**Retention and equity**

Literature Review

In tandem with the literature that focuses on attrition is a dual or complementary focus on retention for equity group students. Issues with retention are evident across equity groups in higher education (HE), especially among Indigenous students, students with disability and rural and remote students. In their work on developing a critical interventions framework, Naylor, Baik & James (2013) show despite increasing numbers of equity students, retention and success have remained generally the same (96% of domestic students overall), although this is not the case for Indigenous (85% retention; 81% success) or rural and remote students (91% retention; 94% success). In addition, Asmar, Page & Radloff’s (2015) study on the engagement of Indigenous students in HE show that Indigenous students are still underrepresented, and are more likely to withdraw from HE institutions due to factors including financial pressure, conflict between family and studies, discrimination and mis-expectations. The authors therefore argue that a more nuanced understanding of who Indigenous students are is needed, stating that ‘much more needs to be known about who Indigenous students are, with whom they interact, why they may leave and how they may be utilising Indigenous centres’ (p. 28). On the other hand, Kilpatrick, Johns, Barnes, McLennan, Fischer & Magnussen (2016) who examined the relationship between supports and adjustments for students with disability, and their retention and success in HE, contend that the success and retention of students with disability are ‘consistently lower’ (p. 45) than the total student population. They assert that HE institutions should therefore develop strategies to address this issue, with more research conducted in developing better methods of disclosure, and better ways to support students with mental health issues and autism (Kilpatrick et al., 2016). Apart from that, in their study on the social, cultural and locational factors influencing the low post-compulsory retention rates of remote island students, Stewart & Abbott-Chapman (2011) identify dualities which contribute towards students’ decisions to disengage or persist in HE, which include the following: location and displacement, freedom and lack of freedom, fear and lack of fear, familiarity and lack of familiarity, support and lack of support and mastery and lack of mastery (Stewart & Abbott-Chapman, 2011). Stewart & Abbott-Chapman (2011) therefore assert that rural and metropolitan education should not be regarded as ‘separate and unequal, but as interconnected and of equal value, and resourced by governments as such’ (p. 12).

Despite the varying problems influencing the retention rates of students across the equity groups in HE, the literature also highlights findings on factors that support the retention of these students in HE institutions. In their study on the success factors for retention of first-year special entry Aboriginal students of an Australian metropolitan university, Day & Nolde (2009) identified that the most significant factor influencing the retention rates of Aboriginal students was the support provided and the sense of belonging experienced by the students. This was followed by career goals and personal achievement, and the students’ sense of identity (Day & Nolde, 2009). The authors therefore highlighted the significance of the Indigenous centre, noting that ‘further tertiary sector investment in these units is fundamental to enhancing student progress and retention’ (p. 149). On the other hand, for low SES students, Karimshah, Wyder, Henman, Tay, Capelin, & Short (2013) identified informal social support networks and self-agency as significant factors impacting retention. Findings from their study revealed that 33 out of 53 respondents mentioned the importance of friends, family and/or a partner as a significant influence on retention, while almost 50% of low SES participants mentioned a strong sense of self-agency as a key influence on retention (Karimshah et al., 2013). Apart from that, McKendry, Wright & Stevenson’s (2014) study on the attrition and retention of nursing and midwifery students in HE indicated that the major factors supporting retention include role models (who are inspirations for their profession), staff and peers.

There are also many examples in the literature of strategies intended to enhance retention (often positioned in line with increasing success), such as financial support (Carson, 2010; Reed & Hurd, 2014; Zacharias et al., 2016); on-campus accommodation programs (see Burge, 2012;), access schemes (for example MAPS to Success in Christensen & Evamy, 2011), and mentoring programs (for example AIME, see Harwood et al., 2015; Herts Success in Farenga, 2017). Naylor and Mifsud (2020) also propose the use of a structural inequality framework, which frames the problem of social inclusion within the ‘locus of control of the institution’, which increases the likelihood of effective change. They also argue that the three types of structural inequality identified in the framework (vertical, horizontal and internal) are highly effective in identifying and distinguishing barriers to access, consequently allowing for more focused policy solutions. However, overall, other scholars have argued that there are limitations in these strategies and initiatives, and that they are hampered by a lack of institutional and national cohesion (for example, Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Thomas, 2014). As Thomas (2014) argues, there is “little evidence of any theoretically sound, coherent or comprehensive plan to address the challenges and opportunities [including retention] created by increased percentages of students from low-SES backgrounds” (p.818), although he does note that there are pockets of excellent practice across the country.

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Retention: Emplacement and Displacement as Factors Influencing Educational Persistence or Discontinuation, *Journal of Research in Rural Education,* 26(6), 1–17.

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**Equity and Higher Education Annotated Bibliography Series**

**Retention and Belonging**

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| **Citation** | **Annotation** |
| Asmar, C.; Page, S.; & Radloff, A. (2015). [Exploring anomalies in Indigenous student engagement: findings from a national Australian survey of undergraduates](https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/exploring-anomalies-in-indigenous-student-engagement-findings-fro), *Higher Education Research & Development,* 34(1), 15–29.  AUS  Annotated by Sally Baker  *Keywords: Aboriginal; attrition; Indigenous education; retention; student engagement; student support; Torres Strait Islander; university* | **Context:** Set in context of increasing indigenous participation in higher education but addresses concerns about retention, attrition and completion. Indigenous students = still under-represented: “These issues, therefore, demand systematic and serious investigation, including a willingness to re-examine some longheld assumptions regarding the presumed link between engagement and success” (p.16). Literature suggests Indigenous students = more likely to have financial pressure, conflict between family and studies, discrimination and mis-expectations. Indigenous students = more likely to withdraw  **Aim:** To explore links between engagement (location of study/ mode of study/ relationships) and persistence. Engagement in studies = considered a proxy for likelihood to persist (therefore, with indigenous attrition rates high, hypothesis = indigenous engagement is lower)  **Methodology:** Draws on 2009 AUSSE survey (30 participating universities) = responses from 25,795 (77% online responses; 23% paper); 2480 Indigenous students invited; 526 responded + written comments from 355 students. Matched sample approach to compare with a similarly-composed non-Indigenous students (see Table 1, p.18)  **Findings:** Demographic profiles: Indigenous students = more likely to be female, low SES, older, FinF and come from provincial/ remote Australia (but survey shows 2/3 = metro address, presumably because of university attendance). Only 68% = studying on campus (compared to 83% of non-Indigenous). However, AUSSE also shows that 75% of Indigenous respondents = not low SES and 44% are not FinF. Student engagement = broadly the same for both Indigenous and non-indigenous students. Indigenous students = more likely to blend learning with workplace experience (p.20) and are more likely to engage in paid work outside of studies – Indigenous students are more likely to have worked before starting university and therefore choose courses based on profession/ current employment. Relationships with staff: Indigenous students = more likely to discuss grades, ideas and work with teachers (not clear from data if these teachers are also Indigneous). No significant differences between Indigenous/ non-indigenous student-student relationships. Reasons for attrition = more likely with these students:   * students whose circumstances qualify them for financial assistance * students who are studying externally or at a distance * students from a provincial or remote area * students with a disability * older students and * male students (p.23)   Authors also argue that attrition = more likely among students enrolled in Indigenous-specific programs. Financial reasons are most common, followed by academic reasons. Indigenous students with a disability = more likely to consider dropping out. Indigenous students who have seriously considered departing  their institution report lower levels of institutional support (p.25)  **Core argument:** Indigenous students engage in similar way to non-indigenous but attrition rates are still higher. More nuanced understanding of who indigenous students are = needed. Authors make distinction (but problematise the crudeness of the binary) between younger school leavers and older students. They argue that older indigenous students “tend to share demographic characteristics associated with greater likelihood of withdrawal – characteristics such as poor health, financial insecurity, family obligations  and not being full-time on campus” (p.26). However, written comments on AUSSE suggest same group = enthusiastic and highly engaged – meaning that ‘life gets in the way’ for this group. Younger students, in contrast, “may well be simply getting on with the job of learning – and succeeding” (p.26). This distinction = also connected to whether students are in indigenous-specific programs or mixed ‘mainstream’ classes. Little is known about impact of indigenous centres for supporting indigenous students (appears positive from data but more research needed). “We propose that much more needs to be known about who the Indigenous students are, with whom they interact, why they may leave and how they may be utilising Indigenous centres” (p.28) |
| Day, D. & Nolde, R. (2009). [Arresting the decline in](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/02610150910937899/full/html?casa_token=34Yei2tzuEUAAAAA:UzvcFIX_MIRJeBEHHs_L06yW0-_0gYWfWFRQ3fpSJ51oEFn9TJ3FPl1cUG_dEOmzfdWNcBwrLnq3e-wc4dnoDxUQN8EUQY5lzQhJHRPmp5qC0ZWzKIo)  [Australian indigenous representation at university](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/02610150910937899/full/html?casa_token=34Yei2tzuEUAAAAA:UzvcFIX_MIRJeBEHHs_L06yW0-_0gYWfWFRQ3fpSJ51oEFn9TJ3FPl1cUG_dEOmzfdWNcBwrLnq3e-wc4dnoDxUQN8EUQY5lzQhJHRPmp5qC0ZWzKIo)  [Student experience as a guide](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/02610150910937899/full/html?casa_token=34Yei2tzuEUAAAAA:UzvcFIX_MIRJeBEHHs_L06yW0-_0gYWfWFRQ3fpSJ51oEFn9TJ3FPl1cUG_dEOmzfdWNcBwrLnq3e-wc4dnoDxUQN8EUQY5lzQhJHRPmp5qC0ZWzKIo), *Equal Opportunities International,* 28(2), 135–161.  AUS  Annotated by Sally Baker  *Keywords Australia, Higher education, Australian aboriginals, Retention, Careers, Ethic minorities* | **Context:** Situates the paper and research in context of differences between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians – noting higher levels of health concerns, lower life expectancy, more cases of domestic violence, lower rates of participation in school/ school success. Scopes literature relating to participation of Indigenous students in higher education – points to a small and sketchy body of literature at the time. Point to no research that explored differences between first and second generation indigenous students in higher education. Authors also note that once in higher education, financial and health concerns = significant impact on Indigenous participation  **Aim:** To reveal the success factors for retention of first year special entry Aboriginal students at an Australian metropolitan university.  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Grounded theory/ longitudinal study of 12 Indigenous non-traditional entry Year 1 students from 2006 intake (most not FinF = 9/12; equal f and m; self-selected; 9 = 18-19 years old/ 3 = 23-24). In-depth interviews conducted with participants x 3 over one year regarding “impacts of schooling, teaching and learning, life experience, career aspirations, relationships and racial identity on academic success” (p.135)  **Findings:** No clear academic distinction between Indigenous and non-indigenous students (except for special entry). Data categorised into: belonging, future plans, identity, personal recognition, and finances. Support and belonging = most significant, also career goals and personal achievement showing strongly. Identity = important theme.  Prior life experience = relatively little bearing on academic performance = similar learning and life issues to non-Indigenous students. Most did not have a strong connection to their Indigeneity, but wanted to find out more; also factors related to this (for example, friendships and support from Indigenous centre, also and AIME mentoring at school because of Indigeneity) = significant on students’ experiences and ‘success’. Authors found that private schools = “pipeline (in)to university” (8/12 had attended private schools on indigenous scholarships). Students adopted both indigenous and non-indigenous world perspectives and displayed robust resilience in the face of challenging family and educational experiences.  Authors discuss the significance of the Indigenous centre, noting “further tertiary sector investment in these units is fundamental to enhancing student progress and retention. However such resources are often not forthcoming. Most non-indigenous faculty do not visit indigenous academic spaces, maintaining academic and cultural divides” (p.149).  Barriers: “Students identified three main barriers to academic success: difficulty writing essays and managing time, poor communication about resources available to them including support programs, and, not knowing what was needed to succeed in their first year” (p.151).  Authors offer a model for pathways of indigenous student special entry access to a metropolitan university (see p.155). Model shows how most students from study had clear career goal prior to entering higher education, they had close relationships with the Indigenous centre and friends, participated in lots of ECAs and were enthusiastic. **Core argument:** Spaces of recognition and belonging = key: “a key positive factor to retention to be provision of an indigenous study and support unit on campus, which provided a safe counter space for indigenous students  only. Here students became part of the indigenous family” (p.156). |
| Farenga, S. (2017). [Students on a journey: an institutional case study of a widening participation success and retention programme](https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/openu/jwpll/2017/00000019/00000002/art00008), *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 19(2), 142-156.  AUS  Annotated by Anna Xavier  Keywords: *widening participation; student support; transition; student experience; retention* | **Context:** Students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds entering higher education (HE) in England have soared in number in the last decade, rising 43% since 2004 (HEFCE, 2013). The boom in WP students numbers can be partly explained by the New Labour government’s (1997-2010) concerted effort to preserve access to HE as tuition fees increased. More recently, the Conservative government (2010- present) shifted policy outputs towards supporting the success and retention of these students (Farenga, 2015).  **Aim:** To consider how a support programme (Herts Success) might best support WP students and their diverse needs at the University of Hetfordshire. Herts Success: Starting in 2014/15, Herts Success delivered a programme based on social integration, skill development and developing an employability profile. Students were selected based on family income (under £25,000) and living in postcodes with the lowest levels of progression to HE.  **Theoretical frame:** Not specified in study.  **Methodology:** Qualitative approach; Data collection method: Focus groups & Online surveys (Open-ended, qualitative questions) across two academic years 2014/15 & 2015/16; Research participants: Focus groups – Year 1 & Year 2 students at the end of 2013/14 (n=56); Survey responses: 1000 responses; Data analysis: Thematic analysis (Flick, 2014).  **Findings:** 1)Individualised pathways: For WP students, the student experience impacts their success at university and eventually the graduate labour market; While some consensus was reached on individual activities, students requirement for support were ‘virtually unique’ for each individual -Students appeared to have highly individual conceptions on when support should be available & varying ratios were observed on the academic, employability & social support needed. 2)Herts Success’ role in fostering success: Herts Success provides ‘individual, tailored experiences’ (p. 149), which meet the needs of students, consequently promoting retention; Despite varying employability needs among students, Herts Success allowed students to tailor experiences according to their respective needs; Herts Success impacted students academically, either directly or indirectly – Personal academic mentor supported one student’s success, while access to social events helped another student focus on their studies by providing an outlet. However, many students chose not to engage with Herts Success, although some felt that the available access of the program was already a ‘reassurance’ (p. 150).  **Implications:** 1)Cultivating a personal experience at university, where students can choose what to engage with, based on individual needs, would allow for personal pathways to be developed. 2)Incorporating concepts of ‘transition’ and the wider student experience will benefit students by allowing for a ‘multiplicity of student lives’ to be considered (p. 151). 3)Need of WP students can be met by offering ‘specific forms of support’ (p. 153) (Farenga, 2015) **Core argument:** HE institutions should re-conceptualise ‘transition’ and the student experience away from a definition that places the institution at the centre, to one where the student journey is prioritised. |
| Gale, T. & Parker, S. (2017). [Retaining students in Australian higher education: cultural capital, field distinction,](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1474904116678004) *European Educational Research Journal,* 16(1), 80-96.  AUS  Annotated by Anna Xavier  Keywords: *Bourdieu; cultural capital; drop out; higher education; media analysis; under-represented students* | **Context:** In the global phenomenon of WP policy in higher education, lower retention rates for students from less advantaged socio-economic circumstances have potential to undermine the social inclusion agenda of HE. In Australia, however, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are retained at similar rates to their peers, yet there persists a sense of public crisis that WP presents a threat to the quality and integrity of the higher education system as a whole.  **Aim:** This paper responds to two questions arising from these data and public confidence discrepancies:   1. Why are students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds retained in Australian higher education (HE) at rates comparable with their peers, and higher than similar students in other HE systems within other OECD nations (particularly in the UK but also within other parts of Europe); and 2. Given their comparable retention, why does there appear to be such panic in Australia about the retention rates of low SES students in Australian HE?   **Theoretical frame:** Bourdieu’s Social Theory (1984): ‘Cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986) & ‘Distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984)  **Methodology:** Document analysis – Newspaper and other media reports on issues related to WP in Australia (Participation targets, retention rates, equity initiatives, & government policy). Database: *Newsbank,* the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). Most print media articles: From *The Australian* (Australia’s only national newspaper). Timeline: 2009 (when retention issues became a significant concern in HE) to 2015 (time of writing).  **Findings:** 1)Retention as problem: The crisis of confidence in WP - the media do not merely report the ‘facts’ but actively construct issues and problems that imply particular responses; media commentary has 3 overlapping strands: i) Increased student access leads to increased student drop out ii) The extent of drop out is unacceptably high and costly for governments, universities and students iii) Lower university entry scores are indicative of dropping standards; Perceived root of the problem -‘Alleged academic inadequacies of disadvantaged students’ (p. 83): a)The perception of ‘under-prepared’ students – Key theme in media reports & official documents: ‘drop out’ is almost a ‘foregone conclusion’ (p. 83) for low SES students because they are ‘under-prepared’ for university study due to low entrance scores or ATARs (Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks); b)The perceived extent/cost of the problem - Increased attrition is reasoned to be an ‘inevitable result’ (p. 85) of WP policies, which lead to excessive and unacceptable financial costs to institutions and government; It is also perceived that attrition has ‘apparent personal costs’ (p. 85) for students – ‘breaks a lot of hearts’ (Souter, in Trounson, 2011). c)Perceptions of quality – Potential of WP policies to reduce HE quality (Observed in sentiments by the Go8 & political campaigns leading up to the 2013 elections); In more elite universities: Quantity represents the ‘antithesis of quality’ and increased selectivity is presented as a solution. 2)Retention as evidenced in data: not a problem particular to socio-economic status – The media-induced panic about low SES students ‘flooding’ (p. 87) the Australian HE system & ‘diluting’ (p. 87) its quality does not match the reality: Despite the increasing number of domestic undergraduate students in Australia (204, 874 to 263, 073 from 2009 to 2013) (DoE, Selected Higher Education Statistics, Students), the proportion of low SES students participating in HE has remained ‘relatively stable’ (p. 87). Data on retention is similar: i) Retention rates of students from low SES backgrounds: in 2012 the retention rate was only slightly less for low SES students, at 80.08% compared to 81.96% for all domestic undergraduate students. ii)Retention ratio: Students from low SES backgrounds (0.98 from 2006 -2012), only slightly lower than their high SES peers. Three universities (Victoria University, University of Western Sydney and Central Queensland University – all with very high rates of low SES representation) have retention ratios above 1. Conversely the University of Melbourne (which often appears in international league tables as Australia’s highest ranked university) and Macquarie University have low SES student retention ratios below 1. 3)Retention, as a function of cultural capital: theorising system, institution, group differences – National & system differences in student retention: Australia has a relatively more even distribution of cultural capital (which defines the field between advantaged & disadvantaged groups) than in some European countries & the UK that experience lower HE retention among students from dis- advantaged backgrounds (Bowes, Thomas et al., 2013); Institutional differences in student retention: There appears to be a more significant difference in the quantity of cultural capital between institutions. Universities that typically attract students from more advantaged backgrounds tend to have higher student retention rates overall than those with higher proportions of students from low SES backgrounds; Group differences in student retention: While the data show that differences in retention rates between groups (i.e. low and high SES groups) is small, these differences are greatest in Australia’s elite universities. 4)Retaining field distinction: the politics of preserving advantage: In Bourdieu’s (1984) terms, increased access to and participation in higher education no longer ascribes its graduates with distinction. A university degree is therefore perceived to be less distinguished, in ‘mass’ and near ‘universal’ HE systems (Trow, 1974, 2006) (p. 91). This ‘sense of loss’ (p. 91) underlies the imagined crisis of attrition in Australia. The resistance to WP policies observed is therefore an attempt to protect the distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) and value of the ‘positional goods’ of elite HE in a global market (Marginson, 2006) by limiting access to parts of the market.  **Implications:** For HE research in Europe: 1) European researchers should not take for granted where the problems of student attrition lie. 2) Research should expand student ‘drop out’ problem to include institutions & systems & how these produce attrition. 3)HE research should understand that not all attrition is due to the unpreparedness of for HE study.  **Core argument:** The value of the Australian HE retention case to the European HE lies ‘not so much in their empirical similarity but their contrast; their juxtaposition provoking alternative ways of thinking about ‘drop out’ in European HE’, consequently encouraging new research avenues. |
| Hockings, C.; Cooke, S.; Yamashita, H.; McGinty, S. & Bowl, M. (2008). [Switched off? A study of disengagement among computing students at two universitie](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237403897_Switched_off_A_study_of_disengagement_among_computing_students_at_two_universities)s, *Research Papers in Education,* 23(2), 191–201.  UK  Annotated by Sally Baker  Keywords: *academic engagement; disengagement; learning and teaching; higher education; widening participation; classroom observation* | **Context:** UK higher education context: pre/ post-1992 universities (first year computing modules) in context of increased student diversity. ESRC/ TLRP-funded project  **Aim:** To examine conditions of (dis)engagement in/from learning; to consider “what might be done to increase and widen academic engagement in the computing classroom” (abstract)  **Theoretical frame:** Uses different conceptual lenses: habitus (Bourdieu), approaches to learning (Prosser & Trigwell) and theories of knowing (Belenky et al.). Frame engagement around ‘deep’ learning and disengagement around ‘surface’ learning  Deliberately resists binary labels of traditional/ non-traditional students.  **Methodology:** Employed “range of mostly qualitative methods’: interviews and focus group meetings, observations of lessons with video-stimulated review, document collection. Wider project focused on subject areas that attract diverse learners (computing, nursing, social work, business, biology). This paper focuses on computing only in 2 different universities.  **Findings:** There are many periods/ moments in which students are not academically engaged because their diverse needs are not met.  Describes differences in learning spaces and class size, and similarities in content and level.  Main reasons for disengagement:  ● Variation in students’ prior knowledge ranged well above and below that assumed by tutors.  ● Students’ opportunities to think through problems collaboratively or independently were curtailed.  ● Students’ different interests, backgrounds and motivations were not known, ignored and/ or not valued.  ● The dominant culture of the classroom is unwelcoming or alienating to some (female) students (p.199).  *Staying quiet*: Students generally did not offer answers in either large or small class environments (unwilling to speak out) – curriculum and pedagogies = not addressing diversity in student body (and different kinds of qualifications students use to gain access). Students don’t want to expose lack of knowledge/ be humiliated. Tutor B started from assumption that students knew nothing or little, but then failed to extend more knowledgeable/confident students. Students described feeling more confident in peer groups.  *Getting stuck*: students spoke of enjoying ‘playing around’ (aka a problem-solving approach) in own time but seemed very dependent on tutors when stuck in class – short analysis of tutor talk shows that in one situation, tutor took over and showed student what to do  *No connection*: engagement = related to students’ reasons for choosing computing course (to get a job but with little connection to life outside the course/ uni).  *Gender* (for computing): offer example of ‘Ana’ who is marginalised by male peers and male tutor **Core argument:** There are several reasons for disengagement. There is no one-size fits all approach to addressing/ responding to diversity. They “call on academic leaders and developers to play a part in creating a climate of trust and openness in which staff and managers can express and debate their ideas and beliefs respectfully, make pedagogical and curricula improvements unhampered by unwieldy bureaucracy, and challenge policies, practices and discourses that inhibit the creation of inclusive learning environments” (p.200). |
| Karimshah, A., Wyder, M., Henman, P., Tay, D., Capelin, E. & Short, P. (2013). [Overcoming adversity among low SES students: A study of strategies for retention](http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Overcoming-adversity-among-low-SES-students.pdf). *Australian Universities Review,* 55(2), 5-14.  AUS  Annotated by Anna Xavier  Keywords (Anna’s): *retention; low SES; higher education; self- agency* | **Context:** The Bradley Review in 2008 and the following response from the Australian government indicated policy concerns that young people from low SES are underrepresented in tertiary education. In order to address this, responses to both recruitment and retention are required. While there is a considerable number of studies on reasons for student attrition, few studies examined the factors enabling students from low SES backgrounds to stay in university.  **Aim:** To report on research examining the issue of retention among low SES undergraduate students at the University of Queensland (UQ). Focus of the study: To identify the strategies used by students to continue in their studies when faced with adversity and stress. RQs: (a) Are the stressors that low SES students experience different from other students? and (b) What are the factors that contribute to their retention  **Theoretical frame:** Key concepts: Cultural capital (Bordieu, 1984) –‘practices, experiences, perspectives and knowledge that one generation passes to the next that enables an individual to prosper within certain cultural factions’ (p. 6)(Godina, 2008); Social integration (Tinto, 1975) – students’ ‘ability to integrate socially and interact positively in their institution’s social and academic domain’; Self-agency (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997) – how ‘individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities of history and social circumstances’(p. 7) (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003); Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) – ‘a belief in one’s ability to complete a specific task’ (p. 7).  **Methodology:** A mixed-methods approach was employed; Data collection method: Online survey – included both close-ended quantitative questions & open-ended qualitative questions. Quantitative questions: 1)Demographic questions 2)Assessment of students’ stress and its effect on them 3)Students’ motivating factors for remaining in university. Qualitative questions: Reflection on events that may have affected students’ and led to consideration of dropping out; Research setting: University of Queensland (UQ) St Lucia Campus; Research participants: First year undergraduate students (low SES & other SES categories -1002 responses); Selection process for low SES students – Students who meet 2 out of 3 criteria: Postcode; Level of parental education; financial disadvantage; Percentage of low SES students: 15.8% (n=158). Data analysis: Thematic analysis.  **Findings:** 1)Understanding the stressors: 57.3% of surveyed population experienced two or more of the identified stressor types – financial problems, health problems, family issues & relationship problems; 11.5 % of students experienced all four; Low SES students were more likely to experience multiple stressors compared to other students (41.8 % -low SES students; 31.2% - other students); Impact of stress was greater for low SES students than other students: 72% of low SES students felt that the stressors affected their university studies ‘moderately to a lot’ (p. 9) compared to 60% of other students; 39% of low SES students have considered dropping out due to their stressors compared to 28% of other students; Most prevalent stressor: Financial stress (69.9% -low SES & 53.1% -other SES); Other stressors: Health problems: (44.9% -low SES & 40.8% -other SES), Family issues: (51.3% -low SES students & 42.%- other SES ), Relationship issues (44.33%- low SES & 39.7% -other SES). 2)Understanding retention processes: Informal social support networks & self-agency were significant factors impacting retention; Support services accessed: 82% of respondents were aware of student support services, but access of services was at a very low rate - Accommodation services (15.8 % low SES & 10.0% other SES); Counselling services (15.8% low SES & 14.2% other SES; Financial advisors (3.2% low SES & 1.4% other SES); Programme advisors (39.2% low SES & 30.1% other SES); Career advisors (15.8% low SES & 13.4 % other SES); Health services (35.4% low SES & 24.2% other SES); Legal support (5.1% low SES & 3.0% other SES). 3)Staff support: Majority of low SES respondents felt that lecturers and/or tutors were ‘available & approachable’; Varied experience with teaching staff: Dependent on year of study, class size, differences between lecturers & tutors; 16% of low SES students felt unsupported by their lecturers/tutors at some point in their degree; Only 4% of low SES students mentioned that university staff recommended student support services to them. 4)Informal social networks: 33 out of 53 respondents mentioned the importance of friends, family and/or a partner as significant influence on retention. 5)Self-agency: Almost 50% of low SES participants indicated a strong sense of self-agency, a personal commitment & determination to continue their studies.  **Recommendations:** 1) Universities should develop & implement policies that ‘support and promote social inclusion and support networks’ (p. 12). 2)Low access rate of student support services also suggest that universities should improve these services & promote them to students to ensure higher levels of retention. 3)Universities should also consider ‘personal characteristics’ as a significant element in understanding retention processes.  **Core argument:** The strongest influence for retention are ‘social, rather than institutional’ (p. 13). |
| Kilpatrick, S., Johns, S., Barnes, R., McLennan, D., Fischer, S. & Magnussen, K. (2016). [*Exploring the Retention and Success of Students with Disability*.](https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/exploring-the-retention-and-success-of-students-with-disability/) Report submitted to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Curtin University: Perth.  AUS  Annotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** NCSEHE-funded research that examines the retention and success of students with disabilities (SwD) in higher education  **Aim:** “to explore the relationship between supports and university adjustment for students with disability, and their retention and success” (p.ix).  **Theoretical frame:**  **Methodology:** Mixed-methods: examined data (2007-2013) from Higher Education Student Data Collection for: number of students with disability, type and disclosed need for support. Disability categories = hearing, learning, mobility, visual, medical and other [note: nothing explicit about mental illness] . Student data was also analysed regarding retention and success. Universities (Table A and B) categorized according to performance (high, medium, inconsistent, low). Three institutions from each category invited to participate in interviews on policy and practice to provision of adjustments for SwD. Desktop audit also conducted: “to provide an overview of policy, practice and institutional culture in relation to  disability across the institutions” (p.ix) in 2015.  **Findings:**   * Percentage of commencing and enrolled SwD increased over 2007-2013 but no real changes in types of disabilities (3.67 – 5.04%) * Smaller universities (10k-30k students) have larger proportion of SwD * Students with medical disability = most common; hearing issues = least reported * SwD = slightly lower success rate * Students with learning disability = retained at higher rate than other disabilities * SwD + support = retained at consistently lower rate * Differences between institutions in terms of policy and practice = at level of maturity of inclusive policy/ practices * Some institutions do not have current Disability Action Plan (DAP) * Few institutions involve students in development of policy * Disability support services = generally located in central support and generally shared throughout the institution = “indicating the move from a medical model to an inclusion model” (p.xi) * Factors that improve retention and performance * Recruitment via external linkages (schools/ disability networks) * Collaborative approaches (internal + external stakeholders)   **Recommendations**  Nationally consistent approach to categorizing students needed  Changes to policy and practice needed nationally, including: whole-of-institution inclusive framework built of concept of universal design, flexibility and current policy, offer financial resources to create suitable responses, integrate disability support with mainstream support, employ specialist disability support staff, regular monitoring of student outcomes, develop formalized learning action plans. Also “Consider students with disability from the perspective of the student lifecycle model, including recruitment and outreach strategies, and career transition strategies” (p.xiii).  **Core argument: “**students with disability are retained at consistently lower rates and have lower success rates than the total student population, suggesting that higher education institutions need to do more to redress this situation” (p.45) More research needed on better methods of disclosure, how to better support students with mental health issues and autism and more training for staff needed (academic and non-academic) |
| Masika, R. & Jones, J. (2015). [Building student belonging and engagement: insights into higher education students’ experiences of participating and learning together](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13562517.2015.1122585). *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21(2), 138-150. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2015.1122585  UK  Annotated by Sally Baker  Keywords*: belonging; retention; identity* | **Context:** Focuses on connections between retention and sense of belonging in context of diversified/massified HE system. Insights gathered from retention initiatives in Year 1 Business Management course/students in UK university (from HEFCE/ PHF/ Thomas ‘What Works’ project). Interventions = “encouraged active learning linked to personal development plans and employability through use of an online learning resource to capture student reflection on their learning development” (p.2) in ‘Developing Academic  and Employability Skills’ module. “Students were required to create a webpage and record reflections of their experiences and learning linked to ten milestones related to academic and social achievements, for example, settling in, socialising, team skills development, assignments and presentations for which students received feedback from lecturers and tutors” (p.4). Also = blog, additional group activities, formal group assignments and ‘Studentfolio’  **Aim:**  **Theoretical frame:** Wenger’s social theory of learning/ community of practice. Draw’s on Liz Thomas’ definition of belonging in HE  **Methodology:** appreciative inquiry (Bushe, 2007) = participants discuss problems and suggest positive change (discovery, dream, design). Conducted focus groups  **Findings:** Belonging to course: online communication and group work facilitated sense of belonging; in particular Studentfolio considered to facilitate feelings of encouragement and inclusion (p.6). Students formed own support-groups (Facebook). Authors consider impact of team learning on CoP theory.  Engagement with learning together: “meaning was grounded in the actions and the significance of the actions  in relation to the encompassing activity” (p.8) **Core argument:** Communities of Practice are important for fostering belonging and improving retention.  Study identifies three areas of importance: 1) curricula and teaching exchange + peer-to-peer exchange = enhance student CoP (and need to be responsive to diversifying student body); 2) push message that students belong via retention initiatives, curricula, teaching (both extra and curricular); 3) institution should acknowledge range of CoPs (e.g. Facebook) and integrate into institutional practices |
| McKendry, S.; Wright, M.; & Stevenson, K. (2014). [Why here and why stay? Students’ voices on the retention strategies of a widening participation university](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24090617), *Nurse Education Today*, 34, 872–877.  UK  Annotated by Sally Baker  Keywords: *retention; support; expectations; identity* | **Context:** Attrition/ retention of nursing and midwifery students. Attrition is particular concern because of impact on future workforce of nurses and midwives. Cites Tinto’s work on retention (1975) and other work (e.g. Liz Thomas’ work). Examines literature relating to experiences of students who are educationally disadvantage  **Aim:** “to explore student motivations, experiences and support requirements during their first year to determine the efficacy of institutional retention initiatives” (abstract).  “Collect reflections from students about their motivations for joining the nursing and midwifery professions.  Determine what type of support available in first year had helped make nursing and midwifery students feel part of their programme  Agree on improvements that could be made to support students during the challenges faced in their first year of university study” (p.872-3)  **Theoretical frame:** Not specified in study  **Methodology:** Qualitative study in large Scottish university with ‘a reputation for widening participation’ (73% = FinF; 25% of students in School of Health and Life Sciences = experience multiple deprivations). Focus groups conducted to ‘capture authentic student voice’ (p.873). Pilot focus groups (n=57) with Year 1 students in May 2011. Data collected in two phases: Sep 2011 (n=44; 6 focus groups) and Jan 2012 (n=22; 3 focus groups). 42 participants = female. Analysis = grounded theory (thematic analysis)  **Findings:**  Phase 1 focus group data: motivation for enrolling = largely due to reputation of course (reputation passed via friends, family, college staff + observations from open days) + keen to get clinical experience/ placement.  Biggest challenges with transition = due to logistical issues – accessing VLE/ timetables. Most negative expectations = not met.  Role models = important for inspiring and motivating students – particularly lecturing staff and other students  Phase 2 focus group data: Expectations = largely met (positive) or unmet (negative)  Juggling multiple/ competing demands = challenging  Academic staff = still significant for providing support.  Independent learning = challenging **Core argument:** Three major sources of support: role models (inspiration for profession), staff and peers. Students’ expectations = significant for retention |
| Naylor, R.; Baik, C.; & James, R. (2013). [*Developing a Critical Interventions Framework for advancing equity in Australian higher education*](https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Critical-Interventions-Framework-20-August-2013.pdf)*.* Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education.  AUS  Annotated by Sally Baker | **Aim:** To add to the evidence base – to help build a stronger platform for research and evaluation  **Context:** Critical Interventions Framework (CIF) was designed “to assist in advancing equity in higher education” (p.5). Report includes – summary of patterns of access and participation post-Bradley Review, literature review, typology of equity initiatives (CIF), summary of plausibility and evidence base for initiatives in CIF, broad summary of national patterns of equity initiatives (analysis of HEPPP reports) against CIF.  Access/Participation since Bradley Review: uncapping system (demand-driven system) “may have been the single most significant factor in the rising numbers of students from equity target groups who have been admitted to higher education” (p.5), but rise in numbers = “across the board”, meaning that proportional representation has not changed. **HEPPP** funding has allowed “institutions, often working in partnerships, to influence particular key points in the student ‘life cycle’ to encourage more students from equity target groups to, among other things, consider higher education to be a possibility for them, to build academic attainment and to be more fully conversant with the opportunities available to them” (p.6).  *Key issues*  Student share (1.0 = parity):   * low SES = 0.62 * indigenous = 0.55 * remote = 0.39   High levels of differentiation between institutions (% of low SES)  Assumptions that changing student profile = drop in quality/ retention. Retention/success is generally the same (96% of domestic students overall) but this is not the case for indigenous (85% retention; 81% success) or remote students (91% retention; 94% success).  CIF typology (Fig. 1.1): 1) plausibility or theoretical case for types of equity initiatives based on timing and method; 2) available evidence on effectiveness; 3) analysis of HEPPP reports  Typology “derived from widespread assumptions about potential barriers or inhibitors for low SES students rather than a comprehensive empirical conception of the terrain, for none exists” (p.9). Literature suggests there are 5 broad periods in a student’s life cycle: a) prior to seeking access, b) at point of selection/admissions, c) during transition, d) during studies, e) post-completion period of finding work. Outreach is core of initiatives for aspiration-raising but there is little effectiveness. Literature points to school performance/ low SES so there is “an argument for implementing early initiatives aimed at improving students’ academic achievement and year 12 retention rates; scholarships/ financial support are important but cost might not be the only barrier to participation. Literature strongly supports idea that transition/orientation initiatives are valuable. Evidence suggests that low SES students less likely to make use of support services – better/ more extensive support services doesn’t necessarily increase retention.  *Prior to starting HE* – discussion of Year 12 (p.15); aspirations (p.16); VET-HE (p.17)  *Selection/ Admissions* – scholarships and grants (p.18-9)  *During transition* – transition/ transition programs (p.19-20  *During studies –* effective factors in successful completion for low SES, childcare, mature age, not seeking/using support servicesp.21-2  **Methodology:** Draws on gov’t (DIIRSRTE) data to examine % representation. Two methods use for determining low SES: postcode and census collection districts (CD measure) = see page 31-2. Examined 38 HEPPP reports for 2011  **Findings:** Data analysis shows that population parity was still far off in 2011 (disability = 5.07 std pop v. 10.6% Aus pop; indigenous = = 1.38 std pop v. 2.5% Aus pop; NESB = = 3.1 std pop v. 3.8% Aus pop; WINTA = = 17.47 std pop v. 50.6% Aus pop; low SES = = 16.76 std pop v. 25% Aus pop; Regional = 18.63 std pop v. 29% Aus pop; Remote = 0.91 std pop v. 2.3% Aus pop**).** Studentsfrom equity groups “are almost as likely to successfully complete their studies as any other student” (p.25) – but see lower retention and success rates of indigenous students and attrition rates of remote students, especially in Year 1. Chapter 4: CIF and evidence/ plausibility table.  Chapter 5: Distribution of HEPPP against CIF. 49.3% of HEPPP = pre-entry initiatives; 34.5% on post-entry and 16.2% on costs associated with management of equity programs. Highest % of HEPPP funding spent on provision of student services, scholarships and later-year outreach to schools. Lowest % was spent on marketing, school curriculum enhancement and adult ed outreach |
| Naylor, R. & Mifsud, N. (2020). [Towards a structural inequality framework for student retention and success, Higher Education Research & Development](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07294360.2019.1670143), 39(2), 259-272, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2019.1670143  AUS  Annotated by Anna Xavier  Keywords: *social inclusion; structural inequality; retention; attrition; higher education* | **Context:** University campuses are becoming increasingly diverse, indicated by the significant growth in student enrolments, but this has not translated to equitable outcomes for all students. While much attention has been focused on student retention and success, particularly for those from non-traditional backgrounds, dominant theoretical models rest on a limited notion of cultural capital that places undue responsibility on students themselves.  **Aim:** To encourage greater consideration of specific factors that institutions can target to ‘shape themselves, rather than their students’ in their pursuit of becoming ‘equitable places of learning’ (p. 261).  **Theoretical frame:** Structural inequality framework – Examines ‘conditions in which groups of people are provided with unequal opportunities in terms of roles, rights, opportunities and decisions compared to others’ (Archer & Leathwood, 2003) (p. 261). Types of inequalities examined: ‘Vertical inequalities’ - circumstances whereby people with particular characteristics or backgrounds (for example, but not limited to, low SES, Indigenous, or non-English speaking backgrounds) have fewer opportunities to access HE; ‘Horizontal inequalities’ - People with particular characteristics or backgrounds may also have fewer opportunities to access prestigious institutions or certain highly selective fields of study (eg: low SES students are over-represented in (arguably) low status fields such as nursing & education & under-represented in fields such as medicine & architecture); ‘Internal inequalities’ - People with particular characteristics or backgrounds may also be disadvantaged within the institution itself;  **Methodology:** Systematised literature review (Grant & Booth, 2009); Primary database: Google Scholar. Following completion of the literature search, a critical synthetic approach was undertaken to develop a taxonomy of internal inequalities in HE institutions that impede retention.  **Findings:** Framing social inclusion policy via cultural capital is unproductive for 2 primary reasons: 1)The typical usage of ‘cultural capital’ robs Bourdieu’s original concept of its theoretical power & causes confusion with a simpler concept of ‘cultural resources’ (p. 266); 2)Attempting to assimilate non-traditional students into a traditional institutional structure may encourage problematic deficit & acculturation models; A structural inequality approach to WP and social inclusion provides 2 advantages: 1) three types of structural inequality presented here separate out barriers to access and participation more clearly than a cultural capital lens, which allows more focused policy solutions, and therefore increase the likelihood of effective change 2) More likely to be effective because policy change is located more fully within the locus of control of the institution (or other stakeholders); Non-exhaustive taxonomy of internal inequalities:  **Teaching**  ○  In what ways does the institution prepare or offer professional development to staff for teaching diverse cohorts?  ○  Is there a focus on structural or implicit bias in teaching staff training?  ○  In what ways do teaching staff make clear to students their expectations around  workloads, academic standards, grades, assessment deadlines, etc.?  ○  To what extent, and in what ways, do teaching staff explicitly engage with the structures of the academy (e.g., institutional policy requirements, course advice, career development) as part of their work with students? Are these requirements overtly contested, discussed or accepted by staff?  ○  What opportunities are teaching staff provided to influence relevant policy based on  their interaction with students?  **Students**  ○  What is distinctive about the institution’s approach to helping equity students succeed compared with other higher education institutions?  ○  Are students made aware of the inherent requirements of their chosen course? Does it require proactive effort from students to discover these requirements, or are they promoted to students?  ○  How are students taught to act inclusively in their interactions with other students and staff?  ○  How do students perceive the institution in terms of equity?  ○  How do students perceive themselves as members of the university community (e.g.,  as junior colleagues, as partners, as learners, or as consumers)?  ○  What opportunities are students provided to influence relevant policies, curricula  and other aspects of university activity?  **Curriculum**  ○  How is curricula made accessible and relevant to students from all backgrounds?  ○  Which aspects of assessment policies at the institution cater to equity students?  ○  How does the institution provide advice on course content, inherent requirements  and selection to prospective students or current students?  ○  How is career advice integrated into the curriculum?  **Administration**  ○  What help is provided to students to navigate the administrative side of the institution? What is done to make these processes accessible, transparent, flexible, and jargon-free?  ○  How well does the institution identify and respond to students facing difficult personal situations (e.g., homelessness, financial hardship, mental health)?  ○  How well does your institution accommodate part-time study, leaves of absence etc.?  ○  Does the institution collect and respond to data on why students have withdrawn from study?  **Campus life**  ○  What are the accommodation options, including emergency housing, available to students?  ○  To what degree do students participate in the institution’s broader life outside of  classes? What kinds of experiences are available? How could these be developed?  ○  To what degree do students interact with the institution’s support services? What kinds of services are available? How could these be developed?  **Physical environment**  ○  How is the physical environment of the institution used to support or engage students with the institution or their educations (e.g., through community spaces, study spaces, wifi access etc.)?  ○  Does the institution collect data related to commuting? If so, how, and what kind of impact on the institution has it made?  ○  What impression do students have of the ‘feel’ of the campus?  **Core argument:** Structural inequality is a productive framework for understanding and supporting the student experience in HE because: 1) The three types of structural inequality identified – vertical, horizontal, and internal – clearly identifies and distinguishes barriers to access and participation, which allows more focused policy solutions, and therefore can increase the likelihood of effective change. 2) It frames the problem of social inclusion within the locus of control of the institution - much more likely to result in more efficient, more effective change. 3) The dominant framework in this area, cultural capital, is often conceptually and theoretically misused, and potentially leads to problematic discourses of acculturation or deficit models. A structural inequality approach therefore leads to different policy outcomes, as well as more focused responses. |
| Pitman, T.; Koshy, P.; & Phillimore, J. (2015). [Does accelerating access to higher education lower its quality?](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07294360.2014.973385) The Australian experience. *Higher Education Research & Development,* 34(3), 609–623.  AUS  Annotated by Sally Baker  Keywords: *access; higher education; measuring quality; quality; retention; widening participation* | **Context:** Looks at three proxies of educational quality (prior academic achievement), attrition/retention and progression rates to explore idea that accelerating access (as a result of uncapping places/ the demand driven system) leads to ‘lower quality’. Examines student data from 2006-2011 (particularly 2010-2011)  \*regarding NESB\* NESB status = greater predictor [in Foster 2012] than international student status in terms  of performing/ controlling for selection into courses, “suggesting that literacy rather than cultural conditioning  was a greater issue” (p.613)  **Aim:** To assess the extent to which concerns regarding higher education quality can be informed by the data.  **Methodology:** Statistical analysis of student data sets  **Findings:**  Prior educational attainment: with DDS, more students “with lower (not low) academic grades gain access” (p.614), but so are more students with higher ATARs (because more competitive courses grew as well: “When access to supply was accelerated, universities first addressed the demand from ‘elite’ students… and only then moved to make offers of places to others”, p.615). Also, more mature-age students entering HE  Attrition: with growing number of entrants, would expect attrition to increase but in many universities attrition rates dropped. Pre-DDS, Aus HE “was already tolerating institutional attrition variances of over 450%” (from 4.69% - 27.70% in 2008; 5.16% – 27.26% in 2011) – all p.616. **Core argument:** It would “not be correct to say that accelerated access universally leads to lower quality inputs” (p.615). There is “no evidence that admission processes are over-selecting students unprepared for university studies” (p.620). Focus on metrics reduces access/quality to attention to “minor statistical shifts in scores”; meaning that the question of what is quality “is overlooked” (p.621). “This ultimately devalues higher education institutions themselves, as it suggests their role is primarily one of certifying the prior educational achievement of the students rather than value-adding in meaningful ways” (p.621). |
| Roberts, S. (2011). [Traditional practice for non-traditional students? Examining the role of pedagogy in higher education retention](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0309877X.2010.540320), *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 35*(2), 183-199.  AUS  Annotated by Anna Xavier  Keywords: *retention; pedagogy; non-traditional students; drop-out* | **Context:** The current agenda for widening participation (WP) promotes equal access to higher education (HE), yet it also implicitly requires institutions to develop support strategies to ensure a successful learning experience and good retention for different groups of students. However, ensuring progress in retention among an increasingly diverse student body is a significant challenge for the HE sector (Grives, Bowd & Smith, 2010).  **Aim:** To promote understanding of the possible role of pedagogic practice in WP retention strategies, by exploring whether non-traditional students’ experiences of teaching environments could potentially contribute to ‘drop-out’.  **Theoretical frame:** Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984): ‘a familiarity with the dominant culture and an ability to utilise and understand educated language’ (Sullivan, 2001) (p. 189).  **Methodology:** A qualitative approach is employed. Data collection method: Focus group. Research participants: Second-year non-traditional students (n=5) in a medium-sized 1960s university based in the south-east of England; students who had recently completed stage 1 of transition. Sampling strategy: Respondents were self-selected based on the criteria offered- a ‘mature or first-generation student’ or someone who had enrolled in university with any other qualification besides A levels; 2 males & 3 females; 2 mature students & 3 first-generation students of ‘standard’ student age (18-21).  **Findings:** 1) Students’ feelings towards pedagogy related issues: All students indicated a mismatch between their expectations and the reality of the teaching experience in terms of – the number of contact hours, the flexibility of seminar times, and the content and style of learning required, and the personnel delivering the teaching; Contact hours – Students (standard age group) were unhappy about the perceive insufficient contact hours but mature students dismissed the idea of needing more hours; Flexibility – Students wanted improved sensitivity in regards to their commitments outside the university, especially part-time employment; Style of learning: All students shared concerns on how ‘isolating and particularly unrewarding’ (p. 192) independent learning could be & expressed a desire for more structured direction; Teaching personnel: Students wanted more time with ‘experts, not just PhD student-teachers’ (p. 194). 2)Changes wanted by students: An extra hour per module per week, a debrief Q&A with the expert, followed by a discussion seminar facilitated by a student-teacher.  **Core argument:** ‘It is important to avoid uncritically accepting that non-traditional students are forced to change, and indeed that they must change en masse, in order to succeed in HE’ (p. 196). Rather than expecting students to adapt to the ‘university way’, HE institutions should move beyond providing *additional* services and towards re-developing pedagogical practice to suit the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, to promote retention. |
| Rubin, M. & Wright, C. (2015). [Age differences explain social class differences in students’ friendship at university: implications for transition and retention](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269289955_Age_differences_explain_social_class_differences_in_students'_friendship_at_university_Implications_for_transition_and_retention), *Higher Education,* 70, 427–439.  AUS/USA  Annotated by Sally Baker  Keywords *First-generation students; friendship; social class; social inclusion; social integration; socioeconomic status* | **Context:** Based on idea that social integration = important for emotional and informational support at university, which helps students transition into higher education. Making friends is particularly important = Thomas (2012) suggests making friends at welcome lunch increases likelihood of retention and leads to “better learning, cognitive growth, critical thinking, personal and moral development, confidence, academic self-efficacy, and academic performance” (p.428). Works from limited research (including Rubin, 2012) that working class students have fewer friends  **Aim:** Test of hypothesis that working class students have fewer friends and this is because lower SES students tend to be older than mid-SES  **Theoretical frame:** Not specified in study.  **Methodology:** Quantitative: survey research at UON with 376 first year Psychology UG students (81% f; 19% m), with mean age of 22. Three scales of friendship used in survey design: Relevance of Friends to Identity scale, Openness to Friendships scale, and New Friends Concern scale  **Findings:** Clear evidence of social class differences in friendship at university: “working-class students reported having fewer identity-relevant friends and regarded the friends that they did have as being less relevant to their identity” (p.434) and less open/ less concerned about making friends. Age = salient factor but not more or less important than other (untested) factors – see Rubin 2012.  **Core argument:** Age should be taken into account when designing transition and retention activities: “*A key*  *implication of the present research is that arrangements for on-campus accommodation should take into account students’ social class, age, and concomitant family commitments”* (p.436; italics in original); universities should invest in accommodation for families to encourage students to live on campus*.* |
| Stewart, A. & Abbott-Chapman, J. (2011). [Remote Island Students’ Post-Compulsory Retention: Emplacement and Displacement as Factors Influencing Educational Persistence or Discontinuation](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4493/566ac01a0893e15e2a3f709423a571e994a1.pdf), *Journal of Research in Rural Education,* 26(6), 1–17.  AUS  Annotated by Sally Baker  Keywords: *Australia; rural; islanders; school; transitions; challenges; equity; postschool futures; aspirations; experiences; ethnographic; longitudinal* | **Context:** Explores students’ experiences of transitions to later-years schooling and post-school futures in the particular (‘specialness’) context of remote islander inhabitants who attend school on the island until Year 10 and then have to migrate to mainland for Year 11 and 12. Paper focuses on “place attachment”. Discusses educational issues that rural students face; notes the mitigating influence of home schooling (but with challenges). Offers history of Tasmania (p.3)  **Aim:** To examine “social, cultural and locational factors which result in low post-compulsory retention rates of remote island students” (abstract) and also to explore perceptions of and aspirations for post-school futures, relating to senses of identity and belonging in context of migrating from rural to urban environments  **Theoretical frame:** Works from notion of place as a social construct connected to cultural values and social capital that also acknowledges emotional connections (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to the land. Authors note [similar to Roberts & Green, 2013] the deficit positioning of rurality against metropolitan norms. Similarly, authors note the importance of ‘place conscious education’ that “recognizes spatial as well as cultural diversity in education and challenges the locational homogenization associated with economic globalization” (p.2), but without romanticizing rural places and the challenges that people face.  **Methodology:** Longitudinal ethnographic research (mixed methods) using grounded theory. Study followed group of Year 10 students from a small island off Tasmania to Year 11 in secondary school on the mainland. One third of participants = Indigenous. Research site = ‘very remote’, where trend of ‘out-migration’ is local concern and which represents a physical and psychological journey (need to fly to mainland); also issues with internet/ communication reception = isolated and remoteness.  Research design: Stewart = teacher of 25 years on the island (see page 5 for explicit unpacking of her positionality). Research set around Year 9 ‘work studies’ module and project around aspirations/ experience of island life. Stewart’s observation = students with high aspirations and achievement did not always complete Year 11 or 12. All 16 students (9 girls, 7 boys; all NESB) took part in subsequent interviews in Year 10 prior to leaving and then in Year 11 after moving. Questions included topics such as education and employment aspirations, what they thought they would be doing and where, the following year, in five years time and in 10 years time.  **Findings:** Data identified “socio-spatial ambiguities experienced” (p.1) and factors that influenced students’ transitions into later years of high school and factors that contributed to persist or disengage: “Attachment to the island as their home place and the emplacement of their cultural ties to family and community contrasted with the displacement experienced in the urban environment” (p.1). This sense of community and attachment = more for Indigenous students.  Tracking students over three years showed strong continuation from Year 9 – 10 (100%) but discontinuation happening in Year 11 (8 completed Year 11; 7 completed Year 12) – lower academic achievers more likely to return home without completing (but acknowledgement that moving away to attempt Year 11 = an achievement in itself). Where students stayed on the mainland = significant.  Data from Year 10 (interview 1)  5 students thought they would progress to VET or university and 3 wanted to join the military. Only 3 thought they would return to the island. Students expressed vague (and sometimes unrealistic) = “relationships, marriage and family, but more often they imagined being able to own and drive cars, have money, drink alcohol and to enjoy a “good lifestyle” (p.7).  Academic transition viewed as less challenging than practical challenges of moving – students feared being ‘dispossessed’ of place and identity and anxieties about practicalities of living away from home and managing a budget  Data from Year 11 (interview 2)  Most were feeling good about their studies (minority finding it tough). Students exploring new opportunities and “the demands of academic study did not in themselves create pressure to discontinue” (p.8), rather the issues were located in the size of campus and complexity of course offerings. Students = supported by teachers and Home/School Liaison Officers (but not always + lack of familiarity with teachers = challenging). Students found punctuality difficult and they got lost often + fear of crowds. Accommodation = problematic (not like home), as was difficulty in finding part-time work and homesickness/ place-sickness (missing way of life) was common: “The highs and lows of place attachment and detachment made settling-in a very slow process. It also contributed to feelings of losing social competence and concern that teachers might see them as not coping” (p.9).  Authors offers dualities:   * Location and displacement * Freedom and lack of freedom * Fear and lack of fear * Familiarity and lack of familiarity * Support and lack of support * Mastery and lack of mastery   Home and college = created ‘hybridities of place and identity’ **Core argument:** “The island students’ experiences of the educational transition process, and their subsequent academic outcomes, emerged as closely linked to their attachment and sense of belonging to place and community in both the sending and receiving places, and to their experiences of location and dislocation” (p.1). Whole of institution approach needed to help compensate for challenges faced by students who need to migrate to study, particularly for school age children (suggestions made in last section of paper). Rural and metropolitan education should not be “regarded as separate and unequal but as interconnected and of equal value, and resourced by governments as such” (p.12) |
| Thomas, K. (2015). [Rethinking belonging through Bourdieu, diaspora and the spatial](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kate_Carruthers_Thomas/publication/274704942_Rethinking_belonging_through_Bourdieu_diaspora_and_the_spatial/links/57161c6c08ae6177286cefc9/Rethinking-belonging-through-Bourdieu-diaspora-and-the-spatial.pdf), *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 17(1), 37–48.  UK  Annotated by Sally Baker  Keywords: *higher education; part-time; mature; retention; belonging; Bourdieu; diaspora; space; power* | **Context:** Draws on her doctoral work on retention strategies for part-time, mature learners in UK HE.  **Aim:** Offers reconceptualization of notion of ‘belonging’ based on three sets of theories: Bourdieu’s toolkit (habitus, capital, field), Brah’s notion of diaspora and Massey’s notion of space/place = working from multiple theoretical territories helps to capture more complexities and according to Abes (2009) is “theoretical borderlands”  **Theoretical frame:**  Bourdieu’s theoretical toolkit helps to position belonging as a relational concept (drawing on habitus, field and capital) but “it risks homogenising internally diverse social groups and is limited in its articulation of belonging and not belonging as a lived experience” (p.42).  Brah’s notion of diaspora = interpretive frame for analysing cultural, political, economic aspects of migration – relational positioning shapes “lived experience of a locality” (Brah, 1996: 189) and explore intersections between home and displacement (e.g. how do students feel about new environment of HE away from ‘home’ spaces?)  Massey’s space/place = geographies of belonging. Space is “product of social relations shaped by power” (p.45) – space is temporal (space-time), signifies networks of social relationships and understandings. Places are “particular constellation of social relations” (Massey, 1997) and a “meeting up of histories, a multiplicity of trajectories” (Massey 2005:59). Space-place permit view of ‘activity spaces’ which have their own geographies of power. HEIs are ‘extroverted places’ – own institutional geographies of power create dominant narratives/ identity positions which are relational and imbued with/shaped by power relations  **Core argument:** Thomas argues that from exploring experiences of p/t mature age learners, arguments are formed that challenge the dominant positioning of ‘belonging as a retention strategy’ because this analysis illustrates that the dominant view jars with diversity and complexity of their experiences. |
| Thomas, L. (2012). [*Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme*](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/what_works_final_report_0.pdf)*.* Retrieved from The Higher Education Academy website: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/what\_works\_final\_report\_0.pdf  UK  Annotated by Anna Xavier  Keywords (Anna’s): *retention; success; higher education* | **Context:** The NAO report recognises England’s good standing on retention in HE institutions internationally, but urged the HE sector to find ways of further improving student retention and completion. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) felt that a significant barrier to further progress was the lack of evidence about what actually works to improve student retention and completion. Although there is extensive research about student retention and success (Jones, 2008; Troxel, 2010; Krause, forthcoming), it is, difficult to translate this knowledge into activities that impact on student persistence and success, and institutional outcomes. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF), an independent charitable organisation responded to these challenges by initiating and supporting the ‘What Works? Student Retention & Success’ programme. The primary purpose of the programme was to generate evidence-based analysis and evaluation about the most effective practices to ensure high continuation and completion rates through seven projects involving 22 higher education institutions.  **Aim:** This report aims to provide a synthesis of the key messages, findings, implications and recommendations resulting from the projects funded through the ‘What Works? Student Retention & Success’ programme from 2008-2011.  **Theoretical frame:** Not specified in study.  **Methodology:** Project 1: A comparative evaluation of the roles of student adviser and personal tutor in relation to undergraduate student retention (Anglia Ruskin University) – Data collection method: Online survey; Participants: First and second-year undergraduate students at Anglia Ruskin University (n=722, over 10% response rate); Data analysis: Using SPSS & NVivo; Project 2: Pathways to success through peer mentoring (Aston University, with Bangor University; Liverpool Hope University; London Metropolitan University; Oslo University College; Oxford Brookes University; University of Sheffield; and York University) –Approach: Mixed-methodological approach & multiple case-study design; Data collection methods: Survey, in-depth qualitative interviews & non-participant overt observations of peer mentoring activity during ‘welcome’ weekend in September. Participants: Questionnaires (302 completion); Follow on survey (374 completion); Qualitative interviews: 97 peer mentors & mentees; Data analysis: Quantitative data – SPSS; Qualitative data – grounded theory approach. Project 3: ‘Belonging’ and ‘intimacy’ factors in the retention of students (University of Leicester) – Data collection methods: Questionnaire surveys, individual interviews & analysis of video diaries of first- and second- year students involved in a longitudinal student experience project carried out by GENIE, the university’s Centre for Excellence for Teaching and Learning; Participants: current first- and third-year students from medical, Biological Science and English courses, as well as students who have withdrawn from their courses. Project 4: Dispositions to stay: the support & evaluation of retention strategies using the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) (Northumbria University, with the University of Bedfordshire & the University of Manchester)- Approach: Analysis of relationship between scores on the ELLI & student retention & success & the student experiences of using ELLI. Project 5: HERE! Higher education retention and engagement – Mixed-methods approach; Data collection methods: Six large-scale transition surveys, 17 interviews & three focus groups; Participants: Over 3000 first-year students & staff at partner institutions. Project 6: Comparing and evaluating the impacts on student retention of different approaches to supporting students through study advice and personal development. Data collection methods: Surveys, focus groups & interviews; Participants: First-year undergraduate students at an academic school (Life Sciences at Oxford Brookes University) & across an entire institution (University of Reading). Project 7: Good practice in student retention: an examination of the effects of student integration on non-completion (University of Sunderland, with Newcastle University & University of Hull). Primarily qualitative methodological approach; Data collection method: Cross-institution survey & analysis of retention performance data; Participants: Mature students, first year students, part-time students & local students.  **Findings:** Project 1: Key finding – 42% (n=237) participants have considered dropping out on at least once, and 46.6% (n=110) of this group have considered dropping out more than once; 59% (n=153) considered leaving due to internal reasons (personal circumstances/self-doubt on personal ability to succeed in HE); 35% (n-196) considered withdrawing prior to or following assessment, or following a failure. Project 2: Key finding: i)Transition period: Majority of students were concerned about making friends when starting university. Transitional peer mentoring provides a means for students to quickly gain a sense of ‘belonging’ (p. 77); Longer term pastoral mentoring provides ongoing, long-term support for students who require it. ii)Following transition: Peer mentoring works by assisting students to make the most of the available academic opportunities at university. iii)Academic support – belonging & peer mentoring: Peer mentors can help students on how to ‘learn to learn’ (p.78) at a higher level. iv)Benefits for mentors: Develop valuable transferable employability skills (self-management, leadership & communication skills). v)Challenges of peer mentoring: From students’ perspective: Institutional issues & communication problems vi)Writing peer mentoring: Provide a specialised service to improve students’ overall academic portfolio vi)Challenges of writing peer mentoring: Balancing expectations of both parties, that are often different. Project 3: 6 key themes/messages which play a significant role on establishing students’ confidence and sense of ‘belonging’ throughout their course: Personal tutors & other staff relationships; departmental culture & curriculum methods; managing expectations; central services; social spaces; clubs and societies. Project 4: Key finding: Strong learning relationships between students & staff is a key factor in promoting motivation, engagement; a significant statistical relationship was evident between student success (as measured by a grade point average) and two of the ELLI dimensions, **critical curiosity** and **meaning making**. Project 5: Key findings: a) Approximately one third of first-year students have experienced doubts sufficiently strong to make them consider withdrawing at some point during the first year; b)Doubters are more likely to leave than non-doubters; c)Doubters reported poorer quality experience than students who have not doubted; d)Students usually report more than one reason for doubting; e)The primary reasons for doubting are associated with students’ experience of the programme; f)There were four main reasons cited by doubters for staying: ‘support from friends and family’, ‘adapting to the course/university’, ‘personal commitment & drive’, ‘future goals, particularly employment’; g)The primary times for considering leaving are immediately before & after Christmas; h)Students reported different degrees of doubting; i)Some student groups (part-time students, students with disabilities & female students) appear more likely to doubt than others. Project 6: Key finding: providing structured support, fostering engagement, managing expectations, enabling a sense of belonging are all central in helping institutions to retain their students; students are more likely to engage with the study support and personal development available from the institution if they are easily accessible and students feel there is a reason to engage; the building of relationships, particularly between personal tutors and their tutees, helps retain students; staff members who operate as personal tutors want to feel valued in the role and rewarded for it; holistic models of study advice and personal development are effective in making students feel they are supported towards success, whether these models are delivered across the university (Reading) or locally in an academic school (Oxford Brookes). Project 7: Key findings on the effect of student integration on retention: a) integration of the social and academic elements of university life is key to the integration of students into the school and wider university community; b)early imposition of structures upon students by staff appears effective in giving a sense of continuity and purpose; c) teams and groups working collaboratively on academic tasks enhance their social opportunities; d) integrating social and academic elements of university life encourages students to build relations with each other and with staff and to engage with the curriculum.  **Core argument:** In HE, belonging is critical to student retention and success**.** However, the implications are often not addressed in institutional priorities, policies, processes & practice. A mainstream approach to improving the retention and success of all students should be implemented. |
| Wilcox, P.; Winn, S. & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). [‘It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people’: the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03075070500340036), *Studies in Higher Education,* 30(6), 707–722.  UK  Annotated by Sally Baker  Keywords: *transition; social integration; first year; retention; attrition* | **Context:** UK higher education and first year student retention. Looks at role of ‘social support’. Concerns regarding retention driven by government intention to address drop-out rates (financial consequences) and anxieties about quality of learning, Cites research and commonly held understanding that two drivers of attrition = lack of preparedness and misalignment between choice of course/ institution and student (see Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998). Scopes literature on social integration - starting with health literature – connections between social integration and wellbeing/ health, moving on to psychological accounts. Authors note there is little sociological explanation. Furthermore, most attention = paid to students’ experiences of academic domain, rather than the wider social milieu  **Aim:** To offer analysis of academic and social integration of students post-entry into Year 1, with particular focus on social support; to explore the experiences of a group of first-year students to try to capture their social development over time, and how social integration (or lack of) influenced drop out  **Methodology:** Qualitative study of students in Applied Social Science at University of Brighton = 22 students who completed Year 1 and 12 students who dropped out. Students were mostly female, white and under 21 years old. Interviews conducted with students (face-to-face with current students; telephone interviews with drop out students). Students asked to narrate experiences at different times (first day, first week, typical week)  **Findings:** Deciding to drop out = complex and multifaceted decision made over time, and was a serious decision for all students. Only one student who dropped out said it was because he chose the wrong course. Major themes in reasons for dropping out = 1) social; 2) independent learning; 3) material reasons. Detail of reasons = difficulty in making friends, accommodation, studying independently, mismatch with expectations, unhappy with subject/ course, no connection with tutor, location of campus, friends had withdrawn, finances (and others; see p.712).  Making compatible friends = authors relate to idea that student = becoming: new identity/ sense of belonging, which involves negotiation between past, present [and future]. Feeling lonely/ homesick = common – emotional support from home (family and friends) = important ‘buffer’ = leading to ‘transitional [liminal] phase – where students are anxious to make friends and connections. As students settle in, they develop friendships and ‘home’ becomes less necessary for support. Later, it becomes more important to make ‘good’ friends. Data suggests living arrangements (living in halls of residence) = significant to this (both positive and negative impacts). Students relationship with staff, particularly personal tutors = important **Core argument:** Students’ anxieties about making friends = important aspect of students’ transitions and more consideration needs to be given to this (e.g., by accommodation designers, by institutions). |