loneliness, the majority (42%) reported feeling lonely on a weekly basis. Generally home students report loneliness at a higher rate than international students.

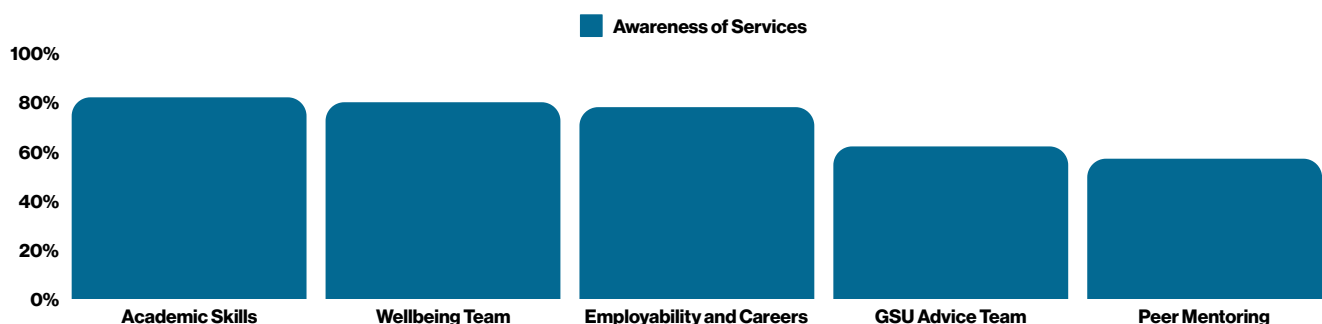
Cost of Living Concerns

13% of students were concerned about supporting themselves financially or paying their fees. Of those students concerned about their finances and fees, 52% identified financial pressures affecting their studies, such as cost of living, commuting and travel or work commitments.

Commuting and travel came up as a consistent concern. This was spread fairly consistently across all campuses, and consisted of comments regarding the Medway bus, parking issues and students who live far from campus. Part-time work and worries about employment were also repeated issues. Students, particularly international students, are struggling to find part-time work alongside their studies and they highlighted this as an additional pressure which was impacting their studies.

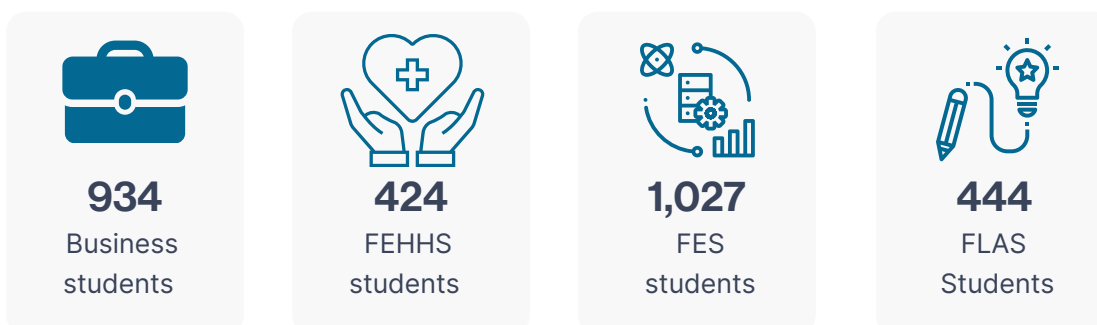
Support Service Awareness

During the calls, students are asked if they are aware of and have used, the following services. All students called were reminded about the support that these teams offer, and many students commented at the end of the call regarding how useful it is to be given this information.



Absences

2,829 students who completed the survey were called due to non-engagement across the faculties.



The most frequent reason for non attendance cited was due to illness (30%). Other significant and reoccurring reasons included - bereavement, family issues, problems with tuition fee payment and commuting issues, such as oversubscribed Medway buses.

Linking students with support

We aim to link students with the right support at the right time.

We believe if we support students with the underlying issues they are facing they will be more likely to continue on their course of study.



1,034

Students had a follow up with further support

This is why we prioritise making contact with students who are likely to be withdrawn because of poor attendance or who we know are more likely to withdraw because of their personal circumstances.

Referrals to other services

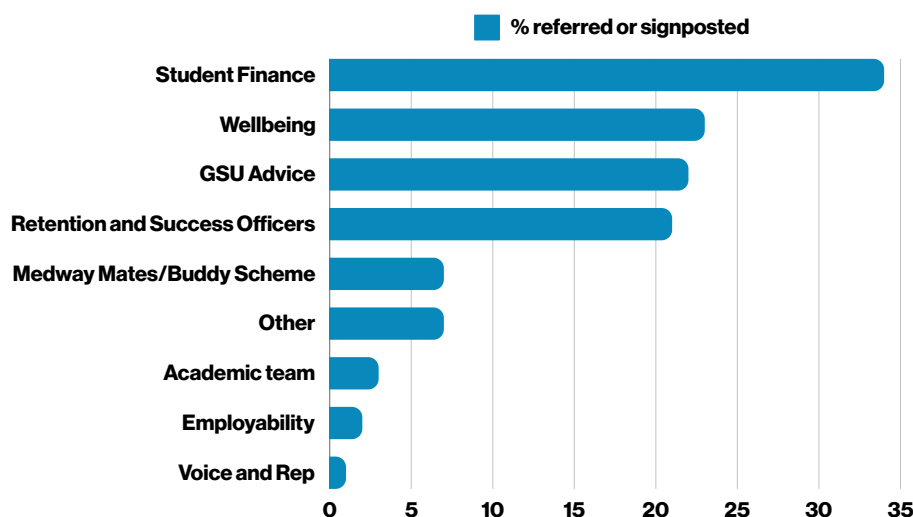
267 students were sent personalised follow up support based on their specific circumstance. Some of this support includes direct referrals to other services, as well as more complex signposting and ensuring students have the information about support that they need.



267

Students were sent personalised follow up support

87%
of students who were directly referred to another service are continuing with their studies



In addition to those students who were directly referred for support, students told us about financial concerns, social support, and course issues. We send these students additional information in support packs.



626

students told us they were concerned about their finances, and were sent a finance support pack



279

students told us they felt lonely, and were sent a social support pack



92

students told us they were struggling with their course, and were sent a course support pack

Continuation Rate

96% of students who completed a check in were continuing their studies as of the end of the academic year

Faculty	Continuation %
Faculty of Education, Health and Human Science	98%
Greenwich Business School	95%
Faculty of Engineering and Science	97%
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science	96%



96%

Of students called continued on their programme

Those considering withdrawing

161 students told us they were considering withdrawing or interrupting this academic year.

129 were home students, 32 was an international student. 140 were UG students, 21 were PGT students.

All students who are considering withdrawing or interrupting receive follow-up support including signposting to Retention and Success Officers, their personal tutors and to any other additional support tailored to their situation.

90 students who told us they were considering withdrawing and interrupting continued with their studies.



161

Students told us they were considering withdrawing

71

students withdrew (or were withdrawn)

90

students continued with their studies

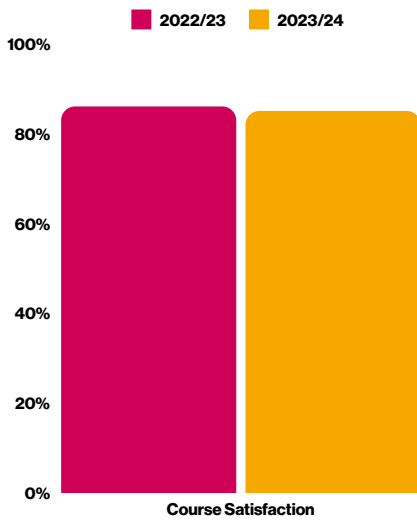
**Approx
£936,550**

of fee income retained this academic year*

* Combined retained student fees over all terms

2 Year Comparison of Check In Calls

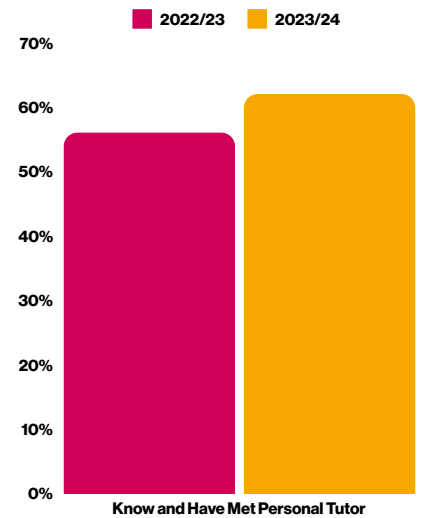
Over the years that the calling service has been running, the questions being asked have changed and adapted to the needs of students and the perceived pressures they may be facing. However, we do now have enough similar data to compare overall trends from the academic year over the last two years, which we can continue to monitor in the coming academic year.



Academic life

Course satisfaction over the academic year has remained roughly the same over the two years.

The percentage of students who know and have met their personal tutor has risen slightly when looked at over the whole academic year.

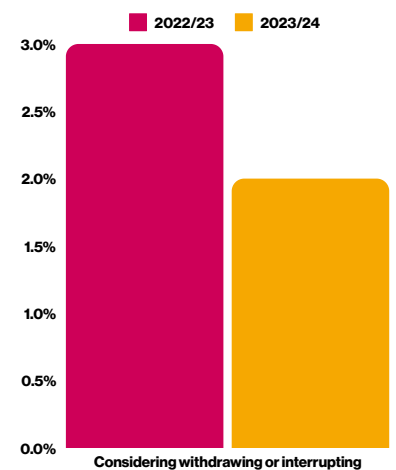
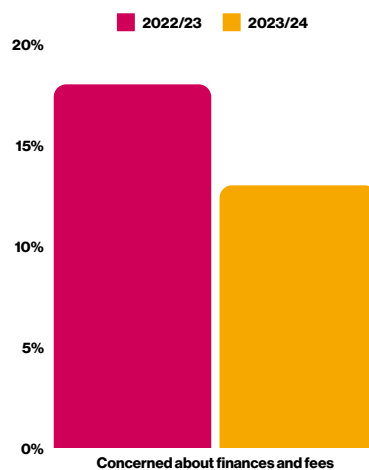
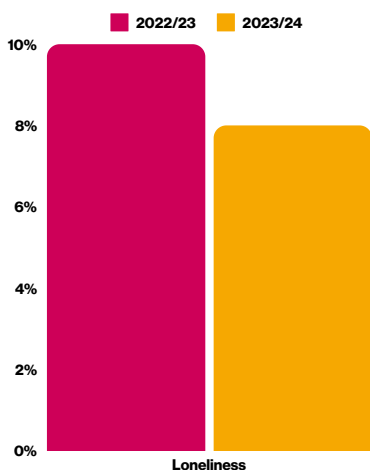


Co-curricular student experiences

As would be expected, reported loneliness by students has dropped over the years, presumably since lockdown and remote study has been phased out or decreased. Programmes which have been put in place to support students to return to campus and connect with their peers again may be part of this decline. This is positive to see, however we are still seeing almost 1/10 students reporting that they feel lonely at least once a month.

Concerns about financially supporting themselves or paying fees have also dropped in this time. This is interesting, as we may have expected this to remain more consistent or have risen, given the economic context that students are currently studying in.

Finally, less students are reporting considering withdrawing or interrupting. These are very small numbers dropping from 3% to 2% over the two years, so we cannot infer anything significant from these numbers. However, it will be interesting to see if this trend continues in the coming year.



Recommendations

The recommendations made here stem from the conversations had with students and the themes that emerged from each term of calling over the year. It is proposed that these are reviewed by university services, faculties and the GSU.

Timetabling

The issue: Timetabling has been a recurrent theme this year and in the previous academic year.



Students said: Timetables can be sporadic which result in frequent journeys to campus and difficulty with balancing other commitments. There have also been reports of last-minute timetable changes and overcrowded teaching spaces.

The Retention Service recommends: Coordination across faculties and programmes to ensure that, from the beginning of the year, there are as few issues as possible. As suggested last year, flexibility for students to change seminar groups to ensure they are convenient for students is recommended, although initially arranging timetables carefully may limit disruption for both students and teaching staff of mid-term changes.

Placements

The issue: During placements there is a higher risk of students having negative experiences which are missed by the university and this leaves students feeling isolated if they face any issues.



Students said: There were several students who spoke about difficulties with placements, including experiences of bullying and other issues, as well as difficulty finding placements for students who have to apply independently.

The Retention Service recommends: Ensure that students know who to contact for support with finding placements (if needed) and are given enough support to find them. Strengthen the processes for students reporting difficulties on placements so that they can be supported through any issues. Ensure students are given support to find placements when needed.

Refunds

The issue: Some refunds are delayed and not reaching students for months after graduation.



Students said: They were feeling stressed and upset by the delays and lack of communication. Many had been waiting for their refunds for several months.

Retention Service recommends: Ensure that communication is sent regarding any refunds that are required for students and that students are given realistic timelines, so that they can plan financially around these timelines.

Employability support in Term 3

The issue: Term 3 may be a particularly important term to host employability and employment activity so that students feel confident leaving university and moving into the UK job market.



Students said: They felt stressed and worried about being able to find a job after graduation. They were looking for more employment support from the university.

The Retention Service recommends: More employment support offered in Term 3 after assessments have concluded. These would need to be advertised very specifically to students who are graduating and looking for post-academia support.

Spreading payments for international student fees

The issue: A recurring theme in the Retention calls and the GSU Advice Service is international students asking for payment plans, although they do not meet the University of Greenwich criteria for a payment plan.



Students said: They felt the payment plan was too harsh, worry about paying fees was impacting on their ability to study and the Student Finance team were very slow to respond to emails and queries. Students reported feeling very stressed and worried about finances and visas.

The Retention Service recommends: Additional fee payment installments could be offered to all self-funding students. Other London universities already offer this - for example, Goldsmiths College offers three or five payment installments, UCL, LSE and London South Bank University offer three installments. These do not include the initial deposit that international students are required to pay. We believe this could significantly reduce the number of students contacting the GSU Advice Service and the Student Finance team to request payment plans, as well as addressing the stress and detriment that students report.

Temporary Illness Support

The issue: It is unclear where students should go to get support for ongoing illness which has not yet lasted for 12 months, as this does not qualify as long-term, therefore they cannot get support from the Wellbeing team.



Students said: Students report that they are unsure where to go to get support for ongoing but as yet short term illness such as hospitalisations lasting several months, surgery with an extended recovery time or long COVID.

The Retention Service recommends: Having a clear section on the university website, potentially in the Wellbeing section, as this is where students will look, that states the ways in which they can access support. Ensuring that tutors are equipped to support these students in the ways needed.

Commuting between campuses



The issue: Medway buses to Greenwich and Avery Hill were oversubscribed at the beginning of the year, resulting in students being unable to commute to their classes, difficulty integrating into the student community and increased stress levels. The price of the buses can also be detrimental to students.

Students said: They were getting stranded and missing lectures. They had to book the buses weeks in advance (an issue when combined with changing timetables) and the buses are very expensive.

The Retention Project recommends: As much as possible, provision should be accounted for at the beginning of term to limit impact on students. We also recommend a reconsideration of the price of the Medway buses.

Communication of support services

The issue: Many students were unaware of the support services within the university before the Retention Project call, which may be problematic when we are unable to call every single student at the university.



Students said: They were very thankful for receiving the call and found the information on support services very useful. They said that it would be useful to receive the information earlier.

The Retention Project recommends: Information sharing is spread across the year, with relevant information being shared by the university and GSU at key points throughout the academic year. We are aware that most of this information is given at the beginning of the year, which can be particularly overwhelming.

Bereavement support

The issue: In both the Retention Project and the Advice Service we see many students who have experienced a bereavement during their studies. This obviously has a big impact on their studies, but also often students do not want to take an extended break.



Students said: If they had experienced a bereavement, they didn't know who to talk to, they were worried about missed time and the impact it would have on their studies.

The Retention Project recommends: That the university and GSU look into what support can be put in place for students who experience a bereavement during their studies. This may include external partnerships, specialist support within the Wellbeing team or easier access to academic support processes.

Academic Year 24/25

In the coming academic year we have refocused our objectives for the service. We are focusing on the support and retention aims of the project, and therefore focusing on students who are at higher risk of withdrawal. We are operating on a much smaller budget, so we expect the number of students reached to be smaller in the coming year.

We have laid out a number of strategies which we will implement over the next academic year, to ensure that we are reaching the students that we would like to reach, and to provide the most high quality support to those students.

Strategy	Objective
<u>Outreach</u> Calls; updated survey Texts and WhatsApp; new ways of reaching students	<u>Outreach</u> Diversify contact methods and therefore reach more students Focus on support and retention aims Targeted support to students with an increased risk of withdrawal
<u>Follow Up Support</u> Signposting and referring Additional follow ups for escalated students	<u>Follow Up Support</u> Tracking outcomes for students and ensuring communication has reached them Consistent support and monitoring Early identification of unresolved or repeating issues
<u>Marketing</u> Social media Updated website New brand identity for the service	<u>Marketing</u> Increasing the visibility of the service Potentially increasing self-referrals
<u>Training and monitoring</u> More in-depth training and refreshers Call quality monitoring alongside 121s	<u>Training and Monitoring</u> Increased quality of support and signposting Callers feel supported and upskilled
<u>Collaborative targeted support</u> Linking with the university when reacting to global events Linking with Engagement and Opportunities to launch the AH and GRE buddy schemes	<u>Collaborative targeted support</u> Ensuring a joined up approach Increased visibility of the service for university staff Targeted support for students facing loneliness

If you have any further questions about our aims and strategies for next year, or questions about any of the information and recommendations given above, please to reach out to:

Steph Scott - Retention and Insights Manager - s.e.scott@greenwich.ac.uk