



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Developing targeted, efficient and personalised mechanisms to enhance and expand the support for at-risk students

Transition(s) the practice supports: This case study describes current initiatives originating from within Edinburgh Napier Business School (ENBS) towards the expansion and enhancement of mechanisms supporting the transition of direct entrants, especially the international students.

Abstract: The practice proposes to personalise the support available to Higher Education (HE) students, in the context of the large variety of entry routes into HE. Dr Carles Ibanez, lecturer and programme leader at ENBS, has put forward proposals and conducted pilots to smooth and hasten the transition of international students by offering a student centred, targeted and efficient system of support. The recommendations include pre-transition preparation in terms of building the student's knowledge and skills. Upon arrival, the students' knowledge and skills are assessed in order to direct the students towards adapted support. Finally, the support mechanisms further include support workshops, targeting key skills and offered in a timely manner to the students.

Description: This initiative aims at accelerating and smoothing the process of transition experienced by direct entrants at ENBS. Indeed, the transition of overseas students into the UK higher education environment can take a long time, and sometimes these students entering programmes in the Business School will still lack key skills and background knowledge at the very end of their studies, such as how to use referencing, critical analysis or how to make an effective class contribution ([Ibanez et al., 2015](#)). Consequently, overseas students get on average more fails, lower grades and less merits than European and domestic students (ibid.). This difference cannot be wholly attributed to language level; indeed, European students tend to outperform domestic students (ibid.). A series of proposals and pilots have been put forward at ENBS to enhance, expand and personalise the support addressed to international students, overseas students, direct entrants and in general all at-risk students. Listed below are three support initiatives which are already implemented, plus

a summary of future proposals to take this targeted and contextualised support forward into future academic sessions.

1. Online Checklist for assessment of academic skills and background knowledge

The skills and background knowledge of all students need to be assessed upon arrival at their HEI. An online checklist, available to all ENU lecturers on Moodle, can be used at ENBS to be completed jointly by the student and his or her Personal Development Tutor (PDT). When a box in the online checklist is not ticked, the student can be referred to the adequate resource. Examples of items on the online check-list include time management skills or preparing for exams. This assessment aims to identify gaps in background knowledge and skills, and to direct the students towards the relevant support mechanisms. The student can also be directed towards additional extra-curricular experiences, such as summer schools or volunteering opportunities.

2. Colour-coding to prioritize PDT support

Dr Carles Ibanez has further added a color-coding system to be used by the PDTs, so as to identify students who are likely to be at a greater degree of risk in terms of their retention, progression and completion.

- The blue colour is attributed to first year students, who are new to HE and ENU. Blue students receive an email in week 3 to ask how they are settling in and to arrange a meeting later in the term (weeks 6 to 9) to see how they are getting on.
- The green colour is used for students who have not failed any module or reported any problem with the programme. The PDTs contact the green students by email, letting them know they are welcome to meet their PDT if any issue should arise.
- The orange colour is used for direct entrants from college or students who have failed some modules, while the purple colour is for overseas students. Purple and orange students are invited to come for a meeting by the end of week 4, to find out how they are getting on, and to talk to them about what they have studied before, what difficulties they have faced in the past and currently, what study skills (if any) they are missing.
- Finally, red is for students who have failed a lot of modules. Red students are invited for a meeting as soon as possible to discuss their situation and find what assistance they require, from the PDT, the module leaders or support services.

This colour-coding system ensures that the limited PDT time is targeted towards students most in need of support.

3. Student support linked to a specific assignment

The support to address the key skills lacking needs to be targeted and efficient, for instance by being linked to specific assignments. Indeed, many students tend to behave strategically and look for efficiency (Biggs and Tang, 2011); so, they tend to be more receptive to help when it is targeted towards a specific assignment and is timed appropriately with respect to it. Dr Carles Ibanez organised a pilot workshop in critical writing for two groups of direct entrants in his programme, connected to an upcoming assignment in one of the final year compulsory modules. The module leader and academic support advisers worked together to set up workshops and one-to-one sessions. This programme-led module-specific approach led to excellent student feedback and turn out.

Future Plans

A further proposal recommends online modules available to overseas students, covering the background modules of the programme to ensure that international students are able to address the same areas of curriculum prior to their starting at Edinburgh Napier. There is currently a dissertation preparation ([known as the Dissertation Maze](#)) which delivers online module at ENBS which is working well but the practice would ideally be generalized to cover the entirety of the programme core knowledge. Such a tool could also be used by all other students to review and revise.

Expanding the module-specific but programme-led assignment support workshops to the other compulsory modules in the programme, and enhancing the online PDT check-list so that it can automatically direct the students to the relevant support measures when a box is not ticked, are also part of the plans Dr Carles Ibanez has for the programme.

In conclusion, such initiatives aim towards delivering a more personalised and efficient support to at-risk students, for a faster and smoother transition into HE at Edinburgh Napier University.

Ibanez, C., Gavris, A. and Handyside, G. 2015. *Overseas Students In transition*. (Online). Available from: <https://ilrb.cf.ac.uk/citingreferences/tutorial/faq.html#faq1> Accessed 01/03/2016.

Biggs, J. and Tang, C. 2011. *Teaching For Quality Learning At University*. London: -McGraw-Hill.

Contact details:

Dr Carles Ibanez
Lecturer and Programme Leader
Edinburgh Napier Business School
Craiglockhart campus
Edinburgh
EH14 1DJ
E-mail: c.ibanez@napier.ac.uk