

The Triple C Model for Student Retention, Progression and Completion Matures

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Introduction

The global educational landscape continues to be shaped and re-shaped by factors that include technology advancement, social media, internet availability, massification and widening access. The resultant diversity has dramatically influenced the needs and expectations of current and future student populations entering and studying in Higher Education Institutions. In the UK, publication of Key Performance Indicators for programmes and degree courses, publication of student satisfaction rates from the National Student Survey and the many league tables comparing the 'performance' of universities has focused the sector on what might be seen as quite crude measurable factors of the quality of the student experience such as retention, progression and completion rates [Williams, 2008, Buckley, 2012].

Over the last 15 years a paradigm of optimum HEI student retention has been conceived, designed, implemented and evaluated by the authors. This model of the student experience was based on what was described in the literature as the Triple C model of student care, control and consistency. The Triple C model has now been further evolved using an action research approach which has influenced, expanded and modified the original methodology. Throughout a prolonged period of time, evaluation has taken place at each stage as the model was applied first to a group of 120 UK HEI first year engineering students, then to all first year students in a broad range of subject disciplines. The original success of the model was measured by an increase in student progression of between 5% and 19% in a single academic year. The student groups that were evaluated were home and overseas undergraduates in the first year of a 2 year Diploma, a 3 year Degree or a 4 year Honours Degree. These student groups had different entry point tariffs. It was noted that students with better school qualifications (higher entry point tariffs) did not necessarily perform better in their first year at university than students with lower entry point tariffs. Evidentially they did, however, respond better to the introduction of the Triple C model in 2001 – see Table 1.

Table 1 – Early Model Percentage Retention

	HND	BSc	BEng
1999/2000	40%	63%	65%
2000/2001	55%	68%	63%
2001/2002	60%	81%	92%

The successful Triple C model was subsequently scaled up and applied across all levels of undergraduate programme in a Department and ultimately applied to more than 2,000 students in all Departments of a School offering a range of technical degrees in engineering and computing disciplines. The students included school leaver entrants to Level 1 and advanced entry students entering Levels 2 and 3 of 4 year honours degrees. Evaluation of this stage of the model's evolution saw undergraduate progression improved by 10% over two academic years and NSS overall student satisfaction rates improved by 4% in one academic year - see Figure 1.

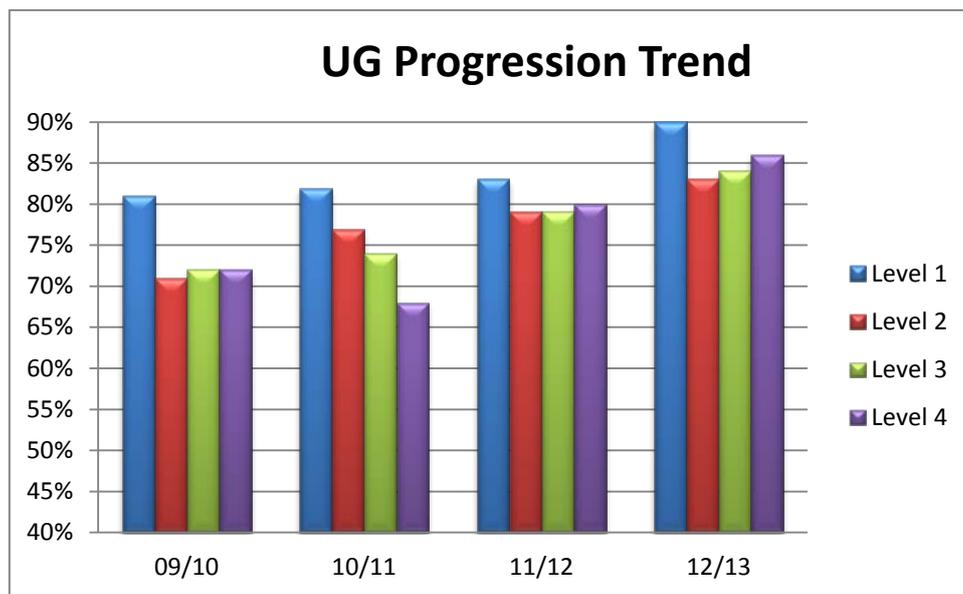


Figure 1 – Example of results - Undergraduate Progression

The Triple C model has further evolved and continues to be refined as it is adopted in HEIs in the UK and beyond. The model has always had the wellbeing, aspirations and success of students at its core. Consistent and repeatable improvements in retention, progression and completion that have resulted from the implementation of the Triple C model mean that large numbers of students from diverse backgrounds, who may otherwise have withdrawn from or failed to succeed in their studies, have been retained, progressed and completed their programmes. The beneficial impact on the individual students, their families and communities and society at large has been, and continues to be, very significant.

The Early Triple C Model

The Triple C model uses the three 'C's of Care, Control and Consistency and details of the contributory aspects to this can be seen in the bridge representing the student journey

shown in Figure 2. Care relates to the vital pastoral care element of the model and this is demonstrated particularly by the peer support and university support that combine to give an appropriate level of maintenance of student wellbeing. Care is also exercised by good risk assessment and diagnostics early on in the student experience which is then followed up by informed personal interventions and support. Further care is provided by a well designed and well implemented induction experience. The second 'C', control, is achieved by careful preparation and delivery of the model, the centralised monitoring of attendance and the use of that data to *manage* absence. Absence management is presented as the keystone of the bridge as a result of evaluation of a range of risk factors that confirmed a strong correlation between absence and poor student performance [Newman-Ford, 2008]. The third 'C', consistency, also incorporates communication. Consistency can be achieved by clearly setting and managing student expectations and by appropriately timing regular communication with students. There are other important aspects of good communication to and from students.

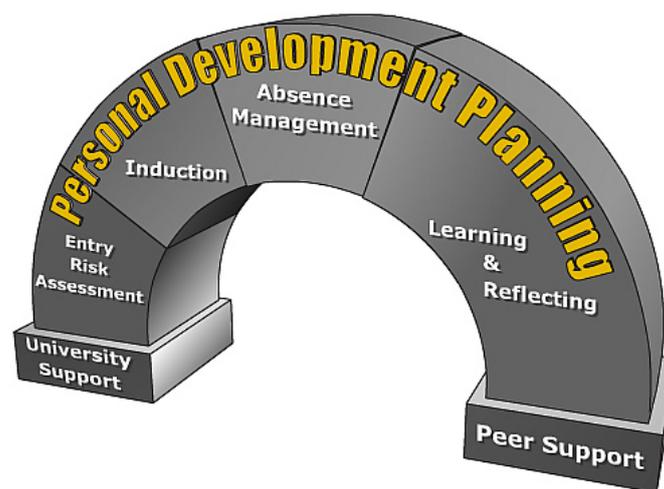


Figure 2 – The Early Triple C Model

Once the support elements of the Triple C model are in place using drop-out risk assessment, various diagnostic methods, induction and absence management, the remaining elements of the student experience can successfully proceed. These other elements include the learning, knowledge and understanding of the student in their chosen subject discipline and the embedded development of their employment skills. Significant analysis of assessment loading and module performance has taken place and academic staff development activities and mentoring has more recently been introduced to enhance the student learning experience.

The Matured Triple C Model

As the Triple C model was used and the results evaluated over a number of years the model has matured and some further useful techniques have been incorporated. In particular, the layers of the bridge have been explored and refined to demonstrate the attributes that a student may arrive at university with that could increase or decrease as their learning experience evolves. It has become clear that, as the use of the Triple C Model becomes more 'routine' as accepted practice, the focus of attention can move from being targeted at general improvements in retention and progression to become more interested than ever before in making real improvements to the learning and teaching environment experienced by students. In this way there are some interesting interfaces between the general learning environment and the Triple C Model that show the potential for the model to have positive and beneficial influences that go well beyond the fundamental objectives of the model.

Limitations and Challenges

During the period of more than a decade of using and evolving the Triple C Model for student retention and progression there have been challenges, difficulties and obstacles encountered by those seeking to use the model. One example of such challenges is the fundamental oversimplification of the model to make the incorrect assumption that it is exclusively about taking attendance in classes – this on its own will not work. Another example of a challenge known to have occurred is the deliberate avoidance of engagement with the model by staff members who, for one reason or another, have not been convinced of the benefits of its use.

References

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