International Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education

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Parallel Session 1: Workshop

Approaches to transitions

Now I know what to expect

Facilitator(s):

Angela Shapiro and Margaret McShane, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

The workshop seeks to share good practice and exchange ideas with other institutions who are interested in supporting disabled students prior to commencing their studies. Feedbacks from the attendees of the bespoke programmes have given positive feedback and their comments will be disseminated at the workshop. Findings to date indicate that students have integrated well into their programmes and students have displayed an increase in their confidence which has transferred into their academic studies.

This is the fourth year that Glasgow Caledonian University has run the study skills programme which is specifically tailored to meet the needs of disabled students prior to commencing their studies at university. The idea of the course originated from a member of GCU’s Disability Team and an academic member of staff. Both staff members found, from previous experience of working directly with this group, that there was a need for this type of provision.

The programme provided students with the opportunity to: increase confidence; engage with support services before the start of the course; encourage students to access support as early as possible; provide useful advice on a range of topics specifically designed to meet their needs. Since its inception the provision has been extended across the university with participation from GCU’s three Academic Schools: School of Engineering and Built Environment, Glasgow School for Business and Society and School of Health and Life Sciences.

This year the university together with colleagues from Further Education will expand the programme by running a one day course within the Academic Schools during the third semester for students joining the institution in September 2015. This programme is aimed at articulating students.
Parallel Session 1: Workshop

Transitions into HE

How can we make use of technology and community to assist in students transition into university?

Facilitator(s):
Alexander Macdonald, Daniel Mackay, Ouanis Seddaoui, Konstantin Ivanovich, Karen Petrie and Rachel Menzies, University of Dundee, Scotland

Learning Objective(s):
To gain a better understanding of what students need and to understand how we can help students transitioning to higher education by accommodating individual learning styles through the use of the community and their peers.

Overview:
University classes consist of students from many different countries and backgrounds; including (but not limited to) high school, college and work. Students from different backgrounds will most likely have different needs and abilities, for instance: in high school you are very much spoon fed in comparison to university; students coming from a work environment may have been out of education for a long time and students from different countries may find it harder to understand lecturers as they may be speaking a foreign language.

Making use of peers to assist in a students learning will help make both students and their teachers’ lives easier, as the community may find it easier to cater for the varying needs of students from different backgrounds in the class.

Outcome:
The aim of this workshop is to discuss the roles of both peers and modern technology in helping a student transitioning into university and to come up with a tool that makes the best use of both of these.

Workshop Overview:
The workshop will begin with a short presentation that will introduce the audience to the problem. We will split the group into teams and have them come up with ideas on which technologies would be best to solve the problem. After this we will get them to present their ideas to each other and build a final concept using the best points from each idea we will then create a requirements document and begin to design a product based on the requirements gathered.
Transitions into HE

Student Voice and Peer Support During Transition

Author(s):
Debbie Meharg, Jenny Tizard and Alison Varey, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland

Despite increased investment in transition between college and university during the last 10 years, research indicates that direct entrants from college to year 2 or 3 of degree programmes are still less likely to take an active part in class, less likely to feel part of the academic community and less likely to get involved in student representation (Higher Education Academy, National Union of Students, 2013) (Ingram & Gallacher, 2013). During 2013/14, the School of Computing’s Associate Student Project introduced a range of partnership and bridging initiatives to link college and university experience for associate students studying Higher National Computing in partner colleges. This session, as the associate students move into their second year of study at college, the project is focussing on the student voice, directly engaging students in supporting themselves and other students through the transition to university.

Previous work by the team (Meharg & Fotheringham, 2013) argued that giving college students the status of Associate Student of the university did not, in itself, support students to become more effective learners. Focus groups with articulating students suggested that social integration can improve retention and academic performance. A large scale survey of students in the School of Computing has examined differing attitudes and approaches between college students and continuing students and direct entrants at the university. Findings from these investigations has led to the development of new interventions addressing social relationships (Tinto, 1997 & Crisp, 2010), increasing the role of peer support for college to university transition, in addition to academic support.

This paper introduces two new projects exploring the student voice and peer support for students in transition from college to university. The first project involves the development of an Aspire media group, made up of associate students from the colleges and led by university students. They will jointly produce a quarterly magazine and online content developed by the students for the students. This collaborative media project is designed to increase social integration and give a voice to a group of students who have sometimes been considered invisible (Christe, Barron, & D’Anunzio-Green, 2011). The second project, known as the CU Mentoring project, uses students who have successfully articulated into university to provide one-to-one support for associate students both at college and when they make the transition onto the university campus.
2+2=3? : A comparative study of academic attainment between FE to HE articulating students and their HE only counterparts

Author(s):

Craig Leith and Elliot Pirie, Robert Gordon University, Scotland

The transition from further education colleges (FEIs) to university (HEIs) at advanced entry level is undertaken by thousands of students in Scotland every year, with this “2+2” route becoming an increasingly common pathway due to formal articulation agreements between HEIs and FEIs. The appropriateness of this arrangement, the readiness of the student and their eventual progress can be overlooked in an effort to engage with the “2+2” route gaining momentum and acceptance as part of a government-led widening participation agenda.

This study focuses on a “2+2” agreement between Robert Gordon University and several Scottish Further Education providers and tracks the progress of undergraduate students studying Events Management. The main aim of the study has been to analyse the assessment performance of the direct entry (FE-HE) students in comparison with that of continuing (HE) students. A pragmatic, sequential, mixed-method methodology is adopted, using quantitative analysis of the students’ final summative results (at this stage a relatively small sample of 91), before moving to the second phase of the research: a qualitative analysis of FE-HE students own reflections and explorations of the findings.

The preliminary quantitative findings support the supposition and anecdotal evidence of the authors – i.e. that FE-HE students are more likely to have lower attainment in the first semester of their university study, improving over the remainder of the degree but in general do not achieve as highly as their HE counterparts with regard to their final assessments. The nature of their grade profile however suggests that FE-HE students equal or surpass HE students on practical assignments for example in a real-world context such as ‘live’ projects, but have lower attainment in academic assessments whether assessed via coursework or examination.

The paper concludes by exploring a series of recommendations on how FE, and HE, institutions, can improve the preparation and transition process for the student, identifying extensive pre-enrolment workshops to be offered by the receiving HE institutions and a “Preparing for University” programme to be delivered by the sending FE institutions. The proposed solutions have been developed directly with students to seek their views on their understanding of the attainment gap identified in the study.

Whilst these solutions may help the transition process, addressing the ‘attainment gap’ in the longer-term requires greater focus on curriculum design if we are to achieve a seamless transfer from FE to HE.
Student Perspectives on Transitioning from FE to HE

Author(s): Ana-Maria Bogdan, Isla Elliott, Craig Leith and Elliot Pirie, Robert Gordon University, Scotland

With an increase in the widening participation framework in the form of direct entry (2+2) courses, this study looks specifically at the transition of BA Hons Event Management students between further education institutions and Robert Gordon University. Recent research (Ingram and Gallacher, 2013) has indicated that students who complete their degree via “2+2” options achieved poorer grades than those who have been in higher education since their first year of study.

The following paper aims to investigate underlying aspects of the transition process direct entry students go through in order to help reveal any potential improvements from the student perspective.

In order to accomplish this, reflective evaluations of the presenters’ own experience identified three key themes where there were perceived differences between continuing and 2+2 students: academic writing and technique, student access to university resources and social wellbeing.

Using a qualitative methodology, this investigation will make use of focus groups made up of continuing and progressing students and plan to uncover and discuss various factors affecting the students’ transition. Preliminary issues highlighted include: perceived differences in academic delivery and resources, standards of students’ academic performance and student body cohesiveness.

This research should be useful for decision makers who can positively adapt and offer a seamless transfer between FE and HE. Based on the recommendations presented, improvements could be implemented by both FEIs and the HEIs to enhance the transition experience.

(This paper is linked to submission 34 by Craig Leith and Elliot Pirie “2+2 =3?” The papers would benefit from being presented sequentially.)
Transitions relating to specific disciplines

Pharmacy programme at the University of Strathclyde

Author(s):
Anne Boyter and Philip Winn, University of Strathclyde, Scotland

As a result of a condition placed on the Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy & Biomedical Sciences following the regulators accreditation visit in 2012 we redesigned our MPharm teaching and learning. To do this we first defined graduate attributes: Our graduates will be outstanding pharmacy professionals who are experts in medicines, safe and effective practitioners, and able to maintain and improve their professional performance.

We realigned our curriculum to allow direct entry into year 2 for applicants with good Advanced Highers (or equivalent) awarding 120 credits for prior learning at SCQF 7. We maintain a year 1 of study, mapped to our Bioscience first year, for students who are not able to take these qualifications at school. For year 2 entrants, to make sure we have effective transition into university, we provide diagnostic assessment to ensure that students are adequately prepared with the chemistry they need in a pharmacy programme; and we have increased the level of support from personal development advisors (PDA) to ensure that we can reinforce positive behaviour or intervene where needed at an early point. All students meet their PDA in weeks 1, 5, and 10 of each semester at times aligned to key formative assessments.

The core focus of the redesigned degree is on student learning rather than staff teaching: the course provides far greater opportunity for student/student and student/staff interaction. The curriculum is based on body systems where the complexity of diseases studied transitions progressively year-on-year from dealing with normal function, minor ailments and how the body maintains homeostasis in year 2 through management of long term conditions (year 3) to management of patients with multiple diseases and polypharmacy (year 4) and investigation of evidence based medicine in final year. This is underpinned by the sciences of pharmacy: how medicines are formulated, how they are absorbed, distributed, metabolised and excreted, and the quality systems that underpin safe pharmacy practice. We integrated experiential learning (EL) into all years of study so that students can implement the classroom learning in practice situations where they will appreciate how the science and practice of pharmacy come together to ensure best patient care.

The new strategy in teaching and learning develops and supports a curriculum that equips our students with the skills, attitudes and behaviours required as graduates and to prepare them for transition to careers as healthcare professionals.
Guiding students onto a successful undergraduate path. Are we taking the route through the “mole”-hill or are we climbing the mountain?

Author(s):

David Booth, Nicholas Brewer, Linda Morris and David Coates, University of Dundee, Scotland

Prior to the development of a new Life Sciences curriculum at the University of Dundee, which began in the academic year 2011/12. It was clear that some students were weak in the applied numerate aspects of biosciences, which presented serious difficulties at the later stages of their degree. In order to mitigate this, going forward, in addition to raising entry requirements a system of bootstrapping was introduced.

All students entering the undergraduate degree programmes in Biological/Biomedical Sciences undertake a ‘skills’ audit to assess their proficiency in maths, physics and chemistry. Those not achieving a satisfactory passing grade of 70% are automatically enrolled on a 20 credit intensive foundational module that supports their transition to independent learning and enhances their integration into the theory and practical modules that run parallel. This module takes place over 10 weeks and contextually covers topics such as diverse as moles/molarity, use of logs and the physics of fluids.

As the University of Dundee values informed teaching through an empirical approach where possible, we explore the effectiveness of this module. In a post-hoc, non-invasive and multi-dimensional approach, we analyse the strengths and weaknesses of these students relative to their peers. Data is derived from the pre-entry skills audit, in-course assessments across shared modules and running average grades from four cohorts of students entering first year between 2011/12 and 2014/15.

We have evidence that students are embracing the module and are integrating into promising scientists. At the half-way point of their academic career at the University of Dundee their performance is indistinguishable from the rest of the cohort.
Digital Pigs and Digital Natives: How FarmVille Prefigures The Future of Higher Education

Author(s):
Jason Robertson and Neil Mcpherson, University of the West of Scotland, Scotland

Shirky (2008) describes how the creative disruption of digital technology has led to a move from scarcity and monopoly to abundance and low margin costs. Entire sectors are being redefined and remoulded, moving from traditional products and services to an experience economy (Pine & Gilmour, 1998) and the key focus for the new economy, including higher education, is customer experience management.

The games company Zynga are in the customer attraction, retention and upselling business. Universities are increasingly following a similar strategy. Against huge competition, since its inception in 2007, Zynga has generated more than $1.5 billion in revenues. But the core element of their product range is always free. The success of games comes from powerful real-time analytics and a customer relationship management system, strategic partnerships, a focussed first-time user experience, social media/social interaction and community building, and a recognition that value is complex and variable, and flat pricing is an anachronism.

Higher education can learn from the games industry. The threat is not technology - the threat is competition using the technology to disrupt. As Lovell (2013) notes, “The same technology that enables files to be shared easily also offers an unprecedented opportunity to build one-to-one relationships with your customers and fans. The web enables artists and businesses to share what they do at a very low cost while building relationships with customers…. How you choose to respond to this opportunity will determine how you fare in the digital age.”

JP Rangaswani (Killer Apps in the Gigabit Age, 2014: 13) notes “the school day will disaggregate into a number of learning sessions, some at home, some in the neighborhood, some in pairs, some in larger groups, with different kinds of facilitators.” Ed Lyall (ibid) notes that “Just-in-time learning will continue to expand, permitting people of all ages to find the information they need when needed. It will permit the human mind to focus on creativity and critical thinking with known information being available as needed. Time in school will need to radically change.”

It is the author’s contention that much of what constitutes the current higher education experience will be superseded sooner rather than later by a disaggregated learning experience where the learner decides where, when and how they learn. This presentation will examine Zynga’s development strategy and draw parallels with current innovations in pricing and delivery within the education sector.
Transitions relating to placements/work experience

Supporting student transitions to placement: developing a new self-identity

Author(s):
Sally Smith and Colin Smith, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland

Employer expectations of graduates, as evidenced by the job descriptions of graduate vacancies, often include (either implicitly or explicitly) relevant work experience. As a result, students are increasingly aware of the value of a period of work placement, for example through a summer internship or placement. Meeting student demand for placements with pay and/or academic credit remains a challenge for universities; a challenge in terms of resources and balancing supply and demand. In practice there is generally substantially more student demand than employer supply. Through e-Placement Scotland we are increasing the number of available placements in the IT sector to ensure that computing students maximise their chances of securing a computing placement and ultimately a graduate job. Funded by the Scottish Funding Council, e-Placement Scotland has been running since 2010, creating paid placement opportunities for students studying computing in all universities and colleges in Scotland. Through our unique cross-sector insights we have identified successful strategies to ensure smooth transitions from university to placement.

This presentation focuses upon the concept of identity which offers the possibility of an appreciation of the wider gains for students in deciding to pursue a placement – whether they are successful or not. The presentation argues that a student’s decision to pursue a placement both represents and is a component of an identity shift, where a student identity is complemented by an emergent professional identity. We ask whether a professional identity is constructed through students researching relevant industry sectors, attending employer presentations, investigating job roles, participating in ‘tech-talks’ and industry networking events, utilising a careers service, and producing significant ‘artefacts’, such as a CV and a LinkedIn profile.

It is the contention of the presentation that the construction of a professional identity can and should be facilitated while the student is still at university. The process of constructing a professional identity should be valuable in its own right, whether or not the student is successful in obtaining a placement during their studies. The presentation outlines how e-Placement Scotland has implemented a programme of outreach designed to stimulate the emergence of professional identity amongst computing students, in the hope that we can capture the benefits of placement to all students (placed and unplaced) and facilitate transitions to the workplace.
From Placement to Academic Meltdown: a qualitative study of student experience in the transition from 3rd year work placement back to 4th year academic study

Author(s):
Tracy Pirie and Carolyn McNicholas, Robert Gordon University, Scotland

With over 113 HEI's across the UK providing “sandwich” degree courses, providing students with discipline relevant placements, between 2003-2009, the effectiveness and of this approach is relevant for discussion. These placement experiences enable students to secure employment more quickly on completion of their studies, and research identifies higher academic performance in the final year. However the success factors of placement are not uncontested. One area unclear from the literature is the influence that placements have on students' feelings of readiness, for the challenges of academic engagement and level of performance in their final year. Some authors suggest students may find re-adjustment back into academic life difficult.

This qualitative study explores the experience of a range of students from different courses involved in a 4th year Business Creativity module. It will investigate the impact they perceive a placement in 3rd year had on their ability to engage in the early stages of resumed studies, comparing the results of returning placement students who undertake an intensive week-long workshop related to the creativity module during summer against their placement counterparts who enter in a 'normal' manner. The study uses an interpretivist paradigm taking a purely qualitative approach, so that a deeper understanding of how 'prepared' these students feel for entry into their final year can be gained, and a comparison drawn on how engagement with the workshop impacted on this transition phase for students.

The preliminary findings support the suppositions and anecdotal evidence of the authors; that students who engage with preparatory workshops are better prepared to resume with the academic challenges that 4th year studies pose due to the intensity of the workshop sessions, providing a more positive experience on commencing their first semester.

The paper concludes by proposing recommendations on how universities can improve the transition process for these students, identifying how intensive workshops can prepare students for their move back into University.
Transition to professional practice placements: improving the experience of disabled and non-disabled students

Author:
Shirley Hill, University of Dundee, Scotland

Research on the experience of disabled students in higher education has become increasingly prevalent in the UK, including studies investigating students’ transition to higher education and their experience on work or practice placements. However, limited comparisons have been made between the experience of disabled students and their non-disabled peers, particularly in the practice placement context.

This session will present the results of recent doctoral research that investigated the experience of disabled and non-disabled students on practice placements, across six professional disciplines: medicine, nursing and midwifery, dentistry, education, social work and community education. These particular disciplines were selected to enable comparison with previous research and to explore the dichotomy between the social and medical approaches to disability; and the potential impact of these approaches on the experience of disabled students.

The results revealed that both disabled and non-disabled students reported positive placement experiences, highlighting the importance of such learning opportunities for gaining an insight into the reality of professional practice and reinforcing their knowledge in a practical context. There were also some similarities in the challenges reported by both disabled and non-disabled students but notably some differences. In particular, difficulties that were experienced by both disabled and non-disabled students, such as travelling to placement and developing relationships with placement staff, were exacerbated for some disabled students. This appeared to be primarily a consequence of the nature of the student’s impairment and attitudes to disability.

The results also revealed some differences in the experience of students in different disciplines, including in relation to their preparation for placement, and provided evidence for the prevalence of a medical model approach to disability. The results highlighted the importance of pre-placement planning, communication and information to support a positive transition to placement for both disabled and non-disabled students; particularly in relation to disability disclosure procedures, the expectations of students and the role and responsibilities of placement staff.

This session will conclude by identifying recommendations for practice that aim to improve the placement learning experience of all students and to ensure disabled students are not disadvantaged in such contexts; promoting inclusivity in professional training and practice.
Empowering students through transitions

‘Second year is an enormous step up’: Understanding and supporting transitions within undergraduate degree courses

Author:
Sue Whittle, University of Leeds, UK

The need to support students during the transition between school and university is well documented, and there are a range of initiatives designed to support students during this transition; however, transitions into subsequent years of undergraduate degree courses have been less extensively studied, and resources to support students are less common.

In 2012, a survey of the opinions of over 750 biological sciences students regarding their educational environment was undertaken. The questionnaire, based on a modification of the internationally recognised Dundee Ready Educational Environment Measure (DREEM) used in medical education settings, aimed not only to assess the participants’ view of the teaching they have received, but also the effect of that teaching on them, and their self-perceptions.

The key outcome from the survey was the recognition of a significant ‘dip’ in student perception across all aspects of their educational environment between first and second year, which largely resolves in final year. This presentation will share outcomes of a qualitative study using 6 focus groups of second and third year students (n=33), who represented all programme areas in the faculty. These focus groups aimed to investigate the concerns which underpin the decreased satisfaction observed in the survey. Students described the stresses associated with increased and changing expectations in Year 2, and highlighted specific areas where additional academic and pastoral support would be valued. These included advice on preparing for Y2 modules, and support in developing new skills such as finding and reading research papers, and writing essay-style exam answers. They also requested easy access to advice on sources of academic and pastoral support.

As a consequence of the information provided by students, a suite of on-line resources which aim to meet the needs expressed by students for support during the transition to second year was created and made available across the Faculty. This resource will be demonstrated, and feedback on students’ perception of its value described.
Student engagement at all points of transition: partnership working in policy and practice

Author(s): Nicola Andrew, Lesley McAleavy, Ruth Whittaker, Jackie Main and John Gaughan, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has recently developed a new Student Experience initiative; ‘Engage’. The overarching aim of Engage is to enhance the GCU student experience through a visible, integrated and embedded GCU model of Student Engagement and Partnership Working.

Engage has two dimensions:

• Engaging students in their own learning and teaching
• Engaging students in shaping the learning and teaching experience at GCU.

The development of the model is driven by two key GCU Policies; the Strategy for Learning (SFL) and the Student Experience Framework (SEF) and major external policies; QAA Quality Code for Higher Education (2012/13) and Sparqs Student Engagement Framework (2011) . In addition, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) want learners to have a strong voice in shaping their experience of university and expect institutions to demonstrate that they are listening and responding to students.

The construction of the institutional evidence base is underpinned by the findings of the final report of the HEA ‘What Works?’ Student Retention and Success Programme and also informed by the recent HEA report; Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education . These reports are utilised to make an informed pedagogical case for embedding an effective student/staff partnership model across the university and mapping strategic and sustainable engagement activity and inquiry around the four Engage principles:

1 Enhancing the student experience
2 Working with students as partners
3 Capturing the student voice
4 Engaging with the university

Successful student engagement is central to transition, retention and success and underpins the GCU Strategy for Learning and the Student Experience Framework. This workshop will explore, from a national and international perspective, the dimensions of undergraduate student engagement and transition into and within Higher Education.
Students As Partners: Building Sustainable Learning Communities

Author(s): Jade McCarroll and Kety Faina, University of the West of Scotland, Scotland

It is argued that partnership learning, and the encouragement of ‘participatory pedagogies’, creates an environment conducive to learning, in which students are empowered to engage in learner-led, peer-supported learning activities and to become co-producers of their own learning experience, who have the potential to act as ‘agents of change’ (see Dunne & Zandstra 2011; Healey 2014; Kay et al. 2010; Land & Gordon 2008; Neary & Winn 2009; Taylor & Wilding 2009). In recent times the notion of ‘partnership’ has become a buzzword in higher education - a multitude of partnership projects exist in universities up and down the country, as well as a plethora of student engagement mechanism which ‘listen to the student voice’. However, as argued by Neary (2012), the idea of listening to the student voice and responding accordingly, implicitly, if not deliberately, supports the idea of students as consumers of education, rather than as ‘active collaborators’ or ‘co-producers’ in their learning environments. In order to be effective real partnership must be an ethos, rather than an activity. A central focus of the philosophy underpinning the project undertaken at UWS from the outset is the belief that ‘The sum total of an institution’s student engagement mechanisms does not equal partnership’ (NUS 2010). And that for a sustainable model of change to be developed, students must be engaged from the outset as critical partners. It is argued that through partnerships at individual and institutional level the goal of student empowerment is served, and a space is opened up for the creation and development of sustainable learning communities (NUS 2010). Using the discourse surrounding partnership learning, and drawing on empirical data gathered from student feedback, this presentation will critically evaluate the experience of students engaged in this process, through the development of a research focussed level 9 module, as well as the experiences of those engaged as pedagogic consultants in the process.
Parallel Session 2: Workshop

Approaches to transitions

An institution-wide learner journey approach to transition and widening access

Facilitator(s): Stephanie Mckendry and Anna Damer, University of Strathclyde, Scotland

Transitions are, by their very nature, complex, often emotional and sometimes fraught. They involve shifts in identity and a change from the familiar to the unknown. The opportunities and risks inherent in educational transitions are widely recognised, but for those from widening access backgrounds, such experiences are likely to be magnified. Unfamiliarity with the higher education environment may increase anxiety and concerns about fitting in may be exacerbated. Lacking Bourdieu’s social and cultural capital and remaining unfamiliar with the institutional habitus of university (Thomas, 2002) non-traditional students may not be able to turn to family or friends to help them navigate the new environment. Those with caring responsibilities may not be able to prioritise acclimatisation to university. Since a sense of belonging and matched, realistic expectations appear key to retention (Mckendry, Wright & Stevenson, 2013) successful transition is obviously vital. It is, therefore, worth examining and attending to the transition needs of widening access learners in particular. This workshop will focus on the approach developed by the central Widening Access Team at Strathclyde. Taking a learner journey perspective, their activities are informed by the need to support learners as they negotiate the many transitions in compulsory education and the varying routes into university study. Recognising that aspiration and attainment can be effected during the transition from primary to secondary school and from the broad general into the senior phase in Curriculum for Excellence, activities are designed to support learners and promote the prospect of university study as they progress into the later years of schooling. Further work is undertaken during the application and admissions process and at the pre-entry and induction stage. Some of the team concentrate on the transition requirements of widening access learners articulating from FE or who may be returning to education. Finally, activities are targeted at the transition stages encountered by widening access students during their degree: into the later years; employability and beyond. Delegates will be asked to consider the transitions widening access students encounter and the barriers different groups face at these transition points. They will be asked to consider what activities or support could be developed to mitigate some of these difficulties and to harness the valuable skills and insights access students can bring.
Quality Enhancement: National Approaches

Making Recognition of Prior Learning work: implementing the National RPL Framework for Higher Education (HE) in Scotland

Facilitator(s): Ruth Whittaker, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland, Heather Gibson, QAA Scotland and Peter Chatterton, Independent Consultant

Developing more effective, accessible approaches to RPL within HE supports key policy drivers at national and international levels relate to widening participation, lifelong learning and workforce development. The QAA Scotland, Universities Scotland RPL HE network was established in 2008 and been leading a programme of work to support RPL development in Scotland. The network consists of members from across the Scottish HEI Sector, NHS Education for Scotland, QAA Scotland, Universities Scotland, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Partnership and the Scottish Social Services Council.

In 2013-14 this programme of work resulted in the development of an RPL Framework for Higher Education in Scotland. This is of strategic importance in supporting a key dimension of HE policy in Scotland- the development of more flexible, efficient learner journeys. The framework was launched within the context of the Developing and Supporting the Curriculum Quality Enhancement Theme. This developmental framework is aimed at supporting key stakeholders to engage with RPL: students, academic staff, senior management and sector level organisations and employers and professional bodies. It aims to expand and embed RPL to a much wider extent in the HE sector.

This workshop will focus on the programme of activity that is being led by the RPL Network in 2014/15 to support the implementation of the National Framework in order to address key issues of professional development, strategic implementation, pedagogical and practitioner approaches, promotion of RPL and student engagement and awareness. This work includes the development of a practical toolkit to support programme teams in implementing RPL and in embedding approaches to recognising and building on prior learning within the curriculum.

The workshop will introduce the RPL toolkit in terms of its context, need and use. Workshop participants will then be provided with the opportunity to experience the toolkit and to discuss the ways in which it can be applied and the means of engaging HEIs in its use at a sector level in order to increase understanding of, and engagement in, RPL. This will involve discussion about future engagement activities as part of the continuing programme of work of the RPL network.
Academic Writing Matters

Author(s); Mary Pryor and Alison Lumsden, University of Aberdeen, Scotland

Academic writing is one of the cornerstones of university study and is the key to success in many disciplines. Without a sound grasp of key concepts such as paragraph structure, verb tenses, spelling and punctuation students cannot express their ideas clearly and often fail to reach their full potential. While we may expect students to come to university with these ideas fully honed it is clear that early intervention to identify those students who need additional help is a crucial part of easing the transition into higher education. Timely, focused writing development, offered in a positive setting, operates both to increase student morale and improve outcomes, thus aiding retention.

Following a pilot scheme in Education and Law, the University of Aberdeen has rolled out Academic Writing Courses across each of the six Schools in the College of Arts and Social Sciences. Now in their third full year these non-credit courses help to identify those students who need writing development and provide it in the form of online resources and tutor-led workshops. Founded in a partnership between the Schools and the Student Learning Service, the courses aim to give students an opportunity for early feedback on their writing skills and offer development and strategies that will help them throughout their academic career.

This workshop will open with a short presentation by Dr Mary Pryor of the Student Learning Service, at the University of Aberdeen, and Professor Alison Lumsden, Director of Teaching for the College of Arts and Social Sciences. They will share their experiences of running these courses at Aberdeen and the successes and challenges that have been met along the way. The main aim, however, is to open a discussion on an issue that is encountered by all in Higher Education, offering an opportunity to share good practice and learn from the experiences of others in the sector. Key questions to be addressed will include: how can we improve the quality of academic writing in our student body? How can we convince all academic colleagues that early emphasis on writing skills is of value? To what extent do we think an early focus on academic writing can ease students’ transition into higher education?
Understanding Student Transition to UK HE: the expectations of essay writing for students and staff.

Author: Michael Mcewan, University of Glasgow, Scotland

Students’ prior educational experiences influence their expectations about the requirements for successful learning in Higher Education. Such prior educational experiences can be very diverse as the number of international and non-traditional students enrolling on UK HE undergraduate programmes of study increases. Moreover, the context of UK Higher Education has certain conventions, or academic cultures and this influences the expectations that teachers and lecturers have of their students and the work their students produce, particularly for assessments such as an essay. This interplay between student expectations, diverse academic backgrounds and the requirements for successful participation in Higher Education (informed by the expectations which teaching staff have) is theorized in Ramsden’s (1992, p. 83) model of student learning in context. Importantly, any mismatch between student and teacher expectations of a task, particularly assessment tasks, can impact on student outcomes and, ultimately, can present a barrier to successful student retention, progression and attainment.

This paper outlines some findings of a survey which aimed to identify and understand the expectations that first year university students, including a significant proportion of international students with diverse backgrounds, have towards essay production during their acculturation to HE study. Further, this paper also examines teaching staff perceptions of essay production. In particular, the paper focuses on examining the differing approaches that 37 students and 14 teachers on a first year business course take when interpreting essay questions (i.e. content focused or task focused approaches).

The findings presented here are directly relevant to lecturers and university teachers of students in transition to UK HE. This work can be used to better understand why the essay you are marking might look the way it does. Moreover, this understanding can be further used to provide more effective, targeted student support (and staff) so that student assessments are more likely to match the expectations of their teachers, thus enhancing teaching and the student learning experience.
Using Technology to Encourage Social Interaction during Induction: the use of Adobe Voice on the iPad

Author(s): Julie Thomson and Margaret McCann, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

The ability for technology to support and bring tangible benefits to educational experiences has been well documented, (e.g. JISCinfonet, 2008). In addition, today’s students are using the web and social media in everyday life and so expect to use these media within their own educational environment (OLTF, 2011).

Glasgow Caledonian University is committed to the 'participation, progression and success of all students regardless of background' by providing an inclusive learning environment with effective practice in learning, teaching and assessment (GCU, 2013). The university’s strategy also includes opportunities for widening access, building on partnerships with schools and colleges by increasing the number of direct entry places offered. Meeting this commitment brings many challenges, in particular supporting the increasing number of students entering university directly from college. Research has revealed that these students have different needs and expectations of university from school leavers, and can suffer from social isolation and alienation, and therefore require a diverse range of support to help them adapt in their transition into the university environment (e.g. Barron and D’Annunzio-Green, 2009, Caldwell-Brodie et al, 2007).

The challenge addressed in this case, was to design a technology teaching intervention during induction that would engage the students, encourage socialisation and peer support for their new university journey, whilst helping build confidence. Using an action research methodology, this paper discusses the technology intervention which was carried out in a class of 70 direct entry students, involving the novel use of iPads and the Adobe Voice application. The students worked in groups to turn their first impressions of university life into an animated video. The students found the technology easy to use and although taking them out of their comfort zone, felt that it was a fun learning experience. Analyses of the findings of this study are presented including reflections on the learning gained by the students. Recommendations for future practice are also provided.
Transitions relating to specific disciplines

transition points in professional degree programmes: monitoring the student experience to identify enhancement opportunities

Author: Kirsty Hughes, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) are used as a measure of student satisfaction and can drive organisational change. The NSS focus on final year students does not allow a cross sectional view of how satisfaction may change during the degree or indeed identify opportunities to implement change that will impact upon its respondents. This is an issue in identifying and responding to difficulties with transitions during the programme, for example, from pre-honours to honours or pre-clinical to clinical teaching.

Surveys such as NSS may also miss disciplinary nuances in the curricula and be unable to pinpoint specific areas for enhancement. A more context-specific survey can be a better tool for informing curricular change. The Dundee Ready Education Environment Measure (DREEM)(1) is a well-established questionnaire developed for use in the health professions. It is designed to provide insights into health professions students’ perceptions of their learning environment. Up until recently the DREEM has mostly been applied in the medical school context but at least one veterinary school has tested an adapted version with their students.

This presentation will present the results from a pilot using the DREEM questionnaire adapted for the veterinary education context and applied across a whole programme. We discuss how information from such surveys can be used to identify particularly challenging transition points in the curriculum.

The DREEM survey was administered on paper to all students in a veterinary programme and 452 out of 750 students fully completed the survey and were included in the analysis. The data illustrated elements which were of most concern to the students including workload and feedback and that some wider aspects such as students’ perceptions of their academic self-efficacy were also of concern. These were found to be less positive at key transition points such as entering the first year, moving from pre-clinical to clinical teaching and into final year rotations.

Ways in which surveys like DREEM can be used to drive and monitor the impact of curricular change are discussed. They can also be used longitudinally to monitor for improvements or areas of concern following interventions through year on year application.

Solve your own problems! Peer designed and student led methods for transition through the threshold concepts of Pharmacokinetics.

Author(s): Shelby Barnett, Alex Currie and Steven Tucker, University of Aberdeen, Scotland

Pharmacokinetics is concerned with understanding what the body does to a drug and is a model-based approach to understanding and predicting dose, metabolism, and excretion of drugs. As a critical, threshold concept in undergraduate and postgraduate pharmacology degree programmes; pharmacokinetics represents a genuine student challenge. As a discipline with its roots in mathematics, the use of equations, graphs and data-modelling moves the student considerably outside their comfort zone, which makes visualisation of the core pharmacological concepts and how they inter-relate difficult for even the most astute. Feedback suggests current teaching approaches are ineffective, students rarely reach an appropriate level of competence and confidence with the subject.

The rationale was focussed on designing engaging ways in which students could enhance their own personal appreciation of the subject, equipping them with the opportunity to instil, enhance and assess their pharmacokinetic skills. This could then be easily transferred from the classroom to a clinical setting. This was best achieved by employing students with recent experience of the subject area to lead the design i.e. a resource created by students, for students. The resultant product has 2 key components:

1. A spreadsheet-based resource, presenting students with data and graphs representing drug behaviour within the body. The meaning and derivation of key pharmacokinetic parameters is explained in simple terms illustrated with examples and presented in graphical form making the link between the numbers and their meaning less tacit. Furthermore, the spreadsheets are interactive with spot tests, quizzes and practical exercises.

2. A feedback driven tool, created using Questionmark, leading students through pharmacokinetic data handling, complete with worked examples and real life problems. At each stage, students are required to apply their knowledge and understanding to proceed and in the event of an incorrect choice they are provided with feedback before being re-directed to the question again. Such architecture creates an interactive, experiential learning platform.

This suite of innovative teaching and learning tools is flexible, interactive and student-friendly, creating an effective way of equipping students with support in attaining an applied understanding of this challenging threshold concept subject. Importantly, this design and approach is applicable to any such curricular area, is sustainable and evolving, providing a modern approach to enliven a traditionally dry subject area.
Learning to learn Maths: Getting students to think about how they’re going to approach Maths at university.

Author(s): Jenna Mann, Pamela Docherty, Abby Shovlin, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

The School of Mathematics (University of Edinburgh), in collaboration with the Student Experience Project and the Institute for Academic Development, ran an Enhanced Longitudinal Academic Induction Programme for new joint honours and Maths students in September 2014. The programme aimed to help students effectively transition to studying Mathematics at University through group activities of generic and subject specific tasks.

The Induction programme was designed according to Wingate’s (2007) ‘Learning to Learn Framework’ that aims to facilitate “transition to university by helping students...understand what is expected from..., by addressing their conception of learning and knowledge...as well as their competence in constructing knowledge in their discipline”. In the context of Mathematics, this meant focusing on the following areas: effective generic study skills, mathematical reading and writing, mathematical communication skills and group work. Each of these four key areas was the focus of an induction activity station; the fifth station was led by higher-year students who are trained leaders of the Peer Assisted Learning Scheme, MathsPALS. Students worked through all the stations in groups. At the end, students completed an individual feedback/feedforward postcard.

The feedback allowed the team to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. As a new Maths student, 87% of students agreed or completely agreed that the Induction was useful to them. 88% of students agreed or completely agreed that the Induction was enjoyable. The feedforward section forms the basis of the School’s longitudinal approach to induction. Students were asked to write down what they thought their biggest challenge would be in studying Maths at university, how they were planning to manage this challenge and the strategies from the Induction session that they would apply to their future study of Mathematics. The cards were returned to students during mid-semester review meeting, allowing them to reflect on their resolutions made at the beginning of their university careers.

This presentation will allow participants to experience one of our Enhanced Maths Academic Induction Programme tasks and an opportunity to discuss and reflect on current practices.

Placement is a two way street! The impact of work placement on academic identity and progression of final year undergraduates

Author: Neil Lent, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Individual graduate employability remains prominent in higher education policy discourse to the extent that the main role of higher education can be seen as equipping graduates with specific employability skills and graduate attributes to enable smooth transition into the workplace.

One way of enhancing university to work transition is through the provision of work placements. The advantages of placements tend to be expressed in terms of opportunities for the development and rehearsal of general employability skills and attributes. This suggests that placements can be understood as standardised, predictable placement experiences with clear benefits for employability. The emphasis on post-programme employability also strongly suggests that such a transition is primarily in one direction.

This paper challenges both the notion of a standardised placement experience and also the presumed single direction of travel of the transition experienced by students undertaking a work placement. It is argued that work placements can affect individual academic performance and identity in ways that enhance transitions through academic programmes.

Data is presented from six interviews with final year undergraduate students all of whom had completed a 12-month placement as part of their degree programme. The interview data was gathered from a wider project (involving 36 participants), conducted in the Computing Department of a large pre-1992 university in the United Kingdom. This wider project explored these undergraduates' transitions from university to work. The focus here is on how their placement experience influenced their approach to final year of study.

The interview data was explored using Activity Theory as an analytical framework. Variable outcomes of impact on post-placement approach to study were articulated by participants. These included the application of employability skills acquired from placement, no benefits from the placement whatsoever and also two participants who described themselves as personally transformed in their approach to learning when they returned to university.

Individual transformative change (or the lack of) was better explained in terms of contextual factors relating to placement such as the nature challenges presented to students and the placement organisation’s culture rather than the acquisition of specific skills and attributes. Implications of these findings are discussed in relation to supporting placement learning.
A unique approach to placement and work experience transitions though collections

Author(s): Monica Callaghan and Sally-Anne Coupar, University of Glasgow, Scotland

The Hunterian, at the University of Glasgow, is a museum uniquely placed to meet the university’s strategic plan and enhance the student learning experience. In addition to an emphasis on research-led teaching, we are pioneering a number of initiatives to establish innovative, interdisciplinary programmes enabling students to broaden their university experience and develop their professional attributes. We have considerable experience in transitions related to placement and work experience, as we respond to a high level of student demand for diverse work-related learning, professional development to secure opportunities to develop student skills in public engagement and knowledge exchange by creating a widely marketed and programmed schedule of activity in the three main areas of student lifecycle demand: undergraduate, PGT and PGR.

This session will demonstrate the value of museum collections in Higher Education, not only for formal teaching and learning, but also to enhance the student experience and support the transition from learning into a work-based environment. Through this presentation, we will demonstrate how the Hunterian’s model of engagement with students can feed into the graduate attribute framework and prepare students for transitions between levels of Higher Education and employment. Students who have undergone the transitional experience at The Hunterian will be there to help facilitate the session, encouraging dialogue and answering questions.

This interactive presentation will explore the use of collections and object based learning to demonstrate their value in student transitions how the programme encourages and motivates our students through placement and other employability initiatives. By supporting students to realise their potential, not just through study of subjects, but how their creativity, flexibility, knowledge and personal experience can be applied in a wider context, we can better prepare them for further transitions from higher education into employment.
Empowering students through transitions

Poetic transcription with a twist: an option in supporting student transition?

Author(s): Fiona Smart, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland, Daphne Loads, University of Edinburgh, Scotland and Irene Malcolm, Heriot-Watt University, Scotland

In this paper we explore an innovative group activity that has the potential to help students make sense of transitions in their studies. Borrowing a technique from qualitative data analysis and drawing on traditions of storytelling and personal development, poetic transcription with a twist enables students to engage with each other's accounts of experience by retelling them in poetic form. Our findings so far suggest that this methodology can lead to deep understanding and fresh insights: we are carrying out further investigations.

References:


Smart, F. (2014, in press). Poetic transcription: an option in supporting the early career academic
Vertically integrated transitions: empowering students through integrative, peer learning

Author(s): Iain Mitchell, Stephanie Mckendry, Amanda Baldwin and Jan McGhie, University of Strathclyde, Scotland

The University of Strathclyde has pioneered the concept of Vertically-Integrated Projects within undergraduate learning and teaching in the UK. Students engage in projects within multi-disciplinary, multi-level teams to apply their knowledge and acquire new skills, gaining course credits as they do so. This concept of multi-level, peer learning is also fundamental to the institution’s approach to widening participation; with undergraduate students engaged in access activities with school pupils as an integral element of their programme. This facilitates vertically integrative transitions for all involved.

This paper will discuss the impact of one such widening access activity within Strathclyde Business School. All students in the third year of their degree programme undertake a Social Responsibility module as part of their Management Development Programme, a spine of theoretical and practical learning running throughout the degree. This module is managed and developed by staff within the Widening Access Team. Students choose from a range of options from one to one mentoring of young people to encourage transition into post-compulsory education to designing learning activities for classes of Business pupils within low progression Secondary schools.

The undergraduate students design their own learning outcomes and an element of their assessment, thus enhancing their independence and employability. This facilitated transition encourages participants to develop and articulate a range of graduate attributes as they ready themselves for employment or postgraduate study. In addition, and of vital importance from a widening access perspective, the social responsibility element of the module actively encourages students to engage with access issues; researching under-representation and barriers to participation amongst school pupils as well as developing activities designed to overcome some of these obstacles. Peer support and learning between students and pupils empowers both and promotes transition into university for the latter.

The paper will outline:
- The impact of the module from the perspective of participating students, participating school pupils and external stakeholders such as teachers and local authorities
- The nature of the transitions facilitated by the module
- How this model of vertical integration fits into the wider University access strategy
- The results of the initial evaluation of the module as undertaken by a group of participating students.
Empowering students to be a resource in each other's learning through active student participation

Author(s): Susanna Barrineau, Ulrike Schnass, Alexis Engström and Fredrik Härlin, Uppsala University, Sweden

A recently initiated project, “Continuous Development of Active Student Participation at Uppsala University,” (2014-2015) aims to create durable structures for active student participation in higher education and to support the development of both existing and new initiatives. The project was proposed by students, teachers, and pedagogical developers who saw potential for educational development in existing forms of active student participation. The proposal suggests that "active student participation" is both, students as a resource in each other’s learning (peer-to-peer learning) and students as co-creators of the planning, facilitation, and evaluation of their education.

The subsequent project group formed comprises of three student project assistants and a pedagogical developer project leader. According to the project’s aims, the project has arranged a variety of seminars and workshops for teachers and students in order to enhance the sharing of various experiences on active student participation and to support new initiatives in different subject fields.

By highlighting stories of students involved in various initiatives, this presentation will focus on how students' transitions in active student participation initiatives can lead to empowerment within the wider university. In further taking up the project group’s personal experiences in transitioning from student to academic developer, this presentation will shed light on how a student perspective in pedagogical development empowers students.

As such, what is the potential for student empowerment through transitions undergone in active student participation initiatives in various contexts and at various scales? What are the limitations of this type of empowerment? Could this lead to a wider university culture transformation? A new focus on the student perspective in a pedagogical context is needed. This focus will lead to new approaches in teaching, critical perspectives to who “owns” knowledge, and new, radical forms of collegiality within higher education. There is a large potential for active student participation to be implemented at other universities and institutions as a mode of empowerment.
Parallel Session 3: Workshop
Approaches to transitions

Assessment design and learner transitions: from programme entry and progression to entering professional practice

Facilitator(s): Lynn Boyle, University of Dundee, Scotland, Keith Smyth, University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland, and David Walker, University of Sussex, England

Drawing upon examples from a range of contexts and disciplines, this interactive workshop will allow participants to explore the role of assessment, and assessment design, in supporting learner transitions to, within, and beyond higher education programmes.

The workshop will begin by outlining the need for assessment strategies that recognise the importance of programme-level cohesion, the impact of learner perceptions and prior learning on approaches to learning and use of feedback, and the value of authentic task design.

The workshop will then break into a facilitated group activity, in which different groups will explore examples of assessment design to support transitions in three areas:

- Preparing students for tertiary level assessment, recognising that where there is a clarity of expectations and experience the potential for positive and successful student transitions is enhanced (HEA, 2013)

- Approaches to holistic assessment design (Joughin, 2009) within programmes, drawing upon the University of Dundee’s application of the Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) process (Jessop et al, 2014) which identified inconsistent assessment practice as having a detrimental impact on student success and transitions between stages of their programme

- Assessment practices that support transition into the workplace and professional communities, and which are designed to move learners from engaging on the periphery to actively contributing to their wider professional and discipline-related communities

After exploring and critiquing examples in the above areas, participants will be asked to identify and report back on similar or comparable approaches to designing assessment for student transitions that would work in their own practice. The outcomes of the workshop, including key points and examples generated from the workshop activities, will then be captured and shared online. The aim is for participants to leave with an increased awareness of assessment design to support student transitions at key stages, and to have a range of examples to draw upon.

References


Delivering Internships in China: Transitions into International Employability

Facilitator(s): Lynsay Pickering and Sophie Morrison, University of Dundee, Scotland

Participants will hear about our initiative to help graduates with the transition into employability in a global economy through the Global Internship Graduate Certificate (GIGC), a programme which addresses the need to increase outward mobility and global awareness in graduates.

A very brief history of the GIGC’s development will be followed by a discussion of how the programme has added value to the graduates’ international internship experience by supporting them with career management skills, intensive coaching and by addressing the key graduate skill of globalisation in the form of university-based pre-departure taught modules.

We will discuss the views and experiences of current students, graduates and key partners and provide the opportunity to participate in discussion groups on the key issues raised by the programme.

The workshop will cover:

1. A brief introduction into the issues facing students/graduates as the move into the global workforce.
2. Participants will discuss what their institutions currently do to address the issues of outward mobility,international internships and the help they give students/graduates moving into a global market.
3. An introduction to the GIGC and how it addresses some of the issued faced by the University of Dundee, detailing the taught aspect of the course in preparing students for this transition and the support received while completing their international internship in China.
4. We will look at feedback from the graduates and current students on the programme as well as our partner organisation in China.
5. Participants will discuss what they can take forward from the session in terms of helping students with the transition into the global workforce.
6. Question/answer session on how this can be implemented in their intuitions.
“You have to be independent. It’s very different.” Exploring ways in which completing an International Foundation Year influences international students’ transition during the first year of their degree course.

Author(s): Jennie Jones and Stephanie Fleischer, University of Brighton, England and Alistair McNair, University of Brighton's International College, England

Enhancing first year international student engagement is a key focus across the UK Higher Education sector due to concerns over international student retention (Higher Education Academy (HEA), 2008). Many universities provide International Foundation Year (IFY) programmes to help international students experience a smooth transition during the first year of their degree courses (Kic.org.uk, 2013). IFY programmes incorporate courses in discipline-specific teaching through a Pathway programme linked to the student's future degree course, along with academic skills, English language support, and face-to-face tutorials (Kic.org.uk, 2013).

Research by the HEA (2008) found that first year students’ transition into higher education may be affected by new experiences of learning, teaching and assessment that contrast with experiences at school (HEA, 2008, p47). International students may experience a more difficult transition, the areas affected including: English language; educational customs; communication with academic staff; friends and peers (Kingston and Forland, 2008; Wisker, 2004). In 2011, an International College responsible for IFY programmes was launched as partner college to a post-1992 UK university. This paper presents qualitative and quantitative research findings that identify good practice regarding how IFYs prepare international students for the first year of their degree course, and how they influence students’ experiences of transition, engagement, learning, teaching and assessment in their first year. The presentation highlights the differences between students’ experiences of the IFY and partner university, and between students’ experiences who have and have not completed an IFY. A challenge for IFY students is the greater time available for classes or lectures and more interaction with lecturers at the IFY than at university; however, the IFY enhances students’ ability to cope with transition challenges, including being more independent, both academically and socially. For instance, non-IFY students find academic writing challenging compared to IFY students, who are prepared for the formal requirements of universities. Solutions identified to help all international students include more one-to-one tutorials with academic staff; integration activities early in Semester 1 to help international and home students work together; Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) early in Semester 1; earlier individual feedback in tutorials and in writing; interactive teaching with student participation using audio-visual resources, and revision sessions.
Dr Who and the Curriculum Planners: early observations from a longitudinal study of Associate Students’ transition to University.

Author(s): Julia Fotheringham and Alistair Stupart, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland

Associate Students making the transition from further to higher education along an articulation route known as 2+2 (Scottish Government, 2013) provide the context for a longitudinal study which forms the basis of this paper. The study focuses on student practices and the ways in which transition support activities mutually shape interactions amongst engineering students and staff in colleges and in a post-92 university. Data generation began in October 2014 and is scheduled through to June 2016, so this paper offers preliminary analysis of data obtained through observation and informal interactions with staff and students involved in the Associate Student project in partner colleges and in the partner University’s School of Engineering and the Built Environment.

Typically articulation is viewed, at least in policy terms, as primarily a matter of curriculum planning (Scottish Government, 2011) involving the alignment of content and level of study, all of which is viewed as essentially unproblematic for students and institutions. The socio-cultural perspective adopted in this study enables the consideration of issues that go beyond curriculum planning, enabling the exploration of some of the socio-cultural differences that lead to discontinuities in practice between studying and teaching at college and at university. Transition support activities provided by the University including shared lectures, lab sessions, academic skills workshops, and Facebook interactions have all created rich opportunities for the deployment of a series of ethnographic approaches to data collection.

One type of question frequently asked by Associate Students is ‘why is everyone doctor this and doctor that at University?’. Our paper will offer a preliminary analysis of early observations of the socio-cultural issues as well as curriculum planning concerns identified by Associate Students as they explore the transition space between college and university. This paper will be of value to staff who are who are interested in socio-cultural perspectives on transition support activities and Associate Student practice.


Using a Virtual University World to aid Overseas PGT Orientation

Author(s): Ishbel Duncan and Janie Brooks, University of St Andrews, Scotland

The Virtual University of St Andrews (ViStA) project was developed by staff in Computer Science and in ELT. Understanding that PGT students have only a few days to orient themselves to a new city, culture and University as well as studying in English at a more advanced level, dictates that staff should aid not only the formal orientation but should support the social and psychological needs of the students. The researchers decided to build a Virtual World in which students can visit St Andrews before arrival in Scotland, and, also interact with staff or students. Interviewing current students led to the requirement that it was the social, accommodation and shopping needs of students that were often more important than the academic needs. Consequently, ViStA was set up to allow students to see accommodation residences and to find out about the social aspects of the University alongside reading in-world leaflets or watching videos on social clubs and events. Students have led the growth of the in-world content through student videos, and the world has brought together several Schools and Units to coordinate activities and content. Academic input can be simple lectures on course outlines or information about academic misconduct (plagiarism) and University regulations. The Virtual World is growing and some work is being done on student stress and the need for in-world anonymous support from 1-1 anonymous chats with staff or other students.
Parallel Session 3: Presentations

Transitions relating to specific disciplines

The Academic Skills Project: Helping undergraduate students develop discipline-specific skills

Author: Catriona Wilson, University of St Andrews, Scotland

This presentation will outline the newly introduced Academic Skills Project at the University of St Andrews.

Across 10 Arts Schools, 55 research postgraduates have been working together, alongside Academic Staff and the University’s Centre for Academic, Professional and Organisational Development (CAPOD).

CAPOD’s aim for the project is to develop the academic skills of undergraduate students in a discipline-specific context; a departure from previous approaches. The approach is supported by the research of Smyth, Mavor et al (2013), which shows that students are more likely to engage in ‘deep learning’ when there is a high “discipline-based social-identity”, and even more so when there is peer normative support. School-based workshops led by local graduate students seemed likely to capitalize on both of these effects.

The presentation will explain the way the project is structured, with responsibilities for 10 School Project Coordinators, 45 Workshops Leaders, Directors of Teaching and a central Project Coordinator. It will also outline the nature of the discipline-specific academic skills delivered, such as ‘Group work’ (Management), ‘Critical Engagement and Research Skills’ (Modern Languages), ‘Thinking critically – thinking Geographically’ (G&SD), ‘Visual Analysis Trip’ (Art History), ‘How to argue like a Philosopher’ (Philosophy).

The project has resulted in high engagement from the Academic Schools taking part, with approximately 50 workshops being delivered, and several hundred undergraduates participating.

Early evaluation data indicates a positive impact, with the postgraduates reporting skill development in curriculum design and teaching, and undergraduates reporting behavioural change, increased confidence, and an expansion of knowledge as they transition into Higher Education.

The presentation will share the latest evaluation data, and the planned expansion of the project in 2015.
Effective Action Strategies to Improve Retention, Progression and Completion of Transitioning Students

Author(s): Elaine Clafferty and Barry Beggs, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

A challenge faced by some Higher Education disciplines is that, when compared to other disciplines, the completion, retention and progression rates are consistently lower. Technology subject areas often face this challenge, particularly with students making the transition from FE to HE. The research study reported in this paper illustrates that it is possible to perform an analysis of an existing difficult situation and to then design and implement an action strategy aimed at improvement. Very positive and significant outcomes are elaborated and quantified.

A four year action strategy involving a cohort of over 300 technology students at Glasgow Caledonian University has been conducted with the aim of identifying main causes of poor performance. Technology disciplines such as engineering can have some or all of the following characteristics:
- Significant numbers of students joining as Direct Entrants into years 2 or year 3
- Modest entrance qualifications
- Extremely high proportion of male students

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were taken to discover what factors may be contributing most to the ongoing performance issues. Major contributors identified included:
- Direct Entry student performance consistently poorer than progressing student performance
- A small number of modules consistently returning very low assessment marks
- Very high assessment loadings on students
- Mathematics underpinning sometimes not strong
- Students operating within a ‘resit culture’ where resits are the expected norm

The action strategy that was designed and implemented included the following activities:
- Student absence management process (not just simple attendance registers)
- Assertive outreach to students when difficulties are noticed
- Focus on outlier modules with low pass rates (less than 80% passing)
- Focus on improving academic feedback to students
- Online peer support and student led self-study groups
- Maths underpinning, summer school and drop-in sessions
- Challenge to the acceptance by staff and students of the resit culture
- Student assessment workload re-examined and made appropriate
- Staff development workshops on various issues related to the action strategy

The results from the action strategy have been very significant and have taken place rapidly. Numerically, the progression and completion rates for the cohort of over 300 students are around 10% higher than earlier cohorts. This performance enhancement has been consolidated with further cohorts.
Enhancement Themes: a brief outline

Author(s): Dr Christine Macpherson, QAA Scotland

The Enhancement Themes have been in existence since 2003, as part of the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scottish higher education.

During that time, the approach to the Themes has developed and adapted in light of feedback and evaluation.

This presentation will set out how Themes are currently conducted, and why.
Parallel Session 3: Presentations

Transitions relating to placements/work experience

Experiential learning in the Pharmacy degree

Author(s): Anne Boyter and Philip Winn, University of Strathclyde, Scotland

As part of a redesign of the pharmacy degree at the University of Strathclyde to meet the standards for Pharmacy Education specified by the regulator, the General Pharmaceutical Council, we designed experiential learning (EL) into all years of our course. In the past students concentrated on learning theory at University and then engaged in practice during the pre-registration year. This new approach emphasises integration of preclinical and clinical work throughout the curriculum and the development of increased EL will significantly benefit the transition from full time student to pharmacist. EL is designed to link the science and practice of pharmacy through students applying classroom learning to real situations in pharmacies, then reviewing this learning in facilitated group discussions and reporting in a portfolio of reflective descriptions of learning.

EL takes place in both hospital and community pharmacy from the entry year of the course; students choose one sector in final year. In both sectors EL is aligned to the learning in university so that students are supported in their ability to put knowledge into practice. This will better prepare them for moving from university studies to the period of learning in practice which precedes their registration as pharmacist.

EL is progressive: it starts with tasks related to communication with patients, understanding simple QA tasks such as expiry dates on medicines and investigating different formulations of the same drug. In the second year of study this progresses to counselling patients on use of antimicrobial agents, linking to learning about antimicrobial husbandry, assembling prescriptions for collection and participating in conversations with patients about the chronic medication service. In the penultimate year students speak to patients about polypharmacy and interact with other healthcare professionals who impact on patient care. In the final year students spend a week in practice where they participate fully in the working of the pharmacy and all aspects of patient care.

Critical to the success of EL are the facilitated discussions in university. Students discuss their experiences of different practices and aspects of pharmacy experienced to ensure that they gain insight into different methods used to tackle similar clinical problems. Finally all students must write a reflection on what they have learnt in EL related to core competencies in pharmacy of behaviours and attitudes, professionalism, review of practice, information gathering, communication, team working and patient factors.
Enhancing work-placement provision in the life sciences sector across Scottish universities

Author(s): Allison Carrington, University of Aberdeen, Scotland and Ronnie Palin, Skills Development Scotland, Scotland

The aim of this project is to increase undergraduate work-placement provision in the life science sector across all Scottish universities. Scottish industry has highlighted a need to train, develop and retain our best researchers and entrepreneurs in order to help our economy grow. Employers are however expressing concerns that many new graduates lack the basic skills necessary to make the transition directly from education into careers in their chosen field, or are leaving Scotland and taking their skills with them.

Work placements give students a fundamental advantage in this transition by providing vital work experience and training in specific skills necessary for a number of careers. Universities across the UK are working to expand the number of work-placement opportunities open to their students in areas directly related to their degree programmes, either through integrating them into specific degree programmes or by encouraging students to suspend their studies in order to gain relevant work experience. The Government is also working with representative employers and professional organisations to encourage employers to offer more work experience opportunities for students.

However, many companies are still disengaged in the process for a number of reasons, including:
• Confusion over the different placement provision systems which are currently in operation across the country.
• Difficulty in accessing appropriate students.
• The often complicated processes which need to be followed in order to find and take on a placement student.
• Lack of understanding of what is required by a student on placement.
• Lack of financial support to take on a student.

Scotland’s universities are all very different and a ‘one-size fits all’ placement policy simply would not work. There is currently a highly complex landscape of initiatives for students, employers and universities to navigate with schemes differing in length and flexibility and having different entry criteria for students and companies alike. A mapping exercise to determine the current state of play regarding placement provision is currently being undertaken and the results will be used to determine whether it would be possible to create a single, unified, system to provide details of sector-wide, university-level placement opportunities to students in all Scottish HEIs and provide dedicated advice and support for companies interested in offering such a placement. Initial results will be available early in 2015.
Development of contextualised math problems for Engineering students

Author(s): Kalina Asenova and Andrew Starkey, University of Aberdeen, Scotland

Maths is a core component of Physical Science degrees, particularly engineering. However, students sometimes find it difficult to apply the maths they have learnt in an abstract context to engineering problems. In addition, some students are offered a direct entry into Level 3 after they have completed their HND in College. Due to a variety of factors (different teaching and learning styles in College versus University, emphasis on numerical methods rather than theoretical analysis in maths courses at College), those students can have difficulties adapting to the expectations in terms of maths knowledge at Level 3. Finally, the Curriculum for Excellence that is now being implemented in schools in Scotland from S4 and S5, will likely result in students starting in the next 2 to 3 years having different mathematical skills and different confidence in their maths abilities than the students that were previously progressing to University. The challenges encountered with maths can quickly become overwhelming for students, and more importantly for retention and progression issues, will result in them dropping out of University or failing subjects and being unable to progress. For articulating students evidently, this can also directly affect their degree classification since they enter in Level 3 (an Honours year), and result in demotivated students who also may choose to leave early. Many Higher Education institutions in Scotland and Britain have already recognized this and set up maths support of some sort.

Mathematical content that defines problems in the context of engineering has therefore been developed by a current 4th year student within the School of Engineering in the five maths topics that students in Engineering should know by the end of Level 2 in order to progress well to Level 3: Differentiation, Integration, Matrices, Complex Numbers and Ordinary Differential Equations. This content is therefore aimed at both articulating students and also those progressing from year 2 to year 3 within the University.

The content has been created using the free DEWIS e-assessment system, developed by the University of the West of England. This is compatible with Blackboard, used by the University of Aberdeen, and diagnostic tests can be uploaded for student feedback and monitoring. However the intention is that these tests are not formally assessed but are student led self-tests to assist in self-directed learning.
Empowering students through transitions

Student-led teaching: role models and rolling legacy as students taught by students teach students in their turn

Author(s): Roger Watt, Rebecca Skinner and Francesca Worsnop, University of Stirling, Scotland

What happens when students who were taught statistics by students become teachers to students in their own turn?

We report evidence that using final year undergraduate students to teach practical statistics to a class of 2nd year undergraduate students is successful. For two successive years we have used undergraduate students to teach the practical aspects of statistics. The tutors are given the task of ensuring that every student that engages becomes adept at doing statistics, through repeated practice with diagnostic feedback. The success is twofold: learners do become proficient at doing statistical tests (choosing the right one and carrying it out) and learners become confident in this skill. Our evidence is that the learning process is more effective because the learning environment lacks differentials in status and expertise and so supports active trial-and-error learning.

Although it generates strong learning of statistics, this method of teaching statistics is used primarily to enhance student-tutor confidence and readiness for the transition from University. By giving them responsibility (supported within a carefully controlled environment) we give them an important opportunity to articulate a wide range of skills and attributes.

We have reached the stage where students who learned statistics in this way are now delivering statistics themselves as tutors. The empirical question is whether we discover that the completed cycle generates additional enhancement to learning. The observation so far is that it does.

Our evidence is that the student teachers are using their experience of student teaching to find a role-model. The first cohorts of student tutors had to be encouraged by ourselves to see their role as an experienced student and emphatically not as an inexperienced lecturer. Student tutors in the current cohort already have that idea and naturally adopt a facilitator style of teaching rather than an authority-based style. Their security in doing so is greater than earlier cohorts because they have seen it in action. We will present data exploring this.

Additionally, we will present data that the new student teachers are actively engaged with the legacy issue: of what their teaching style will mean as a model for others in its turn and how they ensure the unusual learning environment continues. This suggests that the student teachers are becoming self-reflective.

The cycle relating learner to teacher rolls forward synergistically, started off each generation by role model and driven forward by an awareness of legacy.
Harnessing Technology to Improve Functional Writing Skills which Empower Students Through Transitions

Author(s): Margaret McCann, University of Glasgow, Scotland and Julie Thomson and Claire Bereziat, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

According to many employers, “the ability to communicate [both orally and in writing] is the most important skill that a graduate can possess” (CMI, 2014 p. 8) yet some employers note that “candidates’ letters showed signs of poor grammar, sentence construction and spelling errors.” (FSSC, 2010 p. 2). As Programme Leaders of direct entry programmes in Glasgow Caledonian University, the project team have first-hand experience that a fundamental challenge facing the transition of many students relates to their basic functional writing skills. This paper describes a scholarly staff-led project which aims to evaluate how technology can be used to improve basic functional writing skills in students.

It is crucial that students entering Higher Education should possess the required functional writing skills, however consistent anecdotal information and colleagues’ comments on poor quality of writing, as well as first-hand experience, tell us that this needs to be addressed. This is supported by numerous reports (BIS 2010, BIS 2012, Scottish Tourism Alliance 2013, FSSC and SIO, 2010) which highlight concerns regarding students’ communication skills, including basic grammar.

Although some online material related to functional writing skills does exist, it is not always in a format that students identify with, and/or are willing to use or are aware of. This project will identify, develop and evaluate a programme of learning, incorporating a range of online learning and teaching materials, designed to improve students’ transition and functional writing skills in an attempt to better prepare them for writing essays, reports, etc. as well as improve awareness, understanding and good practice in their use of grammar. It will identify the best existing materials and, where appropriate, develop new bespoke materials related to functional writing using online, interactive technologies. A programme of learning will be developed directing, encouraging and supporting students’ learning as and when appropriate within their programme of study.

This 2 year project started in Sept 2014 and this paper presents the work-to-date. This will include a presentation of:

• The data collected identifying the main issues with students’ functional writing skills, awareness and understanding of language
• A demonstration of the materials piloted to enhance students’ transition and functional writing skills
• A description of future work
Rethinking peer, rethinking review: Students’ transition to colleagues

Author(s): Kelda Sinclair, Andrina Matthew, Ursula Green and Samantha Purves, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland

This innovative pilot project, likely to be unique within Higher Education, positions Edinburgh Napier students at the heart of an intervention that offers an alternative to the traditional peer review process. During the project, Students as Colleagues in the Review of Teaching Practices, students and staff members enter into a collegial relationship, transitioning across academic disciplines and onto a new, non-hierarchical, shared platform of cooperation and understanding. Students act as a colleague, tasked with professionally reviewing the teaching practices of a staff member from a different discipline.

Voluntarily recruited through university wide advertising, eighteen students were randomly paired with eighteen members of staff. We are four of these students. In rethinking how to evaluate teaching practices, we initially invested in our own personal and professional development skills through collaborative training workshops. We engaged in tasks that would better enable us to articulate our already valuable perspectives as constructive feedback in a professional manner. Our confidence increased as did our understanding of the philosophies and realities of the discipline that is teaching and learning. During one trimester, we engaged in a range of evaluative review exercises: an observation of the staff members’ teaching practice, an evaluation of virtual teaching resources (i.e. Moodle), a focus group with our paired staff member’s students, a review of the feedback given on assessed coursework and a one–one video–recorded feedback session, between the student-staff pair.

We are also in transition to an equally unique role as ‘Students as Researchers’. We four are representative of eleven students volunteering to invest our time and enthusiasm in developing our research skills alongside participating in this study. We have kept written reflective diaries about our experiences of observing teaching practices and providing feedback, and have recorded our reflections on our training sessions and our thoughts about engaging with staff members in a collegial relationship.

Our presentation will outline this student-led initiative in more detail before discussing our personal reflections about the project’s feasibility and effectiveness. We will then discuss the implications of this alternative process for university professional development policies. Finally, we will offer our own recommendations for future student involvement in the evaluation of teaching practices.
Parallel Session 4: Workshop

Approaches to transitions

Practical Ways to Improve the Success of Transitioning Students

Facilitator(s): Elaine Clafferty and Barry Beggs, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

This workshop will discuss and explore the practicalities of how to design and implement action plans and processes to assist students making the transition from FE to HE. The workshop will not be discipline based and will be relevant to any subject area where there is an interest in improving the performance of FE to HE transitioning students. In some subject areas it is recognised that Direct Entry students joining years 2 or 3 of HE programmes can face challenges that result in poorer performance compared to students who are not Direct Entrants. Retention, progression and completion statistics in many cases illustrate the difficulties faced by some transitioning students. Over a number of years at Glasgow Caledonian University there has been work going on aimed at improving the overall performance of Direct Entry students in engineering programmes. This work has resulted in some very significant improvements with respect to retention, progression, completion and student satisfaction. The improvement achieved will be quantified at the start of the workshop. The session will include brief presentations illustrating key aspect of the improvement action plan and how each aspect has been implemented in practice.

Attendees will have the opportunity to engage in a number of role playing activities either as a student or as a staff member or both. The role playing activities will allow attendees to assess each key aspect of the action plan in order to inform them about whether the method(s) would be suitable for use in their own learning environments.

Attendees will be provided with the rationale behind each of the workshop activities and support materials and documentation will be supplied. The key aspects of the overall action plan to be illustrated and practiced will include:

- Getting students off to a good start – workshop activity 1
- Support and advice to students - workshop activity 2
- Clarifying expectations of an HE environment
- Helping students to become more independent learners
- Managing time - workshop activity 3
- Goal setting - workshop activity 4
- Creating a vision board - workshop activity 5
- Personal reflection
Engaging articulating students as partners

Facilitator(s): Eve Lewis and Hannah Clarke, sparqs, Scotland

Students working with their colleges and universities are key to shaping student learning and ensuring the very best student experience in Scotland. From this perspective our students are not passive recipients of their education but partners in shaping the outcomes, not just for themselves but future generations of students. Students as active partners in their learning is a topic of increasing importance to the sector which is reflected in recent national and international literature (Healey et al. 2014; Cook-Sather et al. 2014).

In some institutions, almost a quarter of students will articulate into second or third level of a degree programme. Students who articulate from college may face particular difficulties at university: for example, in relation to curriculum alignment, the learning and teaching process or assessment and feedback. What is being done to engage with this diverse group of students? And to what extent have we achieved the goal of putting students at the centre of the learner journey in our work to develop proper, planned articulation?

In this workshop sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland), the national agency responsible for supporting student engagement, will examine this fundamental question in relation to the Student Engagement Framework for Scotland. Participants will be expected to share the ways in which their institutions currently address the challenges encountered by articulating students.

Organisation of workshop and objectives
The format of the workshop will involve a presentation which examines the implications of A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland, which will be followed up by small group discussions. Overall, the workshop aims to enhance participants’ understanding of this framework, as well as suggest ways in which the work of sparqs can assist in supporting the journey of articulating students.
Parallel Session 4: Presentations

Transitions into HE

A Pre-Entry Distance Course on Moodle: articulating course expectations, aiming to impact on access, and student confidence.

Author(s): Chris Finlay, Mary McVey, Beth Paschke, Graham MacIntosh and Leoni Dewert, University of Glasgow, Scotland

During 2013-14 the five authors developed an accessible, flexible model for online delivery and learning within Moodle, a 6-week course called Pre-Entry Nursing Summer School (PENSs).

This course was developed in response to a recognised barrier to potential nursing students. If potential nursing students need to update their biology and chemistry knowledge they must attend a 6-week on-campus summer school as part of their condition of entry. This immediately creates financial and timing pressures that may prevent students from choosing the University of Glasgow course.

There is a lot of untapped potential for pre-entry engagement with students prior to them starting their undergraduate studies. With careful thought and design this interaction can be used to ease the transition to HE, a known difficulty for many students (Thomas, L, 2012). This staff and student contact can benefit everyone involved and pre-entry courses like this could also be used to promote courses and help attract students to the University.

The PENSs course is an on-line alternative delivering nursing focused content, unlike the on-campus summer school, that is accessible by enrolled students anywhere in the world. The course allowed students to experience University level teaching and assessment methods. In addition the course structure and content aimed to articulate the expectations placed on first year students helping to highlight the reality of transition into Higher Education.

In this initial pilot 6 students enrolled onto the course. Evaluation questionnaires were collected from these participants before, during and after the course, investigating aspects of accessibility, student confidence and awareness.

This presentation will:
- Outline the developmental work and delivery methods used in the PENSs course
- Report the student evaluation results, assessing any changes in student confidence and awareness
- Discuss course design, scalability and expansion for future years

This information will focus on key points useful to anyone considering designing online distance materials.
Making sense of assessment expectations and feedback in the first year

Author: David Carless, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

A major challenge in the transition from secondary school to university relates to students’ understandings of the expectations for quality academic work. Supporting students to develop a sense of the nature of quality in the discipline can promote productive engagement and stimulate progress towards worthwhile learning outcomes. The aim of this paper is to analyse students’ experiences of coming to terms with assessment expectations in the first year.

The data is drawn from a study which analysed the assessment practices of five teachers from different disciplines who had been recipients of internal or external awards for teaching excellence (Carless, 2015). The research involved a series of classroom observations to understand teaching, learning and assessment in context; multiple interviews with the five teachers; and individual interviews with 51 of their students to enable the important student voice to be articulated.

In this presentation, I focus on the History case which involved a foundation course open to students from multiple disciplines. Two main student challenges arose in relation to transition. The first relates to the difficulty in decoding criteria in the form of rubrics even when these were well-designed. Students reported criteria as being vague and looking “all the same” and this reduced their engagement with them (cf. Woolf, 2001). The second issues relates to challenges in interpreting and acting on feedback. Some of the less higher-achieving students expressed frustration in understanding and using feedback (cf. Orsmond & Merry, 2013).

Both of these issues have been much discussed in the literature and I bring out similarities and differences with the existing knowledge base. In the final part of the paper, I argue for the dialogic use of exemplars to support students in understanding the nature of quality work as embodied in criteria. When students have a better sense of what quality looks like, there are also more prospects for feedback to connect with them.

References


Supporting Transitions to Degree Study using an Online Module

Author(s): Colleen Maclean and Donald Macdonald, University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland

UHI has a robust, inclusive RPL policy that supports access at first year and with enhanced standing. As a result the student profile for UHI demonstrates much diversity with various routes used to access degree programmes. Some students will progress from existing programmes using qualifications gained to support entry with enhanced standing; others enter first year with traditional Highers or vocational qualifications. In many cases the students will have no recent experience of study, or experience of study at the level and each student is likely to be challenged by the expectations of study skills in transition. A 20 credit module, Nature of Health, taught fully online at Level 7, is used to support transitions for many of these students. The module is an existing, well established module that forms part of the core structure for 2 degree programmes and an option module for others. This module has explicit study skills outcomes alongside subject related outcomes. It takes an overtly developmental approach with extensive lecturer support online, connections with support systems in enrolling colleges, embedded formative assessments and links to longitudinal induction (also online). It makes full use of the tools of the VLE, supporting students to use these with confidence.

Alongside its function as a core module, it is used as a pathways module for BA Childhood Practice, a bridging module for 2nd year entry for HNC and equivalent, an access module for students who have not studied recently or have awards in unrelated area, and as an extended 6th year experience for small cohorts of school pupils. Evaluations suggest that this module provides an accessible and confidence building entry to degree level study with formative assessment tasks particularly useful for transition. Confidence building from regular contact with lecturers and peers within the VLE is also considered supportive, useful and enjoyable. School pupils are vocal about the transferability of the study skills of time management, self discipline, reading and referencing learned while studying on the module and transferable to degree programmes outwith UHI.
Transitions relating to specific disciplines

The University of Glasgow Reach programme: supporting the transition to professional degree study

Author(s): Scott Iguchi-Sherry, Laura Tansley and Karen MacEachern, University of Glasgow, Scotland

Reach Scotland is a national project, created in 2010 with support from the Scottish Funding Council, which aims to widen access to high demand professions – subjects which have not greatly benefited from efforts to widen participation in higher education to date. Reach West is coordinated by the University of Glasgow and works with 95 secondary schools across the region to encourage, support and prepare S4-S6 pupils interested in studying a degree in Dentistry, Law, Medicine or Veterinary Medicine.

This presentation will show how, using the successful model of the Top-Up Programme and in direct collaboration with the professional academic schools, Reach West has developed a programme which supports and guides pupils through the application process and the transition to Higher Education. Pupils taking part in the programme attend school sessions, campus sessions and summer schools where blended learning methods are employed (i.e. virtual learning environments, online student mentoring and, crucially, interactions with staff working in the professional subject areas).

The paper will show how, in the first three years of the project, Reach West has had a positive impact on the numbers of pupils from target schools and socio-economically disadvantaged areas gaining entry to the University of Glasgow. It will examine the impact that the project has had in preparing pupils for the transition to University study across all four professional disciplines. In addition, the paper will consider the specific model of staff mentoring employed by the School of Veterinary Medicine and the benefits this brings to their students. In a unique feature of the programme, staff from the School of Veterinary Medicine provide consistent mentoring support for pupils during the three-year pre-entry programme, through the application and admissions process and in to the first year of University and beyond. This comprehensively covers the transition from low-progress school to high-tariff, intensive professional degree study.

Feedback from focus groups will be included and used to consider the role of mentoring for widening access entrants.
Transitions 20/40: Facilitating fairer transitions into further and higher education in the performing and production arts.

Author(s): Graeme Smillie and Suzanne Kay, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scotland

“It feels like, because you’ve been picked for something like this, you’ve got a bit more potential. They see potential. They see potential there, which kinda gives you a bit of confidence that I’ve got something there, there must be something that somebody is seeing.”

Transitions 20/40 Drama Student

Transitions 20/40 at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is designed to minimize an inconsistency of opportunity in the performing and production arts that is correlated to location and socio-economic circumstances. Subsidised by the Scottish Funding Council, Transitions 20/40 provides applicants from SIMD 20/40 postcodes with indispensible knowledge and skills training from sector leading teaching professionals. The initiative aims to create a more equal and diverse demographic in both the wider creative field and in those able to apply for highly competitive undergraduate programmes in the performing and production arts.

Transitions 20/40 endeavours to connect students’ different strands of formal and informal learning and to manage the transition into a competitive, demanding but ultimately transformative learning environment. This process is managed holistically and realistically, offering students guidance towards a successful training or employment destination. In doing so, a bespoke learning journey is mapped and informed by how the students and tutors wish to use their funded hours to work towards that goal.

This workshop will facilitate a discussion about what a joined up approach actually means when conducting a nationwide transitional programme across five related yet distinct disciplines. How do you establish and maintain relationships with such a broad range of students? How can you effectively manage a diverse range of ages and stages? What are the real and perceived barriers learners face in accessing high quality facilities and training opportunities?

The Transitions 20/40 team continues to work reflectively to answer these questions.

This workshop will offer an insight into the first educational initiative of this kind in Scotland, assist the team in locating the programme within a broader creative context, discuss the appropriateness of early intervention in widening access and gratefully receive feedback from workshop participants.
Evaluation of a peer tutoring scheme to empower students in their transitions through the student journey

Judith Lane and Jane Hislop, Queen Margaret University, Scotland

Peer tutoring has potential to empower students to successfully navigate transitions across different stages of their student journey. A peer tutoring scheme was therefore introduced in which senior physiotherapy students supported first year student from the BSc (Hons) and MSc (pre-registration) Physiotherapy programmes, to develop practical skills during taught classes and self-study sessions. The aim was to improve the quality of the students' learning experience and enhance their self-efficacy for independent study. Additionally, the scheme intended to offer opportunities for senior students to develop transferable skills and graduate attributes to support their transition into employment. The aim of this study was to evaluate student attitudes towards peer tutoring.

Two focus group interviews (n=17, 6 males, 11 females) were conducted with year 1 students who had received support and guidance from senior students. A focus group was also conducted with five senior students who acted as peer tutors (2 males, 3 females). Audio data from the focus groups were transcribed verbatim and analysed using a thematic approach.

Five major themes were identified. These themes were: 1) Developing communities of learners: all students identified the value of shared learning for developing self-efficacy and creating a 'safe' space for learning; 2) Validation of learning: senior students were able to provide reassurance about the challenges of learning in relation to developing profession specific skills; 3) Personal development: student tutors recognised the benefits for them in terms of their professional development and reported feeling valued and respected; 4) Approaches to learning: having been through the learning themselves student tutors were able to empathise and provide practical strategies for learning; 5) Need for structure: the need for self-study sessions to be structured was raised by all participants.

The results suggest that the peer-tutoring scheme was well received by students both as peer tutors and learners. Benefits included: developing confidence and self-efficacy to support independent learning; consolidating practical skills and theoretical knowledge as well as contextualising university based skills and knowledge. The peer tutoring system offers a non threatening supportive learning environment and helps to develop a community of learners across and within programmes.
Transitions relating to placements/work experience

Transitions relating to placements/work experience

Transitional expectations: the interface between skills and knowledge at a post-1992 university

Author(s): Sam Ellis and Alison Nimmo, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

At Glasgow Caledonian University, we have developed a visual audit tool which enables programme leaders to reflect on the design of learning environments as students make the transition between years of a degree programme. The tool is intended to be the first stage in rethinking environments and materials where necessary.

For each of the four levels of an undergraduate degree, the programme leader is asked: To what extent are students being asked to acquire knowledge? To what extent are students being asked to acquire skills? To what extent are students being asked to apply their knowledge? To what extent are students being asked to apply their skills?

These shifting emphases are mapped in a simple matrix model with two domains (skills and knowledge) and a bisecting continuum (from ‘acquiring’ to ‘applying’). The resulting visualisation provides a platform for a qualitative discussion, and will allow us to aggregate data across subject groups. We also intend to conduct semi-structured interviews and focus groups to both support implementation and evaluate impact.

Our initial pilot will focus on teachers’ perspectives, i.e. those who are responsible for the design and delivery of programmes. As important, though, are student perspectives on these transitions, so that we may investigate the extent to which students are aware of the expected demands on them as they make the transition between years. By collecting comparative data of this kind it will be possible to address the (mis)alignment between student and teacher expectations. Ultimately, then, we anticipate that this project will effect better alignment of expectations around student demand across degree programmes.

In sharing and disseminating our audit tool at this stage of the enhancement theme cycle, we expect to generate sector-wide data and to contribute to the enhancement of transitional practice across Scotland. We hope to encourage colleagues to interrogate the extent to which an improved understanding of these implicit transitional ‘gear changes’ may result in enhanced learning and shared expectations between teachers and students.

An evaluative component will be included in order to determine a) the usefulness of the tool and b) the enhancement activity implemented as a result of using the tool. Theoretical platforms for our work can be traced back to seminal works such as Laurence Stenhouse’s An introduction to curriculum research and development (1975), and we expect our findings to interact with the rich tradition of scholarship around the domains of knowledge and skills.
Enhancing the ‘Employability Journey’ for Year 3 Direct Entrant Computing Students

Author(s): Patricia Durkin and Colin Smith, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland

This presentation addresses the theme of transitions during study through the experience of college students as they become 3rd year direct entrants on computing degree programmes, and as they prepare to undertake either graduate work or summer placement at the end of that year.

The School of Computing at Edinburgh Napier University has a significant intake of college students articulating into 3rd year, making up 42% of the 3rd year cohort. 3rd year is key for employability because many employers offer summer placements to students at the end of that year, some having the potential to lead to a graduate role. However, long application lead times mean that closing dates for these placements can be just weeks after direct entrants have started their programmes at University. Additionally, during 3rd year, they face the choice of whether to continue into Honours year.

Historically, few direct entrants apply for summer placement opportunities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while these students see the benefit of undertaking placements they don’t feel ready, due to a number of factors including lack of awareness of opportunities and deadlines, and lack of confidence in marketing their skills to potential employers. This is compounded by the challenges of joining an established cohort of continuing students and transitioning into a new academic environment. Additionally, should they choose to leave University with an Ordinary degree at the end of their 3rd year, they face the added pressure of trying to orientate themselves in the graduate labour market just a few months after having transitioned into higher education.

The presentation outlines a response to these challenges, ‘Placement Academy’, a strategic intervention designed to support students as they navigate significant transitions and to provide an ‘employability journey’. Open to all 3rd year students but aimed specifically at direct entrants, Placement Academy is a weekly timetabled programme with inputs from Careers staff, staff from the University’s distinctive ‘Confident Futures’ programme, placement staff and employers. The aim is to help students prepare to take advantage of work opportunities including placements, part-time work and ultimately graduate roles.

The presentation outlines the distinctive nature of the Placement Academy approach, and presents an evaluation of its design and outcomes, drawing upon data from the students themselves to understand the place of Placement Academy in helping them to negotiate transitions into university, and onwards towards the workplace.
From transition points to transition process: developing our conceptual understanding of 'transition' in the 2015 higher education context

Author(s): Alison Gilmour, The Open University in Scotland, Scotland

The current QAA Enhancement Theme of Student Transitions allows us to identify the ways in which we support students into, through and beyond their experience in higher education. Despite the diversity of the student body, it is a relatively easy task for us to identify key transitions for students in terms of a linear chronological conception of the student experience. However, for universities to better understand how we can support students, and importantly where the gaps are in existing support, the Theme offers an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the experience of transition. This can be progressed through a wider conceptual exploration through engaging with transition and change literature from various academic disciplines.

This conference paper will be based on a conceptual exploration of the process of transition, undertaken by staff at the Open University in Scotland during the first phase of the current Enhancement Theme. Creating the space to move away from literature focused on ‘transition points’ and instead to that on ‘transition process’, provides the opportunity to explore the essence of the experience of transition, including the meaning and significance to individuals involved. This paper will reflect this process of conceptual mapping, drawing on key conceptual discussions and areas of debate particularly from education, the social sciences, and business and management studies. This work will be used to inform our theoretical understanding of transitions in higher education and support the conceptual development of the Enhancement Theme.

References
Empowering students through transitions

Transition from Student to Examiner: Assessment Literacy Interventions in a Veterinary Curriculum

Author: Susan Rhind, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Assessment literacy has been defined as a series of 6 competences necessary to understand both the purpose and process of assessment [1]. By developing a deeper understanding of quality work and standards, significant gains can be made that benefit students not only in their transition into higher education but also in transition into different phases of degree programmes.

This presentation will describe a study in a veterinary curriculum where 2 different approaches were used to develop assessment literacy competences in veterinary students. Both approaches were designed to provide explicit opportunities for the students to act as examiners – in the context of both multiple choice questions (MCQs) and free text (short answer) questions. In the first intervention, students authored questions for other students using the web based tool PeerWise and in addition, to give them further examiner experience they were introduced to the concept of standard setting and given the opportunity to set standards using the Angoff standard setting method on a series of 20 MCQs. Student standard setting data were recorded and qualitative data gathered on their experiences. In the second intervention, students attended a workshop where they were given an opportunity to mark authentic pieces of student work from the previous year’s cohort. Their marks were recorded followed by discussion of the faculty mark given to each piece of work in plenary. Evaluation of the workshop was carried out.

In the context of material which students were familiar with, students were able to set standards that were similar to faculty. For material they were less familiar with, they set a standard which was 10% easier than faculty. With no specific training, students showed a wide range of abilities as markers. Further qualitative evaluation of the student’s experiences in both interventions revealed several themes including the value of gaining insights in to the process of assessing and standard setting, and the importance of understanding the wider context of assessment practice. Students also recognized a link between assessment literacy competences and feedback. The implications of these results for future work and curriculum design will be discussed.

Use of Academies as a new model to empower students during transition and help them make informed choices

Author(s): Sandra Grieve, Grace Farhat, Jennifer Bingham and Julie Calfield, Queen Margaret University, Scotland

Previous research indicates that study habits formed by students in secondary school persist until the end of their first semester, indicating that students are not bridging the gap between school and university/college quickly or effectively enough. Therefore, there is a need for a new level of independence and empowerment, and a supportive climate for successful learner development. Whittaker (2007) talks of shifting the focus of transition from the issue of student retention and withdrawal to one of supporting the engagement and empowerment of students. It is then important to establish a positive learner identity and to implement pre-entry activities to support potential students to develop the necessary confidence, skills and knowledge. Whittaker states that one of the ways to support empowerment is to include campus visits by young people and to engage in activities with students and staff on site.

This paper will present the South East Scotland Academies Partnership (SESAP) as a successful model of a collaborative and pedagogical approach to the pre-entry support stage. The presentation will focus on the key benefits of the Academies partnership as an effective method of enabling informed choice, raising aspirations, preparing students for Higher Education study, easing the transition between school, college and university, developing independent learning skills and building confidence. In so doing, the presentation will demonstrate how students empowered by their Academy experience and their real taste of university and college life go on to establish a positive learner identity. The presentation will include findings to demonstrate the above benefits and a case study of an Academy student who has progressed to the 2nd Year of a degree course at QMU to illustrate the programme as a positive learning experience. The presentation will also demonstrate how the Academy helps to integrate successfully into the academic and social aspects of university or college life, to gain a sense of belonging to a group and to encourage students’ engagement and commitment to their chosen course and institution.

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Conflicting roles? Student representatives as the storyteller and the translator

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Students in representative roles have the job of transitioning between their student position, their academic success and engaging effectively with staff and quality processes to resolve issues and bring about positive change. These roles are usually voluntary and often support is thin on the ground and analysis of the impact of this transitioning on the student and the process even thinner. This presentation uses the theoretical framework of Walter Benjamin to consider these dual roles of students as storytellers and translators, the impact they can have and the tensions therein. The presentation itself is a personal story of a current MA student who has previously been involved in many representative roles as a student, a course rep, a president and is currently a committee member of the Critical Studies Research Group Society. It explores the different aspects and restricts of the different roles and the transitions between them in relation to the theoretical framework.