



## Engagement, Retention and Success Report 2014–15

<b>Outcome requested:</b>	Council is asked to <b>consider</b> the report on engagement, retention and success activity monitored by the Engagement, Retention and Success Group (ESRG) during 2014–15.
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p>At the Council meeting in November 2015 members requested that more information should be provided about the work of the ESRG in relation to monitoring progression and continuation data.</p> <p>At its meeting of 12 May 2015 QMSE asked the ERSG to provide evidence and indications of the impact of initiatives on non-continuation rates. Hence, ERSG will now report on changes in progression, non-completion and non-continuation annually to QMSE and Council in April or May.</p> <p>The definitions of the three key datasets and their purpose for measuring student success are described in the report.</p> <p>Over the past three years there is a continuing improvement in non-completion and progression remains steady. Comparison with Russell Group peers for non-continuation shows Queen Mary has been in the bottom three ranked by comparison with the HEFCE benchmark (worst differences).</p> <p>An initial, crude assessment of the potential financial implications has been calculated showing potential lost revenue of between £1m - £4m over two years.</p> <p>There is some limited evidence from individual projects in 2014–15 to show potential impact of activity, particularly on progression. No formal standards for data collection, analysis and evaluation were used.</p> <p>During 2015–16 a different approach has been taken to make strategic and coordinated use of the funding to ensure there is potential for activity to have a wider impact. This approach has been established during the current year and will have some effect on current projects, though some key posts have yet to start, and will be embedded in activity for the following academic year, reporting in 2018.</p>
<b>QMUL Strategy:</b>	ERS Strategy, SETLA Strategy (2.3) and QMUL Strategy (1.2)
<b>Internal/External regulatory/statutory reference points:</b>	Targets for ERS activity are set in QMUL’s Access Agreement for the Office for Fair Access (OFFA).
<b>Strategic Risks:</b>	<p>Risk 1 Student recruitment</p> <p>Risk 2 Student experience</p> <p>Risk 11 Sustainable income streams for activities</p>

<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	Further data analysis is required to understand the impact equality and diversity issues may have on student success. This is embedded in the following Access Agreement target for 2017–18: <i>We will complete an analysis of all students at QMUL to confirm any gaps in attainment compared with entry qualifications. This will include the WP and BME cohorts. The admission of BME students will also be reviewed to compare the proportion of applications with offers and enrolments, controlling for entry qualifications and degree subject.</i>
<b>Subject to prior and onward consideration by:</b>	QMSE 26 April 2016
<b>Confidential paper under FOIA/DPA:</b>	No
<b>Timing:</b>	The report describes activity during considered by the ESG during 2014–15. An annual report to Council will be submitted in future.
<b>Author:</b>	Robert Sherratt (Head of ERS) with input from ERS governance groups and Strategic Planning
<b>Date:</b>	30 April 2016
<b>Senior Management/External Sponsor:</b>	Rebecca Lingwood VP Student Experience, Teaching, Learning and Assessment

# Engagement Retention and Success 2014–15

The Engagement, Retention and Success Group (ERSG) was established in 2014<sup>1</sup> to make recommendations on the use of allocated funding from the Access Agreement, which has been ring-fenced to support the engagement, retention and success of students from widening-participation backgrounds.

This report will consider the definitions and measures of engagement, retention and success, the performance against those measures for the past three years and the outcomes of activity recommended and monitored by ERSG during 2014–15.

## Definitions

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) is responsible, through the annual Access Agreement, for the funding of ERS activity at QMUL. The OFFA Strategy describes taking a lifecycle approach with three key stages. The second stage<sup>2</sup> refers to student success during the time when the student is at university. This is the stage on which the work of ERS focuses, using the term 'student success' to describe the overall aim for ERS activity.

There are a number of ways of measuring student success, three of these have particular relevance to ERS activity, completion, progression and non-continuation. Each measure provides a different perspective on students' experiences during their time at Queen Mary, as demonstrated through their academic achievements.

**Non-completion** is used as one of the Strategic Plan indicators of progress (1.2a) and measures the percentage of students commencing their studies who do not complete the degree programme. This is measured by adding one year to the expected length of the programme, i.e. 4 years for a 3 year programme, and calculating the percentage of students who have completed in that time.

**Progression** is the measure of student success preferred for ERS, enabling an overview of the whole student cohort as well as perspectives on a number of factors such as Faculty and School rates, application route and year of study. It measures students who are entitled to progress from one year of programme to the next based on their academic performance in the current year. It is expressed as the percentage of students enrolled at any time in the academic year who meet the requirements to progress to the next year. As an in-year measure, calculated in the autumn following resit examination boards, it provides a timely snapshot that can be used to influence activity in the current academic year.

**Non-continuation** is measured by HESA as part of their annual, national performance indicators. The rates reflect the percentage of UK-domiciled, first year, new entrant students who are enrolled on 1 December of the year following the year of entry. These rates allow benchmarking against other institutions.

## Data

The data reported here cover the last three years available (2012–13 – 2014–15) and are derived from the 15 QMUL schools based in London. This date range is also significant as it covers the first three years of home students paying the higher £9,000 annual fees.

## Non-completion

The three-year trend for non-completion across the institution is an improvement with an annual decrease in the students who do not complete from 22% in 2012–13 to 20% in 2013–

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<sup>1</sup> Previously this had been the Retention Task and Finish Group

<sup>2</sup> OFFA describe the first stage as access, and the third stage, post graduation, as progression

14 and 16% in 2014–15 (see Annex 1, Chart 1). The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (H&SS) and Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry (SMD) have remained steady while the Faculty of Science and Engineering (S&E) has made improvements each year, though starting from a higher rate of non-completion. An expectation of a year-on-year decrease has been set for this indicator of progress in the monitoring of the Strategic Plan.

### **Progression**

The overall institutional progression rate has remained steady over the last three years with a slight variation of 0.6% over the three years (2012–13 89.5%, 2013–14 89.1%, 2014–15 89.7%). There has been an improvement in progression each year in H&SS with S&E recovering to 2012–13 levels after a dip in 2013–14 and SMD seeing a drop in progression in 2014–15 (see Annex 1 Chart 2).

The progression of individual schools can be broadly grouped into three: the schools, particularly in HSS, that had an increase in progression for each of the three years; those who had a mixture of better and worse rates; and a smaller number of schools where progression has decreased each year (see Annex 1 Chart 3). It is also helpful to compare this with Chart 4 looking at how the average progression for all three years for each school compares to the QMUL average over the same time period. This is expressed as a z-score, a positive or negative number giving an indication of relative performance against all schools.

The application route for students also has an impact on progression. Chart 5 shows the average progression over the last three years of first-year students who arrived through the normal application route and those who applied to Queen Mary via Clearing. The average difference in progression rates is 6%<sup>3</sup>, an important variation when the average proportion of first-year students arriving through Clearing is 19%.

### **Non-continuation**

Non-continuation incorporates a number of measures. When looking at institutional and faculty performance, the percentage of students who continue or qualify at QMUL is used. The QMUL non-continuation rate, i.e. the percentage who transfer/is no longer in higher education has shown some variation, averaging 10.4% over the three-year period, which is also the rate for 2014–15 (see Chart 6).

When comparing with the Russell Group it is appropriate to consider non-continuation expressed as those students who are no longer in higher education compared with the institutional HEFCE benchmark (see Table 1). The table shows that the QMUL rank in the Russell Group has been low, in the bottom two or three for the last three years.

### **Financial implications**

The financial implications of student success is a complex picture with significant variation. It can depend on student domicile, the subject being studied and other funding rules such as the HEFCE top-up grants. As a crude indicator, the non-continuation rate can be used to calculate lost revenue of two years of fees (£18,000) for those UK-domiciled new entry students who did not continue with their studies. In 2014–15 283 students did not continue at QMUL, leading to a maximum lost potential revenue of £5,094,000.

Two further points should be noted: this would represent a minimum of lost revenue as it does not take into account the non-continuation of home students beyond the first year, or the non-continuation of EU and international students; it assumes an unrealistic 100% continuation,

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<sup>3</sup> The difference between the progression of students based on their application route was statistically significant. Students arriving via clearing was found to decrease the probability to progress (with 99% confidence).

the lowest UK non-continuation currently is 2.2% at The University of Cambridge. This would be the equivalent of 60 students not continuing at QMUL (based on the 2014–15 cohort) and £1,080,000 lost potential revenue.

## **Activity**

The ERSG funded 30 projects in 2014–15 at a cost of £1,063,000. This was the second year of funded projects. The projects looked at a wide range of activity designed to support the achievement of the objectives of the Retention and Success Strategy<sup>4</sup>. The portfolio of projects included variations in scale from those potentially having an impact across the institution to a large number of projects in academic schools or looking to support specific cohorts in the student population. There was no standard evaluation method for these projects. This will be partially addressed in 2015–16 and an evaluation framework developed for use in 2016–17.

The projects can be grouped into six key themes: research and analysis; staff development; student success; peer mentoring; support for specific student groups; and employability. Details of the projects can be found in Annex 2 and highlights of the deliverables and outcomes from the groups of projects are given below.

### **Research and Analysis**

Although the three projects under this theme were initiated with funding from 2014–15, they conclude in 2015–16 and will be included in the next annual report.

### **Staff Development**

The Personal Adviser training provides academic colleagues with an opportunity to understand the responsibilities of the role and the range of support services available to students. The training has been delivered through the central academic professional development programme and via bespoke sessions for schools. Highlighting how students can be supported during their time at QMUL, the training has had 230 participants and received positive feedback from the evaluation forms.

### **Student Success**

The majority of the projects in 2014–15 are in this group and cover four main topics: the transition into higher education; support of student engagement; school specific activity; and support for late-summer resits.

Projects looking at transition into higher education have provided new students with survival guides, opportunities to focus and improve their writing and targeted support from a dedicated adviser. In all projects positive outcomes have been found such as improvements in surveyed student satisfaction and in academic performance.

Support of student engagement has looked at the evaluation of existing academic support services, with findings from the evaluation being used to enhance the services in 2015–16 and the development of tools to measure and monitor engagement (QEngage) and facilitate student support (Co-tutor) that have been deployed in most schools in 2015–16.

The school specific activity included support for the outward mobility of Geography students, enabling them to participate in an international fieldtrip, the development of a module designed to support student skills development in Engineering and Materials Science and the initiation of a long-term four year project in the schools of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science and Engineering and Materials Science to enhance the curriculum and student success through development of more effective writing skills.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://connect.qmul.ac.uk/teachlearn/retention/155387.docx> or the electronic background reading document provided to Council.

There was a significant amount of activity in the schools in H&SS and S&E to support students who were taking late-summer resits. Positive results have been seen in a number of schools compared with 2013–14, such as History, English and Drama and Electronic Engineering and Computer Science, which may be expected to have a direct impact on the progression of students who otherwise would have failed.

### **Peer Mentoring**

This important work co-ordinated by the Queen Mary Students' Union enables new students to meet with returning students from their home school. The intention is for new students to learn from the experiences of their mentors, helping them to adjust to life at Queen Mary. The new students surveyed responded positively to the scheme with over 80% saying it helped their transition and to feel a part of the Queen Mary community, 92% would encourage new students to be involved and 72% said it helped them to remain at university.

### **Support for Specific Student groups**

These projects include a significant investment (£400,000) in the estate improving access to buildings, targeted support for students on the autistic spectrum (which had a direct impact on a number of students and may have led to them remaining), and the creation of financial advice films made available online.

### **Employability**

Work in this area sought to develop relationships between students and mentors, some of whom are alumni, and to offer work placements, as well as providing development opportunities by working with local residents through the UpRising initiative. The QMentor project placed 58 students with mentors. The evaluation found that the project helped 50% of students to secure work opportunities with 69% stating an improved confidence in their ability to get a job with improvements in how to write persuasive job applications (59%) and prepare more successfully for interviews (49%).

### **A new central team**

The ERSG decided during 2014–15 to take a different approach to make strategic and coordinated use of the funding to ensure there is potential for activity to have a wider impact. This approach has been established in 2015–16 with the ongoing creation of a new, central team and the funding of posts in associated teams (IT and Learning Development).

### **Next steps**

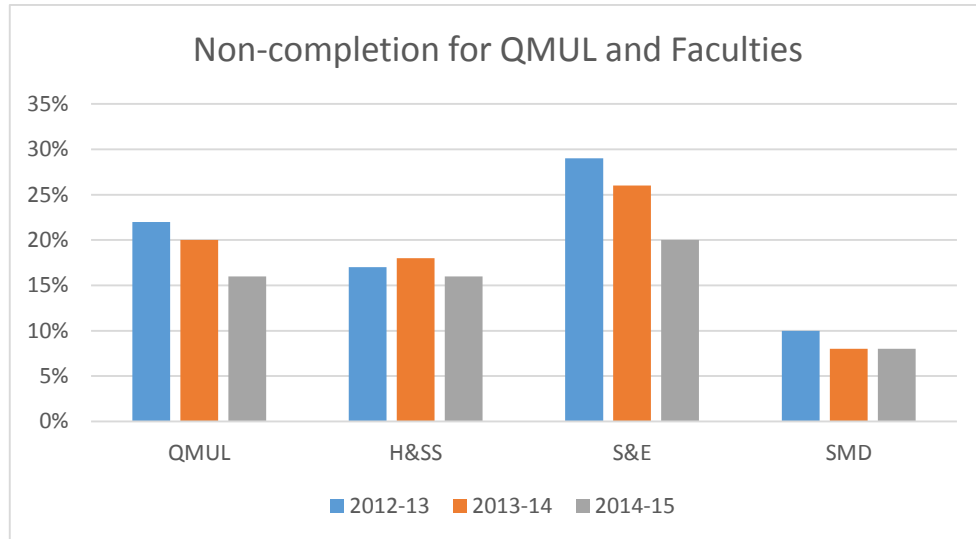
The programme of change to support student success is becoming established. This includes the vision for the programme, 'to encourage and support all our students to fulfil their potential', the effective management of projects and budgets, and the creation and implementation of an evaluation framework for current and future projects. The framework will set standards for measuring and understanding the impact of projects through qualitative and quantitative methods.

There is alignment with the work of the programme and the implementation of the QMUL Model. During 2016–17 it is expected that there will be further development and delivery of Personal Adviser training, preparing staff for September 2017 when the Model is in place for first year students. In addition, there will be emphasis on the experience of Black and Minority Ethnic students through the creation of a two year Research Fellow post.

## Annex 1 – Data charts

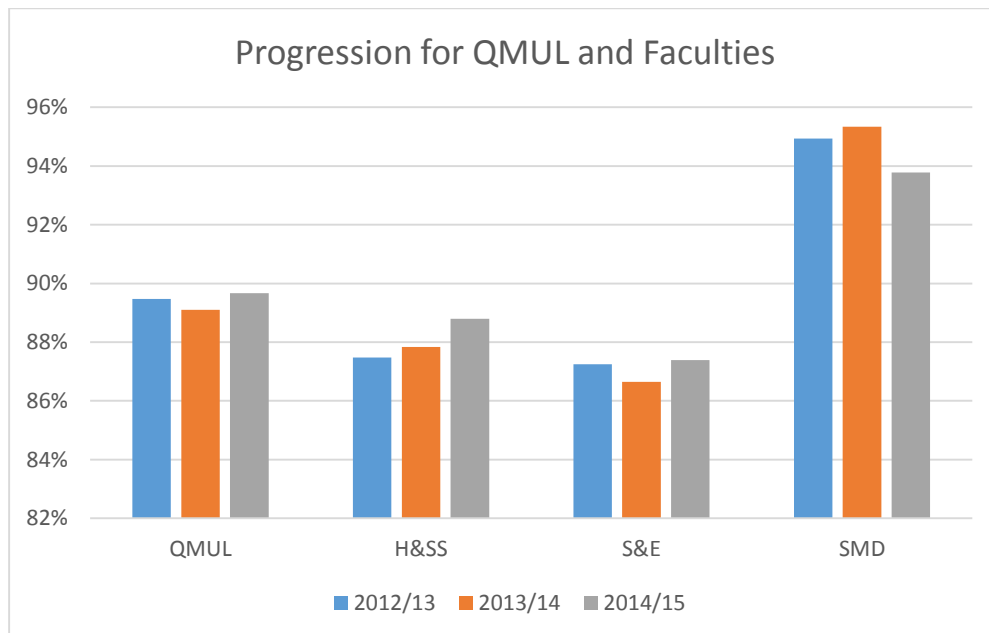
### Non-completion

Chart 1



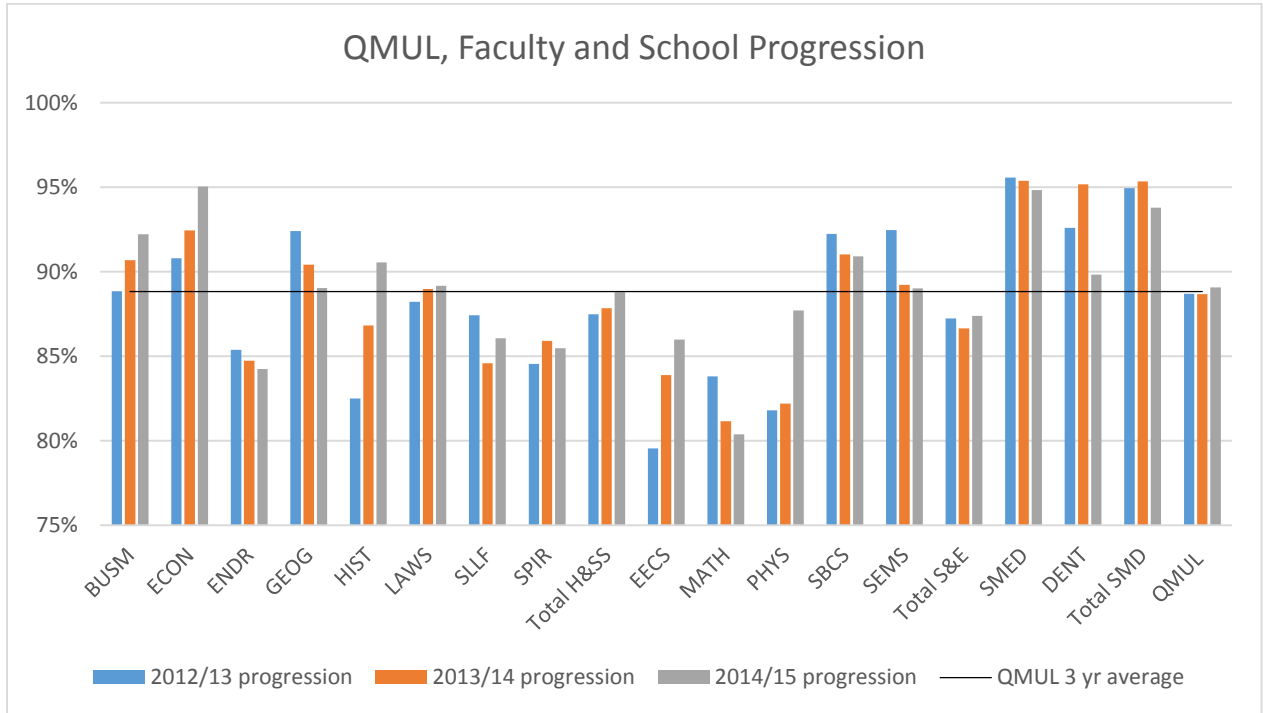
### Progression<sup>1</sup>

Chart 2

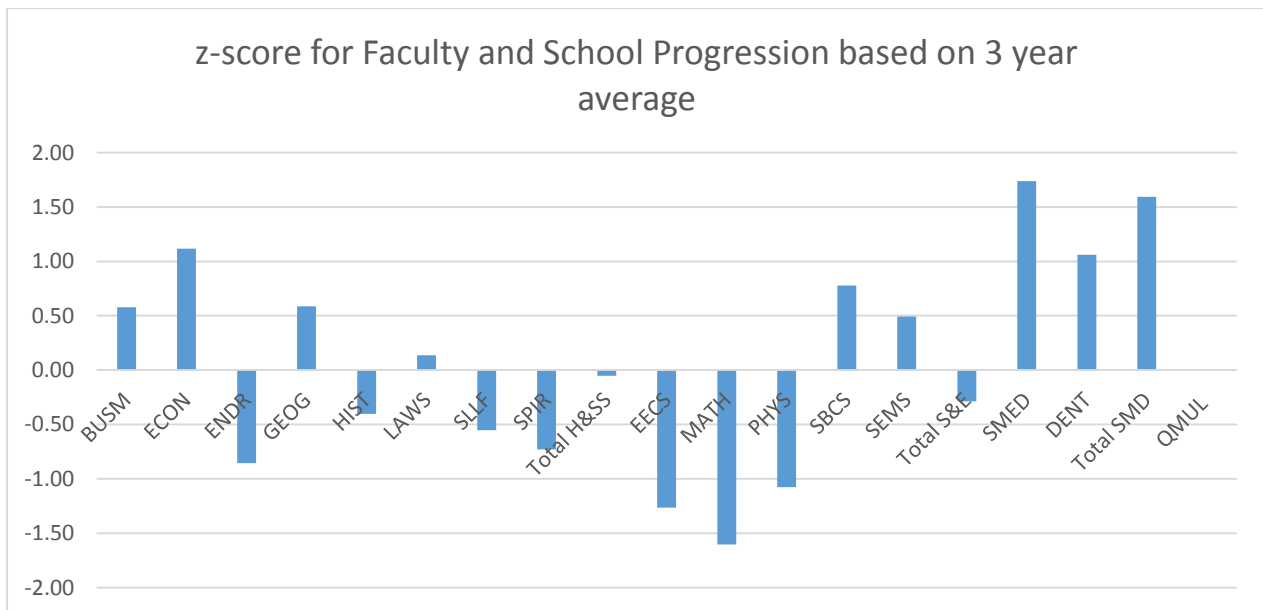


<sup>1</sup> The population for progression excludes students on transnational programmes, one year programmes and the institutes in SMD. It includes Science and Engineering Foundation Programme students.

**Chart 3**



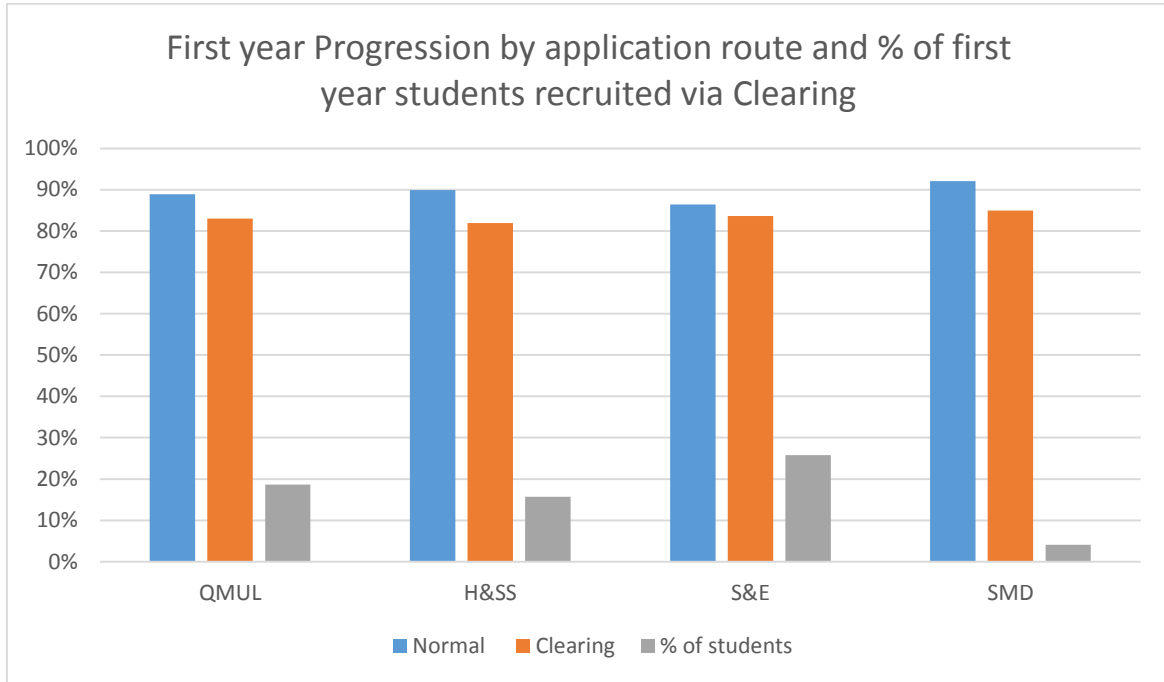
**Chart 4**



This z-score measures Faculty and School progression in relation to the average for QMUL in three consecutive years. It indicates which Faculties and Schools are above and below the mean and by how many standard deviations.

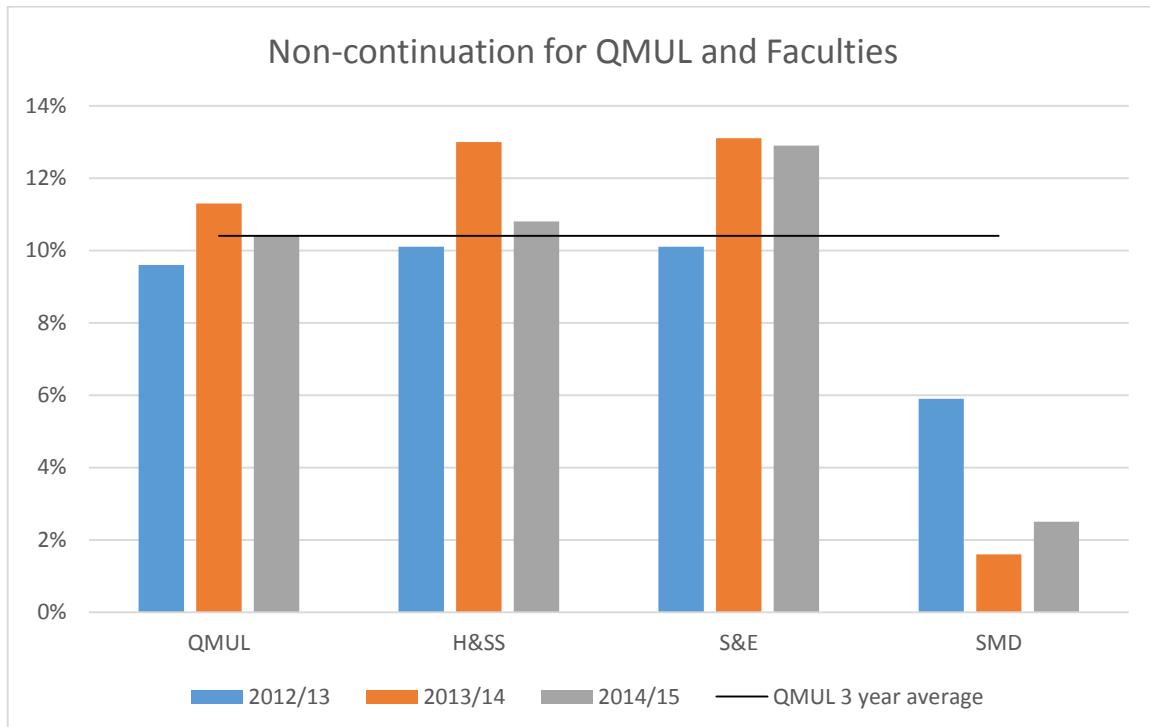


**Chart 5**



**Non-continuation**

**Chart 6**



**Table 1 Non-continuation compared with HEFCE benchmark**

<b>Year</b>	<b>% no longer in HE</b>	<b>Benchmark %</b>	<b>% difference between the actual and the benchmark</b>	<b>RG Rank</b>
2012-13	5.9	4.2	1.7	18/20
2013-14	6.6	4.6	2.0	19/20
2014-15	6.5	4.7	1.8	Joint 23/24

## **Faculty and School abbreviations**

H&SS	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
S&E	Faculty of Science and Engineering
SMD	Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry
BUSM	School of Business and Management
ECON	School of Economics and Finance
ENDR	School of English and Drama
GEOG	School of Geography
HIST	School of History
LAWS	School of Law
SLLF	School of Languages, Linguistics and Film
SPIR	School of Politics and International Relations
EECS	School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science
MATH	School of Mathematical Sciences
PHYS	School of Physics and Astronomy
SBCS	School of Biological and Chemical Sciences
SEMS	School of Engineering and Materials Science
SMED	School of Medicine
DENT	Institute of Dentistry

## Annex 2 – Overview of 2014/15 projects

ID	Title	QMUL/Faculty/School	Deliverables/Outcomes
<b>Research and analysis</b>			
5	HSS Research Projects	Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences	Continued in 2015/16
15	Exploring the factors that impact on the success of students from WP backgrounds	QMUL-wide	Continued in 2015/16
16	Disadvantaged students and informal management learning	School of Business & Management	Continued in 2015/16
<b>Staff Development</b>			
1	Personal Advisor Training	QMUL-wide	Resources delivered Training delivered for 230 staff through school-specific activity and the academic staff development programme.
<b>Student Success</b>			
<i>Transition into Higher Education</i>			
9	How to Survive Student Life	School of Maths	Guide distributed to new students. Increased response rate to survey and student satisfaction.

10	Step-Up	School of English & Drama	Grade average increased for half programmes and absolute numbers of students progressing has increased.
19	Transition Advisor	School of Dentistry	Compared to 2013/14 failure rate in part 1 dropped by 12%; distinctions increased by 23%
<i>Student Engagement</i>			
4	Targeted Learning Development support	QMUL wide	Evaluation of existing Learning Development tutorial provision for WP students, Exam and Revision workshops and QProducers: co-creation of academic content
6	QEngage and Co-tutor	QMUL wide	QEngage the QMUL student engagement monitoring tool was developed and tested for launch in 14 Schools in September 2015. Co-tutor was selected as a Student Support Tool ready for trial in three Schools in September 2015 and institution-wide from January 2016. Continued in 2015/16.
<i>School/course specific</i>			
7	Whole Programme Approach to Writing Development – a long-term project to July 2018	Joint – Electronic Engineering & Computer Science and	Mapping and analysis of student texts and assignments, and preliminary collaboration with staff around teaching and module design

		Engineering and Material Science	
12	Integrating engagement/retention in first year curriculum	School of Engineering and Material Sciences	Module developed for delivery to all 300 first years in 2015/16
21	Supporting and enhancing student engagement in fieldwork	School of Geography	Review of fieldwork provision and subsidies for first year fieldtrips so students can participate in an international fieldtrip in a later year of their course
<i>Support for resits/out of attendance</i>			
20	Support for first sits and resits	School of Electronic Engineering & Computer Sciences	66% take up of mentoring, though lower take up of resit revision classes than hoped (19%). Small decrease in progression for first year UG students and significant increase of c. 7% for 2 <sup>nd</sup> year UG students.
22	Student Engagement Tutors	School of History	13/14 resit and resit out of attendance 10 of 21 progressed (48%); 14/15 resits following interventions by project 15 of 22 progressed (68%)
23	Out of attendance support	School of Law	Supported c. 50 students resitting out of attendance. Compared to 13/14 progression in 14/15 remained static for 1st years and improved by 15% for 2nd years.

24	Out of attendance support	School of Maths	Of engaged students (22) 17 progressed (77%), higher than the previous year, and 17 achieved higher grades
26	Resitting out of attendance and remediation tutor	School of English	51 students who engaged with the tutors progressed. There was an overall drop (52 in 13/14, 36 in 14/15) in the number of students who did not progress.
27	Engagement with learning	School of Economics and Finance	Revision support for resit exams attended by 17 students, increase in progression of 4% compared to 13/14.
28	Support mentor	School of Engineering and Material Sciences	Of the recorded students who attended 80% progressed.
<b>Peer Mentoring</b>			
13	QMSU Buddy	QMUL wide	86 mentors recruited and trained through the scheme offered mentoring to c. 400 students. Positive feedback to the evaluation survey – 72% said helped them remain at university.
<b>Specific Student Support</b>			
11	Autistic spectrum disorder mental health advisor	QMUL wide	Through direct interventions with students it is believed that at least 10 students have remained at Queen Mary
18	Financial advice films	QMUL wide	Financial advice videos on student support site.

30	Estates access works	QMUL wide	Improvements to buildings access and compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act
<b>Employability</b>			
8	QMentor	Faculty of Science & Engineering	58 mentoring relationships – continued in 2015/16. 50% of those looking for part-time, summer or intern work stated the mentoring helped them secure this.
14	SBM	School of Business & Management	75 students in work experience 23 students mentoring relationships
17	UpRising	QMUL-wide	Cohort of 26 QMUL students 20 East London residents

Projects 2 and 3 co-ordinated the work on resit support for the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Engineering. Projects 25 MBBS support initiatives and their evaluation and 29 A personalised academic support scheme are in the process of reporting.

Full project reports were reviewed by ERSG at meetings in 2014/15 and 2015/16. These reports and the minutes of the meetings are available, please contact [ers@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:ers@qmul.ac.uk).