



# EARLY ALERT AS RETENTION TOOL MAU's way

Dorota Gorna, Study and Career Adviser



# Facts about Malmö University

- Newest university in Sweden
- Founded in 1998
- 24 000 Students
  - Women 67 percent
  - Men 33 percent
- 100 educational programmes
  - 350 courses
- 1800 Employees
  - Women 55 percent
  - Men 45 percent
- Five multidisciplinary faculties
  - Faculty of Culture and Society
  - Faculty of Education and Society
  - Faculty of Health and Society
  - Faculty of Odontology
  - Faculty of Technology and Society



# Facts about Malmö University

## The Student Centre at MAU

A single point of access for a vast range of student services

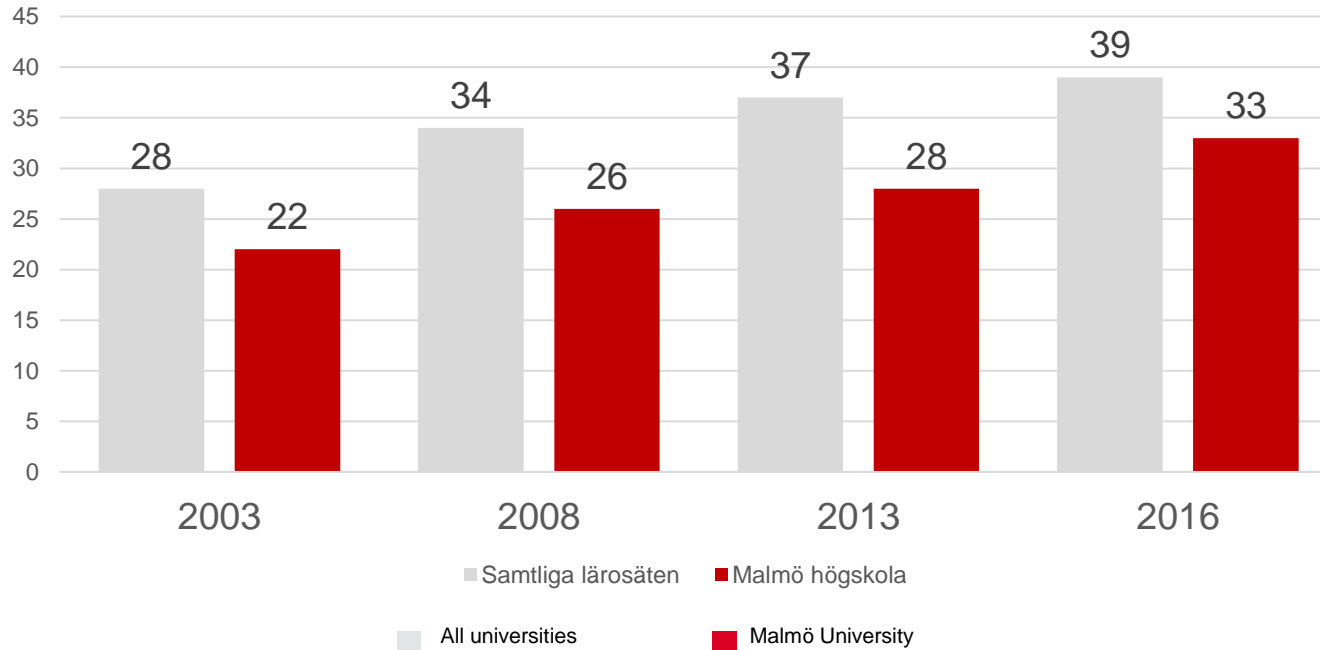
- Study Guidance
  - Student Health Service
  - Disability services
  - Career Services
  - International Office
  - University Chaplains
  - Housing Office
  - Admissions Office
  - Degree Office
- Additional student services at the faculties



# Percentage of first time students with university-educated parents

Andel studenter med högutbildade föräldrar i  
procent

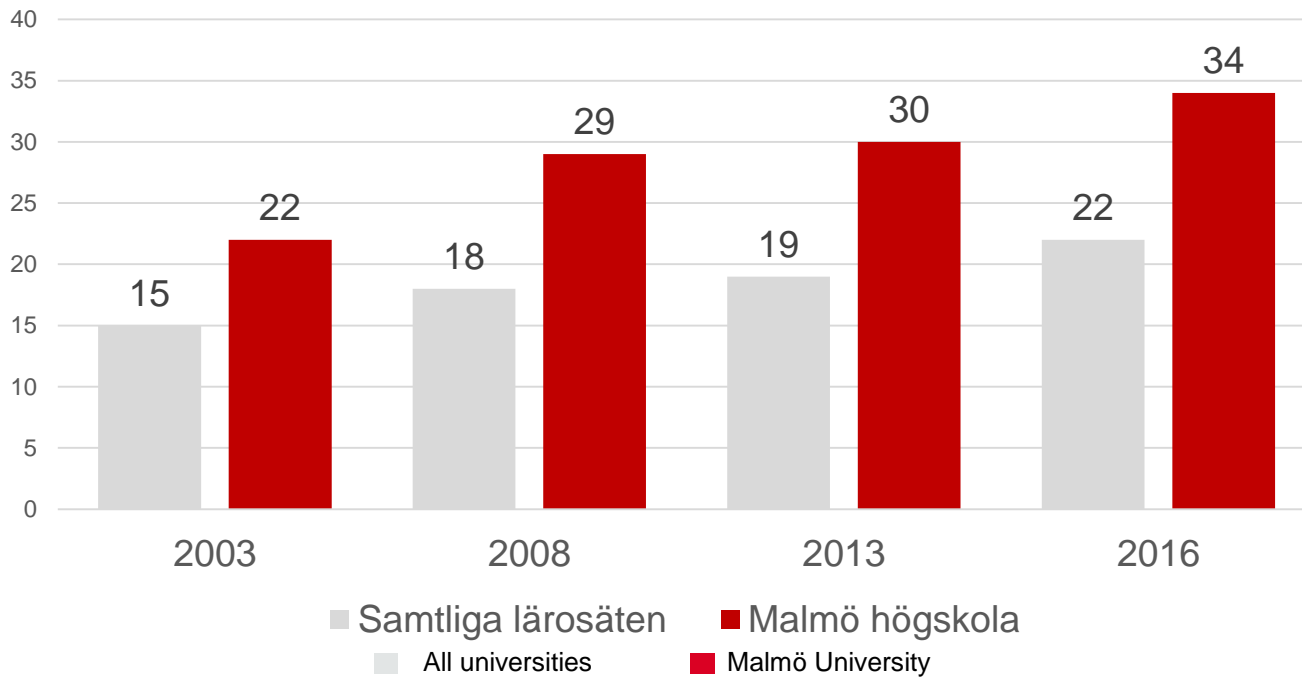
Högskolenybjörjare



Källa: UKÄ

# Percentage of students with foreign background, First time students

## Andel studenter med utländsk bakgrund i procent Högskolenybjörjare



Källa: UKÄ



# Student Retention Challenges



MAU's aim since 1998 –  
to reflect the community at large

- ✓ Widening participation – ✓
- ✓ Retention - ■

# Building A Student Retention Plan



**How to approach such a complex problem in a simple way?**

**Where to begin?**





# Definitely not alone



Retention is everybody's business  
Shared responsibility for success, but also for failure

Well... Ok then.



**Action!**

# **It all started Fall 2015**

## **Pilot at the Faculty of Technology and Society**

- A small team consisting of head of Student Affairs, study and career counselling, experts in system development and from Ladok was tasked with designing a system for Early Alert
- Existing web-based systems (Ladok, Sila, Apsis) were discussed
- Purpose: Develop an Early Alert method for ensuring that students at risk are aware of available support, e.g. academic support, study guidance, study planning, Student Health services etc
- Also to make academic leaders and programme coordinators aware of specific needs for improvement in their programmes
- No new system to be developed – existing systems were to be used (e.g., Ladok)
- Achievable with existing personnel.



# The Pilot

- First Time Students at Malmo Univesity
- Programmes and courses at the undergraduate level
- Both programmes and single subject courses
- Full-time students
- Students without results or failed
- Period of review: 10 weeks after start of semester
- Mail was send to all students in the target group with recommendation to contact study adviser at their faculty

# Early Alert Letter

(Send by email via Apsis)

Dear Emma,

We hope that you are enjoying life with us as a student. However, certain events in life can have a negative effect on your studies. You have been sent this letter as we have noticed that you have not achieved the required results in your programme. We would like to know if you need our help to complete your studies in the best way possible.

Have you experienced any of the following?

You are finding it difficult to keep up with your studies

You are uncertain about whether the programme is the right one for you

You are experiencing personal problems that are affecting your studies

You have health problems

You need support because of a functional impairment

You need to improve your study technique or your language skills

There other things going on in your life that are having a negative effect on your studies

If you feel that any of the above apply to you, we want you to know that support is available at Malmö University.

If you would like to discuss your study situation, you are welcome to contact me. I work as a study guidance counsellor Faculty of Culture and Society I can help you with study-related matters although we can also discuss other forms of support.

We feel it is important that you are happy and that you succeed in your studies. At the same time, we will do everything in our power to help you, although it is up to you to take the first step.

As a follow-up to this letter, we will contact you by phone in about two weeks to complete a questionnaire. We hope that you are open to the idea of answering a few questions about your reaction to this letter and whether it has resulted in you taking any action to address the situation.

Kind regards,

Viktoria Brännström

P.S.

If you are no longer studying at Malmö University, it is important that you notify us that you have withdrawn from the programme. You can do this by using the Malmö University online form store: <https://formstore.mah.se/Withdrawal>

# The Pilot Result

- Very little response
- Decision was made to use student co-workers from Study and Career Counselling Programme to do phone interviews using a template with open questions
- Trained student co-workers made a follow-up phone calls to students who failed to respond to their letter of notification
- Vast majority of students appreciated the interview and wanted to share their experiences



# Interview questions Examples

(Fall 2017 Response collection via Google Forms)

- How are you managing with the course/programme?
- If withdrawal was made: To improve the way we work, would you like to tell us why you withdrew from the programme? What reasons would you say were the most important in your decision to withdraw from your studies?
- The reason why you have received an email is that we can see that you have not yet acquired any credits. As a university, what could we have done different at the beginning to ensure that you did not find yourself in your present situation?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

**”It was just what I needed”**

And so was MAU's idea for Early Alert born





# Encouraging results from the Pilot

- In the fall of 2016 the Early Alert programme was extended to include the Faculties of Technology and Society, Culture and Society and Health and Society
- Should in time be expanded to include all faculties at the university to ensure equal access to support and opportunity for all students regardless of where they study
- Same methodology as the Pilot
- This time a group of 274 students from a total population 2318 (11,8%) were chosen.
- A majority of the students had seen the mail but few had read it. 170 out of the 274 that had been contacted participated in the phone interviews.
- We wanted to find the smallest common denominator for the poor study performance. Four areas could be identified:
- Fall 2017 the Early Alert programme was extended to include four faculties. Result 522 students in the target group. 319 interviews

# Conclusions on Early Alert

- Some form of credit awarding activity must have taken place before the date of follow-up
- Results of an examination must have been uploaded to Ladok before letters are sent
- Vast majority of students were positive towards the contact
- The header in the letter is important and affects the student's choice to open and read the letter
- Most students appreciate being contacted
- Interview/phone call preferable to letters

## Conclusions continued...

- The causes behind the student's failure can be many, but the conclusions from the interviews are that these are all related to the academic introduction, study-social environment, the availability of information, external factors and the wrong choice of study
- A general introduction to academic studies would be beneficial to new students who don't have prior experiences of higher learning

**And....**

- EA offers a good tool for study and career advisers to facilitate early, systematic monitoring and therefore enable efforts to improve retention early in the process.
- Increased knowledge about the students contributes to a better approach to Retention because it offers the opportunity to engage with the students on the student's own terms



# What research says

## Institutional Actions that Enhance Retention

1. Providing support (e.g., tutoring, developmental courses, student groups, academic advising, personal counseling, freshman seminar)
2. Connecting academic support to everyday learning (e.g., Supplemental Instruction)
3. Effective assessment (e.g., entry assessment, early warning systems, student learning, student satisfaction, student engagement, educational outcomes, advising, teaching)
4. Engaging students on learning (e.g., cooperative/ collaborative teaching strategies, learning communities)

Vincent Tinto, 2004

# Result Simplified

## Why Students Fail Their Classes

No alarms and **no surprises**. Silent, silent (Lyrics Radihead)

1. Academic difficulty
2. Adjustment/transition difficulties
3. Information
4. External factors and goal change

**Once again our study and research confirm that...**  
**Students need to feel that they are important members of our university**

# Best practice in Early Alert at MAU



Run in partnership with our students

Pre-emptive approach to Early Alert.

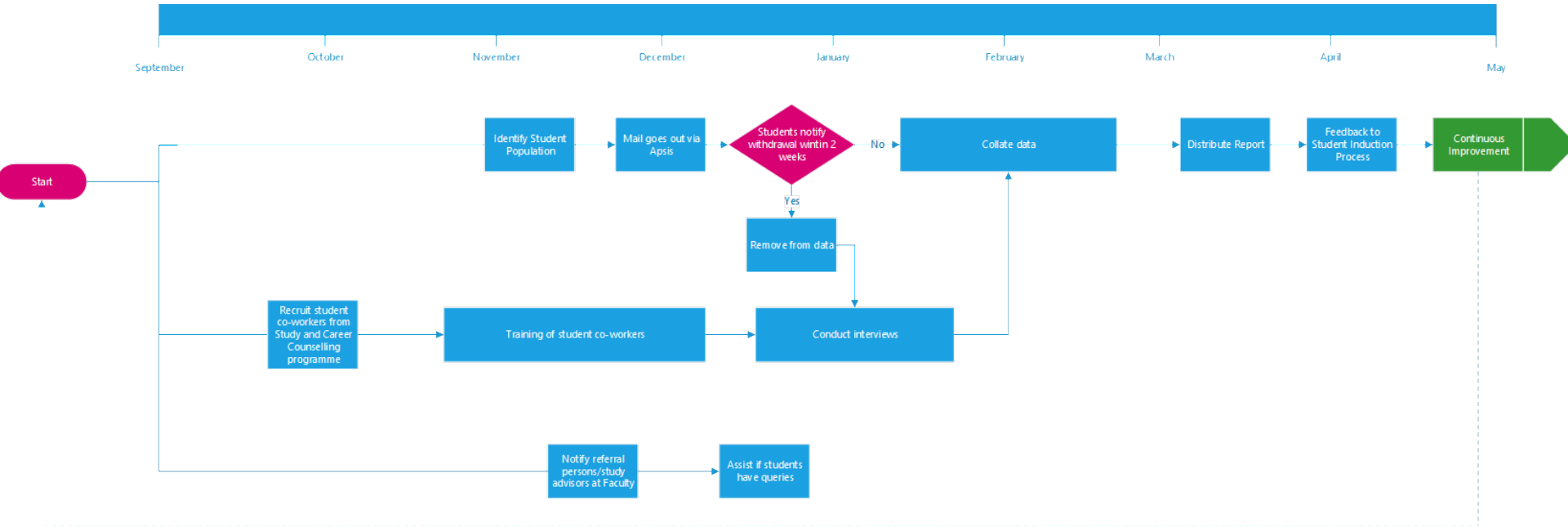
# **Building A Student Retention Plan**

**We decided to do more than Talk About students**

**We decided to Talk With Them**



## OVERVIEW OF THE EARLY ALERT PROCESS



# **Early Alert - giving MAU's students a voice**

## **"You Speak, We listen"-policy**

EA enables consistent tracking of students needs and wishes and pinpoint areas of possible improvements.

Systematic dissemination of information and creation of awareness among leaders and teachers

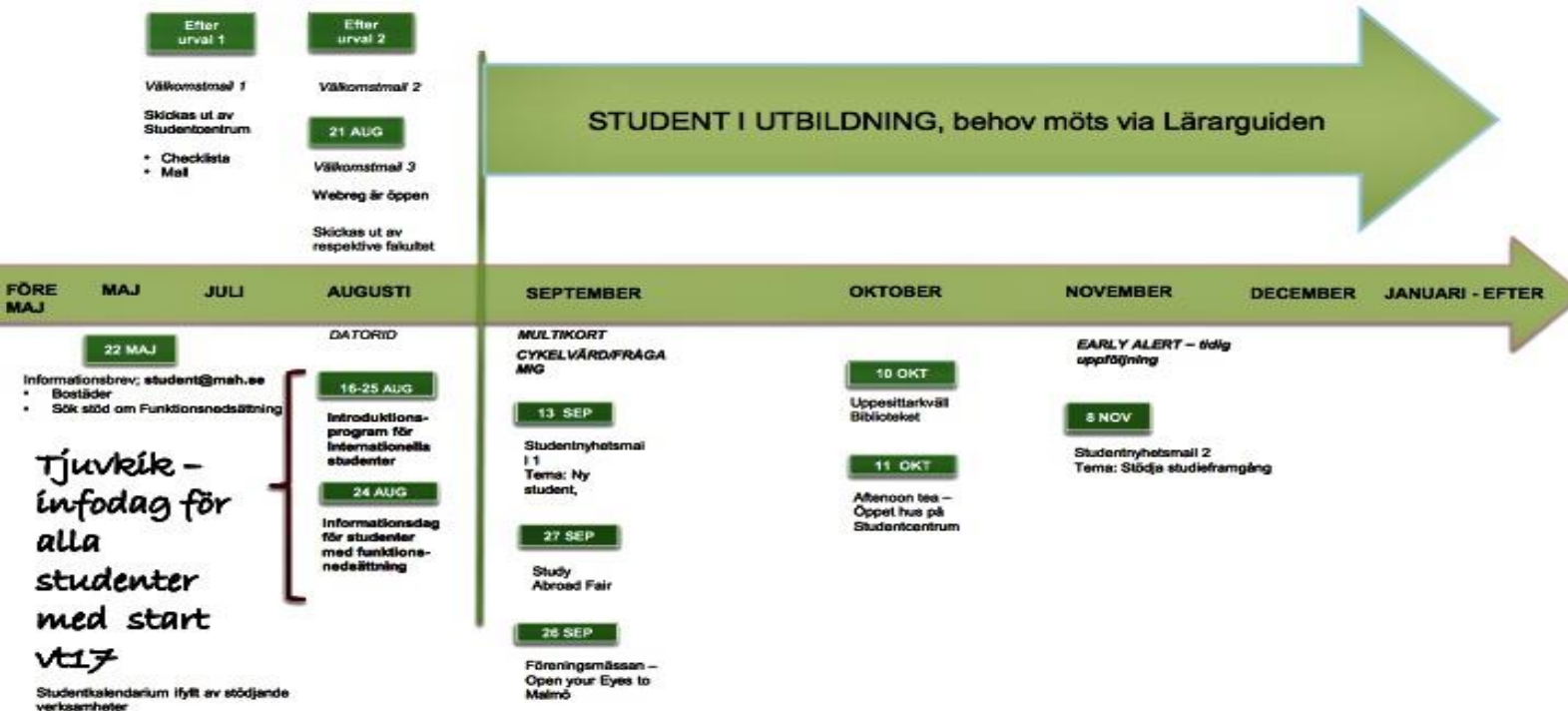
Continuous improvements in student support

Long-term influences of student learning

# Early Alert - giving MAU's students a voice

## "You Speak, We listen"-policy

### NEW STUDENTS ORIENTATION FALL SEMESTER





# **Early Alert Plan**

## **We are still in the early stages of implementation**



**Research suggests that classroom absences are one of the most important indicators for early alert systems to track.**

**But what strategies to use in order to require students to attend classes if we do not have mandatory attendance as eligibility?**

**Student Retention.. Whose Job Is It?**



# What Strategies for Improving Student Retention do You use at your university?

Student-centred education and a internal commitment are some strategies to achieve belonging, engagement and retention in higher education students.

If you´re implementing Early Alert Programme, what criteria do you use who is at risk and who isn´t, missed classes, low grades?:

- particular student cohort or academic programme/course?
- who is responsible for the process?

## EARLY ALERT MAU's way



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Thank you!