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Abstract 1C

Exploring links between personal attributes and the first-year student experience

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Student retention (as measured by continuation and completion) remains a concern within UK higher education. Several studies have shown that students with high levels of motivation, determination and commitment, and confidence are more likely to persist and succeed (Browitt & Walker, 2007; Roberts et al., 2003; Walker, 2007). We are now conducting longitudinal research at the University of Glasgow to investigate the hypothesis that measurable personal attributes, which might be related to confidence at the time of transition to higher education, are predictors of student persistence. We invited all new entrants to the university in 2009/10 to complete online versions of standard instruments for measuring self-esteem, self-efficacy, resilience, hope and Mindset, guided by the work of the Centre for Confidence and Well-being (<http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/>). Pilot work on Mindsets has already been undertaken at this institution (Cutts, 2008) as well as others (Dweck, 2000). Students completed these tests before or at the very start of session. We received 1505 usable responses (19% of all new entrants), 1097 from undergraduates and 408 from postgraduates. These were linked to students' demographic data using registration numbers. We later asked half of these participants, selected at random, to retake the tests at the end of teaching in Semester 1; the others will be asked to retake the tests at the end of teaching in Semester 2. We present preliminary findings. We describe patterns of personal attributes at entry and their association with background demographic characteristics, and how these may change by the end of Semester 1. We discuss what these results might suggest about the immediate impact of higher education on students. We indicate how differences between the personal attributes of undergraduate and postgraduate students might inform the graduate attributes agenda. We consider the scope for appropriate intervention to help students improve their chances of success.