

Retention Project

Term 1 Summary
2023/24

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greenwich
students'
union

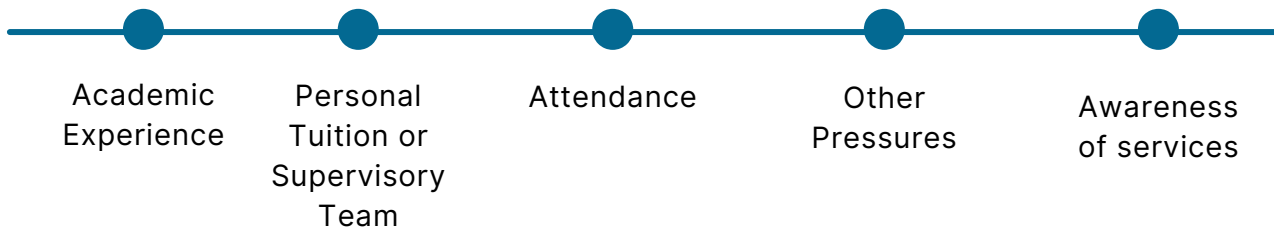
Retention Project

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

Who we called

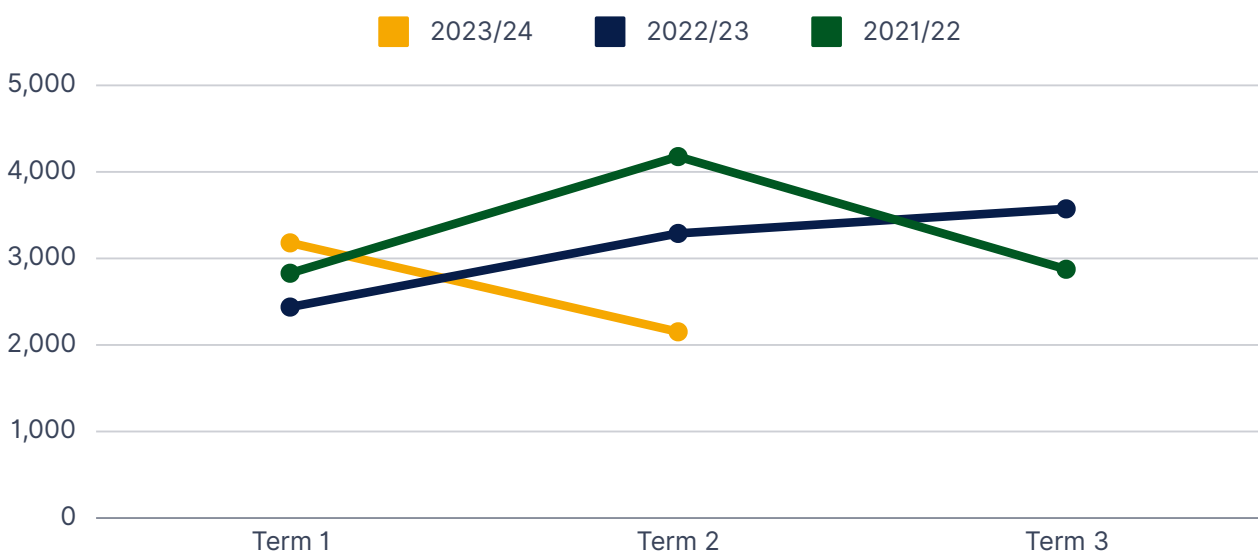
We prioritise calling students who are most at risk of being withdrawn due to nonattendance and students at risk of withdrawing or interrupting themselves.

- 1st International students,
- Returning Interrupting & Repeating students
- Students flagged for non-attendance
- Final-years on NSS taskforce programmes
- POLAR Q1 first year students
- Remaining student cohorts

Number of calls made

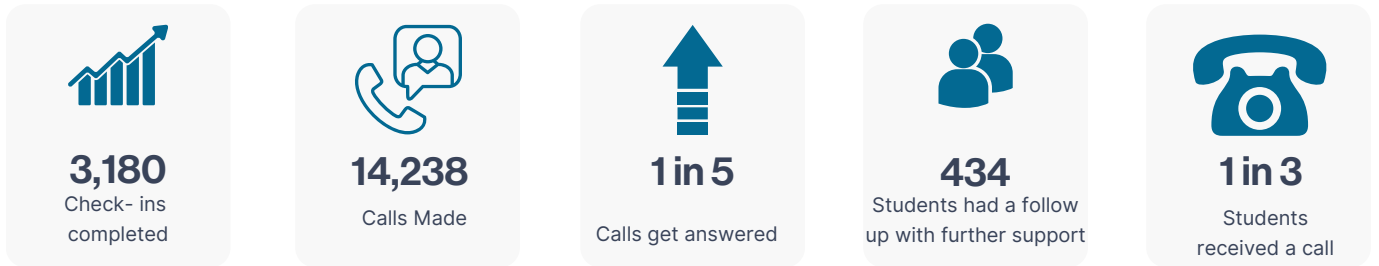
We spoke to 3,180 students this term, 30% more compared to term 1 last year

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

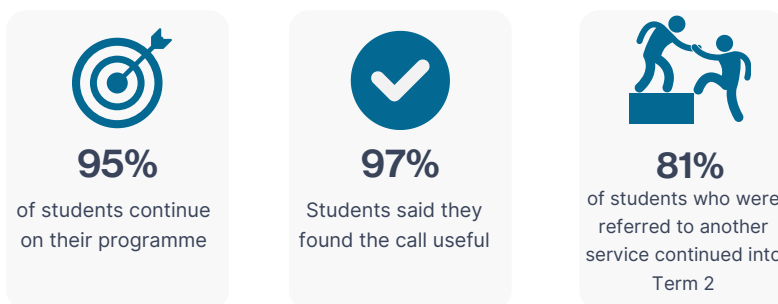


Executive Summary

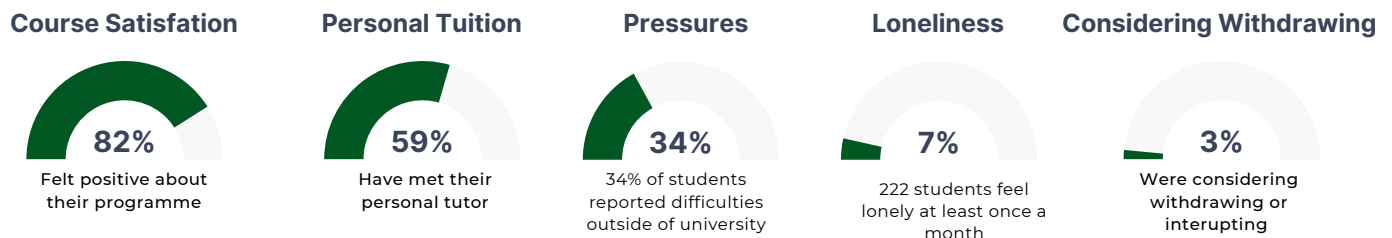
KPI overview



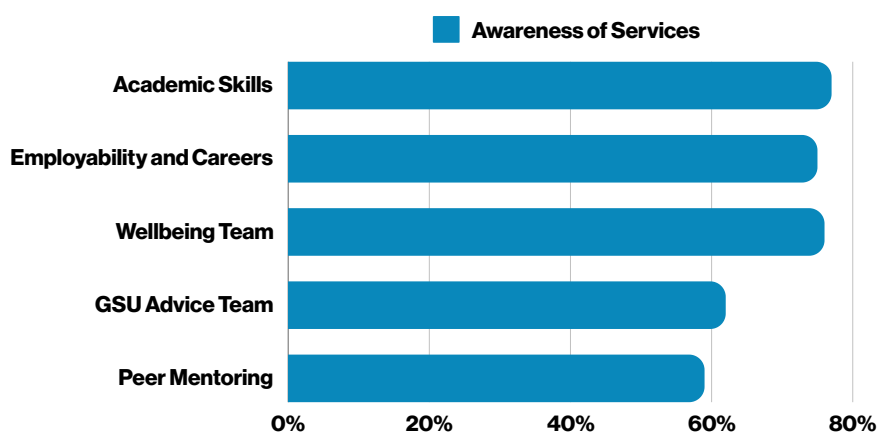
Our Impact



What are students saying?



Support Service Awareness



Term 1 Project Overview

This report gives a summary of the key findings, themes and recommendations from the Retention calling project in term 1 of 2023/24.

Who we call

- 1st International students,
- Returning Interrupting & Repeating students
- Students flagged for non-attendance
- Final-years on NSS taskforce programmes
- POLAR Q1 first year students
- Remaining student cohorts

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

POLAR Q1 PROJECT

This term we partnered with the university recruitment team and the GSU activities team to support the conversion of POLAR Q1 applicants. This support included:

- a personalised letter sent to the applicant's home from a GSU Officer
- a range of supports to help them meet new people
- a call from GSU to ensure they settled well at the University

Course Satisfaction

82% of students felt positively towards their course and only 2% negatively, with the remaining 16% offering a neutral response.

74% of students who felt positively towards their course cited 'quality of teaching' as one of the reasons. This was the most frequently given response. The area that drew the most negative response was 'timetabling' - 12% of all respondents said they were unhappy with timetabling on their course.

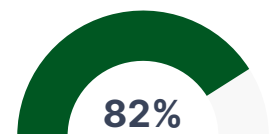
For example, students reported timetables changing at short notice which then disrupted childcare arrangements, some students reported not having timetable access or having large gaps in their timetables.

Comparing this to 2022/23, these numbers are almost identical (72% and 11%). This shows us that there have not been significant changes in the suitability and organisation of timetabling over the past 12 months.

Overseas students also ranked greater course satisfaction (86%) than their home counterparts (80%).

Personal Tutoring

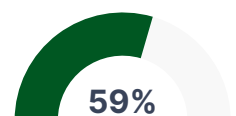
59% of all students know and have met their personal tutor and 21% know, but have not met them.



Felt positive about their programme

"I love the overall university experience at Greenwich!"

MBA Marketing Management student



Have met their personal tutor

Personal Tuition Feedback

The 20% of students who do not know who their personal tutor is are told on the call who they are.

GSU more generally has fed back on the personal tuition review being conducted across the university.

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.

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.



434

Students had a follow up with further support

Direct Referrals to other services

101 students were referred for support to another university service who aim to follow up with the student the next day as per an agreement set out in service level agreements.



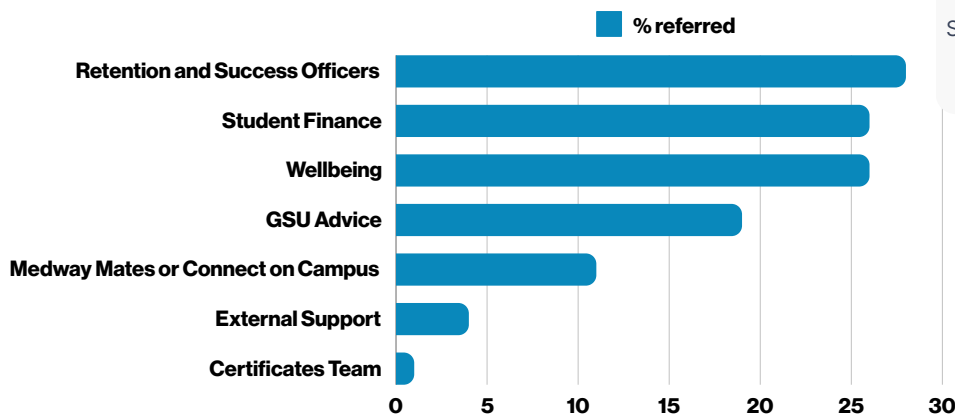
101

Students had a direct referral made to another service



81%

of students who were directly referred to another service continued into Term 2



Case Study

We spoke to a student who had had trouble with Student Finance England on returning to her studies following a period of illness, delaying her registration. She wanted to ensure that she would do her best in her studies and felt she had missed too much teaching this year, and so wanted support to interrupt. As well as preventing a complete withdrawal, we were led by the student and her wishes - we empowered her to make the best choice for her and her studies.

In addition to those students who were directly referred for support, 434 students told us about financial concerns, social support, and course issues. We send these students additional information in support packs.



329

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



128

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



42

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

The finance support pack includes information on ways to access cheaper food shopping, such as Too Good To Go or local community pantries, the free breakfasts and dinners provided by GSU on campus, university hardship funds and bursaries, budgeting tips and the opportunity to get a free Totum card.

The social support pack includes information on the Global English courses, Vygo (the peer mentoring app), GSU's buddy schemes, a downloadable calendar and colouring pages and information on GSU societies.

The course support pack includes information on the interruption and withdrawal process, how to contact your personal tutor, financial, academic and wellbeing support and information for international students on the visa implications of interrupting or withdrawing from their studies.

So far reading [the financial support pack], it's really useful and I'll be applying for some financial help.

FEHHS undergraduate student

Absences

1,517 students who completed the survey were called due to non-engagement across the faculties.



480

Business students



266

FEHHS students



556

FES students



215

FLAS Students

The most frequent reason for non attendance cited was due to illness (30%). Other significant and reoccurring reasons came under "other" - bereavement, family issues, problems with tuition fee payment and commuting issues, such as oversubscribed Medway buses. Next term we are separating some of these issues out, so that we can have clearer data on the reasons students do not attend.

Continuation Rate

95% of all students called continued on their programme.

These were broadly consistent across faculties with FEHHS had the highest continuation rate and the Business school had the lowest.

Faculty	Continuation %
Faculty of Education, Health and Human Science	97%
Greenwich Business School	93%
Faculty of Engineering and Science	95%
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science	96%



95%

Of students called continue on their programme

Those considering withdrawing

95 students told us they were considering withdrawing or interrupting. Of these 95, 45 continued on their studies.

70 were home students, 25 were international students. 81 were UG students, 14 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.

Of those who suggested that they were considering it, 37% chose to withdraw or interrupt their studies.



95

Students told us they were considering withdrawing

36

withdrew (or were withdrawn) or interrupted their studies

14

were withdrawn by the university due to registration issues

45

students continued on their studies

**Approx
£481,750**

of fee income retained so far this year*

*2 x PG home, 34 x UG home, 6 x PG Overseas, 3 x UG Overseas

Co-Curricular Experience

Loneliness

222 students we spoke to reported feeling lonely in Term 1 equating to 7% of respondents, 5% less than Term 1 2022/23. This shows that interventions by GSU and the university to increase student engagement and community have been having an impact.

Of those who did report loneliness, the majority (46%) reported feeling lonely on a weekly basis. 69% of those who feel lonely are home students.

Case Study - Medway Mates

All Medway students who report feeling lonely are either referred or signposted to GSU's Medway Mates scheme. Students who engage are then matched with another student who is also looking to make new friends, and given some suggestions for activities to do together. In Term 1 GSU hosted a Medway Mates event which 15 students attended, some of whom had been signposted through the Retention Project calls.

Cost of Living Concerns

15% of students are concerned about supporting themselves financially or paying their fees.

Of those students concerned about their finances and fees, 57% 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.

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.



Recommendations

The recommendations made here stem from the conversations had with students and the themes that emerged. 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 Project 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.

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.

Retention Project Support Packs

The issue: Low open rate of the additional information sent by the Retention Project.



Retention Project response: We are reconsidering the format by which we send information to students after the calls. We are looking into ways of tracking engagement with the information sent and improving the quality of information.

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.

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 Project 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.

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.

Term 2

In Term 2, as mentioned above, we will be reconsidering the ways in which we contact students with additional information. We will also be reviewing the script used during calls, and ensuring that the survey is both comprehensive and efficient. We will also be looking into ways of increasing our pick up rate, to enable us to reach as many students as possible.

We will be calling in a new priority order:

1. January starters
2. Students not in attendance
3. PGR students

These calls will take place from the 29th January through to 5th April.

As before, we will be reactive to any local or global events that may make students vulnerable to disengagement from their studies and will prioritise checking in with them where needed.

Want to make a referral?

We will also check in with any students that staff have concerns for. Staff can refer a student for a check in call via email at gsu-retention@greenwich.ac.uk.

Full breakdown of data by cohort, stage and priority group available on request to -
Steph Scott
Retention and Insights Manager
s.e.scott@greenwich.ac.uk