



## **Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice**

### **Title:**

Learning in practice: enhanced support for work-based learners

### **Transition(s) the practice supports:**

Widening participation transitions into and through higher education through supported Work-Based Learning and the Recognition of Prior Learning.

### **Abstract:**

Working in partnership with Unite the Union and Rolls-Royce, The Open University in Scotland has been providing opportunities for staff at Rolls-Royce's Scottish sites to study Open University modules and qualifications in the workplace for personal and professional development. The aim of this partnership is to provide flexible pathways that enable engineering workers to access higher education in the workplace and develop new workplace learning models to support credit transfer. Learners are aided in their transition into and through higher education through the use of an Enhanced Support Model designed to allow individually tailored responses to particular barriers in order to facilitate smoother and more successful transitions into and through study, by providing extra support activities and processes to assist learners in the workplace.

### **Description:**

Since 2010, working in partnership with Unite the Union and the Rolls-Royce Company, The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) has been providing opportunities for employees at Rolls-Royce's Scottish sites to study Open University (OU) modules and qualifications in the workplace for personal and professional development. The aim of this partnership is to provide flexible pathways that enable engineering workers to access higher education in the workplace and, in particular, develop a workplace learning model that could support students transitioning to Higher Education (HE) with college-based and workplace qualifications (e.g. Higher National Qualifications). While many have been working towards a Bachelor of Engineering degree (BEng), all OU study pathways are open to these learners.

Learners are engaged in the process through partnership events and discussions led by Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) and Rolls-Royce employee 'mentors', with support and guidance from OU staff. While learners in this scheme have access to all of the same mechanisms of support available to other OU students, they are also

aided in their transition into and through HE by the Enhanced Support Model developed as part of this partnership by OUIS for facilitating the delivery of HE in the workplace. This model provides access to a range of OU-led enhanced support activities described below and utilises the skill, expertise and enthusiasm of ULRs, employer mentors and other learners to embed and nourish peer-support networks. This approach has enabled the development of a creative programme of learning for students who would otherwise have found it very difficult to access HE. The following quote, from a ULR, neatly captures the flexible and responsive approach of this Enhanced Support Model: *'whenever there has been a problem they (Open University colleagues) have "put a ladder over the barrier" to make it a successful work-based learning programme.'*

The Enhanced Support Model was developed in response to perceived challenges that can make transition into and through HE study difficult for work-based learners, and includes a range of extra support measure. For example:

- Engineering students struggling with the Mathematics demands of their modules were offered extra face-to-face lessons to bridge the gap between their knowledge and skill and the requirements of the module, and in the process, boost their confidence in the subject.
- A bespoke student 'Handbook' has been developed for these learners to help foster learner skills, competencies and confidence in academic processes and procedures around learning, teaching and assessment. This document is designed to provide information and guidance on key academic matters and clearly articulate the responsibilities of the learner and the OU.
- For learners articulating with previous certificated learning, and for those studying in a formal setting for the first time, one-to-one module and qualification information and guidance sessions are provided on a regular basis to ensure that learners make the most of their previous learning (e.g. in the form of credit transfer) and make informed, considered decisions about their commitment to study (e.g. volume and level of study, subject choice and combination of modules).
- Additional progress monitoring and learning support is allocated, in the form of extra one-to-one meetings between ULRs or Tutors and learners, and the support of peer-support activities, to ensure that learners are can better negotiate the 'everyday' transitions they undertake.

This Enhanced Support Model for HE students in the workplace has been developed between the OUIS, Unite and Rolls-Royce, and evaluation has shown that all stakeholder groups believe that it is a robust model with clear potential to be extended to other workplaces. The OUIS staff who have been involved in the partnership have reported that the collaboration between partners has enabled the coherent delivery of strong and tailored student support from the Open University, the union and the employer. Moreover, evaluation activities consistently surface overwhelmingly positive reflections from learners, the Union and Rolls-Royce. The benefits of the partnership were identified in terms of the development of a learning culture in the workplace, the value of new and enhanced skills within the workforce and the individual benefits to students, both professionally and personally. The Extended Support Model developed

by the OUIS in this partnership, alongside the individual efforts of learners and mentors, underpins the success of this partnership in supporting work-based learning transitions into and through HE.

**Contact details:**

Khadija Patel (Learning Partnership Officer, Learning Development Team, Open University in Scotland)

[khadija.patel@open.ac.uk](mailto:khadija.patel@open.ac.uk)