Macro: QAA Collaborative Cluster: Personalised Approaches to Resilience and Community (PARC)

Diagnostic Testing at Transition to HEI – Institutional (Macro) level implications

How can we best enable student success when our students enter our universities with an increasingly diverse range of abilities and skills?

PARC seeks to develop, implement and evaluate activities that better prepare the individual student to be successful through the adoption of diagnostic testing of students on pre-arrival/arrival.

This paper highlights some of the issues that could impact at the macro level of the institution. It discusses how diagnostic testing at your institution could help address key priority areas and asks you to consider opportunities for deployment.

Creating robust systems that enable personalisation of a student's first steps at university is even more relevant at this time as the sector moves to offer relatively untested blended approaches to learning and greets a student cohort that has experienced 18 months of educational disruption.

Keywords*: Institution, personalisation, student experience, retention, success.*

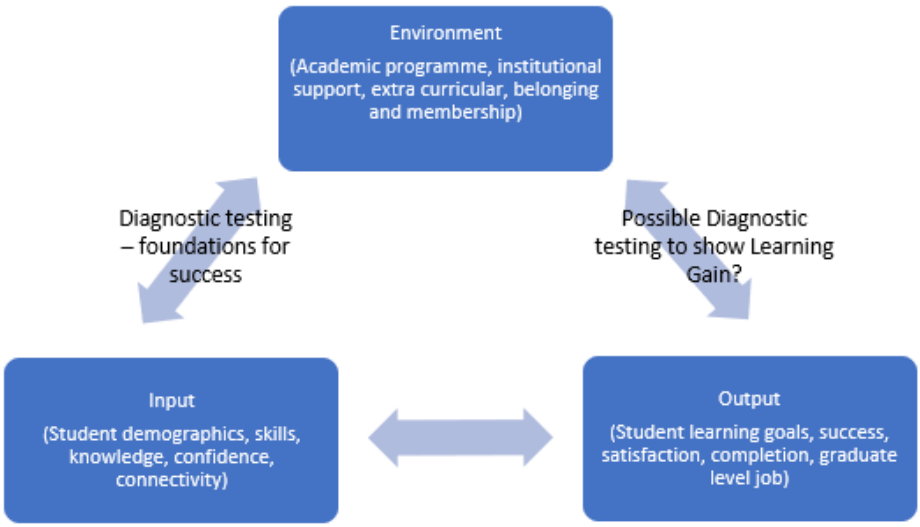
Potential for impact on institutional priorities

Diagnostic approaches to identifying students' strengths and weakness provides the potential to impact key challenges that institutions face through:

- Retention: informed allocation of resources to support student retention as cohort level data informs the institution of student need to become successful learners.
- Professional service infrastructure: student data would signal where and when support service resource would be best deployed to enable student success.
- Progression: Diagnostic testing could be ascribed at the beginning of each year to establish student progress (a Learning Gain approach that could build student confidence) and identify issues as students enter a new year of their university journey.
- Estate: student indicators on the need for socialisation or more study spaces on campus could have significant impact on how we reshape our campuses post pandemic.
- Staffing: diagnostic trend data may help service evolve to meet needs that are special and pertinent to particular year groups or societal changes.
- Recruitment: Through better understanding the data from the diagnostics and aligning it to recruitment data, trends may be identified from particular schools or colleges or particular courses that prospective students studied.
- Student expectations: The diagnostic provides an opportunity to direct students to activities that offer clarity around how they need to prepare to succeed at university. The opportunity to demystify success could be the most important outcome for students and institutions as it could empower students to take forward their own learning paths

A key framework to consider (Astin I-E-O model)

Astin's (I-E-O) model (1991) is adapted in the diagram and provides a foundation to consider developments at your institution. The model offers an insight as to how and why diagnostics might be best deployed and offers the possibility of it being utilised to record some element of student or institutional learning gain (OfS 2019).



Questions to consider:

- Which of your problematic institutional outcomes might diagnostic testing of students help improve?
- How do you signpost access to support resources (academic skills, wellbeing etc.)?
- Are there particular groups of students that diagnostic testing would be most suitable for?
- How does this type of approach complement or enhance existing induction /transition arrangemments?.
- At what point in the Academic Year is this type of approach most useful: before arrival, at induction, during first session?
- Should students undertaking a diagnostic test (and acting on the outcomes) be awarded Credit?
- Should a diagnostic be deployed at each year of student study to show development or Learning gain?

Useful references

Astin, A. W. (1991). Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education. New York: McMillan.

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