

Retention Guide: FutureLearn

This is a guide to facilitate retention strategies for FutureLearn courses.

Ideally, the educator will be spending 30 minutes a day on FutureLearn engaging with students, answering questions, liking and pinning comments, and prompting further discussion where necessary.

The aim is to establish and maintain regular contact with students, adapted to suit their learning style, your teaching style, and the course itself. We suggest contacting students directly (via Blackboard/email) approx. once a week or fortnight, whether in the form of announcements, reminders about course content, video announcements, or more focused emails touching base at key points in semester. Brief weekly announcements at the start of the week are useful in encouraging continuous engagement and helps ensure students aren't falling behind week-to-week. Be clear about each week's objectives. **Key points to consider in planning your course:**

- As you'll likely be engaging with students across multiple platforms (FutureLearn, Blackboard, email), we suggest you streamline your overall approach as much as possible. Clearly outline to students where the majority of their information will be shared (FutureLearn). Keep Blackboard clean of course materials other than assessment submission, course outline, etc – limit to using FutureLearn primarily. No need to use BB Discussion Forums. Maximise engagement by posting key announcements (e.g. assessment due dates) to Blackboard, sharing via email, and including key information in the weekly steps on FutureLearn – e.g., at the end of the week, including a step with a reminder about assessment due dates.
- Regular, personalised contact via FL, emails, and videos helps students feel accountable, puts a face to a name, and reminds them to reach out if they find themselves struggling during the course.
- In communication to students, emphasise self-direction, peer engagement, and the significance of students holding themselves accountable in an online course.
- Peer engagement: Emphasis in establishing a cohort amongst online students through weekly activities, that are adapted to meet the flexibility of the online cohort.
- Quick turnaround of marking with detailed feedback is important for retention. If your first assessment is due and returned before the census date, students may feel more confident of their performance in and understanding of the course.

Sample Timeline: FutureLearn

Time	Action	Action Completed?
Prior to Course Beginning	Blackboard: Post clear directions on how to access the FL course. Include a brief guide on FL terminology, and expectations of the course. Remind students that while staff will be present, consistent, self-directed learning is integral to online learning.	
	If applicable, remind students about MOOC (Massive Open Online Learning) component for first portion of course. While significantly beneficial, MOOC environments run the risk of overwhelming enrolled students with large number of voices/comments. Encourage students to enjoy opportunity for engagement with wide variety of perspectives and knowledge.	

Weeks 1-2	Introduction and welcome to the course: everything they need to know. Remind students to check their student emails regularly. Ensure contacts via BB are clearly displayed.	
	Brief daily engagement with students' comments, continued throughout course. Focus on encouraging engagement through FL tools such as "liking" comments, using @ to reply to students, and "pinning" exemplar comments.	
	Check student engagement in Blackboard and FutureLearn, contacting those who are yet to enter FutureLearn (or log on to Blackboard). Provide a reminder on how to access the course, and remind them that they can contact you if they have any concerns. You can check this in Blackboard by clicking Evaluation in the left menu>Retention Centre. You can also follow Evaluation>Performance Dashboard to view the last time students have accessed Blackboard. Check in FutureLearn by clicking the top left drop down menu (nine dots). Click Learning Manager, then click on your course. Click on a student's profile to see their engagement.	
Weeks 4-5	If applicable, have strategies in place for a post-MOOC environment, as participation will likely significantly drop once the course is closed to enrolled students. In the lead-up to the MOOC closing, remind students regularly via BB or email about the expected shift in dynamic, and encourage them to use this opportunity to have their voice heard if they've been quiet.	
	Reminders about upcoming first assessment (structure as appropriate for your due dates). Direct to additional resources, key information, and extension process through Adverse Circumstances if necessary.	
Weeks 6-8	Strong emphasis in lead-up to key dates and assessment due dates: ensuring information is clear, issuing a FAQ for assessments. Regular reminders about due dates, assessment requirements, and directing students to additional resources.	
	1-2 days after assessment due dates, contact any students who did not submit. Remind students about how to apply for extensions through Adverse Circumstances. Remind students that for each day past the due date, they risk 10% of the total possible grade for that assessment being deducted.	
	After first assessment results are released, contact students based on results and engagement in the course. Emphasis is recommended to be placed on encouraging peer support and recognising strong engagement – e.g., encouraging 'team leaders' who can lead discussion and assist their peers' engagement – and offering support for students who may be at risk or hesitant to speak up in online spaces. Consider how to best adapt your approach for your students – gentle support and encouragement may be best suited to some students, whereas a firmer approach may be more beneficial for others. See templates at the end of this guide.	
Semester Break	Use semester break as opportunity to encourage students to catch up on content they've missed, or to take a well-earned break.	
	Follow steps in Weeks 1-2 to check student engagement/retention; contact using templates below.	
Weeks 9-10	Reminders about upcoming assessments, resources, skills workshops available online through UoN library.	
Weeks 11-13	Continuing regular reminders and posts, touching base with students, particularly those at risk.	
	Emphasis on final assessments/exams, providing resources, additional information. Remind students to apply for Adverse Circumstances if appropriate.	

Email Templates

Templates should be adapted and personalised to suit the context.

For students who were active initially, but have since lessened their engagement:

Hi there,

I hope you're well! I'm writing to discuss your performance in **COURSE** on FutureLearn. I've noticed you were quite active early on in the course, demonstrating strong engagement with some great discussion, but haven't necessarily been as active of late on FutureLearn. I wanted to reach out to make sure you were still on track – please contact me if you have any concerns with the course or your performance. It would be great to see you bringing your thoughts to our weekly discussions – it would be a real benefit to hear your voice in these spaces.

For students who've performed well in the first assessment, but haven't been active on FL:

Hi there,

I hope you're well! I'm writing to discuss your performance in **COURSE** on FutureLearn. I've noticed you performed well in the first assessment, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the concepts we've been exploring. It would be valuable to see you bringing your thoughts to our weekly discussions – it would be a real benefit to hear your voice in these spaces, as peer engagement is a key part of online learning.

For students who aren't active on FL (tweaked to suit particular students/modes of engagement):

Hi there, I'm writing to touch base with you regarding your engagement with **COURSE** on FutureLearn. From your profile, it appears you've made limited progress, or haven't commented or directly engaged with many steps. This may be a result of you not clicking the "Mark as Complete" button on each step as you complete the task. However, I wanted to reach out and make sure you were on track with the course and course content. In an online course, the onus is on you to keep up to date and make sure you are actively learning and working with the course. Engaging directly with material, and demonstrating your understanding of content in the discussions is vital to benefiting from the course. If you feel you're falling behind, or would like to discuss this further, please let me know. I encourage you to start actively engaging with the course material as you progress, which will have the added benefit of strengthening your final assessments.

If this is something you'd like to discuss further, or if you feel you may need further assistance, don't hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to seeing your voice pop up in the discussion!

For students who have been ideal FL students:

Hi ,

I hope you're well! I'm writing to commend you on your performance so far on FutureLearn. You've been an active participant in each step, and it's been great to see you engaging with the course content, as well as having many interesting discussions with your peers. We'd love to see you continue setting such a strong example as the course continues, encouraging others who've been more reserved to share their ideas and opinions.

I look forward to continuing to see your great comments on the site!