

Examples of transition work at Queen Margaret University

Title: *Students' Union Student Engagement Assistants*

Transition(s) the practice supports: This initiative is designed to ease student transition at various stages, encouraging students particularly newly entering the university but also generally to develop a sense of belonging and integration into university life.

Abstract: This initiative, funded through the Widening Participation and Student Retention fund at Queen Margaret University, allows for up to four paid student assistants to develop a programme of activities and services focusing on students who, for whatever reason, are finding it difficult to integrate into QMU.

Description: A number of students face difficulties in their first few weeks with homesickness, health issues, expectations, isolation and relationships. This project appoints students at different stages in the university journey and with different experiences as student engagement assistants (SEAs) to assist these students. The SEAs are paid to provide 30 hours of time before and during Freshers' Week in getting to know students, making themselves available to listen, help or advise on other university services which can help, and organising events. Thereafter, the SEAs are available for four hours a week in semester 1 and 20 hours in semester 2.

The funding also provides some budget for holding specific activities. These are wide-ranging and designed to appeal to particular groups of students who may be vulnerable, at risk or for some reason finding it difficult to fit into university life. As an example, one social event in the first year of operation was a family-friendly occasion which students who are parents were encouraged to attend, as they are often unable to participate in evening social activities. Another event was held over the Christmas period to introduce those students who remained in halls to enable them to socialise and be aware of who else was around over the holiday.

Student engagement assistants hold drop-in sessions, provide support to attend meetings, and hold workshops on skills such as budgeting, cooking, self-defence and fitness. They signpost students to sports and societies and set up and support interest groups, such as a book and film club. One particular area of development is non-alcohol-focused events for specific groups of students, such as mature students and BME students.

During the course of 2013/2014, its first year of operation, the SEA service engaged with hundreds of students in various ways, with up to 60 people attending meet and greet events and other social gatherings, and smaller but significant numbers meeting them personally for informal help sessions.

This is an innovative addition to support services for students at QMU which is student-driven and student-centred. Not only does it provide a sympathetic and empathetic resource for students, it also provides an opportunity for paid experience to those students who take on the role of SEA.

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