



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Vertically integrated events in Chemistry programmes

Transition(s) the practice supports: First year students on Chemistry programmes

Abstract:

Events are held in the first semester to bring together students from all years, along with speakers who may be students who have recently completed study abroad or placements, or recent alumni now in employment. The events are designed to allow first-year students to hear from later-year students and alumni, to better understand the external engagement opportunities that are available to them.

Description:

These activities were developed to provide a networking opportunity for students on individual degree programmes. These informal events are held in the first semester each year and students from every year of each degree programme are invited. Refreshments are served and a number of speakers give short, informal presentations. The speakers include students who have completed study abroad, placements and internships, recent alumni who are now in employment, recent graduates who have chosen to continue into postgraduate study and, in some cases, an industry representative who will present an industrially sponsored prize to a recent prize winner.

Rationale

When students enter the first year of study towards their degree the experience can be overwhelming and adjusting to the concept that they will be presented with a wide range of opportunities during their studies will not be at the forefront of their minds. At this stage, it will often not be clear what opportunities exist for them as they progress and even if they do have some idea about what they might participate in, they may have concerns or anxieties regarding some of these opportunities, e.g. moving away from home for the first time, coping in a foreign country or with a new language, how to find accommodation, etc. These vertically integrated events were therefore developed to allow students in the earlier years of their studies to hear from students who have engaged in a variety of opportunities, building their confidence in participating and supporting their transition into Higher Education. Speakers have included students who have studied abroad, completed placements, have gone on to postgraduate study or have embarked on their career. As the events are informal and the speakers are students or recent graduates the audience are comfortable asking

questions. The department also has a small fund available for any degree stream to bid for financial support for other events. This has led to students working together to create proposals for this funding. For those students who speak at the events they have increased confidence and the satisfaction that they are providing support for younger students. Personal Development Advisers are also invited to attend and this allows them to hear the speakers and discuss the content of the talks further with their advisees.

Successes

These events have allowed students from all levels to interact, form support networks and learn from each other. The events have also promoted an ethos of 'ownership' of their degree and have encouraged students to work together to bid for funding for a variety of further events. These have ranged from covering the costs of invited speakers to social events to visits to chemical plants. The events have been well attended since their inception 6 years ago.

Challenges

There are no huge challenges in organising these events as most of the speakers are current students and easily contactable. One main challenge is identifying recent graduates who are able to take time out from their jobs to come in and address the students. Another challenge is finding a slot in the timetable when all students from each year group are available. This has proved to be impossible for some programmes and events are therefore held early on Wednesday afternoons. Some students are unable to attend due to other commitments

Lessons learnt

Over the time that this has been running we have looked at the timing, whether the start or end of first semester is better. Towards the end of the semester is the preferred time as it gives more time to contact speakers and make arrangements. We always have a member of staff (usually the Course Coordinator) to host the event as we have found students are sometime shy about asking the first question and some questions may initially have to be asked by the member of staff. The formal part of the event usually runs for around an hour but the room which has been booked is booked for two hours and the students are then left to network for as long as they like after the member(s) of staff have left.

Contact details: Dr Debbie Willison (d.willison@strath.ac.uk)

All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.