

NEON Awards 2024 Nominations

Category

NEON Widening Access Initiative (Retention and Progression) Award

Name of project and institution

Higher Education Learning Mentors (HELMs), Blackpool and The Fylde College

Brief Description

An evidence-based approach to renewing the B&FC HE Learning Mentor (HELM) service was taken in 2022. The modified HELM initiative combines rich knowledge of our specific student and apprentice cohorts with evolving technologies and data sets in order to ensure the offer is proactive, predictive and meaningful. Qualitative feedback evidences impacts of the new approaches, highlighting themes such as improved confidence; enhanced motivation and a feeling of being supported. The tangible impact of the new model on retention is also clear: 2022/23 retention rates amongst those who engaged with HELMs was 90% compared with 70% for those who didn't engage.

Why has this project been nominated

The HELM service was introduced at B&FC in 2007. Up until 2021/22, the cohort of those accessing one-to-one HELM support was typically student-driven, with students choosing to self-refer to the team following some promotion of the service during induction. However, primary research in 2020 confirmed that if students have low levels of confidence, they may be passive in terms of accessing support. An evidence-based approach to ensuring HELM support became targeted and proactive was therefore taken in 2022. The renewed HELM initiative includes:

- Caseloading: underrepresented groups we commit to in our Access and Participation Plan; those marked at-risk by curriculum and those who are experiencing other barriers such as working alongside study or returning from a break in education are now allocated one HELM who supports academic, personal and professional development.
- HELM delivery of an induction presentation outlining support available to 100% of cohorts in 22/23 and 23/24.
- The 'Study Check' form, promoted by HELMs during induction. The form asks students to rate their confidence levels in a range of carefully considered areas which relate to the gains we wish our students to achieve incrementally during their time with us: learning to study; self-management; critical thinking and communication. Those with low scores are caseloaded.
- The allocation of each HELM to a curriculum area to ensure the embedding of support into each student, HELM awareness of curriculum nuances in order to support personalised support strategies and enhanced collaboration with colleagues.

How long has the project been running

The renewed project began in 2022 and has therefore been running for almost two academic years.

Number of participants for each year of the project's operation

In the first year of the new model (22/23), 697 students engaged with one-to-one HELM support as a result of targeted interventions following widespread induction activities and caseloading. To date, 645 students have engaged with one-to-one HELM support in 23/24. This indicates an increase in students accessing the support as the academic year 23/24 is not yet complete and students continue to be targeted.

More details

<https://www.blackpool.ac.uk/higher-education-learning-support>

