

## Strategic enhancement programmes Commissioned funding application form

Closing Date Noon Friday 20 February 2015

Please complete and submit this form electronically to: [SEP2014@heacademy.ac.uk](mailto:SEP2014@heacademy.ac.uk) by noon on Friday 20 February 2015. All submissions will be acknowledged by email within three working days of receipt.

**Please note:** there are word limits (stated in brackets) for sections, and we are not able to consider additional appendices and text.

### 1. Programme

Please indicate which strategic enhancement programme you are currently engaged with:

Strategic enhancement programme	
Retention and Attainment	X
Flexible Learning	

### 2. Higher education provider name

University of East Anglia
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### 3. Who will lead the funded project within the institution?

The named lead person should be available to liaise with the HEA throughout the project; the choice of lead is the decision of the institution.

Name	Dr Richard Harvey
Institutional role	Academic Director for Admissions and Outreach Academic Director of Internationalisation
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### 4. Funding strand

Please select **one** of the following:

1.	Evidence and impact	
2.	Development of a tool or resource	X

## 5. Project title

“It’s not just me!” - Student Testimonials and Peer-Support for Retention and Attainment

## 6. Proposal (up to 2,000 words)

Please outline the activities that you propose to address for your chosen strand.

### **Project Aims**

Establishing a partnership with the student body on the provision of academic and pastoral support, this project will develop a communication platform where students can share, discuss, and learn about challenges and common issues that might impact upon their academic experience. Much literature now highlights that nurturing a sense of belonging and preventing feelings of isolation represent important catalysts to retention, wellbeing, attainment, and success in Higher Education (O’ Mahony, Thomas and Payens, 2013). Similarly, successful models of retention emphasise the importance of improving student attitude and self-efficacy through positive student-institution interactions and mentoring programmes (Bean and Eaton, 2001). Departing from a traditional view of the HEI as the sole designer and provider of support and advice to students, we propose a peer-led approach whereby students can identify with the experiences of fellow course mates, find solutions for and build resilience to common problems in an accessible and relatable format. To foster a sense of belonging and inclusion that is developed within (not outside) the student community, we will build a web-based communication platform where students share testimonials about how they overcame common difficulties that span the student lifecycle (such as socialising, home-sickness, and performance-anxiety). Combining the re-assuring voice of fellow students with information and signposting to support services, we envisage that our approach will foster a genuine, non-threatening, and sympathetic way for UEA to: (i) facilitate a **peer-led support** network, (ii) learn from the student voice to **increase understanding of issues** that may impact retention and attainment. Designing practice and resources that will be easily transferrable to other HEIs, our project will generate the following outputs and outcomes.

### Outputs

- Communication Tool
  - A UEA web-based platform collecting student testimonials in video, audio, or interview-transcript format. Testimonials will report: (i) common issues affecting the student experience, (ii) coping strategies and ways to address difficulties, (iii) advice and encouragement coming from the students’ own voice.
  - A companion toolkit describing the procedures followed to construct the platform, and the testimonials’ interview schedule.
- Research Tool
  - A summary of interview transcripts, and a critical analysis of the issues emerged from the collection of student testimonials.
- Case-study
  - A summary document describing our peer-led approach to student support, core findings emerged from the Research Tool, and lessons learnt during the development of the project.

## Outcomes

- A switch to peer-led student support, building student confidence and belonging to impact retention and attainment. Through the platform students can identify themselves, reflect on their own experience in relation to that of their peers, and find the confidence to proceed with their academic journey, or seek further help.
- A resource for staff that will: (i) increase their awareness and understanding of common difficulties affecting the student journey, (ii) develop emotional intelligence to empathise with students.
- A resource for HEIs to: (i) shape practice and communication with students in response to their own voice, (ii) develop staff training and CPD that truly embeds the student voice.
- A framework based on staff-student partnerships, empowering students to directly contribute to peer-led support while developing employability skills.

## **Methodology**

### Project Activities and Timescale

The Project will articulate in 3 stages:

1. Collection of testimonials (Mar-Apr 2015)
  - An extensive campaign around UEA campus (by means of flyers, emails, and posters) will inform the students about the opportunity to contribute to the project by providing a testimonial.
  - Students will be able to contribute via: (i) focus groups, (ii) interviews, and (iii) online survey. According to their preferred method, students will be offered a choice of how their testimonial will be recorded. Options will include: (i) videos, (ii) podcasts, (iii) interview transcripts. Students will also be given choice about: being photographed, and either being identified or remaining anonymous.
  - The interview questions supporting each testimonial will ask students to: (i) describe a particular difficulty encountered along their academic journey (e.g. stress, socialising, homesickness), (ii) elaborate on how the problem was resolved, and (iii) offer a final recommendation, or an encouraging 'word of wisdom', to other fellow students experiencing the same difficulty.
  - Student testimonials will be rewarded with campus vouchers to recognise participation.
2. Elaboration of information (May 2015)
  - The testimonials collected will be analysed and codified, according to their format.
  - To develop the **Communication Tool**:
    - a) Testimonials will be edited in short-text, podcasts, and brief video interviews, according to their format.
    - b) Contributions will be organised by theme, and collected on a website accessible to all students and staff at UEA.
    - c) The website will be enriched with links to both University and Community provided student support resources (e.g. pastoral support provided, mental health and wellbeing charities).
  - To develop the **Research Tool**, the data transcripts emerging from testimonials will be analysed through qualitative research methods, and elaborated to produce reports.

### 3. Production and delivery of Project outputs (June 2015)

- The project website (Communication Tool) will be completed at this stage.
- The material collected and elaborated for the Research Tool will be edited and summarised in two documents: (i) a Research Tool Document reporting on the evidence gathered from student interviews in relation to the provision offered by the University, and (ii) a Case Study, which will –more briefly- describe the practice, the outputs, and the outcomes developed within the project.

#### Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact on Project	Action to be taken
Rejection of ethical approval application to conduct project activities.	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The project could not be conducted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Approach ethics committee for advice prior to submission.</li> <li>- Investigate similar practice conducted by colleagues and consult on ethical framework.</li> </ul>
Lack of participation from students (especially during busy exam time).	medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Communication Tool will lack of variety of student experiences.</li> <li>- The Research Tool will not deliver a realistic picture of the student experience.</li> <li>- The Research Tool will not be useful to other HEIs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider alternative participants recruitment methods.</li> <li>- Use own network of colleagues/students.</li> <li>- Develop interview protocols able to maximise the information to be gathered from participants.</li> </ul>
Delays on the delivery of outputs caused by tight deadlines.	medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The outputs would be delivered at a later date.</li> <li>- HEA would take action on the basis of Services Agreement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set project milestones and negotiate intermediate deadlines with all project participants.</li> <li>- Project managers to negotiate adequate buy-out with their line-managers.</li> <li>- Set contingency plans and consider seeking help/support from UEA in recruiting additional members on the project team to support activities.</li> <li>- Inform HEA about envisaged delay and seek for advice ahead of time.</li> </ul>

## Evaluation

The evaluation of the project will take place in two stages:

- Stage 1 (Jun-Jul 2015) – the outputs of the project will be shared with expert colleagues within UEA (e.g. Dean of Students Office) and colleagues within the HEA SEP 2015 Network to feedback on the resources to be delivered.
- Stage 2 (Sep 2015 onwards) – the project website will be available for access. UEA staff and students will be invited to give feedback on the initiative. Website usage statistics will be employed to evaluate the impact of the project on the student population.

## Ethical Issues

Ethical concerns arising from the project include:

1. Student participation: consent, withdrawal, and debriefing.
2. Potential detriment caused by participation.
3. Disclosure of personal information.

These will be addressed in the following ways:

1. Student recruitment will include a briefing about the general aims and objectives of the project. Participation will be voluntary and will require written informed consent from each participant.
2. It will be ensured that participation in the project is not detrimental to any aspect of the student experience. Students will be entitled to take vision of the final output originated from their participation and grant/withdraw their consent for the material to be used within the project.
3. Students will be able to participate in the project completely anonymously. Where students voluntarily share personal information, this will be stored securely on password protected electronic devices.

These principles, along with a thorough design of the incentives to participate in the project, will be addressed (i) ex-ante, by seeking approval from the UEA School of Economics Ethics Committee, and (ii) ex-post, through review of the material ready to be delivered as output. Adherence to these principles will be monitored by the applicant liaising with the School of Economics Ethics Committee. The School of Economics has long-standing and internationally recognised expertise in performing research experiments involving the student body as participants. We will build on this expertise to guarantee that any arising concern will be addressed within an ethically sound environment, in conformity with the guidelines of: the School of Economics, The University's Ethics Framework, and of the British Educational Research Association.

## Anticipated Impact

### Stakeholders and Impact Analysis

Stakeholder	Impact type and Description	Impact Evidence (both short/long-run)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students supporting the development of resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowerment and gratification from supporting peers.</li> <li>Development of communication and social research skills.</li> <li>Enrichment of curriculum with paid working experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive feedback on participation.</li> <li>Enhanced employability with positive impact on employment/education success.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students using resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased sense of belonging to the University environment.</li> <li>Increased knowledge of coping and confidence to seek support.</li> <li>Reduced anxiety about university life challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student feedback about the University's support network.</li> <li>Increased Retention and Attainment indicators (especially for risk-categories).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University staff using resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased awareness and empathy about difficulties experienced by students while at University.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change of practice based on awareness of challenges faced by students (e.g. documented on Teaching Reviews).</li> <li>Increased referrals to University Wellbeing Team (e.g. documented on referral reports).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University as whole</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of a tool for effective communication with students based on peer-support and empathy, and identification.</li> <li>Framework to develop adaptations of the tool to tip in other specific areas (e.g. Mathematics anxiety, learning difficulties, etc.)</li> <li>Availability of research data to be used to deepen the understanding of the challenges posed by University life and experiences and increasing research profile of the institution.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of innovative and excellent practice from student feedback, league table indicators, and accreditation bodies (e.g. HEA, HEFCE, QAA, OFFCOM).</li> <li>Development of a number of additional projects making use of the framework to address other areas of concern.</li> <li>Evidence-based and research-based contributions to HE policy and practice on Retention and Attainment through publications, conferences, seminars, and engagement within the sector.</li> <li>Development of training and CPD courses for academic staff (based on the outputs and evidence generated within the project) to support Retention and Attainment.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HEA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovative addition to Retention and Attainment toolkits based on peer-support and empathy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dissemination of UEA framework and practice to other HEIs, with subsequent adoption.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team of Project Applicants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhancement of project management skills.</li> <li>Improved PPD profile.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased academic visibility (e.g. documented via citations and web-analytics).</li> <li>Academic career progression.</li> </ul>

### Output/Impact beyond HEI

In the matrix presented above we deliberately omit to identify a substantial distinction between the benefits that will be generated within UEA and elsewhere. We envisage that this project will develop tools that can be easily implemented and flexibly adapted by other HEIs. The interview data collected at UEA, as well as the methodology employed to analyse it, will act as a benchmark for other HEIs to further expand the investigation on Retention and Attainment catalysts, and on sustainable and effective ways to enhance them.

### Students as Partners

This project will develop partnerships with the student body in a number of ways:

- Students giving testimonials will shape the very core of the project: peer-led support, sense of community, and information and advice that is relevant to their peers and to University staff; will receive monetary rewards (vouchers).
- Students working as RAs and students working for UEA MAKE (audio/video) will develop social research skills and project management skills; will receive payment for their contribution; will enrich their employability profile.
- Students using the project resources: will develop (i) a sense of belonging with the University and (ii) an open attitude towards University support, for the mutual benefit of themselves and the University.

### **References**

Bean, J, and Eaton, S., (2001).

<http://www.se.edu/dept/native-american-center/files/2012/04/The-Psychology-Underlying-Successful-Retention-Practices.pdf>.

O' Mahony, J, Thomas, L. and Payens, J. (eds). (2013).

[https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resources/detail/inclusion/EandD\\_building\\_inclusivity\\_videos](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resources/detail/inclusion/EandD_building_inclusivity_videos).

## **7. Budget**

Please identify a full breakdown of costs including VAT, and details of any matched funding. N.B. The HEA cannot fund: normal cost of course delivery, FeC/overheads, contingency funds, international travel. Equipment requests would need to be essential to the running of the project and not routinely available for use, e.g. laptops, PCs etc.

	Description	Cost (£)
STAFF COSTS	Project management and day-to-day operations; essential buy-out due to intense teaching period Mar-Jul 2015	
	- Dr Fabio Aricò (3hrs x week – 4 months)	
	- Ms Kristina Garner (3hrs x week – 4 months)	
	- Ms Patricia Harris (3hrs x week – 4 months)	
	Testimonial recruitment, student interviews, liaison with AV production, liaison with web-designing team, logistics	
	- 2 student Research Assistants (4hrs x week – 4 months)	
	Focus group facilitation, analysis of interview and focus group transcripts, support to the production of the Research Tool	
	- Graduate Senior Research Assistant (20hrs in total)	
	Transcription costs	
	- 60min x 4 focus groups transcription - 30min x 10 interviews transcription	
SERVICES	Printing services	
	- 400 advertising flyers (2 flyers/sheet at £0.20p/sheet)	
	Catering services	
	- Lunch (4 focus groups: 5 students + 1 facilitator each)	
	Audio/Video Production by UEA “Make” (student-run TV studio services for UEA)	
	- 10 audio/video units (£250 for each production)	
Web design and development	- Website development service (8hrs)	
INCENTIVES	Incentives and rewards for student testimonials	
	- UEA campus vouchers (50 x £10 each)	
	<b>Total Requested from HEA</b>	<b>£9,949.42</b>
	Estates and Indirect Costs (in-kind from UEA)	£5,023.00
	<b>Total Value of the Project</b>	<b>£14,972.42</b>

