Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: School of Medical Science Skills Support Centre: an online resource for medical science undergraduates

Transition(s) the practice supports: Empowering students through transitions

Abstract: We have developed an online skills resource specifically tailored to our students in the School of Medical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen. This project was initiated in the summer of 2014 and released to students for academic year 2014-15. As an ever growing resource we see this skills support centre as an evolving resource that can be easily tailored to any curriculum or set of degree programmes. Through thorough testing and evaluation of the four skill areas, the resource has been widely used by all levels of undergraduate student within our School.

Description: The aim of this project was to develop an online resource that would act as a "one stop shop" for undergraduate students across all levels of study within the School of Medical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen. The key features desired from the resource were ease of use and accessibility, with students being able to develop multiple skills freely and to an advanced competence regardless of their initial level.

The first phase of this project was to survey teaching staff within the School regarding the problems students encounter as they progress through their degree and what their ideal performance should look like. Afterwards, all final year Honours students were sampled and the process was repeated. The data collected was then analysed alongside researching current trends and techniques deployed in online education at other higher education institutions throughout the world.

The second phase of the project was to adapt a design sprint methodology used by technology start-ups in order to outline the structure of the resource and user experience. This allowed for quick prototyping and development to a final product framework within several weeks.

Blackboard virtual learning environment software was used to build the resource as this is the central online platform within the University of Aberdeen, and as such is familiar platform used by all students. Current skill sets are distributed into four categories (Organisational Skills, Practical-related Skills, Writing Skills, and Scientific Reading Skills) with each containing several subdivisions.

Educational content comes in both text and multimedia formats and was collected from several Aberdeen University resources as well as public resources alongside original content developed specifically for this resource. To enhance knowledge retention, retrieval practice is used, whereby educational content is followed by a short assessment.

The resource was launched to students from the start of academic year 2014-15, with usage being monitored to better understand user needs and observe adoption rates. To encourage collaboration and active learning further developments will include live chats, collaborative assessments and student made content areas (diagrams, notes, etc.).

Future objectives include surveying users to quantify the benefits of using this resource; implementing randomised diagnostic tests so that users can objectively track improvements in particular areas; and also expanding the skills sets to include other relevant skills known to be of high importance from our original surveys and through collaborations with external employers.

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