



Transforming learning through Scholarship Session Abstract

'Experts by experience': Students talk about improving attainment at University

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The issue of student attainment is high on HE agendas and has accrued a palpable urgency given contextual factors such as widening access agendas and the increasing diversity of the student body (Woodfield 2014); government goals for fair access and access agreement requirements from the Office of Fair Access (OFFA 2016). In response, Higher Education institutions are investing a great deal of energy into projects and strategies both to reduce identified attainment gaps within student groups and to enhance the success of all students (Woodfield 2014). To improve student attainment, retention and success, it is argued that HEIs need to devise ways to develop student confidence, to strengthen their identity as students and to improve issues such as student skills and academic practices (Thomas, 2015). It is also recognised that academic support plays a major role in this and that, for example, literacy teaching works to improve attainment (Sosu and Ellis 2014). Key to understanding what works, however, is student engagement. Shakespeare's (2016) argument that data must be informed by its subjects' first-hand experiences is applicable to debates around student attainment for, as he says, 'we have data; they have testimony'. In December 2015, postgraduate and undergraduate students from AAH conducted discussion group research into the School's Academic Support Service in order to gauge what has helped them to improve their attainment at university. Themes explored included: ideas about service approaches and activities that have helped them to improve; recommendations to the School about improving student attainment at university; wider recommendations about supporting students with their study issues. In this session, hosted on the day by students Richard Broomhall and Ben Haworth, Richard and Ben presented their findings in order to open wider debate on improving attainment at university. After all, to use Shakespeare's term (2016), it is our students who are 'experts by experience'.

OFFA (2016) 'Strategic guidance: developing your 2017-18 access agreement' [Online]
At: <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/strategic-access-agreement-guidance.pdf>

Accessed: March 23rd, 2016

Shakespeare, T. (2016) 'Expert by Experience'. A Point of View, BBC Radio 4, Jan, 31, 2016

[Online]. At: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06yfyqf>

Accessed: March 23rd, 2016

Woodfield (2014) 'Undergraduate retention and attainment across the disciplines', Higher Education Academy [Online]. At:

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/undergraduate-retention-and-attainment-across-disciplines#sthash.eVtmFw9v.dpuf> Accessed: March 23rd, 2016

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