



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: The Dwell Project and Time Spent on Campus

Transition(s) the practice supports: Approaches to Transitions

Abstract: Being part of a community and having a sense of belonging are the most important environmental aspects for students during their time in higher education (Kandiko and Mawer 2013). In 2013 in the School of Media, Culture and Society (MCS) at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) ceased using the institutional block timetable approach for its Ayr Campus in favour of a more flexible, student centred approach. This case study outlines the strategic initiative, the Dwell Project, and how changing the structure and delivery of learning, teaching and assessment contributed to enhancing feelings of belonging during the transition into, through and out of the Institution.

Description:

Floud (2003) suggests that retention and withdrawal are not purely down to the characteristics of the individual, but can also be influenced by the processes, procedures and systems of the institution (see also Tinto 1982; Trotter 2003; Parmer & Trotter 2005).

Until 2012, in line with Institutional policy, the School of Media, Culture and Society (MCS) at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) operated a block timetable system. Based on historical influences and practices, this tended to mean that MCS students on the Ayr Campus were only timetabled to be on campus 1.5 days per week (based on 3x20 credit modules per trimester with 3 hours timetabled class contact per module this equated to approximately 9 hours on campus per week).

There is a range of research that demonstrates that if students do not have the opportunity to interact with others, they cannot properly connect with their academic or social environment; they will have a poor experience and may drop out (HEA 2004; Tinto 1993; Astin 1993; Braxton 1993; Emmitt 2002; McInnis 2001, 2003). Evidently, if the students are only on campus for approximately 9 hours per week, opportunities for interaction are severely limited and this was the case on Ayr Campus where there was little, if any, time for peer to peer or student to staff engagement and interaction outside the formal teaching and learning environment.

As part of a strategic approach to improvement of retention and progression, the Dwell project was developed and implemented to contribute to retention and progression by

enhancing feelings of belonging through increased opportunities for interaction and collaboration. The first phase of the project was to move away from the institutional block timetable approach in favour of a more flexible, student centred approach.

This initiative was piloted through revision of the Level 7 timetable to ensure that only one module per day was scheduled, thereby increasing time spent on campus from 1.5 to 3 days. The pilot was implemented at level 7 to enhance the students' transition into higher education. This was preferable to impacting on the transitions of continuing students who were used to the existing approach and had organised their commitments around it.

Academic colleagues revised the structure and delivery of their teaching, learning and assessment for level 7 to help ensure the students felt guided and supported both inside and out of class time. Feedback from students indicated that where academic staff had put thought and effort into directed learning, they benefitted from the approach as they had time to increase the depth of their learning and understanding and did not have to 'hang around between timetable slots with nothing to do'. Additionally, they appreciated the time they had to engage with their peers to identify opportunities for collaborations and also to interact with staff to get to know them and gain guidance and support.

Stage 2 of the project saw the introduction of a range of both student led and staff led innovations and initiatives across the campus to enable collaborations and extra-curricular activities. These included, for example, partnership projects; practice based employability skills development events and; creation and management of subject discipline clubs. Not only did this contribute to the level 7 student experience, it also benefitted students at other levels who had the opportunity to engage with the initiatives, enhance their skills and, in some cases, mentor the students in other years.

Overall the pilot was judged a success and beneficial to the student experience, particularly in terms of transitions and feelings of belonging and was rolled out in line with student progression through their programme.

Activity is now underway with the Institutions professional services to consider how directed learning time can be utilised to enhance and increase student transitions into work based learning; voluntary opportunities; international work and study.

- Astin A (1993). What matters in college? San Francisco: Josey-Bass
- Braxton J, Sullivan A, Johnson R (1997). Appraising Tinto's theory of college student departure in Smart J (ed) Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research 12. New York: Agathon, pp107-164
- Emmitt M, Callaghan V, Warren W & Postill K (2002). First year: the Deakin way. Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference. New Zealand: University of Canterbury
- Floud, R (2003). Policy implication of student non completion: Government, Funding Councils and Universities in Peelo, M and Wareham, T (eds) Failing students in higher education. Buckingham: Open University Press
- HEA (2005). Responding to student needs. Gloucester: QAA
- Kandiko, C and Mawer, M (2013). Student expectations and perceptions of higher education. London: King's Learning Institute
- McLinnis C (2001). Signs of disengagement? The changing undergraduate experience in Australian Universities, Inaugural Professorial Lecture, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne
- McLinnis C (2003). New realities of the student experience: how should Universities respond? In 25th Annual Conference European Association for Institutional Research, August, Limerick

- Parmer D & Trotter E (2005). Keeping our students: identifying factors that influence student withdrawal and strategies to enhance the experience and retention of first year students. Learning and Teaching in the Social Sciences 1 pp149-168
- Tinto, V (1993). Leaving college: rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Tinto, V (1998). Colleges as communities: taking research on student persistence seriously. Review of Higher Education 21(2), pp167-78
- Trotter E (2004). Enhancing the early student experience. Proceedings of the Education in a Changing Environment conference, 13-14 September 2004

Contact details: name and email address of key person who can discuss the case study in more detail. (with their permission agreed before submission)

Fiona Milne, Lecturer, School of Media, Culture and Society: Fiona.milne@uws.ac.uk

You *may* submit a poster (as a PowerPoint slide or PDF) or video or other multimedia element to support this written example. Guidance on multimedia formats is provided separately.

All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website and will become part of the National Transitions map.