# Supporting retention across an institution

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With thanks to Professor Alison Halstead, Aston University

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## Why does retention matter?

### Performance indicator

**Retention is the ability of a particular college or university to successfully graduate the students that initially enrol (Berger and Lyon 2005)**

### Obligation to students

**Implicit in our acceptance of students on to a course is our belief that they can benefit from it**

### Mind the gap!

**Low retention rates imply mismatch between student needs and institutional provision**

### Value for money

**Economic pressure from government**

### Obligation to society

**Society as a whole benefits from having a larger and more representative number of young people graduating with the skills to meet its ever changing needs (Tinto 2006)**

| | Retention (%) | |
|---|---|---|
| **Country** | **2000** | **2004** |
| Japan | 90 | |
| Ireland | 85 | 83 |
| UK | 83 | 78 |
| Netherlands | 69 | 76 |
| Australia | 69 | 67 |
| Germany | 72 | |
| USA | 66 | 54 |
| France | 55 | |

OECD figures from van Stolk *et al.* (2007)

# Pre-entry characteristics predicting HE success:

**Positive factors**

- High school grades
- Parental education and income
- Self-rated emotional health
- Indicators of involvement
  - Community service
  - Membership of student clubs

**Negative factors**

- Indicators of non-involvement
  - Full-time employment plans
- Missing classes & appointments
- Time spent reading for pleasure
- Self-rated artistic ability, creativity, understanding of others

# Environmental factors predicting HE success:

**Positive factors**

- Living in hall of residence
- Financial security

**Negative factors**

- Off-campus employment

# Institutional factors predicting HE success:

**Positive factors**

- Selectivity
  - Benefit of well motivated and academically well-prepared peer group

**Negative factors**

- Large size
- Impersonal atmosphere

# **Student involvement** Astin (1999)

- The quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in their HE experience
  - Absorption in academic work
  - Participation in extra-curricular activities
  - Interaction with academic and other staff
  - Interaction with their peers
- The greater the student's involvement in their institution, the greater will be their learning and personal development
- We must move away from traditional 'black box' pedagogies……..

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# Thomas and Yorke (2003)
## Key interventions:

- A supportive and friendly institutional climate

- Support particularly in the transition into and during the first year

- Early formative assessment

- Importance of the social dimension in learning activities

- Response to the changing patterns of student engagement with HE

# Thomas (2002) "Institutional habitus"

- The norms and practices of an institution which impact on the extent to which students feel that they are accepted.

- Pedagogical, social and environmental issues are addressed from the student perspective

- "Not to blame students for failure, but to address the more pertinent issue of how institutions fail students."

- Need for a strategic and holistic approach to widening participation that moves away from marginal projects, to being integrated throughout the institution's activities

- It is the responsibility of all staff not just of those who care

# Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006)

- Need for a more holistic approach to research

- Need to move away from the "positivist search........ for simple answers to safe but insubstantial questions"

- We need to know more about the 'how?' and 'why' and the implications for the student etc.

# Student Profile



34% Under 21

66% Over 21

First Generation Learners
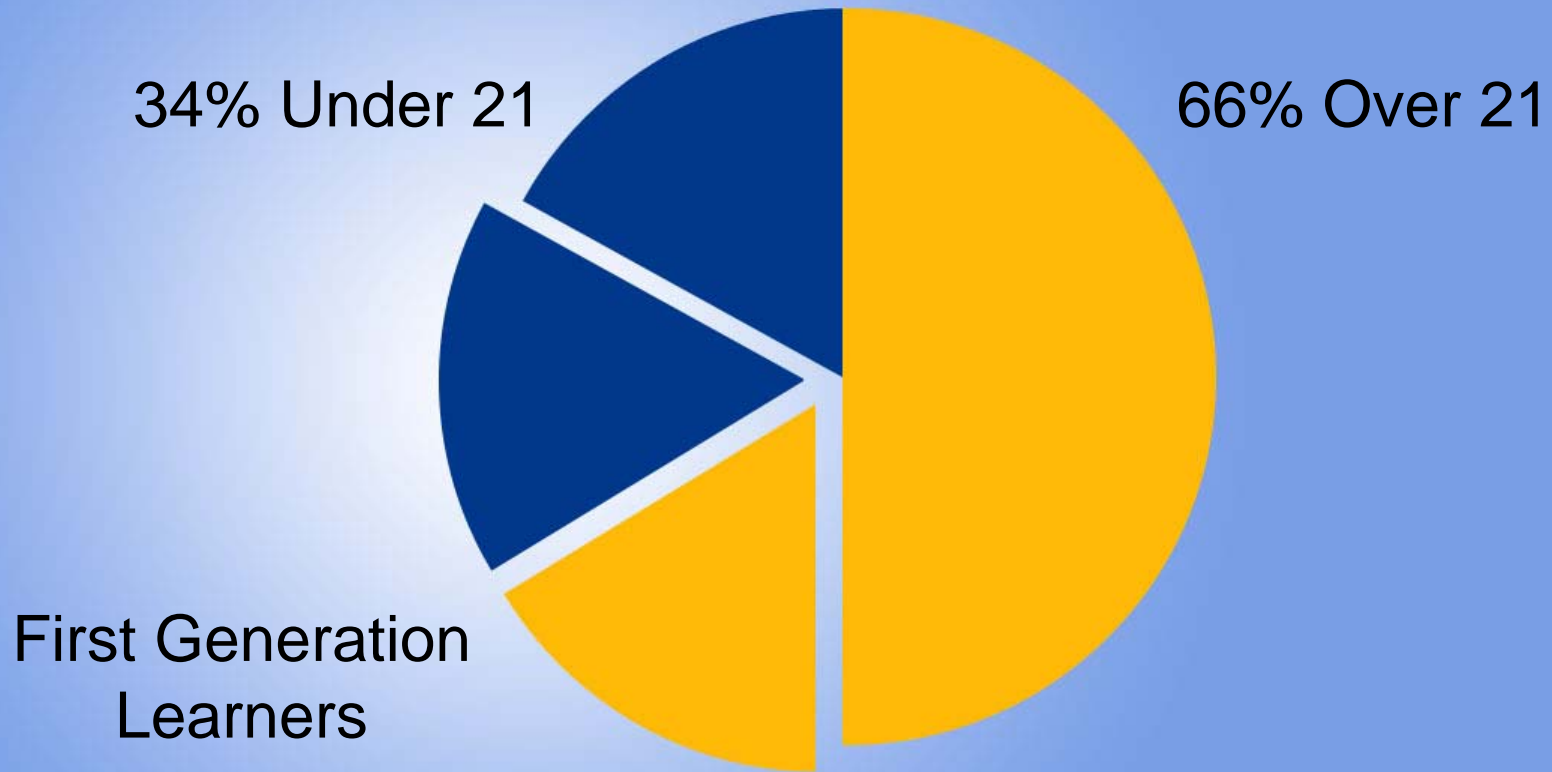
# University of Wolverhampton

- 22,000
- 66% mature
- State School 99%
- Low participation neighbourhood:  26%
- 27% ethnic minority
- 85% live at home
- 11% non-continuation

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# **Challenge of retention**
## Key Objective 2002-5:

- To develop strategies for improving student retention and progression
  - Raised profile across the university
  - Generated great deal of activity: pre-entry, induction, support services
  - One stop advice centres, student buddies, mentors, formative assessment etc.

# **Challenge of retention**

- Driven technological innovation
  - VLE, ePortfolios, SMS texting, Podcasting

- Success at Level 1 resulted in £4.85 million CETL

- Retention and the learning environment the University's highest priorities

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# Learning and Teaching Strategy

## 2006-10: Enhancing the Student Learning Experience
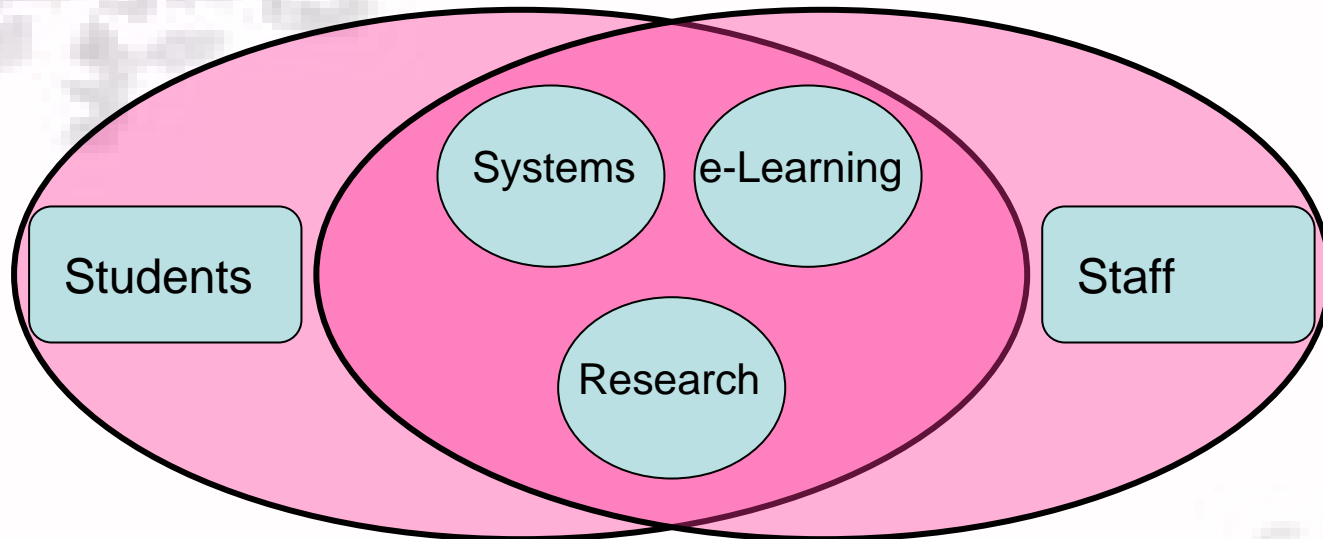


This strategy aims to embed the quality, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of our learning environments into the mainstream processes and procedures of University planning and implementation, so as to enhance the lives, the educational experience and employability of our students.

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# Two main priorities:

- To enable all our diverse students to deepen knowledge and understanding, and develop skills and personal attributes which will enrich their lives and enhance their achievement and employability.

- To enable our staff to develop their learning and teaching expertise in order to enhance the student learning experience

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# Enabling Achievement in a Diverse Student Body

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# Benefits brought by the CETL:

- New build with a focus on social learning spaces
- Strengthened staff research element of the L&T strategy
- Raised the profile of staff development
    - PGCert/MA
    - Learning and Teaching Research Network
    - Rewarding Excellence
    - Full programme of staff development workshops
- Provided foci of activity on key retention issues

# Using Technology to Support the Learning Environment

- WOLF (VLE) Used by almost all students
  – Interactive and collaborative learning
  – Web quests
  – Learning support resources
  – Tracking
- ePortfolio developed for Personal Develop Planning to support independent and reflective learning
- Computer Aided Assessment
- "Sharpen Up Your Skills" on-line study skill support with e-mentors
- SMS text messaging, PDAs for fieldwork
- Podcasting

# Raising confidence and self-esteem through dialogue and collaborative learning

Julie Hughes - Education



- ePortfolio
- Trainee teachers
- Sharing issues and concerns
- Moved from tutor led to student led within the first year
- Group self-sustaining in year 2

# Writing for academic success: encouraging engagement with feedback

Jackie Pieterick



- 300 Level 1 Humanities Students
- Guided work
- Early formative feedback
- Peer mentoring and feedback
- Developmental approach
- Dissemination through blended learning linked to "Sharpen up your Skills" website.

# Tracking, monitoring, student support

Ken Oliver
Senior Demonstrator

School of Applied Sciences

# School of Applied Sciences

- Staff engagement with University initiatives e.g.
  - PGCert, MA
  - Professional Doctorate
  - Membership of L&T Research Networks
  - ILE research grants
  - L&T postgraduate research
  - Awards for innovative learning and teaching strategies
  - Pathfinder project – ePortfolios
  - VLE, CAA, SMS, Podcasts etc.
  - StartRight
  - Review of First Year Experience
  - Etc. etc.!

# Student support
## Additional to University systems

- Student support office

- Personal tutors

- Mentors

- Electronic systems
  - Appointments with staff
  - Enrolment, module registration, results



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# Academic support

Additional to University systems

- Personal tutor
- Module teaching staff
- Demonstrators
  - Approachable
  - Proactive interventions
  - Study skill drop-in and workshops

# **Retention**

- Figures variable but consistently around 90%

- Close monitoring of attendance on core modules
    - Rapid identification of students at risk
    - Swift demonstrator intervention

- System is effective but resource-demanding

- Issue of transferability

- Smart-Cards
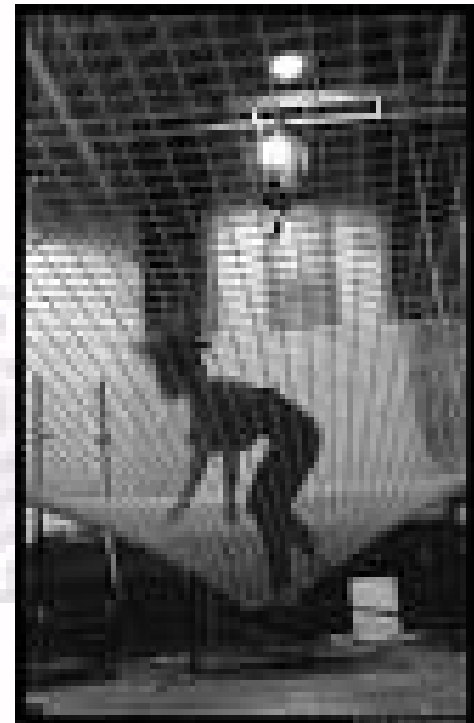
# Students' best asset

- Personal Development Planning
- <span style="color:red">P</span>ersonal, <span style="color:red">A</span>cademic, <span style="color:red">C</span>areers, <span style="color:red">E</span>mployability
- Importance of using non-deficit models
- Self-reflection increasingly embedded into learning
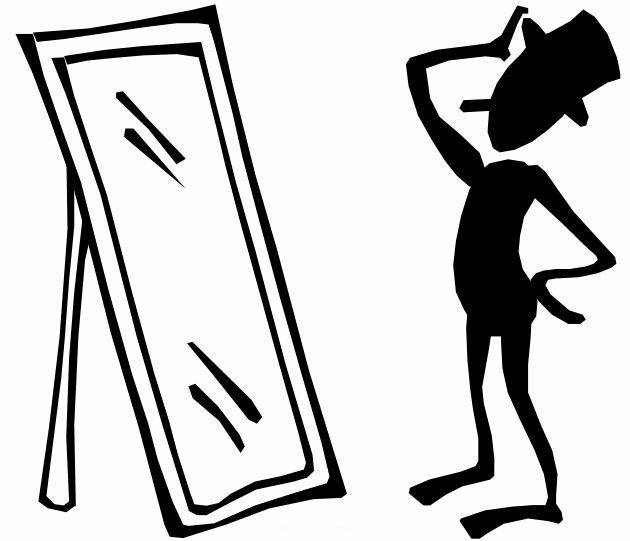
# AB1011 Personal and Study Skills

- Level 1
- 15 credits
- Semester 1

- New module
- Core to Awards in most subject groups
- Cohort of *c.* 180 students

## Objectives

- Module is vehicle for PDP
- ePortfolio provides a platform for students to engage with PDP, in the widest sense, throughout their time at the University
- To prevent separation of personal, academic and study skills
- To facilitate the permeation of PDP and reflective learning through to as wide an audience of both students and staff as possible.

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# Module context

- Each week students focus on a different topic largely concerned with skills for scientists e.g. numeracy, statistics, scientific writing

- Some skills are assessed through formative tests or assignments

- Self-reflection and reflective learning – 25% of module assessment

- Students use the ePortfolio to assemble evidence of their personal and study/scientific skills.…………..

# Webfolio

- Page for each scientific and personal skill
- Prompts on each page:
  - Work to upload
  - Reflective activities

- Webfolio Template

- Plan B (no links)
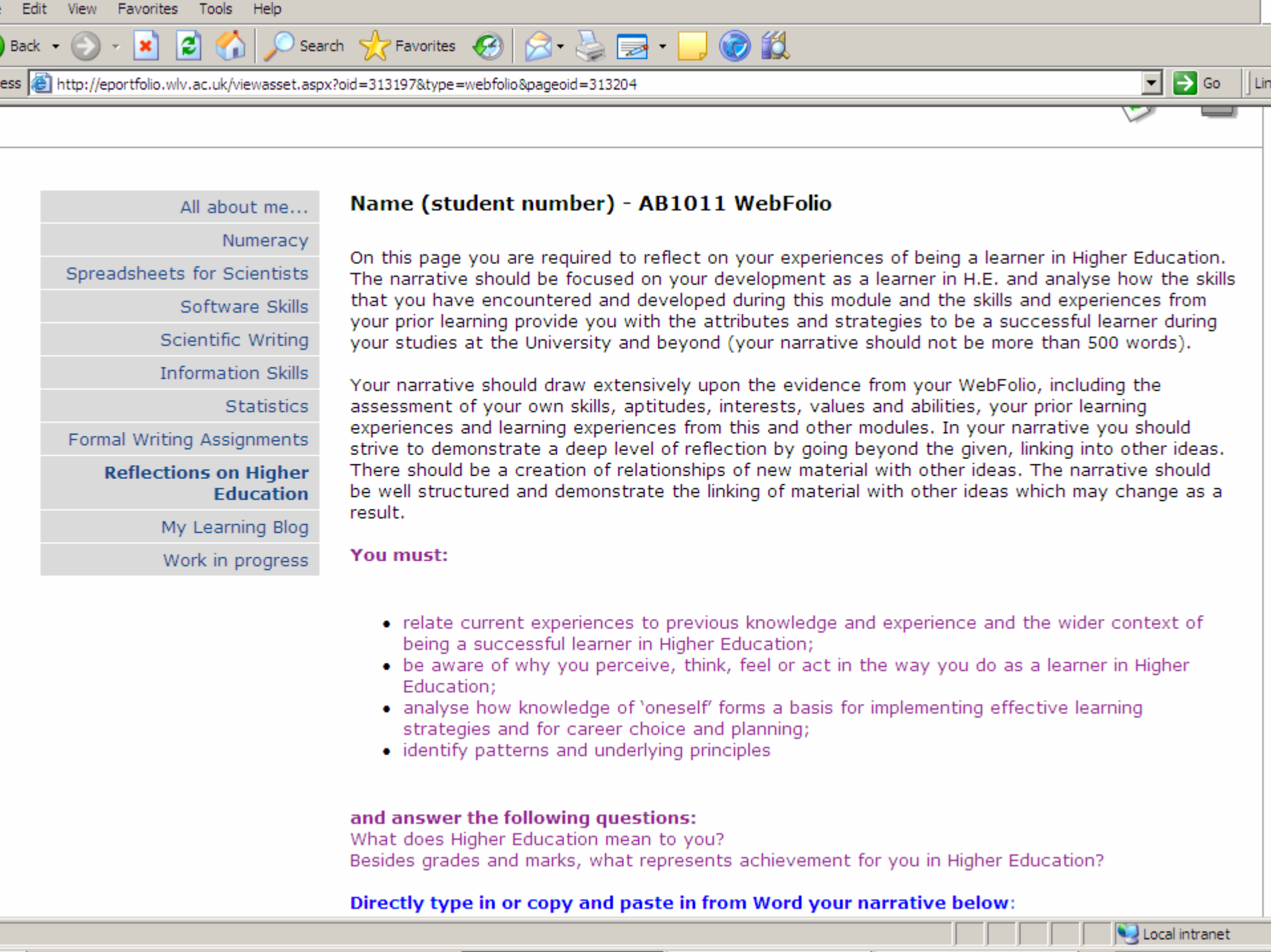
All about me...

Numeracy

Spreadsheets for Scientists

Software Skills

Scientific Writing

Information Skills

Statistics

Formal Writing Assignments

**Reflections on Higher Education**

My Learning Blog

Work in progress

# Name (student number) - AB1011 WebFolio

On this page you are required to reflect on your experiences of being a learner in Higher Education. The narrative should be focused on your development as a learner in H.E. and analyse how the skills that you have encountered and developed during this module and the skills and experiences from your prior learning provide you with the attributes and strategies to be a successful learner during your studies at the University and beyond (your narrative should not be more than 500 words).

Your narrative should draw extensively upon the evidence from your WebFolio, including the assessment of your own skills, aptitudes, interests, values and abilities, your prior learning experiences and learning experiences from this and other modules. In your narrative you should strive to demonstrate a deep level of reflection by going beyond the given, linking into other ideas. There should be a creation of relationships of new material with other ideas. The narrative should be well structured and demonstrate the linking of material with other ideas which may change as a result.

**You must:**

- relate current experiences to previous knowledge and experience and the wider context of being a successful learner in Higher Education;
- be aware of why you perceive, think, feel or act in the way you do as a learner in Higher Education;
- analyse how knowledge of 'oneself' forms a basis for implementing effective learning strategies and for career choice and planning;
- identify patterns and underlying principles

**and answer the following questions:**
What does Higher Education mean to you?
Besides grades and marks, what represents achievement for you in Higher Education?

**Directly type in or copy and paste in from Word your narrative below:**

Local intranet

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Course | Tools | Search | My Folder | Help | Admin

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Final Showing Markup     Show

Start date
Class groups
Health & Safety
General material
Class material
Practice exercises
e-Portfolio
About your e-portfolio
Personal development e-portfolio
Copying and Publishing your AB1011 WebFolio to and
Getting started with PebblePad
Initial Reflections
PebblePad User Guide
How is your best asset working for you?
Best Asset plus diagram
Webfolio help for final class
Careers
Assessments

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pebblePAD

welcome back to PebblePad

current ePortfolio activity
2 new shared assets
0 assets with deadlines near
0 of your assets have been updated
0 shared assets have been updated

search
gateways
deadlines
view shared
view all
create new
tools
upload file

Start     Sticky Notes

3 Internet Explor...

WOLF Topic : Personal and Study Skills I - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by University of Wolverhampton

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Back     Search   Favorites

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WOLF : AB1011: Personal and Study Skills I

University of Wolverhampton, School of Applied Sciences

Course | Tools | Search | My Folder | Help | Admin

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Picture

Final Showing Markup     Show

Start date
Class groups
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General material
Class material
Practice exercises
e-Portfolio
About your e-portfolio
Personal development e-portfolio
Copying and Publishing your AB1011 WebFolio to and
Getting started with PebblePad
Initial Reflections
PebblePad User Guide
How is your best asset working for you?
Best Asset plus diagram
Webfolio help for final class
Careers
Assessments

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GATEWAY                    pebblePAD

University > SAS                              Back

This is the School Gateway for the School of Applied Sciences

More Gateways                    Published Items

Go up a level              No items have been published yet, or you do not have permission to view published items.

AB1011 Personal and Study Skills
Applied Biomedical Science
BM1005 WebFolio
BM1005 WebFolio Resit Gateway
BM1009 Applied Biomedical Science Placement1
Clinical Physiology Gateway (BM1005)

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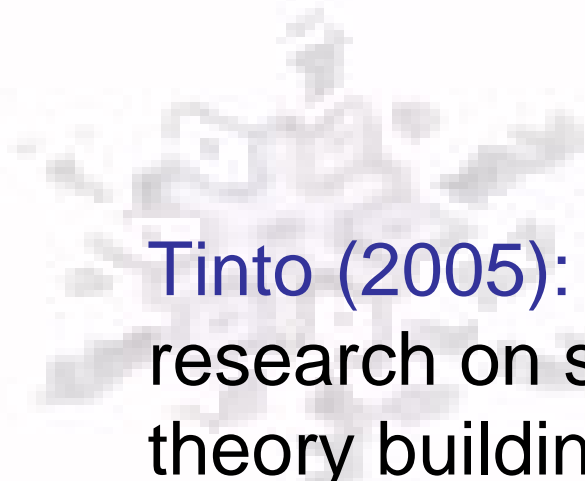Local intranet

# Positive outcomes from using ePortfolio

- the ePortfolio gives individual topics a life after the class

- It helps to provide coherence to what might otherwise be a series of separate exercises

- Makes links to other modules

- Rich source of data on the student experience and the contribution of self-reflection to achievement

# PhD Project:

- First Year Undergraduate Persistence and Achievement in a Post 1992 University Science Department
  - What are First Year undergraduates' conceptions of Higher Education experience and achievement?
  - What are First Year undergraduates' perceptions of self-reflection and its role in HE?
  - What factors influence student persistence and achievement in their first year of study?
  - Does self-reflection play a role in facilitating FY undergraduate persistence and achievement?

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# Future challenges?

- Evaluate current strategies and practices
- Joined-up internal strategies for
  - Pedagogy
  - Research
  - Linking pedagogy and research
- Buy-in by all staff
- Increasing student involvement

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Tinto (2005):  "Despite many years of research on student retention and attempts at theory building, there is still much to do."

We need a theory of action, a model for student persistence which can be used to guide institutional action.

# Elements of Tinto's (2005) model

- Institutional commitment
- High expectations
- Support: academic, social, financial
- Feedback
- Involvement
- Learning



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