

**Nicky Andrew**

Student engagement and belonging: an evaluation of the  
GCU model of Academic Advising



GCU has a commitment to access and inclusion and an excellent track record of widening participation, actively recruiting students from socially and economically disadvantaged communities, successfully engaging those who are 'first in family', mature students and those who transition and articulate from the college sector.



A team at GCU is currently working as part of the UK (United Kingdom) wide Higher Education Academy (HEA) 'What Works?' Student Retention and Success Change Project (2012-2015). This project supports universities across the UK to initiate and evaluate interventions that promote and support student engagement and belonging.

[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/PHF/retention\\_and\\_success\\_change\\_programme\\_2012-2015](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/PHF/retention_and_success_change_programme_2012-2015)



Academic advising at GCU is firmly in line with the HEA ‘*what works*’ characteristics of effective practice. It is a mainstream, personalised and inclusive intervention that supports academic, personal and professional development and highlights ‘at risk’ and failing students at an early stage in their academic journey (Thomas 2012). Crucially, it allows academic staff to develop better understanding of their students.



The context for the PPACT Standard of Academic Advising is located within the two major university policies; The Strategy for Learning (SfL) and the Student Experience Framework (SEF).



# The GCU PPACT Standard: **P**ersonal, **P**rofessional, **A**cademically informed, **C**onsolidated, **T**ransitional



The PPACT Standard of Academic Advising was introduced across the University in September 2013. In April/May 2014 an *'early impact'* evaluation was undertaken across the University seeking the views of both students and staff.



Staff commented that the advising meetings gave students confidence to progress with their studies and fostered a sense of belonging.





Students were generally satisfied with the process and commented that;

*‘It [academic advising] is a vital part of student support and guidance’*

*‘Academic advising is a great support network that lets students know they are not alone’*



Students indicate that academic advising promotes reflection on experience and enables forward planning.



The PPACT Standard is being implemented by academic staff across the institution.

Academic advisors are generally described as supportive and appear to be well regarded by their students

The use of group approaches to advising is viewed by students as positive; building valuable peer support networks



Students are engaging; however more can be done to raise awareness of the value of academic advising generally.

Academic advising is utilised more at undergraduate level and more complex for the diverse range of PGT students.



There is emerging evidence to support the idea that academic advising promotes reflection and forward planning.

There are a growing number of examples of innovative practice in the area of student engagement across the university.





Brighter futures begin with GCU

