



## Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

**Title:** Supporting the Return to Study

**Transition(s) the practice supports:**

Returning to study after an extended period of absence from the University.

**Abstract:**

The project was designed to support students returning from a Leave of Absence to engage and re-integrate fully into their academic studies and wider University life at the beginning of the semester, rather than potentially losing academic ground during what can be a stressful transition back to university life.

**Description:**

**Background**

Students who have taken Leave have usually experienced personal, medical or academic issues resulting in a difficult transition out of university life and a period away from their studies. Extensive support may be available for their return but may be experienced by the student as fragmented. This project demonstrates to the student that support systems are part of an integrated whole with their academic studies, which should help to increase the impact of future academic and personal support. With these objectives in mind, a pilot re-engagement afternoon was planned in Orientation Week by the Registry Officer (Student Support), who is responsible for interruptions of, and return to, studies. Initial funding for the pilot was received from the University's Enhancement Theme, to establish whether the project would receive enough support to receive funding from stakeholders, including academic schools, Registry, Student Services, and the academic support unit, CAPOD.

**Intended benefits**

The objectives of the project were to ensure that students have completed the requirements for re-engagement and matriculation, and therefore have complete access to necessary IT services; that they have received advice on how to manage their wellbeing and early identification of personal difficulties; that they understand the academic requirements of their subjects for the semester, and that they have reflected on their study skills and the areas on which they need to focus.

**Service offered**

The first session of the afternoon was a solution-focused session aimed at identifying practical ways to address these difficulties, mainly building social networks. This was followed by a talk from Student Services about services and support available, and integrating back into student life. Part of the afternoon was also set aside for students to talk together informally over refreshments after a group discussion session led by the Registry Officer about challenges faced by returning students. Providing a social time was intended to give students the opportunity to share experiences, make connections, and normalise the Leave process, as many students feel that they are unique in taking time out.

Representatives from Student Services, for financial and personal support, were available for one to one discussion with students. The Registry Officer was also able to use one to one time to ensure that students had completed matriculation tasks, or knew how to access assistance.

An academic skills tutor attended to talk about time management and note taking, as two basic study skills relevant to both Arts and Science students. Subject tutors attended to conduct group discussion with students around of subject-specific skills, resources, and support available in the academic schools. Student representatives from each subject area also attended these sessions as facilitators.

### ***Student engagement***

This was attended by 15 out of 25 eligible students from three Schools, Modern Languages, Physics, and International relations, as representatives of Arts, Science, and Social Sciences.

### ***Student feedback***

The afternoon was assessed by means of a pre- and post-session questionnaire, confidence scales using a 1-5 Likert scale for students to self-report their confidence levels on a number of factors: how to identify academic or personal support and request it, readiness to integrate back into University life and preparedness for the semester. Reported confidence increased on average by approximately 0.5 on a Likert scale of 1-5.

A free text section for comments, with prompting for feedback on the most/least helpful activities, and things that students would like to see in future sessions, was included.

The most common theme was that meeting and making links with other students in a similar position, and talking about shared challenges, and a welcome back from different units, and the chance to meet staff face to face was also appreciated. There was a mixture of views on the most helpful of the academic skills sessions, but in almost all cases one or the other of generic skills and subject specific skills were mentioned as being useful.

The project was considered to be sufficiently successful that it will be continued in the next academic year, and will be rolled out to all academic Schools, and for both semesters for returning students, with approaches to stakeholders currently being made for future support and funding.

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