enhancement themes

Enhancing practice

Responding to Student Needs

Student Evaluation and Feedback Toolkit

CD-ROM included with this publication

Preface

The approach to quality and standards in Scotland is enhancement-led and learner-centred. It has been developed through a partnership of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students in Scotland (NUS Scotland) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland. The enhancement themes are a key element of a five part framework which has been designed to provide an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement, supporting learners and staff at all levels in enhancing higher education in Scotland drawing on developing, innovative practice within the UK and internationally.

The five elements of the framework are:

- a comprehensive programme of subject level reviews undertaken by the higher education institutions themselves; guidance on internal reviews is published by SHEFC (www.shefc.ac.uk)
- enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) run by QAA Scotland (www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR)
- improved forms of public information about quality; guidance on the information to be published by higher education institutions is provided by SHEFC (www.shefc.ac.uk)
- a greater voice for students in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service - student participation in quality scotland (sparqs) (www.sparqs.org.uk)
- a national programme of enhancement themes aimed at developing and sharing good practice to enhance the student learning experience, which is facilitated by QAA Scotland (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk).

The topics for the themes are identified through consultation with the sector and implemented by steering committees whose members are drawn from the sector and the student body. The steering committees have the task of developing a programme of research and development activities, which draw from national and international good practice. Publications emerging from each theme are intended to provide important reference points for higher education institutions in the ongoing strategic enhancement of their teaching and learning provision. Full details of each theme, its Steering Committee, the range of research and development activities, and the outcomes are published on the enhancement themes website (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk).

To further support the implementation and embedding of a quality enhancement culture within the sector, including taking forward the outcomes of the various enhancement themes, a new overarching committee has been established, chaired by Professor Kenneth Miller (Vice-Principal, University of Strathclyde). It will have the important dual role of keeping the five-year rolling plan of enhancement themes under review and ensuring that the themes are taken forward in ways that can best support institutional enhancement strategies. We very much hope that the new Committee, working with the individual topic-based themes' steering committees, will provide a powerful vehicle for the progression of the enhancement-led approach to quality and standards.

Norman Sharp
Director, QAA Scotland

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Elaine graduated from Glasgow University with a degree in Physics and worked in the Electronics Industry. She became a lecturer in Analogue Electronics at Glasgow Caledonian University. In addition to her teaching and research activity, she is the first year tutor in the School of Engineering, Science and Design and has been the architect of a student experience which has dramatically improved retention and progression.

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Professor David Lines is Head of the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen (RGU). Prior to his appointment he was Assistant Dean (Teaching and Learning) at the Institute of Education. At RGU he coordinates the University's Quality Enhancement Action Plan and he has been closely involved with the sector-wide enhancement themes from their inception. His main research field is assessment and he is the co-author of the QAA's overview paper on that theme.

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Editor

Professor George Gordon

Professor George Gordon is Professor of Academic Practice and founding Director of the Centre for Academic Practice at the University of Strathclyde. He is Chair of the ESCalate Advisory Group, Chair of the Council of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Honorary Treasurer of the Society for Research into Higher Education, and an Honorary Auditor with the Australian Universities Quality Agency. He has undertaken numerous policy evaluations and development projects.

Introduction

The Responding to Student Needs theme

In Autumn 2003 a broadly based steering committee was established with Professor John Harper, of The Robert Gordon University, in the chair. The membership is listed at Annex A.

The topic of Responding to Student Needs encompasses a wide range of issues. Rather than attempt the daunting task of comprehensive coverage the Steering Committee opted to focus upon two specific areas for possible investigation. That focused treatment provides insights into a number of dimensions, illustrates many of the issues and demonstrates some of the complex interactions which impact upon, and inform, the needs of students in higher education.

Between October 2003 and February 2004 a project interview team drawn from administrative staff held a series of focus groups of staff and students. This work was undertaken to inform the planning of subsequent development work. The reports from the focus groups were analysed by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI).

Views were sought from focus groups on two key topics that had emerged from initial discussions in the Steering Committee and a preliminary scoping of available research on issues and developments, namely:

- student needs in the first year of study
- student feedback and evaluation.

In the focus groups a broad spectrum of student needs were explored, both academic and pastoral.

For student feedback, the prime concerns were about ways of learning from experience and of improving practice in relation to the collection and effective usage of student evaluation of their learning. Views were sought on the extent to which the findings in a Higher Education Funding Council for England study were reflected in the Scottish higher education (HE) sector.

The report to the Steering Committee by CHERI (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/uploads/documents/CHERIREPORT.doc) identified a wide range of experiences and approaches within Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs). It also found considerable consensus about the importance of supporting students in the first year of study and of effective use of student evaluation and feedback.

On the basis of that evidence, in March 2004, the Steering Committee commissioned work on two developmental projects:

- Student Needs in the First Year of Study.
- Student Evaluation of and Feedback on their Learning Experience.

Because of the range of key topics identified through the consultations reported above, the Student Needs in the First Year of Study project consisted of four strands:

- induction
- personal tutor systems
- approaches to integrating student support
- the first-year learning experience.

Under the oversight of the Steering Committee, proposals were sought from the sector to lead each strand.

This resulted in the formation of a small project development team of educational developers comprising the appointed project director of each strand, with one project director acting as overall chair/coordinator.

For the work on Student Evaluation of and Feedback on their Learning Experience, the organisational process involved the creation of a project development board, with members drawn from administrative staff on the Universities Scotland Teaching Quality Forum and a student representative.

A project officer was appointed to collect examples of good practice and of innovative approaches.

On 8 June 2004 a national conference was held on the theme Responding to Student Needs in Scottish Higher Education: Towards Meeting the Diverse Needs of Students Today. The conference featured keynote presentations from Australasian speakers and facilitated discourse between practitioners within the Scottish HE sector and members of the project teams.

The project directors perform different roles in their respective institutions. Thus they brought varied experiences and perspectives to the task. They selected the illustrative materials and the referenced literature. Neither are intended to be comprehensive. Rather the purpose is to air issues and practices and encourage reflection.

This book brings together into a single volume the reports from all four strands of the Student Needs in the First Year of Study project and from the Student Evaluation and Feedback project. The editing process has introduced some consistency in formatting and some repetition has been removed. That said, some issues still feature in more than one strand, reflecting the interconnected nature of many of the topics.

The way forward

Responding to student needs is widely seen by the sector as an important area for continuing attention and enhancement. It is a multi-stranded and complex topic with crucial contextual dimensions such as the detailed student profile of the institution, the prevailing institutional ethos and traditions, the nature of the academic infrastructure and the associated organisation of student support.

There are many instances of good practice and innovation within the sector including examples of learning from other institutions, both in the UK and in other countries.

There has been massive growth of the sector, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Institutions are committed to providing excellent learning experiences for their students, including a suitable supportive environment which responds to their diverse needs.

Completion rates continue to be among the highest in the world.

The focus groups, information in institutional strategic plans and a considerable volume of research evidence led the Steering Committee to select the first-year experience of new undergraduate students as the unifying thrust of the Enhancement Theme. The choice was assisted by the fact that other dimensions, such as the needs of postgraduate students and of students with disabilities, have been/are being addressed by other major developmental projects such as the UK Grad Hub and Teachability initiatives.

The materials developed as part of this enhancement theme are intended to spark discussion and evaluation and inform institutional strategies for enhancement.

In their strategic plans, institutions have clearly articulated objectives and goals for enhancing the learning experience of their students, for widening participation and for producing highly employable graduates. A successful first year is a vital moment of transition. That is when students start to engage actively with the institution, their chosen discipline(s), their peers, and staff and services. The research clearly indicates that effective engagement plays an important part in retention and progression. That is why these dimensions feature prominently in the developmental work.

Equally there are important, complex and sensitive issues surrounding the structure and definition of the first-year curriculum and the most effective means of delivering it to the large and diverse student body.

Institutions can now use managed learning environments to maintain regular and rapid contact with students. It facilitates monitoring of student engagement. Equally it can provide students with 24 x 7 access to all of the resources which an institution chooses to make available.

Institutions recognise that they can benefit from student evaluation and feedback. The report suggests ways in which this can be enhanced and provides a toolkit to assist that endeavour.

Many stakeholders can contribute to the way forward for enhancing the response to student needs.

Institutions could use these materials to reflect on and benchmark their provision, policies, procedures and arrangements. Even where extensive developmental work is in hand, the materials should act as a useful resource.

Institutions and the sector should consider ways of maintaining the momentum of the theme, for example through putting in place ways of disseminating and sharing good practice, keeping in touch with the relevant research findings, and/or commissioning targeted developmental work and benchmarking studies. Universities Scotland, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and The Higher Education Academy seem appropriate sources of continuing coordinated support.

In the USA there has been a long-standing annual sample study of the qualifications, expectations and aspirations of students about to enter higher education. Scotland could benefit from equivalent longitudinal data which can provide information on trends and changes, as well as current perspectives on aspirations, expectations and potential needs.

Professor George Gordon, University of Strathclyde

Induction

Claire Carney

University of Glasgow

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Executive summary

Background to the project

Induction was designated as a strand of work by the original 'Student Support in the First Year of Study' development project (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI), 2004). The CHERI report identified a number of issues regarding induction. It indicated that in the first year of study there are 3 clear phases: pre-entry phase, on-course phase and the progression phase onto the next year of study. It recognised that students are a diverse group and enter higher education from a variety of backgrounds. However, students commented that pre-entry information was mainly targeted towards school leavers and the social rather than academic side of university life. The report also raised the need to phase information throughout the first year and to make students aware of all the support services and academic support provision open to them (CHERI, 2004).

The Induction project

The focus of this report on induction is on identifying the building blocks of induction planning, including institution policy foundation; induction strategy; implementation; examples of practice; provision of information; and, finally, guidance on evaluating the induction process. The emphasis is on an integrated coordinated activity between services, faculties, departments, student associations and students, with recognition - and an assumption - that all institutions have an increasingly diverse student body.

Progression to higher education is a challenging and formative experience. It is part of a major life transition that often involves the development of new life-skills, new friends, new community and new approaches to learning. Studies from North America and Australia have shown the importance attributed to the student experience in the first year and its impact on retention. Much of the work has developed from recognising the difficulties associated with the transition to higher education and the provision of induction programmes.

Induction aims to alleviate many of the problems associated with transition and aid adaptation to the new HE environment. For this reason induction in this paper is presented as part of the transition process. Induction and related processes have been shown to assist students and their families to adapt to new circumstances and participation in programmes has been shown to be critical to student success and to their sense of association with their HE institution.

Research work (McInnis and James, 1995; McInnis, James and Hartley, 2000) identified four main factors that influence integration into university life. Many Australian universities have adopted these factors and have based induction/transition programmes on addressing the demands set by them:

- **academic adjustment:** to more independent and demanding learning and assessment structures
- **geographic adjustment:** to a new, larger campus and to new travel and perhaps accommodation arrangements

- **administrative adjustment:** to being responsible for their own administration in terms of enrolment, finance arrangements, and identifying their own needs and seeking suitable assistance, and
- **personal adjustment:** to issues that can include feelings of isolation, the loss of old networks and the need to make new friends, the need to be more financially independent, and the responsibility for managing their own study and other commitments.

In order for induction to be implemented in a planned and coordinated fashion, it is important for it to be allocated a 'home'. This allows integration of induction planning and evaluation, sharing of ideas and resources, and minimising replication, thus making it more efficient and effective. Deciding where to locate first-year transition programmes will ultimately determine their importance and the resources allocated to them. There is evidence to suggest that it is best placed and managed by an authority that has the power to bring about change and drive policy on matters related to support for first-year students.

Core strategies

Three core strategies were identified by Krause (2003) to assist in achieving integrated coordinated transition planning. These are considered best practice and reflect much of the current practice in Australia, New Zealand and North America.

Coordinate first year student support efforts within institutions. For maximum impact and effectiveness, the initiatives developed to support first year undergraduate students across an institution need to be developed, implemented and evaluated within a coherent framework, in consultation with academics, support staff and administrators. To be most effective, such frameworks need to be embedded in the policy and strategic plans of institutions, with achievable outcomes - including regular evaluation and reporting cycles - and clear lines of accountability.

Communicate with relevant stakeholders regarding the success of first year initiatives and future plans. Stakeholders may include institutional administrators, academic staff, community members (including school and industry representatives), and, of course, students (current and prospective). Effective communication needs evidence based on regular monitoring and evaluation of transition programmes and initiatives.

Connect with first year students and the issues they face. Be aware of their expectations and the changes taking place in their experience. Conversely, first year students need to be connected to the university learning community through proactive and consistent communication of what is expected of them as students in higher education. This, too, requires strategic planning and united efforts at the department/faculty and institutional level if students are to have clear understandings of expectations regarding such matters as class attendance, class preparation and participation, time allocation for study, and protocols for use and provision of online resources. (Krause, 2003)

Provision of information

Providing appropriate information to students at the best time is a challenge facing many institutions. Materials should be carefully prepared, simply presented, and timed - as far as possible - to synchronise with student need.

Characteristics of an 'ideal' programme

To summarise ideas from surveyed literature, an 'ideal' induction programme would:

- be strategically located within the higher education institution and managed by an authority that has the power to bring about change and drive policy on matters related to support for first-year students
- address academic, social and cultural adjustments required of students
- provide time-relevant targeted information
- provide early validating experiences
- be inclusive of all student groups
- address special needs of particular groups
- make academic expectations explicit
- include teaching staff at a personal level
- develop required computing skills and e-learning skills
- recognise existing skills/experience
- recognise different entry points to HE
- be inclusive of students' families
- be student-centred rather than university-centred
- be an integrated whole
- be part of an ongoing extended programme
- be evaluated, with findings communicated to relevant stakeholders.

Background

Induction was designated as a strand of work by the original 'Student Support in the First Year of Study' development project (CHERI, 2004) The CHERI report identified a number of issues regarding induction:

> In the first year of study there are 3 clear phases: pre-entry phase, on-course phase and finally the progression phase onto the next year of study. Given today's diverse student body the pre-entry phase includes students who have come straight from school, taken a gap year after school, mature students, FE, access and part-time students.
>
> There is a feeling among many students that the pre-entry information is targeted towards school leavers and the social rather than academic side of university life. Although many students complained of an information overload at this stage they also commented that there was not enough information on practical issues eg finding your way around campus, domestic issues etc. Examples of students unions preparing insiders' guides to university life through leaflets or alternative web 'prospectuses' were cited as being extremely useful and providing much relevant information pre-entry.
>
> In order to provide students with information on what was expected of them during the course, course handbooks and summer schools were seen as good practice. Other points raised were the need for phasing information eg one Scottish

institution advertises study refresher skills courses about 6 weeks before exams begin. There is also the extremely important issue of how to make students aware of all the support services and academic support provision open to them.

The focus of this project is to look at national and international best practice to assess how induction programmes have addressed some of the challenges identified and how they might be applied in a Scottish context. The report identifies the building blocks of induction planning, including institution policy foundation; induction strategy; implementation; examples of practice; provision of information; and, finally, guidance on evaluating the induction process. The emphasis is on an integrated coordinated activity between services, faculties, departments, student associations and students, with recognition - and an assumption - that all institutions have an increasingly diverse student body that includes widening participation students; mature students; students working both full-time and part-time; student parents; home and international students; campus-based and commuting students; students with special needs; and those studying full-time, part-time, or through mixed mode, online, face-to-face, distance or blended learning. See Figure 1.

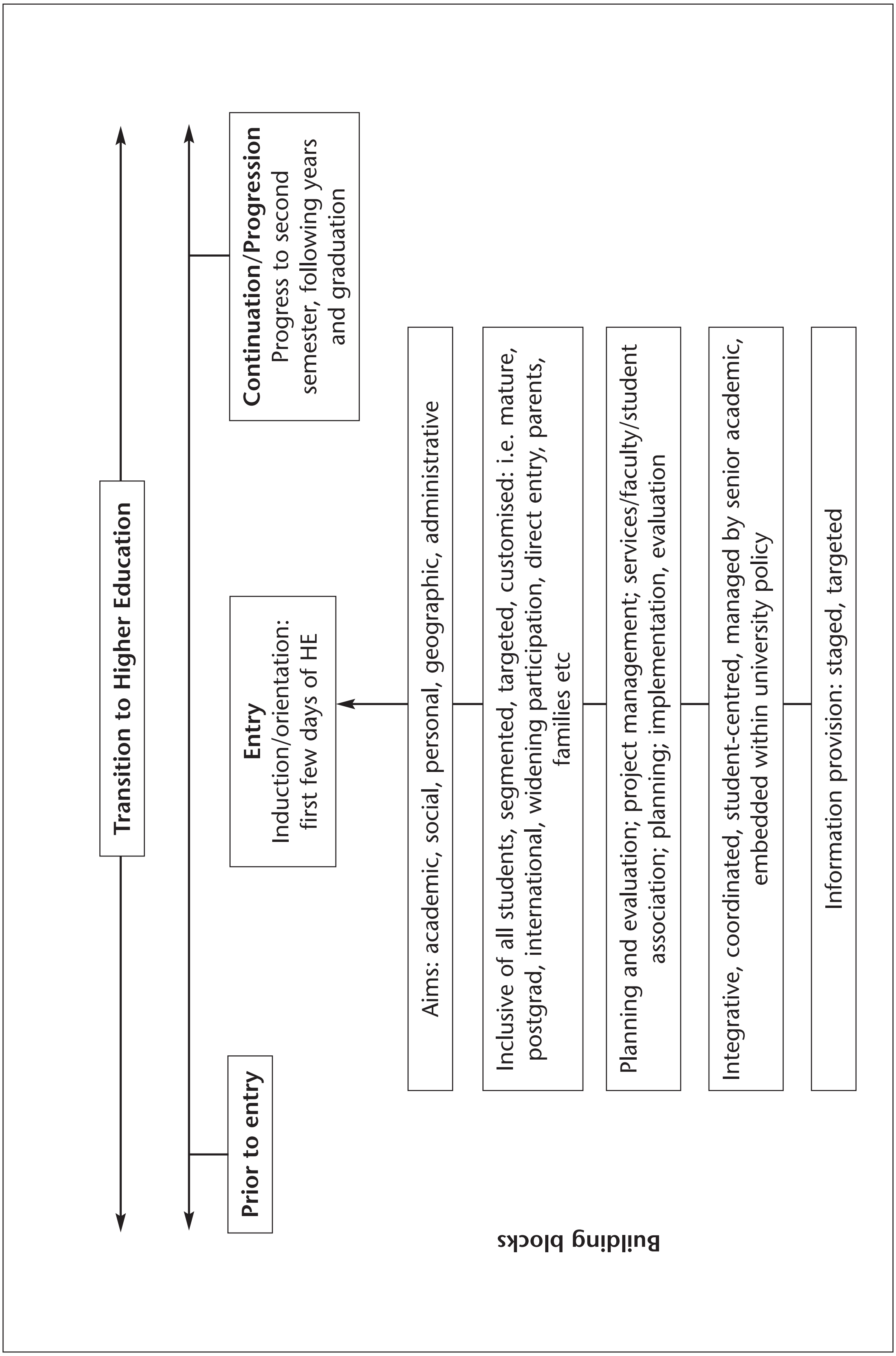

Figure 1 Overview of induction

Figure 1 depicts induction as part of an ongoing process of transition to higher education, including the time prior to entry and the continuation stage. They are all part of a process which takes place over a period of time and which encompasses social, personal, cultural and academic processes of transition (Terezini et al, 1994). Traditionally, most induction activities have focused on the student during the first few days of university, although many institutions now address the stage prior to entry and to some extent continuation.

This view of induction as a relatively long-term process assumes that students will encounter situations through which they will transit at various points during their academic life. Hence, their requirement for guidance may continue beyond entry. These two conceptions of induction are not mutually exclusive; rather they appear to address different dimensions of the student experience (Carter and McNeill, 1998).

North America was at the forefront of work on student transition, with many of the major drivers coming from the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (http://www.sc.edu/fye). Institutions elsewhere have built upon and embellished that work. Thus, many universities in Australia and New Zealand, for example, have developed or adopted detailed approaches to transition and induction. Monash offers a good example of an integrated approach (see below).

Orientation and Transition

Monash University Transition Program

Definitions

'Transition' pertains to issues of adjustment experienced by undergraduate and postgraduate students, and is cognisant of all students being in a state of constant transition: to, during and from the university experience.

The Monash Transition Program perceives transition as:

- A **period** of significant adjustment, development and change affecting all spheres of students' lives.
- **Progression** through an educational institution where the balance of responsibility for achievement rests with students.
- **Enculturation** into the teaching and learning styles, life, procedures, practices and culture of the university.
- **Engagement** with the university, a particular course, subjects and people at a specific campus.

The Monash Transition Program perceives orientation as:

- **Introduction** to the university, a specific campus and the opportunity to beginning making the transition.
- **Identification** with a specific campus, course, subjects and university staff.
- **Familiarisation** with the physical environment of the university.
- **Appreciation** of the expectations the university has of students.

Transition and Orientation Distinctions

Orientation: short term (no more than half a semester)

- A 'fact gathering' mission.
- Can be effected though materials (in printed or electronic form) but optimally accomplished 'in situ'.

Transition: long term

- A **process** of assimilation, accommodation and acceptance - therefore takes time.
- Is **experiential** - for this reason 'templates' on how to 'make the transition' are inappropriate - each student's journey will be different.
- Advice, guidelines and strategies offered by the Monash Transition Program have to be utilised by each student to 'map on to' his/her individual experiences.

Transition and orientation nexus

- Orientation is **embedded** within transition.
- Orientation is the **initial** phase of transition to university.

Introduction

Progression to higher education is a challenging and formative experience. Research has shown that the first year for new entrants, including mature-age students, international students and students with non-standard qualifications, is a period of adjustment or transition (McInnis, 1993, 1994; McInnis and James, 1995; McInnis, James and Hartley, 2000). It is part of a major life transition often involving the development of new life skills, new friends, new community and new approaches to learning.

Studies from North America and Australia have shown the importance attributed to the student experience in the first year and its impact on retention. Much of the work has developed from recognition of the difficulties associated with transition to higher education and the provision of induction programmes. Induction aims to alleviate many of the problems associated with transition and aid adaptation to the new HE environment. Induction and related processes have been shown to assist students and their families to adapt to new circumstances, and participation in programmes has been shown to be critical to students' success and to their sense of association with their HE institution (Pérez, 1998).

Conceptual framing of induction

Over recent years a number of models and frameworks have evolved which help explain the process of transition to higher education. The models offer essential elements that are required for successful transitions to higher education and thus are helpful in formulating principles of an integrated coordinated induction programme. Cook (2000) reviewed the relevant models and a brief summary is provided here.

Campus ecology (Banning, 1989) focuses on the impact the university environment has on student development. It suggests that the greater the match between the new student's aspirations and the experiences provided by the institution, the greater the student satisfaction, academic achievement, and personal growth, and vice versa. The most influential positive conditions for student success include high levels of interaction among students; strong staff-student contact; the availability of accommodation in halls of residence; and extensive extra-curricular activities.

The Theory of Student Integration (Tinto, 1987) is the most widely accepted and used model of student transition. The theory suggests that a decision to withdraw or persist at university results from a longitudinal process that determines the ability of the student to integrate into academic and social aspects of university life. Tinto suggests that entry to university is composed of separation, transition and incorporation phases. The initial phase, separation, suggests that in order for students to be successful at university they must separate from their previous environment, for example school, college, work etc. Transition is adjustment to the new environment, which includes a great number of new experiences coupled with risk. Incorporation describes the final phase, where full integration and acceptance of and by the new environment has been achieved. Other key components in the model include the attitude of the student prior to entry (career and personal goals) and level of commitment to the course and or institution. These factors interact with a student's early experience at the institution to determine that student's persistence. Post entry persistence factors include flexibility (how adaptable a student proves to be), incongruence (whether the institution provides an acceptable match to the student's prior academic and/or social expectations), difficulty (whether the student attains appropriate academic standards) and isolation (the extent to which the student is excluded from social activities or integrates through friendships and relationships with staff and peers).

The student/institution negotiation model (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998) suggests that the cause of non-completion is shared equally between the student who fails to fit academically and/or socially and the institution that was not suitable for that student either academically or socially. Student preparedness and compatibility of choice are seen as the main elements influencing decisions to leave university. Inaccurate perceptions of university life that lead to poor student preparedness are mainly derived from out-of-date or inaccurate information from family, friends, teachers and university literature. A poor choice has long-term implications and stems from unfulfilled or mismatched student expectations of the institution and the disappointment of staff in the students they have admitted.

Cook suggests that the theories presented above view transition as a process involving at its core interaction between students, and between students and university staff. However, he suggests that many of the challenges associated with transition derive from moving to a more independent style of living and learning in higher education. Some students find this transition period more challenging than others and those most affected are unable to connect with their academic or social environment, leading at best to an unpleasant HE experience and extending at worst to drop-out.

Cook suggests that there are four principal influential factors associated with transition to higher education:

Academic and social integration Academic integration is dominated by the student's academic performance and the quality of formal and informal interactions with academic staff. Social integration, on the other hand, refers to the ease of making friends on campus, and the presence of sizeable numbers of students with similar lifestyles and values. If the quality of either form of integration is low, the commitment made by the individual to the institution will also be low. Emmitt et al (2004) talk about acculturation and argue that universities need to be aware that when students choose to come to 'their country', they need to be welcomed: the rules, norms and culture need to be explained to them, as universities would want their students to enjoy and benefit from what their country has to offer.

Lack of preparation Students who lack the appropriate preparation for life as a university student will find it more difficult to make the necessary personal and academic adjustments. As McInnis and James (1995) point out: 'School leavers in particular had typically experienced the close monitoring of their performance by teachers, parents and peers…For many, the decline in attention at university was an abrupt jolt.'

Lack of realistic prior perceptions of higher education Many students enter higher education with inaccurate expectations or perceptions, which may include moderate academic workload coupled with a rich social life. They expect similar teaching and learning techniques to prior experiences and a much more supporting environment.

Personal characteristics Personal characteristics such as age and gender have also been shown to influence transition. Induction programmes have traditionally focused on the younger student. However, with increasing numbers of mature students, recognition of their particular characteristics needs to be taken into account. Cook suggests that although mature students are more likely to make an appropriate course choice they are also more likely to be adversely affected by changes in their domestic circumstances. Male students are more likely than female students to report study problems, including a lack of prowess in the use of study skills; a low commitment to study; difficulty with the programme of study; and a lack of academic progress. It is also reported that students who live at home find it more difficult to integrate into campus life. This was borne out by research conducted recently (Carney, 2002, 2003), which found that 'home' students felt they missed out a lot as many activities were focused on those living in university accommodation.

Much work has stemmed from the research of McInnis and James (1995, 2000) who surveyed first-year students across a number of Australian universities. Their research identified four main factors that influence integration into university life:

academic adjustment: to more independent and demanding learning and assessment structures

geographic adjustment: to a new, larger campus and to new travel and perhaps accommodation arrangements

administrative adjustment: to being responsible for their own administration in terms of enrolment, finance arrangements, and identifying their own needs and seeking suitable assistance, and

personal adjustment: to issues which can include feelings of isolation, the loss of old networks and the need to make new friends, the need to be more financially independent, and the responsibility for managing their own study and other commitments.

Many Australian universities have adopted this framework and have based induction/transition programmes on addressing the demands set by them. Planning has evolved basing interventions on these four principles and measuring outcomes accordingly (see examples in the appendices).

Elements and purposes of induction planning

Ultimately, a primary aim of induction is to empower students to meet the challenge of HE and thus make a significant positive impact on retention. Institutional strategies and approaches to induction have evolved over time. Much of the activity has been frontloaded, occurring in the first couple of days at university, generically delivered and often at a time overlapping with Freshers Week. As outlined above, induction can instead be seen as a more central part of the transition process to HE.

How approaches evolve

Krause (2003) suggests that it is possible to trace the emerging development of first-year initiatives in Australia as demonstrated in the framework in figure 2.

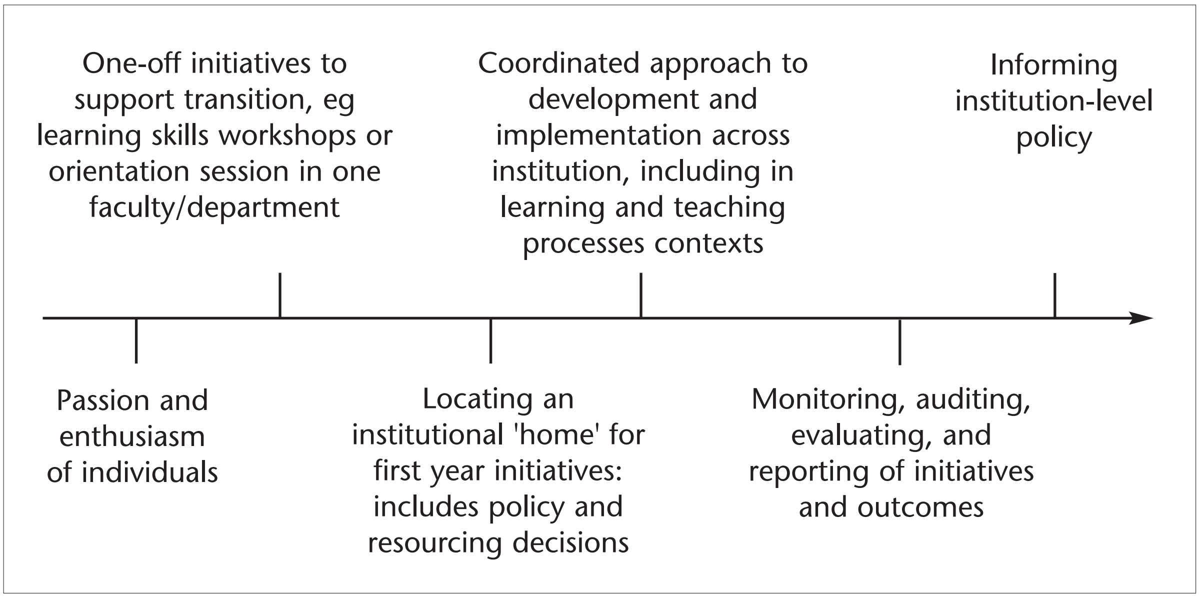

Figure 2 First year in higher education initiatives: Elements of institution-level developmental processes (Krause, 2003)

Krause suggests that the starting point for most first-year initiatives is the passion and enthusiasm of individuals or small groups of people. Typically, these individuals are student support staff or academics responsible for teaching and coordinating large first-year groups. One-off initiatives generally stem from this early developmental stage and often these are replicated in other faculties, yet as the model suggests there is little coordination of efforts and resources at this stage.

As the number of transition initiatives increases and interest develops in the area, the need to focus coordination responsibility of first-year initiatives becomes evident. This allows integration of induction planning and evaluation, sharing of ideas and resources, and minimising replication, thus making it more efficient and effective.

Typically in Australia and New Zealand they are called transition programmes and are based in support services offices or in the offices of a Dean of Students, giving the programme a more academic focus. It is also reported that increasingly, first-year transition initiatives also have faculty- or department-based representatives in recognition of the different discipline demands.

Having a base for coordinating transition initiatives both allows coordination of the planning cycle across faculties and facilitates evaluation of all initiatives to feed back into cycle.

Deciding where to locate first-year transition programmes will ultimately determine their importance and the resources allocated to them. Krause suggests it is best placed and managed by an authority that has the power to bring about change and drive policy on matters related to support for first-year students.

At Deakin University, much of the above recommendations have been embraced and put in place. A First Year Initiative Action Team was formed and they recommended the establishment of an advisory committee and the appointment of a First Year Coordinator 'who would be a senior academic as a reflection of the need to see the first year initiative as an academic responsibility, not just a social/administrative issue'. The aim was to give transition programming kudos within the university and to ensure that it was firmly placed within university policy. Another important aspect in planning was to make sure that all areas of the university would be represented and be active participants in the formation of the programme, its implementation and also its review and ongoing development.

Key strategies

Krause argues for three core strategies to assist in achieving integrated coordinated transition planning to inform and drive institutional policy and decision making:

> **Coordinate** first year student support efforts within institutions. For maximum impact and effectiveness, the initiatives developed to support first year undergraduate students across an institution need to be developed, implemented and evaluated within a coherent framework, in consultation with academics, support staff and administrators. To be most effective, such frameworks need to be embedded in the policy and strategic plans of institutions, with achievable outcomes - including regular evaluation and reporting cycles - and clear lines of accountability.
>
> **Communicate** with relevant stakeholders regarding the success of your first year initiatives and future plans. Stakeholders may include institutional administrators, academic staff, community members (including school and industry representatives), and, of course, students (current and prospective). To communicate effectively, you need evidence based on regular monitoring and evaluation of your transition programs and initiatives. The value of systematic evaluation and judicious communication of results cannot be [over]estimated in terms of raising the profile of key issues and embedding best practice in all areas of first year student support across your institution.

Connect with first year students and the issues they face. Be aware of their expectations and the changes taking place in their experience. Conversely, first year students need to be connected to the university learning community through proactive and consistent communication of what is expected of them as students in higher education. This, too, requires strategic planning and united efforts at the department/faculty and institutional level if students are to have clear understandings of expectations regarding such matters as class attendance, class preparation and participation, time allocation for study, and protocols for use and provision of online resources.

Developing wide-ranging approaches

Based on Australian experiences Peel (1999) suggests that while transition/induction issues are ultimately best addressed at the institutional level, effective progress can be made (as many Scottish institutions have done) by:

1. creating effective liaison and coordination sessions between schools and universities. This could include structures for:
   - collaboration between school and university teachers and
   - strategies for providing information and experience of university study which are sufficiently flexible to address the needs of different types of schools and specific student populations
2. holding prospective student information sessions tailored to provide both school leavers and other categories of entering students with:
   - realistic course advice, focusing especially on changes in learning and teaching environments, the demands of university study, and the objectives, content, emphasis and career and vocational outcomes of specific courses
   - information about the nature of school-to-university transition, and
   - direct contact where possible between prospective and current students and between prospective students and relevant academic staff within specific courses
3. offering early academic orientation and advising programmes, specifically designed to identify mismatches between course expectations and course experiences
4. helping pre-commencement social orientation programmes, such as host schemes, course-specific orientation activities and other initiatives designed to facilitate interactions among commencing students and between commencing students and more senior undergraduate students
5. having an overall orientation strategy, combining teaching areas, student services and student organisations, and designed to facilitate the embedding of new students in the learning and social activities of the campus and the university and to provide the best possible balance between academic and social orientation
6. having strategies which encourage 'institutional identification' with and among a cohort of first-year students, especially in faculties and courses where very few students will share most of their classes

7 making course and subject adjustment procedures which allow students who identify course and interest mismatches an early opportunity to transfer or redesign course programmes where possible

8 having course-specific mechanisms for 'tracking' first-year students within teaching areas which will foster early and effective identification of students experiencing measurable difficulties (for example prolonged non attendance, early difficulties with assessment tasks)

9 creating a core unit and coordinator positions within the university administration to monitor and maintain transition programmes, including the links between academic support and development and more general counselling and health services, with a mandate to assess and seek continual improvement in faculty, support unit and university-wide performance

10 creating a dedicated oversight group linking academic staff, key administrative areas and student services, and ensuring that transition activities and programmes are rooted in the day-to-day teaching and activity of the university

11 identifying key personnel within each faculty to liaise between the core unit, the oversight group, and department-level first-year coordinators, and to facilitate the identification of transition as a core activity at faculty as well as university-wide levels

12 providing 'first-year coordinators' in all departments with specific responsibilities to:

- oversee the implementation of transition strategies, including training for academic staff and postgraduate tutors
- implement individual programmes relevant to the specific transition issues in that department and faculty (for example mentoring, 'academic orientation', or common tutorials)
- serve as a point of contact for first-year students experiencing transition difficulties, and as a liaison between students and support services; and implement and manage faculty- or department-specific services such as first-year study groups and other forms of collaborative and informal learning

13 developing feedback mechanisms among undergraduate students and particular target groups (such as mature-age entry students, access students, first-generation students) to evaluate the effectiveness of existing programmes, gain student input into strategy planning, trial innovations and revise programmes

14 developing strategies to monitor student exit from courses and from institutions, including surveys, interviews and career and course counselling, and to effectively share and disseminate information on student exit and potential 'early intervention' strategies among first-year coordinators, key personnel in faculties, centres, departments and student services, and transition groups on other campuses and in other institutions.

Peel suggests that these strategies and initiatives could be combined and focused in different ways in different institutions. He suggests that there should also be a basic set of expectations in the area of transition that each institution should be encouraged to develop:

1 appropriate strategies for identifying and predicting key transition problems among its incoming student population, and students most likely to be at risk

2 mechanisms to ensure the routine collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative information concerning incoming students' attitudes, skills, approaches to learning, adjustment difficulties and expectations of tertiary education

3 appropriate mechanisms for addressing problems related to specific teaching and learning environments, where units with undergraduate teaching responsibilities are required to identify and develop both existing and feasible teaching, administrative and student support initiatives for improving students' successful transition to university learning

4 appropriate mechanisms for addressing institution-wide transition issues, so that relevant administrative services - with responsibilities for the provision of realistic and accurate information to prospective students, orientation, student services, academic and teaching development, and other related activities - are required to identify and develop specific strategies for improving and monitoring the planning and delivery of services

5 feedback and monitoring mechanisms incorporating students, teaching staff, teaching area support staff and administrative service staff, to allow for ongoing re-evaluation of transition problems and of the initiatives and strategies described above

6 appropriate mechanisms for collecting and assessing relevant documentary evidence in key areas (including student learning outcomes and satisfaction; course transfer, amendment and withdrawal; changes in assessment practices; academic staff development; and rates of retention, progress and completion) by which institutions can report on the implementation of their own objectives, assess the effectiveness of their strategies for identifying, addressing and monitoring transition issues, and make further strategic responses.

It seems plausible to suggest that if a strategic coordinated and integrated approach is undertaken to transition and induction, then the many underpinning blocks (Figure 1) can be addressed and implemented to assure all objectives are reached. Many Australian and North American universities have adopted these methods and a number of examples are given in Appendix A. The examples show how institutions have clearly set out objectives for induction and transition embracing theory and good practice. The first two North American examples, Utah and Syracuse, report examples of mission statements proposed from first-year offices and the remainder (Toronto, Auckland, Deakin and Sydney) provide detail of policy planning and strategy.

Information provision

Providing appropriate information to students at the best time is a challenge facing many institutions. A common complaint from new students is being inundated with confusing information, and a corollary complaint from university staff is that, no matter how much information is sent or indeed how much time is spent making it user friendly, students never seem to assimilate what they receive. This was highlighted in the CHERI report (2004) and over consecutive new entrant evaluations conducted by the author (Carney 2002, 2003). In the latter, students complained about being sent too much information, yet ironically not enough of what they wanted. Students said they would have liked more guidance on important events to attend during the start of semester, general information on life as a student, and targeted information on course and academic expectations.

The general trend up to this point is to send new entrants a large pack of information, much of which is lost or unseen before the beginning of semester. This may then be followed by faculty or departmental information and possibly a separate students association pack.

Kramer and Washburn (1983), as long as 21 years ago, highlighted the problems by commenting that only materials that have been carefully prepared and simplified should be presented and that these materials should be those that are absolutely critical to students' needs at that time. They found that at best all other materials were ignored, and at worst they obscured the impact of the important materials. They recommended that institutions develop a 'centrality index' to determine what is to be presented at different transition stages. This forces an institution to make decisions about what it most wants to accomplish during this period and what it most wants students to understand and retain. These decisions are best made during the planning phase and embedded within transition strategy.

University of Tasmania and Deakin University have attempted to tackle the challenge of information provision and are useful examples of implementation (see Appendix B). These two examples show how technology has been embraced to 'drip-feed' information in a way which proved challenging in years before online technology. However, it is important to remember that technology is not the only solution, as surveys show students appreciate receiving information in a variety of forms. Further insight may be gleaned from the student evaluation and feedback enhancement project. What remains fundamental to student induction information provision is that information is targeted and provided in a timely fashion.

Evaluation and toolkits

Given the number of initiatives that are implemented during transition, it is imperative to evaluate for accountability (did the programme achieve its goals?); development (what are the strengths and weaknesses of the programme?); and knowledge (who are the students and what are their needs?).

Evaluation is the key to monitoring changing needs and experiences of students and as such will influence decision making and support annual planning.

McNeish (2004) advocates a project management type approach to orientation/induction planning and provides an account of one Scottish institution's approach, where formative and summative evaluation are undertaken and results fed back into the following year's planning cycle, allowing for adjustment and refinement.

Three evaluation examples are provided from the desktop survey we undertook. They are based on the principle of planning induction. The evaluation is then based on whether the intended objectives have been met (see Appendix C).

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www.deakin.edu.au/studentlife/orientation/

Deakin Infoflow
www.deakin.edu.au/orientation/infoflow/index.php

National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition
www.sc.edu/fye

Syracuse University
students.syr.edu/orientation/

University of Sydney
www.itl.usyd.edu.au/fye/

University of Tasmania
www.utas.edu.au/firstyear

University of Toronto
www.sa.utoronto.ca/documents/OTFReportFinal.pdf

University of Ulster, Student Transition and Retention (STAR) Project
www.ulst.ac.uk/star/

University of Utah
www.sa.utah.edu/orientation/team/mission.html

Interviews

Dr Kerri-Lee Krause - Project Director, National First Year Experience Study 2004, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.

Appendix A Examples of approaches and policies

The following examples are mostly reproduced verbatim from the universities concerned.

University of Utah

The Office of Orientation and New Student Programs is committed to providing a welcoming and enriching experience for entering students. Through our programs students are introduced to opportunities that encourage engagement in the academic, cultural, and social components of the undergraduate experience in an effort to ease their transition to the University of Utah.

Goals

1 **To introduce entering undergraduate students to the opportunities and responsibilities of academic and intellectual life.**

- Provide opportunities for interaction with faculty, staff and other students.
- Inform students about academic policies, requirements and curricula.
- Introduce students to the philosophy of general education.
- Insure that students have an understanding of advising, its importance and where to obtain advising.
- Familiarise students with services provided by University College.
- Acquaint students with available academic and support services that will assist them in their intellectual pursuits.
- Demonstrate how to gain access to the University homepage and familiarise them with course selection and registration procedures.
- Provide an overview of the University mission and assist them in understanding their rights and responsibilities as University students.
- Role model academic qualities and expectations at the University level.

2 **Introduce students into the University Community and provide information about the wealth of University resources and services.**

- Acquaint students with the variety of curricular and co-curricular opportunities available with which they may become involved.
- Provide students with information about the physical surroundings of the campus.
- Discuss with students the options for cultural, social, athletic and academic enrichment, activities and resources.
- Introduce students to Student Affairs agencies and other service related organizations.
- Inform students of cohort programs and others designed specifically for entering students.
- Acquaint students with the University Library and its services.
- Provide information on auxiliary services (Bookstore, Commuter Services, Ucard, Residency Requirements).

3 **To raise student awareness surrounding issues of health and wellness.**

- Provide information about campus safety and security.
- Provide information on alcohol and drug education.
- Inform students about the variety of accessible services including Campus Recreation, Student Health, the Office of Equal Opportunity, and Counseling.
- Discuss with students the importance of balance between work, school and recreation in order to maintain physical and mental well-being.

4 **To welcome and familiarize parents, families and support members with the University and the college student experience.**

- Assist parents and others in understanding the academic and personal adjustments University students undergo.
- Introduce families to opportunities, possibilities and purposes of higher education.
- Provide opportunities for interaction with faculty, administration, other parents, and students.
- Provide information on University policies, procedures, expectations and resources.
- Assist parents, families and others in understanding the physical surroundings of the University
- Introduce parent and family members to the information about the University found on-line and over the web.

Syracuse University

The Mission of the Office of Orientation and Transitions Services is to help new students transition into the intellectual, cultural, and social climate of Syracuse University; to promote student learning and development; and to facilitate continued student success through graduation.

The Office of Orientation and Transitions Services accomplishes this mission by:

- providing a collaborative and comprehensive first-year experience, beginning with a new student orientation program that facilitates academic and social engagement
- collaborating with students, faculty, and staff members in communicating educational responsibilities to new students
- providing new students with information about academic policies, procedures, requirements, and programs to make well-informed decisions
- informing students of resources available to assist them
- facilitating experiences that promote student learning and skill development
- providing intentional opportunities for students to interact with faculty, staff and returning students
- providing programs and information to new students' families to help them transition effectively to the Syracuse University community.

University of Toronto policy on orientation and transition

Orientation and transition is the process by which new students are welcomed and introduced to the academic and non-academic student experience at the University of Toronto. Orientation and transition activities are also a critical and profound component of the student experience at the University. It follows, therefore, that the planning and delivery of orientation and transition programs is a high priority for the University and the entire campus community.

Orientation and transition begins at the moment a new student accepts an offer of admission to the University and continues throughout the first year of study. While many fall orientation activities occur at the beginning of each fall session, it is important to understand that transition begins long before September and does not end until a new student has integrated into his or her new learning community.

Orientation and transition activities are intended to assist new students in making the transition from their previous academic and non-academic environments to their new environment at the University of Toronto. Transition programs and activities are designed to assist new students in adapting to a new academic setting, to help students begin to achieve their academic goals, and to teach students new learning strategies in higher education. Orientation programs and activities are intended to develop a sense of community, to encourage student involvement in all aspects of University life, to promote a sense of respect for the diversity of culture and experience in the University, to inform new members of the community of standards and expectations for behaviour, and to welcome them.

Orientation and transition succeeds if new students feel welcomed and are provided with the tools to succeed. It fails if it is alienating, humiliating, degrading or painful for any student.

The planning and presentation of orientation and transition programs is a shared responsibility. The academic leaders and the student leaders are jointly responsible for the planning and presentation of transition and orientation programs which are complementary and compatible, and which are designed to meet the goals and objectives articulated in this Policy.

In order to assist in an on-going effort to review and enhance programming, divisions shall be required to report annually on the delivery of orientation and transition programs and the assessment of programs within the division.

The Office of Vice-President and Provost shall publish annually guidelines for the planning and delivery of orientation and transition programs and shall have the responsibility for the implementation of this Policy.

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) orientation programme model

The AUT Orientation Programme has been designed to provide for the effective induction of new (first year) students into the AUT learning community. The programme requires an integrated and coordinated effort by staff in the academic programme in which the student is enrolled, student mentors, faculty representatives, support services staff, campus life staff, library staff, registry staff, AuSM staff and ITG staff. This coordinated effort will be led by an Orientation Taskforce, which will include representatives from all these areas. To create optimum conditions for first year student success it is important that students:

- Have a clear understanding of what is expected of them as learners; and to have early opportunities to develop effective learning skills which enable them to meet the demands of their programme.
- Have an early opportunity to meet other students, and to make friends; as well as to become familiar with the people who can assist them in their learning.
- Know what support services are available to assist them, and how they can gain access to these services, should the need arise.
- Feel good about the social environment in which they will be conducting their learning - and to have fun.

Components of the AUT induction programme

- The student induction programme should integrate three elements:
  - i socialization of students into the AUT community - at department/school level, and at a wider faculty and/or institutional level
  - ii information about AUT - again at various levels. Information dissemination needs to be planned to avoid overload. Dissemination can start pre-enrolment, be highly focused during the first few days, and continue over the year (different structures may be needed for this to happen), and
  - iii skill assessment and development. Induction processes should include opportunities for students to reflect on their preparedness for learning at AUT, including their choice of programme. The induction programme must provide a clear development pathway for those students who acknowledge that their skills need improvement.
- A range of induction delivery options should be offered to suit how much or how little students already know about AUT and themselves.
- Induction should be a 'layered' process, extending over several weeks. It can commence with pre-enrolment information and extend into the first four/six weeks of the semester, with activities which focus on helping students acquire better 'being an effective student' skills.
- The 'captive' period, ie the first few days at AUT, should focus on student self-awareness, ie students being taken through self-evaluation processes concerning institutional (including programme/department/faculty) knowledge, and their capabilities as learners. Follow up activities are then tailored to where students are.
- Opportunities for students to meet people and to make friends should be programmed within the first two/three weeks.
- The AUT induction programme should affirm the following principles:
  - i induction is essential for ALL new students
  - ii induction facilitates the preparedness of students as individuals - with individual needs - therefore multiple induction processes are desirable - to meet the needs of diverse student constituencies eg mature students, part

time students, Maori, Pacific Island, new immigrants, people with disabilities, international students. In part, induction processes will bring together people with common needs or interests

iii induction requires a collaborative approach involving schools/departments, faculties, ATISA, and central services (Student Services, Academic Registry, International Student Centre), and

iv induction processes should be embedded in the curriculum wherever possible and appropriate.

Objective	Strategies	Measurement	Primary accountability
1 To provide students with an overview of their programme of learning	• At orientation, programme leaders or other programme staff give programme overview, question time included	• Orientation feedback questionnaire	Faculty Programme team
2 To clarify with students the expectations which will be placed on them as learners	• orientation programme overview includes learner expectations • Te Tari Awhina's KEYS to Study Success, as part of the six-week orientation programme, includes learner expectations • orientation transition programmes	• Orientation feedback questionnaire • KEYS to Study Success course feedback	Faculty Programme team Te Tari Awhina
3 To raise student awareness of the opportunities available at AUT for improving their effectiveness as learners	• During the orientation tour, mentors show students Te Tari Awhina, make students aware of the KEYS to Study Success and other KEYS courses, writing workshops and other workshops • The SIC refers students to courses, workshops, Support Services • In the first week, Support Services have stands with info • The orientation programme booklet provides workshop info • Orientation transition programmes	• Orientation feedback questionnaire· Increased numbers of students using Te Tari Services and other Support Services	Student Support Services, Student Mentors,Student Information Centre (SIC)
4 To introduce students to the AUT campus and the range of services which can support them in their learning	• During the orientation tour mentors show students support areas, explain what each area provides, including the library • At orientation, ITG sessions show students basic IT use and IT workshops are available throughout the six-week orientation programme • Orientation transition programmes	• Orientation six-week programme feedback questionnaire	Student Support Services Student Mentors ITG Library

Objective	Strategies	Measurement	Primary accountability
5 To provide enjoyable entertainment and promote social interaction	• Campus Life provides social activities and market days • AuSM provides bands and other activities at orientation	• Orientation programme feedback questionnaire	Campus Life AuSM
6 To provide students with opportunities to improve their effectiveness as learners	• The six-week orientation programme provides workshops and KEYS courses	• Orientation programme feedback questionnaire	Te Tari Awhina
7 To provide students with opportunities to gain basic mastery in the learning technologies available at AUT	• The Library run seminars on library use • The six-week orientation programme includes IT workshops, including after hours and weekends	• Orientation programme feedback questionnaire	ITG Library
8 To provide students with opportunities to resolve outstanding issues with regard to enrolment, finances or their programme of study	• Mentors will refer students to areas that can help: Student Information Centre, faculty staff and Support Services • The six-week programme includes workshops in this area	• Orientation programme feedback questionnaire	SIC Student Mentors The Career Centre
9 To assist students to reflect on their future employment prospects and their current employability	• The six-week Getting Started @ AUT orientation programme includes Career Centre workshops and KEYS programmes Career counsellors are available free of charge throughout the academic year Using an established link between Career Centre and faculties	• Feedback from the Career Centre and faculties • Career Centre student visits numbers	Faculty Programme team The Career Centre

Table 1 AUT Orientation Programme objectives and strategies

Deakin University

First Year at Deakin (FYAD) aims to improve transition to tertiary study and retention rates, particularly at first year level, and to ensure the equitable provision of services and the sharing of best practices (Jolley D, Callaghan V and Emmitt M (2004) *First year at Deakin: A University-wide Effort,* Seventh Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, University of Melbourne). As social well-being is fundamental for student success, the program emphasises both social and academic connectedness.

First Year at Deakin

- is a partnership among students, staff, faculties and divisions to enhance and improve the first year experience
- is a unique university-wide, multidisciplinary, coordinated approach
- is focused on providing student support and positive pedagogies to encourage engagement and connectedness.

The processes used in the project's development and implementation include:

- A leadership team that includes an academic and a general staff member, thus emphasizing the collaborative approach. This approach brings together expertise and encourages maximum collaboration across the University.
- Coordination of all parts of the University with the Student Association as an integral partner from the outset. This has ensured full cooperation in planning, implementing, evaluating and determining needs.
- Effective coordination across all areas and campuses that leads to different areas collaborating or developing complementary activities, and encourages the dissemination of good practices and the efficient use of resources. The coordinated approach facilitates the implementation and promotion of resources to new students.
- The approach is underpinned by research and consultation to identify areas of perceived need or gaps and to implement coordinated action to address those needs or gaps. It has led to a number of research projects and the sharing and dissemination of results that inform policy.
- Progressive implementation, evaluation, refinement and extension to new areas of need means that the impact of particular components is documented and improvements are based on knowledge.
- Activities included fit within the three phases of Enrolment, Orientation and the First Six Weeks making the program conceptually simple to promote, and containable, workable, sustainable and reproducible.
- Involvement of large numbers of students in implementing the program (200 student hosts across the University for Enrolment and O'Week and more than 30 student mentors) makes many of the activities possible, develops these students' skills, and provides role models and contacts for new students.

Deakin University diagrammatically represents its multidisciplinary and collaborative approach in Figure 3.

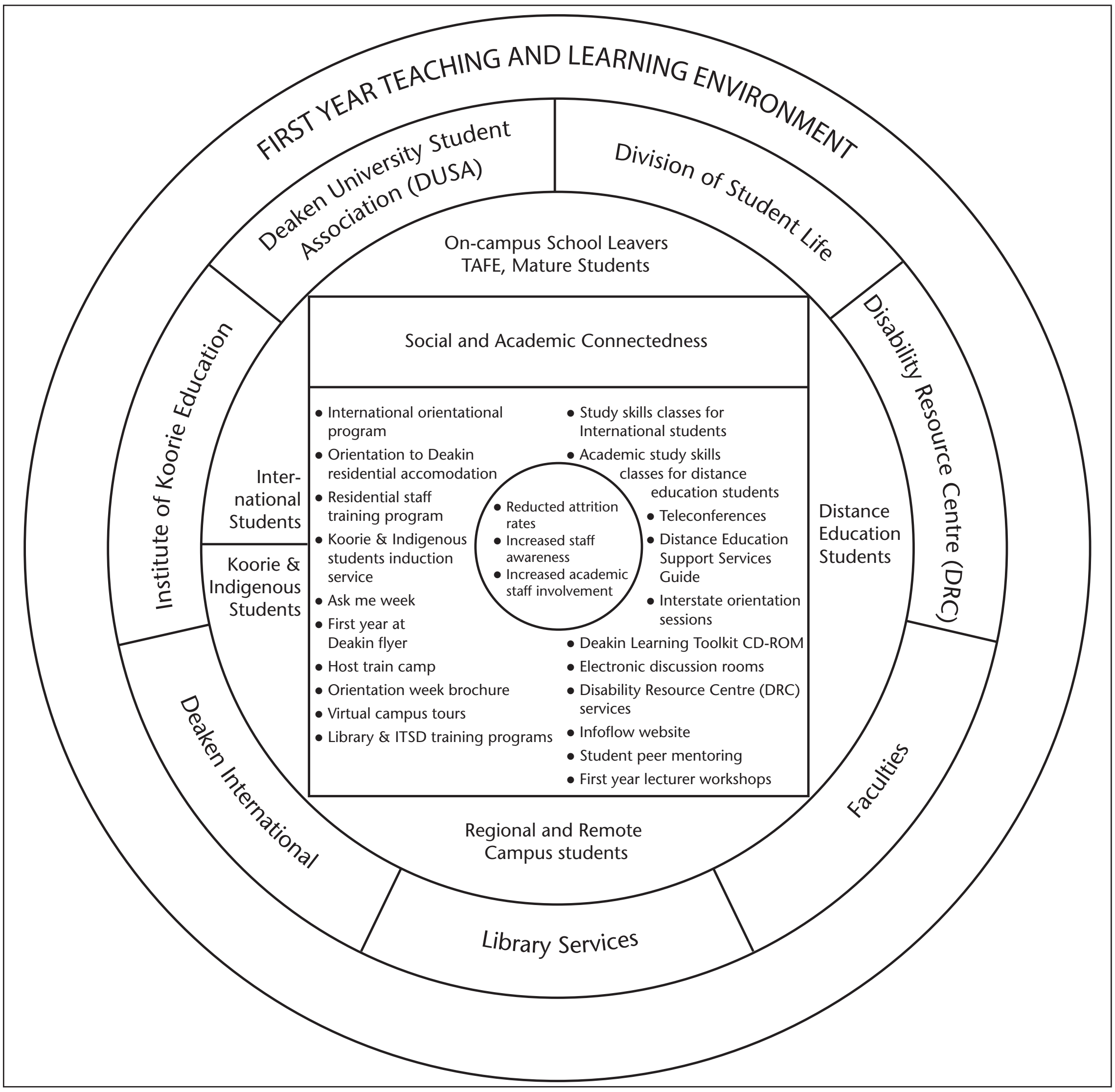

Figure 3 Multidisciplinary and collaborative approach to First Year at Deakin program

University of Sydney

University of Sydney conducted a comprehensive review of their first-year experience (www.itl.usyd.edu.au/fye/). The report writers set out a large number of recommendations under the headings student experience; general; university; faculty; and teaching and learning. Sydney emphasises the importance of integrating transition planning among all key stakeholders, as suggested by Krause, and having it managed at senior level. It embraces most of the strategies outlined by Peel, and works to enhance the experience, orientation and transition of first-year students utilising the following key principles:

- 'Students will be familiarised with the University's physical environment academic culture and support services.
- Students' sense of purpose and direction will be developed by promoting their understanding of what their course involves; where their course will take them; and what their learning in those courses will involve.
- Students' engagement with the University, including with their peers, will be promoted and supported.

Service	Adelaide	Monash	New South Wales	Sydney	Melbourne	Western Australia	Macquarie
FYE/ transition policy		Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
FYE/ transition web page		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
General information web page	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Discipline information web page	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Schools interaction	Partnership with one school	Yes		Yes	Yes		
School mentoring			Recommended				Yes
Academic staff development		Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Peer mentoring at University	Science program, now ceased		Some	Arts	Yes	Yes	
Compulsory O Week		Recommended	Recommended				
Academically oriented O Week						'Flying start' 2-day programme	Yes
Identification of students at risk	Recommended in review	Recommended					Yes
Integration in to coursework	Anthrop 1 in 2002						

Table 2 Summary of FYE/transition programmes in seven Australian universities (Ellis, 2002)

- Students' learning will be enhanced by developing their knowledge and skills, including generic skills and by taking into account students' diverse backgrounds and abilities.'

Transition programmes in seven Australian universities

A review conducted by Adelaide University (Ellis, 2002) looked at those Australian universities adopting various transition activities, particularly policy. Table 2 on the left shows the different services adopted by Australian universities. It also provides information on additional activities conducted.

All six examples shown above embrace Krause's three core strategies and Peel's list of strategies outlined earlier about coordinating, communicating and connecting while planning transition and induction policy. Such strategic approaches have allowed challenges identified in the CHERI report (2004); notes of the breakout groups at the conference Responding to Student Needs in Scottish Higher Education: Towards Meeting the Diverse Needs of Students Today (8 June 2004); and individual new entrant surveys (Carney 2000, 2003) to be anticipated (segmented student groups and layered induction) and addressed in an integrative coordinated fashion.

Appendix B Information provision

University of Tasmania

The University of Tasmania (Parkyn, Karsh and Payne 2004) identified key areas for improvement in its existing orientation programme to more effectively support its diverse cohort of first year students. These areas included:

- reducing 'information overload' during Orientation week by 'drip feeding' information to students before and during the semester
- broadening the concept of orientation to encompass the students' journey through application, preparation, immersion and consolidation through to the end of their first semester
- more effectively meeting the needs of students studying flexibly, late enrolees and those from equity groups.

A First Year at University of Tasmania website and email list were developed in order to 'drip feed' information to students gradually, providing timely information from the submission of applications in September through to the end of first semester (www.utas.edu.au/firstyear). Print-based orientation materials were reduced and students were encouraged to use the website. The website includes a timeline of events, an interactive database of face-to-face orientation events, links to relevant resources elsewhere on the university website and information and resources for staff who support first-year students. The email list alerted students to upcoming events and new information available on the website.

An evaluation was conducted to investigate whether the initiatives were successful and to identify future directions. The initiatives introduced in 2004 addressed the key motivations in several ways, as listed in the report:

> '**Reducing information overload** The website and email messages provided timely information and reminders of coming events to students and staff. The website was updated weekly to fortnightly during the semester; email messages were sent with the same frequency and related to information posted on the website.
>
> **Broadening the concept of orientation** Use of the website was greatest in the two months prior to and the first two weeks of semester one. While peak use of the site occurred during the traditional orientation period, students utilized the site in preparation for university and throughout their first semester. The website provided significantly more support to first year students during these periods than was previously available.
>
> **Meeting the needs of all students** The website and email messages provided orientation information in a dynamic way to students unable to attend face-to-face activities on campus and to late enrollees.'

The report writers suggest that finding an effective balance of print-based and electronic resources is a continuing challenge. While the majority of students surveyed found the website and emails useful, it was notable that students clearly wanted to receive information in a variety of forms, including a posted orientation brochure (54%), school/faculty mailings (53%), and the website (48%).

Deakin University

Deakin University developed a six-week targeted information programme called Infoflow. (www.deakin.edu.au/orientation/infoflow/index.php). The Infoflow programme was devised to overcome the challenges of dealing with information overload. Infoflow is based on the premise that spreading targeted information online over six weeks reduces the likelihood of information overload for new students, and provides information and advice at critical times in an accessible way. Every sector of the University, including the student association, contributes to the six-week programme outlined in a weekly diary form. For each of the first six weeks, all first-year students receive an email that outlines the important information for that week. Students click through to the Infoflow website from a link provided in the email. The home page of the Infoflow website has an iconic diary page, with each week 1-6 hyperlinked to its own separate week page. Dedicated targeted information is given on this page and study hints are provided at the base, with a selection of useful web links

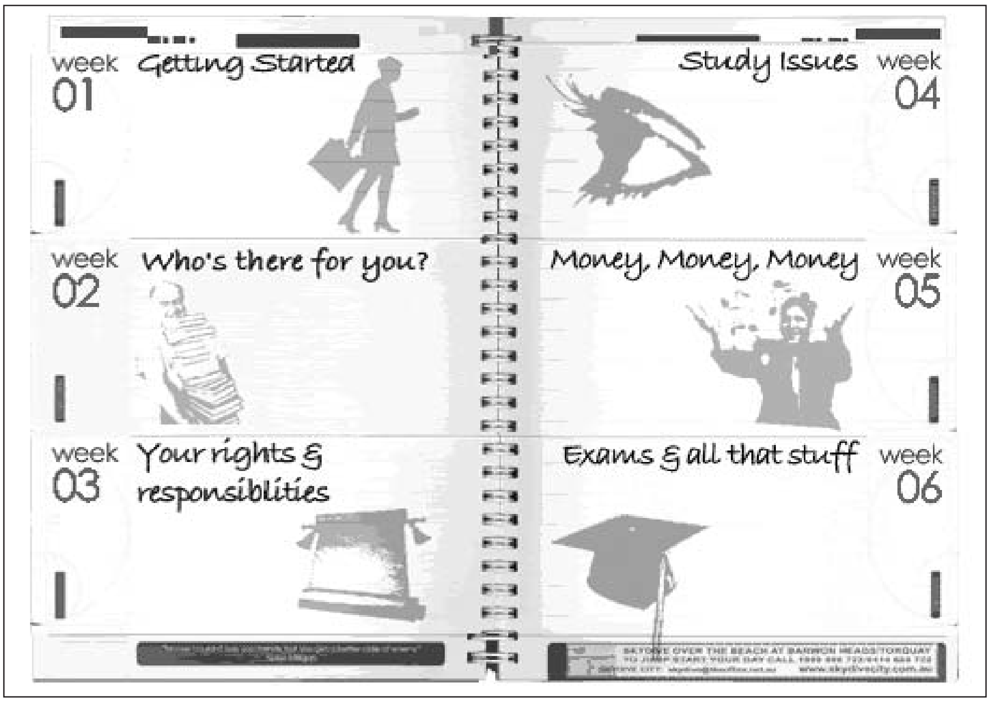

Figure 4 Deakin University Infoflow home page - 'Six Weeks to Success'

Course materials	Library
Deakin Card	Study hints
Deakin Learning Toolkit (DLT)	Textbooks
Deakin Studies Online (DSO)	Time management
Email	Timetables
Fees	Useful links
IT survey	

Figure 5 Content of Week 1 - 'Getting Started'

Appendix C: Evaluation and toolkits

University of Sydney

The University of Sydney adopted a modified framework first devised by La Trobe University. Evaluation is based on outlining:

- their four principles or objectives of induction which were formulated as part of the induction strategy, namely: to familiarise students with the University; to develop students' sense of purpose and direction; to facilitate students' engagement; and to promote and enhance students' learning
- what initiatives are implemented to meet each principle
- who has responsibility for implementation
- what outcomes were achieved (see Table 3 below).

A further template is provided that shows how information can be gathered across faculties to present a matrix view of interventions being implemented (see Table 4). Auckland University of Technology adopted a similar approach and their strategic and evaluative approach can be seen in Table 1 on page 29.

Plan for First Year Academic Orientation and Transition

Faculty of . . . .

The four Objectives set out in the Plan below are based on the First Year Experience Principles endorsed by the Academic Board at the University of Sydney. This template is a modified version of a framework first devised by the Academic Development Unit at La Trobe University.

OBJECTIVE 1: TO FAMILIARISE STUDENTS WITH THE UNIVERSITY'S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, ACADEMIC CULTURE AND SUPPORT SERVICES			
Strategy	Initiative	Responsibility	Outcome

Table 3 University of Sydney Plan for First Year Academic Orientation and Transition (Objective 1)

Faculty responses to four first year experience principles

Abbreviations used in table: FY = First Year; FYE = First Year Experience; ITL = Institute for Teaching and Learning; LC = Learning Centre; 0-Week = Orientation Week; SWOT = Student Welcome, Orientation and Transition.

Faculty	Principle 1 (Familiarisation with the University)	Principle 2 (Sense of purpose and direction)	Principle 3 (Engagement with peers)	Principle 4 (Developing knowledge/skills of diverse students)
Agriculture	All students are interviewed at enrolment. Plans to have Agric. Econ. students share Economics Induction	'Bridging the Gap' 2-day program in 0-week. 0-week BBQs for students.	Excursions for FY students. All FY students have the same tutor, all meet in labs.	'How to Learn' taught in lectures. Academic skills (including IT) taught **and** assessed.
Architecture	New 2-week introductory program run in conjunction with LC and SWOT. Full time staff meet students face to face.	Week 1 introduces students top learning, Week 2 gives them an introduction to Design.	Students go on 'walkabout' to places of architectural interest, do group work on tasks, write an essay, get assessed.	Week 1 gives professional skills development. Electives are provided to address problem areas.
Arts	Many initiatives at Unit of Study level. Pilot study done on factors influencing FY students' retention. FYE Plan in the making.	Faculty piloted Transition Workshop for FY students. Seminar for Faculty staff on 'Setting Clear Goals' including a component on the particular needs of FY students.	Students interact with other FY students and with senior students at Transition program.	New courses taught in Semester 1 on 'Structure of English', to develop written communication skills. Adoption of ITL's Unit of Study template in Flexible Learning program.
Conservatorium of Music	Academic culture is problematic for Con students so they are taught about it in Year 1. 'Academic Study at the Con' booklet given out.	Students are already very focused. 1-to-1 teaching is the norm, so teachers take on counselling/guiding role.		Materials, workshops are provided eg on writing skills. Online support helps students develop aural/analytical skills.
Economics	A Manual is given to all Students. First Induction Day was held this year. The Faculty is reviewing all its programs.	Dean, staff, students, careers advisers and alumni all spoke to FY students at Induction.	Induction Day involved more than 500 students.	IT demonstration given at Induction. Faculty plans to coordinate assessment for 4 'core' units of study. Many initiatives at Unit of Study level.

Table 4 Faculty responses to four first-year experience principles

Student Transition and Retention, University of Ulster

The Student Transition and Retention (STAR) project provides two practical tools for assessing induction: an induction audit, and guidelines for the management of student transition. The premise is slightly different to the Sydney and Auckland examples, as STAR's induction audit provides a means to examine current institutional practice against accumulated best practice. It provides a knowledge base and indicators on best practice and essentially gives a strategic steer for planning and resourcing. The audit considers 10 areas of practice: prior to entry; induction (during registration week); advisors of study/tutors; the curriculum; academic support; student learning; extra-curricular activities; staff-student contact outside class; administrative leadership; and institutional research. Participants are asked to consider their own institutional practice on each of these and select from three scenarios the one that reflects theirs best. Each scenario is scored 1-5 points, with higher scores reflecting good practice. Participants are then asked to review aspects of their practices that do not score well. An extract from the audit (covering prior to entry and induction) is given below in Table 5. The full audit is available from the STAR website (www.ulst.ac.uk/star/).

		Answers from this column score 1 point **1**	Answers from this column score 3 points **3**	Answers from this column score 5 points **5**	Score
1.1	Do recruitment publications accurately portray the characteristics of the campus to prospective first-year students?	Publications are viewed as marketing	Publications give accurate but limited information	Publications give a balanced view of student life. All course and module details are available	
1.2	How much curriculum information is available to applicants?	We have a written prospectus and this is repeated on the web	Each subject produces an information leaflet outlining the course structure career prospects	Applicants can access the module descriptions and course structure from the web	
1.3	When is the first year curriculum available to applicants?	It is sent with joining instructions	An outline curriculum is available of the web and in the prospectus	A detailed curriculum is publicly available on the web	
1.4	How much information is available about student support services?	There are some general statements in the prospectus	Student Support leaflets are freely available	Student Support services are available at visit days and each produces its own leaflet explaining its function	
1.5	Are campus visits explicitly encouraged?	No	Campus visits restricted to large open days	Small open (visit days) days specific to subject arranged	
1.6	Do recruitment practices give an accurate impression of life on campus?	Visit days are organised out of term time	Visit days are organised out of term time but student guides are employed to show prospective students around	Visits days are organised in term time students used as guides extensively	
1.7	Do recruitment practices give an accurate impression of life on campus?	They are welcome to attend visit days	Parents can accompany their offspring for most activities	Parents are separated from the applicants and are given a guided tour and the opportunity to ask questions of students and staff	

1.8	Are applicants interviewed?	Either NO or they get a strict interview with no organised tours or meetings	Applicants have an informal meeting with staff with the intention of encouraging them to confirm their application	All students are interviewed and given the opportunity to participate in sessions designed to answer their queries accurately	
1.10	How much contact is there between the institution and potential students between application and enrolment?	We send them an offer and, if they achieve that, they get the joining instructions	Potential students are sent regular information leaflets	Each applicant is assigned a student who they can contact for information	
1.11	How do you deal with students applying through clearing?	We have an administrator who deals with clearing	Academic staff deal with clearing applications but the emphasis is on filling the places	Clearing students get good academic and career advice from academic staff	
Induction (during registration week)					
2.1	Do you provide an initial induction that includes tours of the department/campus and meeting of academic and support staff?	We let students explore the campus and department themselves and they meet staff as they teach them	Department tour and introduction to department by head	Full campus and department tour and then a meet and greet with the academic and support staff	
2.2	Are trained student mentors involved in initial induction?	Students not involved	Untrained student guides are used for orientation to the campus	Student trained and involved in small group activities	
2.3	What percentage of students attends induction?	<50%	50-80%	>90%	
2.4	Are social activities organised for new students in induction week?	No	Yes this is organised by the students union	Events are organised by the course to ensure that new students get to meet staff and their peers	
2.5	Do parents/family members accompany students to registration?	No we don't invite them and they are not made welcome	We don't discourage them but don't officially invite them	Yes they are invited and there are separate activities for them	
2.6	To what extent do you induct students in course groups?	All students entering the faculty/school are dealt with together	Some events are arranged which are specific to courses	Students on our course are brought together initially and we try to keep them together for most induction activities	
2.7	What subject specific matters are included in induction?	We use a general induction which covers all the students in the school/faculty	Our students get a lecture on health and safety issues	We take our students off campus on a residential induction	

Table 5 Extract from Student Recruitment and Transition Project audit

STAR has also produced a set of guidelines for the management of student transition. The guidelines are based on three phases:

- Phase 1: induction processes - prior to study.
- Phase 2: induction processes - extra activities organised in year 1.
- Phase 3: induction processes embedded in the curriculum.

A number of guidelines are set out for each phase and guidance is provided for each guideline on implementation and measuring effectiveness. An example of Phase 1 summary guidelines is shown in Figure 6, and guidance outlines for guideline 1.1 is shown in Figure 7 for demonstration. The full report can be accessed at www.ulst.ac.uk/star/

Summary of STAR Guidelines

Phase 1 - Induction processes - prior to study

1.1 Student expectations of the campus and the course on which they enter should be accurate.

1.2 Teachers, careers advisors, family members and other educational institutions are important clients of the Institution and should receive up-to-date, accurate and relevant information. Two-way communication should be promoted.

1.3 Where potential problems in transition are predictable, support should be available prior to study.

Figure 6 Summary of STAR Guidelines (Phase 1) for the Management of Student Transition.

1.1 Student expectations of the campus and the course on which they enter should be accurate.

Guidance

Individual institutions do not have total control over all information a student uses to form their expectations of Higher Education. Nevertheless, all have obligations to ensure that the information that is supplied to prospective students is accurate at the time of publication, balanced and accessible.

Course Teams will want to consider the following:

- Does the information supplied during the application and admission procedures accurately reflect the content of the course and the staff with whom new students will interact? Does it communicate realistic career goals?
- Will students understand the nature and quantity of work expected of them during the course from the information supplied?
- Is the course suitable for those that choose to accept places on it?

Is your practice effective?

Information can be gathered from students using focus groups. The timing of such events and their organisation may be critical to the outcomes. Questions should be centred on what expectations students had before they came, whether they were reasonable expectations in the light of events and whether the institution had met those reasonable expectations. Information from graduates, who will have had the experience of the whole courses and therefore be able to set the first year in context, will also be useful.

Figure 7 STAR Guidelines for Phase 1 - Induction processes - Prior to study (1.1)

University of Melbourne

The University of Melbourne, in conjunction with the Centre for Studies in Higher Education, has produced a Faculty Resource Kit for implementing and evaluating first-year transition initiatives (Rhoden, Boin, Krause and McInnis 2001, www.services.unimelb.edu.au/transition/unistaff/resources/101info.html). The resource kit provides guidelines and strategies for those involved in implementing and evaluating faculty-based transition initiatives for first-year undergraduate students. The faculty transition programme is based on four strategic objectives:

- create early links for first-year students to fellow students in their faculty
- allow students the opportunity to meet faculty teaching and administrative staff
- provide students who are new to the university with a set of basic skills with which to tackle first-year subjects
- familiarise students with the services available to them and how to seek help.

The kit includes two sections: implementation and evaluation. The implementation section contains general information about the programme for faculty staff and first-year students, guidelines for designing first-year seminars, information for study group facilitators, templates and activities for facilitator training, and resources for study groups. The evaluation section contains an explanation of the principles, purposes and practicalities of evaluation, plus 19 templates for evaluating transition programmes from a range of perspectives including students, staff and facilitators. Although the kit was originally designed for use within the University of Melbourne, as it is template-based it provides a useful generic means of considering all aspects of induction implementation and evaluation.

Personal tutor systems and their alternatives

Elaine M Smith

Glasgow Caledonian University

Contents

Executive summary

Personal tutor systems have a long tradition in higher education institutions (HEIs). The primary aim is to afford students the opportunity of one-to-one advice from an academic member of staff. Research recurrently indicates that such engagements and interactions benefit student learning and socialisation into the culture of departments and institutions.

Personal tutors often perform additional roles. For example, an element of pastoral care has been implicit or explicit in the operation of many schemes.

The growth in student numbers, the deterioration of staff/student ratios, the increase in provision of specialised student support services, the fact that many students now undertake a significant amount of part-time employment alongside their studies, subtle changes in expectations and the impact of legislation have had complex implications for personal tutor schemes which institutions are endeavouring to address.

Replies to the questionnaire survey associated with this enhancement theme aired many of these issues and specifically mentioned operational frustrations such as:

- slowness in allocating students to personal tutors at the start of the academic year
- difficulties in getting some students to respond to invitations to meet with their tutor
- ensuring that personal tutors know when, and to whom, to refer a student for more specialised advice
- staff and students reporting some lack of clarity about roles and purposes.

With the introduction of personal development planning (PDP) for students, many institutions are reflecting on the next step. Should PDP for students be added to the personal tutor role? Indeed, would that give it greater clarity? Or is there a case for a parallel structure? How would students react to that option?

Institutions use various means to supplement personal tutoring. These include peer support by other, usually later year, students. Examples of these are described in this report.

Increasing use is being made of technology as another means of supplementing support. Again examples are mentioned in this report.

Finally, institutions might wish to evaluate their current arrangements by using an evaluation questionnaire developed at the University of Ulster (the STAR project, see Appendix G). They could also reflect on the relevance for their context and approach of the concluding key points on implementing a successful personal tutor system.

Introduction

The specific aim of this strand was to consider good practice, nationally and internationally, for various personal tutor systems and their alternatives and to recommend the adoption and facilitate the implementation of good practice.

It is argued that a well designed and integrated student support system is likely to include some model of personal tutor or academic advisor support.

The provision of a responsive and supportive environment can do much to enhance the student experience and improve retention and progression. It is true that early drop-out contributes significantly to poor retention, and the experiences and quality of support offered in the first weeks of the term or semester are critical. Although front-loading support into the early weeks is recommended to avoid early drop-out, maintaining an adequate level of ongoing support as the academic year continues is also essential. This parallel approach should help ensure that both sudden problems and those that accumulate to exceed some threshold beyond which an individual student can no longer cope are identified as early as possible and resolved or ameliorated. Personal tutors are well placed to help with the identification of sudden onset or accumulating problems and often find themselves in the front line as such problems become manifest.

In looking at current practice it is useful to identify good and novel case studies in relation to personal tutor systems and their alternatives. This encapsulates both the support to students from their peers (other students) and the support of academic advisors or personal tutors (university staff). Personal tutor systems exist in most institutions and, as evidence of the opportunity for students to engage in personal development planning (PDP) becomes universal, the possible enhancement of the role of the personal tutor to effectively and efficiently provide the development support, or interface to PDP advisors where they exist separately, must also be considered.

Issues raised in phase one of the enhancement theme

The sector-wide CHERI report that resulted from staff and student focus groups in phase one of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA Scotland) project 'Student Needs in the First Year of Study' identified a number of key issues including:

- better guidance/monitoring for direct entry students or those considered to be at highest risk
- the availability of student support outside 'office hours'
- the relevance and relationship between PDP and personal tutoring
- the need to embed learning skills into the curriculum
- peer support and buddy systems
- the potential to better exploit technology particularly to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- the development of organised, supportive, blended learning environments.

Staff expressed concerns about effective communication with students. Even if good models of support exist for students, how are those in greatest need identified, how quickly can intervention take place and how are students made aware of what support options are available to them?

Many academic advisor or personal tutor schemes already exist. However, they are often difficult to evaluate, partly because of the multi-factorial nature of the topic and local variations in actual provision and practice.

Further issues with academic advisor or personal tutor schemes are related to staff time, expertise, aptitudes and development. Academic staff are subject experts. That does not necessarily mean all of them will be comfortable in the role of personal tutor or academic advisor or equipped for that task.

A further dimension may emerge if personal tutors are also expected to act as PDP advisers, since the latter role places a premium on helping students to become reflective learners.

Identifying the type of support needed

The need to provide support to undergraduates is an accepted responsibility of any educational institution. In effect, it is part of the way institutions address a duty of care to students.

Such support can be categorised broadly under three headings:

- academic support
- pastoral support
- development support.

Academic support is defined as supporting the student to attain academic success and achieve the desired qualification. Academic support is normally delivered by academic staff.

Pastoral support is supporting the student on a more personal level to address any difficulties that they might experience in their life that have an impact on their studies. Pastoral support may be delivered by academics or by other institutional staff or services.

Developmental support is often less well defined. It includes general personal development in all subject areas and the development of subject-specific skills such as the essential clinical development in nursing.

Many aspects of developmental support are seen as discipline-based. These can include structured personal development planning or employability skills, although these may also be addressed by central services.

Student expectations of support

Surveys by Gidman (2001) and Gallagher and Allen (2000) investigated what students expected in terms of support and what level of satisfaction they reported. The evidence indicated that where a gap existed between expectation and experience, students could feel aggrieved. That suggests that it is important to communicate clearly to students the type, level, nature and purposes of the support that is provided.

Where an academic advisor or personal tutor is made available to a student, the main requirements reported in these studies to satisfy student support needs are the:

- availability of the advisor
- level of knowledge of the advisor
- level of interest of the advisor.

In situations where different people are acting as advisors for different support needs, it could be helpful to make clear to the student to whom they should go for which purpose. To help with implementing this, a decision responsibility matrix such as the one provided at Appendix A could be modified to make it specific to an institution. This could be given to students at the commencement of their studies.

An alternative to the student knowing to whom they should go for which type of support is the creation of a first-year champion who becomes the focus of support to the student and who directs them to centralised or distributed services as appropriate. Such a position could be a new one or may already be part of an existing year tutor or programme leader role. The advantage of a dedicated post is the ability to pursue consistency across different programmes, schools or departments.

Identifying existing (intrinsic) and developing (dynamic) student risk

A number of longitudinal studies have taken place over recent years to look for facts that contribute to student drop-out (Foster et al, 2002; Johnstone, 2001). These factors can be thought of as risk factors and support indicators. It is argued that students arrive in higher education with a potential point of entry risk factor as a result of what has gone before. This could be considered their static or intrinsic risk factor.

Knowledge of potential levels of risk may help an institution and departments plan an effective student support strategy. A possible tool is the questionnaire given in Appendix B.

Information gathered from such a questionnaire can then be compared with the retention, performance and progression of the cohort. Where positive correlations are proven between responses to the questions and student failure, potential intrinsic risk factors or support indicators can then be confirmed.

Subsequent use of a questionnaire in the following academic year, perhaps modified or expanded on the basis of the local intelligence and experience gained in its previous use, will then provide an early warning of new students whose intrinsic risk factor is significant and who may require more or a different kind of support.

In addition to the intrinsic risk factor that the student brings with them, there is a dynamic risk factor that results from the student's experience in higher education and as a result of their personal circumstances and continued life experiences. Monitoring the student body to look for an increase in their dynamic risk factor can be done by monitoring attendance and engagement or participation. Such engagement could include submitting assessments in the first few weeks of the semester or term (these can be diagnostic or formative if summative assessments are not possible) or being involved in organised social events, meetings or activities. If institutions wish to track dynamic risk then it is important that there are early opportunities for students to engage. Where the existing schedule of formal assessments provides no opportunity for students to submit work, this could be changed to facilitate such monitoring.

Even in the case of large classes of students or hybrid programmes with mixed student groups, feeding back and collating attendance and engagement or participation to a centralised source that can regularly evaluate the big picture is an invaluable way of providing an early warning of increasing dynamic risk or student distress. It could also inform or signal a support need or trend in a cohort.

In addition to the type of general monitoring already described, the personal feelings and instincts of staff working with students in lectures, seminars and laboratories can also act as a litmus paper alerting any manifestation of increasing dynamic risk for an individual. The signs often include changes in student behaviour and/or appearance.

Models of student support

The model for the provision of student support offered locally by academic staff is very different across the higher education (HE) sector and is influenced by a number of factors, some of which are historical and internal to the institutions. Main variations in the design of student support centre around the size of the institution, the student support culture, the centralised support facilities available and the extent to which academic staff, who are subject experts, also take on any responsibility for personal tutoring or advising. The provision of centralised support organised at institutional level is being more fully investigated in a separate strand and this will not be further explored here (see page 72).

There are variations in the model of student support offered by academic staff. It can be primarily a responsive and reactive one centred around crisis intervention, or more proactive, where planned and sequential needs are anticipated and attempts made to meet them. In the latter case, some crises can be prevented rather than resolved. Although crisis intervention and management will always be necessary, it is suggested that the model of proactive outreach supports approaches to risk by the type of monitoring described above.

One-to-one support systems

In today's HE environment of rising class sizes it is becoming increasingly difficult for HEIs to offer a one-to-one personal tutor system. Yet such a system offers real opportunities for student support on academic and non-academic issues. The academic advisor or personal tutor system creates an ideal environment for mentoring and informal face-to-face feedback. It also facilitates personal and professional development.

The Student Needs in the First Year of Study project group issued a questionnaire to staff across different HEIs in Scotland in summer 2004. Responses indicated that very personal tutoring makes student support distinctive and effective. The full response to the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

Comments such as student support is 'geared to the individual student' or that student support is 'personalised' confirm a positive view of one-to-one tutoring.

Information from both the breakout groups at the national enhancement themes conference Responding to Student Needs in Scottish Higher Education: Towards Meeting the Diverse Needs of Students Today, held in Glasgow on 8 June 2004, and the Student Needs project survey indicated that in some institutions academic staff are not expected to become involved in personal issues or problems at any level. Instead they would immediately direct students to centralised services and trained counsellor provision.

In such a model academic staff are expected to confine their role strictly to academic support with personal and developmental support provided centrally.

In part this approach builds upon the traditions of the role of academic advisor who typically has approved the curriculum of students.

Studies on the effectiveness of student support

Studies on the effectiveness of the provision of student support are relatively uncommon. One study was conducted across UK HE in 1995 (Easton and Van Laar, 1995) and reported that 97 per cent of the sample of 567 lecturers had directly dealt with a distressed student. This finding would suggest that it may be difficult to isolate academic staff from the personal problems of students they teach.

For the model of 'academic advisor only' to be effective, the personal and developmental support issues of students would need to be effectively addressed by appropriate centralised services. Adequate provision of interfaces between academic advisors and centralised services would be essential for the latter to work.

A study conducted at Christchurch College of Education in New Zealand discussed the culture in which academic staff take an interest in the development of the student's life as well as their academic advancement of knowledge (Roberts et al, 2001). This study aired the potential conflict of interest that could develop where academic staff with pastoral roles were also assessors making pass/fail decisions about students who may be disclosing very personal information to them. It discussed the power that a member of academic staff could have, in particular circumstances, over a student and questioned the legitimacy of them encouraging or expecting disclosure from students in such a situation. Such arguments can be used to support the model of academic staff not providing any personal support to students they teach. Equally, institutions might feel that adopting good practice in relation to the assessment of students should control or eliminate any potential risks.

Combining academic advisors and personal tutors

In many institutions, the academic advisor and personal tutor is a combined role with some additional specialised centralised support available at institutional level. In the Student Needs project survey, 38.1 per cent of academics had personal tutor roles with students they taught.

Where the academic advisor and personal tutor are the same person, there are variations in the model adopted by HEIs. In some institutions, all academic staff have a group of personal tutees and the role is seen as part of the normal academic activity. In other institutions, being a personal tutor is a choice made by some academic staff, who may be given a financial incentive to take on this additional role. The latter interpretation of the personal tutor model may work particularly for well defined course structures such as medicine or education. For hybrid programmes where students are taking a range of different subjects and modules across disciplines, it may be difficult for one person to handle the complex and varied mixtures of academic expectations, requirements and aspirations, and the personal experiences and needs of students.

Another approach is illustrated by the Department of Biology at Napier University. Here the first-year tutor is an academic who acts as a personal tutor for all of the first-year students, building a personal relationship with them. The same member of academic staff then becomes the second-year tutor, following the same group of students through that academic year. In turn, another member of staff becomes the next first-year tutor and this role alternates on a two-year cycle, maintaining consistency for the first two years of any cohort.

In addition to providing continuity for students, the two-year cycle is also perceived as spreading the workload for the academic staff.

In Queen Margaret University College's Nursing degree, students are assigned a personal tutor who will work with them over three years. This includes visits while on placement, thereby fulfilling the developmental support category identified earlier in this report. The amount of time that a personal tutor will spend with an individual student varies depending on the support needs of the student.

Recruitment of larger classes tends to favour spreading the personal tutor role among a number of staff. Thus at The Robert Gordon University Accounts and Business School, six tutors are assigned to support the first year.

Further evidence from institutional studies

A study at the Medical School of Dundee University evaluated one student support scheme and determined the factors that were essential for success (Malik, 2000). In the study a total of 144 second- and third-year medical students were randomly selected. They were asked to complete questionnaires regarding contact with their personal tutors, frequency of meetings, activities during meetings, opinions on how to improve the system and how satisfied they were with the system.

A high success rating by students was associated with regular and frequent meetings, with tutors actively seeking their students and taking part in social as well as academic activities. The conclusion of the study was that the relationship formed between students and tutors was the most important factor contributing to the success of the scheme. Taking part in social activities encouraged the relationship to develop, while addressing academic problems helped to meet the needs of students. Those needs did not appear to correlate markedly with the academic performance of the students who responded to the survey.

At the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences at the University of Brighton, the 2000-01 Level 1 and Level 2 MPharm cohorts were surveyed with respect to their perceptions of the personal tutor system (Sosabowski et al, 2003). Although the majority of students made one visit, or none, to their assigned personal tutor each academic year, overall positive student perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the personal tutor system were reported, with most students stating that they found their allocated personal tutor helpful. Students described the personal tutor system as a means of listening to personal problems, reviewing status of academic progress and acting as an initial point of contact between the students and the University.

However, the personal tutor was not described as a means of discussing learning and assessment strategies, acquiring information on course and exam regulations, helping choice of modules, or gaining assistance in accessing support services.

Using this information, the School decided to focus on enhancing staff dedication to the provision of a quality service, training support for staff in the skills of personal tutor, instituting a minimum number of personal tutor sessions per academic year and broadening student knowledge of the multi-dimensional role of the personal tutor. It was also concluded that the one-size-fits-all model does **not** fit all, and that a flexible model for tutoring was more likely to satisfy the requirements of the student body as a whole.

Implications for staff development and training

Brookes (1989) concluded that although two-thirds of academic advisors also provide personal counselling, only a quarter of academic advisors were given any training.

In responses from the Student Needs project survey 37.2 per cent of respondents indicated that personal tutors in their institutions received no formal training or training materials to support them in the role.

It would seem prudent to offer some counselling guidance to academic staff both to assist students and also help to protect the academic staff from becoming inappropriately involved in sensitive or critical situations.

For most personal tutors and most students it is the general day-to-day support needs rather than crisis support that will be required. Academics usually want to provide an adequate level of support to students but may have concerns about the adequacy or completeness of their range of knowledge and experience and may welcome clear and relevant supportive information.

Another option is to make the personal tutor meetings part of a larger picture of student goals. An example of successful use of this type of integration can be seen at Appendix D.

A structured approach

Open-ended personal tutor meetings demonstrate a willingness to listen and to allow the student to articulate issues and concerns. However, if that purpose is not clearly stated and agreed the approach can result in student dissatisfaction or confusion.

An example of how to establish where the student is in relation to their goals, and of the minimum that needs to be covered in a personal tutor meeting, is given at Appendix E. Personal tutors operating with these guidelines have expressed satisfaction with the clarity provided but continue to add their own additional discussions with students and prefer to remain in control of the meetings.

Whichever model of personal tutoring is adopted and implemented in any HEI, it is recommended that a set of clear guidelines is available to assist academic staff in defining boundaries and identifying a critical incident in relation to student support. Basic knowledge would ensure that academic staff could identify and respond to emergencies to protect the student in crisis, other students who may be affected by that student's behaviour, and themselves.

Critical incident strategies and personal tutoring

The vocabulary of critical incidents in relation to personal tutoring may seem foreign, even a little disturbing, to many academic staff. In part that can stem from the fact that academic staff often undertake the role because of a personal desire to help students (in essence to be an academic guide/friend). It may also be because they have not encountered a major incident or student crisis during personal tutoring/academic advising or are uncomfortable with the thought of handling that type of situation.

Nonetheless, because these situations do occur it is important, for students and staff, that personal tutors/academic advisors know how to identify potential crises and how to handle/refer them.

Using standard health and safety terminology, a study from Massey University (Graham and Shillington, 2001) on developing critical incident strategies defined a critical incident related to student support as one where:

- there is an element of threat or feeling of crisis
- there is a need for prompt action to avoid a worsening situation
- there is the potential for a student or member of staff to have a strong emotional reaction.

The message from this study is that academic staff need to be aware of what to do where they believe that the situation they are faced with as an academic or personal advisor is critical in order for them both to meet the duty of care to the student and to protect themselves from harm or any long-term adverse reaction.

What is being proposed as good practice is that personal tutors or academic advisors be briefed about how to deal with an immediate situation that arises and when, how and to whom they should refer a student. An illustration of student referral practice can be found at the website of the University of Greenwich (see page 61 for URL).

Many universities already provide excellent support materials to academic staff in training sessions and on their internet sites.

For example, the University of Bath (see page 61 for URL) publishes guides for their academic staff guides which aim to:

- raise awareness of the kinds of difficulties that students may experience
- discuss briefly the pastoral role of staff in the University
- provide practical advice to help staff respond effectively and appropriately
- identify the most appropriate sources of advice for staff and of support for students.

The relationship between personal tutors, PDP and developmental support

HEIs have been encouraged to provide opportunities and evidence of Personal Development Planning (PDP) for students. The extent to which PDP advising and personal tutoring should, or will, merge is not yet clear. In the Student Needs project survey questionnaire associated with this enhancement theme, 46.2 per cent of respondents answered 'yes' in response to the question 'does the personal tutor in your institution also act as a personal development tutor?' This suggests that a significant number of institutions may seek to integrate PDP guidance into an existing system of personal tutoring.

One colleague at the Student Needs Conference described faculty modules designed to promote PDP, generic study skills and professional relationships across subject disciplines. Part of the work included group tasks. Initially there had been enormous resistance from first-year students because they perceived the PDP/group work as divorced from the rest of their academic curriculum. Once the curriculum had been restructured to include an induction to study skills, PDP etc, the students were more receptive. It was suggested in the workshop discussion that academic departments needed to contextualise PDP within their subject rather than it be a separate entity delivered by dedicated staff who were educational theorists rather than practitioners. This supports the involvement of the personal tutors in PDP delivery, but the extent to which adequate training and support needs to be provided to realise appropriate quality standards then becomes an important issue.

Equally there may be scope, at least in the initial stages of implementing PDP, for creative partnership between personal tutors in academic departments and staff in learning support units.

Identified problems in existing personal tutor systems

It may be useful to pause at this point and consider a number of problems identified in the implementation of existing personal tutor systems. Through the Student Needs conference and the Student Needs project questionnaire common problems were identified. They include:

- delays in early allocation of personal tutors to first-year students. This can occur if, for example, the allocative process depends upon the existence of accurate class lists. A vital opportunity for early engagement between the personal tutor and the student may be lost and the whole process may be adversely affected

- different perceptions of the purposes of the schemes
- problems in reconciling the aims of operating a comprehensive approach, ie all students have a personal tutor, with the aim of involving staff with an enthusiasm and aptitude for the role
- significant variations between the proclaimed aims and objectives of schemes and the actual operational experiences of students and staff. For example in the survey less than 37 per cent of respondents reported that tutors met the goal of meeting tutees at least once a semester
- lack of recognition of effectiveness of performance in tutoring or advising roles in reward and recognition criteria. While many staff have undertaken these roles voluntarily, the reality is that they face mounting pressures and demands upon their time. This can cause tensions and strains, especially if the perception is that the role is not highly valued by the institution. For example, 71.7 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire considered that being good at supporting students did not add value to cases for promotion.

Further analysis of the Student Needs project questionnaire revealed that in response to the question 'how would you improve the personal tutor system at your institution?' the most common free text answer was 'staff development and training'. Other answers included selection of appropriate staff, support for tutors, dedicated time for meetings, clearer staff guidelines and more organisation. The respondents also ticked the boxes for more staff and student commitment and more resources.

At the Student Needs conference, views expressed about what makes good personal tutor systems included:

- integration by making learning skills part of the curriculum for all new students and not just for problem students
- the existence of a well coordinated student support system that was well publicised and understood by students and staff.

Additionally it was argued that networks of staff across different universities with interest in various issues, for example giving feedback, would also be useful in generating ideas and sharing good practice.

Developing the skills of reflection and self-assessment were seen as important, as was the choice of language. Related to the point on language was the issue of making sure that the student understands what is intended, offered and expected.

The use of peer support

It is not being suggested that peer support could be used to replace the type of support offered by personal tutors and by institutions. However, the literature does indicate peer support can be an effective supplement to academic and personal tutoring (Etter et al, 2001).

A study conducted in Australia (McKavanagh et al, 1996) proposed that many students did not know of the existence of student support services but that they did appear to listen to other students as a primary source of information.

Another survey of students at James Cook University (McGinty and Zimmermann, 1997) revealed that a significant proportion of students who had contemplated dropping out were unaware of student support services but were very responsive to direct student mentoring.

Many of the published peer support schemes have come from USA studies where the phrase 'supplemental instruction' is widely used. USA terminology refers to a peer supporter as a 'buddy'.

In some Scottish HEIs broadly equivalent practices have either existed for some time or have recently been revised or implemented, sometimes with funded support.

Information coming from Scottish HEIs who have experience of peer support initiatives indicated that most peer support systems required students to volunteer their time. Although peer support can take place between classmates at the same level of study, and good socialisation should naturally lead to this, it is more common for peer support systems organised by the institution or departments to use students who have already progressed further in their programme of study to help first-year students.

Where the students who act as peer supporters have progressed on the same course, both academic support and personal support can take place. An example of this type of system occurs at Queen Margaret University College, where a mentor system runs across the faculty and student volunteers support first-year students.

Some examples of peer support extend beyond targeting only first year to hierarchical systems which create a family of support from one year to another. An example of this can be found at the University of Edinburgh Medical School, where first-year students are allocated second-year students who are their 'parents' (organised with sensitivity to diversity issues). In turn, the second-year students are supported by third-year students who are known as their parents and the first-year students' 'grandparents'.

For many decades the University of St Andrews has successfully operated an academic family approach across their institution providing student support.

Although many peer support schemes are voluntary, there are examples of incentives being provided for some students to act as peer supporters. Glasgow Caledonian University's School of Engineering, Science and Design has a system of peer support called PASS (Peer Supported Study Sessions), where invited students in second and third year are paid to spend one hour per week offering drop-in sessions to first-year students. This support extends into a web-based version called WebPASS, where a bulletin board is moderated by the same PASS leaders over holiday and re-sit periods. The PASS leaders are given training and a set of guidelines (a copy of these is available at Appendix F).

An alternative to providing a financial incentive was to make the time spent by peer supporters recognised by some form of course credit. An example of this can be found at Napier University, where there is a second-year elective module in peer-assisted learning which is credit-rated. Second-year students who enrol for this module each support up to four first-year students. The module is assessed by reflective log and presentation.

Dr Randy Swing, keynote speaker at the Assessment Enhancement Theme Workshop Improving Feedback to Students, held at the University of Glasgow on 4 June 2004, cited evidence of concrete academic performance benefits from peer support. Students entering a USA college were categorised according to their entry grades. Low performing entrants were then paired with high performing entrants. Evaluation of this initiative showed that this pairing had improved the grades of the low-performing entrants, without apparently lowering the grades of the high-performing entrants.

The University of Strathclyde's Mechanical Engineering Department also uses mixed ability grouping to facilitate peer support. This is an integral part of their New Approaches to Teaching and Learning in Engineering (NATALIE) project (see page 61 for URL).

Another case study of peer support is provided by the University of Glamorgan (Miller and Packer, 1999). The aims of the scheme in the Business School, which is also termed PASS, are to:

- assist those students who are having difficulty with the course
- assist in improving marks
- assist in increasing the overall rate of graduation.

Although student-centred, the scheme has to be organised by university staff and they believe that the inclusion of peer support sessions in the timetables is critical to the success of the initiative. One interesting fact that was reported in this study is the high percentage attendance of female students in a population which was equally split between male and female students. It was reported that 88.4 per cent of the people attending were female.

Generally, first-year students are seen as the main beneficiary of peer support, but sometimes provision is also targeted at students entering courses in more advanced years. For example, The Robert Gordon University has an informal buddy system for direct-entry students and it is looking to expand this support.

Recent work on the FE-HE transition also highlighted the need to support direct-entry students and the usefulness of mentoring or pairing direct-entry with existing or continuing students within an institution.

Central Queensland University in Australia reported the mechanics of an off-campus mentoring initiative which they refer to as telementoring - mentoring at a distance (Kennedy, 2002). Originally contact was made by telephone, but this scheme evolved into an email-driven communication system and has been renamed e-mentoring. The initiative was supported by a website that included application forms which could be filled in and submitted electronically from students who wished to become mentors and an online training course for potential mentors. Mentor applicant details were stored on a database and matching and linking was done by a dedicated administrator who managed the project. An indirect financial incentive was provided by giving mentors a 10 per cent discount at the university bookshop on their textbook purchases. This initiative was evaluated from both the mentor and student perspective and was found to be satisfactory by both.

A further example comes from the University of Reading, which operates a peer support initiative and also has an online application form for the peer supporter (see page 61 for URL). Reading is particularly interested in peer support related to student halls of residence.

A number of books have been written as handbooks for peer tutoring schemes. One such book by Goodlad (1998) gives a checklist for setting up a scheme and provides an international review of mentoring and tutoring by students in tertiary and secondary education. It includes research reviews, case studies of mature projects and ideas for new uses of student tutoring and mentoring.

Implementation of peer support systems

Although many positive experiences have been reported and presented above, some institutions also report that the potential advantages of peer support are not always realised in implementation. Some approaches to peer-assisted learning, primarily aimed at supporting first-year students, experienced problems.

Based on experience and feedback, the following guidelines are offered to assist successful implementation of peer support.

- Select peer supporters based on their personality and their academic ability.
- Make sure that the peer supporters are representative of the cohort of students with a proportionate mixture of race, age and gender.
- Provide training and written guidelines to peer supporters.
- Provide financial or course credit incentives to peer supporters.
- Have a member of staff in charge of the initiative who regularly meets with the peer supporters and acts on their feedback.
- Timetable and constantly advertise peer support sessions to first-year students.
- Give the sessions a framework and a purpose, for example making solutions to tutorials, formative assessments and past papers available only through peer support sessions.

The use of technology to support students

Given the rise in student numbers and constraints in the resources available to institutions, new technology - for example online discussions, email, video conferencing and bespoke software tools - may be beneficial in developing and supplementing effective personal tutor systems.

Through discussion in the Student Needs Conference, it was suggested that even when the provision of technology was the same in institutions, student use of what was available in the institution varied.

The engagement of academic staff in using technology was a major factor in its successful adoption by students.

The use of technology in relation to student support includes:

- internet and intranet use
- methods of electronic communication
- bespoke software tools.

Internet sites increasingly extend beyond the provision of general institutional information, into sources of other information and student-specific support. Virtual learning environment (VLE) software, although originally developed to provide learning materials, is being adapted to provide general student support of an academic, personal and developmental nature, the three categories identified for student support earlier in this report.

Another use of technology to support students is in the form of providing information and links via the university intranet or the internet itself. Gathering all the relevant information together to be accessed from one centralised portal is particularly useful for first-year students, who can easily get lost in a general university website. The addition of frequently asked questions and contact links to services such as counselling, learning skills and careers advice are an excellent use of such a resource. An example of a centralised portal for first-year students was found at Glasgow Caledonian University (see page 61 for URL).

VLEs installed on intranet sites, although designed (as previously mentioned) primarily to provide academic support for learning through access to online notes and teaching materials, can also include information and links targeted at student support in the personal and developmental areas.

The addition of computer-supported collaboration using asynchronous bulletin boards can enhance learning and can also serve to foster peer support. Keeping such collaboration active has its problems, and an example of the use of an asynchronous bulletin board was found in Pennsylvania State University (Land and Dornisch, 2002).

It is suggested from the evidence examined in this study that when students see the purpose of the bulletin board activity as oriented to product or answers, they are unlikely to engage in reflection and interaction. Explicit scaffolding may be necessary to facilitate sharing and dialogue using bulletin boards.

Bulletin boards clearly provide a mechanism for vicarious learning and support but can easily stagnate without a continuous need for students to visit and be involved in them. For this reason, it is recommended that bulletin boards are established for limited periods of time with very clear purposes. A good example of this is the establishment of a bulletin board a few weeks before the exam period aimed specifically at exam preparation and support. For example, at Glasgow Caledonian University such a system was run over the summer to support re-sit students and was moderated by students in later years of the same programmes.

Methods of electronic communication are dominated by email systems, which can become the main method for academic staff and personal tutors/advisors to communicate with students.

Although an efficient way of communicating, email is not without its problems, and some of these were raised in the Student Needs Conference. For example, students can:

- use email as an avoidance technique
- make an appointment with an adviser then cancel it without having to confront anyone face-to-face.

Some personal tutors feel that the email method of communication leads to other issues. Concerns were expressed over the informality students attach to email as a method of communication.

Experience suggested part-time students make far better use of email because it is often their main means of contact, while full-time students assume they will also have personal contact, and therefore formulate less focused questions by email.

The use of text messaging between university systems and the mobile phones of students could on the one hand exacerbate the problems of informality, text being an even less regimented form of communication, but on the other hand provide a very personal communication intervention.

These problems could be reduced by having guidance on electronic communication between staff and students.

Although cost may be an issue, one USA study described using telephone calls as an example of care to promote student success and retention (Volp et al, 1998). The authors discussed a collaborative intervention conducted by academics and student affairs staff in which telephone calls were made to at-risk first-year students in the sixth week of the semester. The study group earned higher average marks and had higher retention rates. The authors found gender to be an important element of the intervention. Male students called by men showed the highest positive change in grades, and female students called by women had the highest retention rates.

A number of bespoke software tools identified from the literature have been developed specifically for the purpose of supporting students.

At Brigham Young University an automated profiling system was used to advise students (Kramer et al, 1993). Information about entrance qualifications, academic records and areas of student interest were gathered in a database which could then generate individualised reports. The reports provided specific information to the student but also included general information explaining terminology and providing tips for success. Although students were given large quantities of information in traditional handbooks, the reports highlighted only the need-to-know facts.

There is increasing use of database software to monitor and track student attendance and student engagement. An example of how this can be done supportively comes from a project, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), that provided electronic support for student placements (Lee and Downs, 1998).

This captured and mapped all the activities undertaken within the placement unit at Huddersfield University and focused on activities identified as being required, then designed the tasks and inter-relations to achieve these.

Further examples of the use of technology to provide effective and efficient student support come from websites dedicated to providing students with opportunities to interact through questionnaires and get immediate feedback. There are websites dedicated to providing information and guidance about learning styles, diagnosing levels of skill in certain areas such as mathematics, giving practice opportunities for psychometric tests and providing feedback on appropriate career choices.

A Scottish example is a website called PlanIT Plus that is a resource for careers and lifelong learning (see page 61 for URL). The site includes tools that allow students to complete a questionnaire and generate an immediate report on career choices as a result of their answers. Such guidance is an important way of supporting goal-setting by students and keeping them motivated and focused. The official graduate careers website also provides a good online tool for preparing cvs (see page 61 for URL).

Evaluating an existing personal tutor system

One way to start the process of enhancing an existing personal tutor system, in the hope that these will facilitate student support in the first year of study, is to start with an evaluation.

The STAR project at the University of Ulster (see page 61 for URL) drew up an evaluation questionnaire which it invites other institutions to use provided they give feedback on its use. The audit tool provides a range of questions with three possible answers that are scored with one, three or five points. In line with the recommendations of this strand of work on personal tutors and their alternatives and with the consent of the STAR project, additional questions have been formulated and added to help an assessment of an existing personal tutor system and the identification of weaknesses. The evaluation questionnaire is at Appendix G.

The weaknesses surface where aspects of practice score 3 or lower. Where apparent weaknesses surface, links to some of the case studies, comments or appendices of this report are provided in the hope that they will facilitate implementation of improvements in the quality of support students will receive from personal tutors and their alternatives.

Guidelines for implementing a successful personal tutor system

Institutions might wish to reflect upon the following good practice suggestions in assessing the appropriateness and effectiveness of the structuring and operation of their personal tutor systems.

- Establish the role of a first-year champion supported by a centralised resource of administration.
- Plan an effective student support strategy by determining the profile of the student body and their entry-point static risk factors or support indicators.

- Organise the environment into which the students are to be received including assigning students to personal tutors in the first week.
- Monitor and collate student attendance and regularly evaluate the big picture.
- Create opportunities for student engagement or participation in the early weeks and provide rapid feedback on the uptake.
- Communicate to students, from the start, realistic expectations and detailed information on the support that is available.
- In addition to general information, provide a summary only of the facts that first-year students need to know.
- Provide training and clear guidelines to assist academic staff in providing general support and identifying a critical incident in relation to student support.
- Develop a code of practice for academic personal tutors.
- Integrate personal tutor systems into the general student experience and close the feedback loops to personal tutors.

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Websites

Glasgow Caledonian University

http://esdstudent.gcal.ac.uk/

The official graduate careers website

www.prospects.ac.uk/

PlanIT Plus

www.planitplus.net/careerzone/support/pointer/pointer.aspx?PageNum=1

University of Bath

http://internal.bath.ac.uk/tutors/

University of Greenwich

www.gre.ac.uk/students/office/pash/refer.htm

University of Reading

www.rdg.ac.uk/counselling/counselling/peer_support.htm

University of Strathclyde NATALIE Project

www.mecheng.strath.ac.uk/tandl.asp

University of Ulster, Student Transition and Retention (STAR) Project

www.ulst.ac.uk/star/

Appendix A Decision responsibility matrix

The following matrix is designed to help you to work out how to go directly to the best source of information and support in relation to the most common problems you may have as a first-year student.

Problem or Concern	Person or Service	Location
Accommodation	Accommodation Service	Caledonian Court
Finance	Student Centre	George Moore Reception
Childcare	Campus Nursery	Dobbies Loan
Health problems	University Doctor/Nurse	Occupational Health
First Aid	Receptionist	Phone 2222
Bereavement	Student Counsellors	Caledonian Court
Stress or depression	Student Counsellors	Caledonian Court
Feeling homesick/lonely	Student Counsellors	Caledonian Court
Council tax letters	Student Centre	George Moore Reception
Not able to log on to PCs	IT Support Desk	Library
Not able to access VLE	IT Support Desk	Library
Printing problems	IT Support Desk	Library
No or lost student card	Student Centre	George Moore Reception
Academic transcript	Student Centre	George Moore Reception
Not enjoying course	Programme Leader	Their office
Want to withdraw	Programme Leader	Their office
Want to defer	Programme Leader	Their office
Struggling with work	Effective Learning Service	Library
Struggling with maths	Effective Learning Service	Library
Job reference	Personal Tutor	Their office
Passport form completion	Personal Tutor	Their office
Attendance	Programme Leader	Their office
Special needs	Special Needs team	M131
Bullying or harassment	Personal Tutor or Students Union	Module Leader
Lost timetable	Programme Leader	Their office
Missed assessment date	Module Leader	Their office
Missed exam	Module Leader	Their office
Lost notes	Module Leader	Their office
Any other problems	Personal Tutor	Their office

Source: http://esdstudent.gcal.ac.uk

Appendix B Support indicator questionnaire

Have you started, but not completed, a University or College course before?	
Have you left your parents' home for the first time to start University?	
Was the course you are about to study your first choice?	
Did you apply for the course through the UCAS Clearing System?	
Are you the first person in your immediate family (i.e grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters) to begin a University course?	
Do you tend to get higher marks in class assignments than in exams?	
What age are you?	17 18 to 19 20 to 22 23 or older
If you have a part-time job which you will keep while you are at University, how many hours a week on average do you expect to work?	0, Don't work 1 to 8 9 to 20 More than 20
Have you ever 'bunked off' or 'dogged' school or college	Never Only once or twice Sometimes Often
How many other students do you already know who will start the course at the same time as you?	None 1 2 3 or more

Appendix C Student Needs in the First Year of Study project group: Questionnaire feedback

B1 How would you describe your knowledge of the support provided to first year students at your institution?

	%
I have detailed knowledge	62.5
I have some knowledge	33.3
I have no knowledge	4.2

B2 What is distinctive about student support at your institution?

(we have a) small campus hence support is personalised
based around the personal tutor system
based on student needs and driven by previous experience
both pastoral and academic support
central student information desk
coordinated between academic and welfare support
dedicated student advisors (in some schools) identify students at risk
focus on flexibility and responsive to student needs
geared to the individual student
integrative and holistic
it is distance based but also involves personal tutor contact
it is provided at various levels - central, faculty and department
it organises induction
one stop shop approach
pattern of support varies across the institution
personal tutors teach students as well
realisation of importance
small institution status with fluid communication
student services shared between two institutions
subject focus
support workers rather than counsellors are used
TQEF funded student advice services facility
very personal small community

Source: http://esdstudent.gcal.ac.uk

B3 Are student support materials at your institution made available to students online?

	%
some online	75.0
all materials online	22.7
none online	2.3

B4 Are first year students at your institution assigned a personal tutor?

	%
all get a personal tutor	89.1
depends on school	10.9

B5 How often to personal tutors have contact: in theory and practice?

	in theory %	in practice %
weekly	10.0	7.9
monthly	17.5	10.5
once a semester	67.5	36.8
only if problems arise	5.0	44.7

B6 Does your University have personal development planning advisors?

	%
yes	32.6
no	67.4

B7 Does the personal tutor also act as a personal development tutor?

	%
yes	46.2
no	53.8

B8 Are academic staff given any training on how to be an effective personal tutor or PDP advisor?

	%
training courses are provided	46.5
none	37.2
manual is provided	18.6
other[1]	2.3

[1] Other response was general induction of custom and practice.

B9 Is the personal tutor also a subject tutor?

	%
yes, same roles	38.1
no, different roles	33.3
depends on school	28.6

B10 Do you believe that being good at supporting students is a skill that is valued for academic promotion?

	%
not valued	71.7
of some value	26.1
highly valued	2.2

B11 How would you improve the personal tutor system at your institution?

	%
more staff commitment	52.2
more resources	41.3
more student commitment	30.4
other[1]	30.4

[1] Other responses for improvements include selection of appropriate staff, support for tutors, dedicated time for meetings, clearer staff guidelines and more organisation. Staff development was the most common response.

Appendix D Integration of personal tutoring system with student experience

Week No	Semester A Goals	
Induction	Complete the learning styles questionnaire and diagnostics	
Week 2	Attended group meeting with Personal Tutor	
Week 4	Reflect on first attendance letter	
Week 5	Complete study timetable	
Week 6	Attend mid semester evaluation meeting with Personal Tutor	
Week 8	Reflect on second attendance letter	
Week 10	Reflect on one piece of coursework feedback	
	Semester B Goals	
Week 1	Complete Semester A reflection sheet	
Week 3	Send email informing personal tutor of exam results	
Week 4	Reflect on first attendance letter	
Week 5	Attend ELS Workshop and develop action plan	
Week 6	Attend meeting with personal tutor	
Week 8	Reflect on second attendance letter	
Week 11	Completed CV and Personal Development Record and present to personal tutor	

Source: http://esdstudent.gcal.ac.uk

Appendix E Proposed agenda for personal tutor meetings

Meeting One

The first meeting you will have with your first year students is a group meeting which should take place in Week 2 or 3 of Semester A. You should email your personal tutor group to introduce yourself and arrange this meeting. You will know which programme your students are studying on and you can access their timetable to suggest times that suit both you and them. When the students come to this first meeting, they will already have completed the online learning styles questionnaire. They will have a report that has printed out and this will have their name at the top. Things to do:

- Confirm that they have your name and contact details.
- Ask them how they are getting on and how they are finding the course. Make sure that they realise that since this is a group meeting you cannot discuss anything confidential with them but they could come back to see you as an individual or go to the first year tutor if they have any personal problems or concerns.
- Ask to see their learning styles questionnaire report.

Meeting Two

Meeting two is scheduled to take place in Week 6 or 7 of Semester A. This is an individual meeting and although students will be encouraged to contact you to arrange this meeting, if they don't you should email them. When they come to the second meeting they are half way through the first semester. They will have received their first attendance letter. They will have completed a study timetable after some guidance from the first year tutor. Things to do:

- Ask them how they are getting on and if there are any problems.
- Ask them if they have completed any assessments or coursework and how they found this.
- Discuss their attendance either to congratulate them or to express your concern.
- Ask to see their study timetable.

Meeting Three

Meeting three is scheduled to take place in Week 6 or 7 of Semester B. The student should have contacted you by email to tell you about their results three weeks earlier. They will have been given guidance from the first year tutor and the opportunity to attend an ELS workshop in the previous weeks. Things to do:

- Ask them about their attendance and if there are any problems.
- Ask to see their Semester A reflection sheet.
- Ask to see the action plan they should have completed after the workshop.

Meeting Four

Meeting four is scheduled to take place in Week 10 or 11 of Semester B. The student will have been given guidance from the first year tutor and the opportunity to attend a Careers Service workshop in the previous weeks. Things to do:

- Ask them about their attendance and if there are any problems.
- Ask to see their completed cv and personal development record.

Source: http://esdstudent.gcal.ac.uk

Appendix F Glasgow Caledonian University School of Engineering, Science and Design: PASS Leader guidelines

The role of the PASS Leader is an opportunity for you not only to help first year students, but also to help yourself. The direct benefit to first year students of what you are doing is obvious. In the past, we have found that the PASS leaders also develop their own skills and abilities. To help you to know what is expected of you, it is important for you to be aware of the guidelines that follow. Remember that you are an expert on being a successful first year student.

1 Don't teach the first year students. They should already have attended classes and been given teaching materials.

2 Ask module leaders to give you tutorial solutions and/or past papers.

3 If a student does not have notes encourage them to approach the relevant member of staff to ask for them. Go with them if you think it is necessary but don't get the notes for them.

4 Don't directly supply answers. Work with the students to show them how to get from the information they have in their notes or text books to relate to the solution.

5 Do not complete course work for first year students. Work on similar questions or encourage them to help each other but not to plagiarise.

6 Encourage first year students to take their class attendance seriously. PASS sessions are not a substitute for time tabled classes.

7 Remember that you cannot solve every first year student's problem. Always be sympathetic and prepared to listen but direct students with personal, financial, medical, psychological or bereavement problems to student services.

8 If you discover that some area of work is a common problem to many students, bring this to the attention of the module leader.

9 Do not criticise members of staff during PASS sessions. Criticism of members of staff or teaching methods should be directed to the class reps and the staff student consultative meeting.

10 Speak to the PASS coordinator about any concerns that you have and do not spend more time on your role as PASS leader than is expected.

Appendix G STAR Project: Supplemented Audit Tool

Advisors of study/tutors
Questions

Select the answers that most closely resemble what you do in your institution and note the score	Answers from this column score 1 point **1**	Answers from this column score 3 points **3**	Answers from this column score 5 points **5**
Does each student have a named advisor responsible for pastoral care?	No	They can see the course/year tutor with any problems	Yes, they are officially assigned one at registration
Do you have an academic tutorial system responsible for students' academic development?	No	Yes, academic tutors are available and respond to student needs	Yes, academic tutors are proactive in predicting student needs and meeting them
Do you have a PDP system?	No	Yes, students can construct one on line for themselves.	Yes, students are supported by a tutorial system to keep their PDP up to date
Before changing courses or modules is the student required to confer with and seek approval from an academic advisor? [See Appendix A]	No, they can change modules or courses themselves	They need to complete a form which is countersigned	They need to discuss it and get an official form signed
What procedures are there for students who wish to leave? [See Appendix A]	We only find out when the student fails to attend the exams	Students complete an exit form and leave it in the office	Students normally have an exit interview at which their problems are discussed
On average how many first year students does an advisor of study have?	>15	7 - 15	$\leqslant 6$
How frequently does a tutor meet his/her tutees? [See Appendix D]	Each term	Each month	Each week
What is the uptake of staff development for advisors of study?	Don't have any	Courses are available but few attend	Most advisors would have received staff development

Select the answers that most closely resemble what you do in your institution and note the score	Answers from this column score 1 point **1**	Answers from this column score 3 points **3**	Answers from this column score 5 points **5**
What is the availability of personal tutor guidelines? [See Appendix E]	Don't have any	Some material is available	A comprehensive set of guidelines is available
Are the specific support needs of the cohort determined? [See Appendix B]	No	Some information is obtained	Detailed information is obtained
How often is attendance collated and fed back?[See Appendix C]	Never	Every six weeks or more	Every two to three weeks
When is the first opportunity to monitor student engagement or participation?[See Appendix C]	At least 10 weeks into the term or semester	About 6 weeks into the term or semester	Within two to three weeks of the term or semester
How are students given detailed information on the support that is available?[See Appendix A]	Not given any	Contained within general student handbooks and information	Given a separate summary or dedicated web page for first year
Is a code of practice provided for academic personal tutors? [See McKavanagh et al, 1996]	No	Some guidance is given	Yes
How well is the personal tutor systems integrated into the general student experience? [See Appendix C]	Not at all	Partially, some information is fed back	Fully, all information is fed back to the personal tutor

Approaches to integrating student support

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Contents

Executive summary

This report contributes to phase two of research undertaken on the 2003-04 theme of Responding to Student Needs for the Quality Working Group's quality enhancement framework.

Phase one commissioned research on Student Needs in the First Year of Study from CHERI at the Open University.

The four areas which the Responding to Student Needs steering committee identified for further research included improving communication (integrating and coordinating central-academic-student roles, and enhancing student support services/academic support mechanisms).

Key issues that emerged for further exploration were:

- coordinating student support between academic departments and centrally provided services/academic support
- establishing good working relationships within teams
- integrating academic and student support issues into policy development and strategic planning
- ensuring timely, targeted communication(s) between the central services, academic departments and students
- engaging students in the enhancement of student support services and academic support mechanisms within the university
- tracking the use and impact of support services/academic support.

Relevant literature and examples of national and international good practice in student support have been explored, identifying how the challenges posed above have been addressed and how the Scottish sector may benefit from the application or adaptation of such systems. While the report does not present a comprehensive survey of practice in Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs), it is acknowledged that there is considerable experimentation, development, and reflection on the effectiveness of current approaches to provision.

This report focuses on the provision, at institutional level, of support for a diverse student population within the constraints of limited resources. Alternative approaches to, and degrees of, integration for central support services are explored. Illustrative examples of, and approaches to, integrating academic and central support services are discussed and specific consideration is given to support for distance and flexible learning and to promoting and supporting student engagement.

The following core activities emerge from examination of integrative models, collaborative approaches and enhanced modes of communication across institutions:

- increasing student-peer interaction
- increasing staff-student interaction, particularly outside the formal 'class'
- increasing students' involvement and engagement with the institution and (where applicable) making effective use of their time on campus

- linking the curriculum and co-curriculum
- increasing academic expectations among students and their levels of academic engagement
- assisting students with their preparation (both academic and personal) for tertiary education
- empowering front-line service staff
- making effective use of emerging technologies in student support.

Specific examples that achieve each of the above are documented for consideration, with the proviso that institutional context may require varying degrees of modification. Re-usable approaches and methodologies are highlighted.

Sector-wide issues are identified and potential future areas for research and development are proposed, with specific reference to preventing duplication of effort.

If an institutional mission statement were to emerge from this research it might state:

> We aim to provide a learning environment in which all participants work together to deliver quality, seamless support to lifelong learners anytime, anywhere.

Introduction

In exploring good practice for potential use within the Scottish sector, it is important to recognise the complexity of importing practices that have been reviewed, largely at a point when they have been embedded, within another institution. A number of factors need to be considered, including institutional culture, history and size, resources, disciplines and students. Direct translation from one context to another is rarely possible and frequently practices or structures need to be modified and/or only partially adopted. The benefits to be derived may differ accordingly.

It is important to note that institutions in Australia and New Zealand allocate considerably greater staff resource to student support than in the UK, hence caution should be applied in advocating wholesale implementation of Australasian systems. Proposals for partial change, based on such models, may be more achievable within the Scottish sector.

Although the focus of this report is on the first-year student experience, other students are often involved in, or influenced by, the activities, structures and facilities considered. Many of the report's findings will lead to continued benefits for students beyond their first year.

Here support is defined broadly, to embrace academic, pastoral and more general components. Of course, often these interact in complex manners in terms of both organisation and, more importantly, benefit to students.

Student support models differ across the HE sector due to a number of factors, many of which are internal, including institutional size, disciplinary mix, institutional history and culture and staffing policies. At departmental and school level, currently academic staff are involved with student support mainly through personal tutoring and academic advisory roles. The focus of this report is the provision of student support at an institutional level through integrative models, collaborative approaches and enhanced modes of communication.

Much of the recent work on student support systems has been in response to concerns about attrition rates and the need to enhance student retention. The importance of the first year in student persistence has led to an emphasis on research in this area and exploration of approaches to enhancing this element of the student experience (Pitkethley and Prosser, 2001; Johnston, 1997; Tinto, 1993)

The drivers and facilitators for change in student support provision are both internal and external to institutions, including:

- an increasingly heterogeneous student population with diverse support needs
- increasing emphasis on the student experience from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA Scotland)
- increasingly competitive markets, with students becoming more selective consumers
- technological developments creating the potential for more effective, efficient and client-centred provision
- enhanced student expectations of service, arising from their day-to-day lifestyles

- legislative developments impacting on service provision
- integrative developments, such as online learning and personal development planning (PDP), which cross institutional boundaries
- the need to make effective and efficient use of limited resources
- recognition that support can be improved and that many current structures and working practices are historical rather than designed for today's students' needs.

The composition of the student body will also reflect ongoing changes in the population, becoming increasingly diverse. Census data[1] predicts falling numbers of 17 year olds in Scotland over the coming years, from 65,393 in 2002, to 59,103 in 2012 and 52,027 in 2018. The impact on enrolments may vary across the sector, but institutional and sectoral strategic planning will need to take account of this trend. Institutions may seek to make up any shortfall in applicants from a variety of potential markets including continued professional development (CPD) opportunities, mature students and international students. To reflect the differing needs both within and between such diverse groups of students, the emphasis of student support provision may need to change.

In considering approaches to student support, the increasing diversity of the student body and the variety of institutional contexts across the Scottish HE sector need to be considered. Support models have to be increasingly flexible to meet the needs of the variety of students studying both within the sector and within individual institutions.

Today's students differ significantly from when most current staff were students themselves, as measured by a number of criteria, including demographic, personal, academic and social. Institutional structures and support systems originally designed for a much smaller and fairly homogeneous student cohort may no longer be appropriate for meeting the diverse needs of contemporary students.

Staff and peers, as an institution's 'agents of socialisation', directly influence the quality of students' experiences through their interactions, both formal and informal, inside and outside the classroom (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Research has shown a positive correlation between student retention and students' interactions with peers and staff outside formal classes (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Braxton et al, 1997). Such interactions are more likely to occur routinely on small campuses. Increasingly, however, students are leading more complex lives, juggling university study with family or parental responsibilities, commuting and/or employment (full- or part-time), enabling them to spend less time on campus (irrespective of its size).

Levine and Shapiro (2000) identify specific issues relating to commuter students, who are generally able to spend less time on campus than their residential counterparts. In order to establish ways in which they can develop connections on campus, alternative approaches need to be considered such as discussion lists, email, mentoring and peer support groups in addition to traditional academic advising and PDP. Third- and final-year students may have a role to play in contributing to the learning environment of commuter students by acting as peer advisors and tutors (possibly at least partially online). In some cases it may be possible to link students through shared transport schemes,[2] which many universities such as Stirling are actively encouraging for both staff and students. Such schemes have the dual potential to reduce travelling costs and increase interactions with other members of the learning community. These approaches, of course, have the potential to benefit all students.

Diagnostic tests and assessment of risk

Recognising the diversity of student intakes to HE, institutions are increasingly seeking ways to improve the targeting of their support to make best use of their limited resources. A number of institutions have used diagnostic tests with new students to identify those most 'at risk' and have sought to link admissions and induction procedures to student support in an integrative approach.

In the UK, diagnostic tests are probably most widely used for mathematical skills, particularly for students studying numerate disciplines such as engineering, physics, business studies and mathematics. The Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), (now the Higher Education Academy) MathsTEAM project has documented 65 case studies[3] and a dedicated mathematics support website has been established.[4]

A wide variety of testing practices and support mechanisms have been developed, including maths support and drop-in centres (both dedicated and hybrid learning support centres), peer support systems, summer schools, short courses and test-based support. Many of these approaches could be adapted to test for, and support, other areas of need.

Some institutions have focused on building research data about risk factors at point of entry and using their accumulated knowledge to develop their own diagnostic tests to improve institutional targeting of support. Napier's student retention project[5] (initiated in 1994 in response to poor retention figures) is based on a framework that enables 'at risk' students to be identified, directed to appropriate online support and tracked for further data collection. The diagnostic test consists of questionnaire items, based on characteristics, derived from research, which have been found to be related to withdrawal at the institution. Two versions of the tool are used, as part of induction and within a one-to-one guidance session respectively. Results from the tests are used to identify appropriate learning support. This ongoing approach has increased retention over the last ten years (as measured by internal institutional monitoring and tracking procedures). From Napier's experiences, Johnston (2004) has suggested the use of theoretical models such as the Beatty-Guenter Retention Strategy Model (see Appendix B) to assist in shaping institutional strategic planning.

Tensions in the current organisation of support

One factor that all HEIs appear to have in common is the separation into academic and non-academic units. This contributes to competition for resources, working practices that involve little cross-communication and institutional cultures that regard specialised support services less highly than academic provision. The categorisation of support staff as non-academic appears to relegate them to a secondary role: however, it is unarguable that they contribute significantly to student retention and that, as professionals in their own right, they are often very well qualified. Institutional cultures would need to change before this situation could be addressed. The difficulties of such change and the length of time required are well known, but this report will make suggestions that might contribute to this process.

Arguably reflecting the separation identified above, administrative staff are frequently a taken-for-granted resource in the provision of student support. Within this sphere they are key contributors through their front-line role, are often the first point of contact for students and are frequently required to direct students to appropriate resources, support units and/or individuals. Training for such a role however is often limited, with many staff required to gain the relevant knowledge and expertise through 'osmosis' and trial and error. Little documentation on student support is targeted at this group of staff.

Enhanced training and development support is required for front-line administrative staff. Ideally, support staff and the students' association would lead such developments since, jointly, they can provide the comprehensive overview required by such staff, along with practical suggestions for tackling specific issues and situations with which they may be presented.

The complexity of support systems and the degree to which they permeate institutions appear to mitigate against large-scale change, which may be costly and time-consuming to implement, involving multiple stakeholders and impacting upon most other components within the institutional system.

In a world of global competitiveness and increasing student consumerism and choice, however, institutions are fully aware of the competitive advantage provided by improving the first-year experience and enhancing student satisfaction and retention. The benefits to be derived relate not just to current cohorts but to future applicants for whom peers are highly influential in determining their choice of HE destination.

Integrating central support services

The views of students

Students' views on support service provision differ considerably and are frequently conflicting. Students:

- want support services to be easily accessible yet do not wish to be seen to be visiting services that they feel may stigmatise them, leading others (particularly peers) to perceive them as 'different' or in need of 'remedial' support provision
- do not want to be passed from one service to another to sort out any 'problems' or 'issues' they may have, particularly if this means traipsing from one end to another of a large campus (or even worse between campuses): however, meeting their needs may require a range of specialist knowledge or expertise
- prefer to have to explain their situation only once, yet specialists may need to focus on different elements of this 'story' which may not be forthcoming within an overview
- will often not be able to identify their own support needs without help, but may find it difficult to seek help for various reasons including cultural, financial, psychological, or physical
- may still be loathe to seek support, even after they know they need it, for various reasons which may again be cultural, financial, psychological or physical.

It appears that students want support services that are located both physically and structurally together; do not want to be seen to visit support services; may not know that they need to make use of support services and even if they do, may find it difficult to make their first contact without some guidance, incentive or encouragement.

Responding to students' views

Requirements for improving students' use of central support services appear to be:

- the removal of any stigma that may be attached to use of a service
- assisting students in identifying their support needs
- providing (ongoing) encouragement and incentive for students to seek the support they need
- making access to, and use of, services as simple as possible.

Some issues

Integrated services appear to provide some of the solutions for improving student use of central support services, since they can bring together the different support that students may require. If services are located physically close to one another, however, students can then be highly visible when they visit these services, so it is important to consider how to combat this. Some services have linked up with support provision that students do not perceive as 'remedial' such as sporting facilities or the library, both to encourage students to visit the 'centre' and to remove the stigma from visiting. Although this can appear satisfactory there are always examples which disprove this. For example, one colleague related a student's complaint that she was continually being seen by her friends to be turning in to the disability office as they went on to the sports facilities. She didn't appreciate this continual reinforcement that she was 'different'. Other services have revisited their use of language and moved from use of the term 'support' to others, such as 'enhancement', which students consider to be more inclusive and unrelated to 'remedial' facilities.

Examples of integrative approaches

The Robert Gordon University's Centre for Student Access[6] incorporates study support that provides assistance in mathematics within integrated provision including language, statistics, writing and communication skills, information and communication technology applications and study skills.

The Centre works closely with schools and departments, and in addition to study support it includes the Disability Advisory Service, the Access Teaching Programme and Wider Access Development. Support for mathematics is thus placed alongside other skills development units and widening access initiatives. This linkage avoids the ghettoism from which widening access often suffers by linking it to central support services targeting all students. Widening-access students are not separated out as 'different'.

The Centre is intentionally welcoming and comfortable, to encourage students who visit it to explore other resources and consider making use of other services on offer. The mix of services enables students to visit the Centre without feeling stigmatised as needing 'remedial' support. Advertising and promoting the Centre has remained an issue, with word of mouth proving most effective. This is a common scenario and suggests that support services could possibly benefit from working with marketing professionals within the institution to enhance their image and their marketing strategies.

Due to physical limitations some institutions have developed functionally integrated services without physically co-locating them. This organisational consolidation simplifies referrals and can provide 'seamless' support from the student's perspective, even though they may need to visit several different locations.

Across the Scottish sector, no one model for support systems prevails, even within an institution. The University of Glasgow operates a single information desk that acts as an initial contact and referral point for central support services, while other institutions require students to interact with each service independently.

A number of institutions have introduced a post with oversight of support services for strategic planning and coordination purposes, although the services coming under this umbrella may differ. The degree to which services collaborate with each other varies, as does the degree of communication and collaboration between academic and support staff.

Challenges

The main difficulties in integrating services relate to the different cultures and working practices of potentially disparate sections. It is important in working towards integrative solutions to focus, and build, upon commonality, while retaining the flexibility to accommodate differences via customisation of policies and practice.

For staff, functionally integrating services requires a shift from the role of specialist to generalist: they need to have sufficient knowledge of all the services to be able to refer students as appropriate and to be able to answer at least the first few simple questions that a student may have, before referring them on. This relates particularly to front-line staff at reception or on central help desks. Cross-training is therefore required along with community and team building. The latter two take time and any such cultural change will be slow to embed.

Partnerships and liaison across the institution are key to enhancing the reputation and authority of student support and in turn developing its contributions to planning and strategic development. If academic departments and schools are to offer their own academic and pastoral support provision they should draw upon the expertise of specialist support staff to assist in the design and implementation of their own systems. The provision of study skills support may be one such area where expertise, within a central learning support unit, may be drawn upon by individual departments moving towards integrated support within their curriculum. In some institutions there may be a mixed model with some departments building support into their programmes, while others continue to refer students centrally.

The ultimate aim is to provide seamless support across the institution, from the student's perspective, within the context of complex and diverse patterns of student engagement with higher education. Staff must understand, and be comfortable within, their role such that they are able to manage boundaries, refer with confidence and have the necessary skills and expertise to take responsibility for student issues brought to them. Procedural consolidation (employed by most, if not all, HE institutions) facilitates this by ensuring institutional consistency in policies and practices employed.

Alternative posts and roles

A number of alternative types of posts and roles have emerged, with each lending itself to different organisational structures and cultures. Departmental liaison roles allocate responsibility for liaising with a central support service to an individual member of academic staff, who communicates information as required, acts as departmental representative on any relevant initiatives, acts as a point of contact for the support service and ensures that staff are aware of appropriate procedures for referral. In some cases, they may act as a resource for other academic staff to seek guidance or information. The problem with such roles is ensuring that the right person is selected. Preferably they should be genuinely interested and have, or wish to gain, knowledge (although not necessarily expertise) in the field.

Increasingly, shared posts, where staff work across structural institutional boundaries, have become apparent. For example, the mature student advisor at the University of Hull is a joint appointment between the recruitment office and student services, ensuring that links are maintained between pre- and post-entry experiences. Posts now commonly cross boundaries between learning support and disability support or educational development, and between technology and information literacy support. Such posts reflect student rather than organisational perspectives on support and their emergence coincides with moves towards generalist rather than specialist staff, facilitating greater collaboration between central support areas. On the other hand, however, such staff may be perceived as less expert in each of the areas in which they work due to a perceived 'dilution' of their time and focus.

In addition, hybrid roles have emerged, such as educational developers and learning support staff who also teach and/or research. Other examples include careers' support staff who teach on accredited courses,[7] albeit under the aegis of an academic department for quality assurance purposes.

Trends in central service provision

Student services appear increasingly influenced by external trends (for example in customer service and technology development) and recognise limitations of the traditional student services model, where each unit focuses on a specific student service area. In this model students often go from one office to another, frequently waiting in line to get answers to questions, complete a form or be referred on to another office. In contrast, today's students expect convenient, personalised and interactive services. New models for student services are being (re)designed from the student's perspective (see Figure 1 below).

Integrated systems for storage, processing, retrieval and presentation of institutional data are increasingly prevalent within HE virtual learning environments (VLEs) such as WebCT and BlackBoard. VLEs are routinely linked to libraries and back-end administrative systems, forming managed learning environments (MLEs) that incorporate portals as front-ends to provide an individualised, one-stop service harvesting information from a variety of resources. These new models include self-service facilities and web-based student service portals that provide decision support, personalised communications, and enhanced orientations to the learning community and its processes.

From the institutional perspective, such systems facilitate the tracking and monitoring of students' development and progress. There is also potential for using these systems to track and monitor the use of support services (particularly online resources). Considerable research and development in this field has been funded and documented by the Joint Information Services Committee (JISC),[8] identifying that such changes require a culture shift in how services are defined and delivered.

Traditional student support models	Emerging student support models
• Functional 'silos' with segregated support units and processes • Lack of communication between support units • Vertical structures and multiple offices • Limited access (office hours) • Bureaucratic, paper-driven processes • Sometimes inconsistent information	• Cross-functional teams • Integrated systems of support units and processes • Cross-trained support staff· • Anytime and anyplace (24/7) provision • One source of data (electronic) • Consistent information from an integrated system with a common interface

Figure 1 Shifting Student Service Model

Source: adapted from Beede and Burnett, 1999, p 9

Achieving integration of central services

The table below (see Figure 2) summarises some of the ways discussed, in which integration of central support services might be achieved, and suggests when institutions might consider these alternative approaches.

Focus	Implementation option	Appropriate for...	Examples of approaches
Process/Policy	Procedural consolidation	ensuring that students do not encounter inconsistencies in the policies and practices they encounter within units across the institution (particularly important where support units remain discrete and autonomous of each other and academic units)	• a post with oversight of support units for coordination and planning • departmental liaison posts to elicit/disseminate information and coordinate activity
Organisation	Functional consolidation	removing barriers presented by organisational structures and boundaries to the effective coordination of support	• shared posts • hybrid posts
Staff	Cross-training (linked to functional consolidation)	empowering frontline staff to be able to provide answers to basic questions outside their own functional area (reducing referrals)	• central information centre/help desk

Focus	Implementation option	Appropriate for...	Examples of approaches
Facilities	Geographical consolidation	institutions that have, or are planning, a facility that can accommodate multiple support units, enabling co-location (which may be particularly helpful on large campuses)	one-stop shop (often linked to functional consolidation enabled by co-location)
Technology	Integrated information systems	institutions with student data housed within multiple systems that are not currently linked (for ease of data exchange)	• institutional MLEs • web-based student service portals

Figure 2 Achieving integration

(Source: adapted from University of North Carolina and PricewaterhouseCoopers, 1999, cited in Kramer, 2003, p 31)

Integrating academic and central support services

Organisational structures, and the assumptions on which they are based, are highly influential in determining what staff and students associations do and how they interact. Staff comment that casual contacts and serendipitous meetings with colleagues outside their own departments are becoming less frequent, reinforcing historical 'silos' (Franklin et al, 1998), while strengthening departmental 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998). It is possible that this corresponds to the increasing use of email: however, there are also fewer shared venues in which staff may meet with each other, and/or students, from across the institution. Ideally institutional infrastructures should encourage interaction between staff and students through shared common areas. A mix of venues is therefore desirable, including student areas, staff areas and shared communal locations.

It has widely been acknowledged that an institution's technology-based systems should be fully integrated and interoperable if their full benefits are to be derived. For example, a university's VLE should communicate with the institution's library system, its student system and its finance system if it is to provide the possibility of optimally automating administrative and academic elements of the student learning experience. Collaborative working is required across a number of institutional departments to achieve such 'seamless integration'.

Similar collaboration has been reflected in online teaching, where cross-functional groups have emerged with academic colleagues working alongside learning technology advisers and developers as well as administrative colleagues.

At institutional level, the complexity of collaborative working increases with the number of partnerships involved. The high levels of resource often involved with technology-based developments have, unsurprisingly, resulted in attempts to ensure that such collaborative working functions effectively and efficiently.

One approach is the roundtable methodology, developed in the USA by the Teaching, Learning and Technology (TLT) Group,[9] who have fully documented the approach on their website. The University of Stirling[10] and Queen Margaret University College[11] have both successfully adapted and used this approach.

Roundtables consist of academic staff, technology professionals, students and librarians who collaborate in furthering learning technology initiatives within an institution.[12]

Distance learning developments, coupled with student preferences for online resources and the increasing requirement for all students (whether on- or off-campus, local or distance) to receive the same level of support, suggest that representation from student support services would also be advisable.

The duration of roundtables will differ according to the tasks they set themselves. They are not intended to be permanent groupings, so different roundtables will emerge with new developments.

Enabling approaches

Applying a systemic view, such as that employed for developing technology-based initiatives, to student support systems would suggest that an integrated approach should be taken that ensures all the elements of the system communicate with each other and work towards a shared goal. Taking this one step further it may be valuable to consider whether the roundtable methodology could be adapted for use in the arena of student support. This could prove a particularly useful approach where the institution has a distributed rather than a centralised support systems model or where an institution is seeking to integrate support systems that are currently discrete.

Within a number of USA institutions, learning communities are being employed to enable, among other things, greater peer interaction among students. Discussion here will concentrate upon integrative elements, since curricular issues are considered within the Lines report (2005) on the first year learning experience. Two or more academic courses are linked across the curriculum, reducing academic fragmentation and resulting in greater social connection between students and enhanced collaboration between academics, potentially across disciplinary boundaries and their established communities of practice. Learning communities are highly adaptable and lend themselves to a number of HE environments, but are particularly supportive within commuter institutions, or those with high numbers of part-time or distance taught students where peer interaction may be limited.

On residential campuses, learning communities may extend to linking residence life with the curriculum, by specific student cohorts living in a single hall or on the same floor. Developing and implementing such schemes extends the programme to involve partnerships between academic departments, accommodation services and students associations. Such living-learning programmes require dedicated staff and resources. Academic and/or extra-curricular programmes are designed specifically for participants.

The aim of such programmes, to improve the undergraduate experience, is quite challenging with its objectives of:

- helping students to make a successful transition to college
- improving student learning and development
- facilitating enhancements in academic achievement and retention.

During 2001-02 to 2004-05, a national study in the USA examined 274 learning communities' programmes across 34 institutions, obtaining responses from approximately 24,000 students (see Appendix A for an initial summary of the report's findings).

The Residential Learning Communities International Clearinghouse[13] lists more than 100 examples, including the Universities of Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, and Wisconsin, which have particularly strong traditions of living-learning communities. Planning and developing such communities requires the essential elements of supportive, inclusive communities to be identified and understood. Characteristics identified from research in the USA include valuing diversity; promoting social responsibility; encouraging discussion and debate; recognising individual and community achievements; and fostering a sense of belonging (Brazzell and Reisser, 1999).

Establishing learning communities

Prior to establishing such a community a number of elements need to be tackled. These include:

- identifying the philosophy and goals of the community
- determining, and building upon, the level of support for the community (among academic and support staff, the students association and first-year student cohorts)
- deciding the means by which it will be administered and coordinated
- identifying and obtaining the required budget and resources, including staffing
- developing selection/recruitment procedures including the design of contracts where applicable for participants
- determining the size and specific characteristics of the resident community
- developing the programme in which the community will engage (preferably integrating curricular and co-curricular experiences)
- determining the relationship of the programme to the university as a whole (including its curriculum and accreditation procedures)
- undertaking training and awareness raising among relevant stakeholders to ensure support and commitment to the programme
- developing evaluation procedures to identify areas of strength, development potential and/or revisions required.

Schroeder (1994) suggests that the above equates to the four essential elements of effective learning communities: involvement, investment, influence, and identity. The collaborative nature of such initiatives, and the need for overall coordination, can not be overemphasised, with the need for academic colleagues to work with support staff, administrative staff, student associations and cohorts of students.

Potential difficulties in developing such collaborative relationships include the recruitment and retention of academic staff to such programmes. Given the competing pressures on staff time, motivation for such involvement is required if it is to extend beyond the 'usual suspects'.

To maintain momentum and ensure effective collaborative working, normally a champion or unit would be charged with taking this forward under the aegis of an advisory group. The resource implications of such an endeavour mean that it may have to be scaled according to institutional need and/or linked to other initiatives such as service learning and/or personal tutoring roles.

In some cases academic staff (or possibly postgraduate students) may assume the role of student mentor, assisting with issues and projects within the residential environment. They will also liaise with support staff on facilitating discussion sessions which, depending upon the programme, could include goal setting, time management, decision making, problem solving and examination anxiety.

The Faculty Fellows Program at the University of Arizona[14] is part of the award-winning, nationally recognised, Building Academic Community Initiative. The programme provides a vehicle for students to interact with staff outside the classroom. Office hours are held in alternative venues such as halls of residence and programmes are devised, including outdoor activities and arts events, to enable students to have regular access to staff outside formal 'classes'.

Focusing on retention

Griffith University[15] in Queensland, Australia, has placed emphasis on establishing sustainable and transferable initiatives involving partnerships between student support services and academic units to enhance the experience of first-year students. A key element has been the enhancement of cohort cohesion, particularly given their diverse student population, including international students. The main drivers for change at Griffith were perceived to be the need to ensure effective utilisation of resources; the need to address the relationship between student support services and the academic process; and the need to share knowledge to ensure the enhancement of first-year experiences and processes.

Griffith initiated a Student Retention Project to tackle these issues. It soon became clear that there were already a number of high quality initiatives and ideas within the institution, but that these initiatives and resulting knowledge needed to be shared to maximise resource usage and benefits to students.

In 2003-04, Griffith's Student Retention Project was supported by the Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Development Grant to develop a strategic framework for improving retention, focused on the first year, and to facilitate the development of strategic partnerships, particularly between student support areas and academic areas.

The challenges facing Griffith were recognisable and common to many institutions:

- a context of reduced resources and competing priorities and demands
- the need to improve the quality of the first-year experience
- the need to enhance students' engagement with each other (to develop cohort cohesion)
- the need to enhance student engagement with the institution through greater commitment, focus and direction
- a lack of knowledge sharing between academic units (a 'silo' mentality)
- a lack of coordination between student support areas and academic elements
- the need to link support services to academic processes to provide the broadest level of assistance to students in a proactive/preventative way
- a recognition that issues are often very context-specific and need context-specific approaches.

The project balanced the need for institution-wide coordination and integration of efforts with initiatives that were relevant to local conditions, priorities and contexts of academic programmes, students and staff.

Various approaches were taken to facilitating partnerships. On campus workshops were held, but were found to be attended by those who were already committed. A university-wide symposium was found to be well attended by support staff but poorly attended by academic staff, mirroring the experience at enhancement theme events on Responding to Student Needs held during 2003-04.

In the first semester of 2004, grants of $2,000 were made available for initiatives targeting enhancement of orientation and transition for first-years. The proposals had to be jointly from an area of student support and an academic unit. The initiatives had to be sustainable (since there would be no further funding) and transferable to other areas, and had to be evaluated. A number of initiatives were funded, including:

- tutor training undertaken by the Counselling Service and Industrial Relations on 'skills to promote cohort cohesion'
- development of an induction pack and training for sessional staff by the Counselling Service and Queensland College of Arts
- production of a DVD for enhancing the transition of mature-aged students to university, by Learning Assistance Services and the Counselling Service
- development of a leave of absence questionnaire by the Counselling Service and Queensland College of Arts
- development of a special orientation programme to follow up students after a leave of absence, by the Counselling Service and Queensland College of Arts
- mid-semester interventions after the first assignment, established by the Learning Assistance Services and Criminology
- student associates, established to assist in first-year transition by the Counselling Service and Computing, Science and Business Management.

These initiatives acted as pilots for extension and application across other areas of the university. The resources could be developed and adapted for use in other academic areas and, due to input from the relevant academic units, the programmes were directly relevant to the students in that area. The initiatives increased awareness of resources and expertise available in student support areas and increased understanding of student support roles.

Griffith funded six initiatives in the second half of 2004, with more planned for 2005. The Student Retention Project team will work with the Orientation and Transition Committee to facilitate transference of initiatives.

Conclusions

Most of the programmes and policies that have the potential to foster student learning require collaboration among academic and support staff, administrators, student associations and others in order to adapt organisational structures and processes appropriately. Collaborative working may highlight differences in working practice, culture and ethos between participants and, in some cases, a broker role may be applicable to smooth the process. Educational development professionals are often in a position to undertake such a task and have the requisite skills and expertise.

An integrated approach to student support requires an institutional philosophy that embraces a holistic view of student development, in which conditions are established for a seamless learning environment. Historically, distinction has been made, with resultant separation, between events occurring inside and outside class; those that are regarded as academic and non-academic; curricular and co-curricular; or on-campus and off-campus. Within a systemic view, these need to be perceived as pieces of one whole, bound together through a shared vision and goals. This requires staff to work across historical boundaries between academic and support services and between staff and student associations to link programmes and activities across the diverse dimensions of students' lives. Serendipity alone is insufficient to make people work together towards the goal of creating seamless learning environments for students. One or more champions are required to create and maintain the momentum for change.

Vehicles to promote collaboration between staff and student association practitioners include reciprocal invitations to present research findings, attending conferences together and holding periodic joint meetings. In addition, the Change Academy methodology (initiated by the American Association for Higher Education in the USA, and subsequently run by the HE Academy in the UK[16]) could provide a useful model for taking forward institutional change through a team-based, externally facilitated, approach.

In order to promote such integrative approaches, reward systems that favour independent performance may need to be reviewed. It may be appropriate to consider establishing rewards for teams, units or departments.

Supporting distance and flexible learning

Learning is increasingly making greater use of the web, particularly within distance provision, but also in supplemental instruction and resource-based learning for campus-based students. Pressures are increasing for institutions to provide student services within this environment, as well as instruction. New models for student services are emerging, shifting the focus for staff from specialist to more generalist roles, while students are encouraged to be more proactive, using self-help facilities and automated facilities (see Figure 3 below).

Student services have become a strategic issue for institutions seeking to improve retention and remain competitive. They are faced with the challenge of identifying their students' expectations and designing a model for student service that is attuned to student needs as well as the institution's culture and values. Finding the appropriate balance between 'touch' and 'tech' is critical when determining a strategy for online service provision. The Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET) in the USA has developed a set of guidelines for creating student services online[17] from its project Beyond the Administrative Core: Creating Web-based Student Services for Online Learners.

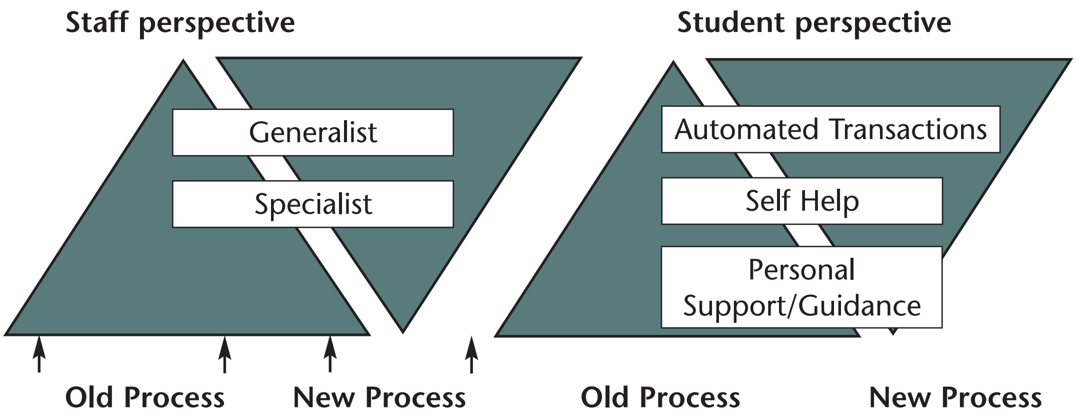

Figure 3 Changing processes within student services

Experiences known to contribute to academic development are frequently unavailable to distance students, for example use of the entire range of services and resources of the physical campus, involvement in service learning, and volunteer opportunities. Similarly experiences with the potential to supplement intellectual development, such as co-curricular activities, are often inaccessible. Opportunities to be integrated fully into the institutional community through, for example, access and contribution to institutional governance are often invisible to distant students.

Examples of developments

Within the last five years, several institutions have attempted to strengthen their remote support provision for distance learning and off-campus students. Few institutions have integrated such systems into a single, highly integrated support model. The University of Illinois at Springfield tackled this through a campus-wide committee, the On-line Technology Integration Sub-committee, bringing together those involved in delivering web-based instruction, including academic, student, business and technology support personnel, to identify and rectify delivery barriers.

The committee was instrumental in promoting campus-wide collaboration in support of integrated web-based instructional delivery, including an e-guide to student services, information about studying online, relevant online tutorials and online technical support.[18]

Illinois' approach illustrates consideration of multiple perspectives on the student experience (in a similar manner to the roundtable methodology). This is important, for example, within institutions that have a majority of traditional campus-based students, since those labelled 'distant' are intrinsically vulnerable to systemic barriers that separate them from academic programmes and the larger university.

The Washington State Community and Technical Colleges Online Consortium's website[19] is an example of an attempt to provide all student services to distance learners through a virtual campus. In particular the site contains access to learning and study resources and to student services such as academic advising information.

The University of Minnesota's website[20] is an example of an online one-stop shop for student support, with the website structured such that all students must visit this page for quick links to view email, access the institutional VLE (WebCT) and their student account or to register for classes. Students are thus encouraged and facilitated in visiting and accessing this resource.

The University of Colorado at Boulder's website[21] features Ralphie's Guide to Student Life, providing a comprehensive support page that includes multiple options for locating answers to questions, including FAQs, recent answers, highlighted questions, search facilities, an online directory and an online question facility.

Good practice in online student services

Shea (2002) cites the following as good practice in the provision of online student services:

- describing how to get started online, eg Rio Salado College's A-Z[22]
- providing easy access to student services, eg Kentucky Virtual University[23]
- providing a means of locating information when students are not clear what to ask, eg University of Colorado[24]
- displaying information about processes and policies, for example for admission and registration, eg Bellevue Community College[25]
- providing access to support staff such as admissions counsellors electronically, eg Community College of Southern Nevada (through CHAT)[26]
- providing online tools such as schedule planners to assist in activities such as registration, eg University of Colorado[27]
- enabling students to access personalised information such as grades online, eg University of the Sciences in Philadelphia[28]
- Using artificial intelligence to provide some advising assistance, eg Penn State University.[29]

Many Scottish HEIs have developed, or are developing, similar online facilities.

Using mobile technologies

Several universities are now looking to mobile technologies, given their prevalence and popularity among students, for their potential in communicating with students and providing support. The University of St Andrews[30] recently piloted a system for sending 'text' messages to student-owned mobile phones (with their permission), as an adjunct to email. This required Information Services colleagues to work in liaison with staff in academic departments and support services, exploring the technical, academic and support usability issues respectively.

St Andrews employed a simple-to-use, free, desktop computer based service with a small number of colleagues across a range of academic, support and administrative units. Staff provided a short message (no more than 80 words) and the required mobile number(s) to which it should be sent.

This service would normally be funded by student-related advertising messages (vetted by the university) that would be added by the company to the end of sent messages: however, for the trial period the adverts were suspended. Although a full evaluation has yet to be completed, initial feedback has been very positive from both staff and students.

The University of Wolverhampton (Riordan and Traxler, 2003) undertook an LTSN-funded (now HE Academy) pilot of a blended approach using SMS (short message system) text and VLEs to provide supplementary support for 'at risk' learners in their School of Computing and IT. The original intention to include WAP[31] was vetoed by students on financial grounds. Text messages provided feedback after assessments had been marked, followed by revision tips prior to the exam. SMS interventions were short, personalised and focused, directing students into VLE material and in-house support. The key to success lay in the timeliness and appropriate focus of the interventions which caught 'at risk' learners early with personalised support. Most students were very positive about the experience and highlighted their preference for communication via email and SMS over websites and notice boards. This may have been influenced by the students' discipline, however, and may not generalise to other student groups. Further investigations are being undertaken at Wolverhampton, including exploration of institutional implications for SMS support, and a funded project to explore the use of personal digital assistants (PDAs) to support 'at risk' students in computing.

In Australia, due to popular student demand, Monash and Deakin Universities provide (as standard) the option to receive assessment results via SMS.

Issues

In establishing cutting-edge services such as the use of SMS, particularly for institutional use, some of the potential issues need to be considered. In particular, students and tutors are likely to occupy different cultural spaces and be separated by 'taken for granted' knowledge within their respective cultures.

Not all staff will feel comfortable, at least initially, with the technology or the casual language and informality of the mode of communication, which may appear disrespectful. In addition, ownership and competence with new technologies such as mobile phones and texting may have a social significance that could lead to restricted disclosure by students about their knowledge, preferences or feelings about using them.

'Texting' has particular potential where staff need to contact students quickly (such as when classes have been cancelled or re-scheduled). It is important to ensure that, whatever system is employed, it does not result in students being deluged by spam 'texts'. SMS can prove a particularly useful means of communicating with commuter students and those with limited access to other means of communication. Accessibility issues remain, since mobile phone ownership and use of 'texting' may not be universal among a student cohort, hence care needs to be taken in using such an approach exclusively.

SMS is fairly efficient, and can save time. Messages can be received, stored and retrieved with minimal disruption and, unlike a voice call, there is no cost for accessing messages. Widespread use may result in students feeling 'swamped', particularly with already full email inboxes, although judicious, targeted use may prove helpful, particularly for high-risk situations such as assignment deadlines and examination periods.

When students are unable to visit the campus SMS contacts may prove valuable in enhancing staff/student contact and minimising feelings of isolation. The use of texting has been hailed as a major breakthrough for those with hearing impairments (Power and Power, 2004).[33]

Tinto (2004) emphasises the principle that communication influences learning motivations, in his work on academic community. Given that students are managing the rest of their lives with the aid of mobile phones and texting, it appears a logical next step to enable students to manage their university lives in much the same way.

The use of email is now ubiquitous across the sector between student peers, staff colleagues and between students and their tutors.

Email encourages an informality and casual use of language that can lead to misunderstandings, so care needs to be taken when using this vehicle for communicating: however, more frequent use may occur where other means of communication and liaison (such as traditional classes or meetings, and casual face-to -ace encounters) are less easily accessible.

Promoting and supporting student engagement with the wider academic community

Students' learning experiences are contextualised socially within a range of roles, responsibilities, expectations and multiple interactions with diverse groups and individuals. These influence the nature of relationships with others, including peers and staff, as well as determining how time is spent, what is valued and from whom advice will be sought. Students benefit from connecting their experiences to their learning community at several levels.

There are three main levels at which students may engage with the institution (outside their formal programme of study):

- The first level involves providing general support through employment or volunteering within, for example, university retail outlets, the university library and office administrative support, establishing informal study support groups (possibly in liaison with the students' association or student support services).

- At the second level students undertake a consultant or technical support role, working or volunteering as a student mentor, peer or ambassador; as a representative on institutional consultative bodies (such as committees and working groups); or in a technical support role with the university's computing service (including website maintenance, loading software etc).
- At the third level, students become involved in development roles or specialised support roles such as working alongside academic and support staff, contributing to student support activities such as help desks (for example IT and/or library), study skills support and tutoring, academic advising and counselling.

The level of training and development required increases at each level, with a corresponding increase in investment made by the institution. By the third level it is desirable to ensure that an institution gains a return on its investment by providing training and development early in a student's learning programme so that they can contribute to the institution before graduation.

A major advantage for students in working for the institution is that their hours may be arranged more flexibly around their studies. Through employment or volunteering students can increase their interactions with other students and staff across the institution, increasing their engagement with the institution and its operation.

From the institution's perspective the main issues relate to turnover and the training/oversight of student employees, although there may also be personnel issues, including contractual requirements, health and safety, and confidentiality in some areas. Initial start-up may require some pump-priming: however, mentoring schemes and work shadowing can be established, over time, as a means of cost-effective training for new student recruits.

Engagement with technical and information services

Most Scottish institutions have achieved levels one and two, to varying degrees, with students frequently working with computing services and the university library. The USA has taken this one step further with their Student Technology Assistant (STA) programme.

Seton Hall University[33] students work with computing services in areas such as web design, technical support, webcasting, videotaping, video editing and computer training (often in media centres). At some universities, STAs work with academic staff assisting them in their use of new technologies. Although this could be viewed as a reciprocal learning process encouraging greater staff-student interaction outside the classroom, it may be perceived entirely differently within the culture of UK institutions, where colleagues could view such proposals as threatening their credibility and expertise. The programme is designed to bring students, academic and support staff and administrative staff together by allowing students to support teaching and learning within the institution. Most STAs are paid, but some volunteer or elect to participate as a service learning activity (often for academic credit). The latter provides enhanced opportunities for linking students' employment with their academic studies, while encouraging greater student engagement with the institutional learning environment.

At Seton Hall, the STA programme is student-centred and student-run, providing structured experiences in technology support and consulting services. Professional development and empowerment are perceived to be the greatest benefits for student participants in the programme, with relevant work experience contributing to their personal development planning and resultant applications for later employment or further study.

Media centres in the USA, which combine library, technology, study and training facilities with students employed in support roles such as student technology assistants (STAs) and library assistants, are increasingly prevalent. Such centres are visible outcomes of collaboration between academic and support staff to identify/design appropriate learning environments. The James and Anne Duderstadt Centre at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, is an example of this.[34] A number of UK universities are now looking to develop similar locations on their campuses.

Engagement in governance

Committee structures provide further avenues for student engagement, but vary considerably across the sector. Separate research by Duncan Cockburn[35] in SPARQs is exploring specific avenues through which students contribute to institutional governance, and will therefore document specific routes through which students input their needs and wishes to institutional strategic planning processes, including input to documents such as learning and teaching strategies.

A clear trend is for institutions to ensure a direct input by students through representation on most if not all committees and decision-making bodies. Some student services, such as at St Andrews, provide consultative fora through which students may make suggestions. In some cases support units are represented on academic committees, at least as observers, and some support committees have academic membership. Teaching and learning committees and quality enhancement committees are becoming more prevalent and these groups often have representation from support units.

Discipline-based engagement

In the USA, mathematics centres provide mathematical tutoring/support, particularly through computer-aided learning packages with final-year and postgraduate students employed as peer tutors working alongside academic staff. A particularly noteworthy example of this is Virginia Tech University's Maths Emporium,[36] which has won several awards.

Student engagement in specialised support roles

The third level of student engagement is more challenging for the Scottish sector and is perhaps best illustrated by the University of St Andrews' SupNet[37] programme, within which student volunteers work within a University Support Service. SupNet (support network) consists of 30-40 trained student volunteers, recruited from all backgrounds and academic disciplines, supplementing and assisting the Student Support Service's team of staff with a form of peer support. All projects and groups established through SupNet interface with support workers to maintain an integrated team.

The Student Support Service at St Andrews is an integrated central unit based within a university located in a geographical area in which welfare, counselling and health resources are very limited. The unit, therefore, aims to provide a comprehensive service covering a range of issues and providing emotional and practical support for students and pastoral care staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during term time. This is a considerable undertaking with a staff resource of only 25 professional and administrative staff serving 6500 students, hence SupNet plays an important role.

Many of the student volunteers have the long-term aim of entering one of the 'caring' professions and, given the increasing competitiveness in many of these fields, relevant volunteer work can prove beneficial to them in gaining future employment or in applying for admission to subsequent courses. SupNet provides students with evidence of the training and experience they have gained through a personal reference and PDP profiles that students are encouraged and supported in completing.

SupNet students are screened rigorously and selected through their references, application forms, interviews and voluntary training. Subsequently selected students benefit, during their first year, from mandatory training in aspects of social and/or welfare skills such as anti-discriminatory practice and confidentiality, and specialist areas of support work such as mental health, eating disorders etc. Training is provided through a mixture of in-house provision and those provided by national services. SupNet students subsequently work (voluntarily) for an average of ten hours per week with the Service for the remaining three years of their study at the university. They run activities for students, offer one-to-one support and organise self-help groups. Continuing professional development (CPD) for SupNet students takes the form of group and individual supervision sessions, and debriefings with the SupNet Coordinator. The Coordinator is a full-time member of professional staff who acts as mentor to the students and liaison for student referrals from members of staff.

The coordinator's role has been pivotal in ensuring that the scheme maintains momentum. The students' uptake of the PDP element of the programme has been less successful, with students more interested in participating in the scheme than reflecting and reporting on their achievements and development. PDP was most successful when three members of staff were allocated, as part of their roles, to supporting students, but this was resource-intensive.

The overall programme has developed through a number of iterations, with changes made along the way in light of experience gained. In particular, mandatory (rather than voluntary) training and a more stringent application process have contributed to ensuring that only committed students apply and remain on the programme, so that returns on investment are achieved. Both staff and students report finding the scheme rewarding.

It has been noted that, in retrospect, students look back at the PDP process and can identify its benefits, even though they had not perceived them during the scheme. It might, therefore, be productive to establish mentoring or peer support for PDP within SupNet. In addition it may be possible through, for example, service learning courses to provide some form of accreditation for students participating in schemes such as SupNet and within such courses to encourage and support PDP. This would require academic colleagues to liaise with support staff and students to explore potential opportunities in this area. Service learning models such as those employed at the University of Stirling[38] may be worth exploring within this context.

Recommendations/proposals

A strategic, coordinated and integrated approach to student support could address many of the current issues and concerns prevalent across the sector and encountered within individual institutions, as well as assuring that the main objectives of student support are achieved. The examples documented within this report illustrate how similar objectives may be achieved through alternative structures, functions, roles and technologies, depending upon the specific requirements and characteristics of individual institutions and student cohorts.

The following provides some practical proposals emerging from this research that institutions may wish to consider for potential application or adaptation within their own context. Although these are structured, generally, according to the report section in which they have been discussed, many are equally applicable elsewhere. Priorities have not been assigned since these will need to be established at institutional level. Consideration will need to be given to the likely impact on institutional priorities, cultures and resources, since these factors will impact on any developments undertaken and may require modifications to be made.

Integrating central support services

- Review support provision from the student's perspective and consider potential for redesign, exploring opportunities for integration at a number of levels, for example procedural, functional and geographical consolidation.
- Consider models such as the Beatty-Guenter Retention Strategy Model (Beatty-Guenter, 1994) for auditing institutional support to identify gaps and develop future strategy.
- Focus, and build, upon commonalities while retaining the flexibility to accommodate differences via customisation of policies and practice.
- Empower front-line staff through appropriate training and orientation (ideally involving both support staff and the students' association).
- Cross-train staff required to move from specialist to more generalist roles, and consider the need for community/team building within integrated service units.
- Explore the potential of alternative types of posts and roles that may cross traditional boundaries.
- Identify key personnel within academic units to liaise with core central services to facilitate the identification of issues and required activity at local as well as institutional level.
- Review marketing and presentational elements of support units (with students' associations) and consider the possible benefits of working with marketing professionals.
- Develop mechanisms for routinely collecting, analysing and disseminating quantitative and qualitative information concerning students' attitudes, skills,

approaches to learning, adjustment difficulties, retention rates and expectations of higher education, ie know your students. Raise awareness of student support and retention as an academic institutional issue (and not only with regard to maintaining high standards).

- Develop mechanisms for tracking and monitoring students' use of support services to inform strategic planning and resource allocation.
- Consider front-loading support to focus on first-year undergraduates.

Integrating academic and central support services

- Create a dedicated oversight group linking academic staff, key administrative and/or technical areas, student services and students, for example steering group or roundtable models, to ensure that student support systems are considered from multiple perspectives and that holistic approaches are taken.
- Encourage, promote and support working across historical boundaries between academic and support services and between staff and students' associations, for example consider providing small amounts of initial funding to pump-prime collaborative support developments.
- Appoint one or more champions to create and maintain momentum for change(s) in student support.
- Provide incentives and rewards for staff engaging with student support initiatives. In particular, review the focus on individuals and considering reward structures that would encompass collaborative teamwork and integrative approaches.
- Consider exploring a range of means for students to interact with staff outside 'class', including (re)developing communal areas to enhance interactions between staff, between students and between staff and students, holding office hours in halls of residence, living-learning communities etc.
- Deliver support through partnerships such as co-delivery and contribution to academic programmes, for example integrating study skills, time management, PDP etc into the curriculum.
- Focus support on the student rather than their presenting 'problem' (since this may hide other underlying issues).
- Establish sustainable and transferable collaborative initiatives to scale up and/or translate into other areas of the institution by identifying priorities and goals to focus initiatives, preventing dissipation of resources and conflicting initiatives. Establish effective procedures to evaluate initiatives and disseminate good practice.
- Explore potential vehicles for promoting collaboration between staff and student association practitioners, for example research seminars, regular meetings, joint conference papers/attendance.
- Emphasise student support activities and roles within academic staff induction/orientation, training and development, with input from students' associations and/or support services. Joint sessions for academic and support staff may be appropriate for some elements of induction and other staff training programmes, encouraging the disassembly of traditional 'silos'.

- Develop institutional approaches that can be tailored to local needs, rather than a proliferation of local solutions that may exacerbate existing 'silos' and potentially result in a more complex student experience (particularly where institutions have a flexible, modular structure).

Supporting distance and flexible learning

- Provide and/or support opportunities for students to develop connections on/with their learning community, for example discussions lists, mentoring schemes, peer support groups, shared transport schemes etc.
- Explore opportunities for strengthening remote support provision for distance and off-campus learning, including integrating such systems into a single support model that strikes a balance between 'touch' and 'tech'.
- Incorporate consideration of the student experience from multiple perspectives (particularly that of diverse student groups) when developing and reviewing support systems, to ensure flexible provision.
- Make effective use of a range of technologies to improve communication and support provision for students: for example, explore opportunities for establishing cutting edge services, using technologies/approaches employed or encountered by students in other areas of their lives. Students' associations will prove invaluable in keeping staff up to date in this area.

Promoting and supporting student engagement with the wider academic community

- Explore opportunities for students to engage, through a number of avenues, at all three levels with their learning community.
- Identify part-time employment and volunteering opportunities within the institution for students, and creatively explore ways in which students can be appropriately trained and mentored.
- Consider establishing consultative fora through which students can provide suggestions and feedback on support provision.
- Explore opportunities, such as service learning models, for students to gain credit through their engagements with the institution and its learning community.

General

At a sectoral level it is worth noting that many thousands of students are involved and duplication of effort is apparent across institutions. It may be worth exploring whether some of the required support resources could be developed and/or provided at a national level, or through collaborative developments within the Scottish sector. The potential for re-use of online resources may be of particular interest. Institutions could still elect to develop their own resources or customise those made available to them. Further research into the potential of diagnostic assessment could identify the most appropriate tools for use within the sector and establish the most effective way(s) to use them for targeting support. There may be potential for providing some elements of support (particularly 'out of hours') on a sector-wide basis. Initially, at least, there may be costs incurred by institutions if they are to implement changes required to improve student support provision. Given that culture change takes time, many of the benefits to be derived from improvements to student support provision will be slow to emerge.

Core characteristics of integrative models considered within this report include:

- increasing student-peer interaction
- increasing staff-student interaction, particularly outside the formal 'class'
- increasing students' involvement and engagement with the institution and (where applicable) making effective use of their time on campus
- linking the curriculum and co-curriculum
- increasing academic expectations among students and their levels of academic engagement
- assisting students with their preparation (both academic and personal) for tertiary education
- empowering front-line service staff
- making effective use of emerging technologies in student support.

In summary, to quote the University of Minnesota's vision from its Student 2000 project,[39] an institutional mission statement for student support provision might read:

> We aim to provide a learning environment in which all participants work together 'to deliver quality, seamless support to lifelong learners anytime, anywhere'.

Notes

1 2002 Census. These figures do not take account of mortality and migration.

2 See for example Liftshare at www.liftshare.co.uk/

3 http://ltsn.mathstore.ac.uk/mathsteam/

4 www.mathscentre.ac.uk/

5 www.napier.ac.uk/qes/studentretentionproject/Studenthome2.htm

6 www.rgu.ac.uk/censa/home/page.cfm?pge=7799

7 Universities of Stirling and Dundee

8 www.jisc.ac.uk/

9 www.tltgroup.org/

10 Contact Ginny Saich, Institute of Education, University of Stirling, tel 01786 467942, email: v.a.saich@stir.ac.uk

11 www.roundtable.ac.uk

12 Variations on this membership may be used. For example Stirling University included colleagues from staff development and Registry for staff training and procedural administrative issues respectively.

13 www.bgsu.edu/colleges/clc/rlcch

14 http://dos.web.arizona.edu/jfpa2.htm

15 www.gu.edu.au/
16 www.heacademy.ac.uk/changeacademy.htm
17 www.wcet.info/projects/laap/guidelines/
18 http://online.uis.edu/
19 www.waol.org/home/default.asp
20 http://onestop.umn.edu/onestop/index.html
21 www.colorado.edu/ralphie/
22 www.rio.maricopa.edu/distance_learning/
23 www.kcvu.org/services/
24 www.colorado.edu/ralphie/
25 www.bcc.ctc.edu/enrollment/
26 http://admrec.ccsn.nevada.edu/
27 http://plus.colorado.edu/planner/
28 www.usip.edu/registrar/Webadvisor.shtml
29 https://elion.oas.psu.edu/
30 Contact Information Services, University of St Andrews, email lis.its@st-andrews.ac.uk
31 WAP, short for Wireless Application Protocol, makes it possible to implement services similar to the World Wide Web for mobile phones.
32 A survey carried out with the Birmingham Institute of the Deaf (BID) showed 98 per cent of hearing impaired people use SMS text messaging www.royaldeaf.org.uk/wmsms.htm
33 http://technology.shu.edu/page/STA!OpenDocument
34 www.dc.umich.edu/
35 35Contact Duncan Cockburn, Development Advisor, SPARQS, email: duncan.cockburn@sparqs.org.uk
36 www.emporium.vt.edu/
37 www.st-andrews.ac.uk/sss/gettinginvolved/supnet.htm
38 www.careers.stir.ac.uk/academic-units/index.php
39 www1.umn.edu/s2000/docs/omnibrie/s21.htm

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Appendix A Results from the 2004 National Study of Living-Learning Programs

(Source: Inkelas, 2004)

- 48 per cent of programmes have 50 or fewer students
- 66 per cent of participating students live in a reserved portion of a residence hall
- 54 per cent of programmes are selective
- 73 per cent of programmes offer no courses for credit
- 51 per cent have 1-5 academic staff with direct roles in programmes: only 33 per cent have no academic staff involvement
- 25 per cent offer academic advising
- 50 per cent facilitate study groups
- 50 per cent have no required co-curricular

Among those offering optional co-curricular opportunities, programmes included:

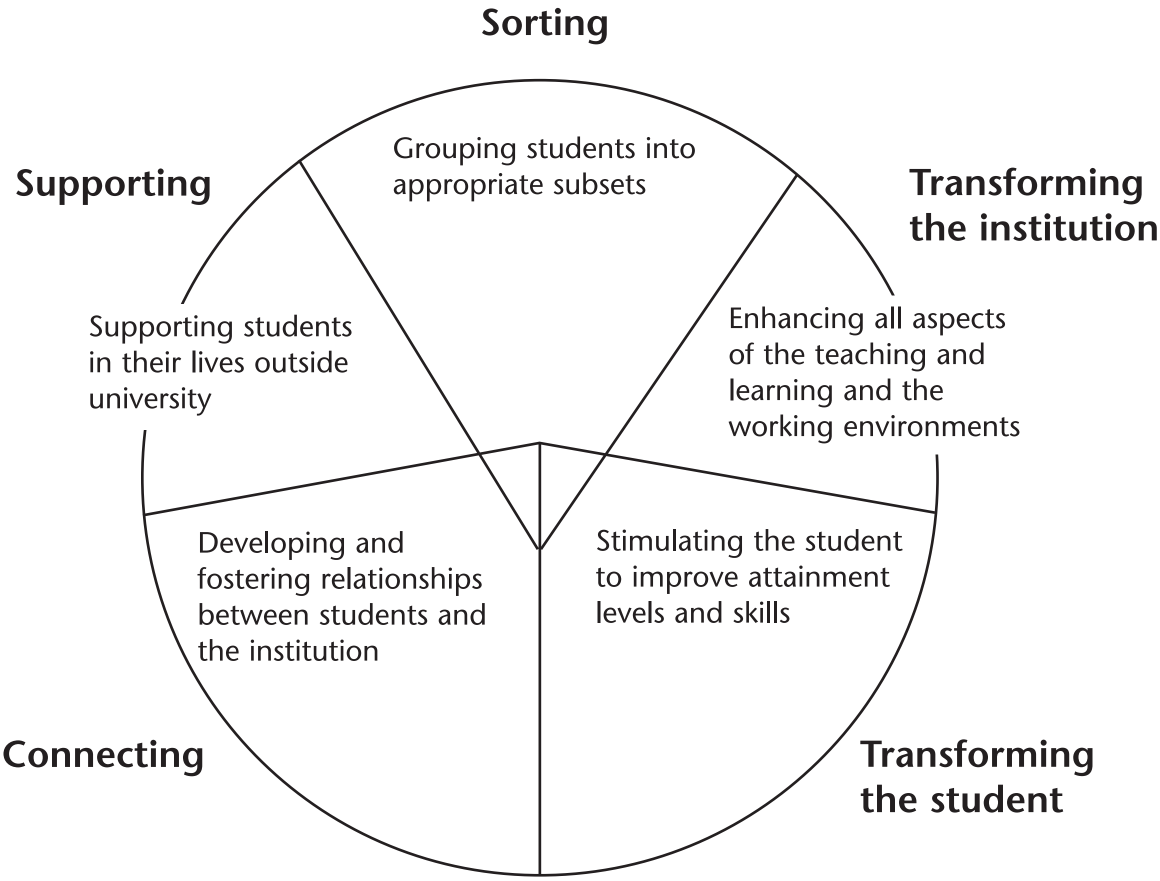
- Team building activities offered by 50 per cent
- Cultural outings offered by 50 per cent
- Multicultural programming offered by 48 per cent
- Community service offered by 46 per cent
- Career workshops offered by 40 per cent
- Intramural sports offered 33 per cent

14 primary categories of theme-based programmes were:

- Civic/social leadership
- Cultural
- Disciplinary
- Fine and creative arts
- General academic
- Honors
- Multi-disciplinary
- Outdoor recreation
- Research
- Residential college
- Transition
- Upper-division
- Wellness/healthy living
- Women's

- Facets of living-learning programmes that appeared to be working most effectively were positive peer interaction and residence hall climate, smoother transition to college, higher civic engagement and lower binge drinking (the latter being more of an issue in the USA where the legal age for alcohol consumption is 21, while students leave home and attend university at 18)
- Living-learning programmes were found to have no significant impact on students' cognitive development, self-confidence and appreciation of racial/ethnic diversity
- Some programmes such as those relating to civic engagement and student/staff interaction proved successful in meeting their objectives
- Other programmes, particularly multicultural programmes and those with greater course content, were less successful in achieving their outcomes of developing racial/ethnic diversity appreciation and higher critical thinking abilities respectively.

Appendix B The Beatty-Guenter Retention Strategy Model



The model identifies five major categories of retention activities.

- Sorting includes admissions processes, diagnostic assessments undertaken on entry, student attendance monitoring and progress reports.
- Supporting includes providing counselling, financial advice, assistance with housing, childcare provision, health facilities, transport, and assistance with locating part-time employment etc.
- Connecting includes activities aimed at socialising students by creating opportunities for them to become integrated into membership of the community through peer support and mentors, personal tutors, course events, involvement with institutional governance and the students association.
- Transforming the Institution may involve learning and teaching innovations, redesigning the curriculum, developing or amending policies, implementing cultural change, refurbishing teaching rooms, delivering staff development programmes etc.
- Transforming the Student may include, for example, developing students' skills, encouraging passive learners to become active learners, increasing student motivation and confidence etc.

Beatty-Guenter's (1994) conclusion is that successful retention programmes need to contain techniques that address all of the above five elements.

The first-year learning experience

David Lines
The Robert Gordon University

Contents

Executive summary

Key points emerging

Higher Education (HE) operates today within a changing context. In various ways many students have different demands, pressures and experiences from those of previous generations; technology has changed the learning environment and continues so to do; universities face increasing competition, often with a diminishing resource; and there are continuing changes in the demand for the skills of graduates and the nature of careers.

Students know, accept, and in most cases want the HE experience to be different from that of school, though they rarely have a clear idea of what HE will be like.

Students will always go through a process of acculturation into the ways of working within an HE environment, but a considered and well-planned approach can ease and speed up that process.

That planned approach is likely to entail a broadly based view of the first-year learning experience which facilitates student engagement with peers and staff and encourages active, collaborative learning.

The experience of a number of universities in North America and Australasia suggests that curriculum innovation to enhance the first-year learning experience is most effective when it is strategically planned and executed.

Early, appropriate and effective assessment can facilitate the process of engagement and acculturation.

'Good teaching' can make an important contribution to improving the first-year learning experience.

How might the key points be addressed?

In reality many 'full-time' students are 'part-time', undertaking paid employment alongside their studies. Widespread adoption of IT applications can ease some of the time-scheduling issues for these students in that they can increasingly access learning materials 24x7.

These changes also offer the potential to individualise the learning experience in innovative and exciting ways.

However, many institutions face complex challenges as parts of the structure harmonise comfortably with the emerging mode of learning while others do so less easily. The scheduling of laboratory classes or short placements often illustrate many of the issues.

Although much progress has been made in recent years in easing the transition between school and university, closer links need to be forged and communication improved so that any myths and misconceptions of HE are dispelled or resolved.

Once they are at university, close attention to the induction process eases students into the academic demands of courses. Gradually lengthening lectures and essay word counts are but two of the methods used to assist the easing-in process.

The first-year curriculum should include aspects of what is sometimes called the 'hidden' curriculum, such as the development of skills for employability, learning how to learn, metacognition and so on.

Following on from that, planning should involve academics, support services, students and, as appropriate, other stakeholders such as parents, school teachers, partners and so on.

In some universities a sub-set of the first-year portal is dedicated to the partners of new students, who, in addition to supporting new study habits, often have to juggle competing demands of childcare and domestic responsibilities. If partners think that the institution considers them to be a part of the process, acculturation for the student will be that much quicker.

Localised approaches can have significant benefits for specific groups of students, but embedding of 'good practice' into the ethos of the university is likely to follow from a more comprehensive strategy.

That may involve setting up a committee, with high level representation and with a 'champion' to steer the initiative. The common objectives are clear: enhancing the first-year learning experience of students. Indicators of progress include student feedback, student performance and specific trends in recruitment.

Many subject areas across the UK, often through the subject centres of the Higher Education (HE) Academy, are engaged in activities to improve the learning experiences of first-year students.

The structuring and timing of assessment and feedback can facilitate student engagement and acculturation and reinforce positive features of the learning experience.

While views differ among academics about the precise qualities of 'good' teaching the research evidence points to a number of components which students recurrently perceive as highly influential in fostering a positive learning environment. For example, students appreciate being identified by name. They like staff to signal that they are approachable and have an interest in the learning and welfare of the student.

At another level, knowledge of the subject and an enthusiasm for it helps the students to seek deeper learning. Commonly reported characteristics of 'good teaching' include being well organised, setting clear assessment objectives, and using relevant examples.

The context

It is timely that one of the 2003-04 enhancement themes focuses on the student experience and within that, the first-year learning experience. HE has changed in a generation to include greatly increased numbers of variably qualified students entering straight from school; others who are returning to education after life - and/or work - experience and still more from groups that previously would not have considered, or possibly not even been allowed access to HE. Furthermore, the nature of study has changed.

'Full-time' students are in reality 'part-time', as the imperatives to fund university education become stronger: the growth of information and communication technology has transformed learning, so that 'on-campus' students are at times as much 'distance learners' as those on more explicitly named off-campus courses.

Students themselves have become more demanding, an attitude reflected in the notion of student as 'customer', while increasing numbers see the acquisition of a degree as above all vocational, rather than primarily 'educational' in a Socratic sense.

And alongside all this change, explicit quality measures have been rigorously pursued, despite a diminishing per capita unit of resource.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that in such a dynamic climate, universities have tended to be reactive rather than proactive; pragmatic rather than strategic; managerial rather than educational. Indeed, an international debate has raged, starting arguably with Reading's book *The University in Ruins* (1996), over the very nature of universities and their role and function in a modern society (see inter alia Barnett, 2000; Delanty, 2001).

It is hardly surprising then that dealing with the new realities of teaching and learning throws up challenges that have yet to be addressed effectively.

In his paper 'Signs of Disengagement? The Changing Undergraduate Experience in Australian Universities', Craig McInnis (2001) expresses the issues thus:

> There are three main concerns underlying this discussion [of disengagement]. First, the rather poor understanding we have of the changing forms of student engagement makes universities vulnerable to ad hoc solutions, from curriculum design to the provision of student support services. Second, the current ambivalence on the part of universities in defining their role in the face of these changes puts them at risk of becoming overly responsive to what students want rather than what might benefit individuals and society. Finally, it concerns me that the undergraduate experience is changing by default when universities should be demonstrating leadership in structuring the experience, particularly with respect to the design of the curriculum and the management of learning experiences. (p 4, parentheses added)

This report will argue that it is time for universities to refocus their efforts and resources on the first-year learning experience, including the first-year curriculum.

The designer of a curriculum has to describe those characteristics, skills and attributes that students should exhibit or be able to demonstrate at the exit of a course of study that they either did not possess or which were poorly formed at the start.

That design is then translated into operation via the teaching and learning strategy. Here attention needs to be paid to factors such as the unique perspective that each student will have on the process; integrating assessment in a timeous and effective manner; the structuring and sequencing of learning experiences; and the means of engaging students and of promoting understanding and effective learning.

For universities, and their students, the period from point of entry into HE until the end of the first year of study is a particularly challenging one. In her report on Induction elsewhere in this publication (see page 4 ff), Carney has examined the distinctions between 'transition' and 'orientation', but for the purposes of this report, 'enculturation', 'engagement' and 'progression' are key because they are intricately linked.

There is strong evidence that unless the student absorbs the culture of the university, engagement will be at best superficial and the likelihood of non progression greater as a result (see, especially, Tinto, 1993, 1997, 1998).

Chaskes (1996) described the student's first experience on campus as being similar to an immigrant arriving at a new homeland. The re-socialization process into the ways of university life involves culture shock, language acquisition and the internalisation of academic, bureaucratic and social norms and expectations. The 'traditional model' of students living on a university campus some distance from home is not one prevalent in many Scottish universities, and indeed it is increasingly less evident across the world as the cost of higher education continues to rise and the type and background of students change.

'Local' students encounter a different kind of 'immigrant experience'. Staying at home, perhaps continuing in a part-time job first acquired at school, they will have already-established friendship groups, their study habits will include web-based elements and they may well be enrolled in combined degrees or cross-discipline studies, or courses with periods of work experience (McInnis, 2001). All these factors encourage them to engage less with the physical campus of the university, with the result that their interaction with academic and support staff and with their 'learning peers' is similarly reduced.

They may also tend towards a more pragmatic view about their years of study and the value of the degree to which they aspire. The campus, then, becomes a place to visit on occasions, for a clearly defined purpose, rather than being the epicentre of their lives.

What students expect at university

Research undertaken by the South East of Scotland Wider Access Forum showed that the 'vast majority of respondents expected the academic work [at university] to be challenging' (Musselbrook and Dean, 2003, p 12, parenthesis added).

However, when asked whether they felt they would be able to cope with this work, nearly one third simply did not know what would be required of them and were therefore unable to say.

Given that less than 1 per cent of students sampled had attended any preparatory or bridging courses prior to the academic year, it is unsurprising that they were unclear as to the number of hours they would be required to study.

The research also showed that once students had started their course, the majority spent less time in independent study than they had been expecting (as many as one in five was putting in fewer than five hours of independent study per week, see Figure 1).

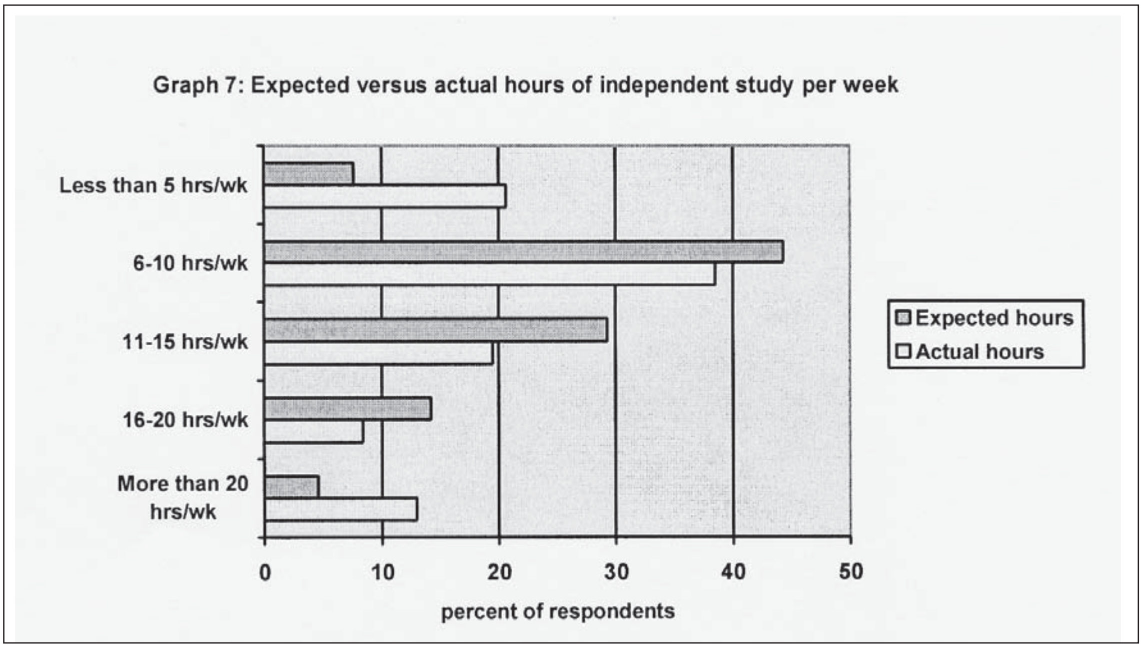


Figure 1 Expected hours versus actual hours of independent study per week
Source: Musselbrook and Dean (2003, p 13, graph 7)

In Australia, Peel's research (2000) revealed similar misconceptions. Peel showed that incoming students expected university education to be 'fragmented and highly individualistic'. They also believed universities would 'expect students to be completely independent' (p 23).

The words 'independence' and 'freedom' carried a double meaning, being seen as negative in a learning context but positive in a social one.

The overall perception of university appeared to be of an uncaring place, where an individual was just a number, with no one there to help in times of need.

For parents, the transition to HE was seen as a move into adulthood; for teachers the transition was seen as a shift from the highly structured, supportive teaching and learning environment found in schools.

From various sources the students' perception of a 'successful' university student was 'someone who neither needs help nor expects to receive it' (p 23).

Research undertaken in the UK reinforces Peel's message. Yorke's (2000) survey on reasons for withdrawal from HE showed that more than one in five of respondents mentioned a lack of support, both inside and outside the timetable, as a factor in their decision; a figure confirmed by Lowe and Cook (2003) in their work with first-year science students at the University of Ulster.

One third of Yorke's survey said the teaching did not suit them, though whether that meant the teaching was different from what they were used to, more challenging, more anonymous, or of a poor standard is not detailed (p 48).

A large number reported making less than satisfactory progress, and while this was explained in many cases by a poor choice of course, a lack of study skills was significant for some; a problem that was compounded by their perception of poor access to staff for support.

Yorke found that some students received poor advice, both from their school and from universities.

Sometimes what was said in university literature about a course did not match closely with the reality (p 38) or the intellectual or pre-course requirements were more rigorous than anticipated (or marketed as being), or in some cases, courses were not as well resourced as they might or should have been (p 39).

A strategic approach

McInnis (2001) argues that unless universities can show that they produce 'something special', for governments in particular and society in general, they 'become part of the problem' (p 13). Improving the student experience, therefore, is not simply a question of retention, though clearly governments will look closely at the cost to them and the individuals concerned of high drop-out rates. It goes beyond that, to the 'value for money', or perhaps better, the 'opportunity cost' argument, centring on the ways experience of higher education has added value to the student and society generally.

Given Lawton's (1996) definition of the curriculum as a selection from the culture of a society to be passed on, then curriculum design and effective implementation become the main focus for managerial support and resources. That includes involving students in the practice of curriculum design.

In what follows, case studies will be used to examine the different ways in which some universities have adopted a strategic approach to the issues surrounding the first-year curriculum and the enculturation of students into HE.

Although much can and should be done at a departmental level (see below), there is a strong case for a strategic approach to the first-year learning experience, encompassing various enhancement strands.

In terms of managing the process, a commonly applied driver is a committee or 'task force' chaired by a senior member of staff.

The outcome often takes the form of an action plan which states specific objectives, timelines, how success will be measured, the means of evaluation and estimates of resource implications.

The academic curriculum is made central, even to the point of manipulating the first year to ensure, as much as possible, that it is coherent and that students on a programme of study feel part of a group or team.

Case example 1: Monash University

Monash University in Australia offers an overarching programme for transition (see Figure 2). Students (and parents) can access the relevant pages on the Monash website and receive detailed advice, depending on whether they are entering university straight from school or from a 'non school leaver' background. There are also frequently asked questions and, using a particularly original and creative idea, there is a competition open to staff and/or students with awards of up to $2,000 available to fund orientation projects of particular merit.

Monash Transition Programme

'Transition' pertains to issues of adjustment experienced by undergraduate and postgraduate students, and is cognisant of all students being in a state of constant transition: to, during and from the university experience.

- a period of significant adjustment, development and change affecting all spheres of students' lives
- progression through an educational institution where the balance of responsibility for achievement rests with students
- enculturation into the teaching and learning styles, life, procedures, practices and culture of the university
- engagement with the university, a particular course, and people at a specific campus

Figure 2 Monash Transitional Programme

Source: www.monash.edu.au/transition/

Commentary

There is talk of a 'balance of responsibility' that rests with the student. There is also an emphasis on both whole-university and course-specific engagement. Taken together this implies a tripartite approach involving students, academic staff and university management.

Case example 2: London Metropolitan University

Combining the University of North London (UNL) with London Guildhall University to form London Metropolitan University offered a unique insight into the ways institutional policies can make a difference to academic engagement and retention in the first year.[1]

UNL and London Guildhall were described by the Higher Education Policy Institute as 'brothers in the same family' (Bekhradnia in Wend, 2003), because they were more alike than they were similar to other UK universities. Both universities had remarkably similar student profiles, with a high proportion of low-income students from lower socio-economic groups, many of whom were immigrants and second-language learners. In addition, both were similar in terms of staff and student numbers; the type of research activity; financial health and physical size.

Where they differed was in rates of retention, though both failed to achieve the benchmark figure calculated by HEFCE. UNL had a significantly higher drop-out figure in the first year, a position that was reversed in the second.

There were no obvious reasons for this. Indeed, the Secretary of State wrote to HEFCE stating that there were '…unacceptable variations in the rate of drop-out which would appear to be linked more to the culture and workings of the institution than to the background or nature of the students recruited'. (House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, Sixth Report, 2001, quoted in Wend, 2003 p 6).

A five-year research programme at UNL identified a number of factors that contributed to what students frequently described as a 'struggle' to keep on the course, namely a minimal contact with academics; the modular structure; and responsibilities outside university. As a result of this work, action was taken in a number of departments that were conscious of high drop-out rates in their areas.

Alongside this detailed work in departments at UNL, a survey of students in the new, combined university was undertaken. Although many systems (such as student records) had been centralised, the physical reality of the two campuses remained. Given the similarities in the student profiles in the two former institutions, it was possible to isolate other factors that might explain the different levels of engagement, especially in the first year of study.

The results of the survey showed that 'the major factor impacting upon the students' overall experience in their course is the quality of teaching' (p 7). This apparently obvious finding revealed others that were less so, and ones that universities across the sector might consider.

What it meant in practice was that if students were happy with the teaching, they were also happy with the overall quality of the course. Similarly, if students were happy with the teaching rooms and cleanliness of the buildings, the overall qualities of facilities were rated positively.

The data also suggested that students' perceptions of the efficiency of the university organisation as a whole were significantly influenced by the speed and efficiency of dealing with their queries and problems.

Findings also indicated that feeling settled as a student and being satisfied with initial experiences was 'dependent on students' perceptions of aspects of their courses and of their tutors' (Wend, 2003 pp 7-8).

In response to this data and to HEFCE requirements, London Metropolitan set in train an overarching plan built around its Learning and Teaching Strategy. This plan was described using the diagram at Figure 3 below.

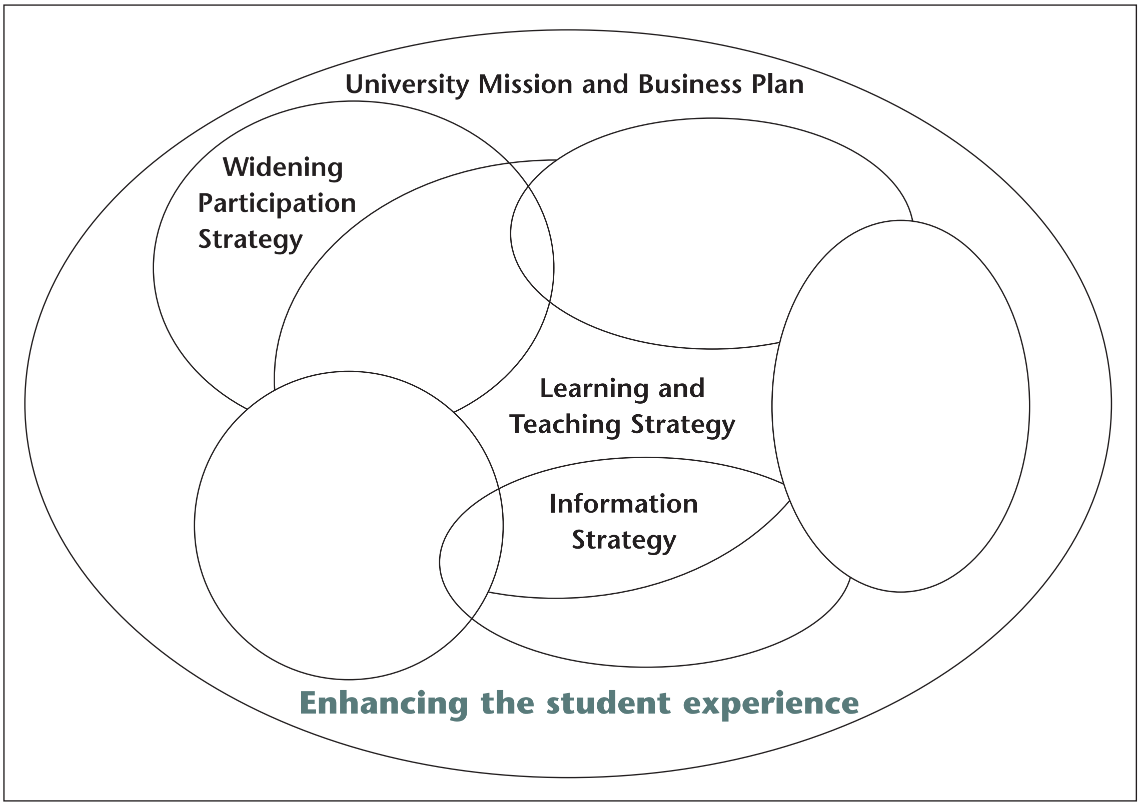


Figure 3 London Metropolitan University plan

The key features of the strategy were that:

- it was joined up with related strategies
- there was an extensive process of horizontal and vertical consultation
- there was a strong focus and team approach towards enhancing student experience and personal development, lifelong learning and employability, progression and retention
- it created an 'integrated curriculum' with co-curricular activities to link learning development with subject-based teaching
- there was intensive teaching and support and dedicated resources in the first year, in order to facilitate students' transition to university study
- it ensured appropriate learning provision for postgraduate students on taught and research programmes
- there was professional development and promotion of good practice, scholarship and linking of research and teaching
- there was departmental and staff ownership
- the first year of operation would be used for reviewing and harmonising provision, building on existing good practice
- there was in-built monitoring and evaluation.

The five priorities of the strategy centred on:

- high quality teaching and learner support

- the development of students' subject expertise and graduate identity that should enhance employability
- improving student progression, retention and achievement
- developing staff and the dissemination and implementation of good practice
- ownership by staff and students (pp 9-10).

In order to engage staff, achieve a sense of 'ownership' and shift both the 'culture and attitude' (p 10) of staff, a Learning and Teaching Consultation Workshop was established. Sitting outside the normal committee structures, the workshop invited all academic and support departments that were involved in the student experience, as well as external experts, to address the membership.

From this input, strategies and implementation plans were written for aspects such as employability, learning development and so on, to provide what was described as a 'whole university - whole student' approach.

The practical implementation of the strategy engaged the main issues for students, which the internal research showed were a lack of belonging; financial hardship; and 'confusion over available information and support'.

Quite fundamental changes to curriculum thinking were introduced, built around the evidence that students can feel isolated within a conventional modular scheme.

These included: a compulsory first year, dependent on the students' choice of programme; diagnostic assessment; discipline intrinsic HE orientation at certificate level; a fully integrated 'skills/employability' approach rather than bolt-on modules to foster subject identity; a spine of core modules for each subject to encourage a cohort identity; a restriction of options to minimise wrong choices for students; a timetabled co-curriculum which included peer-support and peer-mentoring; a new system of academic and personal support which integrated the pastoral and academic sides and sees the students right through their university life; personal development planning in conjunction with the Careers Service, Registry and Academic Tutors; despite restriction of choice, greater flexibility through the years of study; a gradual but clear pathway from extensive learner support in the first year to more independent learning in the final year; a clear assessment strategy with proper assessment timing and tariffs which favours formative assessment but offers a greater variety of assessment methods spread across the year; e-enabled learning which supports traditional methods of delivery. All of this had to be devised on the basis of SENDA (Special Educational Needs Disability Act). (pp 11-12)

Other aspects were developed alongside curricular ones. For instance, given that financial hardship was acknowledged as one of the major contributors to dropping out, the university made it an explicit policy to offer all appropriate internal jobs to London Metropolitan students before going outside to recruit.

Commentary

The changes at London Metropolitan are so recent that it is impossible to judge their long-term impact. Nevertheless, Wend argues that one significant difference that is already apparent is an increased staff awareness of retention as an issue.

Departmental plans are now explicit in addressing retention, and roles such as 'learning support development facilitator' and 'learning and teaching facilitator' have been created at departmental level as a way of improving performance.

Translating the London Metropolitan experience into a Scottish context is not straightforward. Issues such as financial hardship, second-language learners, first generation undergraduates and so on are certainly relevant to all Scottish institutions, even if detailed variation occurs.

There is evidence in the literature that the dominance of the modular curriculum can have a negative impact on students' 'sense of belonging' (though it would be wrong to deny the positive aspects of choice that are derived from modularisation).

Efforts to create or recreate 'learning communities' figure large in responses to this challenge, as will be examined later in this report.

Case example 3: La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia

La Trobe University decided to adopt a strategic approach to the first-year experience because it was believed to be the only way to ensure a complete coverage of the issues (Pitkethly and Prosser, 2001). This resulted in a Plan for the First Year Academic Orientation, which stated explicit strategies: to familiarise students with the university; to develop students' sense of purpose and direction; to facilitate students' engagement; and to promote and enhance students' learning.

Developing students' sense of purpose was to be achieved by:

i 'promoting a clear understanding of why they are doing their subjects and courses and where their subjects and courses are directed and

ii promoting a clear understanding of the aims and objectives, learning outcomes, learning processes, assessment methods, and teaching and learning methods of their subjects and courses.' (p 191)

Promoting and enhancing students' learning was to be achieved by:

i 'developing basic skills and knowledge in the field of study

ii developing generic skills such as group work, oral and written communication skills, research and referencing and

iii taking into account the variation in skills and knowledge to a basic level by addressing deficiencies and enhancing skills already present, (p 192).

Commentary

La Trobe and Monash Universities exhibit similar characteristics in their approaches to the first-year experience. The most important of these is an overall strategy that sees enculturation, both to HE and the institution, as part social, part academic and part environmental. The student is put at the centre, but as one element of a partnership.

Case example 4: Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada

As stated earlier, a strategic approach to the first year links academic study to all other aspects of the student's experience. Ryerson University (www.ryerson.ca/) describes this linkage in diagrammatic form (see Figure 4).

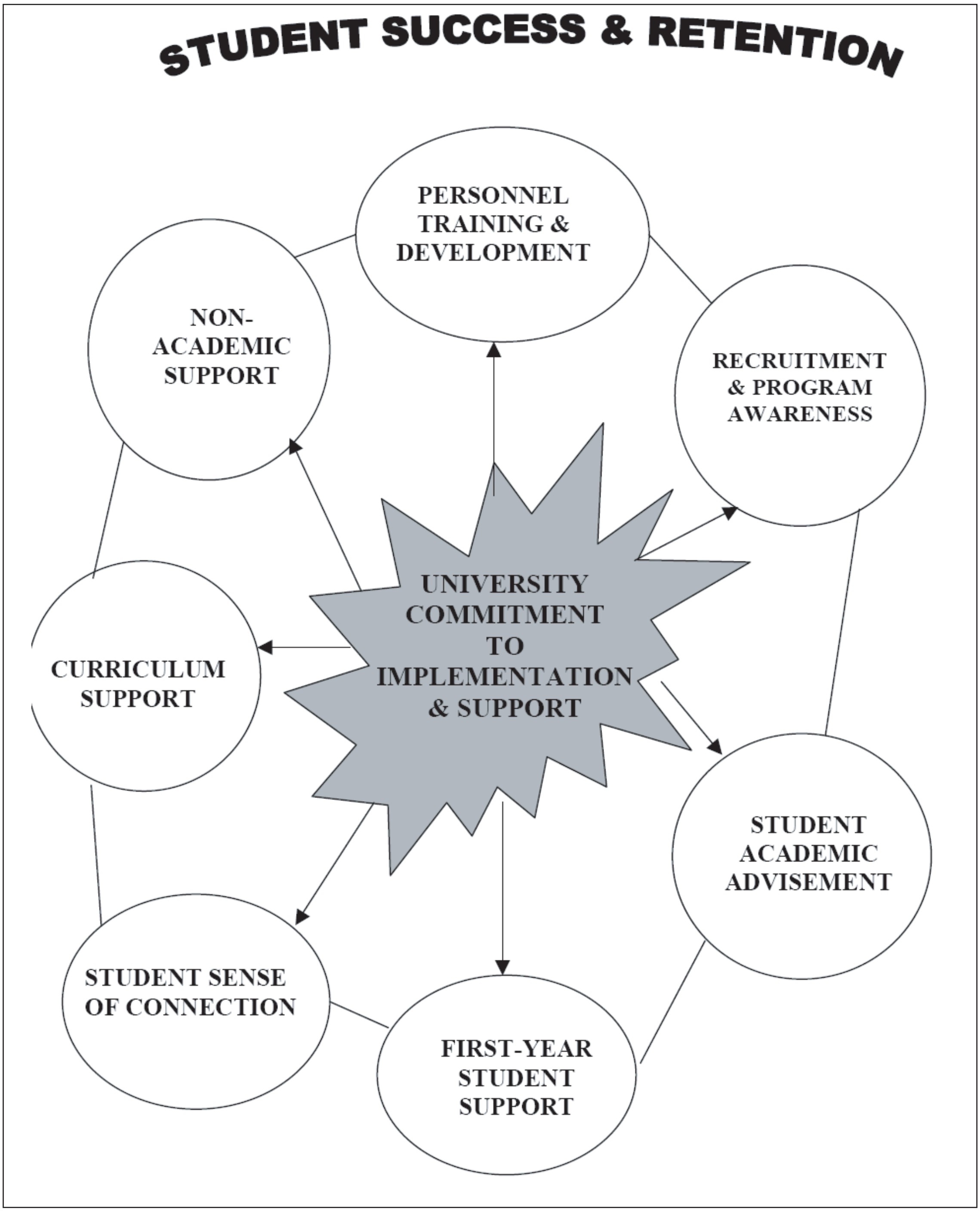


Figure 4 Ryerson University's strategic plan

Source: Student Success and Retention Task Force Final Report, Ryerson University 2002, p 4

Ryerson's Plan of Action has seven 'goals'.

1 'Improve student recruitment and awareness of Ryerson University and its programs.
2 Improve student academic advisement process.
3 Increase support for first-year students.
4 Improve students' sense of connection and satisfaction with programs and Ryerson.
5 Improve curriculum and curriculum support services.
6 Improve student non-academic support services.
7 Train and support faculty and staff in success and retention initiatives.' (pp 7-13)

Each of the goals describes the objectives; names of responsible individuals, schools, departments and programmes; leaves space for a 'report date'; and specifies the suggested implementation date. Goals 5 and 7 are detailed as shown in Figure 5 below.

Goal 5 Improve curriculum and curriculum support services				
Objectives		**Assignee**	**Report date**	**Suggested implementation date**
5.1	To provide early and frequent assessment in each course in order to flag at-risk students.	Chair/Director Dean Faculty		Ongoing
5.2	To devise systems for early identification of, and intervention with, students at risk.	Deans, Depts/Schools/ Programs, Student Services		April 2003
5.3	To link at-risk students - probationary, conditional, and those who have been identified early in the semester - to academic support services (ie student services, library, math and writing centres).	Depts/Schools/ Programs, Library Student Services		
5.4	To encourage a review of current grading practices and policies in schools/departments programs.	Chair/Director, Faculty		March 2003

Goal 5 Improve curriculum and curriculum support services				
Objectives		**Assignee**	**Report date**	**Suggested implementation date**
5.5	To increase math remediation across programs with need, and to develop independent subject-specific remediation (eg statistics).	Depts/Schools/ Programs, VPA		March 2003
5.6	To analyse high failure rate courses to determine the need for curricular/teaching practice change.	Dept/School/ Programs Faculty, Deans		March 2003
5.7	To evaluate student course loads and course sequencing in each program.	Chair/Director		Fall 2003
5.8	To modify programs to promote literacy (language, math, computer and library) skills early in the curriculum, where necessary.	Chair/Director Curriculum Committees		
5.9	To continue to develop and implement University transition programs and assess their effectiveness	Library, Program Dean, Student Services		Fall 2004
5.10	To integrate academic services into course delivery and provide in-class academic and library sessions.	Dept/School/ Program, Library, Student Services		
5.11	To evaluate needs of ESL students in terms of testing, services, and program requirements.	Admissions, English Department, Programs, Student Services	February 2003	Fall 2004

Goal 5 Improve curriculum and curriculum support services				
	Objectives	**Assignee**	**Report date**	**Suggested implementation date**
5.12	To improve student ability to more easily transfer between Ryerson programs.	Chair/Director Curriculum Committee, Dean, Registrar, VPA		
5.13	To encourage a review of the criteria related to the academic standing of probationary students.	VPA Registrar		
5.14	To enhance tutoring support services within programs and University-wide.	Dept/School/ Program, School Services		
5.15	To encourage departments to develop training for new faculty; require new faculty to attend LTO sessions.	Dept/School/ Program, LTO, Student Services		April 2003
5.16	To encourage more opportunities for faculty renewal and professional development.	VPA, DeansChairs/ Directors, LTO		
5.17	To encourage non-traditional role models in all programs (eg males in nursing, females in engineering).	Depts/Schools/ Progams		

Goal 7 Train and support faculty and staff in success and retention initiatives				
	Objectives	**Assignee**	**Report date**	**Suggested implementation date**
7.1	To promote increased collaboration between faculty and librarians (eg, in the design of appropriate assignments).	Library,LTO,Depts/ Schools/Programs		Ongoing
7.2	To ensure that the Liaison office has adequate resources to share accurate information with high schools personnel and students.	AdmissionsDepts/ Schools/Programs, Faculty		March 2003
7.3	To assist faculty in the development of strategies for improved student success in 'killer' courses.	Deans,Depts/ Schools/Programs		June 2003
7.4	To support faculty in the development of student mentoring initiatives (ie students mentoring students).	Deans Depts/Schools/ Programs		Fall 2003
7.5	To offer seminars for faculty on the incorporation of retention strategies to course design (eg study groups, library skills, assignment design.)	Library, LTO		Fall 2003
7.6	To establish a faculty mentoring program targeted to at-risk students, at both the University and department/school levels.	Chairs/Directors, Deans,Student Services		Fall 2003

Goal 7 Train and support faculty and staff in success and retention initiatives				
Objectives		Assignee	Report date	Suggested implementation date
7.7	To provide training sessions for faculty and academic staff on effective student advising skills and counselling/ mentoring of at-risk students.	LTO,Student Services,VPA		Fall 2003
7.8	To provide training sessions for all faculty and staff on recording, monitoring, and assessment strategies to ensure that these initiatives are reported regularly and consistently.	ERU,LTO		Fall 2003

Figure 5 Ryerson University goals 5 and 7

Source: Ryerson University Plan of Action (pp 7-13)

Ryerson University claims that the literature indicates that a structured first-year course content should:

- teach academic skills (writing, study skills, time management etc.)
- incorporate Information Literacy Standards
- help students develop their educational goals
- introduce students to campus resources
- provide an opportunity to compare students' experiences with other students
- provide an opportunity for students to interact with faculty
- help students with transition issues
- clarify faculty expectations, standards etc
- inform students about university policies
- provide career planning opportunities
- enhance self-confidence, self-management

(Ryerson University Plan of Action, Appendix A, p 11)

Commentary

Ryerson's approach uses a clear set of goals, which are known and understood by all, as a means of providing targets for the implementation of the strategy. Such an approach aligns responsibilities and seeks to ensure compliance at one level and commitment at another.

It does seem that those universities that have adopted this approach have done so largely because of pressures exerted either by the market or by external agencies.

Although similar pressure may not exist currently in Scotland, it would be a tribute to the foresight and commitment of Scottish institutions, if such change were effected voluntarily.

Improving the school/HE transition

Several options are appropriate, singly or more probably in combination. These include:

- more visits from HE staff into schools might be made to familiarise students
- school students might visit their local universities more often. Even if they finally decide to study elsewhere, they will have gained some insights that will help them ask the right questions
- effective use of information technology. For instance, The Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen has produced an interactive CD-ROM entitled Study to Succeed (CELT, 2003), which has been distributed to all secondary schools in Scotland, to widespread praise and appreciation from that sector.

Nevertheless, any efforts to inform and enthuse school students about university education are futile if the academic experience once they arrive is not what they expected.

There is often an assumption that students who enter university can immediately absorb higher education's mores, standards and study habits through some kind of osmosis. This often relies on bright students 'picking up' good study habits and methodologies, very often through trial and error in assessments.

There are better ways of doing things. Supplemental instruction (SI), for example, works on the principle that learning improves when we recognise a 'need to know' rather than doing it because we are somehow forced to. It also recognises and acknowledges the centrality of student input into the process.

The acquisition of study skills may be addressed through generic courses, sometimes held in summer schools or learning centres. Fraser and Hendren (2002) at the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic in Tauranga, New Zealand, argue that their summer school is critical, not only in developing academic skills (though they concede that its efficiency in this regard is debatable), but more importantly in facilitating psycho/social enculturation into the institution (p 3).

Peat, Dalziel and Grant (2001) report work done in the Faculty of Science at Sydney University to develop what they call a 'Transition Workshop' given to all incoming first-year science students. The innovation is that this is a one-day workshop held before the university orientation period. It therefore emphasises academic rather than social integration.

The students are divided into their primary areas of interest such as mathematics, the physical sciences, life sciences and so on and during the workshop they work together in different contexts, getting to know each other better. The students' timetables are 'manipulated so that within peer groups of 10-20 students, they are timetabled to meet in two small group classes for up to six hours a week during the first semester' (Peat et al 2001, p 200).

For one year-group the reported results were significant. 'Overall, those who attended the workshop were:

- less likely to have considered dropping out or deferring during the first semester
- more likely to have been involved in collaborative learning activities
- more academically motivated
- more likely to have a well-developed sense of purpose and identity
- more appreciative of their courses and
- more likely to adopt a deep approach to learning.' (p 203)

Attendees exhibited significantly better adjustment to university academic life on a range of measures (see Table 1).

Scale	Mean GR 1	Mean Gr 2	Mean Gr 3	Gr 1 vs Gr 2	Gr 1 vs Gr 3
First Year Experience Questionnaire					
Academic Orientation	21.3	19.3	20.3	sig	ns
Sense of Identity	15.8	14.1	14.2	sig	sig
Sense of Purpose	15.8	14.7	14.8	sig	ns
Academic Application	12.2	11.2	10.6	sig	sig
Teaching	29.1	27.7	28.7	ns	ns
Course	11.4	10.0	10.5	sig	sig
Workload	18.1	17.7	17.0	ns	n
Interpersonal Support Evaluation List					
Tangible	8.4	8.3	9.1	ns	ns
Belonging	5.4	5.3	5.6	ns	ns
Appraisal	8.0	7.6	8.3	ns	ns
Self-Esteem	7.2	6.6	7.3	ns	ns
Approaches to the Study Questionnaire					
Achieving	20.3	19.7	18.6	ns	sig
Reproducing	21.0	21.5	21.7	ns	ns
Meaning	20.7	19.3	19.1	sig	sig

Table 1 Mean scale scores and significance results for students in Group 1 (transition workshop), Group 2 (non-transition workshop BSc), and Group 3 (other faculty)

Another method of academic integration used in many USA universities is to create special learning programmes, often called first-year experience (FYE) seminars (Franklin et al, 2002). These seminars teach study, library and computer skills. Whether stand-alone or incorporated into the curriculum, they often require students to work together on group projects.

Yet study skills are only one part of a somewhat confused picture of what universities really want from their students. Fraser and Hendren (2002) detailed attributes generally expected such as lifelong learning; information literacy; problem solving; critical thinking; working both in teams and autonomously; and metacognition.

High-level content acquisition often continues to be emphasised. A starting point for a revised approach, therefore, might be to ask teaching staff to reflect on the balance between content and attributes.

It is widely recognised within the library service that the acquisition of information literacy, that is to say the ability to identify, use and reference academic work in a correct manner, is another area where students need additional support. Sometimes instances of plagiarism may be due to poor information literacy skills or misunderstanding, rather than deliberate cheating (Carroll, 2003).

A phasing-in or departmental approach

Innovative approaches to the first-year curriculum are constantly being introduced into subject areas within universities, by academics who are dedicated to improving the learning experiences of their students. The work of these individuals is often unrecognised, except by a small circle of colleagues and by the students themselves. This is partly explained by the fact that practitioners rarely write up their work and because many universities do not have formal reporting mechanisms for such initiatives.

As part of the research for this report, a survey was conducted across Scotland and the rest of the UK (see Appendix A). The objective was to discover aspects of work on the first-year curriculum. Given the response rates, the resulting quantitative data should be treated with caution, but the qualitative statements provide an interesting snapshot of what is going on across the country. The overwhelming message is that practice is highly variable.

The section that follows cannot possibly do justice to the work that is proceeding even across Scotland, much less the UK and the rest of the world. It is offered as an illustration of the variety of approaches. For convenience it is divided into subject areas.

English

In 2003, Keverne Smith (2004) undertook a small-scale survey of first-year undergraduate students of English. He received 182 replies, predominantly from five institutions: Anglia Polytechnic University; Cambridge; Bath Spa University College; Oxford University; Staffordshire University; and the University of Ulster. He found that the transition to the use of the lecture was the most difficult for students to make and that the seminar was the most efficient forum for learning the subject. In addition to suggesting that there should be greater communication - and therefore awareness -

between teachers of English in schools and those in HE, he makes further suggestions to ease the transition. He believes that there should be a phasing-in approach to extended (essay) writing, encouraging students to move away from fact regurgitation towards analysis and academic debate over a period, rather than expecting it to happen immediately upon arrival at university. He also believes that in any revisions of Advanced level, Scottish Highers or Access syllabuses, consideration should be taken of requirements at HE, so as to aid transition. For example, the requirement for 'wide reading' was the least expected aspect of the HE experience from those who had done English at A-level. The examination might, therefore, be revised to improve this situation, although one should be aware that A-levels and Highers do not exist solely as a preparation for university.

Kaverne Smith made some other, practical suggestions, such as gradually lengthening lectures over the course of the first semester; introducing 'note-taking' and 'icebreaker' exercise early on; using different formats within the lecture framework, such as reading time, pair and group work (Stewart and McCormak, 1997) or Personal Response Systems; considering 'best practice' in lecturing (see Brown and Race, 2002), perhaps including competing views rather than a monologue; and using feedback on assignments as part of the learning process (see Krause, 2001).

Biology

At Anglia Polytechnic University, first-year tutorials in biology and other sciences are a compulsory part of a first-year module. These tutorials enable staff to work on the students' skills development; work that has recently been enhanced through the use of the Reflections on Learning Inventory (Meyer and Boulton Lewis, 1999)[2]. Students are required to reflect on their learning approaches and consider ways forward. This then feeds into their Personal Development Portfolio.

Chemistry

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) were introduced at the University of Manchester's Chemistry Department in 1995. In 1997 a similar scheme started at UMIST. Although the participation rates were disappointing initially, numbers climbed steadily. Careful data collection showed that those first-year students who regularly participated in the study sessions achieved higher pass rates in chemistry examinations than non-participants (Coe et al, 1999).

Education

From 2004-05, the Faculty of Education at the University of Strathclyde has introduced an initiative called 'Shared Learning'. This consists of a curriculum framework that identifies common learning outcomes and common learning processes. The Faculty's Board of Study paper *Planning for 2006* specifies four action points: the first is to extend shared learning, at least among first-year courses; the second includes a philosophical course aim to invest primarily in creating autonomous and independent students and only secondly address the issues of academic content and professional skills; and the fourth is to modify and simplify assessment workloads (the third is not relevant here).

The initiative suggests areas of learning, clustered within four modules: Human Learning and Development (40 credit points); The Social Context of Professional Roles (20); Collaborative Practice (10); and Personal/Professional Planning (10). The overall scheme places an emphasis on induction, student-centred learning and personal development planning. As well as the first-year core it recommends certain areas of study throughout the four years of the undergraduate course. (For further details contact Anne Hughes at Strathclyde University (a.a.hughes@strath.ac.uk).[3]

Health and social care

Research on retention, carried out by Eileen Trotter at the University of Salford, identified two groups: 'A' and 'B'; A being those programmes with good retention. The differences were described as follows:

'*Pre-entry* The information provided to prospective students in Group A is more comprehensive than that in Group B and is targeted to reach the appropriate audience.

Induction A much greater effort is made in Group A to help students to settle in, make friends and get to know other students on their programme.

Personal tutor support There is a much stronger tutor support and monitoring system in Group A than Group B.

The impact of undertaking paid employment and other commitments Group A is more likely to provide a 'nicer' timetable which facilitates part-time employment and time for other commitments.

Attendance Group A emphasise the importance of attendance more and are more strict in monitoring attendance.

Teaching and learning activities Group A utilised more active teaching and learning techniques, while Group B tended to favour the more traditional lecture/seminar model.

Assessment Group A made less use of purely formative assessment, preferring to grade all work submitted.

Trotter concluded that there 'are differences in the operation of programmes with good and poor retention rates' (p 2, original italics). Though her study did not seek to provide evidence of causality, she states, 'there is a clear correlation between recognised activities and programmes with good retention rates' (p 2).

Apart from the research reported above, Eileen Trotter has worked with Geoff Cove to investigate issues prevalent on a healthcare programme with mainly mature students (Trotter and Cove, 2005); and with Parmar on the reasons for student withdrawal and strategies for improving first-year student experience and retention (Parmar and Trotter, 2005).

Life sciences

Jones, Koutoulis and Brown (2003) report research undertaken at the University of Tasmania to discover which teaching and learning strategies are most effective in motivating students to begin and to continue study of the life sciences, and where additional learning support or different teaching approaches may be required to meet student needs better. Inspiring secondary school teachers were important in terms of motivating students to study the subject, but once at university the learning experiences offered through practical work were appreciated by most (39.5 per cent), with good lectures rated as important by only 11 per cent. Importantly, 44.5 per cent requested more tutorials, with only 2 per cent suggesting use of web-based teaching.

A generic skills approach

At Macquarie University in Sydney, New South Wales, Kerri-Lee Krause (2001) identified two challenges students faced when writing their first essay. The first she called, 'challenges within the broader university context', which centred on feelings of isolation - a condition which, interestingly, was significantly worsened by technology. Krause wrote, 'The majority of students expressed similar views, emphasising their preference for face-to-face interaction with faculty and peers, rather than online teaching and interaction' (p 155).

The second she called 'challenges posed by the research/writing process'. These challenges were shown in tabular form, ranking research and writing skills from the most to least difficult as shown at Table 2 below.

Research/writing skills and tasks	Level of difficulty (1 most difficult)	Mean ranking
Finding relevant references by searching library computer databases (eg ERIC)	1	3.5
Working out which points to include and which to omit for the essay	2	3.7
Putting together ideas from a number of different sources	3	4.2
Finding relevant references on the library shelves	4	4.4
Identifying the most relevant points in my reading	5	4.5
Understanding the meaning of the references if found	6	4.7
Organising points into paragraphs	7	4.9
Working out which direct quotes to use	8	5.2

Table 2 Challenges posed by the research/writing process

Source: Krause, 2001, p 156

The students were also asked to predict their grades. Forty-eight per cent received a higher grade, 36 per cent a lower grade and 16 per cent got the same grade as they expected. Krause made no comments on these results, other than that they were 'interesting', but one might speculate that, at the least, very little effort appears to have been made to engage the students in the marking process. If true, this might have an impact on the level of confidence of the students in general in undertaking their first assignment.

Case study: Teesside University

Teesside University has established a 'Retention Team', which provides consultancy and resource support to Schools, programme teams and individual staff. It is supported by a cross-university group, the Retention Steering Group, which has representation from all Schools and units in the university, as well as from the student union. It has also been involved in a two-year research project looking at student retention.

Teesside, has been designing enhancement of the first-year experience into the curriculum for some years, supported by a publication for staff called *A Guide to Designing and Delivering the First Year Experience*. Enhancing the first-year experience for students at Teesside is a key part of the university's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and is a key aspect of its approach to supporting student retention (see Dodgson and Bolam, 2002, p 51). Teesside has also been involved in the Annual International First Year Experience Conference for many years, as co-host with the University of South Carolina.

The Retention Team has been building on this background to expand the strategies used to support student retention and success. A European Social Fund grant provided staff with the opportunity to do research on the retention of non-traditional students. The project included a quantitative survey with first-year students, and qualitative interviews with both students who had withdrawn and students who had stayed after considering withdrawal. The team also collected email data from students writing about their experiences.

A key part of the project was to evaluate specific retention strategies which had been put into place. The research identified six innovative strategies, one per school, which were supported and evaluated (see Table 3 below for details of the six strategies).

Other cross-school initiatives have been developed. For example, an initiative introduced three years ago, and developed further following evaluations from participants each year, is TOPS (Twenty One Plus). This is an 'icebreaker' event for all new mature students held before the university's welcome week. It provides them with the opportunity to meet other mature students; to get a feel for the university before the 'organised chaos' of their first official week; to meet successful, progressing mature students; to meet staff; and to ask questions in a supportive environment.

Many mature students have identified this as a significant factor in enhancing their experience of studying at Teesside. The retention statistics for mature students are significantly better than many other similar institutions with a similar student intake, and the university believes that this initiative, among others, contributes to that outcome.

Teesside is currently in the process of restructuring all its programmes, moving from a 12 credit base module size to 20 credits, and from semester to year long modules. This change was introduced to focus more fully on supporting students in their first year.

As part of the restructuring, the university is taking the opportunity to design strategies to support student retention and success more explicitly into the curriculum. So, for example, the assessment crisis point identified at the end of first semester is being removed, and efforts are being made to reduce and spread the assessment burden more effectively. Importantly, alongside these changes are others that will provide more opportunities for formative work and feedback, to help students learn in a reassuring and supportive environment.

Developing New Approaches

The following strategies, which are School based, are only an example of the some of the innovative strategies in place at Teesside, have been evaluated through the Retention Team research project.

Student Links Service - School of Social Sciences and Law (SSSL)	Progress Files - School of Arts and Media (SAM)	Student Supported Learning - School of Science & Technology (SST)
The Student Links service was established in 2003 and is one of the key factors in the School retention strategy. It provides assistance and guidance to students on a wide range of issues, using a drop-in desk located within the School which is open for students to discuss both academic and non academic issues. The service is overseen by a 'student advisor', who is a member of staff specifically employed for this role. The desk is staffed by third year students, and is open each working day throughout term time. It provides informal and practical assistance to students with a wide range of problems and thus gives students an alternative source of support from academic members of staff. Feedback from both staff and students has highlighted this as a very successful and useful resource.	Progress files are being used to assist student transition and retention in SAM. This was first piloted with joint degree students to help them establish an effective learner identity. Progress files help students organise their work, to feel a sense of achievement, and to build confidence. The model of personal development planning being used here involves the student building a folder, supported by guidance material. It is designed to promote reflexive learning by encouraging students to monitor their own academic progress and to celebrate success in their studies. Progress Files are used as part of the personal tutor system, and so have become a regular feature of the student learning experience. The university has committed itself to embedding the use of Progress Files in all Schools and programmes across the institution by September 2005, and this model example is being used to evolve appropriate practices of personal development planning across the university.	SST has recruited 2nd year students to act as 'mentors' for 1st year students. Their role is to support students with particular issues that relate to their course and, where appropriate, refer them on to other sources of support within the University, (like Student Services, the Student Union and DISCC.) The mentors are located at particular times in certain locations, and these have been advertised and marketed to the 1st years. 1st year students can then turn up to these sessions and receive support from the mentors on a variety of issues. The mentors then meet with academic staff to discuss progress and to discuss the work that they are doing. Each mentor keeps a log of the contact with the student, only in terms of course, gender and presenting issue, with an additional column for action taken. Student mentors are trained by staff from the Counselling Service (in Student Services) and by a member of the Learning and Teaching Team. Across the university, various models of peer support and peer tutoring are being explored. This model example is in its second year.

Transition Management Workshops - Teesside Business School (TBS)	Learning Groups - School of Health and Social Care (SHSC)	Blackboard First Year Support Site - School of Computing (SCM)
These workshops have been designed to assist students with transition both into the HE environment, and at other key transition points during their HE career (eg the transition from year 1 to year 2, and year 2 to year 3). In the first year, transition management workshops are run on a regular weekly basis with the aim of successfully integrating the new student into his/her social and academic environment. A variety of academic and support staff have input into the sessions. The workshops help students to develop the necessary learning, cognitive, and transferable skills throughout their studies and help students to reflect on progress on a regular basis, to develop academic writing skills, and to be aware of other support services that are available within the university a whole. At levels two and three the transition workshops run for the first few weeks of the academic year and provide induction into levels two and three, providing useful re-integration, as well as guidance on learning at different levels.	The nursing programmes in SHSC attract large numbers of students and typically each year includes large cohort groups. This means students may become isolated from each other and suffer from a lack of group identity. In order to make the transition into HE easier for nursing students, the SHSC have rearranged their teaching structure in order to heighten the feeling of community among its students. All first year students are allocated into the same learning (seminar) group across each module (approx 25 students). The group is small enough for a group identity to develop, but large enough to allow for students to mix. This seminar system is coordinated with the tutor groups, which means each member of a learning group has the same personal tutor. This therefore means that a system of student organisation and support is developed, which is centralised and fully integrated. This encourages students to feel part of a learning community and gives consistency to their course structure. This is something which research has highlighted as crucial for student persistence and success.	Blackboard is an online information system for use by students and staff. All students are introduced and familiarised with Blackboard during induction, and within SCM, where students' learning experience is often computer focused, it was felt appropriate to develop a dedicated First Year Student Support Site. SCM had identified some difficulties with effectively communicating with students, and receiving communication from students outside the classroom, and it was decided to take advantage of the accessibility of Blackboard to build this communication 'virtually'. Blackboard is available to students both on and off campus. This e-learning resource is now a key way in which students find out about their course and their school. In addition to being an online information system where staff make available a range of learning resources, the First Year Support Site also includes discussion forums which allow students to become part of a virtual learning community. The site also provides easy access, for students, to a range of staff, from first year support tutors to core academic staff.

Table 3 Teeside University: Six innovative strategies

Three of these developments have been supported by learning and teaching sabbatical arrangements

Source: University of Teeside Retention Team

Setting the tone/learning pattern

Much of the literature emphasises the importance of the first year in setting the tone for the rest of the time at university (see, for example, Corey Butler J (2003) Recommendations of the Freshman Experience Task Group, University of Nebraska - Lincoln).

If that tone is set by having students sit in large classes, in an inactive learning mode, not being required to write very much or to participate actively, or to engage with materials critically, they become passive about learning. What they do instead is to develop survival patterns that correspond to the demands of the institution and what Schilling calls 'its economy of evaluation', meaning poor feedback on progress.

Once the pattern is set it invariably remains in place. There is evidence in the USA, for instance, that the number of hours spent studying in year four does not change markedly from the figure achieved in year one (Schilling, in Freshman Experience Task Group, 1999).

The opposite of the passive approach is to design and deliver a curriculum that helps students to be inducted into the process of autonomous learning. That might involve the extensive use of formative assessment and associated feedback/feedforward rather than the current emphasis on summative assessment.

Mantz Yorke is highly critical of the role of high-stakes assessment that first-year students face:

> The introduction of modular schemes in UK higher education has led to summative assessments in many institutions at the end of the first semester, around Christmas. In other words, students will have had approximately three months to come to terms with the academic expectations laid on them before facing examinations or other forms of credit bearing assessment. For some, the first feedback they receive on their learning is the results of the semester's assessments. Students could interpret results that are less good than hoped as evidence that they are not adequately equipped for higher education. Failure can load struggling students with the additional burden of resitting assessments, just when they need to take time in order to assimilate what it is that they have to do to improve their performance.

Early summative assessment is fundamentally un-educational, and makes little sense in UK higher education when students merely have to pass the first year in order to qualify for the honours programme. Particularly when students embark on higher education, the support of learning through formative assessment - and both formal and informal feedback - is an imperative. (Yorke, 2001, p 277)

The concern about both the form and intensity of assessment is reflected in its position as the sister enhancement theme in Scotland to Responding to Student Needs. As a result of this concern, the enhancement themes website at www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk contains detailed information pertaining to the formative/summative assessment debate in higher education; the timing and weighting of assessment; innovative means of assessing and so on.

Another source of information on formative assessment and providing feedback is the SENLEF (Student Enhance Learning through Effective Feedback) project. Information is available at the HE Academy's website (www.heacademy.ac.uk/808.htm) and also available in a printed version (LTSN, 2004).

The seven principles of good practice in feedback posited are:

1 facilitating the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning
2 encouraging teacher and peer dialogue around learning
3 helping clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards)
4 providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
5 delivering high quality information to students about their learning
6 encouraging positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
7 providing information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching.

(LTSN, p 2)

Improving the quality of teaching

It is simplistic to state that the most important element in improving the first-year experience is 'good teaching'. Such a statement is open to the challenge that 'good teaching' is ephemeral, a 'gift' and something that cannot be taught. In reality, though some teachers may be more 'natural' than others, many facets of good teaching, such as being organised, knowing the names of students, returning work on time, and being knowledgeable about the subject, can be developed and supported (and if necessary, assessed!).

Whitehouse (in Peel, 2000) advocated what he called an 'active' welcome by teachers to their students. This means displaying enthusiasm and apparent pleasure in teaching, showing a commitment to know and individualise students, developing a learning environment that encourages interaction, and a characterisation of university study as demanding independence but not isolation.

For those who are in danger of dropping out, personal contact (even if it is punitive in nature) is appreciated. Some may wish to leave because the course is inappropriate, but others may be brought back from the brink simply because the institution 'shows that it cares' (Peel, 2000, p 32).

Peel developed the Tables 4-7 below though his work with Australian students. The questions that were asked are printed above the tables in italics. From this data it is easy to identify those skills and attributes that distinguish good and bad teaching and from it deduce that good teaching is a skill that can be taught (and bad teaching can be avoided). In tables 6 and 7, students' views on the factors that make an 'effective' or 'ineffective' teacher are also outlined.

(Question: Thinking of the subject in which you feel you are learning most, which of the following have been important or very important in allowing you to learn effectively?)

Factors	**% important (n=160)**	**% very important n=160)**
Clearly explained subject objectives and expectations	58.1	8.1
Clear criteria for assessment or practical tasks	55.0	6.3
Adequate guidance in how to carry out assessment or practical tasks	48.1	10.0
Enthusiasm of the teacher(s)	56.3	18.1
Teaching skills of the teacher(s)	61.3	18.1
Easily accessible teachers able and willing to help	46.3	8.1
Other	12.5	5.0

Table 4 Identification of factors in effective learning

(Question: Thinking of the subject in which you feel you are learning least, which of the following have been important or very important in making it harder for you to learn effectively?)

Factors	**% important (n=160)**	**% very important (n=160)**
Unclear subject objectives and expectations	43.8	6.3
Few or no criteria for assessment or practical tasks	28.8	3.1
Inadequate guidance in how to carry out assessment or practical tasks	45.0	7.5
Lack of enthusiasm of the teacher(s)	27.5	5.6
Poor teaching skills of the teacher(s)	40.6	11.3
Teachers hard to find and seem unwilling or unable to help	28.1	3.1
Other	20.6	3.8

Table 5 Identification of factors in ineffective learning

(Question: What is the most important factor that distinguishes an effective lecturer from an ineffective lecturer?)

Factors	**% (n=146)**
Interesting content and presentation, maintains attention	32.9
Clarity, organisation, focus, aids comprehension	21.2
Interested in and responds to students, enthusiasm	16.4
Effective use of teaching technologies, notes and aids	6.8
Other	2.1
Not answered	20.7
Total	100.0

Table 6 Identification of an 'effective' lecturer

(Question: In your experience, how can a tutor or demonstrator be most effective in helping you to learn?)

Factors	% (n=146)
Approachable, takes an interest in students	22.6
Ensures understanding, uses good examples	19.9
Answers questions and explains work	16A
Involves students and encourages discussion	12.3
Relates lectures to the subject material	7.5
Other	4.8
Not answered	16.5
Total	100.0

Table 7 Identification of an 'effective' tutor or demonstrator
Peel, 2000, pp 25-6)

Importantly, Peel notes that the students 'do not want more **school** teaching; they want more good **university** teaching: adult, independent, self-reliant, but still including those relationships with teachers which they regard as essential to understanding the content and enjoying the learning process' (p 28, original emphasis).

Developing learning communities

In some American and Australian universities the means of improving the first-year learning experience is through setting up **learning communities** (see appendix B for the rationale and structure of learning communities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the USA).

There are many different types and definitions of what constitutes a learning community (see Goodsell Love, 1999; Freshman Experience Task Group, 1999). Essentially, though, learning communities are designed to recreate something that used to occur naturally when smaller groups of students followed a clearly defined and coherent degree programme. Then the group worked and very often played together, with the result that, because the members enjoyed studying together, they studied more.

At the University of Colorado at Boulder, professors contacted new students by telephone to determine how each student was adjusting to college life (Franklin et al, 2002, p 62).

In work reported by Blackhurst et al (2003), 136 students co-enrolled on three or four thematically linked academic courses and were assigned to a common living unit. Older (later year) students known as learning community coordinators lived in the same halls, advising and mentoring, and planning out-of-class activities that involved learning community students and staff.

In the study, the programme claimed to achieve the following benefits: it eased the transition to university; facilitated social integration; helped students develop personal relationships with members of staff - 'demystifying and humanizing…professors' (p 47) - and facilitated learning through a sense of empowerment and a greater engagement with the learning process.

It was also discovered that peer pressure/support meant students were less likely to miss lectures and more likely to sit near the front, ask and respond to questions and generally participate more. Being 'known' by staff resulted in a greater engagement in lectures and having the confidence to ask a question outside lectures when material was not understood.

The creation of a 'living/learning environment' increased the motivation to study on returning to the halls, and by having students who were on the same course nearby, it was easier to ask for clarification if something was not understood. When assessments were due, everyone was studying at the same time, so noise levels were reduced and the members of the community could help one another by testing each other. Ultimately a seamless living/learning community was formed, which worked against some peer norms, such as individualism, competitiveness and an anti-work ethic.

Research data on the impact of halls of residence on academic performance and retention is mixed, however. Early work (Chickering, 1975) suggested that it had a positive effect on both. Others later countered this view and concluded that the impact was neither positive nor negative (Terenzini et al, 1996).

It may be that speeding up the process of enculturation is the key benefit. The quality of the hall of residence environment may be crucial, rather than being in hall per se. Here 'quality' does not refer simply to the physical environment, rather it is an environment that fosters students' social and academic integration, and closes the gap between the two realms of social and academic (Blackhurst et al, 2003, p 36).

One distinctive version of the hall of residence learning community is that adopted by the University of Hartford in Connecticut, USA. Here, one of the schools of the University, Hillyer College, specialises in providing support for at-risk high school graduates. Their typical student has a quantitative SAT score of 422 and an average verbal SAT of 426. The equivalent student entering Hartford's four-year programme is 528 and 524, slightly higher than the national averages of 511 and 505. Although the college does not have a specifically designed programme for students with learning disabilities, 36 per cent of students on campus with diagnosed and disclosed learning disabilities are enrolled at Hillyer.

Despite the differences in entry credentials, the first- to second-year retention rate is approximately 80 per cent, which is consistent with the university's four-year programmes. Furthermore, 90 per cent of the students who complete the Hillyer programme continue their education, either in a four-year degree course at Hartford or outside (Beaudin et al, 2002).

Introducing supplemental instruction

Supplemental instruction (SI) is subject-based. It is built around the notion that peer support can be an invaluable tool in supporting learning and learners. Year 2 or 3 students supply instruction to those in Year 1. The instructors receive training and sometimes (nominal) payment. They are neither 'teachers' nor 'tutors'; but instead they work with groups of beginning students to explain difficult notions in a non-threatening environment. Attendance is voluntary; participants compare notes, discuss ideas, develop organisational tools, and predict test items.

Advocates of SI argue that it is successful in improving academic achievement and retention rates. One of its most appealing features is that it recognises the difficulties associated with a particular course, rather than stigmatising those on the programme as lacking intelligence. It sets the learning of content in context and so study skills are taught incidentally within the discipline (Fraser and Hendren, 2002).

It also offers benefits to the instructors. It prompts them to revisit areas that they themselves possibly found difficult, thereby reinforcing their knowledge and understanding. It also conceptualises the data, putting it into a 'bigger picture' of the overall course or programme (Clulow, 2000).

One of the potential problems with SI is that those students who are most in need of support become poor attendees. This can be for a variety of reasons, but may include social factors (jobs, family commitments and so on) as well as academic achievement. One answer to poor attendance by weaker students may be the introduction of accelerated learning groups (ALG), as described by Stansbury (2001), at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Stansbury shows that by combining ALG with SI the grades of weaker students were significantly improved over those who only attended SI.

Conclusion

The main conclusions from this report are two-fold. Firstly, it is suggested that Scottish universities should consider adopting a strategic approach to the first-year experience. Secondly, within the academic sphere, greater emphasis might be placed on a coherent and thought-through curriculum. That may require additional resources including investment in staff development. Evidence suggests that the objectives are achievable and that their impact upon the student experience can be both significant and positive.

Notes

Case example 1, London Metropolitan University. The description provided leans heavily on the work of Petra Wend (2003).

Case example 2, La Trobe University. The same inventory has been used at Anglia Polytechnic for the past three years with all social work first-years. Students incorporate the results into portfolio/progress file development but each one comes for an unthreatening (non punitive) interview to talk them through and to discuss issues of deep and surface learning.

Case example 3, Ryerson University. A paper on the development of student PDP in the BEd (Hons) Primary Education course at the University of Strathclyde can be found on the Strathclyde website at www.mis.strath.ac.uk/Secretariat/Publications/general/spdp/index.html.

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Appendix A Curriculum models

What follows is one section (D) of a larger questionnaire constructed and then analysed by David Laing of the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.

The full version of the survey was distributed to delegates at the Scottish Student Needs conference in June 2004. Fifty useable responses were obtained.

Additionally a second shorter version of the survey was mailed out to members of the Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG), which has members across UK universities, in July 2004. This version had only two sections: curriculum models and background. Eighteen responses were obtained.

Some duplication of responses was a possibility between the two surveys. To control for this possible effect, full survey respondents who were HEDG members and who identified themselves,* were excluded from the second survey. Additionally, the front page of the survey asked respondents to ignore it if they had already completed it.

* Respondents were asked if they wanted to participate further in the research project in both questionnaires. Hence some respondents could be identified.

The results from both surveys were entered and analysed using SPSS.

(68 responses in total)

D1 Are teaching methods and assessment tailored to first year students? (%)

some are tailored	56.4
yes, all are tailored	32.7
no, none are tailored	10.9

D2 How are they tailored to first-year students?

- approaches vary across schools - good practice includes peer tutoring and buddying schemes
- at introduction via diagnostics and follow-ups
- carefully thought through from the student's point of view
- computer-aided assessment, multi-choice questions, resource-based learning in one department and results don't affect degree class
- coordinated development of skills and their assessments
- designs sometimes involve socialising activities
- essay word length, learning outcomes, embedded study skills
- explicit first-year course
- first year has more formative assessment - better balance of exams and assignments and a retention programme
- first year is a foundation course (in Art and Design)
- first year is diagnostic, second is for specialism

- focus on development of academic writing skills and analytical and critical thinking
- geared towards lower cognitive skills and practical skills
- generic skills focus - reduced summative and more formative assessment
- in accordance with agreed learning outcomes
- inclusive of effective learning support
- increased formative assessment, delay summative assessment
- indirectly as mentors tutor learning outcomes
- it is school-dependent - embedded in modules and some study skills programs
- learning outcomes matched to year of study/level
- learning outcomes relevant to stage of course
- level of workload lessened
- level one students must pass generic skills module
- modules for first year only - they cater towards progression in line with teaching and learning strategy
- more academic support/group tutors
- more examples given in advance, feedback available
- more teacher-led with some student-led activities
- no exams in year one
- special curriculum with a student support and development focus
- students offered many study support strategies as part of timetable
- study skills/support blocks are timetabled
- through course programme management team
- through programme specification and principles of constructive alignment to SCQF levels
- use computer-assisted learning
- use of problem-based learning
- varies considerably
- very variable across the institution
- via teaching, learning and assessment strategies
- whole module dedicated to teaching and learning methods.

D3 What methods, if any, are used to cater for the transition to Higher Education learning styles?

- a number of schools use team development methods
- a revision week mid-semester in one academic module
- action learning sets group assignment and supported open learning
- additional use of personal tutors and encouraged to use diagnostic learning styles tool
- assessment style changes
- common modules and personal development planning and study skills programme
- coordinated development of skills and their assessments
- course induction session on some courses
- development of study skills
- diagnostic tests, induction, PADP
- discussion of learning styles and approaches to learning
- effective learning advisors available
- effective learning service supply guides
- induction/study skills
- induction programmes, skills modules
- induction weeks, extra help and guidance
- induction, workbook for freshers on learning
- learning outcomes take account of transition - welcome week, open day and tasters
- learning skills programme
- lot of formative assessment to provide early feedback and study skills modules
- none
- Our University might be greatly expanding semester one induction
- personal tutor, academic tutor, study skill pack
- pre-entry and on-course induction events and close collaboration with central learning
- project meetings, feedback sessions, project data
- some study skills centralised
- some subjects embed study skills into the curriculum
- study skills/support forms part of the timetable
- study skills embedded in modules
- summer schools/college visits
- tutorials, personal tutor support
- very few
- very few but we are researching the issue

- we offer a spiral induction programme, covering aspects of learning styles etc
- whole module dedicated to teaching and learning methods, transition etc
- workshops, study IT skills
- year-long induction.

D4 Does the pedagogy used in first year link in with the induction process? (%)

sometimes	80.8
yes, always	11.5
never	7.7

D5 Do particular groups of students obtain extra learning support? (%)

open and distance learning	71.9
direct entrants	51.4
mature students	37.5
non native English speakers	85.4

D6 What assessment methods are predominately used in the first year?

exams	82.4
essays/reports	82.4
practicals	70.6
presentations	56.9
multi-choice	52.9
team work	49.0
computer-aided assessment	45.1
portfolios	35.3
case studies	25.5
other*	2.0

* The single other response was oral assessment.

D7 Are peer and self assessment used in first year? (%)

	widely used	used sometimes	not used at all
peer assessment	5.6	61.1	33.3
self assessment	3.6	60.0	36.4

D8 Are learning styles developed through the first-year curriculum? (%)

yes	85.5
no	14.5

How are they developed through first year?

- a variety of embedded and centralised support systems
- all first-years receive a minimum of six timetabled sessions
- different skills developed using a variety of teaching styles
- embedded in module
- embedded in year one modules/curriculum
- essay writing and critical thinking
- formative feedback and academic skills modules
- generic skills identified in all modules
- guidance is given in modules
- in learning outcomes
- integrated within tutorial programme/and workshops during curriculum
- learning outcomes and formative assessment
- level one transferable skills module
- module on it, principles applied throughout
- only in some disciplines (eg business)
- practical skills based exercises
- problem based learning
- professional skills module
- range of assessments used with guidelines
- range of practical assignments and items of formative assessment
- specific modules
- students setting own briefs
- study skills blocks are part of the timetable
- study skills input
- subject based skills, modules and formative feedback
- through academic and professional development modules
- through academic tutor scheme
- through core modules
- through personal development planning
- through project work and skills based assessment regime
- varies at department level
- variety of embedded skills modules
- within modules
- yes in some programmes, but very patchy

D9 Are formative tests used in first year to enhance learning and teaching?

yes, always	18.2
sometimes	72.7
never	9.1

D10 Have formative tests become more or less frequent?

more common	52.9
no change	25.5
less common	21.6

D11 How does your institution promote independent student learning?

- case studies, 24 hour PCs
- Division of Academic Innovation and Continuing Education, Stirling University (DAICE), IT
- develop peer instruction
- directed reading, compilation of student profiles
- done at module level
- independent learning modules - more negotiation with higher levels
- largely on a rhetorical level at present
- learning and teaching strategy
- making explicit what's expected
- modules encourage self-directed/independent learning through assessment methods
- no institutional approach
- online and teaching methods
- our University is based on independent student learning
- personal development planning should have an impact on this
- project work, practice-based
- provide advice on time management and tutorial restrictions
- spurious in some places, directed in others
- students setting own briefs
- styles of teaching, projects, group work
- supported open learning
- through a more student-centered approach with a variety of tasks
- through learning and research skills development
- through level one transferable skills module and project work
- through levels
- through module templates/descriptor
- through new lecturer programme and CPD

- through self assessment, group work and tutorials
- through study skills sessions and support throughout the year
- through the curriculum
- transferable skills training
- use of enquiry-based learning
- use of intranet/computer-assisted learning
- use of project-based learning and teaching
- varies across the institution
- via learning and teaching and curriculum development strategy
- vocational courses - independence is inked to success in employment
- we do lots, but not a first-year focus.

D12 Do some lecturers specialise in first-year teaching in assessment due to their competence in this area? (%)

no	67.4
yes, some specialise	26.1
school level	6.5

D13 Which grade of staff are most likely to be involved with first-year learning and assessment?*

	Mean**
lecturer	1.50
senior lecturer	1.96
other***	3.00
research asst/fellow	3.31
research student	3.38
professor/reader	3.43

* Very few respondents filled in this question correctly by ranking the grade of staff. Hence the results should be treated with caution due to the low response rate.

** The lower the number the more frequent the grade of staff teaches first year students.

*** Other responses include associate lecturer, teaching assistant, teaching fellow and IT, resources and other staff.

D14 How might the first-year learning experience be improved at your University? (%)

more professional development for staff	71.2
more interaction with induction	54.2
other*	28.8

* Other responses included including staff at all levels, equality for students across departments, increased student commitment and attendance.

Appendix B Learning communities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA

The University Learning Communities is a term used to define learning communities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln which have the following multidimensional structure:

- **Conscious curricular structure** in which a group of students are co-enrolled in two or more courses.
- **Planned activities outside the classroom** which encourage formal and informal mentoring by faculty, staff and peers and the development of friendships.
- **A common focus** which, in some way, assists students in identifying the purpose of the learning community. For example, this might be done by giving special meaning to a word (eg, ACE, NU Start or ALPHA), by identifying the interest of the faculty sponsoring the community (eg, Journalist's Perspective, Educational Occupations) or by connecting the courses in which students are co-enrolled (e.g., Ancient Peoples and Cultures).

The University Learning Communities designed specifically for freshmen refines this structure further to allow us to assure freshmen and their parents in our recruitment efforts of what these communities will offer. The University Learning Communities specifically designed for freshmen will:

- **Co-enroll students in two or more courses** using either a cluster of courses in a single semester (e.g., Residential University Learning Communities) or a student cohort which is co-enrolled during two contiguous semesters (e.g., ALPHA).
- **Select courses for co-enrollment** because they further the goals and objectives of each individual University Learning Community. Although specific selection criteria may differ with each community, the following factors should be considered when forming a community:

  a **Class size.** Whenever possible, a small classroom experience - a large classroom experience should be included in the co-enrolled courses. If a small course is not available, include a course with a large classroom experience which creates opportunities for the smaller community to form through a small recitation section, lab, or Supplemental Instruction. Although this pairing of large and small classroom experiences may not always be possible, several reasons exist for this recommendation.

- A group of students may be more readily connected through their academic experience if they can **come together as a community in at least one course** which offers a small interactive classroom experience (eg, English Composition).
- A group of students who have gotten to know each other in a small classroom and who are co-enrolled in a large classroom in which they represent only a portion of the students enrolled will find the **large classroom feels smaller** because they already know some of their classmates (ie, the anonymity of a large classroom is less likely when you know your classmates).
- Including large classroom experiences **validates the large classroom experience** as a regular part of a research university experience and suggests that we believe the students will find excellent instruction in them.

- Pairing a small classroom experience with a large classroom experience enables students more easily to make the transition from the small classrooms of high school to the large classrooms of a research university.

  b **Communication.** Consider courses, regardless of size, which include course-specific websites or require collaborative group work as they are more likely to enhance student-student or student-faculty interaction.

  c **Meet graduation or degree requirements.** Include courses which satisfy university graduation requirements or college degree requirements or complement the degree goals of a student because they are more likely to make the community experience attractive to prospective students and parents; eg, being in a community is not an add-on.

  d **Essential Studies.** Including Essential Studies courses is particularly relevant, not only because they meet degree requirements which make them attractive to students and parents, but also because the co-enrolled course pairings allow us, as a faculty, to create greater relevancy and coherence in our curriculum.

  Professional colleges which sponsor learning communities may build relevance for their students by using a mini-seminar to relate the concepts being learned in a co-enrolled Essential Studies course to the students' career goals or majors.

  Professors teaching Essential Studies courses may create coherence by linking their Essential Studies course with another one which has been included within the learning community.

  e **Complement Focus of Community.** Courses might be included which build on the focus of the community through career-exploration or discipline-specific introductory courses; eg, MNGT 198D in The University Learning Community for Business.

  f **Other academic goals or objectives.** Courses might be included because they develop academic skills, eg, courses supported by Supplemental Instruction, or because they are designed to provide experiences that allow students to be timely and well-grounded in their personal and academic choices, e.g., University Foundations.

Focus of community should assist students in identifying the academic purpose of the learning community (eg, theme). That purpose may be to provide coherence to the academic experience: eg, The Journalist's Perspective co-enrolling students in Mass Media 123, American Government and English Composition, or it may be to connect the community with the student's career or life goals, eg, Business or Educational. The focus may be developed through the selection of co-enrolled courses or through sponsorship by a college or department.

Sponsorship by academic unit, including an appropriate partnership with student affairs, creates opportunities for out-of-class mentoring by faculty, staff, and upperclass students who share a similar academic interest. This sponsorship is more fully explored under action steps as the intent is to develop a team approach for each community composed of an upperclass peer adviser-faculty-staff.

Co-curricular activities integrating academic and social experiences should be developed through close cooperation of academic affairs and student affairs. It is most important that these activities start during the first week of class and continually support the development of a strong community during the first six weeks of class.

Source: Freshman Experience Task Group 1999 University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Student evaluation and feedback

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Contents

Executive summary

The project

The work of the project involved:

- a survey of current approaches to student evaluation and feedback within the Scottish sector
- a search of Scottish, UK and international sources of good practice and thinking on student evaluation and feedback.

The outcomes from the project are:

- a web-based toolkit of ideas and approaches to student evaluation and feedback for staff in Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- key points about current practice, and recommendations arising from the survey and search.

Toolkit

A copy of the toolkit is enclosed with this publication. It is also accessible from the enhancement themes web pages (http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/student_evaluation).

Current practice in the Scottish sector

Student evaluation for quality assurance purposes (students' views on what they have received):

- is widespread and well embedded
- is not necessarily linked to action.

Student evaluation for quality **enhancement** (students' ideas on actions for improvement):

- is not widespread and not systematic, but
- there are many local examples of very effective practice that is comparable to best practice internationally.

There is considerable diversity of approach to student evaluation across, and within institutions.

Student evaluation for quality enhancement

The terminology can be problematic, including specifically the following words:

- 'assessment' - staff marking of students' work or students' summative comments on their experience, for example a module
- 'feedback' - staff comments on students' submitted work or students' comments on their experience
- 'closing-the-loop' - reporting student evaluation (ie what they say) or implementation of action in response to students' feedback.

Approaches to evaluation for quality assurance and quality enhancement are different. Approaches for **assurance** can focus primarily on student satisfaction with what they have received. Approaches for **enhancement** typically involve:

- dialogue rather than simply reporting
- real-time comments throughout the learning experience rather than at the end (of the year or module).

Assurance-oriented practice and baggage can be problematic in terms of perceptions about approaches to evaluation for **enhancement**. Over-preoccupation with the need to provide evidence can be inhibiting. Real-time approaches ('quick and dirty') can be viewed in a pejorative sense.

Recommendations to Scottish HEIs

Scottish HE institutions should consider the balance of evaluation for quality **assurance** and quality **enhancement**, considering:

- effectiveness of evaluation in driving and steering change
- efficiency, considering student time, staff time, administrative systems.

Institutions should not necessarily seek to do more evaluation, rather they should seek to do it differently and/or effectively.

Institutions should consider how evaluation could make a difference for the students who actually provide inputs to the evaluation. This could include:

- real-time evaluation during delivery of a module
- speeding up all processes - from collection through to actions and response
- linkages within the institution for example to student support.

These aspects are particularly important for students in their first year of study in an institution. The focus group interviews conducted in the first phase of the project identified the importance of early intervention to support new entrant students who had problems. An end-of-year questionnaire is irrelevant to a student who dropped out early in semester one.

Institutions should consider what terminology relating to student evaluation and feedback would be meaningful to their students, in their context.

Institutions should consider how best to engage their students in enhancement-orientated evaluation. The ability to give good feedback is a skill that needs to be taught, developed and supported.

Recommendations to the Scottish HE sector

The sector, including the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and Enhancement-led Institutional Review teams, should recognise:

- the realities of the current situation across the sector (as discussed above)
- the many local pockets of best practice within the Scottish sector
- the opportunities for the sector to do better
- that resource constraints (time and money) suggest that the emphasis should be on quality and effectiveness.

The sector should encourage and support approaches oriented to quality **enhancement**, and should continue to share ideas, approaches and insights gained from student evaluation and feedback.

The toolkit is a new resource for staff, and a potential vehicle for ongoing extension and development.

Overview

Project aim

The primary aim of the project is the provision of support for the development of an enhancement-oriented approach to student evaluation and feedback quality in the Scottish HE sector. This support will be assisted by the provision of a set of practical resources to support student evaluation and feedback.

Planned outcome

The envisaged outcome is the development of a resource base that provides references on good practice and a toolkit of ideas, methods and templates.

Introduction

Why are we collecting feedback?

Students are uniquely placed to provide feedback on education delivery and the overall educational experience - they are at the point of use and are essentially the customer base.

> Although there is still some debate over whether students are to be thought of as 'consumers', 'customers' or 'clients', there is no denying that as actively engaged participants in the process of teaching and learning, they are well placed to offer a valuable insight into the day-to-day operation of an HEI. (Martin, January 2003)

Many explanations have been given as to the purpose of collecting student feedback. Lee Harvey clearly defines student feedback as having two main functions:

- internal information to guide improvement
- external information for potential students and other stakeholders. (Harvey, October 2001, April 2003)

However, Harvey goes on to explain that '…so much data on student views is not used to effect change, irrespective of the good intentions of those who initiate the enquires.' He goes further by claiming that:

> It is not always clear how views collected from students fit into institutional quality improvement policies and processes. To be effective in quality improvement, data collected from surveys and peer reviews must be transformed into information that can be used within an institution to effect change. (Harvey, April 2003)

Brennan and Williams confirm that the main purposes of student feedback are reported as:

- enhancing the student's experience of learning and teaching
- contributing to monitoring and review of quality and standards. (Brennan and Williams, January 2004)

In a recent report to the HEFCE, Professor John Richardson gave three reasons for obtaining student feedback:

- to monitor the quality of teaching and learning
- to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- to advise potential students about the quality of teaching and learning. (Richardson in Brennan et al, March 2003)

Elsewhere, in Scotland, the collection of course or programme feedback has been determined as having 'twin' purposes:

- to ascertain how well a course or programme of study is doing, and thus to evaluate the extent to which it meets its stated aims and objectives or learning outcomes
- to identify both its chief strengths and its main weaknesses (neither of which may necessarily be those most readily perceived by the course team) so that its strengths can be appropriately acknowledged and capitalised upon, while its weaknesses can be remedied or at least ameliorated wherever possible within the constraints of staffing, timetabling, facilities and other resources. (Day, Grant and Hounsell, 1998)

Collecting feedback without clear intent and purpose is counter-productive. The collection of feedback can become a self-sustaining industry where feedback is collected from students without thought as to the intended purpose. The routine collection of the feedback can become the end product, not the analysis or use of the data but the mechanical collection of the data itself. There must be a clear purpose for the collection of feedback, and similarly the feedback collected must be fit for the purpose intended. In this the needs of the sector may have to be reconsidered. Do we continue to evaluate yearly, as a matter of habit or routine, to determine if the system is working, or do we assume that the system is functioning correctly, with a general evaluation every three or five years, and targeted evaluations directed annually at the module level? At every level institutions should continually step back and address the simple tenet, why are we collecting student feedback?

How do we use feedback once it is collected?

The Scottish HE sector currently utilises student feedback for a variety of uses such as course development, staff development, teaching evaluation, and student involvement. In a survey of schools and departments across the Scottish HE sector (July/August 2004) the respondents highlighted the following areas.

Course development

- 63 per cent recorded feedback in module report
- 79 per cent recorded feedback in the course report
- 29 per cent used feedback to enhance lectures on a daily or weekly basis
- 93 per cent used feedback to effect changes in course design and content

Teaching evaluation

- 16 per cent included feedback in staff teaching portfolios
- 74 per cent shared and used feedback openly with the teaching team

Staff development

- 38 per cent discussed the issues raised in staff appraisal
- 47 per cent used feedback as an aid to staff's ongoing professional development

Student involvement

- 42 per cent discussed feedback in informal chats with students
- 83 per cent used feedback to raise issues for discussion and action at staff/student liaison committees

What need or problem is student feedback meant to address?

Are the mechanisms that are being used to collect student feedback achieving their intended purpose?

> A very brief questionnaire may aim to elicit quick feedback on the effectiveness of a module or even a single class session, and a more substantial questionnaire or other procedure may put the whole course under scrutiny. (Silver, 1992)

The driving force behind the collection of feedback should be determined by the intended use and the identified need for the feedback. If an overview of the student's academic experience is required then a satisfaction survey could be used to present a student's eye view of the higher education experience. Harold Silver includes in this experience 'course design and management, teacher effectiveness, and the wider experience of the institution.' If a more focused view of module or programme content is required this can be achieved by other methods of feedback collection. Silver clearly acknowledges that, in the field of student feedback, one size does not fit all. 'Different procedures, such as group discussion or interviews, may be adopted for different aspects of the student experience.'

Terminology

In order to avoid confusion there needs to be clarification of terminology, as the majority of staff outwith the fields of Assurance and Learning and Teaching identify the terms 'student feedback' or 'feedback' with marking and commenting on student coursework. Similarly, while the term 'assessment' has traditionally been used to describe assurance-centred oversight based on student feedback, for line teachers it primarily indicates judgment of student coursework or academic performance. Current terminology presents parallel problems for students as the term 'feedback' is linked with marking and staff feedback on coursework.

In order to collect reliable student-generated feedback for the purposes of enhancement a dialogue must be opened up between staff and student and perhaps this is how the overall process of student-generated feedback should be viewed and promoted - a **dialogue.**

If what we are seeking is student views on teaching and learning then, since we are in effect asking students to evaluate the provision of education, perhaps the term **student evaluation of learning and teaching** (SELT) should be used to clearly highlight student involvement and the use of student-generated feedback, rather than the more generic term student feedback. The use of the term 'student evaluation' rather than 'assessment' or 'feedback' is an indicator of a forward-looking approach to student-led enhancement, embracing not only what students have experienced but presenting ideas for future improvement.

The overall process of dialogue also includes what has increasingly been described as 'closing the loop', which in its simplest, and most effective, usage is identified as keeping students informed on any action arising from student-generated evaluation. This term is at best vague and at worst misleading - indicating as it does a finality to the process of collecting and using student-generated feedback. A more direct term could be **response to student evaluation of learning and teaching** (ReSuLT), which indicates action taken in direct response to student views collected.

Survey of current Scottish practice on student feedback

The survey

A cross-section survey of the Scottish HE sector was undertaken for the Student Evaluation and Feedback Project. This was essential in identifying existing practice within Scotland's HEIs in a number of key areas:

- the process, or processes, currently adopted to gather student feedback
- the time frame in which that feedback is sought
- the use, or uses, currently made of the information collected
- methods currently employed to 'close the loop'.

A postal questionnaire addressing the above points was devised and distributed to a sample of the Scottish HE sector. The sample taken comprised ten universities within the Scottish sector covering ancient and post-1992 universities as well as those which received their charter in the1960s. This sample accounts for 50 per cent of the Scottish HEIs.

The questionnaire listed those methods previously identified by literature review as being most commonly used throughout the international and UK HE sectors for the purpose of collecting student feedback. The questionnaire also listed the most commonly used methods of 'closing the loop' by returning feedback to the students, as well as a variety of times within the academic cycle when feedback could be collected, and also the uses to which such student feedback is put. The survey invited those approached to indicate which of the methods are currently used to collect student feedback within their departments, schools, etc.

In the first instance a cross-section of schools, departments, and divisions was targeted and questionnaires sent to Head of School, Head of Department, Course Coordinators, Course Convenors, and Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) etc. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter to the relevant Head of School, etc, thanking them in advance for their participation and briefly outlining the requirements of the questionnaire. The faculties involved include Medicine, Arts and Social Science, Engineering, Computing, Veterinary Medicine, Life Sciences, Nursing and Midwifery, Art, Music, Management, etc, which ensures a wide representative sample of university teaching perspectives and also provides a representative sample covering the structure within Scottish universities - how each level views student feedback.

The short time span allocated to the project did not allow for a sector-wide survey However, a sample such as detailed above provides enough information to give an overview of the practices currently in use within the Scottish HE sector. It provides relevant information on how feedback is currently gathered, when it is sought, how it is used, and how universities currently 'close the loop'. This information on current practice is necessary to give a definitive starting point, a datum if you like, with which to measure change or to give comparison with current international practice.

Results

Feedback collection

Methods used	**All universities** (% of departments)	**Ancient universities** (% of departments)	**Post-92 universities** (% of departments)	**Sixties universities** (% of departments)
Questionnaires	90	85	100	100
Staff/student liaison committee	89	90	87	88
Course representatives	80	77	87	88
Informal and anecdotal	58	63	47	50
Tutorials	54	56	60	46
Course committee representation	49	41	80	54
Structured feedback sessions	48	40	100	42
Computer-based questionnaires	42	38	67	38
Focus groups	18	21	7	17
Log books	10	8	13	13
Reflective journals	6	7	7	4
Self research	5	8	0	0
One-minute methods	3	4	0	0
Shadowing	1	1	0	0

Table 1 Methods used to collect student feedback in Scottish HEIs

The survey clearly demonstrated that, while Scottish HEIs use a wide range of methods to collect student feedback, the majority rely on three main methods (see Table 1): 90 per cent of the departments surveyed used questionnaires, 89 per cent used staff/student liaison committees, and 80 per cent relied on course representatives. As well as indicating some degree of uniformity, this also demonstrates the reliance on student participation, not only in generating feedback but also in the collection of the feedback. The reliance on these three methods is fairly consistent across the range of institutions.

In stark contrast to this, only 6 per cent use reflective journals, 3 per cent use one-minute methods, and shadowing is used in only 1 per cent of the departments surveyed.

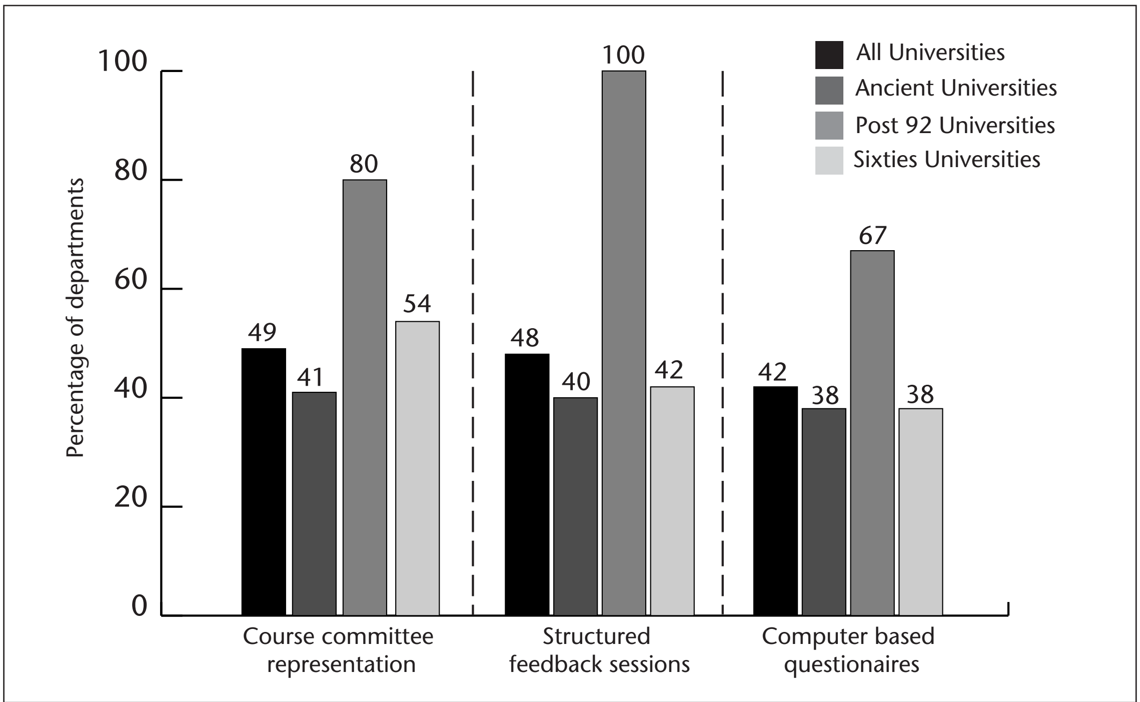

Figure 1 Methods used to collect student feedback in Scottish HEIs

What is apparent from Figure 1 is the propensity of post-1992 universities to drive forward change and utilise additional methods of formal feedback collection. While overall only 49 per cent of departments in the Scottish sector are currently using course committee representatives, this figure rises to 80 per cent for post-1992 institutions compared to 41 per cent for ancient and 54 per cent for the 1960s universities. The figure of 40 per cent of ancient universities and 42 per cent of 1960s using structured feedback sessions is sharply contrasted with the 100 per cent adoption of this method by the post-1992 universities. Scotland's post-1992 universities are also taking the lead in introducing computer-based questionnaires, with 67 per cent of departments using this new technology compared to 38 per cent of departments at both the ancient and 1960s institutions.

Closing the loop

Methods used	**All universities** (% of departments)	**Ancient universities** (% of departments)	**Post-92 universities** (% of departments)	**Sixties universities** (% of departments)
Staff/student consultative meetings	75	67	93	88
Student academic representatives	65	60	80	71
Course committees where student representative present	51	51	60	46
Informally	44	47	33	42
At lectures and/or tutorials	33	27	47	42
Individual lecturers inform students	31	25	40	46
Notice board	26	27	27	21
Internet and/or text	21	22	20	17
VLE	12	10	27	8
Only if action is taken	10	11	13	4
Student newsletter	1	1	0	0
No information given to students	0	0	0	0

Table 2 Methods employed to 'close the loop'

A similar pattern can be discerned when current methods of 'closing the loop' are examined (see Table 2). Within the departments surveyed 75 per cent use staff/student consultative meetings to relay feedback to students, 65 per cent use student academic representatives, and 51 per cent use course committees where student representatives are present. Again this demonstrates an existing high reliance on student representatives, not only to collect feedback, but to assume the role of conduit in feeding back to the student body. However, these methods are more frequently used in departments at post-1992 institutions. As with feedback collection, the post-1992 universities reported a higher usage of technology in returning student feedback. Virtual learning environments (VLE) are utilised by 27 per cent of the departments in post-1992 universities, compared with 10 per cent at traditional institutions, 8 per cent at sixties universities, and 12 per cent overall. Only 10 per cent of the departments surveyed give students feedback only if action is to be taken on their comments, and only 1 per cent use student newspapers to keep students informed.

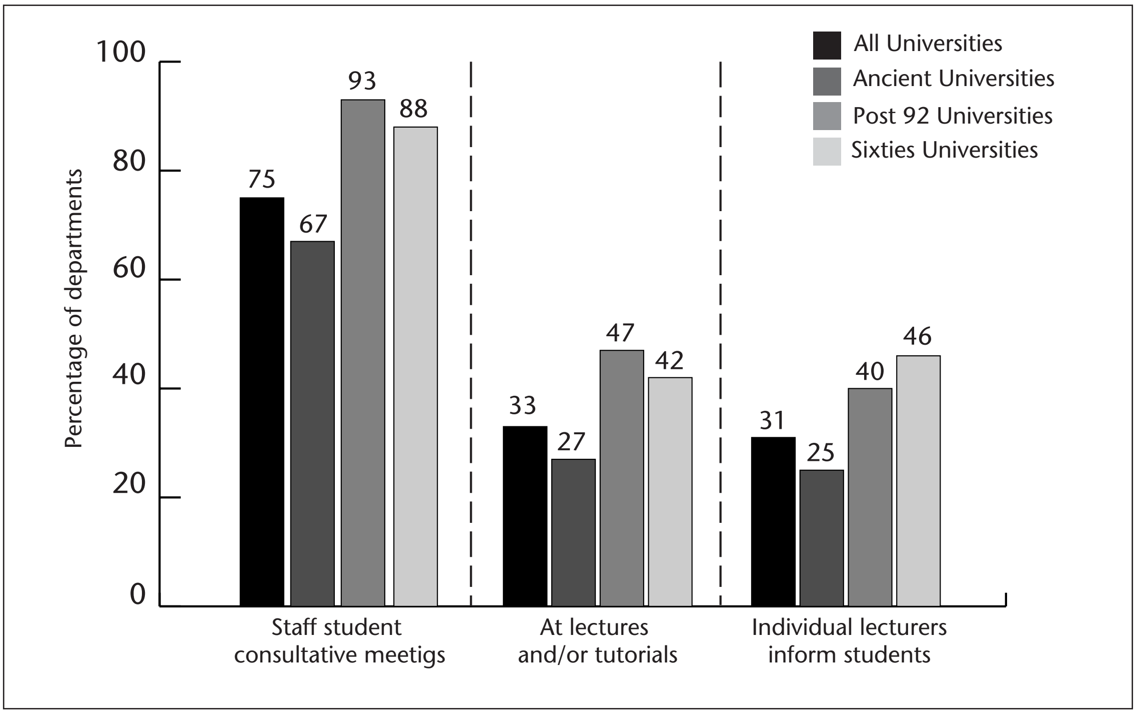

Figure 2 Methods employed to 'Close the loop'

As demonstrated by Figure 2, it is in post-1992 (93 per cent) and 1960s (88 per cent) universities where greatest reliance is being placed on staff/student consultative meetings, with only 67 per cent of departments in ancient institutions using this method to keep students informed. Feedback is less likely to generate an instant response in those departments housed within an ancient university, as only 25 per cent of lecturers at those institutions inform students directly, with only 27 per cent informing students during the course of a lecture or tutorial. This contrasts with figures of 47 per cent and 42 per cent respectively for lecturers at post-1992 and 1960s institutions discussing feedback at lectures or tutorials, and 40 per cent and 46 per cent returning feedback individually.

Timing of feedback collection

Feedback timing	**All universities** (% of departments)	**Ancient universities** (% of departments)	**Post-92 universities** (% of departments)	**Sixties universities** (% of departments)
End of module	65	64	73	63
End of course	62	62	60	63
Regular intervals in course/module	51	44	87	50
When needed	30	30	33	29
Occasionally in lectures/seminars	21	21	13	25
Mid-semester	19	21	7	21
Regular intervals in lectures/seminars	15	12	47	4
Before course/module starts	6	7	7	4
Once yearly	5	8	0	0
After every lecture/seminar	4	1	20	0

Table 3 Timing of feedback collection in Scottish HEIs

Also identified is the point within the academic year, or semester, at which the feedback is solicited (see Table 3). As with the current methods used to collect feedback and to close the loop, there is a degree of uniformity as to the time in the academic calendar when student feedback is sought. Within the departments surveyed some 65 per cent collect feedback at the end of a module while 62 per cent do so at the end of a course, with the figures remaining uniform across the range of institutions. Overall, feedback is sought at regular intervals during a course or module by 51 per cent of those departments who responded, while only 6 per cent collect feedback before a course or module starts. Feedback is collected occasionally, as and when required, by 25 per cent of departments at 1960s universities and 21 per cent of those at ancient universities, but only at 13 per cent of departments at post-1992 universities. Similarly, mid-semester feedback is collected at 21 per cent of departments at ancient and 1960s institutions but only 7 per cent of departments at post-1992 institutions. Student feedback is collected once a year by 5 per cent of the departments surveyed, while 4 per cent collect feedback after every lecture.

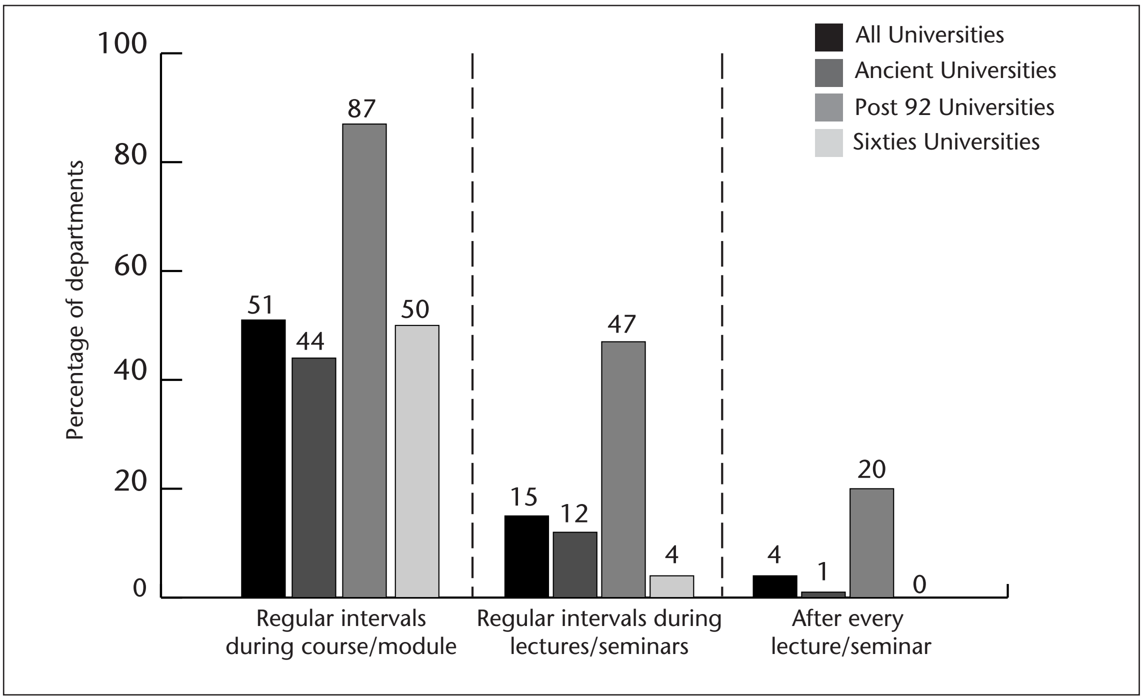

Figure 3 Timing of feedback collection in Scottish HEIs

Figure 3 demonstrates that, as with collection methods and dissemination, it is those departments situated within post-1992 universities that are taking the lead in the frequency and timing of student feedback collection. Feedback is collected at regular intervals during a course or module in 87 per cent of the departments in post-1992 universities while only 50 per cent at 1960s institutions and 44 per cent at ancient universities do so. Similarly, 47 per cent of departments in post-1992 universities collect student feedback at regular intervals during lectures and tutorials, with only 12 per cent of ancient and 4 per cent of 1960s universities doing the same. Within the departments surveyed in 1960s institutions none collected feedback after every lecture or tutorial while only 1 per cent of those at an ancient institution did so, in contrast to 20 per cent of departments in post-1992 universities.

Use made of feedback

Usage	All universities (% of departments)	Ancient universities (% of departments)	Post-92 universities (% of departments)	Sixties universities (% of departments)
To effect change in course design/content	93	90	100	96
Discussed and action agreed at staff-student liaison committees	83	82	93	79
Included in course report	79	78	80	79
Discussed with teaching team	74	75	67	75
Recorded in module report	63	56	87	71
Aid to staff professional development	47	48	40	50
Informal chats with students	42	42	33	46
Discussed in staff appraisal	38	33	40	54
To enhance lectures	29	29	47	17
Included in teaching portfolio	16	19	7	13

Table 4 Use made of feedback collected within Scottish HEIs

Of equal importance is the use to which student feedback is currently put. The information obtained from student feedback is used by 93 per cent of those departments surveyed to effect changes in course design and content (see Table 4). In 83 per cent of those departments that responded the issues raised are discussed and action agreed at staff/student liaison committees while 79 per cent include the information in course reports. The results for these three items remain broadly uniform across all types of institution. Overall this uniformity is also applied to other uses such as aiding professional development (47 per cent) and also discussion within teaching teams (74 per cent) and using the feedback in staff appraisal (38 per cent). Overall, student feedback is used to enhance lectures in 29 per cent of the departments, while in 16 per cent it is also included in teaching portfolios.

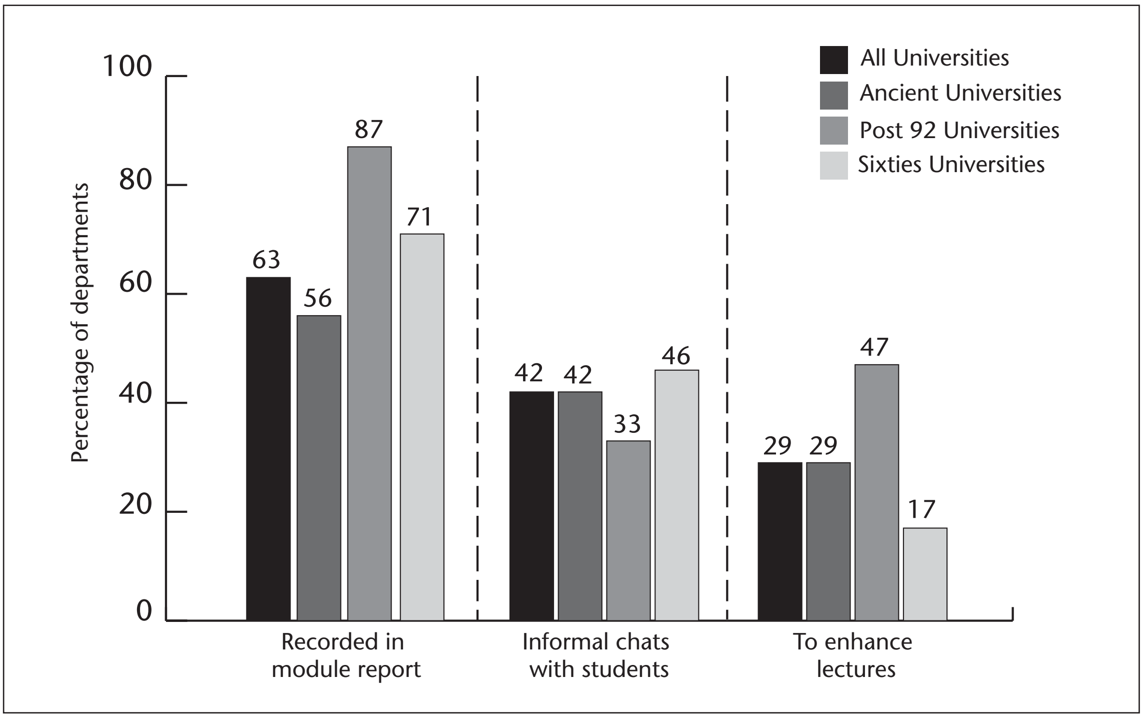

Figure 4 Use made of feedback collected in Scottish HEIs

Figure 4 demonstrates that student feedback is recorded in module reports by 87 per cent of departments in post-1992 institutions and 71 per cent of departments in 1960s institutions but only 56 per cent of the departments surveyed in ancient universities. Using feedback to create a staff/student dialogue through informal contact is only used at 33 per cent of the departments in post-1992, 42 per cent in ancient and 46 per cent of departments in the 1960s universities. As a tool for enhancing lectures, student feedback is used in 29 per cent of the ancient university sector, 17 per cent of the 1960s sector, and 47 per cent of the post-1992 sector.

Open-ended questions

The final section of the questionnaire was designed to elicit respondents' views as to whether existing feedback mechanisms met their information requirements. Eighty per cent indicated that the information collected met their needs, 9 per cent indicated it did not and 11 per cent were not sure. They were also asked for recommendations for developing feedback structures. Responses were categorised and the four recurrent themes reported below emerged:

- methods of feedback collection
- online feedback
- questionnaire fatigue
- closing the feedback loop.

Methods of feedback collection

A number of respondents suggested that a variety of feedback collection methods should be used.

- Different staff have different needs - one system may not address all needs.
- Feedback structures have to reflect the nature of the courses/modules.
- There are a range of different techniques. The problem is to identify which has the most positive impact on outcomes.

Others made specific recommendations.

- Focus groups and informal chats best but time limitations cause problems.
- Student logbook/learning journal an excellent vehicle if started early enough and a taught part of the programme.
- More opportunity for verbal comments - 5 minutes at the end of some tutorials.

Online feedback

There was considerable support for making greater use of online feedback.

- Try to do things online as much as possible. Paper-based systems are pretty hopeless.
- Use online questionnaires, surveys, feedback discussion forums.
- Give students the opportunity to give feedback via electronic boards where there is a guaranteed response within 24 hours.

However, a number of comments relating to online feedback demonstrate divergent views regarding its impact, actual and expected, on response rates.

- We would like to move to online feedback collection for all courses, as it would be much easier to collate the results. However, we fear that response rates would suffer.
- Computer-based questionnaires have a poor take-up rate. Better to fill in paper questionnaires at the end of 'captive' teaching sessions.
- Make questionnaires for online use to increase response rate.

Given that some Scottish institutions consistently achieve response rates of over 70 per cent - in some instances as high as 90 per cent - using online methods, one potential response could be a cooperative policy whereby those institutions achieving high response rates assist or 'mentor' institutions adopting electronic evaluation for the first time. The sharing of accumulated experience could aid in the development of online evaluation in the Scottish sector.

Questionnaire fatigue

Low response rates were considered to be a problem area across all types of feedback collection and the most commonly cited reason for this was questionnaire fatigue.

- We would like to survey students more, however we are aware of questionnaire fatigue.
- Need a balance between data collection and subjecting students to feedback fatigue.
- Low rates of return because of over-surveying is a problem.
- Students suffer from 'assessment fatigue' with low response rates.

Closing the feedback loop

Respondents also emphasised the importance of 'closing the loop' by disseminating the results and impact of feedback to students.

- The results of student feedback need not have a high degree of confidentiality.
- Feedback is meaningless unless students have access to responses taken to their comments.
- Have a mechanism for letting students know of the impact of their feedback.
- Faster response to feedback especially after confirmation of problem topics via formal assessments.

About the toolkit

Toolkit criteria

The toolkit should address the needs of both students and staff, offer opportunities for enhancement, and in the process assist in the evolution of a partnership for change, in which both staff and students have a clear role in initiating change and development in teaching and learning.

The project development group agreed a set of criteria for the inclusion of material within the toolkit. The criteria cover three separate sections - key criteria, student-related criteria, and staff-related criteria.

Not all tools will fulfil all the individual criteria, but the overall effect of the toolkit is aimed at improving learning and teaching and, in so doing, promoting dialogue between student and staff.

Key criteria

Promote positive change by including in the toolkit those items that encourage positive rather than negative feedback and actively promote 'suggestions for change' rather than merely critical comment.

Encourage staff/student dialogue by providing staff and students with the means to open or engage in a productive and informative dialogue as a result of and in reply to student feedback.

Address the issue of trust by highlighting clarity of purpose and use of student feedback.

Student-related criteria

Increase student awareness of the rationale behind feedback collection and of the processes involved in course evaluation by highlighting the inherent benefits through improvements to teaching and learning.

Promote student involvement in the process of enhancement, as it applies to teaching and learning, by encouraging students to adopt an active role in assessment and evaluation.

Encourage student responsibility in ensuring educational aims and objectives highlighted at the onset of a course, as regards teaching and learning, can be met.

Encourage students to suggest change by providing the means through which responsible suggestions, promoting positive changes to teaching and learning, can be simply and easily highlighted.

Staff-related criteria

Easily adopted by providing staff with methods that have been tried and tested, or ideas that have been proposed and accepted, within the HE sector.

Be easily adaptable by focusing on format and methodology rather than any one particular subject or faculty.

Offer tangible results to staff by providing practical examples with demonstrable results rather than theoretical models.

Easily implemented with a minimum of administration and evaluation.

Cost implications should be addressed by highlighting a practical, simple and basic no-frills approach, adapting what is already available.

Toolkit design

The toolkit is designed to be a practical resource for 'line teachers' within the Scottish HE sector by providing tried and tested examples rather than theoretical models.

The toolkit gives clear, useable resources detailing current methodology both within the Scottish HE sector and internationally.

In doing this the toolkit presents no new innovations but brings together a collection of proven and practical examples, previously tried and tested in the British and international sectors.

The methods included in the toolkit are those that can be easily adopted and adapted to suit individual needs and, with one or two exceptions, are not intended to be subject-specific.

Feedback collection and dissemination is highlighted by including the variety of methods currently used in the Scottish and international sectors to collect and return feedback.

Tools are available for both accountability and improvement, but emphasis is on tools by which current practice can be changed to make it more enhancement-oriented.

An underlying theme of the toolkit is to increase staff/student dialogue by providing greater opportunity to develop face-to-face or instant response methods of feedback collection and dissemination and increase the number of opportunities for informal feedback through personal contact. By doing so it is hoped to promote greater student involvement in the process of enhancement and encourage students to develop a proactive approach by suggesting change.

Closing the feedback loop is addressed by providing practical examples designed to develop a constant flow of information to the students - ensuring that they are not 'forgotten' in the assessment process.

Student representation and engagement is addressed by delivering methods that are designed to encourage and increase direct student involvement.

It was recognised early on that the success of the project would depend on cooperation within the sector. To this end the sector was invited to contribute ideas and examples for inclusion in the resource base. A circular was distributed electronically to all members of the Universities Scotland Teaching Quality Forum soliciting their help in identifying examples of existing and potential best practice. A revised version of this circular was distributed electronically to all delegates who attended the national conference Responding to Student Needs in Higher Education: Towards Meeting the Diverse Needs of Students Today, held in Glasgow on 8 June 2004, calling for their help in identifying examples. In tandem with this a short one-page flyer, outlining the project and soliciting help in identifying best practice examples, was sent to individual departments and schools across the Scottish HE sector for distribution on internal staff notice boards. This flyer was also sent out with the questionnaire used to survey current student feedback practice (see page 161).

The examples collected for the project form the basis of a resource base providing references on good practice and a toolkit of ideas, methods and templates. It is not intended to be a code of practice or set of expectations - it is simply practical information that users can adopt, adapt or customise to suit their needs and context. However, with the Scottish HEIs currently sharing the same methods of collection, evaluation, and return, the resource could provide a means by which uniformity can be applied to student evaluation and feedback in the Scottish HE sector. The resources are available at www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk, and as a CD-ROM with this publication.The toolkit itself is split into two main parts with a variety of subdivisions.

Toolkit content

Part One - Project Overview

Rationale This section provides a brief overview of the current student population in the Scottish HE sector as well as links to SHEFC online publications, and provides background material on the Scottish HE sector and Scottish Executive higher education policy.

Why Feedback? This section gives an overview of the collection of student feedback as well as providing material giving a general insight as to why student feedback is collected.

Project Report This section will hold a copy of the project overview report allowing those using the website to view any recommendations arising out of the project.

Scottish Sector Survey This is a brief overview of the Scottish sector survey carried out to determine current feedback practice in Scottish HEIs and demonstrates the current methods used within the Scottish HE sector.

Part Two - Toolkit

Criteria for inclusion in toolkit In order to make the process of material selection transparent, the criteria for inclusion in the website have been made available within the website itself.

Methods of collection This section presents material relating to the most commonly adopted methods of feedback collection as identified in the sector survey and literature review. It presents a range of examples, academic papers, design aids and further reading.

Timing of collection Material covering the collection of student feedback at various times within the academic calendar.

Teaching feedback skills This page highlights methods used to teach feedback skills to students in order make the greatest use of feedback as a tool for enhancement.

Effective student representation A variety of literature highlighting how the subject of student representation is dealt with in a number of institutions.

Encouraging student engagement in quality enhancement Literature highlighting student participation.

Closing the feedback loop Material on informing students of action taken as a result of their feedback - the majority of the 'methods of collection' also deal with the return of student feedback.

Resource packs A number of resource packs for staff that have been developed at higher education institutions.

General resources A selection of general resources, examples, presentations and academic papers.

Bibliography - further reading A selection of further reading for those wishing to conduct further study or research.

Literature and information review

For the purpose of this project - the provision of a practical toolkit - it was not necessary to conduct a literature review as a separate item. Any review undertaken was an integral part of the process of gathering papers and examples for inclusion in the toolkit. Following on from the premise of the project - to utilise existing knowledge - the toolkit utilises existing literature reviews rather than duplicating existing research. Within the toolkit itself there is a section entitled **Bibliography and further reading** which gives a general overview of current research and methodology within the Scottish, British and international sectors. Also included within the various sections of the toolkit are other papers that are more method- and subject-specific, together with links to detailed reports that contain recent literature reviews and therefore a collective wide-ranging bibliography.

An information review was undertaken to identify key figures in the field (both national and international) and the key themes and issues which they support - what could be termed as the current received wisdom. Of primary importance was addressing the current debate on the issue of 'what is quality?' and 'what is its function?'.

Care was taken to identify those emerging figures and streams of research which fulfilled the project development group's desire to produce a body of work which is forward-looking - rather than a reflection of past intervention - and in the process produce a readily accessible 'reference guide' which will fulfil two clearly identifiable functions. The first is to provide a synopsis of the current and future themes, condensing the information into a 'manageable' size for ease of use and quick reference. The second function is to act as a guide for those wishing to delve deeper into the literature, and in this respect to highlight resources which could provide a starting point for further individual research and development.

Identifying current Scottish thinking, practice and approaches to student evaluation and feedback has involved the study of papers and publications which have been produced by those working in the Scottish sector and which cover the subject of feedback and evaluation.

The project identified current UK practice by looking at those methods which have been developed within the UK sector (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and/or those international practices which have been successfully adopted or adapted in that sector and are now in use at a variety of British universities.

Identifying current international practice has involved reviewing current practice in a variety of locations including Australia, America, Spain, Germany, West Indies, South Africa, and, where possible, identifying where that practice has been adapted and used across the sector, how it has been validated across the sector, and if it could be used or adapted for use in the Scottish sector.

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), also known as the Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS), has become the preferred assessment tool across the international sector. Countries using this method include Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, America, Spain, Germany, West Indies, South Africa, Cyprus, etc.

However, the core function of the CEQ is that of a performance indicator. In Australia, seen by many as the birthplace of the CEQ, the CEQ has been imposed on the sector, is administered by the Graduate Council and is sent to all students graduating in a particular year. Such a sector-wide use ensures that the CEQ is viewed, and used, primarily as a comparative performance indicator. The use of such a widespread comparative tool is also linked to core funding and initially the installation of the CEQ was not welcomed by staff or students.

After initial mistrust and disruptive protest by both staff and students, the CEQ was accepted in Australia as primarily a comparative evaluation tool - a performance indicator of the students' overall experience. However, since 2002 there has been a large-scale sector change in Australia over the design and use of the CEQ. Institutions now have the opportunity to 'customise' the CEQ by including a choice of sections aimed at providing information which will be utilised at department level within institutions, while at the same time retaining three core sections which will continue to allow direct sector-wide comparison. However, within the Scottish HE sector there is no coordinated system or unified approach.

Messages from the project

The Scottish sector is good at using feedback for assurance purposes which is predominantly collected by means of questionnaires and is summative in nature.

Although feedback collection has devolved to departmental level, the Scottish sector, through the gradual introduction of Course Evaluation, measures student satisfaction primarily at an institutional or faculty level and not at the departmental level where enhancement should be led. Recent research has shown that it is at the departmental level - Head of Department or Head of School - that innovation can be encouraged or blocked, and consequently it is at this level that support should be sought.

The Scottish sector could consider redirecting existing resources and expertise to the collection of student-generated feedback for the purpose of enhancement and in the process express a willingness to accept qualitative and informal approaches alongside the traditional summative methods currently employed.

The results of the survey show that there are few, if any, workable methods of student feedback collection and return in the international and British HE sectors which are not currently being used or evaluated somewhere in the Scottish sector. However, while examples of all the main methods are currently being used, few are used in any integrated or uniform fashion. Different departments within an institution, or even across a faculty, are using a variety of evaluation methods.

There are islands of innovation within the Scottish HE sector where isolated pockets have already adopted an enhancement-led approach to learning and teaching through the development of student-focused methodology.

Scotland does not need to import specific methodology but should concentrate on making existing good practice available and accessible across the sector by capitalising on this existing growth and by providing the means to spread good practice across the Scottish HE sector.

End of course has habitually been the time to collect student feedback, but evidence suggests that feedback is increasingly being collected earlier in an effort to initiate continual evaluation of teaching and learning.

The Scottish sector needs to focus on developing the quick turnaround of information - returning information to students in a timely fashion where the results of the feedback can be adopted by those students providing the feedback rather than the following year's cohort.

There is a need to promote ways of giving a rapid response to student feedback through increased staff/student dialogue and by the increased adoption of informal and face-to-face methods.

It should be possible to build on existing approaches that encourage students to promote change actively, by encouraging student ownership of, and involvement in, enhancement-led assessment.

In addition to fulfilling the project aims and intended outcomes, the work of the project has fulfilled several more general functions.

- It has served to increase awareness within the Scottish HE sector about the need critically to examine existing practice.
- It has helped to create an awareness to look outwith the Scottish sector for innovation and change.
- It has endeavoured to involve, and more importantly was seen to involve, the teaching sector rather than, or alongside, the quality assurance sector.
- It has raised awareness within the Scottish HE sector of the aims of the enhancement themes, which in turn helps to promote continuing sector participation.

The way ahead: new directions

The HE sector in Scotland is not promising to deliver a New Scottish Enlightenment, but we are saying that it is possible to set a series of conditions which might lead to a real and positive change in Scotland. (The Knowledge Society: A submission to the Scottish Higher Education Review, Universities Scotland)

Culture change

Students should no longer remain passive, or at best reactive, participants and should be encouraged to assume a clear role within the Scottish HE sector. If student-led enhancement is to become the positive force for change that is intended, then students must be actively encouraged to assume a partnership role in evaluating the functions of teaching and learning. The Scottish HE sector has been presented with the opportunity to initiate a culture change - the change from evaluation for accountability to the evaluation of student views for the express purpose of enhancement. Perhaps the best approach is also the simplest: staff need to talk to students; engage in a dialogue with students - all students and not just selected representatives. If staff are open and receptive to students there will be a continuous process of feedback and dissemination. The collection of student-generated feedback should become the norm: methods currently used to 'collect and return' serve to promote the process as 'out of the ordinary'. It is argued that what is needed is to make the process a 'normal' everyday part of the learning experience. If students were involved from the outset in an atmosphere conducive to dialogue, then that dialogue would provide, create, become, a method and means of continual appraisal and change.

Institution change

There is a case for the introduction of an end-of-studies student satisfaction survey which could be administered centrally within institutions and cover areas such as library services, career services, IT, etc, and which would cover departmental facilities but stop short of detailed departmental practice. This would be for summative purposes and could be used as a performance indicator or for comparison across an institution or across the sector to monitor change in student services. Evaluation for the purposes of enhancing teaching or learning or course change etc could be undertaken by more direct and immediate methods within departments or by individual staff to initiate change. Methods should be those which advocate 'fast return', such as informal, face-to-face, one-minute etc: short, with an instant response, where the response is evident and is seen to have a practical application - seen not just by the student but also by the staff.

There should be greater recognition of the value of informal feedback, which would in turn lead to the acceptance of qualitative feedback as one of the prime tools for directing enhancement-led change, working in parallel with existing, more formal, methods. The mindset that 'if it isn't written down it doesn't exist' may need to change.

Recognising that all departments, schools, faculties, institutions, etc, within the Scottish HE sector are initially starting from different points within the enhancement process, there is a need for institutions to identify clearly where they are now in the spectrum of approaches to student evaluation and in the balance between evaluation for assurance and evaluation for enhancement. Within this context individual institutions should consider any shift that would be appropriate to their specific circumstances. This project has already identified the mechanics for a possible sector shift through the sharing of ideas and insights and, by the creation of the toolkit, has provided the means to initiate such changes.

Feedback skills: catch them early

'Learning to give good feedback is much like learning any other skill: it requires motivation, direct teaching, and optimal conditions for practice.' Some, like Marilla Svinicki, advocate that giving feedback is a skill and as such it should be taught just like any other skill required to complete a higher education. 'Faced with the request for feedback and a lack of clear understanding about how to give it, students may choose to say nothing at all or make very general statements that could not be criticised.' (Svinicki, 2001)

Currently there appear to be limited opportunities for students to learn the skill of giving feedback, although this could be introduced quite simply in the first instance by providing model examples of constructive feedback. The practice of evaluation and student participation is best instilled from the outset. Students should be aware of their responsibility, not only to the institution but also to themselves. They need to be encouraged to accept responsibility for their own education. Svinicki advocates that time spent in class teaching students how to give feedback is not wasted but in fact demonstrates to the students the importance placed on the feedback they are being asked to give.

Trust and transparency

Students need to be assured that giving feedback is not a waste of time, a PR exercise, and that their comments are going to be acted on, not misused. By highlighting the concept and uses of student-generated feedback, once students see the validity of feedback collection - as it directly affects them - it is easier to get them 'on board' in later years. The need for feedback should be clearly explained to each new cohort of students along with a clear explanation of what will be done with it once it is collected.

It is in the interest of Scotland's HEIs to provide a clear understanding of the use and intended purpose of feedback collection, not only to the student body but also to staff, many of whom appear to be in the dark as to the wide range of uses to which the information is subsequently put. Institutions should ensure that information collected is subsequently used and not collected out of habit - if feedback is not used then that is a signal that it should not be collected.

There is a strong case for a change in mindset - do we need to collect all the information every year? Summative information could be collected at the end of a student's time at an institution. Newly graduated students could be presented with an experience questionnaire after the euphoria of graduation and the stress of new employment have worn off, a time when they would be in a better position to give a valid judgment. If delivered electronically the questionnaire could be available for a period of several weeks and could be linked to evaluation of student employment. For the purposes of accountability there would still be summative feedback, although in an effort to redirect existing resources such a survey might not be administered annually but biennially or at the time of institutional review.

Questionnaire fatigue can be overcome by transparency. It has become convenient to cite 'questionnaire fatigue' when questionnaire response falls below an acceptable level. However, increasingly this is nothing more than an excuse for poor questionnaire design, poor communication, or students perceiving no benefit. If a first-year student attending a Scottish university completes six modules, they might receive on average six or perhaps seven course evaluation questionnaires. Seven questionnaires within an academic year should not be considered overkill and should not result in 'questionnaire fatigue' among the students. However, students display little interest in questionnaires which they perceive to be of no obvious benefit to themselves. In order to generate student interest and at the same time increase response levels, active student involvement must be encouraged. In some instances this can take the form of students generating qualitative questions for inclusion in student satisfaction surveys, but more importantly it means students must be informed about and involved in the quality assurance process. Students must be made aware that they have the opportunity to be involved with change and development - enhancement at its most basic.

Alongside the need for transparency there is also the need to develop trust between staff and student, institution and student body. It must be made clear from the outset that constructive and responsible student-generated feedback will not lead to students being penalised if staff or institution disagree with comments made or issues raised. This does not, however, give carte blanche to those students who disagree with a tutor's assessment of coursework to generate spurious comments. Students should be encouraged and provided every opportunity to contribute constructive opinion and comment.

Every effort should be made to ensure the process of providing student-generated feedback does not impinge unnecessarily on the student experience or detract from academic study. The process of feedback contribution and collection should be easy, painless, and an efficient use of the student's time.

Fit for purpose

Summative evaluation has evolved to become a creature of habit - it has become self-sustaining. In many instances information is collected with no clear end use in sight - the purpose of evaluation has become the gathering of information, rather than the analysis of information to promote change. In many cases the feedback (summative) collected for assurance purposes is also used to measure enhancement - in this way it is not fit for the purpose for which it is being used.

> …although feedback from students is assiduously collected in many institutions, it is less clear that it is used to its full potential. (Harvey, April 2003)

If student feedback is to be used for purposes of enhancement, then from the outset it should be collected for that purpose - formative and qualitative. While recognising that summative feedback can, under some circumstances, be a valid measure of enhancement, there is a need to ensure that the method used to collect feedback accurately reflects both the type and intended use of the student feedback collected. In this sense, for quick response, and to address items raised concerning learning and teaching, formative and direct contact should be a primary aim. There should be clear division between the need to ensure quality of education provision and the adaptive methods used to deliver that provision. A change from continual summative evaluation to one which is responsive to the needs and demands of learning enhancement favours the continued adoption of 'quick response' methods.

If a quick return on student feedback is required, questionnaires are not the most suitable method of feedback collection. Feedback obtained from questionnaires is usually in the form of experience or satisfaction surveys. Most instant, or quick response, mechanisms are used at a modular level or on an ad hoc basis by individual members of staff. The recent survey of 200 departments and schools across the Scottish HE sector revealed that most departments used multiple methods of feedback collection. While 58 per cent used informal or anecdotal feedback methods and 54 per cent reported addressing the issue of feedback at tutorials, only 3 per cent used one-minute methods to provide a quick turn-round of information. However, in parallel with these more informal methods 90 per cent of those departments surveyed reported their continued reliance on questionnaires to provide student feedback. Perhaps this continued reliance on the widespread use of questionnaires to provide student feedback deserves to be re-evaluated in light of the desire to place student involvement and enhancement at the forefront of the Scottish higher education experience.

Currently, the three most frequently used methods of collecting student feedback are questionnaires (90 per cent), staff/student liaison committees (89 per cent), and course representatives (80 per cent). The downside of these methods is the time taken to respond to points raised by student feedback -often points raised are not addressed until the following semester or academic year. If learning and teaching is to be enhancement-led, then the emphasis should be on those methods of feedback which promote ease of dialogue between student and staff and promote an instant response, if not instant action.

'Little and often' might be the best way - one-minute papers at the end of the lectures would encourage participation - but only if comments were seen to be addressed. However, results and comments from the sector-wide survey indicate that heads of departments/schools find it is difficult to get academics to give up a couple of minutes of their lecture time. Yet one-minute papers would allow minor changes to be incorporated immediately. If the lecturer talked too fast, or not loudly enough, if the computer-projected presentations were lacking in detail, or had too much detail for students to comprehend - these minor points, which are really only dealing with the context of 'delivery', can be easily resolved and more importantly can be seen to be quickly addressed.

By providing feedback on teaching and learning, students are not necessarily advocating changing the course content but the method and means of delivery. In most instances criticism directed at the teaching staff is not attacking their knowledge or subject understanding but only the delivery of the information - staff would often be quick to advocate change if the positions were reversed.

This does not signify that 'one size fits all', as the needs and peculiarities of the individual module and/or course might lend themselves to specific methods. That said, many methods can be adapted to suit the form of learning and teaching. For example, one-minute methods can be easily adapted to evaluate online teaching and virtual focus groups can replace the face-to-face version.

Creating a dialogue

The term 'closing the loop' is more often than not misrepresented, misinterpreted, and, in some instances, used for purposes of misdirection, merely fulfilling external assessment requirements rather than addressing student needs. The term gives the wrong impression of feedback return. Closing the loop can be accomplished by giving the minimum return or only that return which the institution desires. It allows the institution to fulfil, and be seen to fulfil, the obligations and requirements for accountability and assurance - ticking the box for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education - while at the same time ignoring the needs of the student population.

For many, the term 'closing the loop' indicates opening a dialogue with students to keep them fully informed on any intended changes as a consequence of student feedback. However, perhaps the term 'closing the loop' should be expanded to include proactive measures such as clearly explaining to new and existing students the reason behind the collection of feedback and the purposes to which that feedback will be put. This would include highlighting the benefits to the students themselves and explaining their role in assuming some of the responsibility for their own educational experience. Encouraging student involvement could be seen as a function of closing the loop.

Barriers to change

Professor Paul Ramsden, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Academy, recently addressed the subject of innovation in teaching.

> Many great innovations and many brilliant ideas in teaching and improving the student experience never get beyond the individual staff member because they aren't supported and encouraged by senior managers. In surveys, academic staff say that one of the key ways to recognise good teaching is the backing and enthusiasm of academic managers - but that this encouragement is all too often absent. (Paul Ramsden, Belfast Castle, 14 October 2004)

This is a view which has been echoed by Universities Scotland:

> …accountability must not create a risk-averse system in which institutions and academics are afraid to innovate. If an institution or an academic sees an opportunity and pursues it effectively but it does not pay off, they should not be penalised. (The Knowledge Society: A submission to the Scottish Higher Education Review, Universities Scotland)

In order to encourage the dissemination and adoption of new, more direct, and informal methods, the Scottish HE sector at large should endeavour to create an environment where staff are actively encouraged to take risks and experiment with different ways of collecting student feedback. There should be no penalty for failure - if new practices are found to be unsuitable in particular subject areas it should be looked upon as part of the learning curve in shifting the emphasis from assurance-based evaluation to evaluation based on enhancement.

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Annex A

List of steering committee members

Professor Rao Bhamidimarri	Napier University
Dr Kim Jauncey	University of Stirling
Mr John Martin	University of Strathclyde
Ms Fionna McCleary	Glasgow Caledonian University Students Association
Mrs Kathleen McMillan	University of Dundee
Mr Sean Morton	Stirling University Students Association
Ms Pauline Parr	Perth College UHI Millennium Institute
Dr Frank Quinault	University of St Andrews
Professor Brenda Smith	The Higher Education Academy

QAA Scotland officers

Dr David Bottomley
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Annex B

List of project directors and members of the Project Development Board

Student Needs in the First Year of Study

Project Directors:

- Induction, Dr Claire Carney, University of Glasgow
- Personal Tutor Systems, Ms Elaine Smith, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Approaches to Integrating Student Support, Ms Ginny Saich, University of Stirling
- The First-year Learning Experience, Professor David Lines, The Robert Gordon University and Chair of Project Development Team

Student Evaluation of and Feedback on their Learning Experience

Project Development Board:

- Dr Alan Davidson, University of Dundee (Chair)
- Mr Duncan Cockburn, student participation in quality Scotland (sparqs)
- Dr Gillian Mackintosh, University of Aberdeen
- Ms Donna McMillan, University of Paisley
- Dr Frank Quinault, University of St Andrews
- Ms Ruth Williams, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI)
- Dr Derek Young, University of Dundee (Project Officer)

Publications

Editor, *Enhancing Practice: Responding to Student Needs* Professor George Gordon, University of Strathclyde

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