Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Providing Information Literacy support across a multi-campus HEI.

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transition into HE across a range of entry levels (for distance-learning as well as campus-based students).

Abstract: SRUC is a multi-campus Small Specialist Institution offering 'escalator model' provision in rural and land-based subjects from National Certificate qualifications to undergraduate degree or postgraduate study. Regardless of the level of entry, students are faced with an enormous range of resources, as well as a need to develop appropriate academic skills very quickly. These Information Literacy (IL) skills become ever more sophisticated as students transition through academic courses. It is especially vital that distance learners quickly acquire IL skills in order to facilitate engagement with their learning. SRUC libraries at the six campuses aim to ensure that all students have options to access training, either virtually (Skills4Study campus) or on campus. Both formal and informal training is available, as one-to-one or in groups/classes.

Description: SRUC libraries offer a variety of training options for Information Literacy skills, ranging from induction packages which introduce the library resources (physical and electronic) and some basic IT skills, to sophisticated training on e-resources including journals, conference papers, databases, research data etc.   There are two main challenges – firstly to provide support in the development of Information Literacy skills appropriate to the level of entry and the demands of the learning, teaching and assessment activities (bearing in mind the style of provision, SQA HNC/D or degree, within the 'learner journey') and secondly, to provide parity in this support service across programmes some of which are offered at five of SRUC's six campuses.

New students entering SRUC are timetabled to receive a library induction session. This is usually early in their studies as part of induction, and the session covers some of the more basic elements they need to succeed – from logging on to the student desktop, introducing library resources and how to 'discover' them through the library catalogue or library website, how to access their library account, and introducing the library staff to students to help gain confidence for requesting support at a later date. Although all students should be given this session, they are able to request refresher or further training at any point in their course of study. Increasingly, the number of resources introduced to students in a very short space of time becomes more overwhelming, and it is unrealistic to expect them to either remember everything or to instantly acquire a confidence in searching for, and accessing, resources. Information overload is ramping up all the time, and every effort is made to help all users control it as best they can.

Library sessions are also delivered to students who undertake their SQA project-based Graded Unit towards the end of their second (HND) year – the Graded Unit expects students to integrate knowledge and skills from other Units studied during the academic session. At

this point the students may be introduced to new skills and resources plus there is an opportunity for a helpful refreshing of others, just before the students make the transition into the third year of a degree programme (and encounter the different demands that this entails). As part of this service, the Libraries offer proof-reading for any students who aren't confident in undertaking the task themselves, or are not able to access formal or informal proof-reading by friends, colleagues or support staff.

Information Literacy skills are reinforced with sessions early in third year. At this point expectations from the students are raised as they are in a Junior Honours year or the final year of an Ordinary Degree. This requires sessions which deal with identifying and accessing academic papers in greater detail, and a greater understanding (and practice in) the use of citations and referencing. In general, instruction is delivered by library staff in conjunction with the specialist lecturers, and an exercise covering all the topics above is available to assess students' capabilities and aid them in a process of self-assessment and reflection. Every opportunity is taken to remind students of Skills4Study Campus as a revision tool which is always available to them through Moodle.

In the fourth year, with the demands of the dissertation, students receive refresher training, with an emphasis on drilling down to more and more specialised information via various abstracting and indexing resources e.g. Web Of Science, CAB Abstracts etc. The concept of scientific or academic communication is introduced by identifying the possibility of contacting lead authors for free copies of papers and kick starting a conversation with them. At this point Open Access is also introduced, in particular SRUC's Institutional Repository which offers the opportunity to build on research that SRUC is carrying out or has carried out in the recent past.

SRUC also offers Distance Learning programmes at HNC and Taught Masters levels. Library sessions are arranged for delivery when students attend campus-based study weekends. These sessions will cover the same type of work as detailed above but concentrate more heavily on electronic access and on support mechanisms including contact with staff via phone, email and instant messaging, with online tutorials uploaded to our Library Guides on the website. Again, depending on the level of study, sophisticated training will be given on the use of abstracting and indexing databases and the research process in general.

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All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.