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BANGOR
UNIVERSITY

Embedding research on student engagement in learning: lessons from the from First Welsh Collaborative Enhancement Project

Davies and Lowe

Student Engagement: a Collaborative Enhancement Theme

Wales-wide collaborative approach

Undeb (Bangor SU) Student Futures Commissions :
lack of social interaction impacting on learning.
BU internal group: effects of off-campus teaching,
cohorts and underrepresented groups

Bangor Digest: active participation and interaction, proportion of well-designed studies - less than 2%.

Disciplinary differences

GllM – retention

In May 2021, funding from QAA Cymru.

https://www.qaa.ac.uk//en/membership/collaborative-enhancement-projects-cymru/student-engagement-in-learning.

Rationale:

The definition of student Engagement is cloudy
Establishing what works to meet what need is difficult!

This study helps us determine:

- Factors that drive student engagement

- Students' experiences of group and individual learning

- What defines high quality interventions

Method:

- **Profiling...**

  the engagement of students in in-person and online timetabled events. The use of resources using business reporting and attendance monitoring.
  Orientation and assessment drive engagement.

- **Developing...**

  a definition of 'good-quality' reviewing reports of well-designed interventions.

- **Conducting...**

  focus groups across all three colleges at BU and in GLlM:

  Thirty-two (32) participants years 2 and 3.
  Five groups in each of 3 Bangor Colleges and a follow-up, 1 group at GllM
  Mostly White (N = 27),
  Gender balanced.

Orientation, understanding and testing ideas

- "When you're starting a module, it can be a bit much and comparing notes really helps you get over that."

- "It might just be a couple of minutes, but you really want to be asking, "does this make sense" and it's much harder if you're not walking to lectures together"

- Whatsapp: "Sometimes you see people posting about an idea they've got for their essay. We're a small class (fine art) but people like to talk about it. Sometimes the idea changes quite a lot and is a lot better, I think."

Making sense of assessment and feedback

- "When you walk out of an exam and you think you're bombed it but when you talk to someone in your class, you can see what you've done right too".

- "Feedback can be hard to understand. I'd rather talk to someone in my class first before going to a see a lecturer."

- "if you've got the same feedback, it can help to talk it through"

Instigating Social Learning

- *Study spaces: "It's when you meet people from your course almost accidentally. Not your friends and you get talking about this lecture or that. That's what keeps me going".*

- *•"If I'm feeling a bit unmotivated, I go to our whasapp group. It always makes me feel like I've got something to say."*

- *Mix of staff and students: 'It's paramount. You've got to have the right people in the right place in the institution or you don't have that level of motivation among students'"*

Literature review

Evans' criteria [1]

- Terms including higher education, student engagement and aspects of engagement such as attainment, active learning, retention, belonging and learning style and synonyms

- Databases, biographies of major UK pedagogical institutions and references from key papers.

- A total of 956 items were initially collected.
  - After applying the exclusion and quality criteria, 118 items were selected.
  - Removing: review and theory-focused papers: 60

- Clarity of the pedagogical approach
- Clear information on methods, including sample and measures of success
- Good research design and coherence
- Clear reporting of data
- Explicit implications and recommendations
- Transferability of the findings

- We added impact factor of more than 1.0 and since 2001.

1.Evans C, with Muijs D, & Tomlinson D. *Engaged student learning: high impact strategies to enhance student achievement*. York: Higher Education Academy, 2015.

Good quality interventions

Lecturer-instigated interventions e.g. participative approaches, assessment and feedback techniques, active learning interventions, group work, technologically enhanced learning, flipped lecturers and simulations.

The primary outcome measure: improved **student performance**. Changes in **student perception** were widely reported and behavioural and attitudinal changes.

Some interventions targeted at **risk groups or minorities.**

Peer to peer learning was used as part of other interventions.

Social Learning and EDI

- Parallel with ours. an English CEP was exploring experiences of blended learning using an ethnically-stratified sample (N=900).

- Black, Arab and some Asian groups had a better learning experience off-campus in 2020/21 while White students had a poorer one.

- Major factor, loss of peer interaction.

- Is peer learning better for White students?

2. Dunbar-Morris H, Ali MA, Brindley N, et al. *Analysis of 2021 Differing Perceptions of Quality of Learning: QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project. Gloucester:* Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. 2021. Available at: https://sites.google.com/port.ac.uk/qaa-bame-enhancementproject

EDI and Research

Staff mentoring successful for underrepresented group [3-4]. Early intervention & formative feedback works for at risk minority students [5].

Peer or social learning: Among students whose first language isn't the language of study, social learning was curtailed [6].

How does peer to peer learning work?
Is this different for ethnic or cultural minorities/int students?
In-depth work (Ethnography, diaries, photos).

3. Chelberg K, & Bosman L. The Role of Faculty Mentoring in Improving Retention   Completion Rates for Historically Underrepresented STEM Students. International Journal of Higher Education. 2019, 8 (2), 39-42.
4. Grier-Reed T, Arcinue F, Inman E. The African American Student Network: An intervention for retention. Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 2016, 18 (2),183-193.
5. Espinoza, P. & Genna, GM. Hi, I Want to Talk to You About Your Progress: A Large Course Intervention for At-Risk College Students. Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice 2021, 23(1) 2–27.
6. Sung C, & Cheung M. Negotiating participation and identity in a second language: Mainland Chinese students' English learning experiences in a multilingual university in Hong Kong. Research Papers in Education. 2021, 36(4), 381-40.

Embedding and Use

- **Findings presented to the University**

  - Presented at multiple levels including to the University's main T&L forum

- **Estates strategy development**

  - A new estates strategy is being developed, the key findings will help give a student focus

- **Further Research from the SU**

  - Building on this work the SU ran a survey and focus groups collecting further student feedback

- **Proposals for peer-peer learning research**

  - Structure and impetus to do the work, to disseminate it and to build a network across the institution, Wales and the UK.
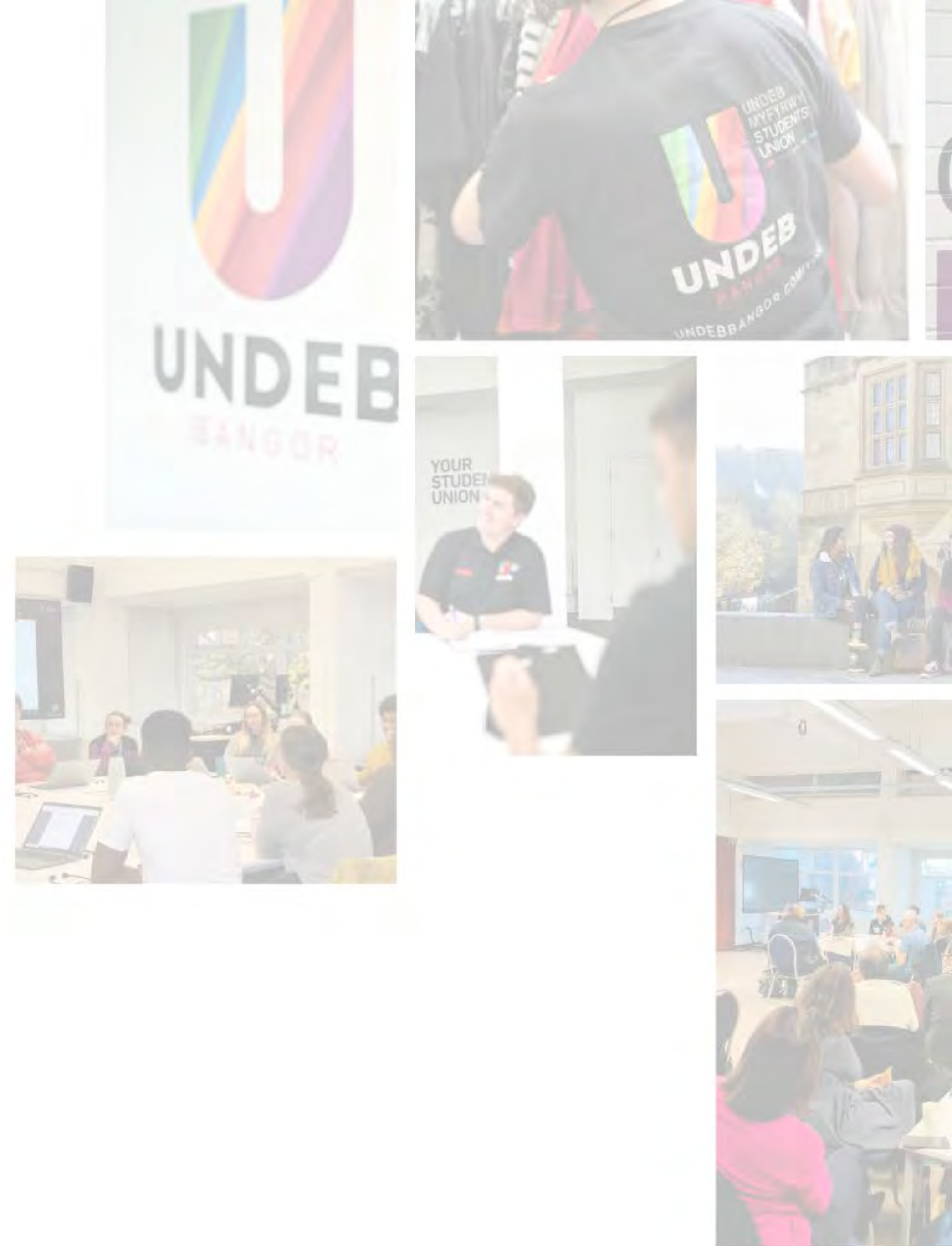
Study spaces survey

Scope

Open for 1 month to all students
Promoted via social media and an all students email

524 respondents
77% of whom use University study spaces

Study spaces survey

Key Findings

- Lack of quiet study spaces

- Lack of charging ports

- Out of hours provision needed

- Different spaces for quiet/silent/ group study

- Equipment to heat food and get drinks needed

- Lack of disabled access/ accessible desks

Study spaces survey

Solutions

- University task and End group to focus on improvements

- Short term fixes to estates
(i.e. More plug sockets)

- Development of new study area in Pontio

- Separating space use: Silent, Quiet, Social

Considerations for future work

Where have students come from?
Culture, social background, friends and family, disability, identity

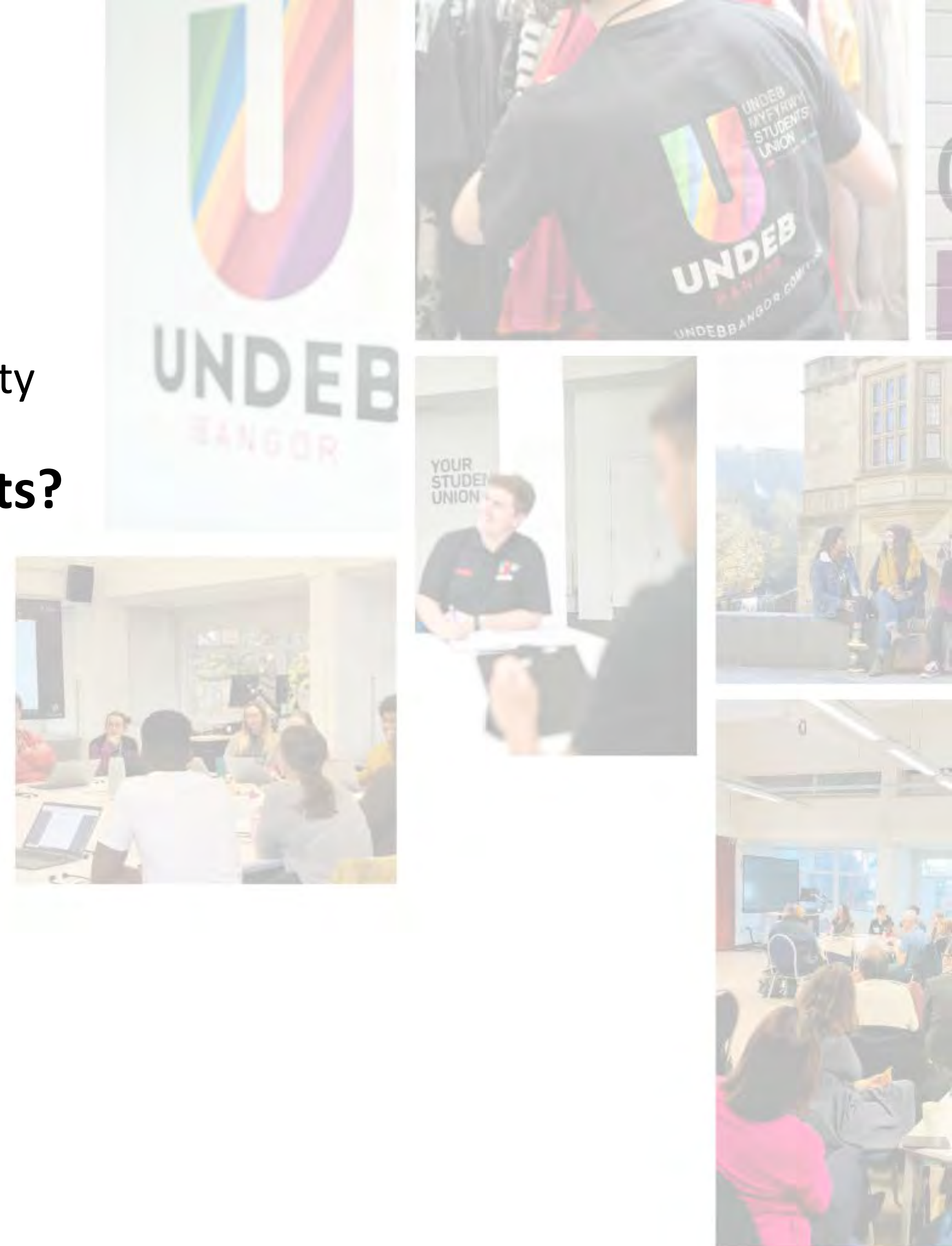## What major external stressors are affecting students?
Cost of Living, Degree value, Strikes

What courses are students on?
Expectations, mindset, method

Distance leaners/ on or off campus?
Access to resources, social opportunities, online/ in person

Conclusions

Peer-Peer learning

Essential to student engagement
Enhancements targeted around student engagement should account for this

- Wales wide project: deliberative stakeholder discussion, relevant questions

- Funding and reporting duties of project provided the structure and impetus to do the work, to disseminate it and build network.

- Discussions led to the study spaces survey

- Findings fed into new strategy group and conversations around Estates.

- Short term and long-term changes planned collaboratively between the University and the SU for social and study spaces

Join us!

There is a lot of further work that can be done across the UK around peer-peer learning

- Further **research** peer-peer learning

- **Sharing** data and key enhancements amongst institutions

- Finding creative and **alternative methods** to boost engagement in:
Teaching
Assessment practice
Feedback collection

- **Toolbox of illustrative interventions:**
https://sites.google.com/view/v4student-engagement/home

Diolch yn fawr!

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