Student retention and widening participation

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The National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation

The Higher Education Academy

Overview

What is the relationship between widening participation (WP) and retention?

How can we improve the success of all students?

What do we already know?

What do we want to find out?

What is the relationship between WP and retention?

Government reports

National Audit Office (NAO): retention has not improved between 2002 and 2007

Public Accounts Committee (PAC): concerned this is due to WP and thus greater diversity might worsen retention rates

MPs' interpretation (PAC report)

Increasing and widening participation in higher education attracts more students from under-represented groups who are more likely to withdraw from courses early. These students may need more support to complete their courses. Universities need to understand the needs of their changing student populations. PAC recommendation 2

Expert opinion (PAC report)

The Department recognises the tension between widening participation and non-completion, and the Government's previous target required progress on both retention and participation. In recent years, retention has held up while participation has increased and the Funding Council sees no reason to think that the retention rates will fall as further progress is made towards 50% participation. (PAC, paragraph 6).

Research evidence (NAO report)

NAO (2002 and 2007) and other studies suggest it is not the background of the students which is most influential, but rather **entry qualifications**.

Entry qualifications also account for much of the institutional differences that can be observed across the sector, hence the NAO (2007) finding that most institutions meet or exceed their benchmarks.

Correlation between occupational class and probability of early withdrawal (Smith and Naylor 2001). But, this is not necessarily causal and is likely to be linked to entry qualifications.

Institutional research evidence

Institutional research at Roehampton University (Curtis 2007) analysed the planning data for the 2005/06 academic year. The following factors were correlated with non-continuation (statistically significant p. < 0.01):

- **Type of qualifications** (those with non-A-levels qualifications were more likely to leave);
- **Level of tariff points** (those with lower tariff points were more likely to leave);
- **Gender** (males were more likely to leave);
- **Entry** (those coming through clearing were more likely to leave).

Policy context

HEFCE definition of WP incorporates access, success and progression http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/

Proposal to move retention funding from WP to teaching enhancement (HEFCE 2008/28).

Strategic assessments (HEFCE 2009/01) require institutions to report on retention and student experience and not just access issues.

How can we improve the success of all students?

Retention Grants Programme

NAO (2007) and PAC (2008): Lack of progress and lack of evidence about what works.

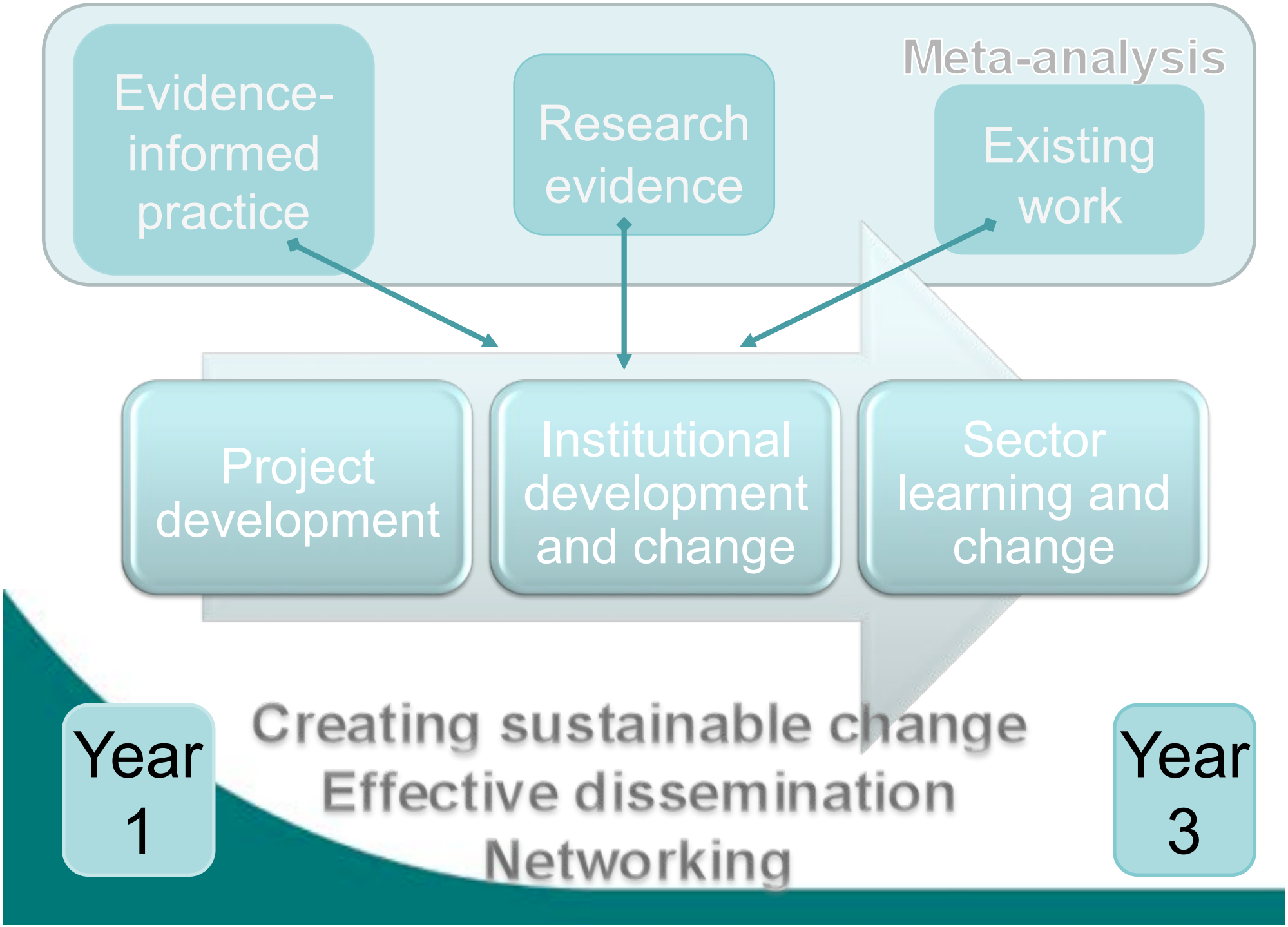
£1 million (Paul Hamlyn Foundation and HEFCE) to support projects that identify, evaluate and disseminate good practice.

The primary purpose of the programme is to generate robust, evidence-based analysis and evaluation about the most effective strategies to ensure high continuation and completion rates.

What are we doing?

Seven projects have been funded and a support and co-ordination team which aims to:

1. To support individual projects to enhance your development, evaluation and collaborative dissemination;
2. To co-ordinate inter-project working to further the learning and dissemination across the 7 funded projects;
3. To undertake meta evaluation and analysis of effective strategies to support retention;
4. To promote dissemination and learning across the HE sector.


Meta-analysis
Evidence-informed practice
Research evidence
Existing work
Project development
Institutional development and change
Sector learning and change
Year 1
Creating sustainable change
Effective dissemination
Networking
Year 3

What do we already know?

Widening Participation Research Service (WPRS)

Student retention and success synthesis (Jones 2008)

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/institutions/wp/wprs

The Higher Education Academy
Widening Participation Research Service

Why students leave

There is rarely a single reason why students leave. Contributing factors are:

- Preparation for higher education
- Institutional and course match
- Academic experience
- Social integration
- Financial issues
- Personal circumstances

Factors improving retention

- Pre-entry information, preparation and admission
- Induction and transition support
- Curriculum development
- Social engagement
- Student support
- Data and monitoring
- Institutional commitment to retention and management of the process

The Pre-conditions for Retention

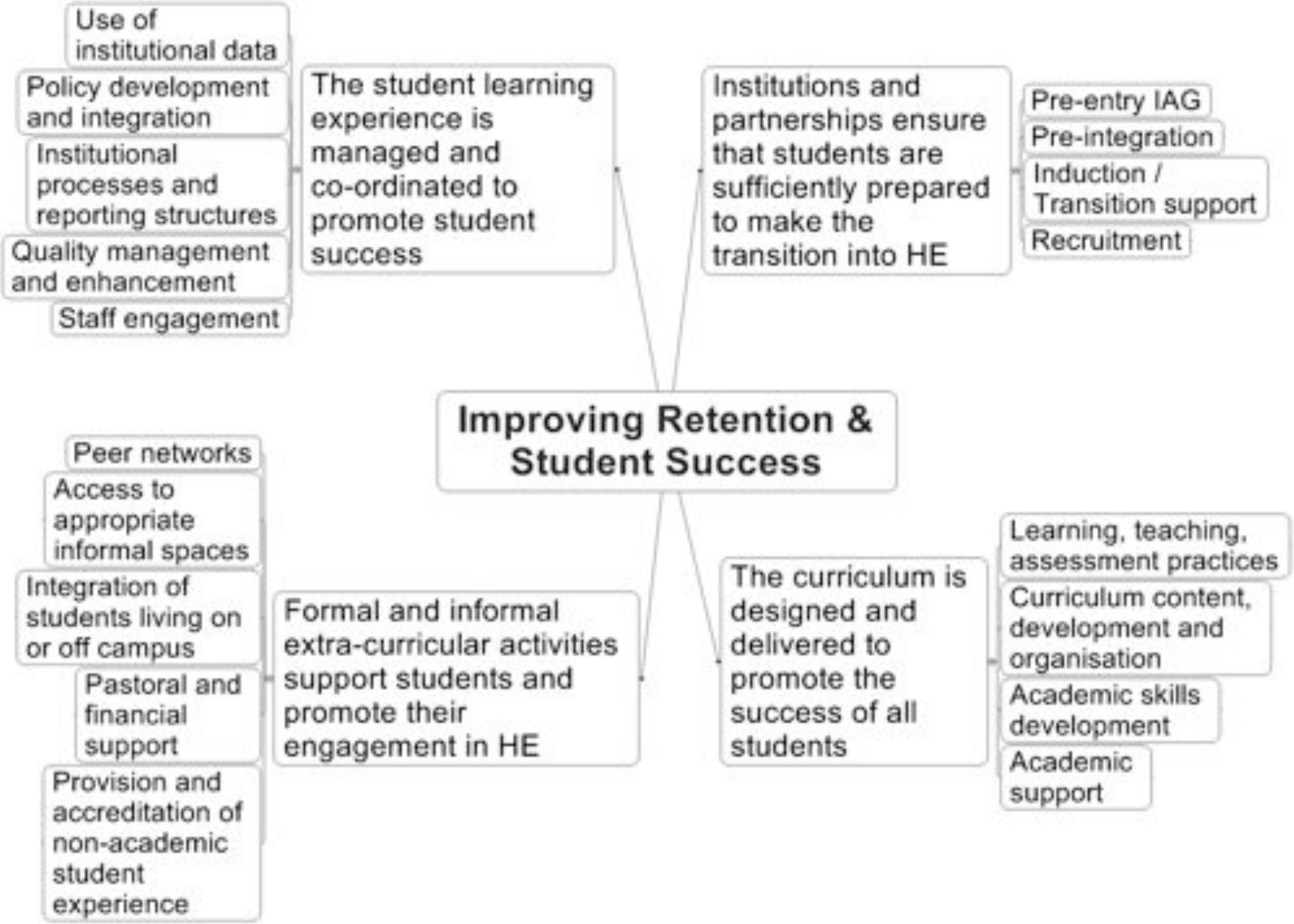
The student learning experience is managed and co-ordinated to promote student success

Institutions and partnerships ensure that students are sufficiently prepared to make the transition into HE

Improving Retention & Student Success

Formal and informal extra-curricular activities support students and promote their engagement in HE

The curriculum is designed and delivered to promote the success of all students


Improving Retention & Student Success
The student learning experience is managed and co-ordinated to promote student success
Use of institutional data
Policy development and integration
Institutional processes and reporting structures
Quality management and enhancement
Staff engagement
Institutions and partnerships ensure that students are sufficiently prepared to make the transition into HE
Pre-entry IAG
Pre-integration
Induction / Transition support
Recruitment
Formal and informal extra-curricular activities support students and promote their engagement in HE
Peer networks
Access to appropriate informal spaces
Integration of students living on or off campus
Pastoral and financial support
Provision and accreditation of non-academic student experience
The curriculum is designed and delivered to promote the success of all students
Learning, teaching, assessment practices
Curriculum content, development and organisation
Academic skills development
Academic support

What do we want to find out?

Meta-evaluation questions

How can the learning experience be managed to promote student success?

How can institutions and partnerships (e.g. Aimhigher) ensure that students are sufficiently prepared to make the transition into HE?

How can formal and informal extra-curricular activities support students and promote their engagement in higher education?

How can the curriculum be designed and delivered to promote the success of all students?

How to get involved: Share your expertise and learn from others

Dissemination Opportunities

- Student retention and success community of interest
- Biannual briefings throughout the programme
- Retention strand within Action on Access 2008 and Academy conferences 2009
- Two day retention convention 2010
- Ongoing National Research Seminar Series
- Final dissemination conference 2012

Publications.

More information:

Student retention and success JISC list email
info@actiononaccess.org

Retention Grants Programme visit the website at
http://www.phf.org.uk/landing.asp?id=367 or
email lthomas@phf.org.uk

Widening Participation Research Service:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/institutions/wp/wprs
or email inclusion@heacademy.ac.uk

References

Curtis, A. (2007) *Student Retention Guide for Academic Staff*. London: Roehampton University

Jones, R (2008) *Student retention and success*. Research Synthesis. York: Higher Education Academy

National Audit Office (NAO) (2007) *Staying the course: the retention of students in higher education*. London: The Stationary Office

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Smith, J. and Naylor, R.A. (2001) 'Dropping out of university: a statistical analysis of the probability of withdrawal for UK university students', Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Vol. 164, No. 2, pp. 389–405