

# Enhancing Cohort Identity in Legal Education

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## What is Cohort Identity?

- Linked to notions of **student belonging** and **engagement**.
- Identity by community, institution, learning group/subject or intended vocation?
- **For example, Identity as:**
  - A student in Higher Education
  - A BU student
  - A BU student in the Faculty or School of ..
  - A BU law student
  - A BU law student on the LLB, GDL etc
  - A BU law student in seminar group...
  - As a BU International student etc
- **Student Engagement:**
  - As a deliberate attempt by institutions to involve/empower students in shaping their learning experience (HEFCE 2008 in Trowler 2010)
  - But students are the ultimate agents in this process (Coates 2005 in Trowler 2010)

## Why does it matter?

**Identity, belonging and engagement are the key to student retention and success** (Thomas 2012)

**Student belonging/identity/engagement is achieved through:**

- Supportive peer relations
- Meaningful interaction between staff and students
- Developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners
- An HE experience relevant to students' interests and future goals

**What works?** (Thomas 2012)

- Mainstream interventions
- Proactive & developmental NOT reactive
- Relevant
- Well tried & appropriate media
- Collaborative
- Monitored

## Influencing Factors

### Macro

- External factors (NSS, Legal Regulators, Government)
- BU Recruitment Policies
- BU Student Enhancement Themes (flexible, employable & global)
- BU Operational Policies & Physical Environment
- Academic Labour

### Meso

- Discipline
- School & Faculty
- Programme
- Unit
- Workload & staffing levels

### Micro

- Pedagogic beliefs
- Age, study & cultural background of individual students

(Developed from Fanghanel 2007)

## Enhancement Strategies

- **Pre-entry:** microsite – preparation for course
- **Intensive Induction process**
- **Week 1: legal careers day** (trainees & local employers, opportunity to meet other law students & each other)
- **3 week intensive starter unit for FT & PT students:**
  - Skills focus
  - 3 pass/fail assessments (1 group presentation, 1 MCQ & 1 written case note)
  - Early feedback
  - Careers sessions
- **Ongoing collaborative work:**
  - WIKIs
  - Presentations
  - Posters – shared revision
- **Peer to peer Feedback:**
  - Own work
  - Past students work
- **Law benefits from:**
  - A strong disciplinary belief
  - A clear regulatory environment
  - Clear vocational pathways
  - High uptake to the legal profession

## What works?

- Early group assessment
- Early opportunities for collaborative work
- Fostering professional identity, team behaviours & vocational pathways.
- Early vocational support/training & networking
- Group based assessment with a pass/fail outcome
- Meaningful interaction between students & tutors (small class size, informal & formal contact, clear tutor base)
- Facilitating and supporting peer relations
- Facilitating social contact via BU Law Society/undergraduate reps
- Active & separate representatives for full and part time students

## References

- Fanghanel, J, 2007, Investigating University Lecturers' Pedagogical Constructs in the Working Context, HEA
- Thomas, L, 2012, Building Student Engagement & Belonging in Higher Education at a Time of Change, HEFCE
- Trowler, V, 2010, Student Engagement Literature Review, HEA