# Improving Student Retention

## A Mobile Solution

# Student Retention

*is a top priority for all UK institutions as they face the annual challenge of ensuring students return and remain focused and engaged in their studies.*

On average, six out of every 100 students drop out of their university course, many in the first year. Many students find the first year of education to be the most challenging. Adjusting to a new environment, meeting new people and getting used to a schedule, are just a few of the demands students face when entering education. While many adapt, and have a positive experience, others will have a negative one. These negative experiences often result in the student disengaging with their studies and institution before dropping out.

This guide aims to review the various reasons students drop out, and how institutions can help and support to increase student retention and drive student success.

# 1 Reasons For Dropping Out

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)[1], in the **2019/20** academic year, **5.3%** of **329,315 young, full-time undergraduates dropped out** and did not continue into their second year. There are many reasons why students drop out of education. Factors such as disengagement, mental health issues, financial strain and academic burnout all affect student retention.

**WHILE THE REASONS CAN BE COMPLEX FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL, RESEARCH HAS SHOWN CLEAR GROUPS OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS.**



[1] https://www.hesa.ac.uk/

## Financial

Financial strain is nothing new for students. For decades those in further and higher education needed loans to study. The high fees linked to education and the long gaps between receiving loan payments are a stark reality for many who lean heavily toward their decision to leave education. Data from the Student Loans Company[2] showed that almost 40,000 students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland permanently withdrew from their university courses and stopped receiving student loans by the end of August 2022.

Students still require loans to enter the world of academia, but today's financial crisis adds further pressure on students to make ends meet. The National Union of Students Student Cost of Living Survey[3], published in July 2022, revealed that one in three students are living on £50 or less a month after paying rent and bills, with 64% saying their student loan did not cover energy bills.

## Academic

In a report by The Times[4], one of the main reasons students drop out of education is because they are not ready for academic pressures. According to the report, critics attribute the number of dropouts to institutions admitting too many students who lack the academic skills required for a degree.

The hardships of study and the complexities of academia are daunting prospects for any student. But, students who enter higher education and are not academically prepared will face greater challenges than those who are and may opt to drop out of education.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-in-year-student-withdrawal-notifications-academic-year-201819-to-202122-up-to-21022022/early-in-year-student-withdrawal-notifications-academic-year-201819-to-202122-up-to-21022022

[3] https://www.nus.org.uk/articles/cost-of-living-rise-sees-96-of-

[4] https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/unconditional-offers-blamed-for-increase-in-students-dropping-out-of-university-7zdmst86w

# Health and Wellbeing

A top factor driving student dropout is related to health and well-being. These reasons include physical, mental health, and social issues like "poor social fit, " lack of family support, and distance from home.

Research by Science Direct[5] claims dropout rates are significantly greater among students with mental health-related problems. According to the article, around 60% of students have considered dropping out due to mental health-related issues in the UK.

# Student Dissatisfaction

Several factors are associated with student dissatisfaction that leads to dropout. Poor learning environments, unsatisfactory teaching, and courses being a value for money were established as reasons for students wanting to leave. Figures from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator[6] revealed complaints from students in the UK about their university courses reached a record high in 2021.

The data showed that one in three university students were unhappy with the current academic environment. Figures like this are concerning and prove that if students are not satisfied with their institution, it increases the likelihood of them leaving without completing their courses.

[5] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844022007927
[6] https://www.oiahe.org.uk/

# ② Tackling the Dropout Challenge

Whatever the reason students have for considering dropping out, it is important to identify them and look into their options. Addressing these reasons and concerns allows you to provide students what their next steps could be.

## Financial

Regularly notify students that additional funding is available throughout the academic year. Most institutions offer grants, bursaries, benefits and schemes that students can apply for. Tell them of financial support sessions that provide information students can use in real-life situations. Lessons in budgeting, spending habits and job search advice could benefit those seeking financial assistance.

## Academic

Reassure students that help and support are always available when it comes to the academic pressures of essays and exams. Remind them of key dates/deadlines and the importance of being organised. Share preparation tips and point out that help and support are available through peers, tutors, drop-in essay clinics, the library and online resources.

## Health and Wellbeing

Ensure students that mental health awareness is a crucial value at your institution. Try to remove the stigma surrounding the issue by routinely promoting that services are always available and signposting them to those resources. Identify those you and your team feel are most at risk and reach out to them personally.

## Student Dissatisfaction

Collect student feedback to help you understand the areas where your institution isn't meeting their expectations. Communicate and engage with your students regularly to ensure they positively interact with your institution. As you interact with students, you identify areas where you can improve. Make changes to ensure that your students see improvements and are more satisfied.

The question now is, how do you deliver students with the support that they need? In the next chapter we will discuss how you can put these initiatives into practice.

# ③ Start Reducing Dropouts

When it comes to putting your plans into action the right solution can go a long way. As today's students are part of a digital-minded mobile-first generation, it does not come as a surprise that over **95%** of students own a smartphone and spend, on average, **8-10 hours a day on those smartphones**. Additionally **78%** of **Gen Z** consider their mobile device to be the most important device to go online.

It won't come as a shock that mobile solutions have proven very effective in supporting students and increasing engagement. These days there are even functionalities, like **Ready Education's Interventions+ tool**, to help you better support your students in an effective way. The feature addresses critical areas of potential student disengagement by taking your student communication and support, from reactive to proactive.
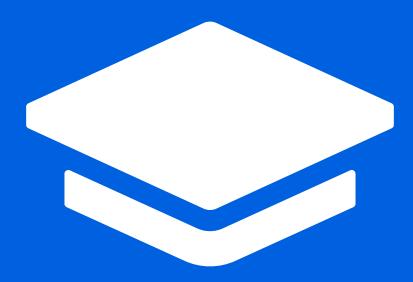
Take the financial challenges of students for example. A survey about financial matters could trigger an automated yet personalised response based on the response of students. If they would indicate they are struggling financially, that could trigger additional information being sent to that student about student finance and further services available.
These responses address the top issues that lead to disengagement and dropout for students, allowing institutions to make more efficient use of their in-person/on-site resources.

Taking student support from reactive to proactive will go a long way in reducing dropout rates and helping students be successful during their time at your institution. If you want to learn more about how to do that,
**feel free to reach out to us and one of our experts will happily continue the conversation.**

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**Reach out via**
**+44(0) 151 433 0696 or email**
**info@readyeducation.com**

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