



It's All About Communication:

*Tackling retention, building belonging and improving student success
in the Built Environment*

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Institutional Context

- *The work was undertaken as part of the What Works? Student retention and success change programme, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access.*
- *13 Institutions*
- School of the Built Environment largest grouping within this
 - 3 Construction related programmes included in the project:
 - Construction Engineering & Management
 - Building Engineering & Materials
 - Building Surveying.
 - First plans in place for September 2013-2014
- Theme – **INDUCTION** in the first year of study

The What became a BIG How?

Initially – how how could we improve induction as a medium to improve retention (3 programmes)

And we quickly moved to

How can the School of the Built Environment improve the first year student *experience*, build (early) belonging, support *transition* & improve retention?



WHY?

A Whole School Approach

Whole School approach including our 13 undergraduate programmes because students from across the School often:-

- Shared accommodation
- Shared transportation to campus
- Live beside each other
- Shared modules



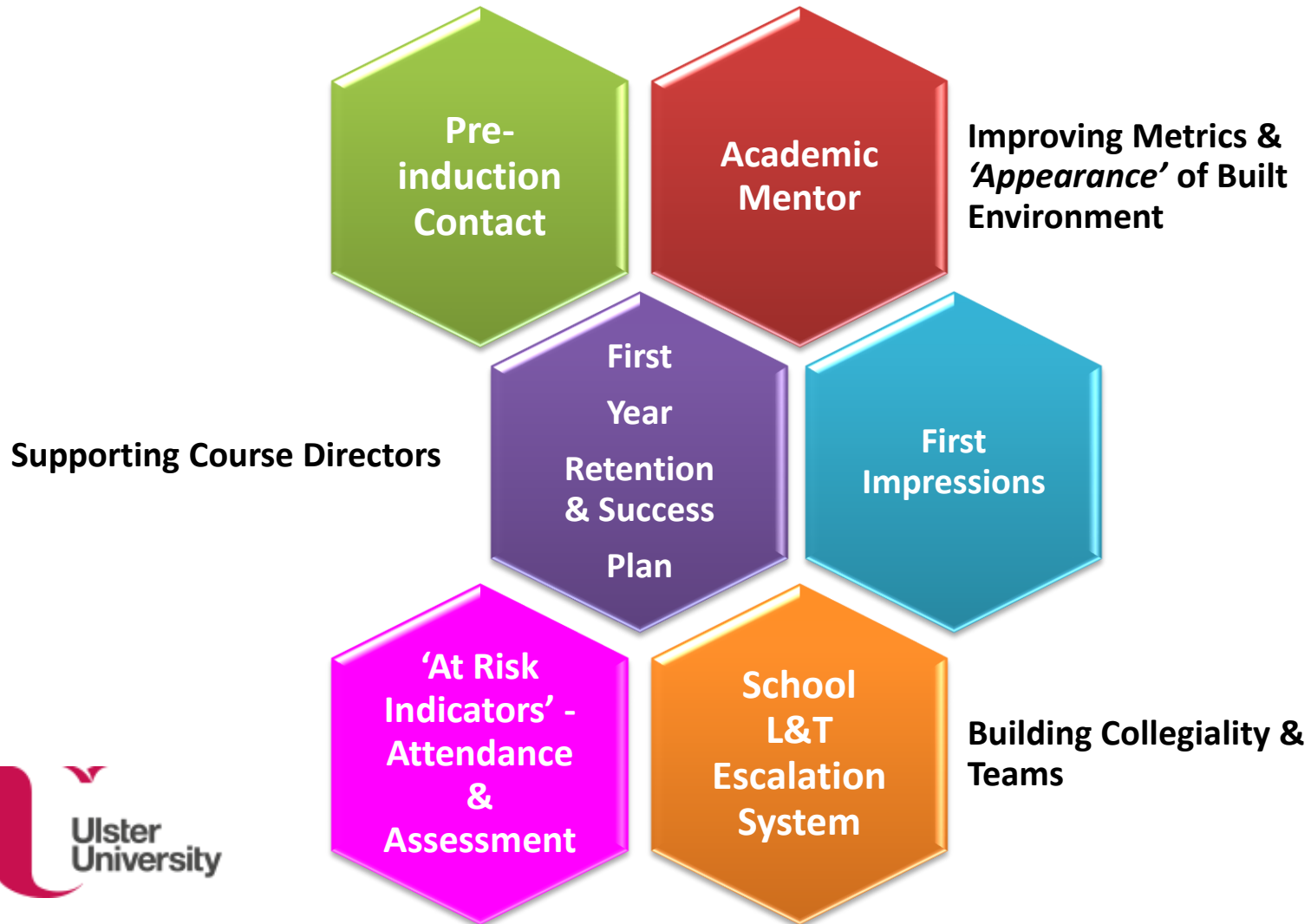
Our Students
Communicate!!!!

If we were to be effective we needed to:

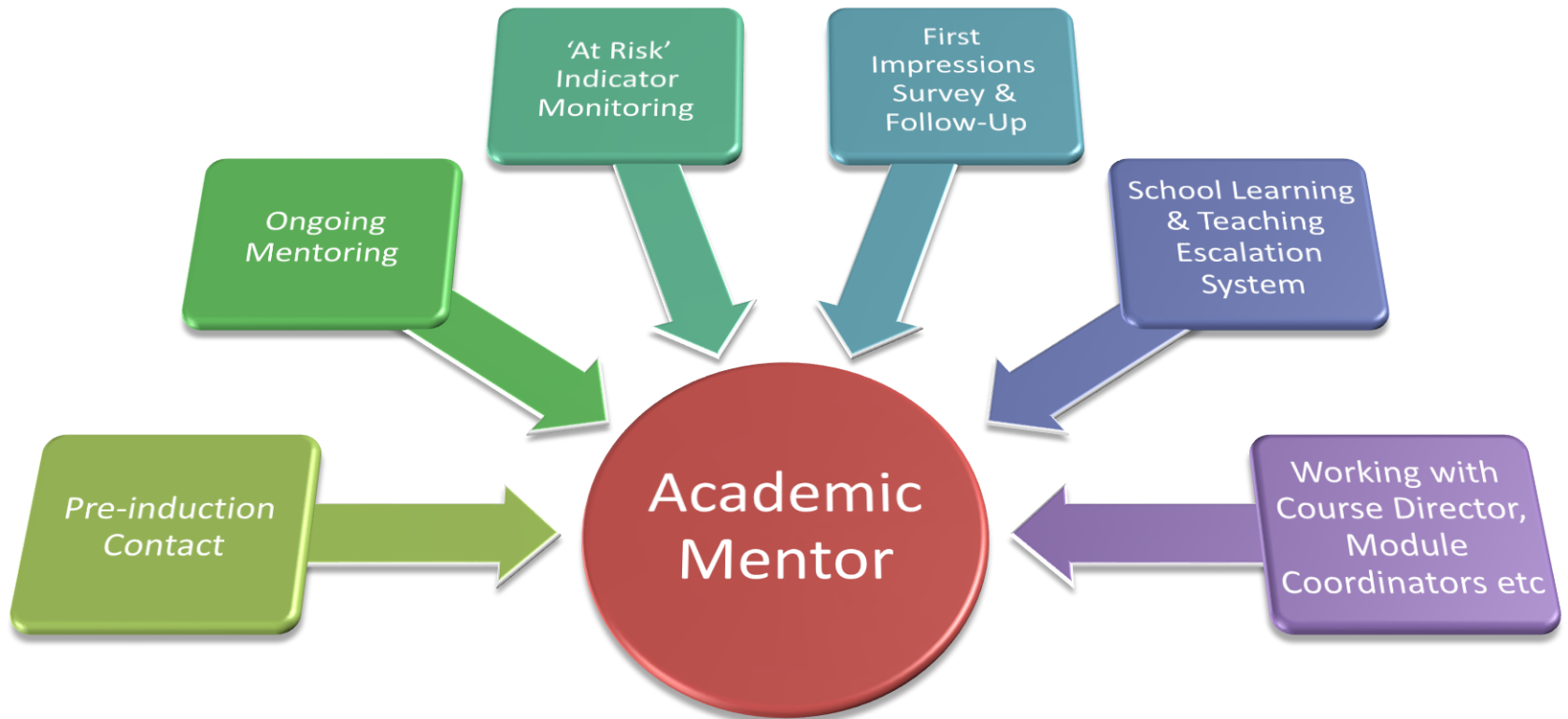
1. Give a **consistent message** to all first year students
2. Look at the student experience throughout the first year (including pre-entry and transition) not solely 3 days of induction.

HOW?

Package of Measures – one Goal



The Academic Mentor



Varying Communication Methods: Early Snapshot Questionnaire

Questions

1. Where are we?

Do you know:

- Who ... is?
- How to contact?
- How to use?

2. Belonging

3. Early Warning Indicators/ Identification of Risk Questions

- Do you feel that you are on the right course for you?
- Have you considered dropping out of university since commencing your studies with us?

- Useful early indicator
- Allowed 'Backfilling'
- Allowed an additional and sympathetic medium/communication tool for students to raise an 'at risk' flag
- Facilitated follow-up with students to discuss programmes, transfers, 'at risk' students, issues affecting studies etc at **VERY early juncture**



DROP **IN**, DON'T DROP OUT

School of the Built Environment
supporting students to make
the right decisions

The Foundations of Belonging

(By weeks 2/3, Semester 1)


I feel comfortable with my classmates & feel part of the class	Valid Percentage (n)				I feel comfortable with my lecturers	Valid Percentage (n)			
	SA	Agree	DA	SD		SA	Agree	DA	SD
Building Engineering and Materials	21.1 (4)	78.9 (15)	0	0	Building Engineering and Materials	36.8 (7)	57.9 (11)	5.3 (1)	0
Building Surveying	43.8 (14)	53.1 (17)	3.1 (1)	0	Building Surveying	40.6 (13)	59.4 (19)	0	0
Construction Engineering and Management	45.5 (10)	54.5 (12)	0	0	Construction Engineering and Management	38.1 (8)	57.1 (12)	4.8 (1)	0

IMPACT & BENEFITS

Communicate for Success

- Retention – significantly improved
 - Attrition 20.5% in 2013-14 compared 13.9% 2014-2015
- What does this mean ... significant improvements across a range of measures

(Remember those students we transfer between programmes count as in attrition statistics)

 - More students remaining & being successful in higher education
 - Semester 1 data showed 10% improvement of success at the first attempt.
 - Significant reduction in modules with failure rate over 15%
 - More students on the right courses (sometimes surprisingly)
 - e.g. Academic Mentors have helped to transfer a student VERY successfully from Civil Engineering to Environmental Health
- Staff antennas are up
 - increasingly so and by the many rather than the few
-  Team working & collegiality - through & between

Key Messages

1. Pre-induction contact – been a critical tool for contact & *building early belonging*
1. Academic Mentors – supporting the student experience
2. Focused Induction to build belonging & engagement
1. Consider how we are communicating with our students & what messages are we giving
 - Be consistent and give a consistent message
2. Open and use as many lines of communication as possible
 - There is not a one size fits all approach to when and how our students need and want to tell us things
4. At risk indicators have been invaluable – attendance & submission