

Exploring student lived experiences of leave of absence.

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Centralise Communicate Connect



The FASL Role

Lead on external, institutional-wide and faculty initiatives to enhance student retention, success, and outcomes.

Attrition rates in higher education are increasing!

Multiple demands on students; financial, family, academic study and placements; alongside difficulties transitioning into higher education. On top of this students can face unexpected problems including physical and mental health and wellbeing, family issues or academic difficulties.

43% of students doubt their abilities to continue at some point in a programme.

When issues combine to a point where a student feels they can't continue taking Leave of Absence can be an option.



LOA can allow individuals to tackle and overcome the issues that have previously been affecting them (Boston University, ND).

Prevents withdrawal from their programme (Harvey and Szalkowicz, 2015).

Demonstrates a commitment to return to the institution in the future (Naylor, et al, 2021).



However, data suggests that LOA doesn't normally play out in this manner...

51.7% of students return from a break in studies and these students are 41% less likely to successfully achieve their qualifications. (Naylor, et al 2021)

Five-year study of 48,000 medical students found that 28.5% of students who had taken LOA withdrew from their programme compared with only 1.1% of those who had not. (Nguyen, et al 2021)

University of Sunderland: internal reports suggest approximately 50% of LOA students return and approx. half of those complete.





LOA has been taken for a reason!

LOA may bring financial and academic, anxiety can be heightened or introduced (Active Minds, ND).

Loss of self-identity and purpose, lack of structure and low self-esteem (Mezey 2021).

Reduced the sense of belonging to an institution or self-image as a student (Naylor et al. 2021) .



OUR APPROACH



Planning for LOA

Engagement with the University

Return to study

Planning for LOA:

"I was forced to take leave of absence."

"Had the academic staff listened to me and took time to understand the situation I would not have needed to take a year out."

"No support was offered, and senior lecturers tried to get me to leave the programme rather than taking a leave of absence."

"I feel as if I had more support, I maybe would have been able to stay on the course."

"The course lectures / senior program lead and program leader did not offer me any support that in any way and this was a massive let down to me not only did my mental health take a massive hit because of it but everything did that was because no support"

Engagement - Communication During LOA:

"I continued to receive emails meant for current students and even received the invitation to my own graduation which would not be taking place."

"I was removed from all module content on canvas and isolated with no connection from university it was like I had been disengaged and felt forgotten about. "

"I was told that I could not attend university while on leave of absence, which thought included SU events and sporting"

"Someone to check in would have been nice."

"I think when people go on leave they should be contacted even if it is just to check in on how people are coping."

"Not being able to speak to senior lectures about how I was feeling just told you will come back in September we will speak to you then..."

Engagement – Support whilst on LOA:

“Practically everything!”

“I regret giving up on my course and have hope other students will be given more support than I was.”

“Allowing students to use the University who may struggle with the written and refence to still improve there written skills”

“Being offered counselling or mental health support Communication, help and support.”

“This was without a shadow of doubt the most stressful and unpleasant experience of my adult life.”



Returning to Studies – Needs and Support:

“I built a bond with people in my cohort and was placed into another one where I didn't really know anyone and most of them knew each other.”

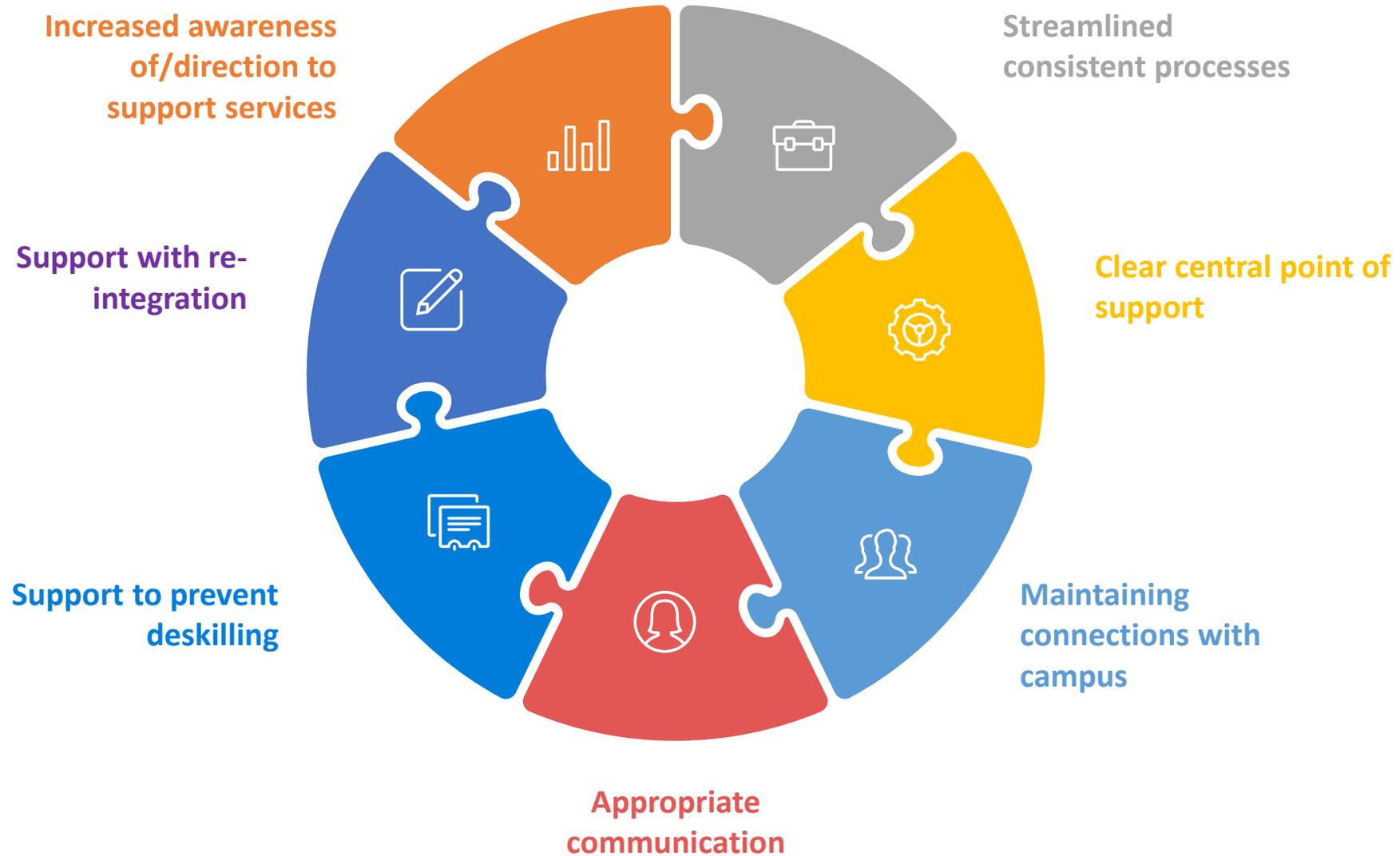
“I still feel lost and like I have deskilled because of being out of practice for over a year. I feel my confidence has totally taken a knock and I'm not the enthusiastic student I once was.”

“It would've been beneficial to be contacted prior to my return with a plan of action such as application of new DBS and returning documentation etc.”

“A whole year out is a lot of time and joining a new cohort where you know nothing or no one is scary.”

“It's a big deal and very scary, Problems chasing to get things sorted, it was not a nice situation to come back to, someone perhaps not as strong as myself may have left. It was a very lonely experience ”

So how can we enhance the LOA experience?



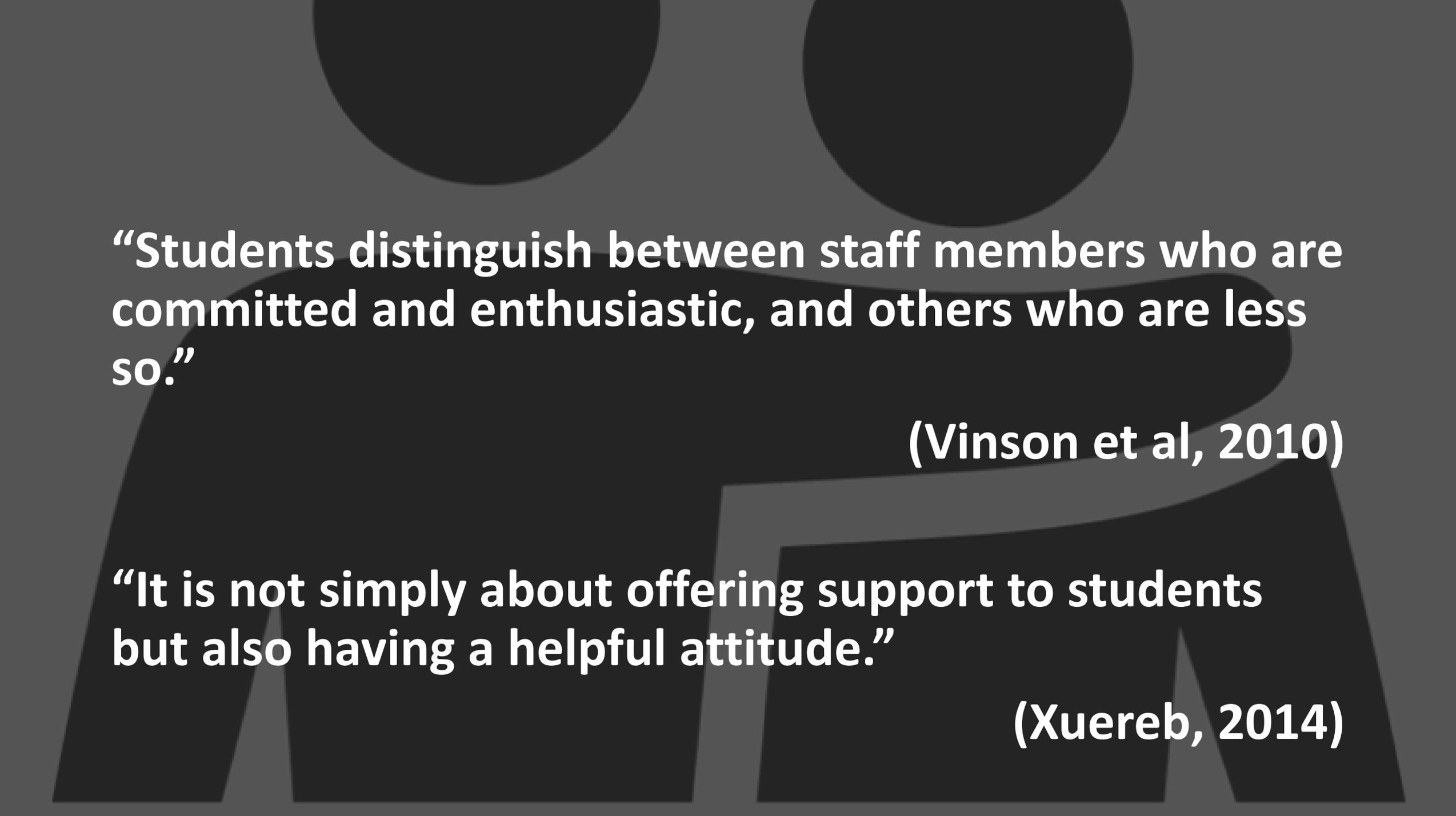
Recommendations

Policy Review

Communications with
students

Keep-in-touch
'connections' strategies



The background features a dark gray gradient with several large, stylized human figures in a lighter gray color. The figures are simplified, showing only the head, shoulders, and legs. They are arranged in a way that suggests a group of people, with some figures appearing to be in the foreground and others behind them.

“Students distinguish between staff members who are committed and enthusiastic, and others who are less so.”

(Vinson et al, 2010)

“It is not simply about offering support to students but also having a helpful attitude.”

(Xuereb, 2014)



THANK YOU.