



# Student retention on an Infant Massage Teacher Training Programme

## Touch-Learn International Ltd



Factors influencing non-completion and delayed completion of students on a Level 5 work-based training programme and recommendations for good practice

### Project Theme

Investigating the factors affecting student non-completion and delayed-completion (N-C & D-C) of the Touch-Learn infant massage teacher professional education programme and subsequent changes required to androgogic practice.

#### Hypothesis

It was thought that the company ethos of learning support and positive student experience should lead to low N-C & D-C rates. In addition it was thought that student non-completion and delayed-completion rates were affected by both student related and programme related factors, eg whether a student received adequate support for their learning, whether the programme was long enough, whether the programme was funded by an employer or self-funded and the students' entry-level qualification.

#### About the programme

The Infant Massage Teacher Training Programme is designed and delivered by Touch-Learn International Ltd and received accreditation from Birmingham City University at level 5, 30 credits. It is broadly similar to part-time Foundation Degree level study.

The programme consists of many sessions, consolidated into 5 days, delivered in two parts, spanning 4 months. The programme is studied by professionals, in a work-based learning setting, working to enhance parenting skills, encourage learning and understanding in families. The students accessing the programme are all employed as health professionals or family practitioners working with parents of children in the early years foundation stage (0-5) primarily funded by PCTs, Family Centres

(Sure Start) and national charities such as Barnardo's. The learners' academic attainment ranges from Level 3 to post-graduate level.

#### Why the project?

- Programme Director recognised:
  - as a commercial organisation, in a competitive business environment, the company requires apposite Management Information to make appropriate programme management decisions
  - there was no formal quantitative data to measure student non-completion and delayed-completion
  - there were no procedures in place to capture additional information for the reasons students did not complete or deferred completion

#### Definition of Terms

**Student completing on time:** Completion within the 16 weeks of the programme, attendance to parts 1 and 2 of the programme and all aspects of the programme completed.

**Student delayed completion:** Student has attended part one and two and has outstanding work to complete or attended part one and has yet to attend part 2.

**Student non-completion:** This is where a student has attended part 1 of the programme but has withdrawn completely and will not be attending part 2.

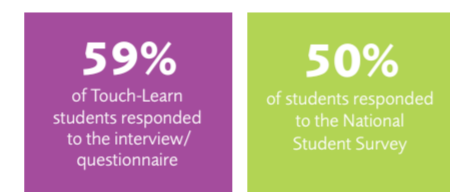
### Investigative Approach

- Fast track ethical approval
- Researched primary and secondary research methods
- Primary Research:
  - To capture and combine qualitative and quantitative data
  - To collate and interrogate existing student data
  - To survey students using interviews and questionnaires

- Secondary Research
  - To identify and investigate factors influencing student withdrawal in other sectors, including FE and HE

#### Data

- 13 courses were identified where part 1 and part 2 had both been completed
- The courses were delivered by 5 different trainers
- Total number of students included in the study were 114 and of these 34 were identified as either delayed-completion or non-completion
- The 34 students identified, received a questionnaire and/or were interviewed



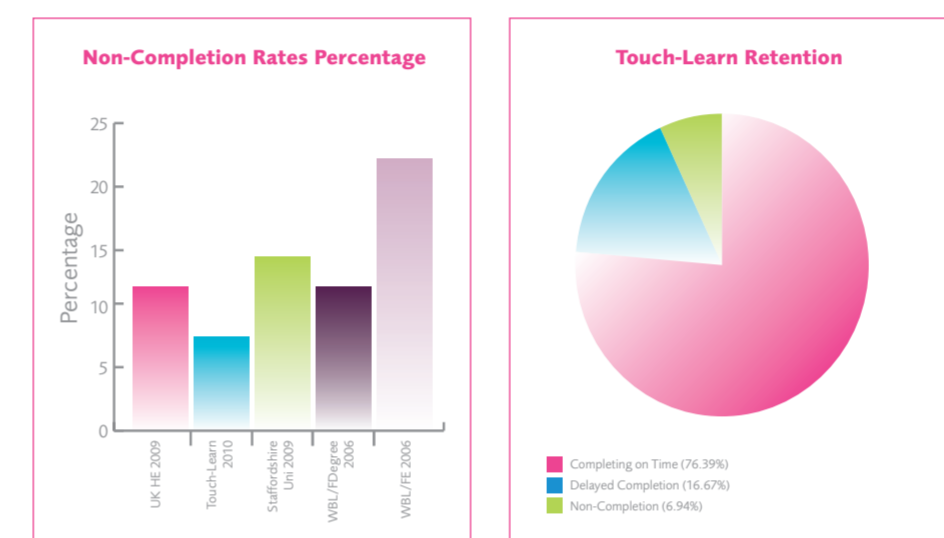
#### Strengths of Approach

- Access to a large sample
- Access to a comprehensive database of participants and extensive, complementary paper records
- A mixed approach meant interviews uncovered opinions that questionnaires did not

#### Limitations of Approach

- Only surveyed late and non-completers, not all the participants
- Literature review did not uncover published work specific to retention on comparative infant massage programmes
- Interviews were not carried out by an independent third party to eliminate possible perception of bias

### Macro Findings



The results of this study show that only 6.94% of students who enrolled on the Touch-Learn Infant Massage Teacher Training programme did not complete the course successfully. This is low compared with students on comparable work-based learning Foundation Degrees, where the non-completion rate in 2006 was 12%. (HESA)

their qualification later than the 4 month programme duration; this delay may have only been a matter of weeks after part two and a late submission of an assignment. Others will have attended another part two not related to their original planned programme.

All Touch-Learn students are encouraged to attend both parts of their two-part programme as planned to maintain their learning community with other learners (Tinto 2003) and momentum of learning. 16.7% of students achieved

### Micro Findings

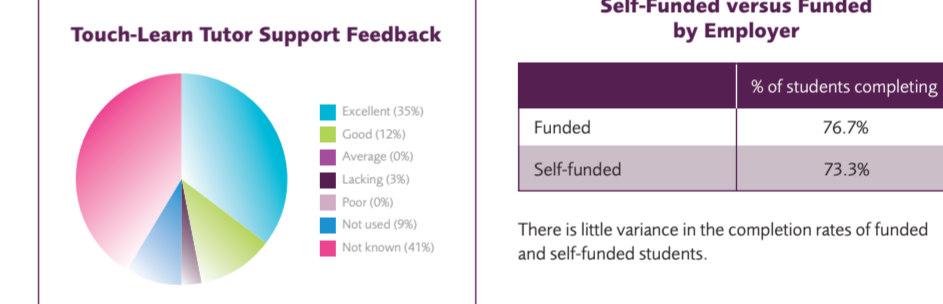


The NE figure is not a true picture due to the small sample size.

This data is comparable with those findings in the Nursing Standard magazine (BBC) that stated that students studying in London/SE were more likely to quit their course than those in other regions.

Overall encouraging findings.

Further investigation is required to determine reasons for differences in trainer percentages.



60% of those students that were interviewed or completed the questionnaire said their tutorial support was excellent.

The students' perceived view of their support from Touch-Learn aligns with Tinto's findings that the student experience of academic support and social integration contributes to lower drop-out rates.

There is little variance in the completion rates of funded and self-funded students.

### Literature Review/References

BERA: Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2004

Dept for Children, schools and families: Further Education, Work Based Learning and Train to Gain - LSC-funded learner outcomes in England 2006/07

Every Child Matters Policy

Francis, F (2010) Student Retention [Lecture] Contemporary Issues, Staffordshire University, PGCHPE, Stafford 12.05.10

HEFCE Student Retention and Success

HESA Non-continuation rates

Higgins et al (2002) The conscientious Consumer - reconsidering the role of assessment feedback in student learning Studies in Higher Education, Vol 27 Iss 1 Feb 2002

Simon Rogers (Guardian correspondent) on the student experience

Quality Assurance Agency for HE: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/foundationDegree/learnin

Salmon, G (2010) http://www.atimod.com/ accessed 1 August 2010

Study of nursing degree drop out rates by region on BBC website.

Tinto (2003) Promoting Student Retention through Classroom Practice

Yorke, M. and Longden, B. (2004), Retention and Student Success in Higher Education, The Society for Research into Higher Education.

### Change to Practice

**Summary of Results**  
The results of the study demonstrate that the overall learning experience of students on the Touch-Learn Infant Massage Teacher Training programme, whether completing on time, slightly later than planned or not at all is very good indeed. This is borne out by the excellent completion rates of 93.06% and that 60% of the respondents rated their tutorial support as excellent.

Those who did not complete the programme attributed this to work, personal and health reasons and not to any aspect of the programme. Those who completed later than expected had many reasons, but felt comfortable overall with the standard length of the programme, apart from some on in-house courses where the number of parents to teach was low.

The original hypothesis that student retention would be high due to receiving positive support throughout their learning experience was proved to be correct. However, the belief that non-completion and delayed-completion would be affected by factors such as whether the programme was long enough, whether funding source was an issue, or the students' entry-level qualification were all unsubstantiated by the study. The qualitative information was invaluable in that it gave a detailed insight into the reasons why students did not complete and why their qualification was delayed allowing for changes to be implemented to meet these shortcomings.

#### Changes to androgogic practice

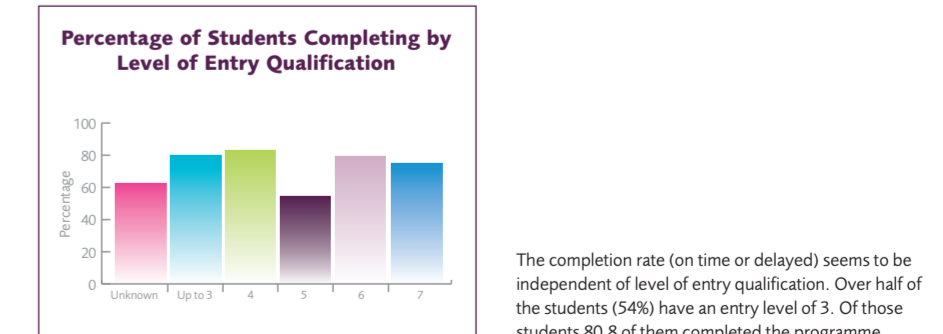
- Introducing more formalised learning communities for tutors and peers (Tinto 2003). Although 60% of students said their tutorial support was excellent, a concerted effort to be made to increase this number and reduce the numbers of students who did not use the tutorial support offered.
- To investigate, in the future, technology-based support for learning, such as web-based communication and resource availability (Salmon 2010).
- Offering an extended programme of say 20 weeks for those students for whom there may be insufficient parents because of many students on an in-house course at one place of employment. However, caution should be exercised as students overwhelmingly agreed that the 16 weeks was just right for the length of the programme.
- A detailed marking and feedback guide to be formulated that is valuable for trainer and student alike as students commented that they were unsure how to complete competencies and feedback from trainers was sometimes unhelpful (Higgins 2002).
- Performing exit interviews with students that do not complete the programme to keep up-to-date with students' experience of the programme.

### Feedback from Students

The reasons for students not completing are unrelated to the content, structure and delivery of the programme.

Delayed completion reason 'other' includes mainly outstanding assessments or inability to find enough parents for teaching practise within the programme time frame. Improvement to practice required here.

The majority felt the programme length was just right. However, six students felt the programme was too short; two of these had high work loads and two could not find parents to teach in the time frame.



The completion rate (on time or delayed) seems to be independent of level of entry qualification. Over half of the students (54%) have an entry level of 3. Of those students 80.8 of them completed the programme.