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Who are we?

The University of Hertfordshire’s (UH) Outreach and Widening Participation department delivers a suite of initiatives aimed at improving access to higher education and fostering success for its students from under-represented backgrounds. **Our flagship programme for supporting UH students is Herts Success**, which forms part of the National Scholarship Programme (NSP). The NSP is a financial support tool designed to increase access and drive success amongst students from families with incomes less than £25,000 and from POLAR3 postcodes. During 2014/15, the NSP was awarded to approximately 1400 students: 600 1st year students, 580 2nd year students and 250 3rd year students. NSP students were awarded between £1,000 and £2,000, as well as automatic inclusion in the Herts Success programme.

Herts Success encompasses a broad approach to supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds by working with them across the key attributes listed in our access agreement (retention, success and employability) to impact transition both into university and out in the graduate job market: social events build peer networks; academic workshops and events underpin key skills; employability sessions and opportunities particularly aimed at 2nd and 3rd years to give them experience and confidence heading out into the job market; personal development opportunities boost overall confidence and a range of skills that students would not otherwise have access to.

During 2014/15, the Herts Success team consisted of the following team members:

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1. As of 2015/16, Herts Success is funded entirely by UH, owing to the end of the NSP.
2. For more information about POLAR3 data, visit HEFCE’s website: [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/polar3/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/polar3/)
3. You can find our access agreement for 2014/15 here: [https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/UniversityofHerts_NSP_revised_merged.pdf](https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/UniversityofHerts_NSP_revised_merged.pdf)
Background

From 2012/13 to 2013/14, we offered a mentoring programme as part of the NSP. £300 of students’ NSP award was diverted towards the programme. Students were opted-in but could opt-out and claim back their £300 contribution. The programme matched students with more experienced mentors, most often from similar courses, and they provided a range of support: help with academic assignments, exam advice, navigating courses and non-academic advice. We found that for a segment of NSP students, mentoring had a real impact on the successes they had at UH (28% indicated it helped them reach their academic goals; 32% of mentees who engaged significantly with mentoring were satisfied with their final grade; students living off-campus were 3 times more likely to praise the mentoring programme).

However, we also noted that although mentoring had its benefits, a significant segment of NSP students did not want to engage with it, believing they did not need that kind of support. However, they did express a desire for greater choice in the support they wanted to access. This was coupled with our reviews of national evaluations of the NSP, which promoted the NSP as tool better aimed at improving success and retention than focusing on access. So, after consultations with students and staff, we launched ‘Herts Success’ as part of our NSP model in 2014/15, drawing on £350 of students’ award (again with the option of opting out to claim back the funds).

Herts Success encompasses a much broader approach to support across academic, social, personal development and employability strands and is more focused on the transitional issues students can face during their university lives.

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2014/15 at a glance

Here are some key highlights from the last year, including some of the events we delivered.

- 1400+ student participants
- 11,500+ hours delivered
- 58 events delivered

Events:

- Exam preparation workshop
- Personal effectiveness
- Interview clothing vouchers
- Language evening classes
- Public speaking training
- Adventure weekend
- Camp America
- TEFL
- Welcome / Induction
- Adventure weekend
- How to get a 1st
- G200 & PIMUN Conferences
- First Aid
- Improve your referencing
- Academic writing
- Winter Wonderland trip
- Personal effectiveness
- Work experience bursaries
- Yoga
- International language experience
- Mentoring

Cookery classes

International language experience
Spotlight on Year 1s

The statistics below highlight just how diverse our Herts Success are, in terms of background, experience with higher experience, subject studied and location.

Percentage breakdown of NSP students by academic school

- **BUSINESS**: 28%
- **LIFE & MEDICAL SCIENCES**: 18%
- **CREATIVE ARTS**: 13%
- **OTHERS**: 41%

- 57% BME from backgrounds
- 6% mature students
- 35% live at their family home
- 47% have additional commitments
- 54% are first in family to attend uni
- 55% live on-campus
Transitional support

Transition as ‘development’\(^5\)

The literature around the first year experience at university suggests it is the most critical year for students in terms of persistence, especially for students from diverse backgrounds. However, there is little consensus of what constitutes ‘transition’ into higher education. The traditional conception of transition is as ‘induction’, which funnels new students down a pre-defined pathway, encouraging them to experience university at sequentially fixed places in time (i.e. course induction sessions). Aside from being rigid, transition as induction is institutionally-orientated and does not account for the diversity of student lives, specifically of students from widening participation backgrounds who might have alternative profiles and modes of learning to traditional university students. It also fails to address the multiplicity of identities that students embrace throughout their time at university, for example as a new student, or a student coming back from placement or a student ready to graduate and enter the world of work.

We prefer to adopt a view of transition as ‘development’, which encourages students to follow their own trajectories throughout their university careers and validates the different lives they occupy (e.g. a student can be a commuter and a learner). It also supports them in developing identities that they see fit to deploy. This is why we delivered Herts Success along four major strands: academic, social, employability and personal development.

Academic transition

We offered students the chance to dip in and out of a number of academic initiatives, with some designed to develop specific skills (e.g. Academic Writing), some aimed at working on personal skills, such as confidence (e.g. Presentation Skills) and some simply geared towards motivating them (How to get a 1\(^{st}\)). We also coordinated a peer-to-peer mentoring programme that involved more experienced students mentoring students within the same subject area.

74% said Herts Success had a positive impact on academic success

60% of students who needed extra academic support received it from Herts Success

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Mentoring was particularly crucial for helping Year 1s transition and achieve their academic goals.

“Having a mentor which had previously [studied] my course and who has experienced a lot of what the University has to offer definitely helped academically and fitting in the University. Having a mentor as a first year was a major help to me and partly contributed to the success in my assignments” – 1st Year female, Aerospace Engineering

Social transition

Part of students’ feedback following the 2013/14 year was a willingness to be part of a community of like-minded people that was not bound by subject matter and that could present them with opportunities they might not otherwise be able to afford or experience. To try and achieve this, we set out to offer a range of social activities that students could engage with depending on their interests:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trips &amp; experiences</th>
<th>Local exploring</th>
<th>Weekends away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• London Eye and Duck tours</td>
<td>• Trips within Hertfordshire, incl. Ghost Tours and Cycle Tours in St Albans</td>
<td>• Adventure Weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Thorpe Park</td>
<td>• On-campus socials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Harry Potter Studio Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Winter Wonderland</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Winter Wonderland</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The feedback largely reflected the positive experience and community-feel we set out to achieve.
"Herts success helped me fit in much quicker and easier by organising little events and trips at the start of the year, when no one knew anyone, this helped me personally by allowing likeminded people and others in the same boat to meet and get to know each other." – 1st Year female, Motorsport Technology

Employability transition

We felt it was important not to ignore the different transitions students might be making aside from transitioning into university and acclimatising to independent learning or new social circles. Finishing university and entering the job market is a journey in its own right and that starts much earlier than graduation. We understood that while students could access job or placement experience via the Careers, Employment and Enterprise service, they might still face key barriers that could affect their confidence or ability to undertake any work. As such, we focused on providing opportunities that students of all year groups could take advantage of, along three strands: building confidence, removing barriers and developing skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building confidence</th>
<th>Removing barriers</th>
<th>Developing skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Professional headshots for adding to online profiles</td>
<td>• A bursary fund totalling £11,500 to distribute to students who found non-paid work experience and needed help with living expenses</td>
<td>• Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• £6,000 worth of clothing vouchers that students with an upcoming interview could spend on smart clothes</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Assessment centre training packages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A bursary fund totalling £11,500 to distribute to students who found non-paid work experience and needed help with living expenses</td>
<td>• Summer work experience (e.g. Camp America)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Language courses</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

59% said Herts Success helped them fit in (incl. 67% of Year 1s)

Year 1s said they met people via Herts Success as much as they did on nights out
Here are some of our key statistics relating to employability:

180 students supported
36% positive impact on Y1s
47% positive impact on Y2s

“The clothing voucher really helped me feel more comfortable and confident as I had new appropriate and presentable clothes.” – 2nd Year male, Creative Arts (Film & TV)

“Through Herts success I was able to attend a language course. The completion of this course has given me an advantage in achieving employment [by] having skills in another language” – 1st Year male, Aerospace Systems Engineering

Personal development transition

The last aspect of transition we sought to impact was students’ personal development. This involved a range of events aimed at building students’ confidence, key life skills and offering new opportunities. These initiatives are designed to allow students to weave in these skills and opportunities as best suits them along their personal transition trajectories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key life skills</th>
<th>Confidence building</th>
<th>New opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cookery Classes</td>
<td>• Personal Effectiveness</td>
<td>• Access to conferences abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• First Aid</td>
<td>• Public Speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The impact of attending the G200 Youth Forum 2015 has made me such a confident person than I was before. I now believe in myself more and I have a different view to life through meeting people from all over the globe.” – 2nd Year male, Computer Science

“[Public Speaking workshop] Big impact. I now feel confident to make presentations and to speak about myself in interviews. The course was brilliant I would attend it again and again!” – 2nd Year female, Creative Arts
I was growing disillusioned with my mediocre work output. But the various events and short courses offered by Herts Success made me realise that opportunities could be found if I worked hard enough. I have stayed because Herts Success has showed me that I can build skills even when I may feel I lack them.

– 1st Year male, History

Impact on retention

As mentioned earlier, the first year of a student’s university life is crucial to their persistence into Year 2. With this in mind, we tried to act as a safety net for 1st years, both by providing them opportunities to acclimatise to university and by communicating regularly with them, thereby positioning ourselves as a group they could depend on. However, we were also aware that withdrawal is a problem for all year groups and is a highly personal and situational issue.

We are delighted to have had the following impact on students’ persistence:

- 20% considered withdrawing across all years
- 46% of Y1s who considered withdrawing said we had a positive impact on their decision to stay
- 47% of all who considered withdrawing said we had a positive impact on their decision to stay
- 62% said this impact was highly significant

We are even more excited about the very demonstrable impact we have had on the retention of Year 1 students compared to the Year 1 cohort of 2013/14 (when Herts Success did not yet exist).

### 2013/14 vs 2014/15

- 2013/14: 13.85% withdrew
- 2014/15: 8% withdrew
- 42% decrease

"I was growing disillusioned with my mediocre work output. But the various [events] and short courses offered by Herts Success made me realise that opportunities could be found if I worked hard enough. I have stayed because Herts Success has showed me that I can build skills even when I may feel I lack them." – 1st Year male, History

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Overall

We are confident that Herts Success has impacted students across the priority areas outlined in our access agreement of retention, employability and success.

This first year of Herts Success was a pilot. We are delighted with the initial success and on the basis of student feedback we are making the following changes to further improve our satisfaction outcomes:

1. Modifying the frequency and nature of some of our communications to better target students
2. Refine our provision to offer opportunities and experiences that can further impact our students

We would like to finish this report by sharing some final statistics on overall student satisfaction with Herts Success and some key quotes.

[Table showing satisfaction rates]

"Herts Success has played a big role in my first year, as I have been able to attend various events, academic and social. Through such events I have gained skills and have widened my experience. I believe the events, which Herts Success has provided, developed me and increased my employment value." – 1st Year male, Engineering

"It gave us the opportunity to do things we wouldn't normally be able to afford to do whilst at uni." – 2nd Year female, Marketing & French

"Every event, short course and form of support that Herts Success provided which I attended had everything I expected and required. I now hope to take everything I have learned and further improve upon myself and hopefully give the same impact to the fellow students around me. I cannot thank the Herts Success team enough for how they have helped me this academic term." – 2nd Year male, Business & Marketing

"I genuinely think this is a genius department. It makes the less privileged feel on par with the rest." – 2nd Year male, Aerospace Engineering