

International Benchmarking: Student Support Services

Scoping other UK and International Developments

This report scopes developments, practice and activities aimed at supporting student success in higher education in the other UK countries and internationally. These webpages outline around 70 examples drawn from practice in over 35 institutions in 12 countries. They provide a range of activity across all of the areas identified by the Working Group as important in supporting student success.

The report uses the “learner journey” - from pre-entry to alumnus - and a series of additional categories, identified by the Working Group and suggested by the initial findings, as an organising framework. Clearly these categories are not discrete but they serve as a means of broadly categorising practice and have been cross-referenced as appropriate and practical. Each section could, of course occupy an entire report of its own but the aim of this project was to give a sense of some of the activity in each area. These may be filled out and added to at a later date.

The categories, and sections, are listed below. Click on the links to access practice for each aspect.

- A. [Strategies and policies for student support](#)
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[Acknowledgements](#)

A. Strategies and policies for student support

A number of institutions have developed policies and strategies with a view to having a direct impact on student success. Many individual institutions communicate values and make use of these to help delineate their own distinctiveness and niche and to inform students about what they will gain from their education. As one interviewee put it, **“the key is to give life to what some consider to be generalisations”** and the following are examples where these feed directly into the whole of institutional activity.

The University of Leeds, for example, has developed [“Leeds for Life”](#) which combines a philosophy, a strategic approach, a series of initiatives and a website full of information for students and staff and covering a whole range of practice and activity including the introduction of “a more consistent personal tutoring model within and across schools”¹ in the University (see [section E](#)). The University's values are set out, linked to associated skills and attributes, as “a guide to the way we work, teach and learn”. Leeds for Life aims “to help all taught students develop, reflect on and articulate the skills and attributes they gain through their academic and co-curricular experience”.² Students therefore understand what is expected of them and what they will gain from the experience at Leeds.

Contact: Dr Clara M.A. Davies
Senior Academic Staff Development Officer
University of Leeds

Values are also applied specifically to services. **“The Magnificent 8” strategy** at the University of Sheffield launched in 2006-07. Using the “strategy map” concept developed at the Harvard Business School. This represents a strategic approach to the development of student support services, an area where, the interviewee considered, “year-on-year operational planning is more common than holistic strategic thinking”. The strategy is the context for an array of developmental projects to create innovation and deliver improvement across the range of services that support student success.

Contact: Andrew West
Director of Student Services
University of Sheffield

See also: [Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education, Volume 12 Issue 3 2008.](#)

At Queens University Belfast, the **“Student Employability and Skills Policy 2008-2011”** identifies the skills which a QUB graduate should be able to acquire. The policy is derived from a number of drivers for change, principally set by Government policy in the way in which graduates are equipped to supply the skills of innovation, enterprise and leadership for the economy. The policy is being enacted through embedding skills development in the curriculum, compulsory engagement with Personal Development Planning supported by a structured Personal Tutor System and many other changes (see also [section E](#)).

Contact: Maria Lee
Head of the Centre for Educational Development

¹ Website

² Website

In 2005, Victoria University of Wellington also identified the attributes its graduates should have in its **Strategic Plan 2005-2015** and subsequently systematically implemented a series of measures across the institution to ensure these are fully embedded. The process is managed via a Student Experience Group which seeks “to consider the services provided to students from an undifferentiated perspective, regardless of where in the University they are situated”. (See also [section E](#))

Contact: Professor David Mackay
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Victoria University of Wellington

The student transition and mentoring programme (STAMP) at the University of Guelph-Humber deliberately conceives of students from “**cradle to grave**”. All new students are assigned an upper year mentor, before they have even started their course. Contact is made and maintained over the summer before the course starts and continues through the student’s first year. Support is maintained at different and appropriate levels throughout the students’ academic career and continues beyond graduation. To make this effective the registry, student life, careers and alumni services are all co-located and have similar approaches - an unusual combination. Students see the administrative face of the institution as a single team in a one-stop shop.

Contact: Dr John Walsh
Vice-Provost
University of Guelph-Humber

The Open University’s (OU) overarching model of Supported Open Learning incorporates a **Learner Support Framework** which is used by the OU’s Student Services to support students from first registration to completion and complement the support provided by students’ tutors and study advisors. Again, a set of key activities mapped onto the learner journey from the spine of the Framework, from enquiries and requests for advice through to proactive post-course contact. Resources for learning and teaching are “skewed towards students in the early stages of study” so that they are equipped “to self-manage their learning...as they continue their studies”.³

Contact: Lucy MacLeod
Depute Director (Students)
The Open University in Scotland

³ OU Learner Support Framework: private paper provided to QAA

B. Support for students prior to entry

The student journey arguably starts prior to entry to the institution, i.e. before the student is formally “a student”. There are many ways in which institutions seek to engage students before they begin their studies. In England, the [University of Winchester](#) developed an intensive pre-entry three-day course offering anxious students study skills, life skills and a social programme. This has been so successful that it has been developed into a new induction experience offered to all students (see [section C](#)).

In 2003, the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada initiated [START Online](#) - **an online experience designed to facilitate the transition to university life** and considered by the University to be possibly “the most comprehensive such program in Canada”. START Online is an online community, built on community development principles. It comprises the integration of several different existing technologies - two blogs, forums (using proprietary software), a video server, authentication against the University’s server and content management. It originally included a live chat tool, but that technology needs to be replaced and has therefore been removed for 2008-09. START Online is launched each year just after the deadline for accepting offers of admission. Each new student is assigned to a volunteer and receives an e-mail once per week during the summertime, inviting them to participate in online activities and providing an update on recent news/activities. Feedback from participants indicate that the personal connection is a critical component of their experience with this programme and the University reports that approximately 40% of incoming students have used START Online and found it helpful. The University interviewee considers that “significant friendships and engagement in on-campus opportunities...grow out of START Online participation”.

Leading up to START Online, a teaser page with a countdown clock is posted in the START Online web space. The University has also begun a “soft launch” by asserting its presence through Facebook prior to the program getting underway in earnest. In addition the University sends a postcard by traditional mail to all incoming students. Growing out of START Online, the University has also developed START International (see [section F](#))

Contact: Barry Townshend, MSW, RSW
Manager, Centre for New Students
Student Life & Counselling Services
University of Guelph

The University of Bradford has an ongoing project to engage students considering or having recently accepted, a place at the University. There is “[Develop Me](#)”, a social networking “[NING](#)” site where students can sign up and connect with other potential students, and where some Schools have put pre-entry learning materials. There is a pre-enrolment portal where students can check/update personal information before confirming enrolment status and pre-allocation of computer accounts to avoid first-week hiccups.

Contact: Sara Marsh
Director of Learner Support Services
University of Bradford

The University of Guelph-Humber (UGH) ensures contact with students, even before they have definitely decided to become students. UGH uses a “prospect management system” to communicate in an ongoing and personalised way with enquirers, as soon as they contact the University. Once a prospective student applies, they are invited to join the on-line community which enables them to chat with current students, staff, and other applicants on a message board and discuss life at the University. The University also runs Kick Start a one-day on-campus summer orientation program for incoming students and their families. Incoming first years are assigned mentors - “**students who have managed it themselves**” who are in contact with them in the summer preceding the start of the course as well as throughout their first year at UGH.

Contact: Dr John Walsh
Vice-Provost
University of Guelph-Humber

The **University of Chester (England)** offers a package of pre-entry and on-programme support to international students as part of an integrated 'Culture Shock' programme facilitated by international mentors. Pre-entry students are sent a comprehensive information pack about the university and UK culture (see also [section F](#)).

James Cook University (Australia) developed 'Happy Landing', a pre-departure, interactive tool offering a collection of resources for international students providing a friendly, attractive web interface.

C. Academic/campus orientation

As ⁴Gordon (2008) recorded “there is widespread interest in a range of aspects of the nature, purposes, character and enhancement of the first year undergraduate experience in HE”. Earlier Enhancement Theme activity has identified and considered a range of practice designed to orient and engage students, particularly first year students, and this is not repeated here. Effective orientation to the institution and academic life is clearly a key way to enable subsequent student success.

From the pre-entry course for anxious students, described above, the **University of Winchester** has developed Headstart - introduced in 2008-09 - **a new form of induction process**, taking place in Week 0, and including all first year students. Online enrolment and pre-entry registration has freed up time which new students previously spent queuing and Headstart capitalises on this. Each new student is allocated to a team of 30, headed up by two student guides recruited from second and third year. The student guides seek out the new students in their team on the day of their arrival and make sure each student has enrolled. Over the following three days, the student guides escort their students through a series of events which include registration, a campus trail, an assignment planning session, role play sessions and fun activities (organised by the Students Union) such as dance, self-defence, chocolate tasting and steel drums. The University has put considerable time into training and preparing student guides for the event. Headstart incorporates study skills, “socialising” aspects (e.g. life skills sessions including role plays for living and working together) and fun sessions. The aim of Headstart is to help students integrate more quickly; provide a cohesive framework across year groups and to enable commuting students to make friends more easily. A further, and explicit, aim is that University staff can identify frail or at-risk students early.

The programme is new and the University commentator already considers it to be a success with a marked increase in the numbers of students signing up for support and study skills courses and fewer visibly upset students during the opening weeks of term. There have been notably talented student guides, acting over and beyond their remit to make the new students feel welcome and included. The University hopes to use these students to help train student guides for next year.

Contact: Rosie Johnson
Study Skills Coordinator
University of Winchester

Every February, **the University of Sydney** undertakes two parallel and complementary streams of orientation activity - the [Sydney Welcome Orientation and Transition \(SWOT\) Program](#) provided by the University and [O-Week](#) which is run by the University of Sydney Union and primarily involves the student organisations, Sydney Sport, clubs and societies and bands and other social events. The University and student organisations liaise closely. When the SWOT and O-Week websites are live there are reciprocal links between the two. In addition, Faculties are critical in their orientation and support of students and many have

⁴ Gordon, G 2008 Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience page 6 QAA

developed welcomes and social “mixers” to assist their students meet staff, senior students, as well as other incoming students within the faculty. These events fall under the SWOT project banner.

The SWOT project aims specifically at first year incoming undergraduate students, both local and international and the University views Orientation Week as the starting point for ensuring student success. SWOT information and activities are organised under four themes:

- creating a platform for academic success;
- adapting to life at Sydney;
- creating freedom and independence; and
- making friends and contacts.

Each year a dedicated website goes live and intending students begin to be directed to the SWOT site from mid December, to coincide with their High School Certificate results, the University information day in early January, and the enrolment period in late January. The information on the site should assist them to find their way to the University, orient themselves geographically to the campus, and to find their way to the various SWOT and USU event locations. This information is regularly updated and the majority of visitors to the site bookmark it as a resource to return to, and may continue to use the information with this link beyond the lifetime of the SWOT site being updated. At this point, students are directed to the Orientation pages of the Student Administration and Support site for clarification about any newly emerging orientation issues. SWOT is therefore seen by the University as being part of the whole first-year student life cycle, beyond O-Week. Ongoing activities for first-year students, both centrally and within faculties, run throughout the academic year. In the second semester, SWOT (Re) Orientation is held to assist students who may have missed out on SWOT earlier in the year, who may require 'booster' information about resources, or who may be part of the mid-year intake to access the resources and transition information.

A booklet outlining the SWOT program is sent out to approximately 5,000 local students once they have enrolled in their courses. Around 1500 international students receive a SWOT booklet in their arrivals pack, when they reach the University. The SWOT project encompasses the faculty welcomes, official welcome to the University, keys to success seminars, library tours, ICT tours etc. All of these components are geared to assisting the students become aware of the resources required to make the best social and academic adjustment possible. The booklet and website highlight that this adjustment is an ongoing process, that the resources they are encountering through the SWOT week may not have salience for them until further down the track (such as when they need to submit their first assignment, or purchase their textbooks for example) and this is one of the reasons the SWOT site stays alive until the end of March. By the end of March, most of the lectures, tutorials and lab rotations will have occurred, the course information will have been distributed, and semester deadlines handed out.

The first 4-6 weeks are the critical timeframe for the SWOT site. If students decide to withdraw from their studies, or change courses within their degree program, it needs to occur within this window.

There is Marketing and Student Recruitment and Alumni representation in the SWOT Project Group and ongoing activities for first year students both centrally and within Faculties throughout the academic year. First year events run throughout the year to assist with ongoing adjustment to University life and include faculty events, peer support groups and mentoring programs. The Learning Centre and Counselling Service offer workshops tailored specifically to the needs of the first year student.

In July, in the second semester, SWOT (Re)Orientation is held to assist students who may have missed out on SWOT earlier in the year (job demands frequently preventing attendance), students who may require 'booster' information about resources, or who may be part of the mid year intake to access the resources and transition information. The University has found that for this mid year intake the SWOT (Re) Orientation website is the most effective means of relaying information, and face to face sessions are not required. About 200 local students and a higher number of international students, come through this route.

In tandem, the University of Sydney Union holds Re-O day in second semester and this serves as an opportunity for currently enrolled, as well as newly enrolling, students to join the USU and sporting clubs and societies, and has a social focus.

The University commentator considered that both the academic and social aspects of university life are vital to an engaged and successful transition to the University, and so the Union and SWOT programs run in parallel.

Contact: Jordi Austin
Head Counselling Service
SWOT Convenor
University of Sydney

The University wide involvement in SWOT is coordinated by the [SWOT Project Group](#) which meets twice a year to review orientation activities and plan the following Semester's activities.

Other orientation activities include [Orientation Week at the University of Guelph](#), which offers a **combination of social, co-curricular and classroom activities** co-ordinated by the Centre for New Students documented in an Orientation Guide/Handbook for New Students available in hard copy and online.

At **Griffith University (Australia)**, the First Year Advisor is responsible for coordinating a minimum half day of academic orientation for new students, including clarifying student expectations of higher education and the university, providing clear and accurate information about the programme in which they have enrolled, requirements for satisfactory progress, and so on

All first year students at the **University of Western Australia** are assigned a mentor as part of **an integrated suite of five programmes** (UniStart, UniMentor, UniDiscovery, UniAccess, UniSkills) designed to promote student success, particularly commencing students.

Contact: Barry Townshend, MSW, RSW
Manager, Centre for New Students
Student Life & Counselling Services
University of Guelph

Contact: Associate Professor Keithia Wilson
Chair Educational Excellence Committee
Griffith University

Contact: Judith Skene
Manager of Student Support Services
University of Western Australia
[website](#)

The Momentum program at the **University of Guelph (Canada)** is intended to help new students - particularly those most 'at risk' - to more quickly engage in academic activities by creating a seamless transition from the well-established programmes covering summertime, to Orientation Week, to regular academic life. The program aims to shift the perception of orientation as a discrete collection of events occurring during the first week of September to an ongoing process designed to equip new students with the tools they need to make successful transitions throughout the first year. Momentum aims to: create an atmosphere where academic success is realistically appraised, valued and discussed openly by new students; provide new students with the tools to chart their way through the academic transition from high school to university learning; strengthen problem-solving, assertiveness, self-reflection and effective information-seeking skills; increase familiarity with campus resources that support learning success; increase proactive (rather than reactive) use

D. Library and information resource services

Libraries and information resource centres are important buildings for higher education institutions and often considered to be “the heart of the campus”. The research identified two particularly interesting, large scale, integrated examples of Learning/Information Commons.

The University of Guelph, [Learning Commons](#) is a partnership model which brings together a range of services (learning, writing, research, numeracy, and use of technology) in one location (the library) to improve the quality of learning on campus. In addition Learning Commons staff work with academic staff and teaching assistants to help them enhance learning in their courses. Over half of all first year students attend programs in the fall semester. The Learning Commons provided over 400 workshops and special programming for undergraduate and graduate students and over 200 discipline-specific workshops in courses at the request of academic staff during the past fall and winter. Peer Helpers are a strong feature of the University of Guelph (see below) and the Learning Commons uses a cadre of highly-trained Peer Helpers, described by the University as “academically successful students selected to reflect a wide cross section of University disciplines”, to deliver several of its services. There are currently three services in the Learning Commons that have Peer Helpers:

- Learning Services: 14 Learning Peers
- The Supported Learning Groups Program: 35 SLG Leaders
- Writing and ESL Services: nine Writing Peers
- The University is currently piloting a discipline specific approach in which four new Learning Peer Helpers will be recruited, trained and hired to work specifically with Engineering students.

The Learning Commons also supports a series of weekly **review sessions attached to traditionally difficult courses**. These Supported Learning Groups are provided for any student in first-third year who wishes to improve their understanding of the course materials. Again they are facilitated by a peer helper - who will have previously undertaken the course and obtained an “A”.

Contact: Nancy Schmidt
Director, Learning Commons Programs

The University of Auckland’s brand new [Kate Edger Information Commons](#) was opened in 2003 and was commended by the [New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit](#) in 2004. Aimed at undergraduates, it represented an immediate and huge increase in desk space and computer access for students. It comprises electronic information resources - over 500 computer terminals - materials and software. The University Library’s short-loan collection, the Student Learning Centre and the English Language Self Access Centre are co-located in the Learning Commons. It aims to be a “student-centred” and “student friendly” facility with a variety of different study spaces (e.g. with group work and noisy space on lower levels whilst in the designated quiet study spaces on levels 3 and 4 there is “absolutely NO talking, whispering cell phones or music permitted”). There are lots of terminals and printers. Student helpers are employed to roam the Information Commons and answer questions.

The Information Commons was deliberately sited across the road from the Library and adjacent to the Students’ Association and the Student Services building. This part of the

campus was “already a hub for students” and the University aimed to capitalise on this by adding to the complement of student-related facilities. These services are “linked by crossovers and plazas”. From its opening day, the Information Commons has been “immensely popular with students”.

The Information Commons is under the control of the University Librarian and the Library is managed through the academic route whilst IT is generally managed through the Director of Administration. The Library and IT work closely together, and integrated desktop and desktop supports are features of the Information Commons.

Contact: Professor Raewyn Dalziel
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
University of Auckland

Southampton Solent University in England undertook a small and interesting initiative using “library ambassadors” to secure longer opening times, in response to demand from students for longer and late night library opening. The Learning and Information Service trained 20 “library ambassador” students to provide front line support for other students during these times. The process of selection was thorough - applicants had to participate in a formal process akin to applying for a job and there are clear expectations of the role of library ambassador. The University commentator considers this formal approach is important to impress upon them the need for commitment and reliability and so boost their employability skills and experience. Employment of this nature also “changes the student's relationship with the University” and they enjoy finding out how things work behind the scenes. They involved the students’ union fully in the selection and interviewing process. The University is using the success of this initiative to develop others where students can provide a useful service, earn money and improve their skills.

Contact: Elizabeth Selby
Acting Dean
Learning and Information Service
Southampton Solent University

E. Range and balance of services

Different higher education institutions have different models with a different balance of roles and responsibilities for central and departmental support services, academic staff and the students' association. This section considers examples of how institutions manage student services and different forms of personal tutor systems.

Structure of student services

In 2004, following a review of student engagement, the University of Bradford, England reorganised into two Directorates: the more “administrative” student service functions, such as accommodation, admissions, registry and student finance joined the Academic Administration Directorate. The **new Learner Support Services Directorate** now comprises the more directly student-facing support services: the Library, IT services (including Management Information Services MIS), careers, counselling, disability, Learner Development Unit, Teaching Quality Enhancement Group, Graduate School and staff development. It now represents an example of “super-convergence” which “the Society of College, National and University Libraries ([SCONUL](#)) identified...as a key theme ...it is described as 'defining and implementing new organisational structures around academic support (wider than library and IT convergence) by the integration of library services with other areas of student support),' (Enright, 2006)”.

Contact: Sara Marsh
Director of Learner Support Services
University of Bradford

Reference

Marsh, S 2008 From Learning to Learner: the role of Learner Support Services in the Bradford student experience In Weaver M. (ed) *Transformative Learning Support Models in Higher Education: Educating the Whole Student* Facet Publishing

At the University of Winchester, England, Student Services incorporates enrolment, induction, study skills and all support services. It is also **integrated into the academic side** of the University, overseeing the personal tutor system and careers within the curriculum. The Director of Student Services chairs the Enrolment Strategy Group whose role it is to plan the enrolment and induction of all new students to the University. All reporting on enrolment and induction is passed to the Senior Management Group, Learning and Teaching Committee and the Student Affairs Committee.

Contact: Rosie Johnson
Study Skills Coordinator
University of Winchester

At the Victoria University of Wellington, most traditional student services and the Library are managed within the remit of the Deputy Vice Chancellor. However, to ensure that all services which affect students are considered coherently, the University established a more

broadly-based **Student Experience Group** (SEG) which comprises representatives from Information Technology, the International office and the Students' Union. The SEG meets every month and is involved in a number of initiatives including taking forward the University's aim to help students gain key skills and attributes.

Contact: Professor David Mackay
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Victoria University of Wellington

Bournemouth University is currently restructuring its Academic-related Services and Student Services - comprising around 15 different Departments, into a single "Student Experience" unit of around 5 Departments.

Contact: Hugh Fleming
Senior Lecturer and Learner Support Tutor (Peer Assisted Learning and Student Development)
Bournemouth University

At Queen's University, Canada, the Coordinator of Community Service-Learning reports jointly to the Associate Vice-Principal and Dean of Student Affairs and to the Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning. The opportunity for the Coordinator to report to senior people, and to **traverse Student Affairs and Academic Affairs**, is unusual and brings a range of benefits to the way that community service learning can be conducted. The Coordinator is able to frame a range of different projects in the best possible context for all involved (e.g. projects can include a research-intensive element and be carried out in the context of an academic course. The interviewee considers this provides a broader range of options than traditionally structured community service learning units would be able to offer and also reduces fatigue on community organisations as they are dealing with a single officer in the University. Having the ear of two key senior people also enables the post holder to move swiftly and capitalise on opportunities as they happen.

Contact: Matthew Ascah
Coordinator of Community Service-Learning
Queen's University
Canada

From 2000-2005 the University of Hong Kong reformed its student support services from a "highly administrative" service into a more **developmental range of services**, more closely allied to "whole person development." Initially this involved the Office of Student Affairs, Personal Development and Counselling Centre and the Careers Education and Placement Centre. The focus was on student development across all these areas (e.g. the Personal Development and Counselling Centre oriented itself more towards educational programmes to help students grow, rather than remediate for problems, and the Careers Education and Placement Centre oriented itself to running workshops on careers and development of skills needed for employment, rather than simply finding students a job). The focus was also changed to a more service oriented approach through ISO9000 accreditation. The University revamped its brand, so that the external image portrayed was one of education, service and support for students. A (physical) help desk, amalgamating all the departments, was

introduced; also a unified website and a more casual, social look to the physical facilities instituted. Significantly the final aspect for the reforms involved the Department of General Education integrating with Student Affairs/Services into the one-stop **Centre for Educational Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS)**.

The broader mission was to make the campus a place of activity, a place that students would want to come to, whether they are students of the University, potential students, staff, or even members of the general public. The “campus education” is thus integrated with both a public relations approach, as well as a closer “town-gown” community integration approach. The role of service units therefore moved away from providing support services to students, to providing this as well as an educational environment within which students can live and develop. This mission is at the heart of the “broad education” moves that pervade teaching and learning at all levels.

Contact: Professor John Spinks
Special Adviser to the Vice Chancellor
University of Hong Kong

Personal tutoring

In response to an analysis of staff and student feedback, periodic review, etc the University of Leeds introduced a new unified approach to personal tutoring in 2008. The aim was to develop a “distinctive Leeds model” to meet demands of new era of HE. A key aim has been to reflect the strategy and values of the University by embedding the University values within the **personal tutoring system**. In this model, the academic tutor is placed “at the centre of the delivery of personal tutoring”. Students had expressed “a clear need for an individual academic as their first point of contact” although staff are invited to refer students onto a more appropriate source of guidance where necessary. The new approach specified some minimum requirements:

- the personal tutor will be an academic member of staff;
- the personal tutor will play a distinctive core role in the delivery of personal tutoring, aimed at supporting the student’s general academic and personal development;
- the personal tutor will hold one-to-one meetings with tutees; and
- the one-to-one meetings will be scheduled at regular points of the academic year.

The minimum is intended to be adapted by local Schools to suit their circumstances. Personal tutoring at the University is fully embedded within the wider Leeds for Life initiative (see A, above) and personal tutors are expected to use the resources on the Leeds for Life website and to both draw students’ attention to them, and work jointly with students using some of the tools and resources.

Contact: Dr Clara M.A. Davies
Senior Academic Staff Development Officer
Staff and Departmental Development Unit
University of Leeds

Following a reorganisation at Southampton Solent University, England, the personal tutor system was replaced by the establishment in each Faculty of a **Student Support Network Officer (SSNO)**. The Officer reports in at Associate Dean level and acts a front line for

students and provides an overview back to the University of “how are we supporting students?” The Learning and Information Service (LIS) runs the network and senior student support services staff sit on the network committee. The University sees this as “a bridge to link LIS to Faculties”. LIS operates a drop-in advice centre for all students but also has links to Faculties so can refer students back to their Faculty, where necessary. LIS works closely with the students’ union in these activities.

In addition to the network of SSNO officers, there are peer support groups so students have multiple points of contact for support. Attendance is monitored and the appropriate SSNO is alerted to any relevant matters.

Contact: Elizabeth Selby
Acting Dean
Learning and Information Service
Southampton Solent University

As the largest university in Ireland, spread over two campuses, University College Dublin has a highly **decentralised system for supporting students**. Of the team of 13 [Student Advisers](#), 10 are located around the campuses and are attached and embedded in one of the five academic colleges. Two specialist advisers providing other support services are based with the Director of Access and one adviser is based in the International Office. Formally, the Student Advisers report to the relevant college principals or their nominee (most report to the Vice Principal for Teaching & Learning in the College). They are paid from the college budget and derive their own budgets from the college. The interviewee considered that this leads to buy-in from staff and students who feel ownership of the Adviser. They also have “a dotted line reporting relationship” to the Vice President for Students. Student Advisers act as the first point of contact - academic staff are not formally involved in advising students, although some academic programmes also assign personal tutors to students.

In most cases each student adviser also has at least one University-wide specialism and/or project (e.g. first year orientation, peer mentoring). They are also heavily involved in University committees (e.g. student experience committee, first year experience committee, health promotion, student welfare and so on). Where student advisers are not knowledgeable about an issue, they refer the case on to a colleague with expertise “we act as a hub and refer students on to various services, particularly counselling, but also to the other support services on campus”. To ensure coherence, and to share information and experience, Student Advisers meet twice a month as a group to discuss issues around campus. Twice each semester the Vice-President for Students convenes a meeting of all the student services-related professionals.

Contact: Colleen Blaney Doyle
Student Adviser
University College Dublin

F. Engaging students: building student communities and a sense of belonging

There are some interesting initiatives underway to help specific groups of students engage with higher education. This section considers students with disabilities, international students and at risk students.

Students with disabilities

Research demonstrates that the incidence of dyslexia is far higher among art students and the Arts Institute at Bournemouth, England, has a high proportion of students with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties (116 of 994). Most of these students' difficulties have gone undiagnosed throughout the students' compulsory education. AIB pro-actively identifies students with dyslexia -through comprehensively screening all incoming students. This enables the Institute to provide support for students at the earliest opportunity, whilst also avoiding the damaging and demoralising scenario of waiting until students are struggling before referring them for support. In addition, a recent National Audit Office report on retention notes that many HEIs reported difficulties in getting their students through the application process for the Disabled Students' Allowances. In direct response to the lengthy DSA process the Arts Institute is collaborating with the University of Southampton's DSA Assessment Centre to provide a "fast track" system. Originally launched at the Skill annual conference in 2006, this process demonstrates how institutions can work in partnership to bring about reduced waiting times for students as they progress through the DSA process.

Contact: Heidi Cooper-Hind
Head of Student Services
The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

In addition to the general **support offered to students with disabilities**, Leicester University has several other measures in place:

- the University supports students from the point at which it knows that they have a disability, not just from the point that their Disabled Students' Allowance is invoked - e.g. through one to one support, note-taking, etc;
- the Welfare service administers a taxi account so that students who need taxis get the service, do not have to worry about cash flow and the Welfare service recoups money when the Disabled Students' Allowance comes through;
- the University has a collection of equipment and some software which it lends to students - e.g. 5 laptop computers, 20 or so digital recorders, 8 Alphasmarts, tape recorders and tape recorders for blind students;
- a project focussed on employability issues which arise for disabled students including a work placement scheme; and
- in-house support for specific learning difference students and those with Asperger syndrome.

Contact: Dr Paula B Dobrowolski
Head, AccessAbility Centre
David Wilson Library
University of Leicester

International students

The University of Chester offers a **package of pre-entry and on-programme support** to international students including the “Culture Shock” programme of social events facilitated by international mentors. These are international and UK home students trained to provide mentoring and support to international students. Pre-entry - students are sent a comprehensive information pack about the University and UK culture. On arrival International students are offered a meet-and-greet service followed up by the “Culture Shock” programme. The social programme is supported by a fortnightly drop in session where students have an opportunity to talk with the international student welfare officer and other international students about any issues which they are facing. This programme is in addition to standard welfare support. The University reports that student feedback has been positive.

Contact: Paula Harrison
Head of Student Welfare
University of Chester

[START](#) International, at the University of Guelph, is a **half-day program** offered on the Friday prior to general residence move-in. It is co-ordinated by the Office of Intercultural Affairs and is designed to help around 100 international and exchange students acclimatise ahead of the arrival of all new students. The scheme delivers practical information and exposure to a range of campus services and provides the opportunity for some social networking. Following feedback from participants, that they have found the experience valuable but overwhelming, the program has been scaled back to a half day from a full day. A small group of parents are also often around during this event and the University may take them to a separate room and answer questions, provide an overview of the University and the student experience, and then information about shops, restaurants and sights in the local area so that they can settle in and explore.

Contact: Barry Townshend
Manager, Centre for New Students
Student Life & Counselling Services
University of Guelph

James Cook University, Australia, developed “Happy Landing”, a pre-departure, interactive tool providing a **collection of resources for International students** providing a friendly, attractive web interface.

Contact: Maureen Bourke
Support Team Manager
James Cook University

“At risk” students

The **Momentum** program at the University of Guelph, is being implemented from 2008-09 as a response to the increasingly diverse student population. It is intended to help new students

- particularly those most 'at risk' - to more quickly engage in academic activities by creating a seamless transition from the well-established programmes covering summertime, to Orientation Week, to regular academic life. In response to student feedback and experience, Momentum, takes a multi-faceted approach that encourages a variety of modes of participation designed to equip new students with the tools they need to make successful transitions throughout the first year. The program aims to shift the perception of Orientation as a discrete collection of events occurring during the first week of September to an ongoing process designed to equip new students with the tools they need to make successful transitions throughout the first year. Momentum aims to: create an atmosphere where academic success is realistically appraised, valued and discussed openly by new students; provide new students with the tools to chart their way through the academic transition from high school to university learning; strengthen problem-solving, assertiveness, self-reflection and effective information-seeking skills; increase familiarity with campus resources that support learning success; increase proactive (rather than reactive) use of programs and services by new students; and improve help-seeking.

Contact: Barry Townshend Manager, Centre for New Students
[Student Life & Counselling Services](#)

Victoria University of Wellington runs a programme called “**Campus Coaches**” which is designed to help new students make a smooth transition to University life. It employs senior volunteer students to be Coaches and they are assigned particularly to students who are in the first six weeks of their University study since this is identified as a period where there is the greatest risk of them abandoning study. Any first year student can ask to have a Campus Coach. An esprit de corps also develops between the Coaches and it provides an opportunity for them to obtain valuable skills such as leadership and communication and to develop a sense of social responsibility.

Contact: Professor David Mackay
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Victoria University of Wellington

G. Academic peer support and mentoring

The research uncovered several examples where institutions value and utilise their students as an intellectual resource, involving them in academic-related roles including structured mentoring, advising, tutoring and facilitating. The use of peers to support other learners is common practice in North America and Australia in particular.

The University of Guelph “**Peer Helper Program**” (PHP) comprises more than 200 Peers working in 30 different units. It was described by a practitioner in the Ontario sector as “one of the best in the country” and the University itself claims that it is “the largest university-based para-professional helping program in Canada”. The PHP coordinates the selection and general training of students to work side by side with professionals to offer a diverse range of support programs and services for students. Peers are primarily undergraduate students who perform a range of duties and responsibilities including: working with students one-to-one; developing and presenting workshops; planning programs and events; creating resources; and referring students to campus and community resources.

The initiative is co-ordinated centrally and the Program Office approves all Peer Helper placements, is responsible for core training and orientation for all new Peers, and administers the payment of Peer honorariums. Unit supervisors hire Peers for their unit, provide them with training and support throughout their placements, conduct performance reviews, and provide letters of recommendation.

Peer Helpers have the opportunity to register for a notation on their official transcript acknowledging their involvement in a service learning program. Peers also receive a modest honorarium each semester in recognition of their contributions. Additional incentives include access to computers and office space and subsidised training programs. In many areas Peers may be promoted to Senior Peer Helper roles and in some units they can participate in a practicum experience for academic credit. Peers are also recognised each year for academic excellence and community participation through the presentation of several awards and scholarships.

Contact: Nancy Schmidt
Director, [Learning Commons Programs](#)
University of Guelph

The University of Bergen Faculty of Law restructured its curriculum in 2003 to introduce more **problem-based learning, structured feedback and making use of peer mentors** into its undergraduate curriculum. There is a strong practical element to the coursework and each module ends with a final examination. There is an annual intake of approximately 350 - 380 students, divided into groups of 10. In the first two years they have an “older” pedagogical trained law student as their group leader, in the third year the students have to manage themselves. During each module the students have five to eight group meetings (of two hours) to undertake specific tasks. After each meeting they have to write an individual paper (approx 700 - 1000) words. Related to this, there is a dual feedback system:

- Students write approximately 30 papers during each academic year and in First year have one-to-one feedback on individual bases.
- In addition, each group selects a member who meets the professor responsible for the module twice during the module, for two hours, where they discuss all activities in the module from learning outcomes to lectures and literature.

The University commentator considers that this approach is adaptable to other discipline areas.

Contact: Lars Skjold Wilhelmsen
Educational Adviser
University of Bergen

In Australia the [Peer Assisted Study Sessions \(PASS\) program](#) (University of Wollongong and others) is a program, led by trained and accredited staff, where students work together to consolidate understanding, reinforce key concepts, and develop effective study strategies. The University of Wollongong supports every faculty with PASS (currently the only institution in Australia to do so). At Wollongong PASS consists of weekly one-hour, non-compulsory sessions led by Peer Leaders, students who have excelled at the subject in the past. PASS is provided for all students who want to improve their understanding of course material and improve their grades. The University is the National Centre for PASS in Australia, and offers training for other institutions. The University considers it offers the most diverse PASS program in Australia, servicing all faculties across the University and it has been commended by national and international experts for “best practice” in operating a PASS program.

Contact: Sally Rogan (National PASS Trainer for the Australasia region)
Manager First Year & Transition Programs Student Services
University of Wollongong

The University of Manchester uses and benefits from two complementary **Peer Support programmes: Peer Mentoring and Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)**. Both programmes encourage partnership between students and staff and benefit from student leadership. PASS derives from the global ‘Supplemental Instruction (SI)’ model developed at the University of Missouri, Kansas City in 1973. The University of Manchester predominantly uses PASS to support the first year student experience. Trained, higher year, volunteer students (PASS Leaders) facilitate collaborative, exploratory discussions, encouraging deeper conceptual understanding of fundamental academic principles and increasing academic confidence rather than superficial strategic learning. PASS does not replace any form of interaction between staff and students but instead provides additional opportunity for all students to interact with their peers.

The benefits of the programme are wide, enhancing the student experience, developing effective study skills and decreasing attrition. PASS benefits first year students because it is “supportive, non-threatening and non-remedial”, providing social opportunities and increases academic confidence and develops transferable study techniques and interpersonal skills. It benefits the PASS leaders by developing their skills and employability, giving them the opportunity to reflect, review and re-evaluate, and rewarding and recognising their contribution. The scheme also provides an additional mechanism for feedback between teaching staff and students fosters a sense of community and improves academic performance.

The University of Manchester is the National Benchmark for PASS/SI and is developing the UK SI/PASS National Centre that will provide training and support to institutions and practitioners.

Contacts:

Marcia Ody, Teaching and Learning Manager, The University of Manchester
William Carey, Teaching and Learning Adviser, The University of Manchester

See also: Fostier M, Carey W (2007). Exploration, Experience and Evaluation: Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS), sharing the experience of The University of Manchester - 480 1st year Bioscience students. Proceedings of the Science Teaching and Learning Conference 2007 p143.

[Website](#)

RMIT University, Australia introduced **Student Learning Advisor Mentors (SLAMs)** in 2005. Since then the program has grown into what the University considers to be a “sustainable and valued service by both staff and students”. Through this scheme student in second and third year provide academic support to 1st year students in a designated SLAMs room at scheduled times. There is a feedback loop to academic staff and the SLAMs themselves get academic credit. Based on this success the University has begun a pilot project offering a targeted group of students, in one particular discipline, learning support - embedding this support and academic learning skills into the curriculum - as a combined effort between SLAMs, Study and Learning Support and academic staff. This will be evaluated at the end of the semester to see if it has been effective and if it is a sustainable model.

Contact: Lila Kemlo
Manager Student Learning Support
Academic Development Group
RMIT

[Peer Assisted Learning \(PAL\)](#) at Bournemouth University is now a well established scheme that has been running since 2001. PAL is intended to “foster cross-year support between students on the same course. It aims to help first year students: adjust quickly to university life; acquire a clear view of course direction and lecturers’ expectations; develop their independent learning and study skills to meet the requirements of their course; improve their understanding of the subject matter of their course; and prepare better for assessed work and examinations.

In PAL, trained second year undergraduates, called PAL Leaders, facilitate regular, weekly, timetabled sessions with groups of 15-30 first year students. PAL sessions are intended to be planned, structured and purposeful while being, at the same time, supportive and friendly. There is an emphasis on co-operative learning and collaborative group discussion.

For the academic year 2008-09, the PAL scheme is available to approximately 1,700 first year students at Bournemouth, supported by 150 PAL leaders. When the scheme first started attendance at PAL sessions was voluntary. However, this resulted in low levels of take-up. Now PAL sessions appear in first year students’ timetables alongside their lectures, workshops or lab sessions. This promotion of PAL, as a normal part of the student’s learning activities, has been “key” to high levels of participation according to the interviewee.

PAL Leaders are paid (currently, around £8 per hour) for their work in the sessions, with additional payments made for preparation and review, and attendance at follow-up training sessions which build upon the two-day initial training programme. Leaders are also paid to attend regular meetings with a member of the teaching team from the course who contextualises PAL to better suit the needs of students on the course. Academic credit is not given for this work although it is possible to gain separate accreditation as a PAL leader.

There is some demand from second year students to receive PAL assistance from third or fourth year students. However, these students are involved in industrial placements and dissertations and the University does not want to distract them from this. Nonetheless the PAL leaders themselves are increasingly being mentored by former PAL Leaders now in the final year of their studies.

The scheme began with high-level institutional commitment and HEFCE funding under Phase 3 of the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL3). The University had originally experimented with a peer tutoring scheme and various forms of mentoring scheme, but found that the quality of student tutors was highly variable so it has settled on “assisted learning” whereby PAL Leaders are facilitating rather than teaching.

PAL operates as a partnership between a central service unit called Academic Services, and the academic Schools. Input from Academic Services focuses on initial and follow-up training for Leaders, co-ordination of recruitment, general support, observation of PAL sessions together with formative feedback to Leaders following observation, and advice to staff and course teaching teams. The academic Schools are responsible for paying the Leaders, timetabling the PAL sessions into their courses, and providing support to Leaders through a Course PAL Contact whose role is to fine-tune the general principles upon which PAL is based and contextualise PAL to the specific requirements of the course.

As outlined at A, above, Bournemouth University is currently restructuring its Professional Services from 15 different departments down to 5. PAL is expected to reside within the newly formed service called Student and Academic Services.

Contact: Hugh Fleming
Senior Lecturer and Learner Support Tutor (Peer Assisted Learning and Student Development)
Bournemouth University

Queen’s University, Canada, with an overwhelming proportion of the first year population staying on campus, is using the “Dons” (the assistant students who live in halls of residence), proactively to communicate with students about learning styles and strategies, within the residences.

Contact: Matthew Ascah
Coordinator of Community Service-Learning
Queen’s University, Canada

As well as offering one-to-one peer tutoring support, the University of Guelph-Humber has a cadre of Learning Support Peers (LSPs). These are current students trained to assist and support newer students as they make important decisions that relate to their academic

career. LSPs assist in the delivery of learning skills workshops, Career Service information sessions, and a variety of other learning support workshops.

Contact: Dr John Walsh
Vice-Provost
University of Guelph-Humber

H. Roles played by students' associations/unions

Many students' associations and unions complement their social role with a range of other support and welfare activities. The research uncovered some examples - all in the UK - of some key activities run solely by the students' association or jointly with the institution.

The University of Bradford is currently developing a **new partnership** with its Students' Union whereby funds are allocated to the Students' Union in return for meeting agreed key performance indicators (e.g. relating to training for student course reps, volunteering/society/sports opportunities for students). The University commentator also reports very close working between the Students' Union and the Learning Support Services. The Head of Learner Development and Student Engagement is the key liaison person between the Students Union and University senior managers.

Contact: Sara Marsh
Director of Learner Support Services
University of Bradford

Enterprise SU, at Queen's University Belfast, is an enterprise and employability unit located at the entrance to the Students' Union. Launched in November 2007, this "prime location" was deliberately chosen to "interrupt the attention of students as research indicates that approximately 90% of students use the Students' Union on a weekly basis. The unit is open plan and designed as a space that reflects its users: i.e. students. Plasma screens with information on employability and enterprise opportunities operate 24/7. A variety of organisations and employers use this space to promote opportunities linked to enterprise and employability for students. Internally academic departments within the University and student clubs and societies also make use of it to engage students outside of the lecture theatre.

Enterprise SU was developed as one means of delivering the University's wider skills and employability strategy (see section A, above). Following the establishment of the Northern Ireland Centre for Entrepreneurship (NICENT) in 2000, entrepreneurship has been embedded in the undergraduate curriculum for Science and Engineering subjects and in 2007-8 entrepreneurship was rolled out to students in Humanities and Social Sciences. The University formally recognises entrepreneurship through a University Certificate in Entrepreneurship Studies and 2000 students achieve this Certificate every year upon graduating.

As a result of student engagement within the curriculum demand was created for students who wanted to engage in enterprise at the next level. The Unit hosts events, seminars and activities associated with these topics and brings in external experts to support student needs, such as business advisors from Local Enterprise Agencies etc. The Societies and Enterprise Coordinator through Enterprise SU, offers business advice, support and signposting to students who are developing business ideas or starting a business. There are strong links with the curriculum and, in turn, the Unit can complement the academic curriculum by hosting activities on particular themes being focused on within the classroom (e.g. social enterprise, fair trade). The Unit acts as a portal to encourage students to engage in extra curricular activities that will help develop their enterprise and employability skills and encourage them to seek formal accreditation for their work through the Degree Plus initiative (see [section L](#)).

The Unit manager is a member of the Students' Union staff within the Student Plus Directorate but is fully integrated into the appropriate parts of the University including being a member of the Employability and Skills Implementation Group, Widening Participation Implementation Group and Learning and Teaching Support Group. Being employed by the Students' Union however, allows the unit and staff involved to ensure that events and activities are primarily student led and realistically meeting the needs of Queen's students.

Contact: Denise Murtagh
Societies and Enterprise Coordinator
Queen's University Belfast
[Website](#)

The Works was established in 2005 and is a "one stop shop to provide all University of Exeter students with access to jobs, training and opportunities". It is funded by the University (through the block grant) and directly by the University Careers and Employability Service, and run by the Students' Guild. The Works operates a drop-in centre, signposting students to skills-development courses and part-time casual temporary and vacation job opportunities as well as volunteering opportunities. The Careers and Employability Service retains responsibility for graduate and career employment. Students register with the Works - generally out of a need to find part-time employment - which means The Works has them in its database and "they get the employability email add-ons". There is an online portal for advice to complement the drop-in centre. The Careers and Employability Service uses The Works' accommodation to run courses and seminars.

Prior to 2005, many of these activities had been carried out by the Careers and Employment Service, but this is based outside the centre of the campus and consequently had a low footfall. Together with the Students' Guild it conceived of The Works, which takes advantage of its location in the Guild (and proximity to the popular Ram Bar). The Works Manager is an employee of the Guild but the staff are all paid students. Recruited annually, the interviewee considers these enable the service to be "in touch" and credible with students. Being sited within the Guild allows the service to move more quickly than the University (e.g. if a leaflet is needed). The Works communicates using an informal style and direct presentation of information which students appreciate but which the more formal structures of the University "wouldn't get away with".

A Steering Group comprising The Works Manager, two student sabbatical officers, other Guild managers and University managers including the Director of the Careers and Employment Service, meets three times per year to discuss strategic issues. An Operational Group meets monthly to discuss interface with the University and other relevant matters.

Contact: Leanne Fennell
The Works Manager
University of Exeter Students' Guild

Around 2002, the University of Surrey Students' Union established **DAVE (Development, Accreditation, Volunteering and Employability)**. Based on a (now discontinued) idea from NUS UK - the National Student Learning Programme, DAVE took the materials and adapted them for Surrey students. DAVE is a student training and personal development programme that offers a three tier award - Bronze (basic), Silver (intermediate) and Gold (advanced). Combining core and optional sessions (the latter known as DAVE Extra and Pick and Mix)

on themes like time management, assertiveness, leadership etc, students can build towards a DAVE award. In the past NUS accredited the courses but now the Students' Union does this itself, presenting certificates to the successful students at the end of the academic year.

Much of the training is done by specially-recruited student trainers who themselves are recruited and trained by the DAVE office. A typical trainer would run one session every two weeks. Trainers are unpaid but applications are high as it is a popular activity. The interviewee considered using students as trainers to be a strength of the initiative. It helps students to think "I can do that". There are also strong links with the Careers Service and the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTre), both of which deliver DAVE Extra courses. In addition the Library market some of their academic support sessions through DAVE. External agencies (e.g. the Samaritans on "how to listen") also participate.

DAVE is funded via the Students' Union subvention and receives a proportion of this funding, earmarked for membership services initiatives. The interviewee considers it to be "one of the strong projects that the Student Union is running and helps show the Institution the value-added of a strong Students' Union."

Contact: Kath Jones
Representation and Development Manager
University of Surrey Students' Union

I. Use of technology

Higher education institutions worldwide are experimenting with technology in a range of ways to suit their circumstances in terms of delivering both education and services. There have been some interesting developments in the UK designed to improve access to information for students using the internet. In addition, lecture streaming is commonplace in some parts of the world and some examples are included here.

Information access

Cardiff University is currently developing an approach in which students can have access to information via new media including video-based and other web-based information services accessible from anywhere and at anytime. The University is addressing the challenges of meeting the needs of a large and diverse student population in a large multi-site institution. With their experience of social networking sites, students have an expectation about being able to find information when they need it and in a format, style and language that they want to use and the University is making use of Facebook, among other tools to communicate with students.

Contact: Ben Lewis
Head of Student Advisory Services
Cardiff University

The University of Southampton [Student Resources Network \(SRN\)](#) is the “gateway to all the help and support needed as a student at the University of Southampton. The physical and virtual provision of services and information is only a click or a call away”. It is collaboration between the Library, Information Systems Services, Student Services and academic schools and delivers physical and virtual support resources across all campuses. The website information contains links, contacts and information about all the support services available to students. It is intended to give students enough information to know which service they require and how to get in touch with them. The portal links to a range of internal websites so that students get the original source of information or service to ensure the best service possible. Students can use the online Network to pay fees, check timetables, make room bookings, and check the progress of their enquiries at the Student Services Centre as well as browsing the array of information at any time of the day, wherever they are based. The web presence is only one aspect and the custom built Student Services Centre and School Offices are used well by all students and, the interviewee reported, face-to-face interactions continue to rise year on year. The University is particularly interested in ensuring the Network is attractive and relevant to postgraduate and international students and students on remote campuses to build on its success with undergraduates.

Contact: Janice Rippon
Director of Student Services
University of Southampton

The University of Leeds “[Leeds for Life](#)” (see also [section A](#)) website is a resource for students in all years of study helping them identify and reflect on their skills development and providing information and outlining a range of opportunities including links to individual programme specifications and the co-curriculum offer. Students are expected to use the site in conjunction with their personal tutor as well as on their own. The next phase of the project

will include a means whereby students can save information they have gathered and work they have done through using the Leeds for Life site, within the site itself. The next phase will also evaluate and recommend tools for students and their personal tutors to facilitate development and reflection on their portfolio of skills and attributes.

Contact: Dr Clara M.A. Davies
Senior Academic Staff Development Officer
University of Leeds

Lecture streaming

Lecture streaming - whereby lectures are captured digitally then transmitted live, and/or made available to students to view online or download as podcasts - is a significant practice in some HEIs, particularly those which offer a lot of distance learning and/or which operate over different time zones. At the National University of Singapore students can watch lectures live via "NUScast" and some of these are also open to the general public. Edith Cowan University (Australia) is currently rolling out its "FlexiLecture" project across 40 teaching spaces. The University of Western Australia aims to provide a "high tech, high touch" educational experience and developed "[Lectopia](#)" (now "Echo") which is now available as a commercial product.

Curtin University, Australia, started implementing "[iLectures](#)" in 2005 in an attempt to enrich the learning experience of students by providing online access to digital audio and video content which is captured in lectures. This captured material is made available to students through WebCT (currently migrating to Blackboard), as part of their normal program. The unit recordings can be made in one of the fixed facilities and portable digital recording equipment is also available for lecturers to use in almost any setting. The University commentator considers that the majority of students use the system as a refresher or additional resource to backup their notes but there are also instances where students use the iLecture resources in place of attending lectures. A key benefit is that students can go back and review lectures as many times as they want or download them to a portable device and watch them at their leisure. Particularly challenging material is available in a resource that students can review multiple times or single frame which helps their understanding of complex issues. In 2005, the University had 5 active facilities with 419 recordings that were viewed approximately 8000 times. By 2006 this had grown to 15 facilities which captured 689 records that were viewed approximately 15,000 times. In 2007 they expanded to 30 facilities which captured 1325 records that were viewed 40,000 times. The University is again expanding in 2008.

Contact: Des Thornton
Chief Information Officer
Curtin University of Technology

Contact: Narayanan Shyam
Manager Courseware Centre for Instructional Technology
National University of Singapore

J. Life and study skills

Many institutions in many countries are considering explicitly how to encourage their students to become confident, independent, learners.

The University of Western Australia's Learning, Language and Research Skills team mission is to **foster effective, independent, articulate learners**. The team offers a range of expert services in person, by web resources and in peer groups to improve study and assignment skills. As well as physical resources such as drop in sessions, workshops and peer learning groups, its "Study Smarter" initiative collects and co-ordinates a range of resources and services on its website including:

- "Jump Start" which links together tips and resources on a range of study skills themes, updated weekly during semester.
- Survival Guides offer advice on all the essential skills of communicating, succeeding at assignments, managing projects and research, critical thinking and reading and generic study skills.
- Downloadable templates for time management, project and group work, or exams
- Study Smarter workshop sessions available by podcast
- Discussion board.
- Networks, blogs and chat forums
- [Transition support](#)

Students are encouraged to sign up for a weekly newsletter providing study tips and details of upcoming events and information about Study Smarter programs.

Contact: Judith Skene
Manager of Student Support Services
University of Western Australia
[Website](#)

The "[Bounce Back](#)" program, at the University of Guelph, is jointly run by the Centre for New Students and the Undergraduate Academic Information Centre. It takes place in the winter semester and is designed to **assist first year students with a fall semester average of below 60%**. Participants are paired, one-on-one, with a senior student or staff member and support entails a detailed assessment of challenges, goal-setting and strategies for achieving goals in the coming weeks. A "critical dimension", according to the University commentator, is the offering of tuition credits worth \$1,000 each for the most improved participants in the program. The program pays particular attention to those students who are most at risk of being placed on academic probation or of being required to withdraw at the end of their first year at the University. It also specifically encourages involvement from First Generation Students. In the winter of 2008, Bounce Back was implemented for the second time, receiving a warm reception by students and achieving similar results to its pilot offering in winter 2007. The pilot project was pump-primed by the Government Ministry. In 2008, the student body at the University of Guelph agreed to contribute partial funding via the Student Services Fee, with a top-up from the Ministry.

Contact: Barry Townshend
Manager, Centre for New Students
Student Life & Counselling Services
University of Guelph

When it established its new [Information Commons](#), the University of Auckland sited the [Student Learning Centre](#) therein. The Student Learning Centre in its early days in the 1990s was perceived by students, at least to some extent, to be a remedial service. In 2000, it was given the responsibility of providing central skills support for postgraduate students and in 2006 combined with the School of Graduate Studies and the Academic Practice Group to provide a full skills programme for all doctoral students. The programme includes a compulsory induction module. In 2005 the Student Learning Centre became a constituent section of the Centre for Academic Development along with the Academic Practice group and an e-Learning Design and Development Group. Although retaining its title and its base in the Information Commons, the Student Learning Centre benefits from this integration and wider remit. Postgraduate students are offered good quality courses to help them attain high-level skills and this perceived cachet has transmitted to other activities.

Contact: Professor Raewyn Dalziel
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
University of Auckland

The University of Guelph-Humber, Canada, issues all incoming students with a “**4 Year Plan**” document which contains information on key services and planner with checklist of things to think about during each year of study. The aim is to encourage students to think strategically, from the outset, about where they are going and to widen this thinking out beyond their studies.

Contact: Dr John Walsh
Vice-Provost
University of Guelph-Humber

K. Careers and employability support

Facilitating student employability has undoubtedly become a more explicitly addressed aim in recent years in many countries and institutions. Some examples are given in this section along with a short discussion of e-Portfolios which have evolved to support this practice.

Since 2000, Edge Hill University, Liverpool Hope University and the University of Liverpool England have participated in “Outlook” an award-winning mentoring programme. The initiative has been designed to **support and improve the employability of students from groups at a proven disadvantage in the graduate recruitment process/labour market.** The programme is aimed at black and Asian students, disabled students, those aged 30+ on entry to university and those who are in the first generation in their family to go into higher education. The scheme runs over two years and supports students through direct links to employers via workshops and one-to-one mentoring. Around 140 employers and over 300 students across the three universities, participate.

Contact: Sue Hepworth
Senior Careers Adviser
Edge Hill University

The University of Udine, Italy, runs the “Brief Reports on Nursing Research” (BREN) initiative - an **empowerment programme for Bachelor nursing students.** The University had found from research that new nursing graduates felt stressed and disempowered. BREN allows students and new graduates before they start work, to take the small research projects they would be doing anyway as part of their course (and which will be considered by a University Commission) and present them first to clinical nurses. Then there is an open debate on the relevance of the topic chaired by an expert. The project aims to close the gap between academic and clinical practice setting and gives the nursing students a practice run at presenting their research project and fielding unknown questions, in a supportive and professional environment, prior to facing the University Commission. Feedback from students is positive.

Contact: Alvisa Palese
Associate Professor in Nursing Science
Udine University

The University of Melbourne “**encourages Departments and Faculties to employ students for casual and short-term roles**”. These roles are usually over summer periods or at busy times during the University year. The University offers a substantial range of opportunities to students to work in a variety of roles on campus (e.g. tutors, demonstrators, retail and catering roles etc). Care is taken to ensure that students from the Faculty or Faculties in which they are studying are employed in a different Faculty or areas to avoid conflict of interest. Students are assigned roles which do not involve any tasks which are regarded as 'student' sensitive, e.g. examinations, student records, etc. Confidentiality agreements are signed by the student as part of the recruitment process.

Contact: Gillian Luck
Vice-Principal and Academic Registrar
University of Melbourne

e-Portfolios

A recent survey involving 66 UK HEIs, by the UK Centre for Recording Achievement, found that almost all claimed that PDP had now been implemented in their institution and over three-quarters of these were using some form of electronic tool to support the process. Just over half of HEIs surveyed claimed to have an e-Portfolio tool or system. ([CRA 2007 p. 15](#)) Various definitions exist of the term e-Portfolio. The [JISC e-Portfolio Infokit](#) proposes that the “term encompasses both product and process” defining it as “a purposeful aggregation of digital items - ideas, evidence, reflections, feedback etc, which “presents” a selected audience with evidence of a person’s learning and/or ability.” (from JISC Infokit quoting Sutherland, S and Powell, A 2007 [Cetis SIG mailing list discussions](#) 9 July 2007)

The Faculty of Education at Griffith University, Australia, has introduced, implemented, and reviewed **e-Portfolio approaches with teacher education students** in several courses. The University commentator considers that e-Portfolio approaches are becoming very important for teacher education students and provide a powerful multimedia means by which students can portray their information and provide evidence of deep learning. Griffith is now considering how e-Portfolios could be developed as a means for teacher education students to demonstrate evidence of their meeting the official professional standards required for teacher registration purposes. Through e-Portfolios, students would be able to provide evidence for the standards and include rich multimedia evidence to support the more traditional written application and interview selection processes.

Contact: Dr Glenn Finger
Associate Deputy Dean (Learning and Teaching)
Griffith University

More generally, the [Australian e-Portfolio Project \(AeP\)](#), funded by the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, is a research project being undertaken by four Australian universities:

- Queensland University of Technology
- The University of Melbourne
- The University of New England
- University of Wollongong

The project team also draws on a range of international connections to strive to position Australia on the international e-Portfolio scene and to help inform the development of relevant strategic policy. The project seeks to investigate e-Portfolio practice in the higher education sector in Australia, in order to provide strategic and practical guidance about the use of e-Portfolios in academic institutions.

L. Service learning - volunteering and the co-curriculum

Some institutions offer a vast range of co-curricular opportunities to students. Again North American and Australasian institutions provide particularly rich range of examples of service learning and co-curricular opportunities. There are, however, some UK examples explicitly aimed at providing students with the opportunity to augment their degree.

The University of Western Ontario, Canada strongly promotes “**service learning**” - experiential education in which students engage in structured activities that are intentionally designed to enhance student learning and civic responsibility, while addressing community needs - e.g. volunteering or working for community organisations. The initiative allows students the opportunity to critically reflect on the meaning of the service experience. Service-learning at UWO occurs both in and outwith the context of an academic program. It can therefore be curriculum-based (part of the programme and therefore attracting credit) as well as co-curriculum-based (not part of the programme but UWO is considering whether they may eventually be validated by the University and included on a co-curriculum transcript). UWO is an institution where co-curricular activities are fundamental. Although they are optional, they are a strong part of the package that the institution offers to students. The University commentator reports that they are immensely popular with students.

Contact: John Doerksen
Vice-Provost (Academic Programs & Students)
The University of Western Ontario

Australia’s Macquarie University recently reviewed its teaching programs with a new curriculum being taught from 2010. As part of this all students must undertake some form of “**participation**”. The University is taking a very broad view of what falls under this definition: everything from participating as mentors in (existing) Peer Assisted Learning Programs through work integrated learning to an elite form - the Global Futures Program. Global Futures is the result of an Agreement with a not-for-profit organisation called AVI (Australian Volunteers International) who have been active in the area of placing volunteers in aid programs for over 40 years. Global Futures will support students to participate in aid projects in regional Australia, the Pacific and South East Asia. Students will receive academic credit, not for the actual participation but for a piece of reflective work written about their participation program. Credit will range from 2, 3 or 6 credit points - according to the demands of the assessment (based on the length of the participation). Shorter and local options and the inclusion of work integrated learning to suit different students in different circumstances.

Contact: Barb McLean
Executive Officer
Office of the DVC (Provost)
Macquarie University

In England, the University of York’s “**York Award**” has a strong reputation as an established extra curricular programme of personal development. It provides a framework for students to acquire transferable skills supporting development at university and employability

Contact: Steve Page
Manager, Student Support Services
University of York

Since 2005, Southampton Solent University, England, has offered **Curriculum Plus** as an option for students. Curriculum Plus is intended to afford students the opportunity to broaden and enhance their learning and achievements beyond their core discipline. All undergraduate degree courses must provide students within the course structure “with the opportunity to choose an option from the Curriculum Plus programme”. Curriculum Plus units allow students to: do something different from the rest of the course; learn extra valuable skills; and get credit points that count towards their qualification. Curriculum Plus units for 2008/09 are: Community Volunteering; Personal Values in Action; CV and Career Building; Languages; Sports Coaching in the Community; Work Based Learning part of the Solent Curriculum offer. Curriculum Plus and Work-based Learning.

Contact: Professor Jane Longmore
Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic
Southampton Solent University

In order to ensure the implementation of the Student Employability and Skills Policy, Queens University Belfast recognises the benefit of rewarding entrepreneurial behaviour among its students. From 2008-09, all new undergraduate students at the University are being encouraged to take part in **Degree Plus**. Degree Plus aims to provide official recognition and formal accreditation of a student’s acquisition of employability-related skills from extra-curricular activities and achievements. Activities that will count towards Degree Plus are widely drawn and include experience as a course representative, part-time job, voluntary work, holding office in clubs and societies etc. Participants are encouraged to use their PDP e-folio to record their achievement, develop their action plan and assess their skills. Students will receive the Award upon graduating as it is appears as an additional accreditation on their degree transcript.

Contact: Denise Murtagh
Societies and Enterprise Coordinator
Queen’s University Belfast

From 2008-09, Victoria University of Wellington is also offering its students the chance to participate in and obtain a **Victoria Plus Award**. The three key aims of the scheme are to:

- raise awareness and understanding of social responsibility, leadership and employability; and
- develop skills to help in the student’s future life and work
- enable the student to gain recognition from the University for their contribution.

Students must participate in a range of approved programmes and activities at University or in the wider community; they are required to attend a minimum of six workshops/presentations with at least two from each category from: Leadership and social responsibility, Skills development and Career development; and record and reflect on their experiences for the using the CareerHub folio. A minimum of 300 points over two years

needs to be accumulated to apply for the Award (e.g. helping new students settle in as a Campus Coach attracts 40 to 60 points, providing Peer Assisted Study Support attracts 60 to 100 points).

Successful completion of the leadership programme leads to an award certificate and ceremony, and is acknowledged on the student's academic transcript.

Professor David Mackay
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Victoria University of Wellington

Queen's University, Canada has developed its strong, service learning programme to **incorporate student community work integrated into programmes/courses for academic credit**. By 2009-10, the University aims that every student that wishes to should have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful service learning project with academic credit (e.g. the 500 new first year students in the Faculty of Applied Science are each required to undertake a practical course. They can choose to build something in the lab in a traditional manner or, now, undertake projects at the request of the local community which will be assessed and count towards their degree. The second option is far more popular). Credit is not given for the concept of service but for the learning and the outcomes from the service (e.g. "did it achieve what it was supposed to?"). The management structure (see section E, above) facilitates this type of development by linking student affairs and academic affairs.

Contact: Matthew Ascah
Coordinator of Community Service-Learning
Queen's University, Canada

The University of Guelph offers a cluster of programs dedicated to **promoting civic engagement** through its Leadership and Community Engagement unit. [Project Serve](#) is designed to expose primarily first year students to the range of volunteer opportunities available to them in Guelph and Wellington County. During a Saturday late in September over 400 students travel on buses to over 40 volunteer sites across the City. They volunteer for the day, in teams led by a senior student, and return to the campus to reflect on their experience. Volunteer placements include the Donkey Sanctuary of Canada, Women in Crisis, the Guelph Food Bank, and Meals on Wheels. Over 80% of Project Serve participants consistently report that they will volunteer again as a result of their experience. Project Serve was awarded a national innovation prize by the Student Affairs and Services arm of the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services.

Each February, during the winter semester Reading Week, [Project Serve Canada](#) enables students from the University of Guelph to connect with students from other Canadian and American universities and communities. Together, these students serve in collaboratively designed four or five day volunteer placements in one or more communities. A variety of learning opportunities are integrated within these experiences. Education and reflection components are implemented to raise awareness of critical social issues and to encourage the development of a lifelong sense of responsible citizenship in students. Service sites include: Mississippi, USA (Hurricane Katrina restoration projects), the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, British Columbia (working with homeless people and addiction prevention programs), a native reserve in Cape Kroker, Ontario.

The Guelph Global Learner Program was established in 2005 as a means to further develop in students a strong sense of responsibility as global citizens. The University partners with NGOs (e.g. Canada World Youth, Free the Children, and Solidarity in Action) which provide all of the logistical support (i.e. they firm up the service sites, ensure that visa requirements are in order, and deliver pre-departure training). Service sites have included India (2007); Peru (2007 and 2008), Costa Rica (2006, 2007, and 2008), Ecuador (2007), El Salvador (2007) and placements have ranged from teaching in primary and secondary schools to greenhouse projects, alternative education programs, and building/reconstruction projects. Students receive eight weeks of pre-departure training and preparation involving faculty and staff. A professional staff member serves as project 'lead' on the ground, and conducts regular reflection sessions throughout. Upon return to campus, participants participate in a Global Learner showcase where they offer highlights of their learning and experience to other participants and interested campus and community members. Student demand is high and the University to integrate these international service experiences within Guelph courses over the next two-three years.

Contact: Laurie Schnarr
Associate Director
Student Life & Counselling Services
University of Guelph

M. Support for alumni

Many institutions use alumni to inform and inspire their existing students through, for example, lectures, meetings, workshops and web profiles. The study found few examples of institutions providing support for alumni beyond the magazines and newsletters many institutions send out, although it was pointed out that many alumni appreciate being able to stay in touch with the institution, what it's doing and the student experience as it is now.

The University of Birmingham offers alumni a lifelong programme of support including opportunities to meet with old friends and develop new professional contacts. From listening to recent alumni, the University has found that they, in particular, welcome social networking opportunities and the University organises these in localities where there is known to be a cadre of alumni. The University also organises professional networking events - usually themed by employment sector, which provide alumni with the chance to meet a wide range of people at all stages in their industry or profession. Again in response to alumni demand, the University has developed a portal for a new online alumni community called [Our alumni](#). The university views this as a tool for alumni to use in whatever way is most appropriate to them (e.g. they can post and find jobs, track down friends and classmates, make new business contacts and network online, seek advice from others etc). This service also allows alumni to view and update their contact information so that they can continue to remain in touch with the University and their friends.

Contact: Emily Rycroft
Head of Alumni Relations
University of Birmingham

The University of Guelph-Humber believes that **“it is as important to support students out as in”** and graduating students have strong contact with the careers service. A “last lecture” event for graduating students (an initiative of some of the students) also brings closure to the experience. As a new university with only a few hundred alumni, events and traditions for alumni are being devised.

Contact: Dr John Walsh
Vice-Provost
University of Guelph-Humber

Oregon State University has a well-established Alumni Association. As part of a strategy to **involve the families of alumni** in activities, the Association purchases blocks of theatre tickets and tickets to major sporting events in areas where there are known to be concentrations of alumni. These are then sold to alumni who attend the event knowing they will have something in common with fellow attendees. The Association also organises clinics with sporting stars (usually former students) for young people. Although all former students are part of the alumni community, the Association also promotes several tiers of paying membership which entitle members to various benefits and discounts.

Contact: Jeff Todd
Executive Director
Oregon State University Alumni Association

N. Staff training and development

Institutions, especially where they are making fundamental changes to services, appreciate the need to obtain staff buy-in and also to ensure that staff are fully supported and equipped to provide those services.

Student Services at the University of Sheffield reviewed the support that they offered to staff based in academic departments who have a student support or student administration role. This deliberately research and evidence-based, highly collaborative project called [“Supporting the Supporters”](#) drew in the views of around 400 staff in academic departments across the University. An improved range of support resources - including publications, a dedicated website and other web resources and development activities has resulted and are currently being rolled out. Resulting practical outcomes include a guide for staff, a new training programme and redesigned staff web pages.

Contact: Andrew West
Director of Student Services
University of Sheffield

Edge Hill University has adopted a **“Solution-Focused Approach”** initially in Counselling but now being rolled out across the University including as part of staff development offered to all staff - academic, administrative and support. The approach starts with the principle that everyone in the University has a duty of care for students and that this extends beyond the student in crisis to the “creation of an environment within which students and staff are able to realise their potential and their aspirations”. In addition students will seek help from the nearest trusted source, not necessarily the designated source. The approach depends upon acknowledging problems but at the same time focussing on alternative possibilities and the University has applied this with individuals and groups - helping clients identify strengths and resources, goal-setting and next steps. As this approach took hold in Counselling other parts of the University became interested and sought advice and training - initially within Student Services and then Learning Services. Evaluation was undertaken and feedback was positive and the Head of Staff Development invited counselling to offer staff development sessions across the University - evaluation has indicated that staff believe that impact has been positive. The initiative has had a positive reception from students and staff.

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*[United Kingdom Association for Solution Focused Practice](#)

See also Proctor, A (2008) The whole is greater than the sum of the parts Association of University and College Counsellors Journal November 2008

The University of Leeds has established a [University Learning and Teaching Support Network](#) Forum for **all staff who has a role in supporting, co-ordinating, administering or managing** any aspect of learning and teaching at the University. The network fosters communication, dialogue and sharing of good practice among administrative and support staff in Faculties, schools and departments/centres. An important aspect of the Network is to

explore how to minimise duplication of effort across schools when it comes to developing administrative policies and procedures. The Network also acts as a communication link between central management/steering groups and the wider community of staff who support learning and teaching. The Network is primarily for those who support L&T rather than for those who deliver it and the focus is on the systems, processes and structures that support the four main areas of L&T administrative activities: admissions and recruitment, exams and assessment, programmes and modules (including approval, review, timetabling, quality), students and records (including registration, references). In addition the University has a forum for all staff with responsibility for supporting students to hear about and discuss developments in all aspects of student support. The student support network; help@leeds provides a forum for all such staff to hear about and discuss recent developments in all aspects of student support - from recruitment, admission and induction through to academic success and employability. The Forum consists of a series of lunchtime meetings held throughout the academic year, a small programme of training workshops and culminates in an annual conference.

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