

# Promoting retention across the School of Medical Sciences by providing flexible support strategies



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## Background

- Retention figures over last few years suggest a number of students “dropping out” in level 3 (as high as 11%)
- Anecdotal reports suggests a major factor is “stress-related” illness
- CLSM retention and progression committee agreed that provision of support across level 3 might help reduce this loss
- Appointed “Level 3 Retention Coordinator” in 2010 - Dr Steve Tucker
- Role expanded to include level 3 and 4 in 2011

## Reasons for elevated student stress in level 3

- Change in examination format from MCQ-style to essay-style
- Grades now count towards entry into level 4 (Honours) and also for Honours project ranking
- Greater work load and increasing emphasis on mechanistic understanding
- Material being taught at a faster pace and more advanced level
- An increased expectation on students for self-directed learning

## Support strategy aims

- Promote awareness of the challenges at level 3
- Provide a point of contact for troubled students
- Offer advice and guidance with level 3 issues
- Establish links to other staff members & support services
- Advertise level 3 and 4 opportunities
- Create a sense that level 3 is a surmountable challenge

## Support Strategy 1 – The Welcome Meeting

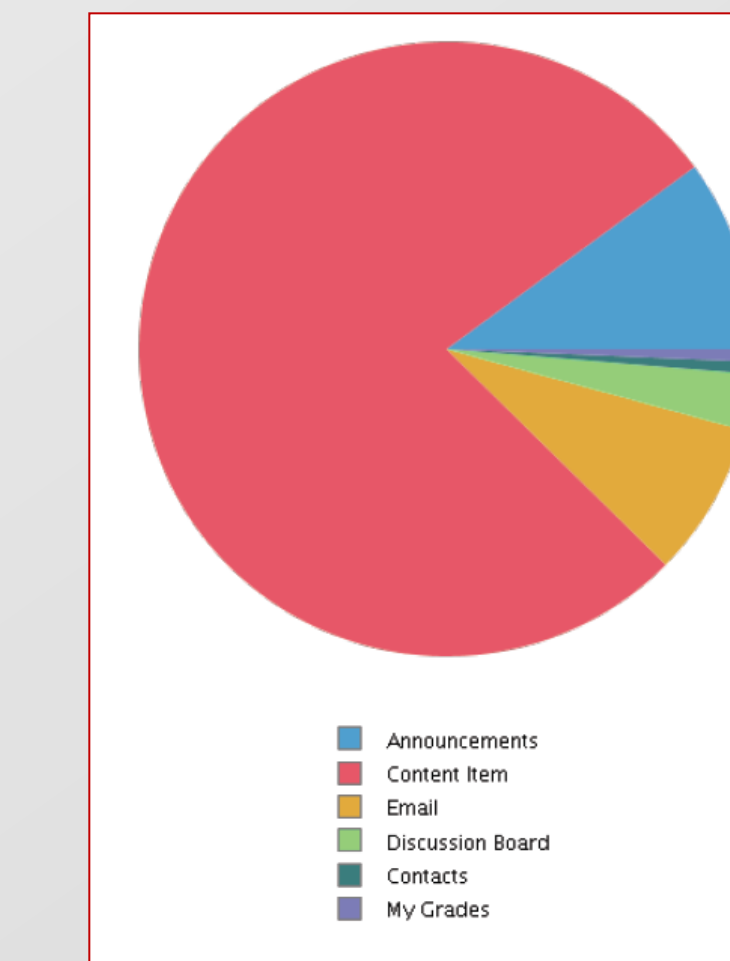
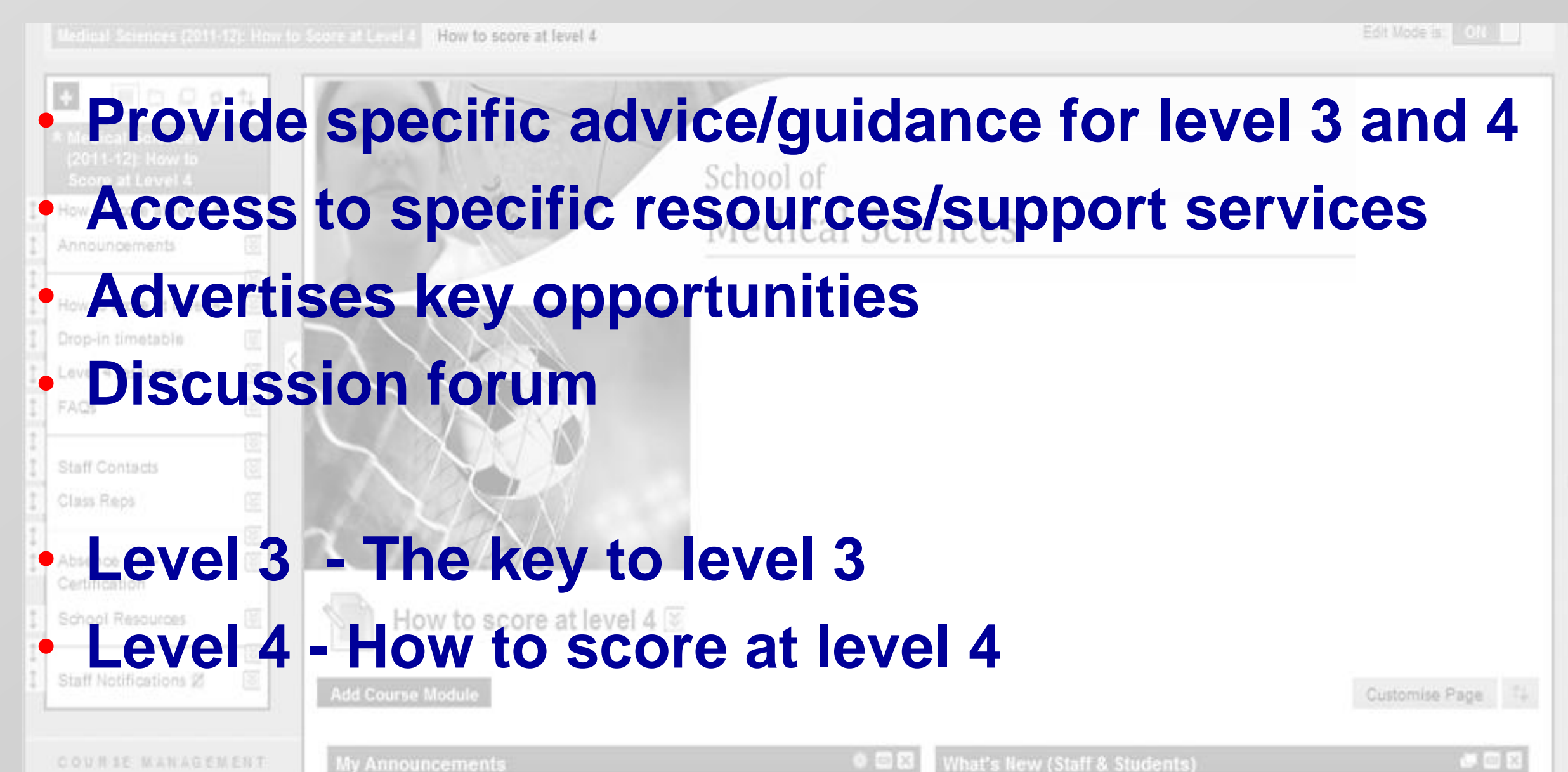
- For all SMS level 3 students
- Friday of Advancing week
- Introduces:
  - role of Retention Coordinator
  - challenges/expectations at level 3
  - related staff
  - welcoming and friendly atmosphere
- Sets student minds at ease and begins year in a reassuring way

## Support strategy 2 – The drop-in session

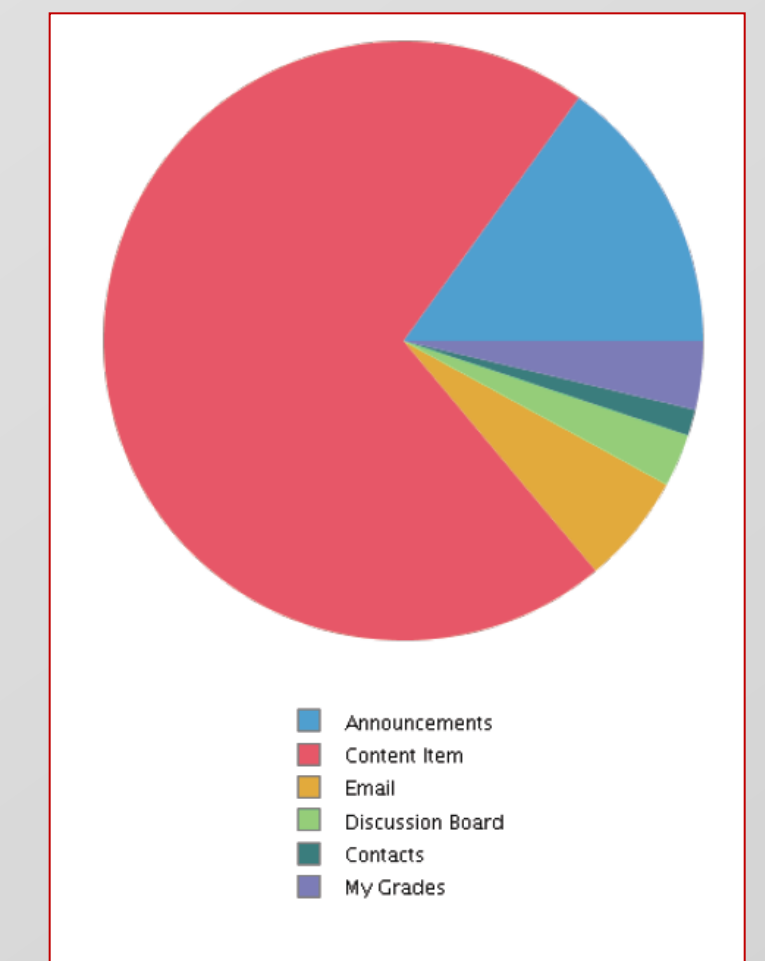
- Every Wednesday afternoon (accessible for students)
- Allocated room where co-ordinator is present to advise and provide help/guidance face to face
- No appointment necessary
- ~300 students attended in first year
- Spectrum of problems (academic difficulties → serious personal issues)

## Support strategy 3 – MyAberdeen sites

- Provide specific advice/guidance for level 3 and 4
- Access to specific resources/support services
- Advertises key opportunities
- Discussion forum
- Level 3 - The Key to level 3
- Level 4 - How to score at level 4



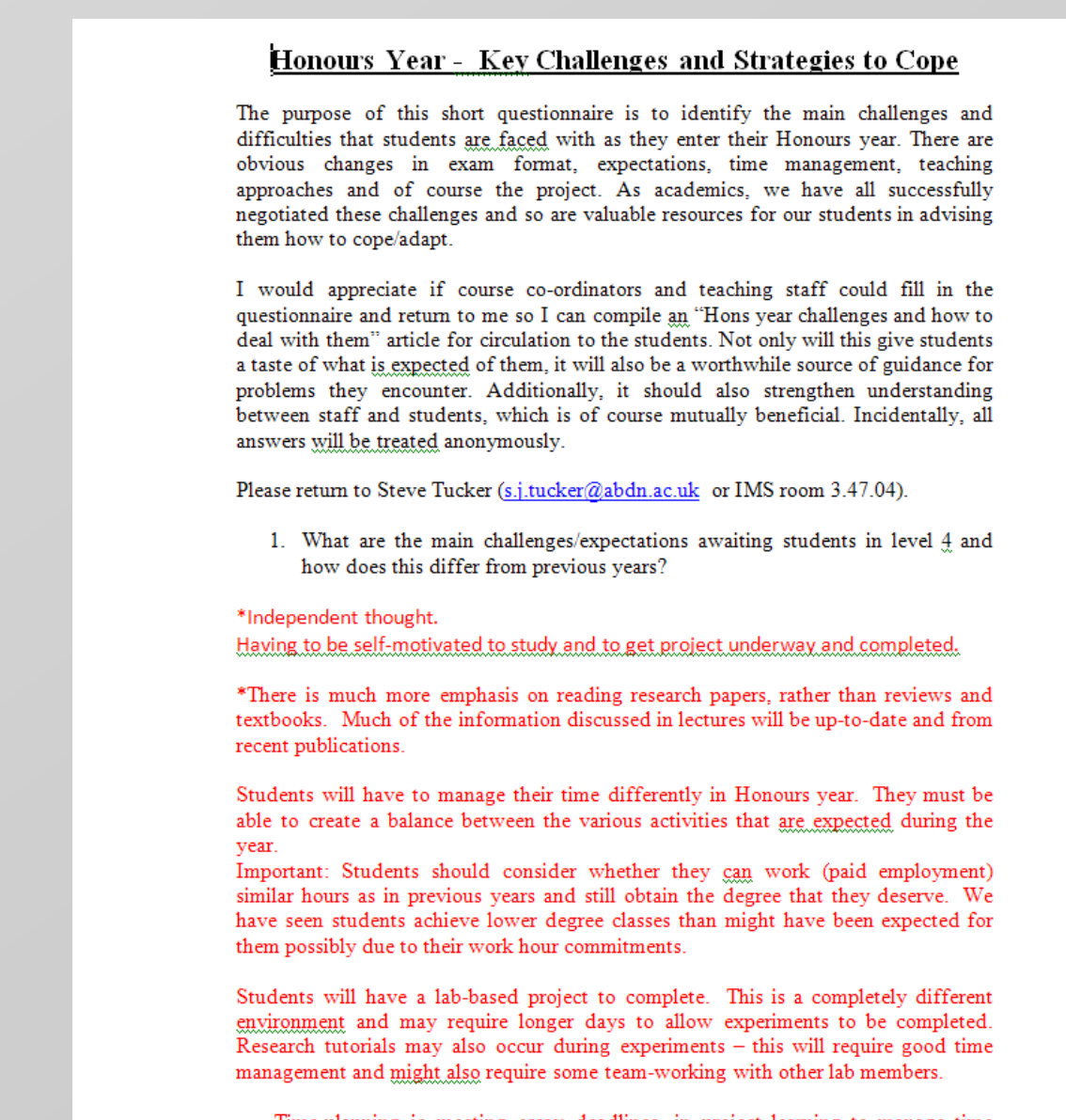
**The Key to level 3**  
~ 1000 hits in term 1



**How to score at level 4**  
~ 600 hits in term 1

- Most commonly accessed on these sites:
  - the resources folders (red)
  - the announcement area (blue)
  - circulated emails (orange)

## Support strategy 4 – The Staff Questionnaire



- Circulated to teaching staff
- Real advice on Hons year
- Tried and tested methods
- Fascinating results
- Posted on MyAberdeen site
- Same done with level 3
- Real life resource

## Summary

- Flexible and informal methods are designed to lessen the stress associated with level 3 and 4 and provide support, advice and guidance where required
- Holistic approach designed to provide face-to-face, remote and written/resource-based help at a key time in the UG degree.