



Supporting the resilience of advanced entry students through peer and academic support

Dr Jacqui Hutchison @jacqui_Hutch

Dr Heather Branigan @HeatherBranigan

Dr Sally Middleton @SallyMidAbdn

Georgie Leeves



The Project Team

- Dr Jacqui Hutchison, School of Psychology
- Dr Heather Branigan, School of Psychology
- Dr Sally Middleton, Access and Articulation Team
- Georgie Minter, Access and Articulation Team
- Carrie Matson-McArthur, Student Intern
- Rosalia McIntosh-Prentice, Student Intern
- Lea Teffner, Student Intern
- Keir Lawley, Student Intern

Funded by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme

Key questions

- **Advanced entry (AE)** students transition into L2/L3 from college
- The AE route is a pathway for **widening access** and improving social mobility (National Articulation Forum, 2020).
- Academic **resilience** is a key transition skill as described by QAA Scotland.

1

Who are our students?

2

How can we support our students?

3

What do we mean by resilience?

4

How can we build resilience in our communities?

Background Literature: Transitions

- Anderson et al. (2000) - Successful transitions requires attention towards students' **preparedness** and forms of **support** before, during, and after the transition
- Griebel & Niesel (2009) - Changes associated with transitions at three levels:
 - **Individual** (e.g., confidence, self-esteem)
 - **Relational** (e.g., changing relationships with peers and/or educators)
 - **Contextual** (e.g., different learning environments, changing curricular expectations).

1495



UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN

CELEBRATING
525 YEARS
1495 – 2020

Phase 1: Understanding the AE experience

Supported by Carrie
Matson-McArthur



Phase 1 Aims

- **Research Question:** What are advanced entry students' experiences of preparedness and support in relation to their transition to university?
- Produce **recommendations** that can be implemented to support students.
- Disseminate **key findings** within own institution and across the sector more widely.

Method

- Conducted 12 **focus groups** using semi-structured interviews.
- Twenty-five participants across Undergraduate Levels 2 to 4
- A total of 9 Further Education colleges were represented.
- Inductive **Thematic Analysis** (TA) was used to generate themes.



Descriptive Themes and Recommendations

Institutional support
plays a key role in
'settling' students

Induction events for AE
Personal tutors, knowledge of AE status

Having realistic
expectations
facilitates preparation

Highlighting similarities and differences in
course content between college and
university
Somewhere to ask questions that feel 'silly'

Social support is
important in
reassuring AE students

Peer support about what to expect
Opportunities to meet other (AE) students

Latent themes

[at college] “they were **treating us** a little bit **like children**”

“I feel like you are **really dragged through the trenches** at uni”

Goldilocks
and the
support that
is “just right”

“everyone was kind of looking at me like **‘who is this person?’** She's new, where has she been for the past two years?”

Sticking out
but not
feeling
“seen”

The
“unknown
unknowns”
of university

“the **unofficial etiquette** at the place [university] ... like when is it OK to contact somebody, how do we address them? Is it OK to go and see them and stuff that it's just, you **can't really find written down** anywhere”

“I just think it was a struggle [to settle in to university]. Yeah, like you know if **you look just like any other student.**”

Discussion of Themes

- Key issues relating to **expectations**, **identity** and **knowledge** of AE students
- **Hidden curriculum**: what is implicit and embedded in education (Sambell & McDowell, 1998)
- Role of **social capital** (Bourdieu, 1986) in AE student experiences



Discussion Points for the Group

- What **strengths** do your AE students have when transitioning to university?
- What **challenges** do your AE students face when transitioning to university?




Phase 2: Enhancing peer and academic support



Phase 2 Aims

- **Overall aim: Develop student-led content to provide peer support for advanced entry students**
- Support materials *for students by students*
- Practical tips and '**unknown unknowns**'
- Formats: Videos, Podcasts, Blogs

Advanced Entry Toolkit – Some Examples

1495 UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN


Toolkit
university support portal

HomeFAQs

Search

Advanced Entry

2. Benefits



Powered by Panopto

Benefits

Advice from AE Students, From AE Students


Word to Describe Uni


This resource is for students who have entered university directly into L2 or L3 of studies. We understand that this can be a daunting time, and you may have many questions about what the experience is like, what your studies will involve, and what skills you might find useful as a UoA student.


This resource has been designed with you in mind – it contains a series of videos made by your peers; people who have been in the same situation as yourself. You will also find some written blogs by students about their experience, as well as some useful resources and guides. We hope this helps answer some questions that you might have.

Remember you can always reach out for help. We have included some useful guides and links for times when you may need support.

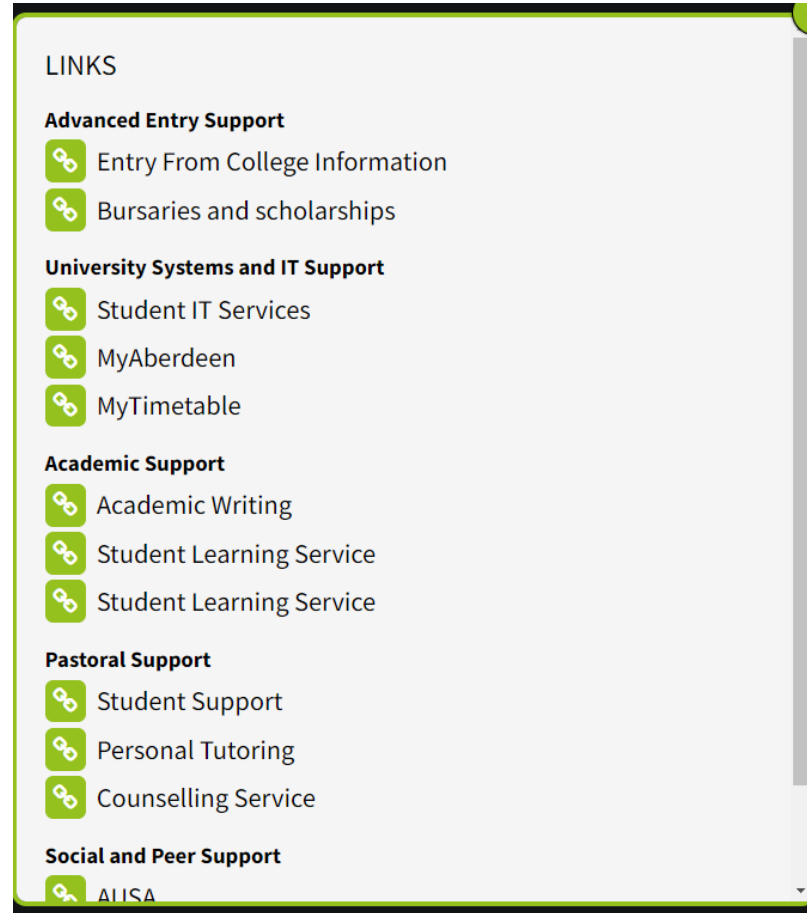
Last updated on 02 November 2022


Guides

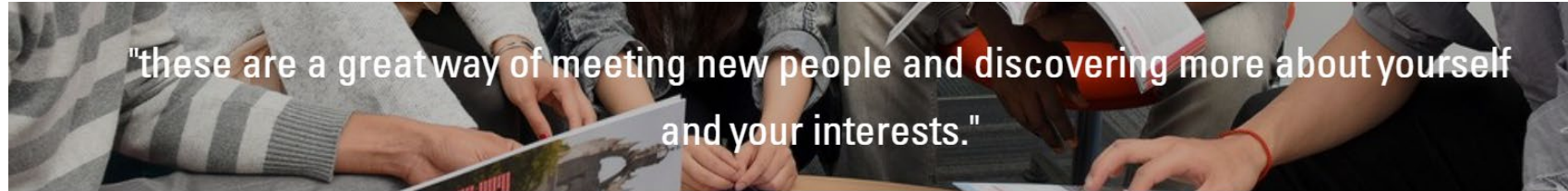

Info


Links

Advanced Entry Toolkit – Some Examples



Advanced Entry Toolkit – Some Examples



"these are a great way of meeting new people and discovering more about yourself and your interests."

Many students find joining clubs and societies to be a great way to meet other students and try new things. Explore opportunities for how to get involved here:

When I began university, I felt like I didn't belong there. I didn't think I was clever enough, and this really came down to my own insecurities. As much as I do feel that college had prepared me for how to research and write academic pieces of work, the standard of work was much harder in university compared to college. The lecturers don't offer you as much guidance compared to the college lecturers, and there is more of an expectation to work out how to do things ourselves. Also, there was a lot of statistics in Psychology which was something that was not covered in a lot of depth at college - this was something that I really struggled with.

It is very common to take a while to adjust and feel like you belong. It is important that you know that you are not alone – in fact, there are hundreds of students who join university through advanced entry every year! Most importantly, there is lots of support available to you. You can explore the 'links' section of the advanced entry toolkit to explore support available to you

Discussion Points for the Group

- What **methods of communication** do you use with (AE) students?
 - What aspects of **timing** of communications do you consider?
- Are there any methods of communication that you find particularly **useful**?



Phase 3: Enhancing staff awareness and support



Institutional support – Key Questions

- Existing support that is accessed
- Existing support that is not accessed
- Non-existing support

Phase 3 Aims

- Overall aims: To (1) understand and (2) enhance staff *support to support* AE students
- Understand ‘pockets’ of support across the university
- Generate examples of good practice
- Develop support materials and a workshop for staff surrounding AE support

Method

Staff
survey

Staff
interviews



Insights from Staff Survey

- General themes from staff survey:
 - Range of support offered (e.g., summer schools, induction upon entry, social events) but perception is that this ends upon entry.
 - Staff's perception of challenges faced by AE students align with those from student focus groups (e.g., sense of belonging, shift in expectations and learning environment, (misplaced?) assumptions of knowledge of learning environment).
 - Mixed responses in terms of staff knowing who to contact within their school about AE students in particular.
 - Mixed responses in terms of whether Personal tutors are informed of their students' AE status.

Future Directions – Staff Workshop and CoP

- Barriers for staff
 - E.g., workload, communication
- Community of Practice (CoP)
 - If you are interested in joining our Community of Practice, contact heather.branigan@abdn.ac.uk

Discussion Points for the Group

- Do you have any examples of good practice for supporting AE students?
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of approaches to supporting students?
- What barriers have you encountered relating to supporting AE students?



Group Discussion

- What **strengths** do your AE students have when transitioning to university?
- What **challenges** do your AE students face when transitioning to university?
- What **methods of communication** do you use with (AE) students?
 - What aspects of **timing** of communications do you consider?
- Are there any methods of communication that you find particularly **useful**?
- Do you have any **examples of good practice** for supporting AE students?
- How do you **evaluate** the effectiveness of approaches to supporting students?
- What **barriers have you encountered** relating to supporting AE students?



Thank You!

heather.branigan@abdn.ac.uk | @HeatherBranigan

jacqui.hutchison@abdn.ac.uk | @jacqui_Hutch

sally.middleton@abdn.ac.uk | @SallyMidAbdn

References

- Barron, P. & D'Annunzio-Green, N. (2009). A smooth transition? Education and social expectations of direct entry students. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 10(1): 7–25
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In M. Granovetter (Ed.), *Republished in The Sociology of Economic Life* (2018) (pp. 241–258).
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- McGhie, V. (2017). Entering university studies: identifying enabling factors for a successful transition from school to university. *Higher Education*, 73(3), 407-422.
- Sambell, K., and L. McDowell. 1998. The construction of the hidden curriculum: Messages and meanings in the assessment of student learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 23, 391–402.