

Promoting Effective Student Engagement

Staff Guide

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1.0 Introduction and Institutional Context

Student Engagement can have a positive impact on enhancing the student experience and has a critical role to play in improving student retention and achievement. Teesside University is committed to promoting effective engagement and key elements of its Learning and Teaching Strategy explicitly captures how we engage our students:

- Create a learning culture and an innovative curriculum with inspirational teaching informed by research and employer engagement and the professions.
- Create a stimulating learning environment that provides the space, facilities and technology for effective learning and personal development.

Teesside University's commitment to student engagement, retention and success is also evidenced through its Vision, Mission and Values and explicit within many themes of its Academic Enhancement Framework (AEF). The AEF provides the structure through which Future Facing Learning, and other key strategic priorities are embedded within academic practice ensuring students are provided with the skills and knowledge to thrive in complex and uncertain futures.

The last few months have seen unprecedented times with Covid-19 and the movement of our teaching and learning support to online. From September 2020, the University will adopt a hybrid delivery model consisting of on-campus and online delivery, aligned with Government social distancing restrictions. When reading this guide it is important to consider its contents from the perspective of delivering teaching and learning support through the hybrid delivery model. To support staff and students in understanding the expectations and key principles aligned with the implementation of the hybrid delivery model (for the 2020/21 academic year) the AEF Matrix has been designed. Whilst all elements of the AEF are pertinent to engaging students throughout course design and delivery across the University, this Matrix emphasises those which are most relevant for the hybrid delivery model. The AEF Matrix, along with further detail on each theme of the AEF, including measures of enhancement and excellence, can be found on the AREG Unity site:

<https://unity3.tees.ac.uk/departments/058/SD2017/SitePages/Academic%20Enhancement%20Framework.aspx>

2.0 Overview of Literature / Defining Student Engagement

Trowler states that:

“Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.” (2010, p.3)

Reflecting on Trowler's definition of student engagement, if our students are engaged, this can improve retention, progression and achievement enhancing student success. It adds value to the learning experience and promotes autonomous and self-directed learning; engaged students are more likely complete follow up work and reading around their discipline. Engaged students will be more motivated with increased levels of

participation, confidence and student satisfaction, this subsequently can lead to increases in staff satisfaction levels.

Student engagement and student retention have been well documented and literature around student retention has been prevalent for many decades dating back to the sixties. The extent of research around student engagement lagged behind for many decades but since 2008 there has been a surge in interest around student engagement and during the last 5 years (2014-2018) there have been a reported 1747 articles with the words 'student engagement' in their titles compared to 470 with the words 'student retention' in their titles (Tight, 2019).

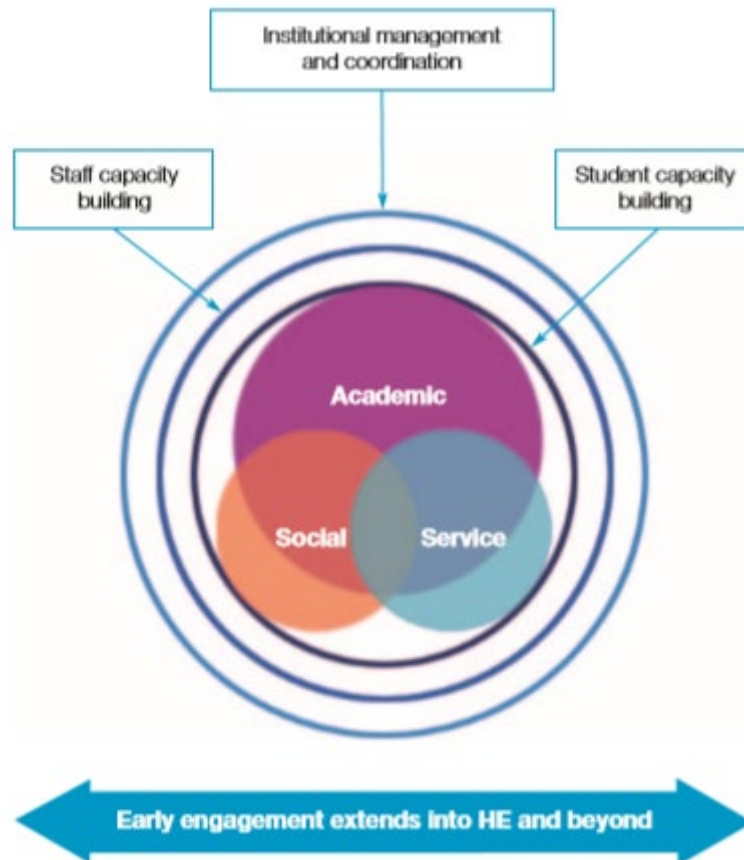
According to Coates:

“engagement is seen to comprise active and collaborative learning, participation in challenging academic activities, formative communication with academic staff, involvement in enriching educational experiences, and feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities.” Coates continues: *“As this list suggests, engagement is a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience.”* (2007, p. 122)

Commenting on the attention that student engagement has received over the past few decades Balwant coined it a 'buzzword' but continued: "... despite the popularity of student engagement, there is often little regard for the meaning of engagement..." (2018, p. 389). The increase in literature has done little to help arrive at a consensus around the meaning of student engagement though the positive impact that effective engagement can have on retaining students and their success is undisputed.

3.0 An Institutional Approach to Student Engagement

There is much literature around student engagement that focusses around partnerships with students and pedagogic practices that help to 'engage' students. These provide valuable contributions to the field of student engagement and subsequent successes that students enjoy; section 5 of this guide explores how pedagogic practices can enhance student engagement. However, taking a step back and thinking about 'student engagement' more holistically in the context of the whole student journey, can help to promote a shared understanding and appreciation that effective student engagement requires an integrated institutional approach. The What Works? Model of Student Success and Retention (Thomas, 2012) usefully captures a holistic approach to Student Engagement.



- **Early engagement:** engagement to promote belonging must begin early and continue across the student life cycle.
- **Engagement in the academic sphere:** engagement and belonging can be nurtured throughout the institution (academic, social and professional services), but the academic sphere is of primary importance to ensure all students benefit.
- **Developing the capacity of staff and students to engage:** the capacity of students to engage and staff to offer an engaging experience must be developed, thus a partnership approach in which everyone is responsible for improving student belonging, retention and success is required.
- **Institutional management and co-ordination:** at the senior level the institution must take responsibility for nurturing a culture of belonging and creating the necessary infrastructure to promote student engagement, retention and success. This includes the use of data to underpin student retention and success.

Source: Thomas, L (July 2012, pp16-17).

It is useful to consider this model in relation to course design and delivery particularly in the context of the hybrid delivery model. It supports the early engagement of students through pre-entry and induction activities focussing around building relationships and engaging students with key information. This engagement must continue throughout the student journey to promote success and avoid student withdrawals. The evidence from the What Works? Programme recognised the importance of student-centred learning and high-quality learning and teaching practices within the academic sphere. However, it also recognised how engagement can take place in other spheres of the institution for example: Student and Library Services, Students Union and Academic Enterprise. These areas can significantly contribute to student retention and success particularly when delivered and integrated through the academic sphere rather than students accessing

them autonomously. This is particularly relevant and important when students may not be on-campus.

Students don't always recognise the value of engagement (according to evidence from the What Works? Programme) and institutions need to work with students to develop their capacity to engage effectively in their HE experiences. They need to provide a range of opportunities to reflect the different levels of engagement that students are comfortable with. Such opportunities throughout the institution and across the student journey require all staff to be involved and this is where the institutions need to provide that commitment and support to staff to develop their capacity around promoting effective student engagement. The final component of the model relates to the senior management of the institution taking responsibility for managing and promoting student engagement to enhance engagement, belonging, retention and success.

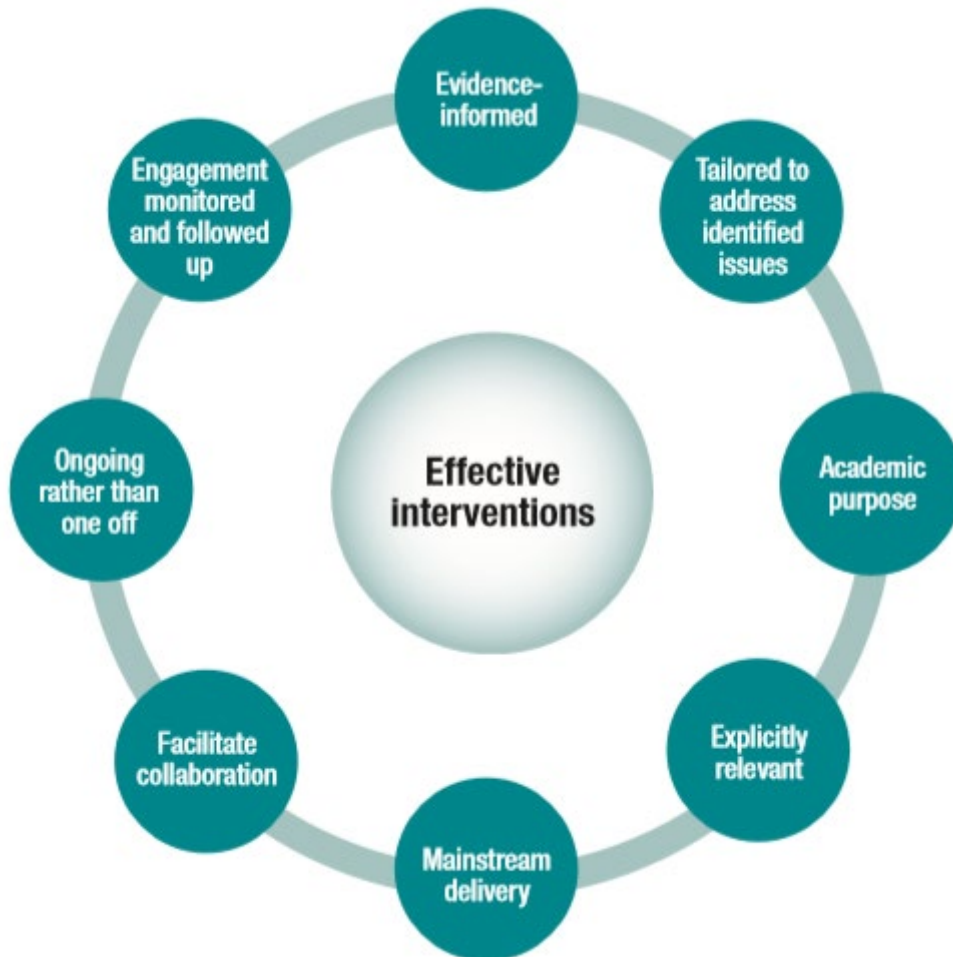
4.0 Effective Practices to Engage Students

The 'What Works? Student Retention & Success Programme', Thomas (2012) identified a set of principles that should inform interventions and approaches designed to engage students. The importance of approaches being embedded into mainstream provision is recognised and the need for activities to be proactive, relevant, timely and collaborative; it is also important to monitor student engagement. Further detail around these principles is provided below.

- **Mainstream:** interventions and approaches should as far as possible be embedded into mainstream provision to allow all students to benefit.
- **Proactive:** activities need to proactively seek to engage students mindful that more motivated students are likely to take up opportunities. If students have to opt in make it transparent how students can and should engage, and the reasons for this.
- **Relevant:** activities need to be informative, useful and relevant making the benefits of engaging explicit to students.
- **Timely:** it is important to remember that early engagement is essential and not to have information overload. Think about the balance between one-off activities and those that benefit from taking place over time.
- **Collaborative:** activities should encourage collaboration with other students and staff.
- **Monitored:** students' engagement should be monitored recognising different forms of engagement and where low levels of engagement are evident then follow up action should be taken.

A second phase of the What Works? Programme (Thomas et al 2017) involved working with institutions putting into practice the learning from the earlier work, evaluating impact and expanding understanding in implementing change. Analysis around effective interventions and approaches further developed understanding in this area and resulted in a renewed list, depicted in the diagram below. In particular, it is recognised that interventions should be tailored to address specific discipline requirements and student cohort characteristics. Ongoing interventions were identified as being important with one-off activities noted as insufficient:

“improving engagement and belonging should extend throughout the first year student experience, either through ongoing interventions (e.g. active learning, personal tutoring, or peer mentoring) or through a programme of linked engagement activities (often starting pre-entry and including a focus on potential future employment outcomes).” (Thomas et al 2017, p. 12).



Source: Thomas, L. et al (2017, p. 13)

4.1 Insights from the What Works? Student and Retention Programme Project

“High quality, student-centred learning and teaching is at the heart of improving the retention and success of all students. Academic programmes that have higher rates of retention and success make use of group-based learning and teaching, and varied learning opportunities including real-world learning and work placements. They provide guidance and support with assessment, useful feedback, a dedicated physical space, op-out co-curricular activities and staff-organised social events.” (Thomas, 2012, p. 31).

The projects that were explored in the What Works? Programme found that the following factors contribute to belonging:

- Staff/student relationships

- staff know their students, their names and respect their individuality
 - staff are interested in their students and their progress
 - staff are available and respond to students in a timely way
 - staff value input of students
 - students can approach staff for support
 - students want relationships with staff that are 'less formal, like a mentor' rather than 'formal like a teacher'
- Curricular content and learning and teaching practices
 - Active learning, engaging students in problem/practice-based learning and drawing on real world
 - Collaborative learning and small group teaching encouraging and facilitating the sharing of own experiences
 - Enthusiastic and knowledgeable lecturers
 - Offering a range of learning experiences
 - Having work placements and field trips
- Assessment and feedback
 - Clarity around assessment process and expectations
 - Feedback on assessments needs to be helpful to students particularly in how it can be used to inform future assessments
- Personal tutoring
 - Should be proactive and not rely on students accessing tutors
 - Provide early meetings with students
 - Develop a relationship between staff and students
 - Structured support with an explicit purpose
 - Embedded into the academic experience and based at school/department level
 - Should have a strong academic focus
 - Should identify students at risk and provide support and development
 - Linked to student services and peer mentoring or similar peer scheme to provide pastoral and social support and referring to students for further support where appropriate
- Peer relations and cohort identity / friendships
 - Friendships and peer relations can help to promote academic integration and belonging; develop student confidence; improve student motivation; provide a source of academic help; sharing of knowledge to support in academic choices; provide emotional support; offer practical advice/support; gain reassurance;
- A sense of belonging to a particular place within the university e.g. department building/small campus

5.0 Learning and Teaching Practices to Promote Student Engagement

Sections 3 and 4 recognise how the various facets of the student experience and the wider University support networks, systems and processes can contribute to promoting the effective engagement of students. This section focusses more on specific learning

and teaching practices that can help to promote and enhance levels of student engagement. The seven principles for good practice in Undergraduate Education developed by Chickering and Gamson (1987) are well cited and despite dating back to 1987 are still of significant value to more contemporary literature around this area. The seven principles are outlined below, and it is useful to consider these principles in designing and delivering modules and courses within the hybrid teaching model.

1. **Encourage contact between students and faculty:** frequent contact is important both in and out of more formal 'teaching settings'; this helps to encourage motivation and involvement.
2. **Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students:** effective learning is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated; a team effort as opposed to individual learning can enhance learning.
3. **Encourage active learning:** talking about what students are learning helps understanding; relating it to past experiences and applying the learning.
4. **Give prompt feedback:** providing feedback allows students to understand what they know and don't know; it helps to focus learning and ongoing opportunities for feedback should be embedded throughout learning and teaching practices.
5. **Emphasize time on task:** 'Time plus energy equals learning'; making effective use of time is important to learning, students may need help in this area.
6. **Communicate high expectations:** expect your student to do well, the more you expect the more you will get.
7. **Respect diverse talents and ways of learning:** students learn differently and a variety of opportunities to allow learning to take place is important.

Evans et al (2015) in their comprehensive project exploring high-impact strategies to enhance student engagement and achievement analysed pedagogic approaches in 273 articles and found that the key elements of effective practice that emerged from their work aligned with Chickering and Gamson's principles. Through thematic analysis of the 273 articles five themes emerged around effective practice.

1. Real-world student engagement is promoted through the use of real-life examples.
2. Student self-understanding is supported through experiential approaches including the use of guided critical reflection.
3. Advance access to course materials is promoted to enable students to familiarise themselves with materials and to prepare for learning prior to taught sessions.
4. Enhancing student access to learning is achieved by ensuring accessibility of ideas at the perceptual level and at higher levels of information processing through appropriate scaffolding and use of tools and models to support understanding.
5. Effective assessment and feedback practice.

Evans et al posed the question: "For which of these pedagogies is there a robust evidence base evaluating the effectiveness of the pedagogy in generating student engagement?"

"a number of key themes were identified, including an emphasis on the use of visual representations; integrated approaches to curriculum development; co-operative learning activities; inquiry including simulations, problem-based and project-based learning; assessment initiatives to include students as producers, co-assessors, and self-assessors." Evans et al (2015 p. 24).

Focussing on curricular content and pedagogies, as referenced in section 4.1, Thomas (2012) noted the following practices as contributing to enhanced levels of engagement:

active learning, engaging students in problem/practice-based learning and drawing on real world; collaborative learning and small group teaching encouraging and facilitating the sharing of own experiences; enthusiastic and knowledgeable lecturers; offering a range of learning experiences; and, having work placements and field trips.

With regards to assessment and feedback; clarity around assessment process and expectations and feedback on assessments were important. Feedback needs to be helpful to students particularly in how it can be used to inform future assessments

6.0 Guide to Practice: Improving Student Engagement

Reflecting on the content provided in this guide and also other literature around student engagement, the following provide some considerations/suggestions around practices that could help to improve student engagement. Focussing on practices that help to engage students is a fundamental part of academic practice. Arguably, however, student engagement is even more important during times of disruption and uncertainty.

- Provide clarity around expectations; be clear about what is required to achieve the learning outcomes.
- Consider the empowerment of students to learn and manipulate the tools for learning in the early stages of their course.
- Ensure content is well structured, coherent and flows logically making links as appropriate not only within a module but across the course.
- Recap, reinforce and check to ensure and promote student understanding.
 - Use of different technologies to quiz the students.
- Consider how increased levels of interactivity can be promoted in delivering content to promote participation and understanding - the use of pre-lecture videos – flipped practices.
- Use a range of different teaching methods to capture and sustain interest: inquiry-based learning, experiential learning, gamification, flipped learning models, group learning, blended learning.
- Be aware of, and respond to, critical moments during the student lifecycle.
- Ensure students know what support is available to them and how to access it.
- Consider immersive learning projects at the start of, and throughout, courses.
- Consider developing the use of peer assisted student support (PASS) schemes and peer mentoring/buddying schemes.
- Develop a ‘partnership in learning’ culture, encourage and utilise student suggestions; listen, understand and respond to concerns raised.
- Consider how students can contribute to module and assessment design.
- Use high quality learning resources to improve / promote student engagement and confidence.
- Embed employability skills and opportunities into the curriculum.
- Integrate the wider university support networks in the delivery of courses and modules: Student Futures and Student and Library Services.

Nordmann et al. (April 2020) discusses 10 simple rules for supporting a temporary online pivot in higher education, the following are particularly relevant in helping to promote effective student engagement through the University’s hybrid delivery model.

- Provide asynchronous content - provides greater opportunities for students to engage with their studies flexibly.
- Provide synchronous and asynchronous contact and communication including clarity around the intended purpose of the different forms of contact.
- Set and communicate clear expectations about engagement across the different channels of communication.
- Design appropriate assessments and communicate expectations clearly.
- Monitor and support engagement.
- Review the use and format of recorded content.
- Ensure resources are available, accessible, and signposted.
- Create a community for staff and students.

Specifically, with relation to Assessment and Feedback:

- Provide explicit guidance around the assessment.
- Consider the use of authentic and meaningful assessments.
- Consider the assessment load and 'bunching' of assessments.
- Consider the use of self and peer assessment.
- Make greater use of formative feedback rather than feedback on summative assessment in support of student completion and achievement.
- Set formative assessments early in delivery of courses and provide formative feedback in order to support student understanding of assessment and increase student confidence.
- Enable students to view feedback as a positive dialogue throughout the learning experience.
- Provide timely feedback.
- Ensure feedback is constructive using appropriate language; be sensitive in wording negative feedback ensuring this is balanced with positive comments.
- Ensure consistent approaches across the course around feedback to students and ensure a shared understanding around feedback between staff and students.
- Particularly where the student has struggled or hasn't performed their best, written feedback may not be enough – consider offering a one to one meeting or try to use alternative feedback methods.
- Be available – ensure students are clear about how and when it is appropriate to contact you.

7.0 University Examples of Good Practice

Induction Activity: Minecraft Campus (Helen Carney, Amber Collings, Ed Rollason and Helen Tidy, SHLS)

Colleagues in SHLS have developed a Minecraft Campus that they are planning to use during induction to familiarise students with the campus - this has the advantage of lessening first day nerves of students as they will have the opportunity to wander around the campus and find their buildings prior to arrival. Conscious that students may need to be inducted remotely this September, the team will still be adopting this approach; it will undoubtedly be more important to build that connection and sense of belonging with Teesside University (TU) and its campus. This activity will develop the students sense of belonging to TU hopefully promoting engagement and enhancing levels of retention in the early stages of a student's university journey.

Induction Activity: Developing a Cohort Identity (Helen Tidy, SHLS)

Ask students to post a picture on a Padlet (this can be done via a phone if need be) each day for a week with a theme for each day. You could have generic or course related themes; for example, Forensic students could be asked to post a picture of their favourite detective. The students put their own name under each picture, so the cohort is starting to get used to names and associate common interests with a person on their course. The final day could be a selfie.

Establishment of a Retention Team to Promote Student Engagement (Bev Boden, TUBS)

Responding to a noticeable increase in lower levels of engagement at level four a dedicated team of academics, from a range of disciplines has been established to support the School's level 4 learners. To develop and enhance the practices of this Retention Team, in supporting level 4 learners, they have engaged in their own professional development which has centred around:

- increasing levels of understanding and knowledge around the previous educational experiences of incoming students
- current course provision and pedagogies
- University student support services
- increase student engagement through a future facing learning curriculum

The overarching aim of this Retention Team is to ensure smooth transition into HE, but most importantly, to raise the students' aspirations and promote early career planning. Support is provided prior to their arrival and throughout the duration of their first year. Students will have access to a wide support network, peer to peer mentoring and the opportunity to participate in regular extra-curricular events to develop academic and personal skills as well as developing a strong cohort identity.

Personal Tutees Group Activity: Promoting a Sense of Belonging and Student Network (Helen Tidy, SHLS)

Individual meetings with students are important throughout personal tutoring but the value of group meetings should not be underestimated particularly in how it can help to promote a sense of belonging and help develop student networks contributing to student engagement. If it is appropriate to develop cohort identity with some of your personal tutees you could try this activity. Sharing of photographs around what the students have been doing helps students to learn about each other. It helps them bond and identify shared hobbies / passions to build a sense of belonging and promote collaborations. It can help to get students engaged and feeling part of a community.

8.0 LTE Online Information to Promote Effective Student Engagement

❖ Hybrid Delivery Model and Student Engagement

Click Here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/06/04/hybridengagement/>

❖ Focus on the Future: information about how the Student Futures team can help and support students

Click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/05/21/focus-on-the-future/>

- ❖ '10 things that all Students should know' is a document produced by Student Futures
Click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/05/21/studentfuturesfaq/>
- ❖ Digital Solutions for Blended Teaching Modes
click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/05/19/digital-solutions-for-blended/>
- ❖ Nurturing student creativity and resilience for an uncertain world: some considerations for what comes next
click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/05/11/nurturing-student-creativity/>
- ❖ 10 Tips for inclusive webinars and online meetings
Click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/05/11/10-tips-for-inclusive-webinars/>
- ❖ Using scenario-based learning to improve engagement – Did you know?
Click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/04/28/scenario-based-learning/>
- ❖ How to facilitate intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for distance learning – Did you know?
Click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/04/27/intrinsic-extrinsic-motivation/>
- ❖ Ensuring Maximum Student Retention and Course Completion
Click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/04/21/student-retention-and-course-completion/>
- ❖ Providing Meaningful Feedback – Did you know?
Click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/04/20/providing-meaningful-feedback/>
- ❖ Designing online group work through problem-based learning – Did you know?
Click here: <https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/lteonline/2020/04/03/designing-problem-based-learning/>
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