



INTERNATIONAL  
COUNCIL FOR OPEN AND  
DISTANCE EDUCATION

**The ICDE  
reports series**

# **Student success in open, distance and e-learning: research findings**



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**Appendix**

## Executive Summary

This research was conducted by the Student Success Working Group in 2014 to ascertain the level of engagement by institutions with best practices for encouraging and increasing student success rates. This research was conducted in the form of a survey disseminated to ICDE members in October and November 2014. Analysis of the data demonstrated a number of trends as well as a few surprising anomalies that are recommended for further research.

From this research the following conclusions were drawn from the data:

- That the level of respondents targeted for the survey was correct in their ability and knowledge of the institutions strategies regarding student success.
- That a wide range in institutes student population responded, ensuring that the data wasn't skewed toward predominantly large or small institutions.
- The focus is primarily towards qualification completion rates, secondary with module completion. However employment rates across all questions scored lower than expected.
- That institutions are aware of external data collection that can impact on them such as National Student Satisfaction surveys.
- That institutions collect a range of data upon entry to their university, however it is not fully disseminated or acted upon by all members of staff to improve student success.
- That stronger links could be made to learning analytics in the planning and actioning of strategies to promote and increase student success. Especially as so many institutions selected correlations between student success and financial aid.
- That most student success strategies had a strong human resource element in the contact made with their students

From the data and conclusions, the following is recommended:

- That secondary evidence in gathering in conjunction with this survey as of the 53 respondents, 20 provided their details with permission to be contact for further research. This evidence could be collected either by a further more qualitative survey or an interview.
- The investigation into the anomalies within the question answers regarding employment and research into student success being conducted by institution, which could be clarified with further contact with the respondents.
- For the Working Group to recommend that further information, guidance, etc. with regards the use of learning analytics be considered for dissemination by ICDE.

## Project Objective

The focus of the Student Success Working Group is to:

- To propose for agreement data points to support definitions of student success at an institutional level, e.g. at registration, module start, module completion, and qualification completion.
- To identify current best practice in strategies for improving student success
- To make recommendations for improving rates of student success
- To create a dissemination strategy for outcomes

## Working Group Members

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Dr Ojat Darajat, Universitas Terbuka

Professor Iolanda Garcia, Universitat Oberta

Hannah Gore, The Open University

Athbah Al Kamdah, Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University

Dr Caroline Seelig, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

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## Current Student Success State of Play

The Working Group was established by the Standing Committee of Presidents (SCOP) in November 2013 by the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE).

The Working Group aim was to publish an authoritative account of current themes and priorities in supporting student success in distance and e-learning, in order to provide a basis for the improvement of student success in this field of practice. The accounts of current practice and major themes of the ICDE member organisations represent an important element in that work.

## Capturing the Issue

To capture this issue, research into a beta survey began in July 2014, with the Working Group enlisting the support of a doctorate research assistant from The Open University to aid the capture of the types of questions forming the survey, and the operation and collecting of the results.

The best practice selected was to collate the relevant questions in August 2014 for the survey into SurveyMonkey to administer and distribute as a beta test utilising the contacts of the Working Group to thoroughly test the beta questions in September 2014. These results in conjunction with the feedback given from the participants was analysed in October 2014 with recommendations as to how best to proceed with the formal survey.

The formal survey was launched on 17 October 2014 via the ICDE mailing list to be dispatched to all ICDE members. The survey remained open until the end of November, whereby 53 responses were captured, of which 34 were fully completed (no questions skipped).

The survey can be accessed for viewing at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5T6DCYY>

## Key Research Findings

Of the 48 respondents for Question 1, 41.67% were at Director level, 8.33% at Senior Executive, 2.08% at Pro Vice Chancellor, and 6.25% at Vice Chancellor. This aided to demonstrate that the correct demographic was targeted via the mailing list to respond to strategic questions regarding student success.

In Question 2, respondents were asked to define the number of full time students that their institution teaches, of the 48 that responded 27.08% selected 20-50,000, 18.75% at 10-20,000, and 12.58% at 5-10,000. A total of 14.58% selected 5,000 students or less, with 12.50% selecting 50-100,000 and a further 14.58% selecting over 100,000, demonstrating a clear span of student population for institutions.

Fifty respondents answered Question 3, stating that 76.00% measured success by qualification completion, with 50.00% selecting module completion. Only 6.00% in both module and qualification registration stated it to be a measure of success with 28.00% selecting employment after graduation as a measure of either undergraduate or post graduate success.

The pattern ordering depicted in Question 3 was also reflected in Question 4, which was answered by 48 respondents. With qualification completion deemed the most important at 75.00%, module completion at 50.00%, and employment outcomes at 39.58% as definitions of student success. 54.17% identified student satisfaction ratings as definitive to student success, with only 4.17% as identifying league tables as a measure of success.

In Question 5, respondents were asked about what targets their institutions had for improving student success. The overwhelming majority at 86.67% identified completion of qualification and modules as a target, 66.67% identified student satisfaction targets which correlated with the responses given in Question 5 regarding student satisfaction ratings stating in the free text the importance of the National Student Satisfaction Survey, national rankings, and government surveys. Interestingly 40.00% stated that they were targeted by registrations, however only 6.00% identified for each module and qualification registration in Question 3. A similar pattern was noted with 40.00% identifying employment targets, yet only 28.00% selected employment after graduation in Question 3. 33.33% answered that both demographic and progression targets, with 16.67% stated they were targeted by other means such as student community service schemes.



Thirty eight institutions responded to Question 6 confirming that data ranges for completion (81.85%) and enrolment (81.58%) were predominant. Data from student surveys (76.32%) was collected with interviews and case studies being identified at 36.84% and 15.79% respectively. Demographic data was collected by 57.89% of the respondents, though only 33.33% identified it to be targeted in Question 5. Employment data followed a similar pattern with 50.00% for Question 6, where it had scored lower in previous questions.

The next four questions (7-10) concentrated on the importance of learning analytics. 54.55% responded that they plan to use analytics with students, but the strategy wasn't in place, with a further 9.09% stating that they had no current plans. Of the 36.36% that identified that they had a strategy in place, the free text comments indicated it was only for selected modules and qualifications. When asked whether institutions use analytics for teachers to manager groups, of the 29 who responded, 48.29% selected that they had a strategy in place, but 44.83% selected that they had no strategy yet in place. Free text comments indicated a range of systems in place from the use of dashboards to pilot schemes in select courses and programmes of study, to in-service training only. When asked whether institutions use analytics for course teams to improve courses, 53.33% stated that they had a strategy in place, commenting on the use of data from LMS systems, faculty reports, and the Higher Education Data Analyzer (HEDA) portal. However, 33.33% had no strategy in place, and 13.33% had no current plans to use analytics for this purpose. In the final question regarding analytics, institutions were asked whether analytics were used at an institutional level. 50.00% responded that a strategy was not yet in place, with 46.67% acknowledging a strategy was in place, tabling at various committees in the free text comments. Only 3.33% stated that there were no current plans for such use.

Question 11 asked institutions whether they received funding dependent on success completion of studies, 73.33% stated a link to government funding, 60.00% stating a link to student success and/or failure.

Question 12 enquired whether any other issues should be considered in supporting student success, 100.00% responded that no other issues could be identified. Yet in the free text field comments referring to employer satisfaction with graduates, student engagement, internet infrastructure for online students, and those students only interested in course, not qualification, completion were made.

In Question 13 a range of strategies and services were provided for institutions to select for their improvement plans for student success. 76.67% selected academic subject based (personal tutoring, extra sessions, etc.), 73.33% both selected financial (student loans, budget accounts, financial aid, etc.) and intervention strategies. 63.33% identified learning through study areas and sessions as important, with 50.00% identifying careers, and 46.67% identifying human resource services such as drop-in centres, and open door policies. The large majority of these selected (bar financial) have a strong personal contact elements between the institution and the students.

The final two questions were with regards to research undertaken by the institutions themselves into student success and dropout. 85.71% stated they were planning to undertake research with a strategy in place, with 14.29% stating that they had no current plans. The final question produced an anomaly with 100.00% selecting that no research into student success and dropout contributed to institutional policy. Yet in the free text field comments were left indicating that research was either taking place or in its early stages. Of the comments made only two commented 'not yet'.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

In concluding this stage of the research the following elements can be drawn from the data:

- That the level of respondents targeted for the survey was correct in their ability and knowledge of the institutions strategies regarding student success.
- That a wide range in institutes student population responded, ensuring that the data wasn't skewed toward predominantly large or small institutions.
- The focus is primarily towards qualification completion rates, secondary with module completion. However employment rates across all questions scored lower than expected.
- That institutions are aware of external data collection that can impact on them such as National Student Satisfaction surveys.
- That institutions collect a range of data upon entry to their university, however it is not fully disseminated or acted upon by all members of staff to improve student success.
- That stronger links could be made to learning analytics in the planning and actioning of strategies to promote and increase student success. Especially as so many institutions selected correlations between student success and financial aid.
- That most student success strategies had a strong human resource element in the contact made with their students

From the data and conclusions, the following is recommended:

- That secondary evidence in gathering in conjunction with this survey as of the 53 respondents, 20 provided their details with permission to be contact for further research. This evidence could be collected either by a further more qualitative survey or an interview.
- The investigation into the anomalies within the question answers regarding employment and research into student success being conducted by institution, which could be clarified with further contact with the respondents.
- For the Working Group to recommend that further information, guidance, etc. with regards the use of learning analytics be considered for dissemination by ICDE.

## About ICDE Projects

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) is the leading global membership organisation for open, distance, flexible and online education, including e-learning, and draws its membership from institutions, educational authorities, commercial actors, and individuals.

To encourage the development of best practices and standards in open, distance, flexible and online education, including e-learning, the new ICDE Strategic Plan highlighted that members would like to be

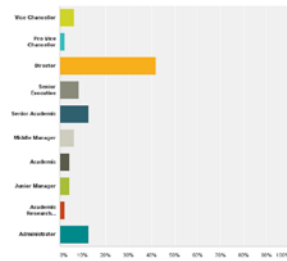
more informed about research & innovation, and supporting student success within distance education. It is with this in mind that the ICDE Executive Committee agreed and proposed that a Working Group be established to conduct a meta-study on the state of play regarding research and challenges in student success and advise the ICDE Executive Committee on student support issues.

Distance education is facing a number of threats and opportunities currently, often accompanied by rhetoric and media speculation, but with little research and evidence. This makes it difficult for many Distance Education institutions to frame an effective response. By providing objective and grounded analysis, the projects will inform decision makers in ICDE.

## Appendix One: Full Research Finding

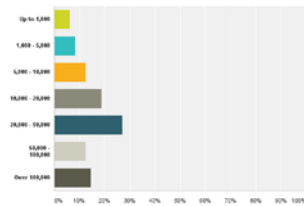
### What is your role in your institution?

- Vice Chancellor (6.25%)
- Pro Vice Chancellor (2.08%)
- Director (41.67%)
- Senior Executive (8.33%)
- Senior Academic (12.50%)
- Middle Manager (6.25%)
- Academic (4.17%)
- Junior Manager (2.08%)
- Administrator (12.50%)



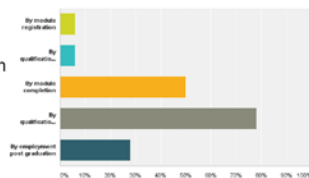
### How many full time students does your institution teach?

- Up to 1,000 (6.25%)
- 1,000-5,000 (8.33%)
- 5,000-10,000 (12.50%)
- 10,000-20,000 (18.75%)
- 20,000-50,000 (27.08%)
- 50,000-100,000 (12.50%)
- Over 100,000 (14.58%)



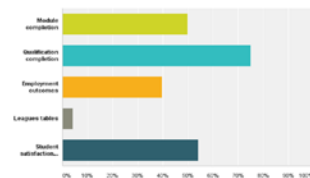
### How does your institution measure student (UG/PG) success?

- By module registration (6.00%)
- By qualification registration (6.00%)
- By module completion (50.00%)
- By qualification completion (78.00%)
- By employment post graduation (28.00%)



### What definitions of student (UG/PG) success do you have?

- Module completion (50.00%)
- Qualification completion (75.00%)
- Employment outcomes (39.58%)
- League tables (4.17%)
- Student satisfaction ratings (54.17%)



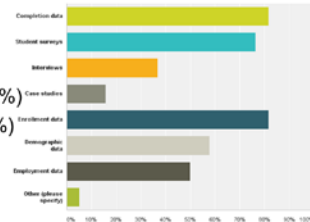
## What targets for improving student (UG/PG) success do you have?

- Financial targets (23.33%)
- Completion targets (86.67%)
- Student satisfaction targets (66.67%)
- Registration targets (40.00%)
- Employment targets (40.00%)
- Demographic/specific population targets (33.33%)
- Progression to higher levels of study targets (33.33%)
- Any other targets (16.67%)



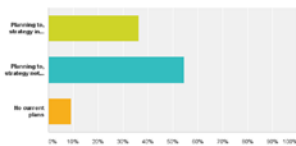
## What data ranges do you collect about student (UG/PG) success?

- Completion data (81.85%)
- Student surveys (76.32%)
- Interviews (36.84%)
- Case studies (15.79%)
- Enrolment data (81.58%)
- Demographic data (57.89%)
- Employment data (50.00%)
- Other (5.26%)



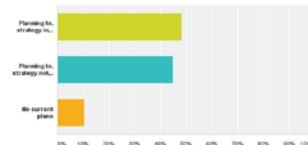
## Do you use Learning Analytics to support student (UG/PG) success, for students to use?

- Planning to, strategy in place (36.36%)
- Planning to, strategy not yet in place (54.55%)
- No current plans (9.09%)



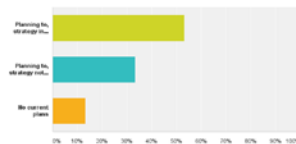
## Do you use Learning Analytics to support student (UG/PG) success, for teachers to manage student groups?

- Planning to, strategy in place (48.28%)
- Planning to, strategy not yet in place (44.83%)
- No current plans (10.34%)



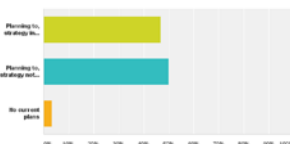
## Do you use Learning Analytics to support student (UG/PG) success, for course teams to use to improve courses?

- Planning to, strategy in place (53.33%)
- Planning to, strategy not yet in place (33.33%)
- No current plans (13.33%)



## Do you use Learning Analytics to support student (UG/PG) success, for management to use at an institutional level?

- Planning to, strategy in place (46.67%)
- Planning to, strategy not yet in place (50.00%)
- No current plans (3.33%)





**Is any funding for institution/organisation dependent on successful completion of UG/PG study?**

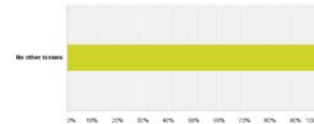


- Government (73.33%)
- State (20.00%)
- Student (23.33%)
- Link to student success or failure (60.00%)

**Any other issues that should be considered in supporting and improving (UG/PG) student success?**



- No other issues (100.00%)



**What strategies and services do you have to improve student (UG/PG) success?**

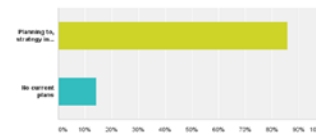


- Financial (student loans, budget accounts, financial aid, etc.) (73.33%)
- Intervention (73.33%)
- Learning (study areas, study sessions, etc.) (63.33%)
- Careers (employment opportunities, careers advisory services, etc.) (50.00%)
- Human resource (drop-in centre, open door policy, etc.) (46.67%)
- Academic subject based (personal tutoring, extra sessions, etc.) (76.67%)
- Other (26.67%)
- There is not formal policy (0.00%)

**Has your institution undertaken research on (UG/PG) student success and drop out?**



- Planning to, strategy in place (85.71%)
- No current plans (14.29%)



**Has research into student (UG/PG) success and drop out contributed to institutional policy?**



- No (100.00%)

