What works? Student retention and success conference 2012

Key Note:

How can a strategic approach improve institutional level student retention performance?

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Outline

- Institutional approach
- Questioning, data and information
- Outlining a new *Systems led Management Model for Improving Student Retention Performance* (James, 2010)
- Overview of the supporting *Improving Student Retention KPI Framework* and the *Improving Student Retention Performance Monitoring Framework* (James, 2010)
- Examples of outcomes and impact
- Reflections on critical success factors

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Outcomes and Impact (Process)

Expected Outcomes:

- Step improvement in institutional level student retention performances

No Compromise on Inputs:

- Retain leading position on widening access (mature, socio economic groups, non-traditional qualifications, LPN, disabled)
- Subject and curriculum (engineering, science, computing)
- Curriculum mix (part-time, employer led, foundation degrees)

Impacts:

- Peoples' lives
- Social and economic
- Institutional performance

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Approach-practice informed

Early days (2001-03)

- Operational need
- Strategic intent but little 'know-how'
- Executive level focus on the 'perceived' blackest and low level clouds-withdrawals
- Exposed performance and drove accountability via Heads
- Opportunities for improvement not recognised or understood

'Enlightenment' (2004-2006)

- Strategic intent and operational need still prominent and evidenced
- Senate and Executive questioning, data mining, institutional/school and programme level performances revealed, understood and communicated
- A wide range of black clouds revealed
- Implications across the entire institution

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Approach- research informed

Ownership, Consistency and Accuracy (2006-2009)

- Generate energy, enthusiasm, ownership and listening
- Grasp the issues coming forth, hold and interpret, translate and pass-on for action, expect an outcome (not process) and close the loop (performance impact)
- Standard reports, driving importance of language and consistency of definitions throughout committees, departments, operational departments

Commissioning (2010- date)

- Strategic and operational priority- CAP on numbers
- Programme and Module KPIs explicit for all to view (internal)
- Tangible outcomes of unattended to poor performance (decommission)
- Support for learning and teaching and student experience enhanced
- Knowledge gap and importance of high level sphere of influence exposed

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Approach-research informed
Ask the question:

'What can a Welsh higher education institution, which has a strong widening mission and student profile, do to realise an efficient and effective step improvement in student retention performance?'

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Approach-research informed

Extensive literature on student retention:

- Various models (Tinto, 1993; Bean and Metzner, 1985; review James, 2010)
- Why students leave (Christie et al., 2005; Trotter and Roberts, 2006; Yorke & Longden, 2008)
- Wide scope of relevant Journals - Subjects, Management, Policy, Learning and Teaching
- Variety of key words – retention, success, attrition, non-continuation etc.

Gap in research, practice and policy literature in relation to:

- Strategic management approaches to improving institutional level student retention performances
- Strategies and instruments available to support strategic management interventions to realise improvement (performance monitoring)

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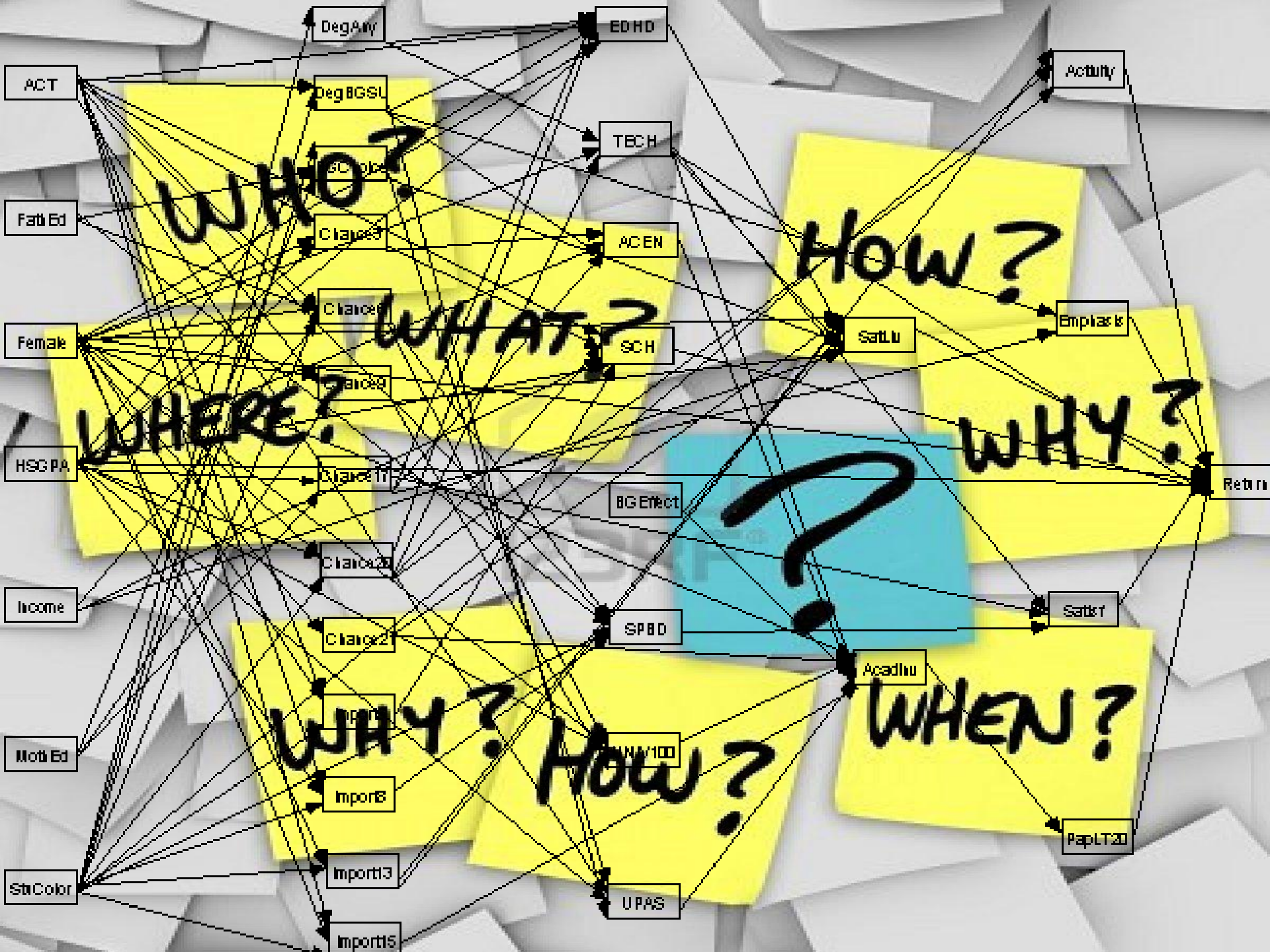
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Definitions Matter

Retention

Non-continuation

Withdrawal

Drop-out

Attrition

Non-completion

Achievement

Suspended Studies

Pass - Progress

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Ask the questions: vocabulary is critical

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Ask the questions: specificity is critical

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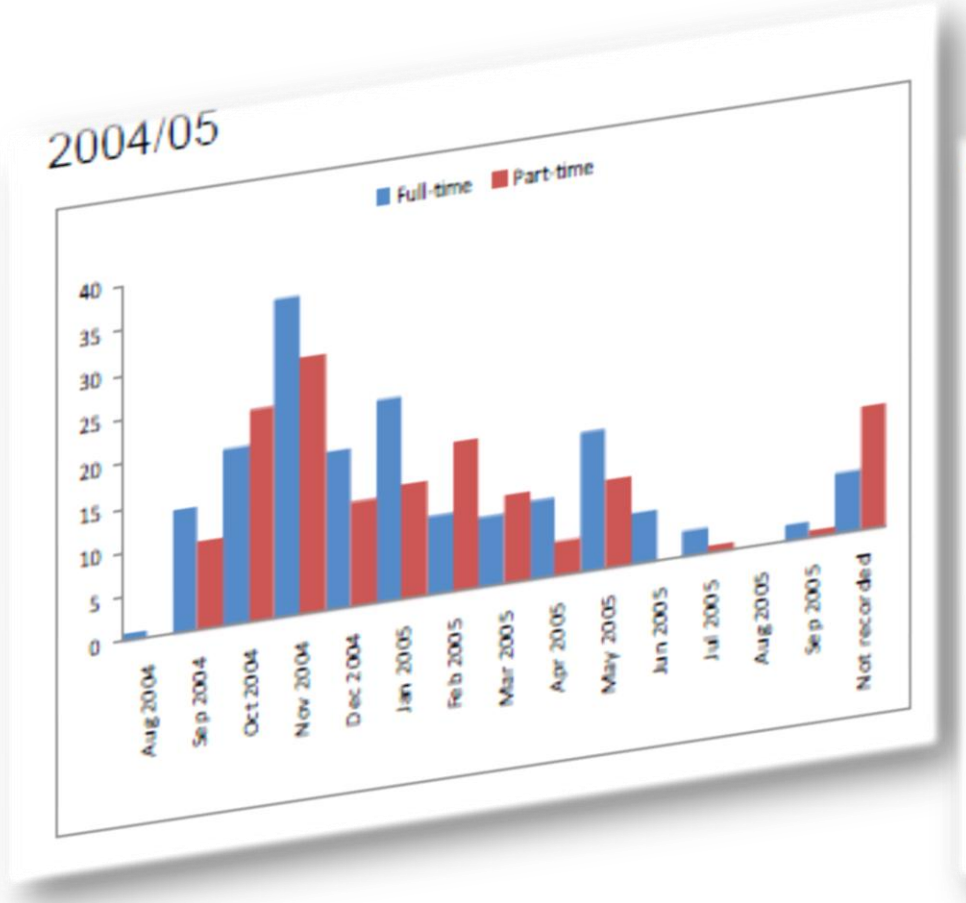
Ask the questions: prepare for the unintended



Developing a Management Model and Performance Framework for Improving Student Retention (James, 2010 p.103)

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Ask the questions: decisions and outputs

Table 19 Student retention analysis - whether students who were entitled to continue after 2007/08 actually returned for 2008/09

School	Full-time					Part-time				
	Progression type	Students who returned in 2008/09	Students who did not return	Total	% of students who returned	Students who returned in 2008/09	Students who did not return	Total	% of students who returned
Art & Design	Pass-progress				98%				92%
Business	Pass-trail				89%				76%
Computing & Communications Technology	Repeat-year				49%				25%
Education and Community	Suspended				45%				20%
Health, Social Care & Sports & Exercise Sci.	Grand Total				86%				76%
Humanities									
Science & Technology									
Grand Total									

Adapted from Doc 55,Doc 56

Developing a Management Model and Performance Framework for Improving Student Retention (James, 2010 p.132)

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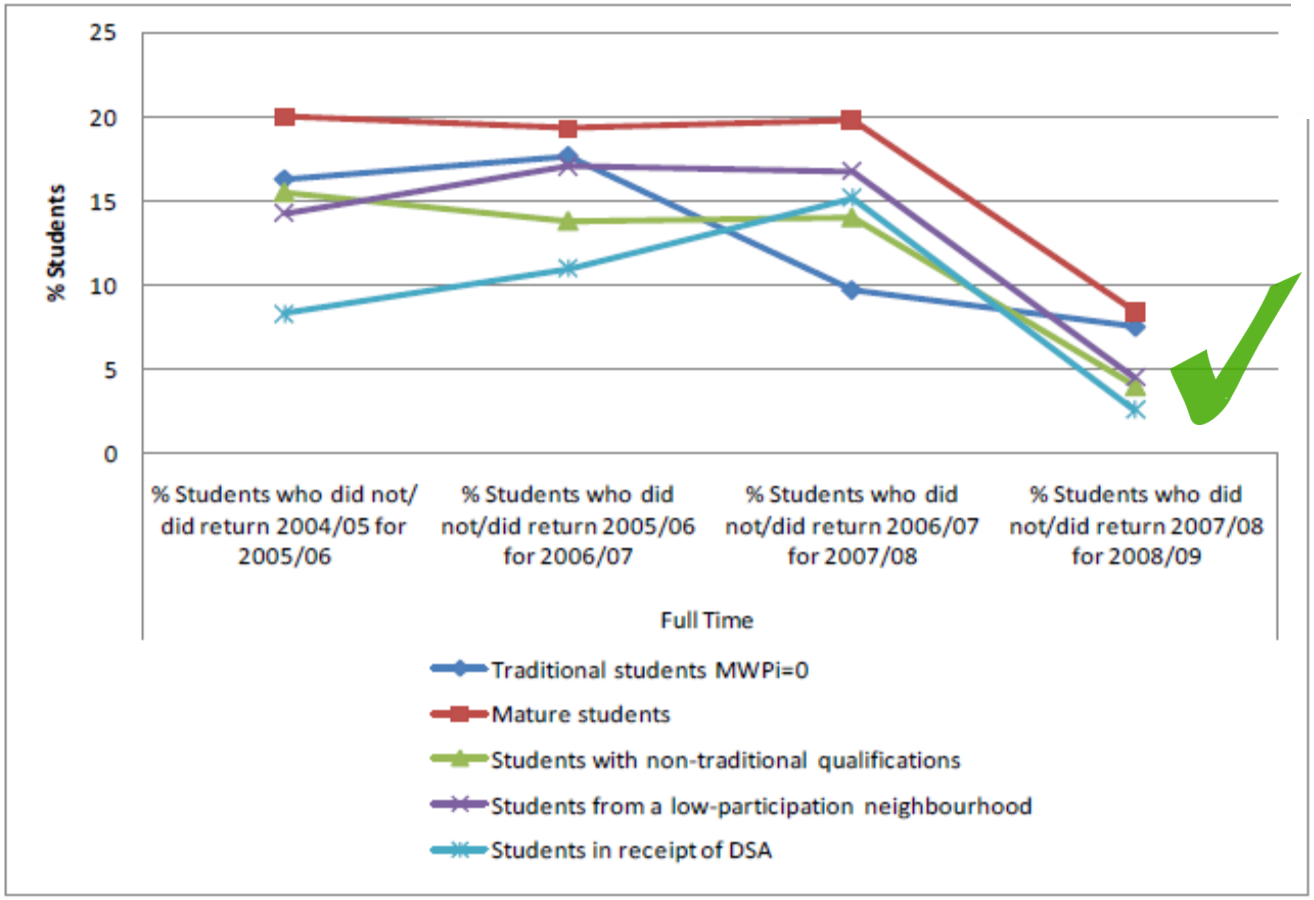
Ask the questions: impacts and trends

Figure 19 Specific widening participation indicators and the percentage of non-returning full time students, 2004/05-2007/08



Adapted from Doc 81, Appendix G

Developing a Management Model and Performance Framework for Improving Student Retention (James, 2010 p.177)

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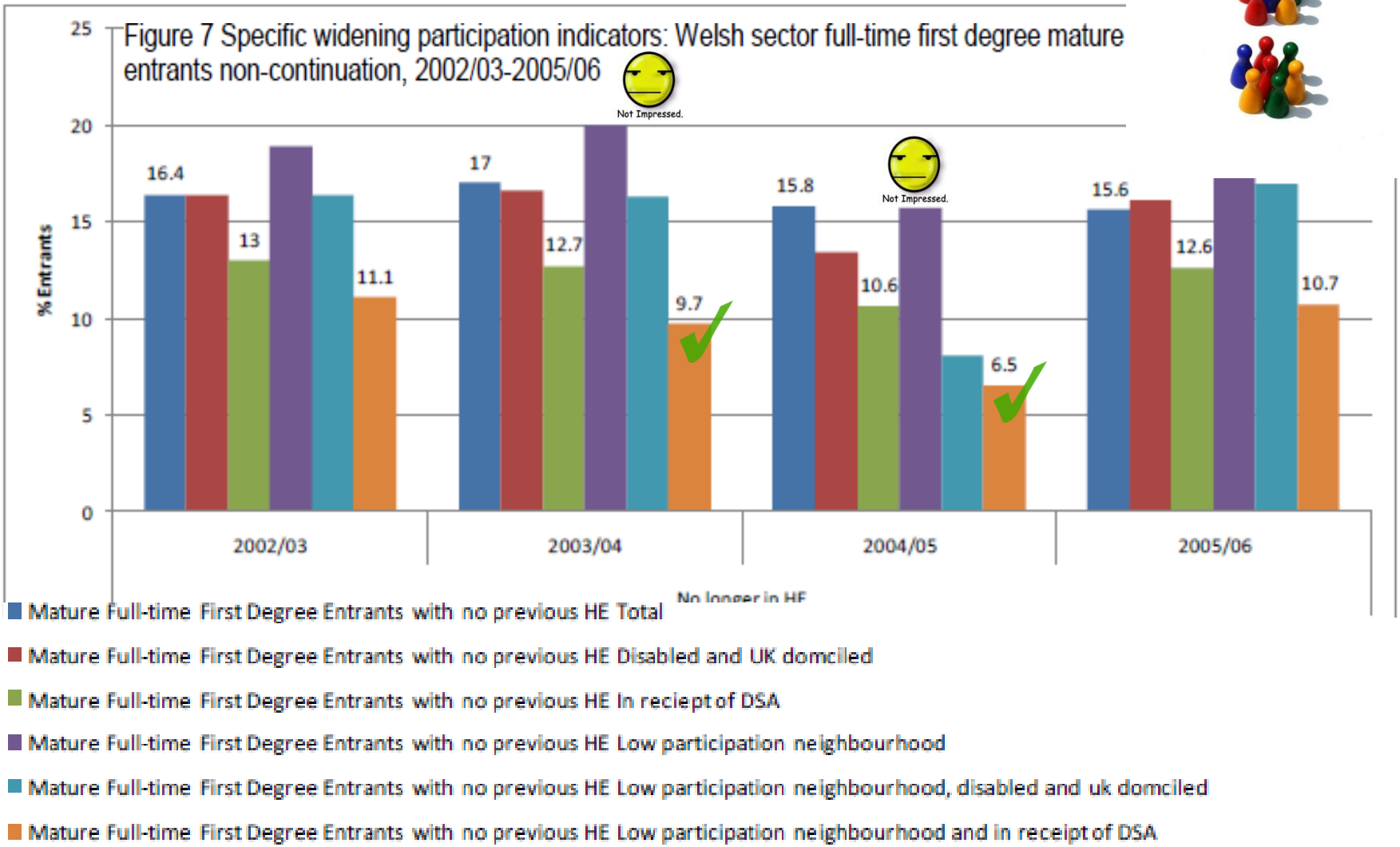
Ask the questions: disability support allowance



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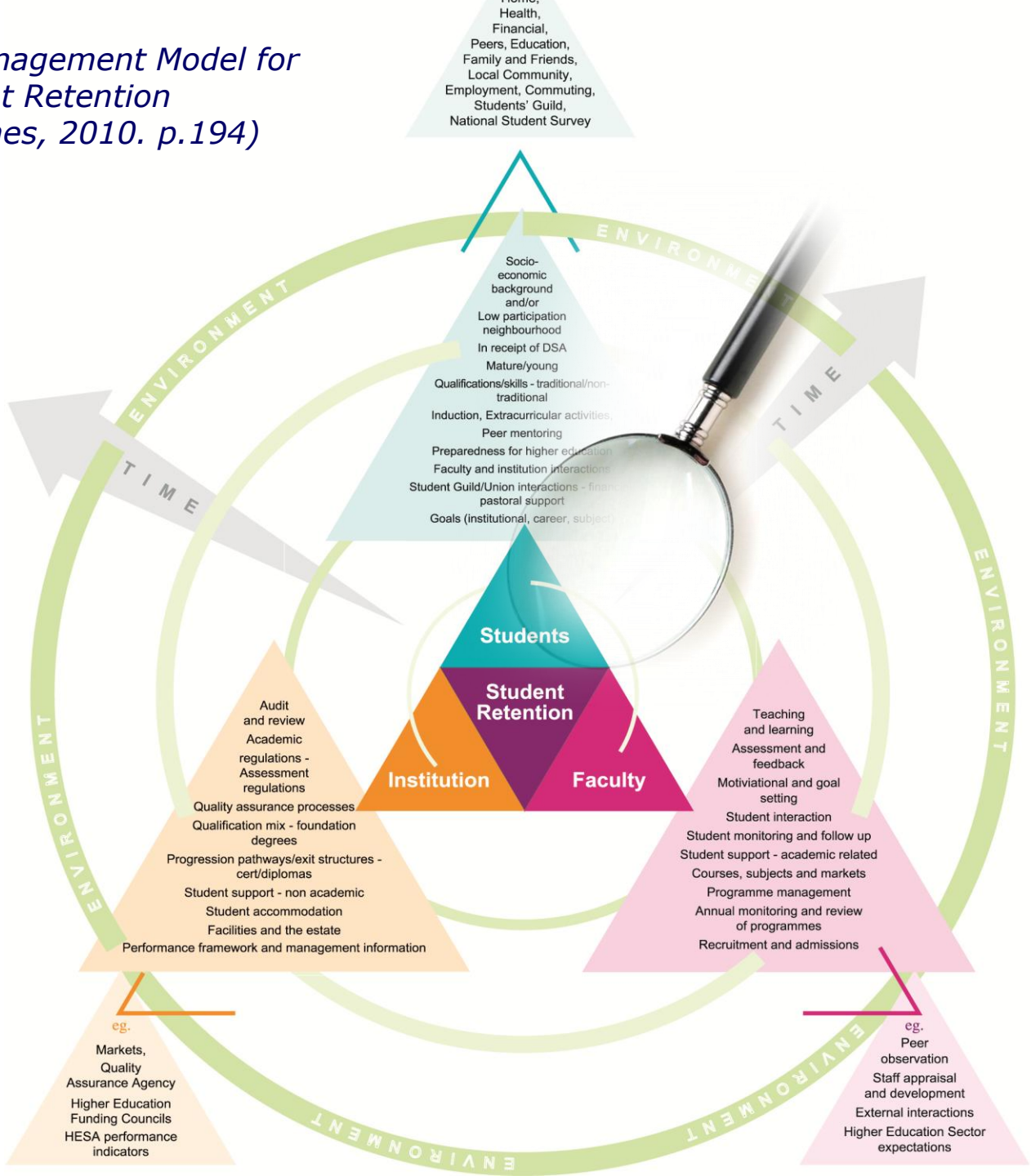
A systems led *Management Model for Improving Student Retention Performance (James, 2010. p.194)*



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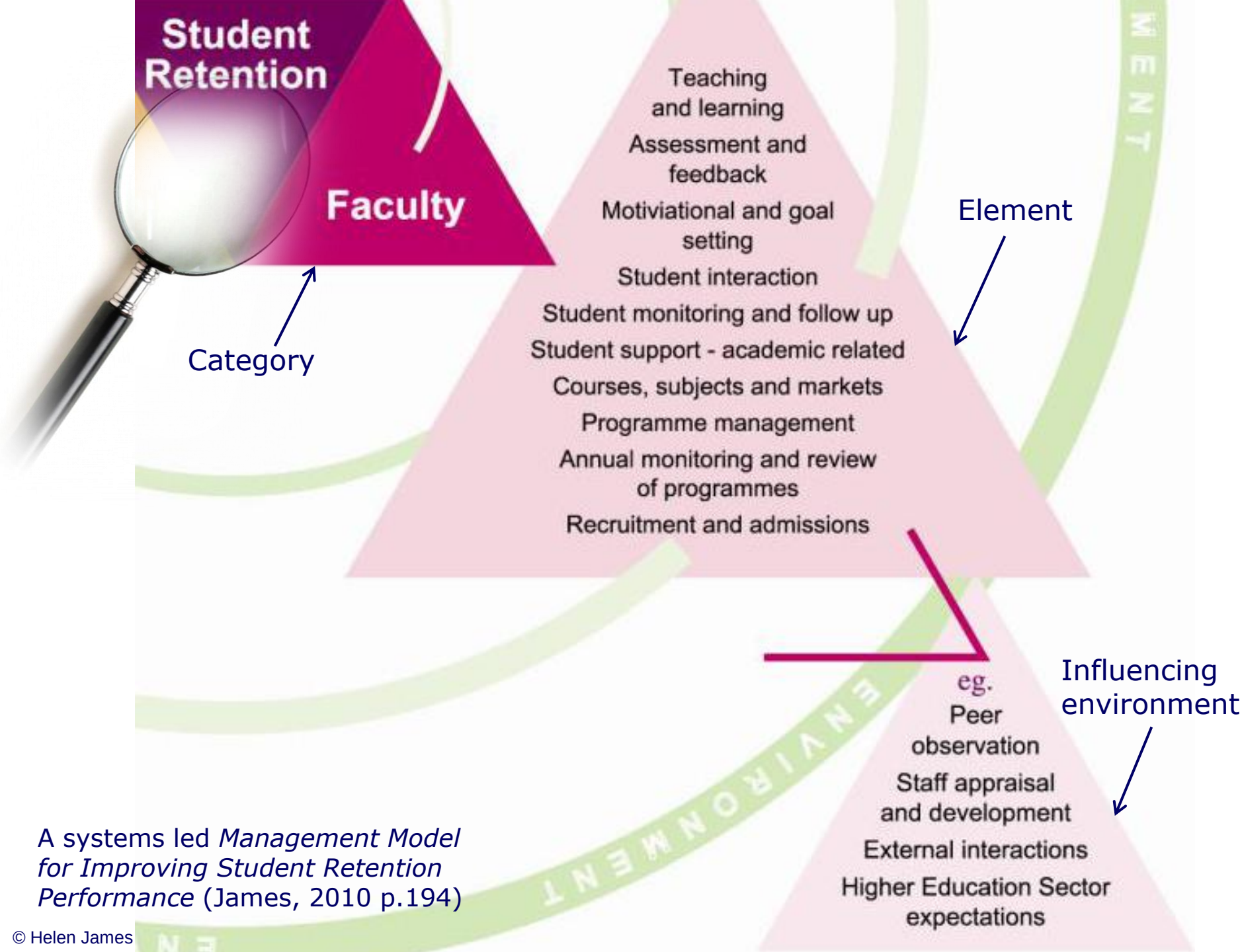

A systems led *Management Model for Improving Student Retention Performance* (James, 2010 p.194)

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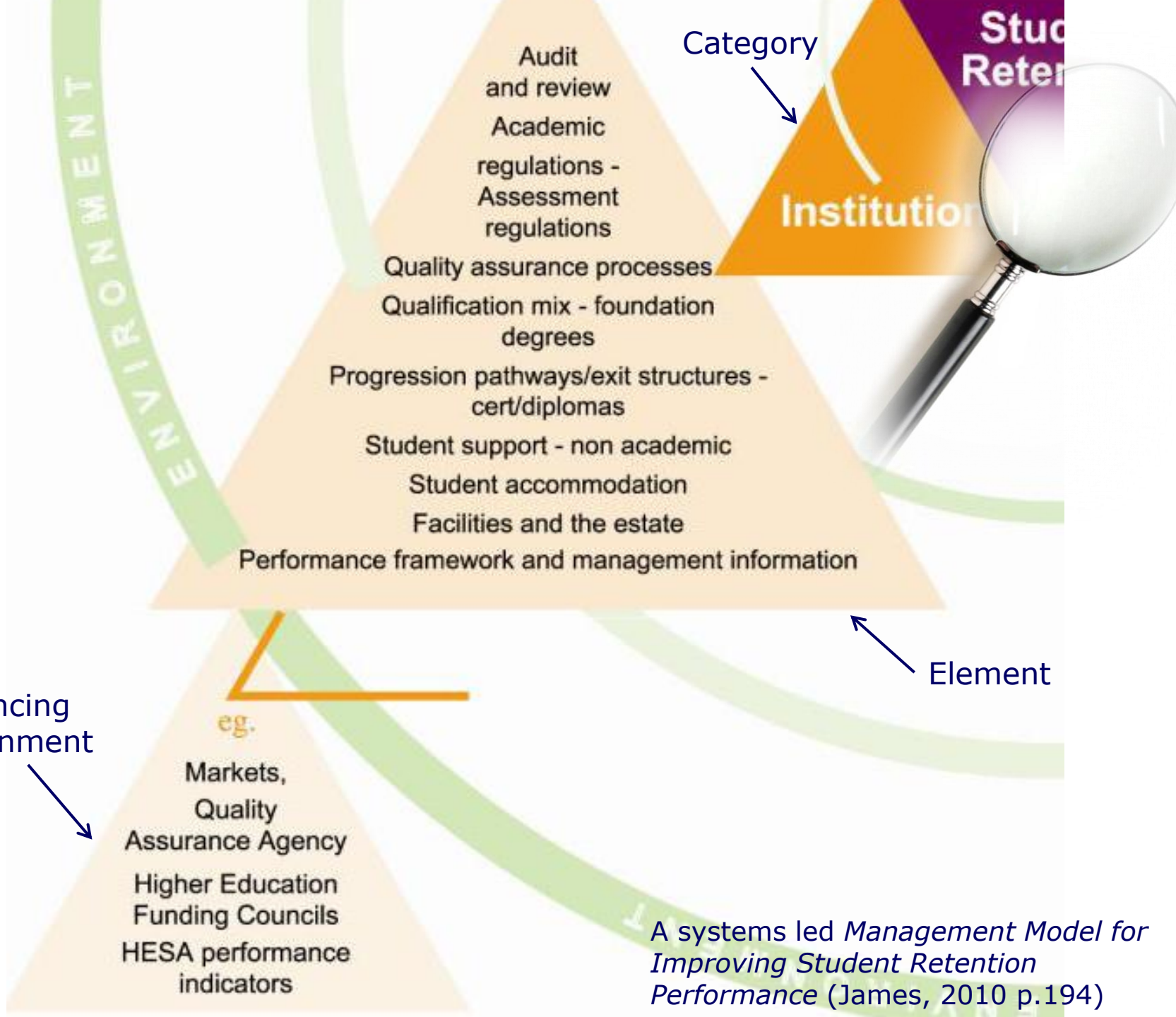

A systems led *Management Model for Improving Student Retention Performance* (James, 2010 p.194)

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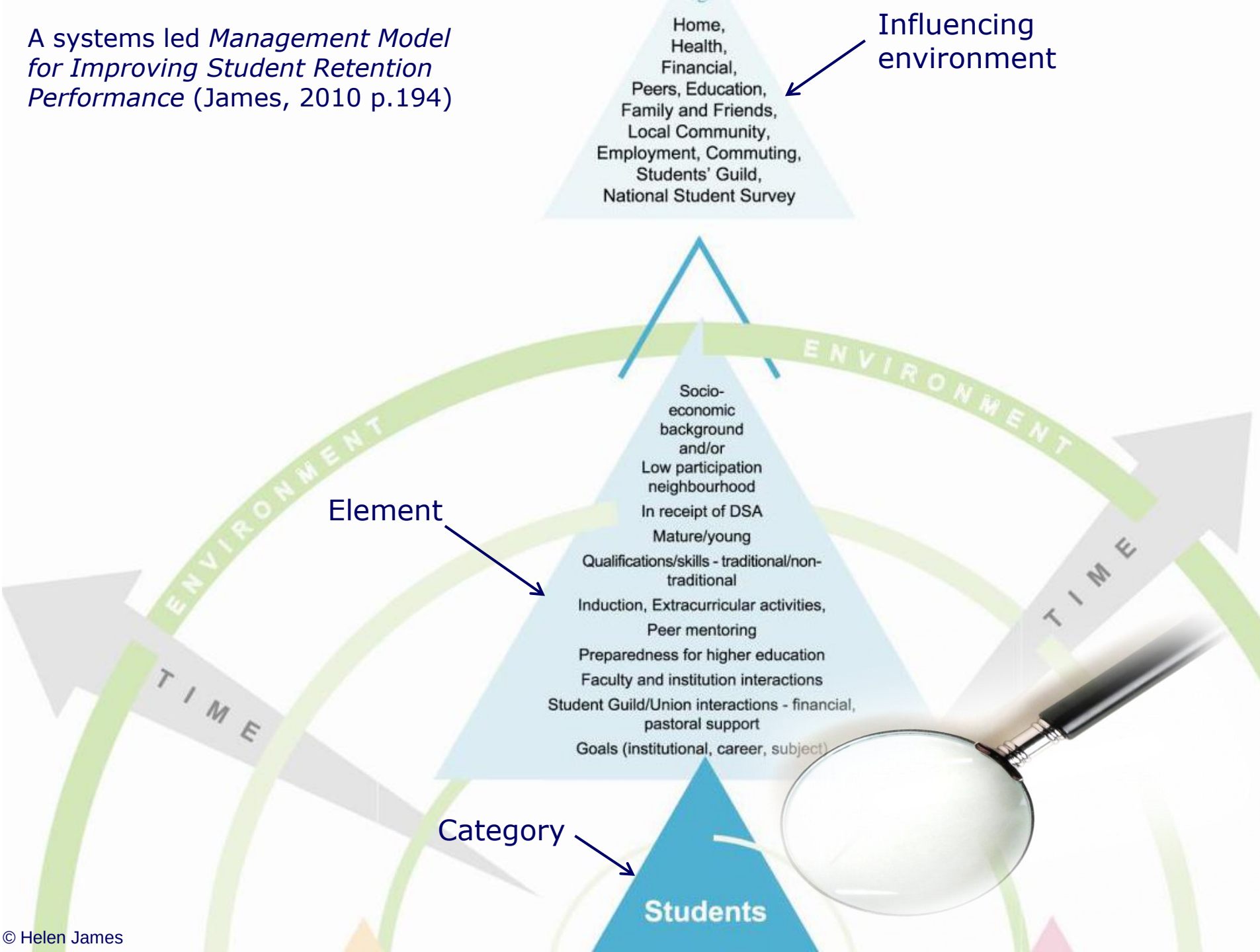
A systems led *Management Model for Improving Student Retention Performance* (James, 2010 p.194)



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Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Monitoring Frameworks

Annual: External (Monitoring of performance, sector context)
(HESA PI data)

- Access and benchmarks of new entrants
- Non-continuation rates and benchmarks of new entrants
  - HESA performance indicator data (www.hesa.ac.uk)
    - available June/July each year- 'census date' population
    - Non-continuation rates have 22month time lag
- Student satisfaction/perception of final year students
  - National Student Survey
    - available June/July each year-'select' cohort

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Cont.

Annual: Internal (Monitoring of performance, 'case-institutional' context)
(entire population; PT/FT; post referral boards; school/programme)

- Access profile of enrolments
- Non-continuation of enrolments
  - Post referral boards (each year-not only on entry; incl. withdrawals)
- Qualifications awarded
  - Number and proportion of enrolments who got an award in the three years or was still on a relevant course (2 datasets)
- Progression and cohort analysis
  - L4 to L5 entitled to progress and actually doing so; L5 to L6 etc.; L4 to L6
- Referrals
  - Number and proportion to total enrolments
  - Rank highest 20 programmes
  - Rank highest 10 programmes with highest average number of modules referred per student

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Cont.

‘In- Year’: Internal (Monitoring of performance, institution context)

- Withdrawals and suspended studies
  - Each month (October- May inclusive)

‘Ad-hoc’: Internal/external

- Audit and review
- Themed audit
- Published reports
- Research

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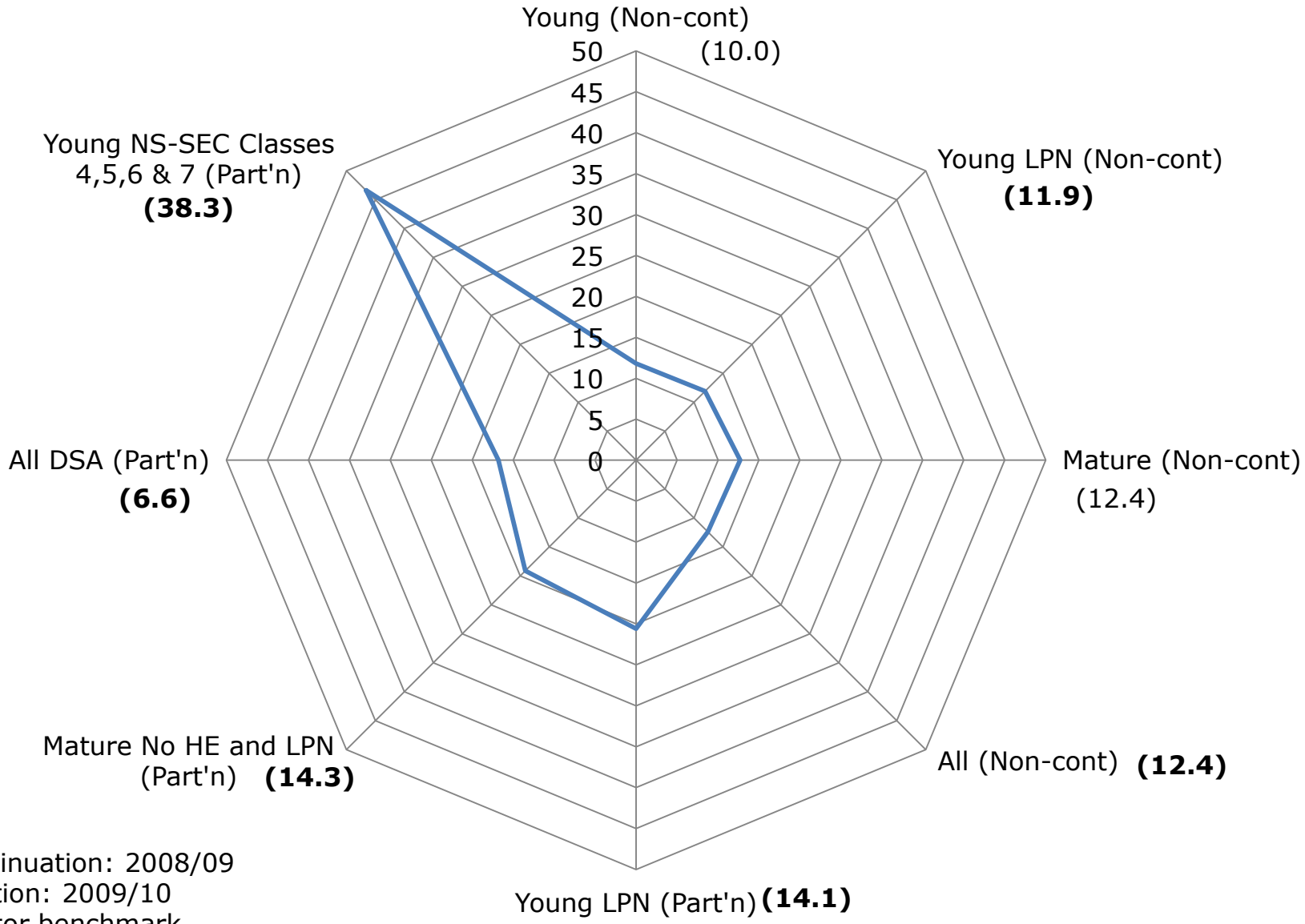
External Performance Monitoring: HESA



Key
Non-continuation: 2008/09
Participation: 2009/10
(x) : sector benchmark
Bold: actual performance is improved on B/M

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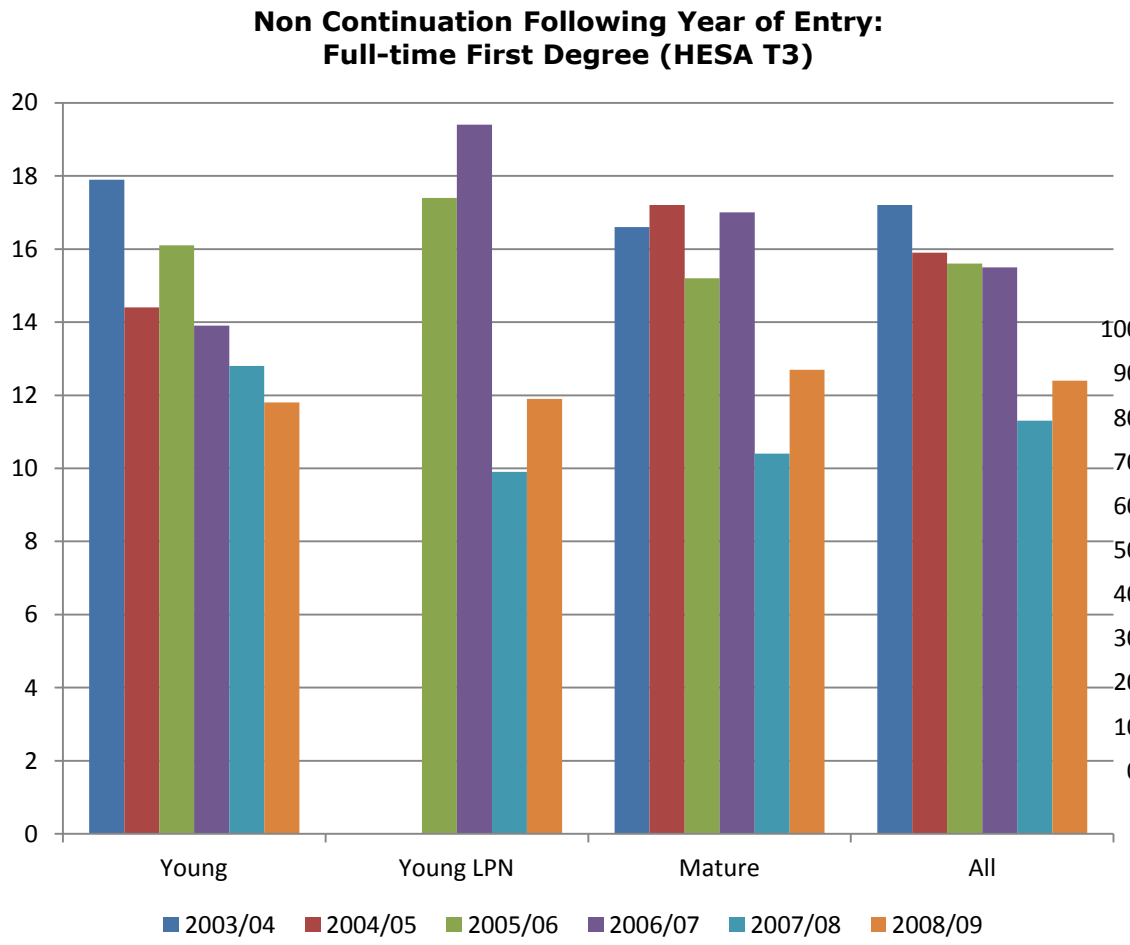
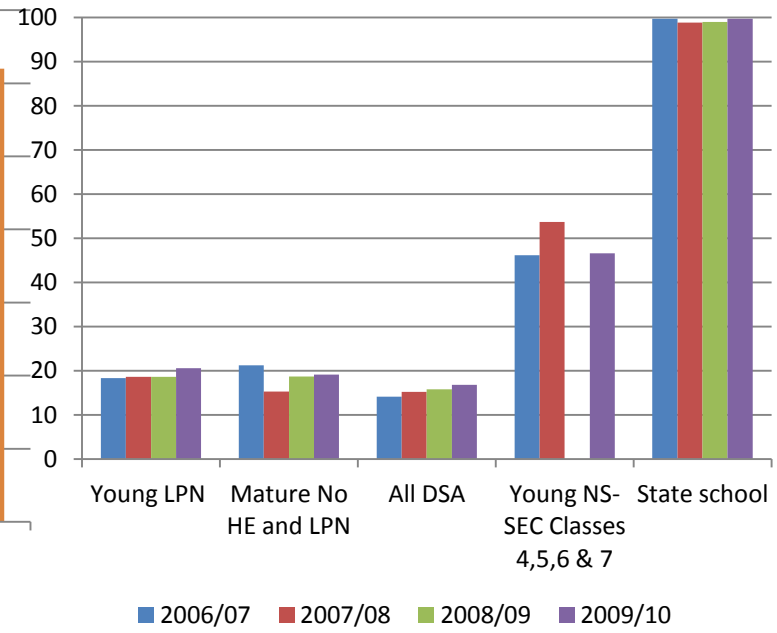
Performance Improvements



Compromise Widening Access Performance



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Critical Success Factors

- Institutional need-motivation
- **Institutional priority-evidenced**
- **Institutional engagement and 'buy-in':**
  - conversations, workshops, seminars, committees, team meetings across operations, administration and academic departments
  - genuine listening and critical reflection
- **Senior management commitment and accountability:**
  - target human and financial resource- case study could be readily adapted to interventions
  - test hypothesis and modify monitoring requirements/reports
  - drive policy and strategy development
- Stability of organisational structure to facilitate consistency of data mining and monitoring
- Interest in data, trends and expectations of performance improvements
- **Tolerance of the need to enable organisational learning**

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‘Hard to do’

but probably ✓ ‘must do’

- Improve performance without knowledge of influences
  - assemble the jig-saw without a picture or knowing how many pieces or even if you have the pieces
- Instil confidence and trust in central data systems
  - Accuracy of data, define data requests and attention to detail and definitions
- Sustain a momentum as an institutional activity from a ‘project’ approach
- Maintain a degree of organisational structural stability during periods of rapid change
- **Develop ‘succession knowledge and commitment’**

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‘Harder to do’

- Be true to institutional mission
- Retain widening access performances
- Retain high level ‘skills’ focus i.e. part-time provision

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Summary

- Tips and insights from practice and research
- Importance of questions, data and information
- Introduction to a new systems led *Management Model and Performance Framework for Improving Student Retention (James, 2010)*
- Some examples of outcomes and impacts
- Consideration of critical success factors

- Enjoy assembling your jig-saw!
- Do not rip too much of your hair out!

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THANK YOU

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