

Who's who guide to student support Dr Michelle Morgan

I first developed the Who's Who Guide in the mid 2000s, along with a Key Information Card for students and parents/guardians that contained term time dates on one side and some key university contact numbers. Both initiatives were created through talking to students and course leaders. It is designed to provide bespoke information by department/school/faculty and university as the examples provided demonstrate.

Rationale for the initiative

Knowing where to access support and having a sense of belonging are known to be factors that impact extensively on retention, progression and attainment. Therefore, it is essential to develop practical initiatives that have a range of benefits that:

- Help empower course leaders to provide effective and practical information. This starts with their welcome session. Students very often engage more with certain hard copy materials from their course leader than if sent a link to a webpage because they are used to hard copy information.
- Help empower students to help themselves. As we know, students access information in different ways so it's helpful to provide some key information in both hard copy and electronic form. We need to help students to help themselves.
- Retain students. The retention of our students is important and this type of initiative helps contribute to reducing attrition rates.

Content

When students are distressed, they do not have the state of mind to access information via an APP or log onto the university pages to find a help number. Neither is it helpful for staff to hunt for a number with a distressed student before them. The guide should be professionally designed and printed on good quality paper.

Distribution

The Who's who guide can be put on the VLE as a PDF but it is suggested that students are given a hard copy in either the course leader welcome or academic advisor session. This creates a transactional relationship and students will identify it with their course. The A4 hard copy Who's who can be put on a student's wall as well as course leaders and academic advisers. This will also hopefully give a visual confidence to students that staff can help them.

Benefits

The guide is non-expensive, it provides key academic colleagues with useful material to help support them in their role and it allows students to feel that they are getting something useful.

Common feedback over the years include:

- Considering I am paying £9000 a year, I would appreciate being given a hard copy rather than having to print this off. That and it's likely that this would be forgotten within many a student's email box.
- A distressed student won't look on an APP.
- I didn't know that all this support was there!
- I will end up forgetting to print out the sheet. I tend not to have any money to print out anyway as it goes on food. If I received a physical hard copy, it will go straight into my important documents folder and be used frequently. Also, put one in the labs in plain sight to help anyone who does not have a sheet on them.
- I didn't know where the printers were for a long time so I would go to print it then forget about it because I couldn't find it.
- Would prefer hard copies because could get lost in emails.
- Aside from it would get lost amongst tons of other emails relatively quickly, I personally wouldn't print it. If I were to save it as a PDF, it would also get lost amongst other files. If it were a hard copy and always accessible such as in the computer labs, students would use it.