



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: 'Sometimes it's easier to learn from someone on the same level as you' -
The Student Mentoring Programme: Supporting students' transition into and throughout their first year at Edinburgh Napier University (ENU)

Transition(s) the practice supports: The Student Mentoring Programme offers academic support and information about how the university works to all students starting and attending their first year at Edinburgh Napier University, irrespective of their discipline, age or country of origin. The Student Mentoring Programme targets students of year 1, direct entrants into year 2, 3 or 4, as well as postgraduate students. However, it is of particular interest to students who have come in from School, College and long term Employment along with International students.

Abstract: This practice matches volunteer student mentors with self-referred first year student mentees. The support provided by this programme is academic oriented, offering personalised help in academic skills and 'fast-track orientation' at the university so as to quickly join the community of learners. It consists of an exchange, between the mentors who acquire training and a diversity of skills - communication, leadership, mentoring - and the mentees who get assistance in the specific academic areas they require – academic writing, exam preparation, referencing, IT skills, organisation...

Description: The Student Mentoring Programme was started 12 years ago, in order to better support Wider Access students' transition at Edinburgh Napier University. It was then a very small programme piloting only 5 matches. It has now grown and is all inclusive, supporting up to 140 tandems, and is currently centrally run by the Widening Access Department.

To become a volunteer student mentor, it is necessary to fill out an application form, attend a training and meet the mentors' eligibility rules – among which attending ENU for at least a year and being a successful student. The mentor training is 2 hours long and is offered on each of the three ENU campuses. It includes training the future mentors in boundaries, confidentiality, active listening, and the role of the mentor. Upon completion of the training, the mentors receive a Certificate of participation. As for the mentees, they meet individually with programme coordinator Caroline Moffat, so as to assess their specific needs - such as skills gaps - and finding the best possible match. The matching is ideally done by pairing a student who is 1 or 2 years ahead in the same course as their mentee. Dependant on the pool of student mentors it is sometimes possible to take into consideration the particular wishes of the

mentees in terms of age group or origin - for instance, some international students prefer a Scottish mentor. The pairs usually contact each other through their university email address and are encouraged to meet once per week for an hour, in a public place, on campus. However, the practice is extremely flexible and is mentee driven, so that the pair can meet for a few sessions only, or throughout the year at their convenience. Programme coordinator Caroline Moffat keeps track of the relationship between mentee and mentor.

The Student Mentoring Programme has received excellent feedback from participating students. The mentors have particularly highlighted the impact of the programme on their employability and feeling that they are more prepared for graduate positions as they have acquired new skills and improved confidence. The mentees have expressed their satisfaction in terms of quality of the matching process, and about 50% of mentees have explained that the programme played an important role in helping them stay at university. In conclusion, the Student Mentoring Programme benefits the university by providing an effective retention tool and the students by improving their confidence and chances of academic success.

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