‘Belonging and engagement’ through an institutional integrated approach

Dr Michelle Morgan

Things to consider in achieving a whole integrated institutional approach

Sector changes and challenges

Increased student diversity

Social changes and challenges

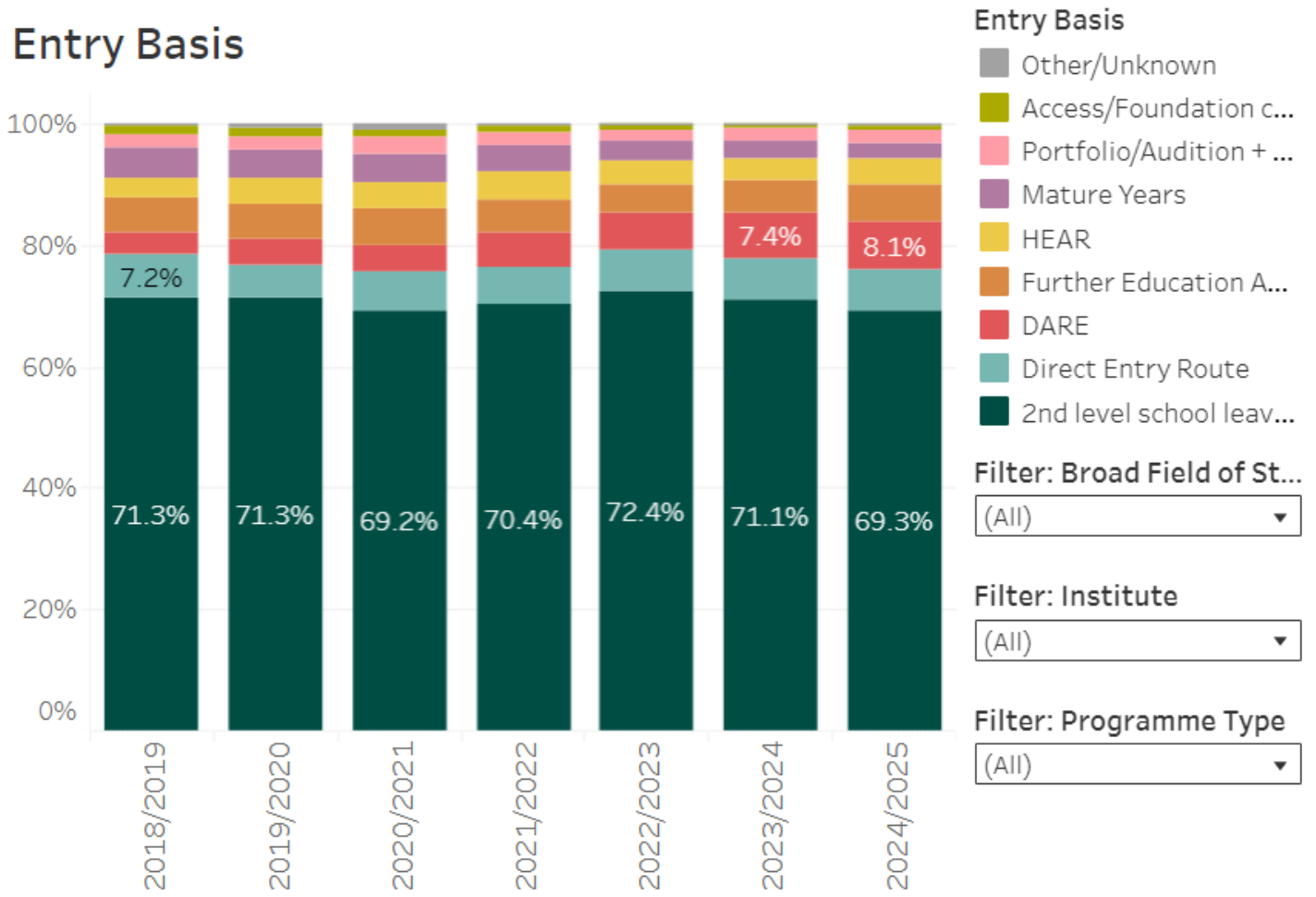
Mental health and wellbeing

Understanding transitions

Engagement, belonging and compassionate leadership

Student diversity- entry route into Irish Institutions

New entrants



Fairly consistent entry routes in

[Key Facts & Figures | Statistics | Higher Education Authority]

All enrolments in HE in Ireland

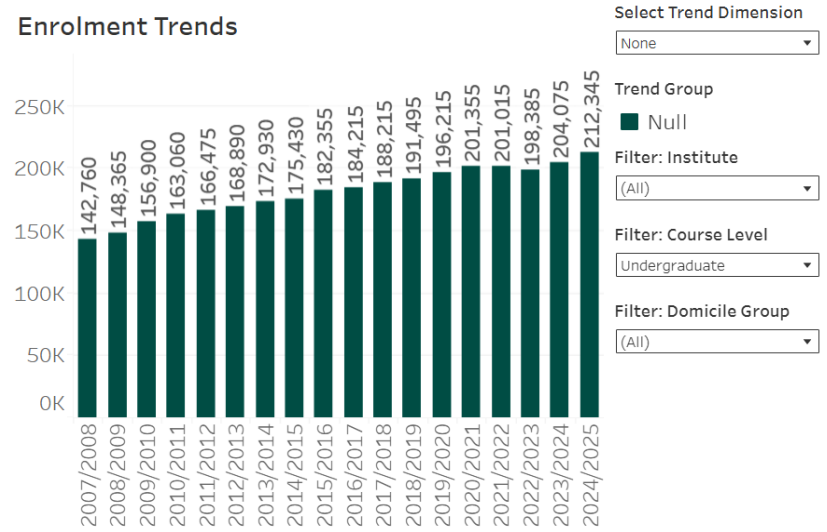
Year on year growth for UG and PGT

As in the UK growth higher amongst females

UG domicile=
Irish 89.2%
NI & GB 1.0%
Non-UK 7.4%

PGT domicile =
Irish 64.4%
NI & GB 1.5%
Non-UK 26.0%

1. How many students were enrolled in the 2024/25 academic year and how does this compare to previous years?



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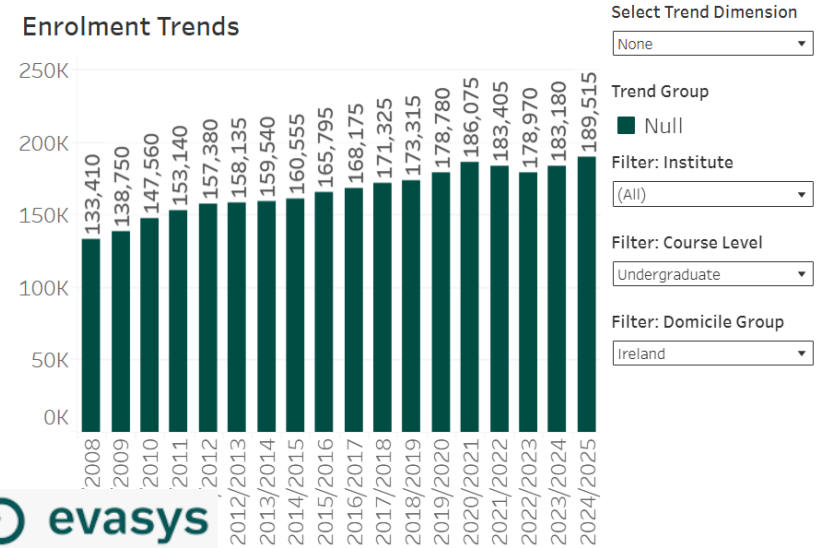

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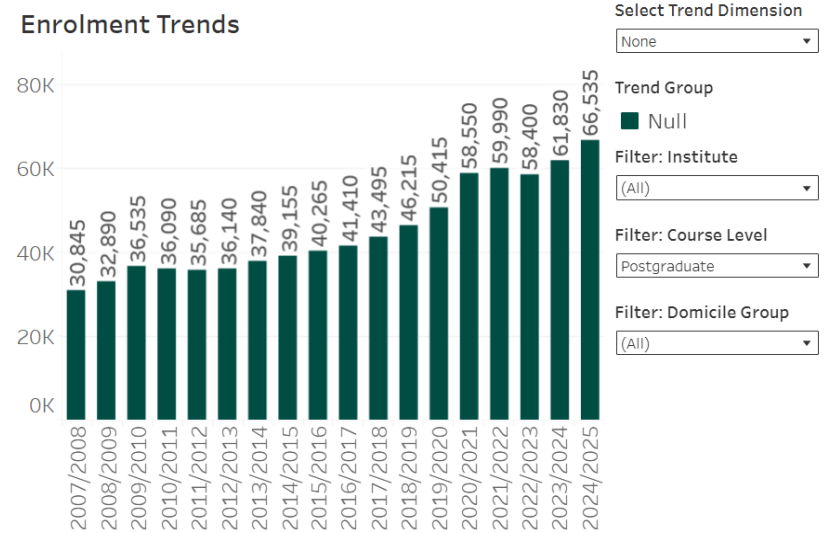

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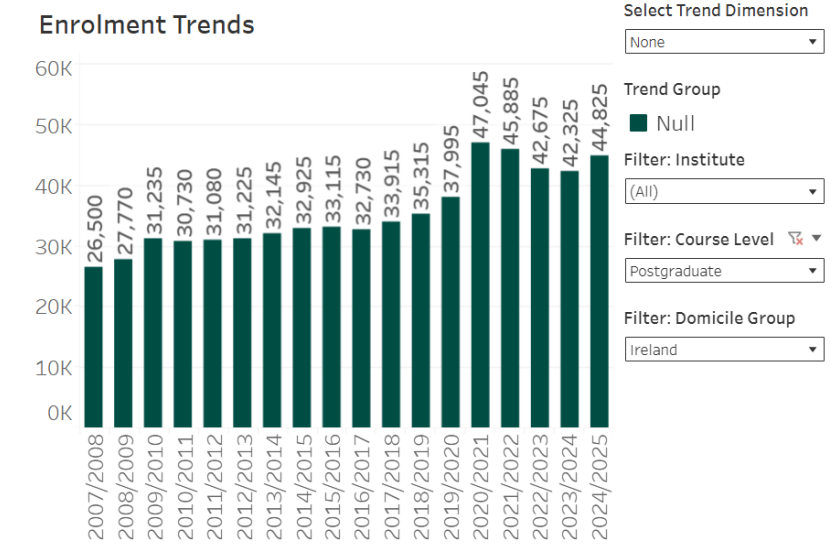


evasys

Social and Mental health changes What the National Pilot of the English Course Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire tells us

Covid and cost of living

Impact of Covid 19

Loss of confidence

Loss of social engagement with friends at school or college

Loss of a structured learning environment

Lack of self-discipline

Affected their mental health

These are worries on entry in terms of confidence and ability to study

Cost of living

Staying local

Didn't visit any universities before applying and starting

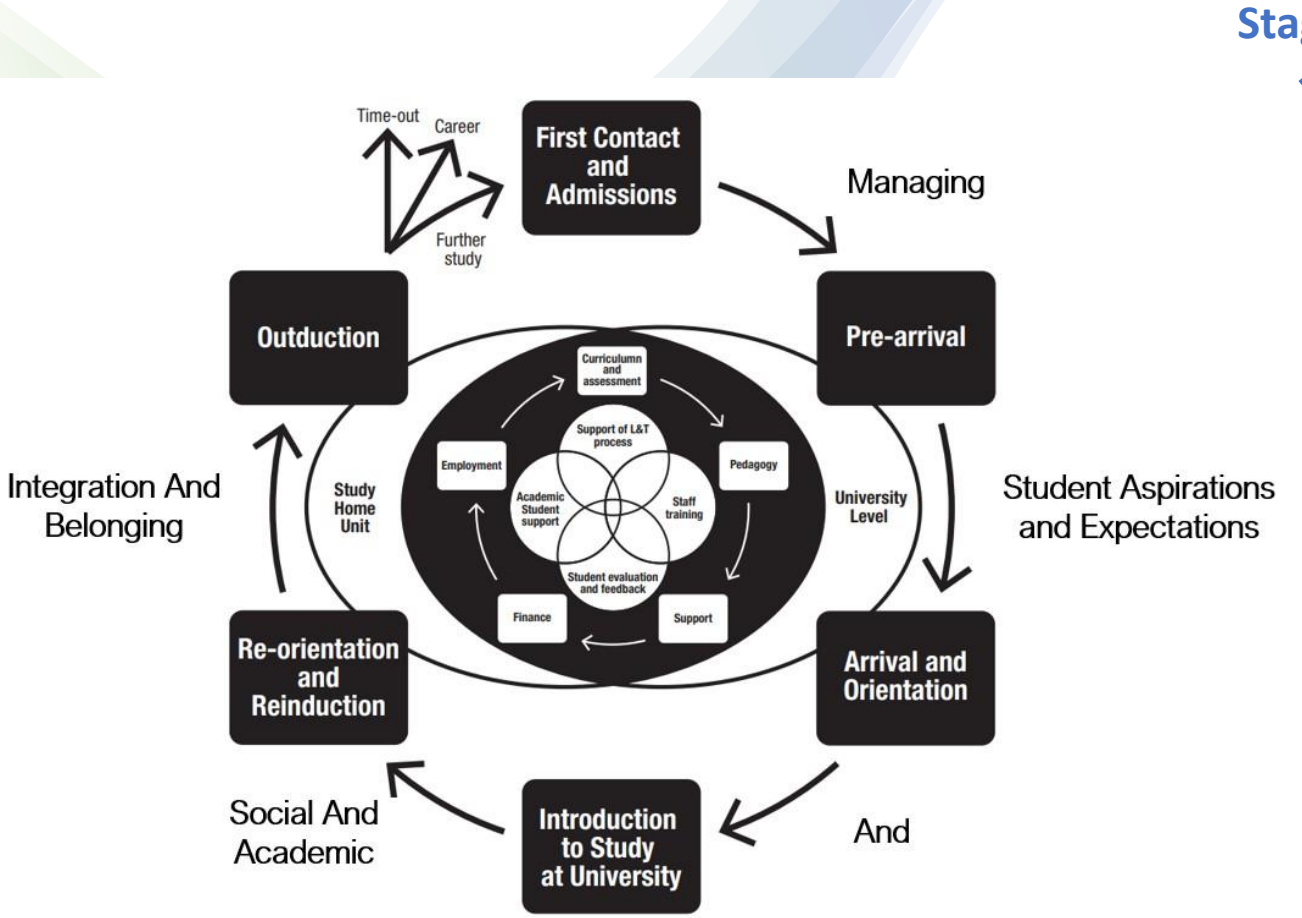
Mental health and disability

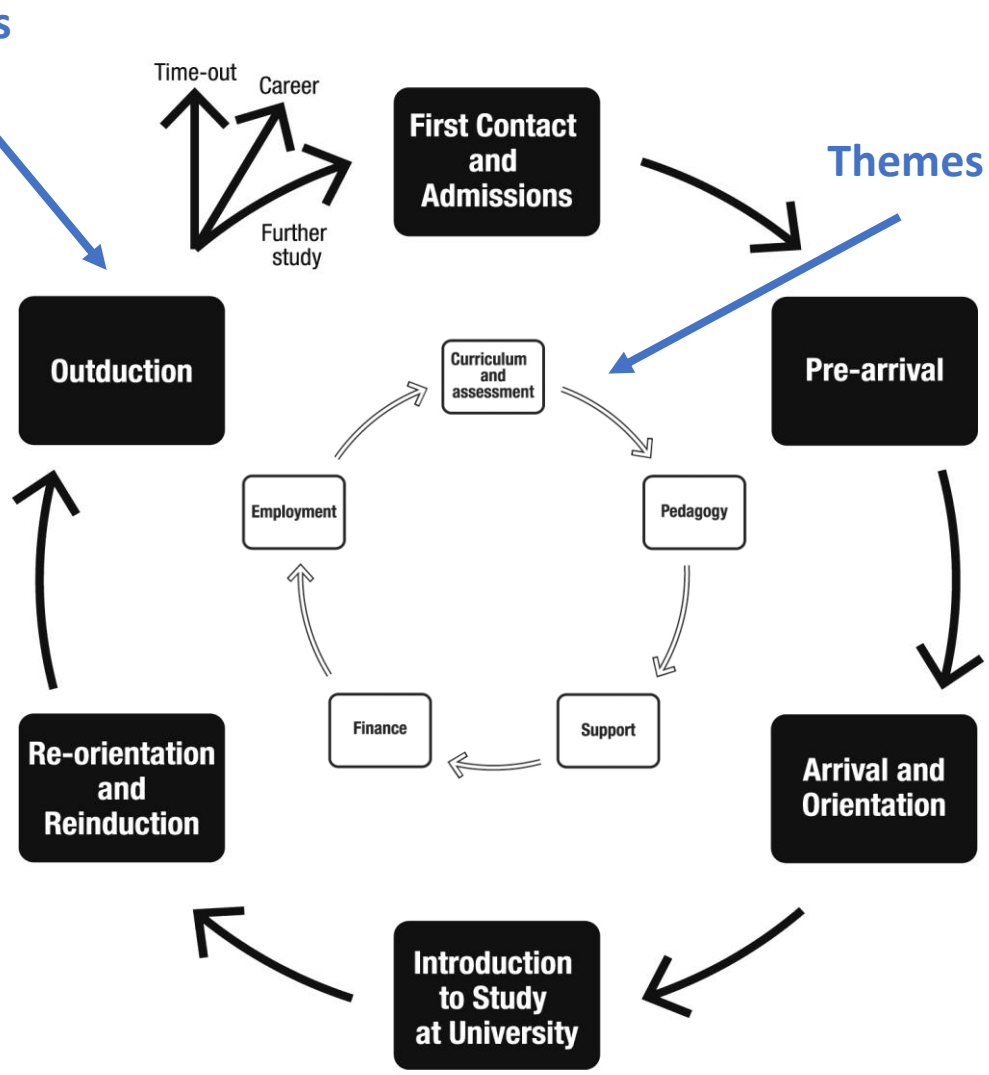
- Mental health
  - Highest declared disability
- Disability
  - More declarations of a known disability provided in the PAQ and not to the university

Pre-arrival questionnaire national pilot - Wave One initial results | Advance HE

evasys

The Student Experience Transitions study lifecycle



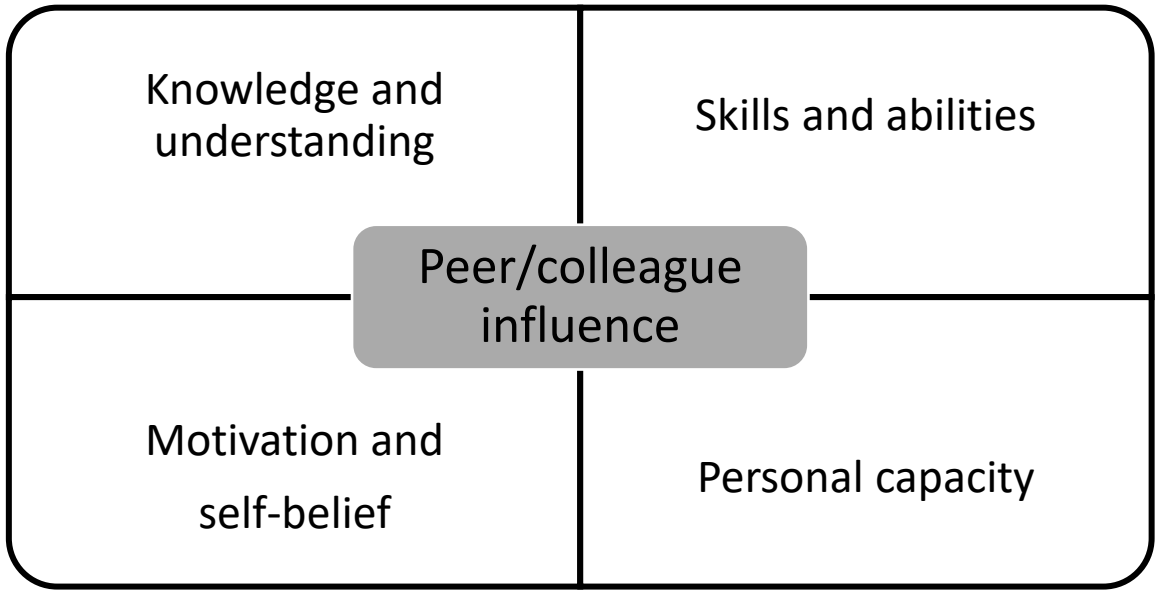


[Improving the Student Experience by Michelle Morgan - Official Website]

To increase Engagement, reduce 'Poverty'

The Joseph Rowntree Trust define poverty when *'a person's resources are not sufficient to meet their minimum* needs' (Joseph Rowntree Trust, 2014).

Resources needed for engagement



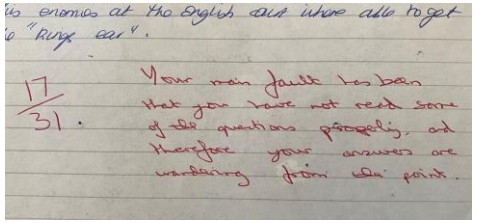
Source: Foster, 2023

Goulden, C. and D'Arcy, C. (2014) *Anti-poverty strategies for the UK: A definition of poverty*, York: Joseph Rowntree Trust.

A practitioner's approach- Why 'mattering' is key to engagement and creating a sense of 'belonging'

'Belonging'
creates the space
Overarching concept
= feeling *welcome, accepted*
'1 directional' experience

'Mattering'
gives the space 'meaning'
Done on an individual level
= feeling valued, seen, heard, personal worth
'Relational' experience



Common words by new UGs and PGTs
Knowing:
useful support available
Academic support
Opportunities
Help provided
Respect and kindness
Equality and Inclusiveness
Heard/listened to
Good communications
Feedback (regular and helpful)
Clear communication
Checking ins
Not lonely

Common words by new UGs
Personal interaction
Understanding
Accepted
Caring environment
Encouragement
Honesty
Patience
Welcoming

Common words by new PGTs
My performance
Personalised support
Recognition for efforts
Acknowledgement
Known by my name
Appreciated
Fair treatment
Friendly environment

These words are about feeling, relationship and activities

Meaningfulness, safety (trust) and availability in everything

William Kahn, 1990 (Expert on Business Engagement)

(structure, management, resources, policies, activities)

Reframed the question

Asked via
the PAQ and Continuation questionnaires

What helps you feel valued, seen and heard at the university?

Engagement → Belonging

Morgan, Hampshire, McIntosh and Page-Tickell, 2026

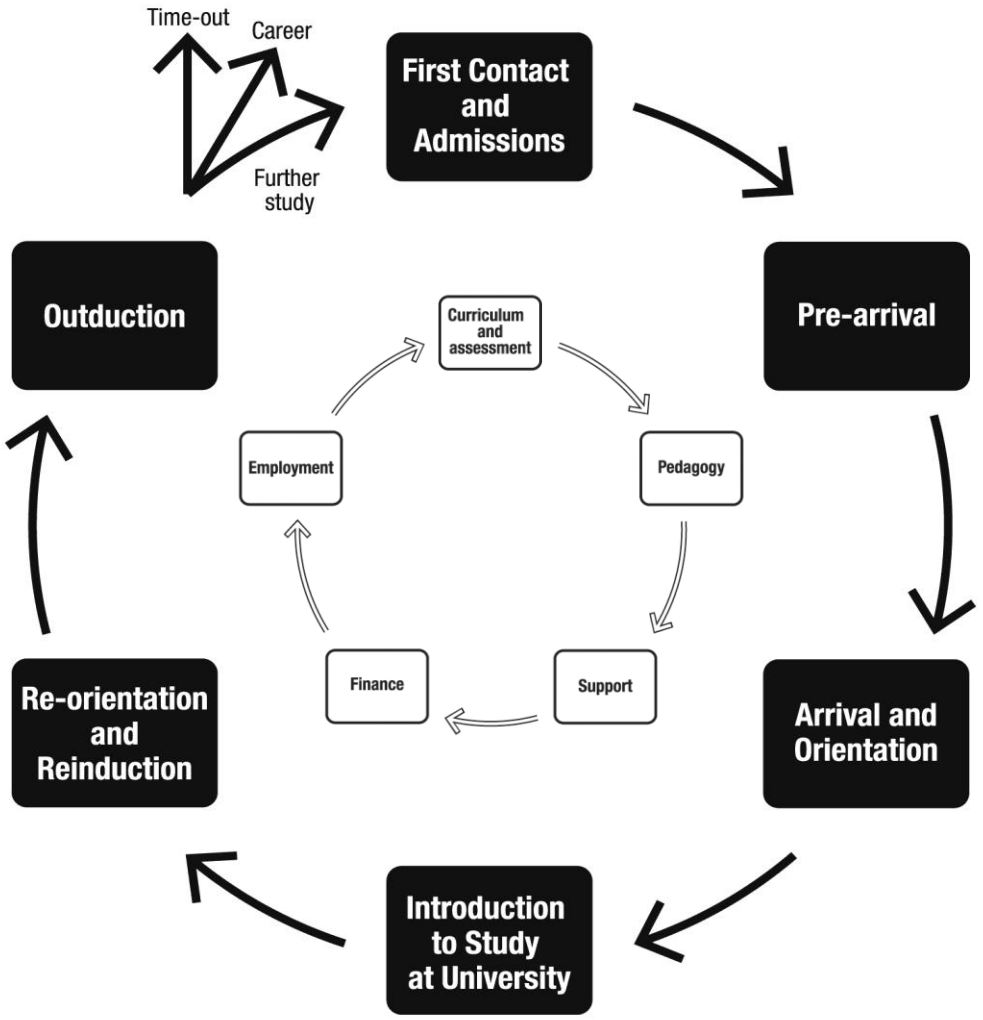
evasys

Understanding the student experience through the student voice

Pre-arrival or arrival questionnaires

Pulse 4 week in surveys

Module Evaluation Questionnaires

Being, Belonging, Becoming (BBB) Survey

Listening to the student voice to make changes in real time