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

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Key questions

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?**

- **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.
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).
Phase 1: Understanding the AE experience

Supported by Carrie Matson-McArther
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

Goldilocks and the support that is “just right”

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

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

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”

Sticking out but not feeling “seen”

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

“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

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 UoS 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
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"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.
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!

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References