



Student Transitions: Example of Transitions Practice

Title: Making positive choices about exits from higher education: Back on Course Scotland

Transition(s) the practice supports: Making positive choices about transitions out of higher education.

Abstract: Back on Course Scotland is a free impartial service run by the sector for its students. It is delivered by The Open University in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council. There are two core strands of the project:

- An information advice and guidance service for full-time undergraduate students who have withdrawn from higher education before completing their intended qualification.
- Research into the motivations, needs and characteristics of early-leavers from university, and to share the findings with the sector to help support a robust practical approach to retention activities.

The Open University works with seven Scottish university partners, but the service is open to receive calls from early-leavers from all Scottish universities.

Description: Back on Course (BOC) Scotland is a free, impartial information advice and guidance service and research project for early-leavers from higher education. Whatever their circumstance, early-leavers are supported in this transition. They are offered the opportunity to reflect and focus on their next steps back into studying at university, or to other positive outcomes such as college, training or employment. BOC is not intended as a substitute for the retention activities of individual universities, but to provide further support once the student has left their institution and to feed back in ways that can help retention strategies within the sector.

- **Project background**

Launched in January 2013 it is a four year pilot project delivered by The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) and funded by the Scottish Funding Council, with plans to improve understanding of why students do not complete their studies.

BOC was established in response to widespread concern about the number of students leaving higher education before gaining their intended qualifications, and the cost of that non-completion in terms of both money and lost opportunity to the student, the university and the wider economy. Furthermore, although a great deal of research has been conducted on improving retention within institutions, there is limited research involving Scottish students after they have left their institutions, nor is there a systematic attempt to offer these students information advice and guidance on possible future steps. BOC was set up to address these deficits.

- **Our Partners**

Currently the OUiS works with seven partner universities: Abertay University; Edinburgh Napier University; Glasgow Caledonian University; Queen Margaret University; Robert Gordon University; University of the Highlands and Islands and the University of the West of Scotland.

One of the core aims of the project is to work in partnership with all Scottish universities and receive contact data for all early-leavers from full-time higher education in Scotland. This will significantly extend the reach of the service and increase the participation of early-leavers in our research.

- **Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Service**

The IAG service is open to any full-time student who has withdrawn from higher education in Scotland and Scottish domiciled leavers from universities in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. There are two ways in which early-leavers can access the IAG service: the BOC course team uses contact data provided by the partner universities to inform early-leavers about our service; or alternatively, students can contact BOC directly by phone, email or via our website. Students are offered tailored support and guidance, whether long-term support or one piece of information they need to get back on track.

The IAG service is delivered by the OUiS. Advisors support early-leavers with advice and guidance on a range of subjects including:

- returning to higher education, including advice on finance and course choice;
- finding a job or work experience;
- taking up an apprenticeship, vocational training or voluntary work;
- writing a CV or UCAS person statement/application.

- **Our Research**

The key aim of BOC research is to contribute valuable insight into the motives, needs and characteristics of early-leavers, and provide a landmark study of the traditionally hard-to-reach early-leavers once they have left higher education. Such evidence can be used to better understand the experience of student transitions and the support required.

BOC uses two main data sources:

- Data uploads
Partner universities share data including a variety of demographic and other key groupings such as date of birth, gender and postcode information, which provide the project with an overall picture of early-leavers from the participating universities.
- Further Information Form (FIF)
The FIF is completed by BOC clients and provides a rich source of data that enables detailed analysis of patterns and characteristics of early-leavers.

- **Additional sources of information**

- Website: <http://www.backoncourse.ac.uk/>
- [Back on Course postcard](#)

Contact details: Kitty Chilcott (Project Officer)

Email: kitty.chilcott@open.ac.uk