Student Transitions: Example of Transitions Practice

Title: Open educational practice and supporting transitions from informal to formal learning

Transition(s) the practice supports: The transition from informal to formal learning

Abstract: The Open University in Scotland's work on widening participation and supporting the transition from informal to formal learning has for several years had a strong focus on working in partnership with unions, third sector organisations, employers, schools and colleges. Partners have become increasingly interested in the potential of open educational resources to support the development of skills in their organisations and to provide informal routes into accredited education and training. The university is currently leading a cross-sector project to share good practice in the use of Open Educational Resources in Scotland – Opening Educational Practices in Scotland – as well as developing an Open Pathways to Higher Education resource to support learner journeys from informal to formal learning by highlighting routes into higher education.

Description: The Open University (OU) has significant experience of working with partners to support learners in making the transition from informal to formal learning. Increasingly, partners such as employers, third sector organisations and schools have been interested in the potential of Open Educational Resources (OERs) to provide informal routes into accredited education and training. This Enhancement Theme example of practice outlines two initiatives within the OU that support pathways from informal to formal learning in higher education: the Opening Educational Practices in Scotland cross-sector project and the development of the Open Pathways to Higher Education resource.

- **Opening Educational Practices in Scotland (OEPS)**

OEPS is a cross-sector project led by The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) and funded by the Scottish Funding Council as part of the university's outcome agreement. Its specific aim is to grow the capacity of the higher education sector in the effective use of OERs. The focus is on identifying good practice in learning design and nurturing the development of social networks that enable OERs to support widening participation and transitions into higher education.

Most OERs can be found by searching through repositories such as *OpenLearn*, *Re:Source* and *Jorum*. However, identifying which OERs are the most appropriate for a specific group of learners or organisational context is challenging for non-specialists. Even if appropriate material is identified, simply providing access to content is ineffective. Prior to the beginning of the OEPS project in late spring 2014, the OUiS worked with a number of partners on successful OER projects. The learning from these projects was that the key to effective engagement is to consider learning design – such as the way the content is presented – and the social relationships between learners, which may be mediated virtually or through face-to-face interaction.

The project team works with HEIs and non-HE partners to understand and share good practice and to develop capacity for the use of OERs in Scotland. The outputs of the project include the development of a Scottish Hub for Open Educational Practice.

- **Open Pathways to Higher Education**

Open Pathways to Higher Education (Open Pathways) is a free resource, designed to help learners navigate their personal learning journey from informal study towards study in a more formal context – if it is appropriate. The resource helps individuals to manage their progress, develop effective study skills and boost their confidence to enable the achievement of personal study goals.

Using *OpenLearn*, a platform offering free Open University materials and course excerpts, Open Pathways helps learners to:
- gain an insight into higher education, without formal commitment or cost;
- identify and develop knowledge of subject areas of interest;
- gain experience of online learning using free materials and courses;
- gain experience of reflective learning;
- develop study skills to prepare for more formal study in the future, whether at the OU or elsewhere;

- understand some of the flexible open routes to formal Open University qualifications at undergraduate and access level;
- track and manage progress and preparation for formal OU study.

The resource takes a learner-centred and multi-exit approach. This means that the individual decides the direction and end destination of their learning journey, as well as determining the level of commitment, intensity and pace of study. It illustrates learning journeys from informal to formal leaning by means of a Guide for Learners, Learning Log, and Pathway documents covering three broad subject areas: Arts and Humanities; Science, Technology and Maths; and People, Society and Work. As well as giving the learner a taste of different subject areas, the resource has an explicit focus on developing and improving study skills to ensure that learners are adequately prepared should they decide to progress to more formal study.

An accompanying Guide for Facilitators will illustrate the ways in which the Open Pathways resource might be used with learners from different backgrounds, in a wide variety of settings, to support successful student transitions.

- **Additional Resources**
- Opening Pathways resource available mid-2015.
- A poster illustrating the OEPS approach can be downloaded from http://oro.open.ac.uk/41467/
- The detailed aims of the OEPS project and examples of how effective practice supports transitions from informal to formal learning can be found at www.oepscotland.org

Contact details:
Open Pathways to Higher Education
Lindsay Hewitt (Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator)
Email: Lindsay.Hewitt@open.ac.uk

Opening Educational Practices in Scotland
Pete Cannell (Co-director, OEPS)
Email: pete.cannell@open.ac.uk