

Summary of Findings and Recommendations from Withdrawal Research

Purpose of the research

- To improve retention generally
- To develop appropriate interventions to support students who might be considered “at risk”

Students from under-represented social groups and students entering via non-traditional routes were slightly more likely to withdraw than others.

The tendencies identified, although sometimes slight, towards greater vulnerability to withdrawal among “wider access students” do suggest a need for the University of Edinburgh to address the particular challenges that these students might face.

1. **Unsatisfactory experience relating to wrong choice**

(reported by 71% of students who withdrew)

-Little or inaccurate knowledge & understanding of what a programme involved before they began it

-Badly informed

- **More pre-entry guidance**
- **Provide more (or better) information on what the courses involve**
- **Information needs to be easy to access and students need to know how to access it**
- **Early provision of good information particularly for over-subscribed courses**
- **Relate relevance of the course to future careers**
- **Good support & advice to help students transfer to another course within the University**
- **Good support & advice for students exiting the University to continue on a suitable education or career path**

2. **Unsatisfactory experience of academic life**

(reported by 58.2% of students who withdrew)

-Discontentment related to course content & ways in which programme were arranged

-Teaching methods – lack of feedback, impersonal, insufficient staff / student contact

-Lack of academic & personal support

-Insufficient time to listen to students who encountered difficulties

-Lack of advice on alternative courses

-Lack of timely recognition & intervention

- **Provide more structured advice & support, particularly for those students who encounter difficulties**
- **Structure more student/staff contact time**
- **Use of more inter-active methods**
- **Improve support provided by Director of Studies**

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3. Difficulties with coping with the demands of the programme

(reported by 45.8% of students who withdrew)

- Lack of confidence (54.8% from CSE 38.2% from CHSS)
- Insufficient background knowledge or understanding (particularly 'H' students)
- Over-stretching due to poor organisation of study time or competing demands on time
- Staff may make assumptions about students recent academic experiences

- **Improve teaching and academic support**
- **Provide more help with study skills**
- **Improve support and advice to deal with academic problems**
- **Demand a certain level of attendance and monitor attendance levels**
- **Early and improved feedback**
- **Be clearer about how much work students need to put in**

4. Dissatisfaction with the Social Environment

(reported by 40.6% of students who withdrew)

- “I didn't feel that I fitted in”
- Social scene dominated by cliques
- Intimidating atmosphere
- Felt uncomfortable in an environment characterised by division of wealth, social class, educational background & nationality
- Difficulties in getting to know other students
- Daunting environments
- Problems with flat-mates
- Difficult to get to know other students because of the sheer size of the university
- Incredibly competitive – no attempt to help students to get to know one another better
- 32.5% → 21.3% more withdrawers than continuers

- **Provide more opportunities to meet other students**
- **Increase efforts to help students become more socially integrated**

5. Financial & Practical Problems

(reported by 29.4% of students who withdrew)

- Least frequent reason for withdrawal
- Financial problems alone seemed to very rarely result in withdrawal but were usually combined with other factors across the categories
- Mature students with family commitments particularly vulnerable
- Accommodation in Edinburgh is expensive
- Withdrawers in paid employment more likely to be working longer hours

- **Crèche facilities**
- **Cheaper accommodation**
- **Directors of Studies aware of appropriate support**

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6. **Personal Reasons**

(reported by 51% of students who withdrew)

-Combinations of factors e.g. homesickness, illness, bereavement

-Impact of personal problems on academic performance

-37% of students who withdrew felt there was no member of staff that they felt that they could talk to about non-academic problems that affected their studies

- **Academic staff to deal sensitively with students who are experiencing personal problems**
- **Increase staff awareness of interaction between the personal and the academic experience**
- **Increased flexibility and support to enable students to get through difficult periods**
- **Advertise Student Support Services more widely**