

# Inspirational session 15

Session's theme: Retention

Paper number: 18

Presenters: Chris Mestdagh

Presenters' Organisation: Howest University College

Session's chair: To be announced later.

Session title: Using research on diversity and inclusion to work on change in the first year

Abstract:

Howest University College (Belgium) gives great attention to an inclusive diversity policy aiming to support all students. It executed a three year research project into the perspective of students with a need for support and of academic staff on diversity and inclusion. The goal of this research was to:

- scientifically underpin and support the further development of the diversity policy by using action research;
- develop tools that support the in-, through- and outflow of disadvantaged groups.

In this inspiration session we will explain what we have done and how change is happening through quotes of students and staff. These quotes were collected by interviewing students and staff during the research project. For this session we will focus on the results of the part where we asked on how students experienced entering higher education: what did students find helpful when enquiring about a programme? How did they choose for Howest? How were the first days and months in Howest? What are their expectations about guidance and support systems?

In the first stage of the project, the focus was on the perspective of students and what diversity means to them in practice meant. A total of 35 students with a need for support shared their story with us. The wealth of information this generated was processed in the next research phase: the experiences of staff in relation to diversity and inclusion. In the final stage (now) the results are being implemented in different tools that support the social policy and actions of the university college. Confronting staff with students experiences was very inspiring, both to researchers as well as staff and key actors in student guidance and diversity policy. On a policy level, as well as in concrete actions new policy is being implemented in function of better support for students in all their diversity. Most of these actions focus on the first months of a programme.

# Inspirational session 15

Session's theme: Retention

Paper number: 21

Presenters: Mark Groves, Christopher Sellars, Alison Barber & Julian Smith

Presenters' Organisation: University of Wolverhampton, UK

Session's chair: To be announced later.

Session title: 'Ok, now I'm at Uni, is it for me?' Examining first year sports students' expectations of and motivations for Higher Education study pre- and post-higher student fees

Abstract:

Higher student fees were introduced in England in 2012, meaning that students could incur a maximum fee debt of £27000 (approx. 31500 euros). Within Higher Education in the UK there is also an increasing focus on student retention and student experience (Roberts, 2011). As a result, the authors decided to conduct a mixed method study over two academic years specifically examining student motivations for and expectations of higher education and the potential impact of higher fees therein.

For the academic years 2011-12 (pre-higher fees) and 2012-13 (post-higher fees) data were collected using the 'Student Engagement Questionnaire' (Zepke, Leach & Butler, 2010) and follow up focus groups. Participants were first year undergraduate sports students at a post-1992 university in the West Midlands of England. The questionnaire was completed using Surveyor, a survey application software. Focus groups were conducted by the first two authors. The survey generated descriptive quantitative data, while focus group transcripts were coded independently by both first named authors with themes identified inductively.

The themes presented were agreed following extensive discussion between these researchers. Themes emerging that will form the basis of our discussion are: perceived competency ('Can I do it?'); staff-student relationships ('It's great when they say hello'); student-student relationships ('I'd really struggle at uni with no friends'); student expectations of higher education and their specific course ('I know it's important, but what's it got to do with sport?'); intrinsic motivation and factors influencing it ('I've only got to pass it'); and students' active engagement ('The lectures have to add something!'). These themes are discussed in the light of contemporary literature (Zepke and Leach, 2010; Zepke, Leach & Butler, 2010; Russell & Slater, 2011) with student motivation and expectations and, where appropriate, the impact of higher fees explicitly explored. Suggestions will also be made for possible interventions.