

Attendance monitoring as a trigger for student support

Debbie Bevitt, Chris Baldwin & Jane Calvert

School of Biomedical Sciences

Newcastle University



Context



- 12 degree programmes within the school
- 2008-09 intake: ~300students
- how can we identify students at risk of failure & withdrawal?
- ~110 personal tutors drawn from across medical faculty
- how can we ensure consistency of support?

Phase 1 advisors

- Provide a “backup” to the personal tutor system
- **Monitor student attendance** at seminars and practicals in Phase 1 and interview non-attendees.
- Meet with students who fail in-course assessment and Semester 1 exams and offer **additional support**



Attendance monitoring: potential benefits

- To identify students who are struggling and offer support
- To encourage good study habits at an early stage
- Signals to the student that the university cares about their progress
- Correlation between attendance and retention/performance

Bowen et al., 2007, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, **29**, 375-385

Newman-Ford et al., 2008, *Studies in Higher Education*, **33**, 699-717

Why monitor practicals and seminars?



- Often associated with development of key skills
- Smaller class sizes and less frequent than lectures – more practical to monitor

These are “high stakes” classes for student

- harder to catch up
- may miss in-class assessment
- smaller classes therefore absence more obvious

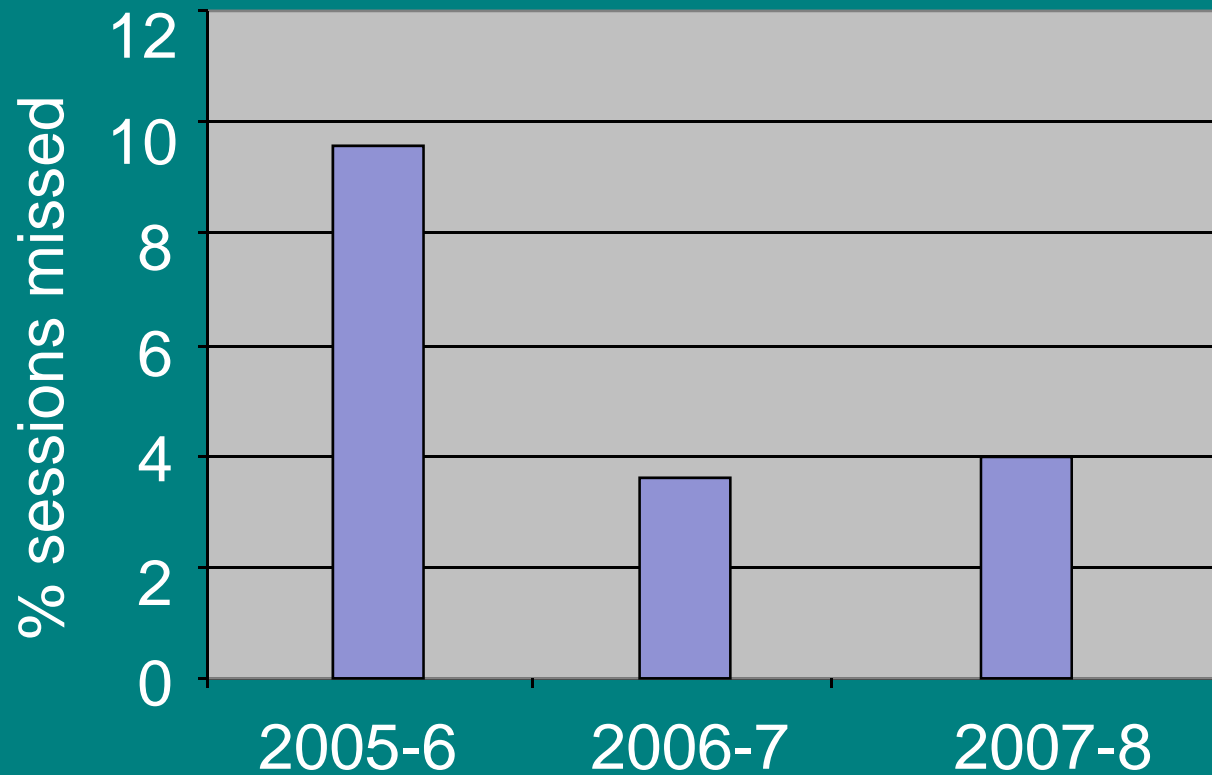
Missing these classes is high-risk for the students (compared to lectures) and absence is more likely to indicate disengagement

Attendance Monitoring: Methods

- Attendance monitored by signed register at all practical and seminar sessions in Stage 1 (& Stage 2 semester 1)
- Absentees contacted by email and required to attend interview with Phase 1 advisor
- Non-response to email followed up by letter from Phase 1 advisor
- Persistent absentees received letter from Head of School

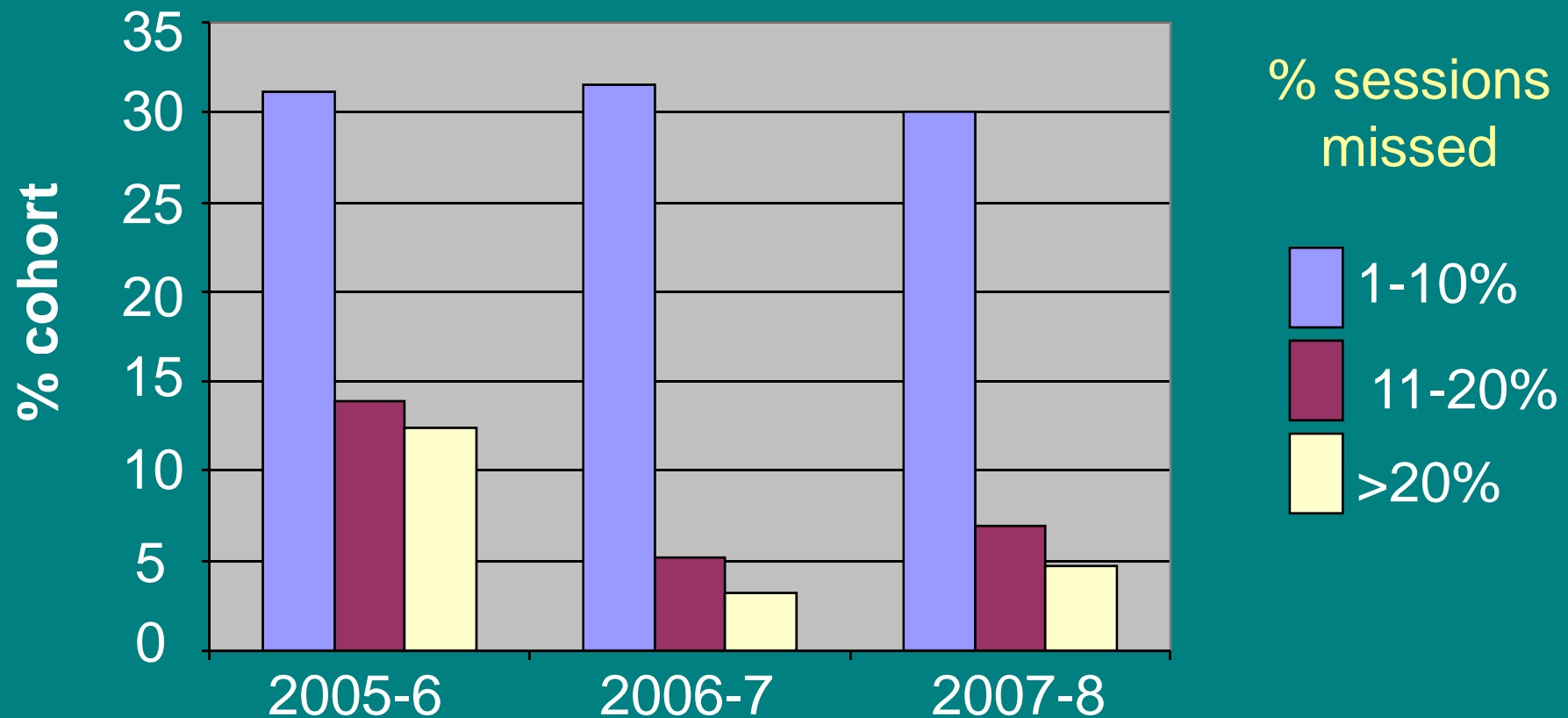
Outcomes

- Reduced absence from monitored sessions



Absence rates before and after introduction of Phase 1 advisors

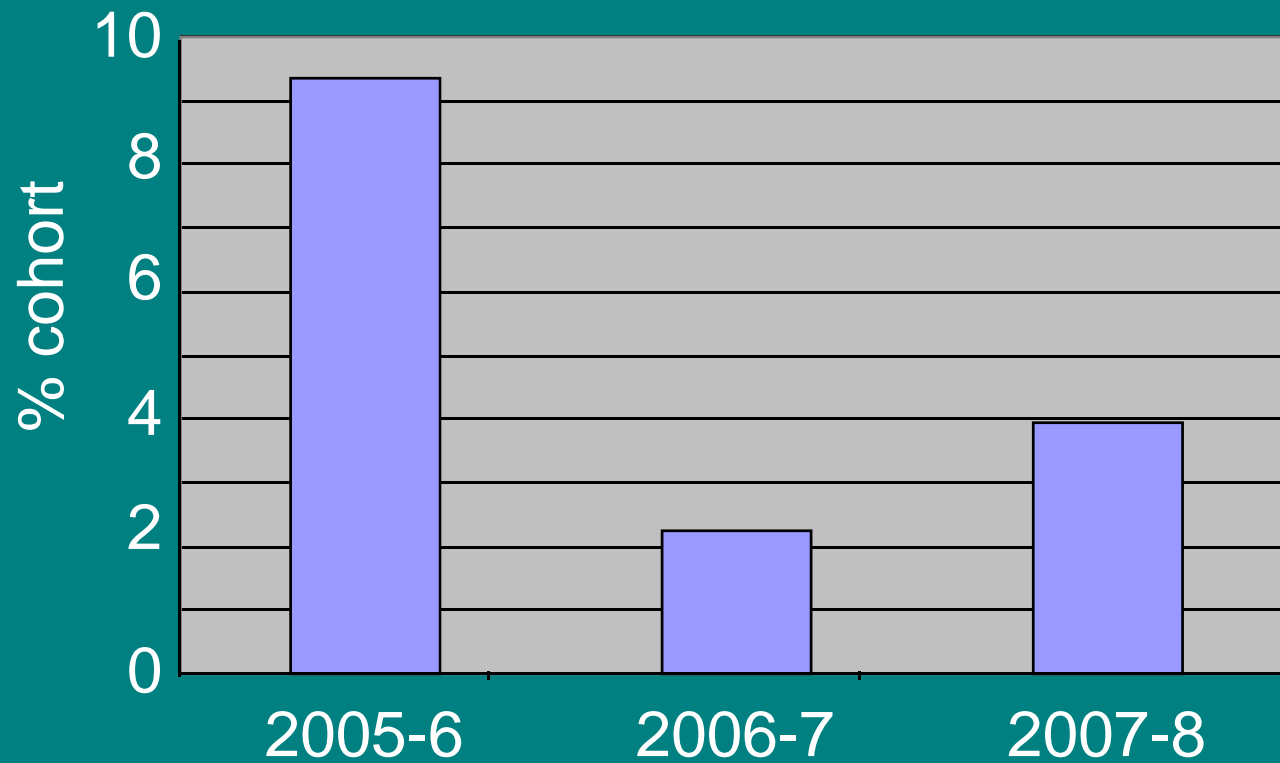
- Most significant impact was on the most “serious offenders”



Comparison of low, moderate and high absenteeism before and after introduction of Phase 1 advisors

Note added after presentation: The scale on this graph has been corrected from 0-70% to 0-35%.
Apologies for the original error!

- A reduction in % students failing and/or withdrawing



% students failing and/or withdrawing before and after introduction of Phase 1 advisors

What do the students think?

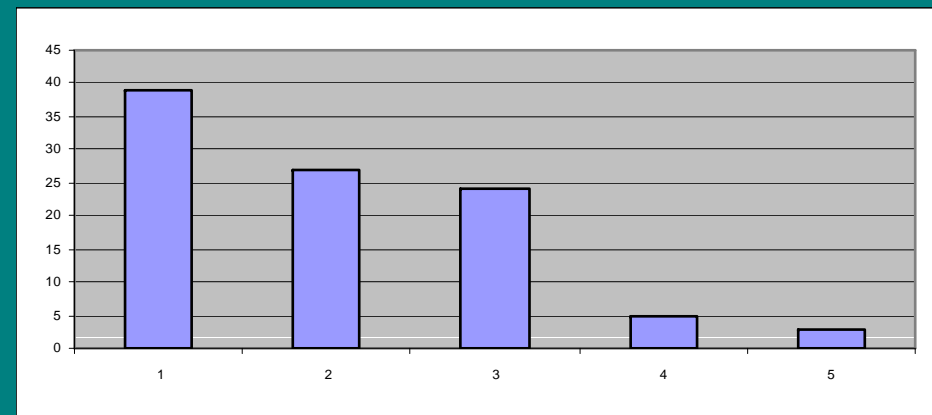
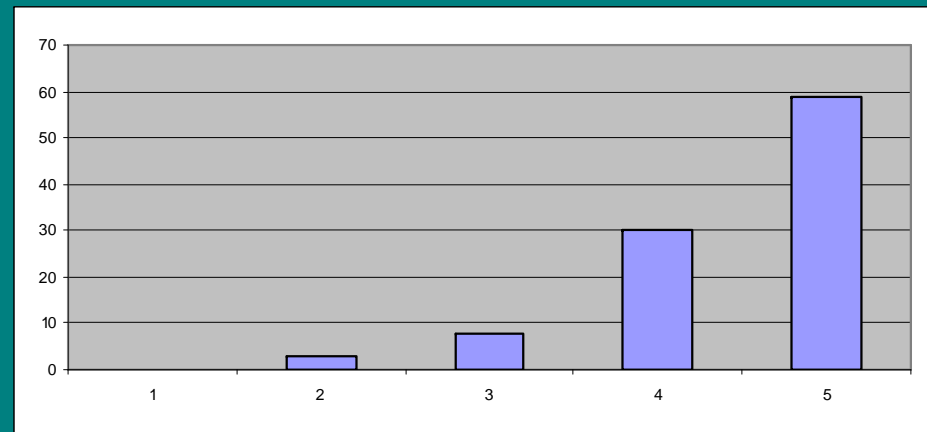
N=105; compliance ~ 20%

I would attend classes regardless of whether attendance was monitored

Attendance at classes should be optional and not monitored

disagree

agree

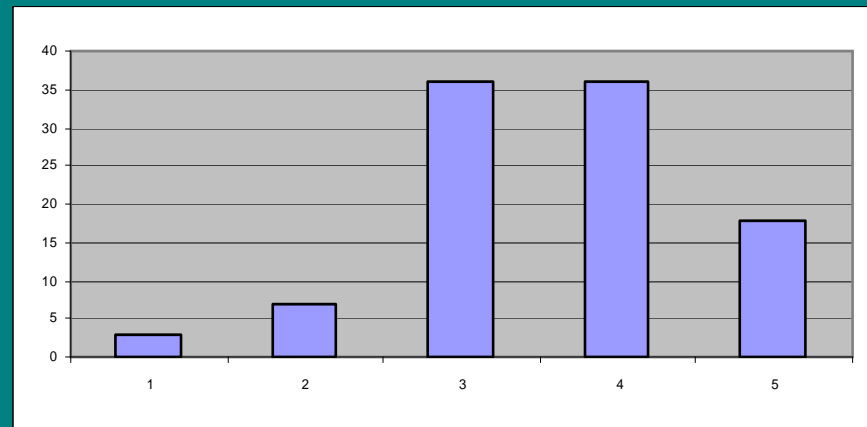
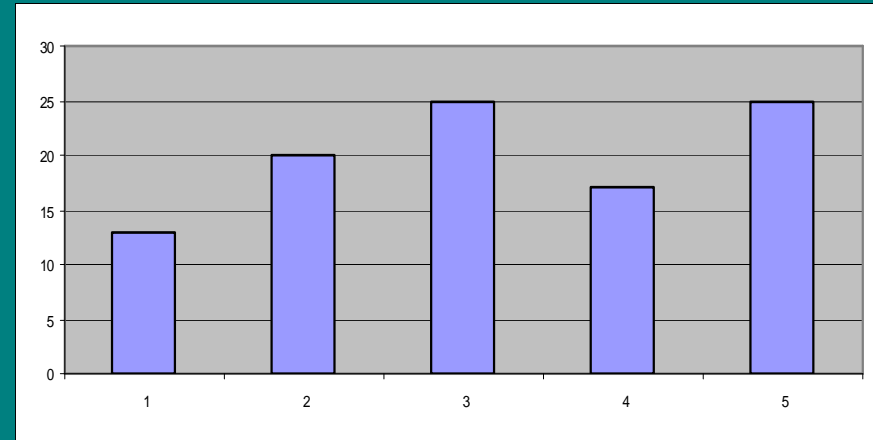


Knowing that my attendance is monitored has motivated me to attend classes

Knowing that my attendance is monitored makes me feel the university cares about my progress

disagree

agree



Summary

We have piloted a student support system which is triggered by poor attendance at “high stakes” classes in the early stage of studies

