QAA Enhancement Theme: Student Transitions

University of Aberdeen’s Institutional Plan of Work 2014 – 2015 and Overall Plans for 2014-17

Institutional Plan of Work for Year 1 (2014 – 2015): Identification of Existing Effective Practice and Areas for Improvement

Background

The University of Aberdeen’s new Student Transitions Team comprises academic membership from each College and representation from relevant Professional Services (the Careers Service, the Centre for Academic Development, and the Student Recruitment and Admissions Section) and the Aberdeen University Students’ Association. At the Team’s initial meeting, members of the group considered the priorities which the Institution would like to address through its Enhancement Theme activities and concluded that:

(i) There is a diverse range of provisions which support students through the many transition experiences whilst studying at the University, including some relatively new initiatives e.g. the Students 4 Students Peer Mentoring Scheme.
(ii) It would be useful to map this transition activity in a way which helps to identify areas where further initiatives (either new or based on existing good practice) could be implemented or adapted from our wider learning.
(iii) There is a varying degree of knowledge about these initiatives and work needs to be undertaken to disseminate this good practice, encourage changes in practice in other areas or connect practice across Colleges and/or academic Schools.

The University of Aberdeen is in the process of writing its Strategic Plan for 2015 – 2020 and the priorities identified in the new plan will inform the Institution’s Enhancement Theme activities where appropriate. Given these considerations, the University intends to undertake the following plan of work:

1. Scoping Exercise to Identify Existing Effective Practice and Areas for Improvement

The scoping exercise will be undertaken as a project by a postgraduate researcher employed for this purpose. A series of focus groups will be conducted with staff, students and employers to identify:

(i) Examples of effective practice under ‘In’, ‘Through’ and ‘Out’ categories of Student Transition.
(ii) Areas of Student Transition which have received little attention or where the current initiatives have not proved successful with a view to changing/improving practice.
(iii) Provision across the wider UK HE sector to benchmark our student transition support and learn from others.

The project output will be a report which will be considered by the Institution’s Student Transitions Team before wider dissemination if appropriate. The areas identified in (ii) will be used to inform the theme of item 2 below.
2. Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme: Changing and Improving Practice

The Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) is an existing University of Aberdeen channel which has been used to distribute funding from the Enhancement Themes to staff, on a competitive basis, for several years. Initiatives funded under LTEP have included small projects, dissemination activities and evaluation of existing practice. This year, the Programme will be reviewed and redesigned to focus specifically on Student Transition initiatives which will change or improve practice, as identified in (ii) above. Dissemination activity will be considered but will not be the main purpose of the Programme. The LTEP will be launched in spring 2015.

3. Internal and External Dissemination Activities

The Team has already identified a need to prioritise the dissemination of existing effective practice in supporting Student Transitions such as the initiative in the School of Engineering to support students from Further Education into years 2 or 3 of Engineering programmes, or the skills support set up by the School of Medical Sciences to improve progression into Honours study. Dissemination will be carried out in several ways including:

(i) *The University’s Annual Academic Development Symposium:* this is scheduled for 29/4/15 with the theme ‘Student Transitions’. This year’s Symposium will include a call for posters which illustrate existing effective practice, and a call for workshop proposals to encourage discussion about new activity to support transition at various stages in the student journey.

(ii) *Other internal events and activities under the Centre for Academic Development’s programme of seminars, workshops and network meetings:* This will include dissemination of activities generated through the LTEP.

(iii) *Employment of a student intern:* The internship will be offered over summer 2015 to develop a good practice ‘portal’ which has the sole purpose of identifying and disseminating effective practice. This will include a website, video case studies and other resources. The student’s work package will include activities to promote the Portal across the institution.

Overall Plans for Years 2 and 3 (2015 – 2017): Implementation, Dissemination and Evaluation

**Year 2 2015-2016: Implementation and Dissemination**

Year 2’s focus will be on continuing to disseminate effective practice and encourage change or improvement in practice where this need has been identified. A further LTEP will be launched which will focus on a different aspect of Student Transition. The Annual Symposium will also have a different focus, whilst remaining in alignment with the overarching Theme.

**Year 3 2016-2017: Implementation, Dissemination and Evaluation**

Year 3 will again continue activities which disseminate effective practice and encourage change or improvement in existing practice. In addition, the enhancement activities which have taken place in years 2 and 3 will be evaluated by a postgraduate researcher. The evaluation will be designed to identify the reach of dissemination activities, and the impact that these have had; in essence, whether the activities undertaken effected change in the Institution’s support for students in all identified aspects of transition. The topic for the final Student Transitions LTEP will be determined by the outcomes of activities in years 2 and 3, and may focus on the evaluation of these activities with the view to identifying an action plan for further work.

Professor Kath Shennan
Chair of the University of Aberdeen Student Transitions Team, and Institutional Member of the Student Transitions Steering Committee