This was a one-day 'workshop' with five presentations about issues in retention and recruitment.

J. Hall summarised general data on retention. It might be useful to compare our figures to the averages cited. The main points were that there are usually several interacting factors behind dropping out (though universities tend to record only one); that wrong choice of course, and failure to settle in socially and organisationally, were important factors (financial or personal problems may be given as cause, but people who don't leave often have similar problems, which are counteracted by commitment to the course). Inability to cope is more often a problem for technical subjects. He noted that there is little data on the impact of assessment procedures, or on the outcomes for advanced entrants.

H. Christie gave the results of a more specific study on 'stayers' and 'leavers'. Similar points about causes: failure to 'fit' into institution and course, were main problems. Some 'expected' causes were less important, e.g. students generally not leaving for jobs or financial reasons. Points for possible action include having induction courses and working to give students a sense of identity with their degree choice.

H. Knox discussed work on enquirers/applicants/entrants for part-time courses at Paisley. Not highly relevant to us; perhaps worth noting that the 'enquirers' cited lack of information to make decisions as an important issue in failing to apply, despite the institution believing that comprehensive information had been supplied.

A. Mitchell reported on a very interesting recent study of attitudes of Scottish school students to studying computer science at University. When asked what reasons they thought there might be behind decreasing CS numbers in HE, these included: done ICT in school, so no need to do more computing; boring; don't know what's involved; difficult; geeky image; less appealing than other subjects. Comments on jobs included: pay not as good as some other professions; more people than jobs; although in general did not perceive as bad job prospect, and would like to have had more information about what computing jobs involve.

ICT in schools seems to be having a negative effect: 55% said it 'put them off' CS; also seemed prevalent attitude that they knew enough about how to use computers, or could learn it themselves, so no reason to study CS. Most pupils had little or no idea of what 'Computer Science' meant; older students said "Understanding the ways computers operate"; junior students said "similar things to ICT"; both associated it with ICT and engineering rather than maths. When asked "which best describes your idea of CS" (options: boring, difficult, interesting, useful, demanding, fun, heavy-going) 35-40% chose boring, about 15% difficult, 15% interesting, and 5-10% the other options.

They were also asked what influenced their choices for HE. In order of influence these were: parents; teachers; guidance teachers; school option choice booklets; older
friends; self; family; careers advisors; university information; internet. Hardly anyone mentioned the last two.

A. Round discussed factors that led students to be dissatisfied (and possibly drop-out). The main issue was that they have mistaken expectations e.g. satisfaction with workload depends on their expectation of the workload, rather than the actual workload. Mistaken expectations were often due to poor advice (usually from school or family - advice from the university was often ignored!). But noted that more detailed information from the University - about everything, e.g. accommodation, precise course content, assessment methods, what is a typical day/week like, what support to expect etc. - helped counteract the problem, and was positively viewed by potential students.

Slides of the talks should soon be available, I assume linked from here: http://www.ics.heacademy.ac.uk/Events/Progression&Retention/index.shtml