

Student Failure in the 1st Year

An Interview Based Investigation

**School of
Biological Sciences**



**University of
Leicester**

- Retention is a key issue for all HEIs
- Recent initiatives have reduced the rate of withdrawal from the School's programmes
- Progressive increase in the numbers of 1st year students re-sitting modules



- STAR project (Student Transition and Retention) to investigate failures
- Structured interviews carried out by staff from Student Learning Centre
- 13 students interviewed



Cohort Summary

- 13 students interviewed
- 11 passed on resit
- 4 non A-level entrants
- 3 from families with no experience of HE
- 3 non-native English speakers



Main Reasons Cited for Failure

- Only 1 of 13 was surprised at failing
- Unclear about the level of detail needed in answers (7 of 13)
- Lack of effort (5 of 13)
- Did not like the module (3 of 13)
- Failure was my wake-up call!

'Lack of effort, bad revision, not enough of it, not going over the texts to find more details'



Main Reasons Cited for Failure

'Didn't spend a lot of time on study, maybe only one hour a day, but I know it isn't enough. Rest of the time, play, on the internet talking to people, sleeping a lot: I sleep a lot here, I don't know why...'

'I am going to prepare a lot more. When I had the exams in January it really freaked me out. After that week I was like, I've really done badly. But I think it is good because it really kicked me up the bum. So I will prepare a lot more....'



Main Reasons Cited for Failure

'You think a certain amount is going to be okay but then you don't pass so you realise that it isn't good enough so you'd best start working harder'

'I knew the 1st year wouldn't count so I just wanted to pass. I was aiming for above 40, around the 50% mark. A lot of people who were 2nd years said they wished they had partied more in the 1st year, so I had that in mind'.



Some Key Differences in Experience

- How did You Find Studying at University Particularly Different to School/College?

'It is really different. Here you are left to get on with it whereas at College you are told what to learn, what to revise, what to do....'



Some Key Differences in Experience

'The level of the academic content was much higher. For A level you were doing one thing for quite a while and here you are doing lots of things at the same time so it is hard to know where I am at any time.'

'...some things are a big change. Getting back into writing essays, because I hadn't written an essay since GCSE, and also the amount of work as well, suddenly writing essays and reports all the time.'



Some Key Differences in Experience

‘A lot of information in a short space of time whereas at college you would have it drilled into you’

‘... small sixth form at school, very informal, good relationship with teachers, socialised with them. Lecturers here can’t do enough for you, if you ask a question they will try, but I think I was used to having my teachers driving me forward...’

