Wish You Were Here: 
*attendance monitoring as a student support mechanism*

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**Background**

From 2001 to 2003, the Learner Experience and Achievement Project (LEAP) conducted at Southampton Institute consistently demonstrated that students who regularly attend classes were more likely to enjoy their courses, feel socially and academically integrated, persist in their studies and get better grades (Lim 2004). These findings are also more widely reported in the recent literature (Moore 2003, Stanca, 2004).

Students did not attend for a variety of reasons ranging from illness to having to work in paid employment. Non-attendance could also be an indicator that things were not going well for the student, a sub-conscious ‘cry for help’. We know from the research that students who did not attend were more likely to fall behind with their coursework, feel disengaged from the curriculum, get poorer grades, and in some cases, withdraw from their courses.

Yet, LEAP also consistently found that students who encountered problems did not always know who to approach for help and advice; or were reluctant to ask for help.

The issues arising from LEAP and other investigative initiations within the Institute led to closer consideration of how we support our students and the systems we have in place to ensure this.

**Supporting Students through Attendance Monitoring**

In 2002, the *Student Support Network* (SSN) was introduced to ease the transition into university life. The SSN is an innovative team-based approach designed to be pro-active in identifying and responding to student needs and to integrate student support across the Institute. The Network puts individual learners in touch with those best able to provide the help that they need, when they need it.

In the Faculty of Technology, an integral component of SSN is *attendance monitoring*. This was introduced as a proactive tool for identifying and supporting ‘at risk’ students. The attendance monitoring is a three-stage process best illustrated in the following diagram.