



## Student Transitions Enhancement Theme: End of Year 3 Report

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<b>TLG Institutional Representatives:</b> <i>Julia Fotheringham – Alternative Sidonie Ecochard</i>
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<b>Outline the extent to which anticipated outcomes were achieved for your Year 3 plan of work.</b>
<p>Our work has run according to plan in Year 3, with engagement from staff and students across the University.</p> <p>Our main strand of development work this year, the research project <i>International Students' Attitude to Support Provision</i>, is now in the data analysis phase. The data</p>

include a survey and one-to-one interviews with international students from a range of countries and UG and PG programmes across the University. The research team for this project comprises staff from the Institutional Enhancement Theme Team and international students. Initial findings indicate that this work will be of interest across the sector. Findings will be presented jointly by staff and student researchers at the 2017 QAA conference.

Strand 4 of the plan of work has similarly produced some interesting findings, with staff and student participants meeting as part of the Friendship Family Programme. The purpose of the programme is to give international students a chance to supplement their life on campus with first-hand experience of local culture and way of life in a staff family. Staff likewise get an opportunity to learn about the students' home countries and cultures. Around 30 students and 15 staff families have been involved with the pilot and we have received excellent feedback from the participants. We have presented this project at the Gearing Up Conference (University of Edinburgh) and will have a poster display at the 2017 QAA conference. We are publishing insights into this work in the Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice (JPAAP) special issue on Student Transition, and in Edinburgh Napier University's Teaching Fellow Journal.

**How has the institution supported the TLG representative/alternative institutionally and in their TLG role?**

The TLG representative and alternative have been supported by students and staff across Schools and support areas, in particular by the members of the Institutional Enhancement Theme Team. The team members supported the TLG representative and alternative on all strands of work, including developing and implementing the institutional plans, sharing relevant information with their teams and colleagues, getting involved in the research projects and disseminating findings to the sector as a whole. The Theme Team members also participated in the development of this report through one-to-one meetings during which they reflected on their practice over the last three years and the impact of the Theme as a whole.

**How have you ensured all members (including students) are involved in developing the institution' plan of work?**

In Year 1 of the Student Transition Enhancement Theme, Edinburgh Napier University used the funding from QAA (Scotland) towards a number of small-scale transition research projects. The research projects, along with the QAA case studies, played a key role in building institutional engagement with the Theme. These projects also helped create a model for supporting enhancement of practice that we continue to build on.

The findings of the various projects conducted in Year 1 led to the team adopting a focus on international transitions and deciding to use the funding from QAA (Scotland) for Year 2 towards a scoping study conducted across the Schools and support areas of the institution. Theme team members acted as co-investigators on this project, investigating practice within their own area of work.

Findings from the scoping project were presented at the institutional enhancement theme team meeting in August 2016. Edinburgh Napier University's plan of work for Year 3 was developed collaboratively at the meeting in August 2016, based on the outcomes of the scoping project and on the inputs of the Theme Team members, both staff and students.

Throughout the Student Transition Enhancement Theme, all theme team members were invited to add items to the agenda of the institutional theme team meetings for discussion and inclusion in the institution's plan of work.

**How have you supported active engagement in the Theme Student Network by your student team member(s)? Please provide some examples of this support.**

Our student team members have been active in engaging with the Theme Student Network. Rojan Subramani is also a member of the QAA Student Advisory Board. We have been supporting them through active communication and booking travel arrangements to the Theme Student Network's meetings.

We have also encouraged and supported student participation in the QAA conferences and other transition events such as the Strathclyde/QAA event *Welcoming and Supporting International Students* and the *SPARQS conferences*, by helping them draft abstracts, prepare student-led presentations and design posters.

Finally, we have supported the student-led initiatives our student team members have put forward at Theme Team meetings, such as arranging guest speakers for the fourth year student-led dissertation conference and helping to organise the YelloWorkshops.

**How have you encouraged and supported students and staff to participate in Themes activities including active participation in the International Enhancement Conference?**

Information across the University:

Key events were included in the agenda of the institutional Theme Team meetings, such as the QAA conference, the JPAAP special issue or the Gearing Up conference. Transition activities and events have also been visible at all times on the institution's transition blog: <http://blogs.napier.ac.uk/student-transitions/>. The blog further features posts about activities and events of interest that staff and students may not have been able to attend.

Participation and engagement across the University:

We have given direct support to staff and students across the University towards submission of abstracts, papers and posters, and practicing presentations. We are proud that Edinburgh Napier University staff and students have engaged so actively in the Theme activities throughout the Student Transition Enhancement Theme. Participation in recent events include:

- 2016 QAA conference - 16 attendees from Edinburgh Napier University, representing all sections of the University, including staff and students.
- 2017 Gearing Up conference - 4 representatives from Edinburgh Napier University.
- 2017 Sparqs Conference - around 10 staff and student representatives from the University.
- 2017 JPAAP Special Issue on Student Transition - 4 submissions by Edinburgh Napier University.

We placed a particular emphasis across the Theme in engaging our students, including in our research and presentations. Several submissions have been accepted to the QAA conferences, both for student-led and jointly led presentations.

**How have you supported staff and student engagement in all aspects of the Theme including participation in events such as the institutional team event held in November 2016?**

Staff and students across the University have been invited to engage with all aspects of the *Student Transition* Theme. Areas of engagement included (but were not limited to):

- Attendance at transition events.
- Developing and carrying out the institution's plan of work, such as investigating as part of the scoping project or planning and organising the Fresh Agenda conference on the student perspective.
- Development and use of resources for the theme, such as our multimedia resource developed with Edinburgh Napier Student Association and the student representatives on our institutional Theme Team.
- Participation of staff and students in the 'Conversation about the international transition experience' workshops conducted in Schools.
- Research projects on transition across the University, involving staff and students.

**How have you engaged staff and students in the work of the Theme and actively disseminated outcomes and resources internally, and to the sector?**

We have seen a high level of engagement from Edinburgh Napier University with the *Student Transition* Theme. In Year 1, our main goal was to communicate the work being carried out on the Theme across the University. By focusing on communication so early, we ensured the theme was high on everyone's agenda at Edinburgh Napier University and facilitated the involvement of a wide group of staff and students.

Internally:

Staff and students were involved in collection and dissemination of case studies as a means of sharing good practice internally and raising awareness of the theme. We collected over 20 case studies in Year 1, reflecting the diversity of practice and research across our University, and promoted through our LTA resource bank.

Dissemination of outcomes and resources across the University was also facilitated through a number of internal events with a strong focus on student transition, such as Edinburgh Napier University Staff Conference 2015 and 2016 and Inclusivity Week 2016. During these events, staff shared and discussed their research and practice on the Theme and the funded projects were presented. The alignment of the theme with institutional strategy was also emphasised.

Support has also been provided on a one-to-one basis for any staff or student who wanted to launch a transition initiative or conduct a transition research project.

Sector-wide:

Edinburgh Napier University staff and students have been very active in disseminating outcomes and resources to the sector as a whole. For instance, the Employability team submitted a range of presentations, both paper and poster, to the QAA conferences representing aspects of the Graduate Employability Project (GEP) across the institution.:

- Skills Passport for Life Sciences at Edinburgh Napier University: Helping students to help themselves – paper presentation by Samantha Campbell Casey, Janis MacCallum, Patricia Durkin, and Anne MacNab at the 2015 Assessment in Higher Education Conference, June 24-25, Birmingham.
- A Rising Tide Raises All Boats: the work of the Graduate Employability Project at Edinburgh Napier University – paper presentation by Veronique Johnston, Cathy Lambert,

and Deborah Callister at the 2015 QAA Scotland Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education, June 9-11, Glasgow.

- Supporting Student Transitions to Placement: developing a new self-identity – 2016 article by Gemma Webster, Sally Smith and Colin Smith in *New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences*, 11(1), doi: 10.1080/03075079.2010.532548.
- Building an Evaluation Approach to Evidence Impact: Edinburgh Napier University's Graduate Employability Project experience – paper presentation by Fiona Wager, Ana Zeron-Rodriguez, and Veronique Johnston at the 2015 QAA Scotland Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education, June 9-11, Glasgow.
- Re-energising the Employability Agenda – driving forward the development of student employability skills within Edinburgh Napier University Business School – poster presentation by Deborah Callister, Lena Bauchop, Kirsty Black and Brian Windram at the 2015 QAA Scotland Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education, June 9-11, Glasgow.
- Enhancing the Employability Journey for Year 3 Direct Entrant Computing Students – paper presentation by Colin Smith and Patricia Durkin at the 2015 QAA Scotland Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education, June 9-11, Glasgow.
- Re-energising Employability – development of a 'Personal Selling Skills and the Sales Process' module within Edinburgh Napier Business School – poster presentation by Deborah Callister and Tony Douglas at the 2015 QAA Scotland Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education, June 9-11, Glasgow.
- Preparing Students to Compete for Jobs: the Recruitment Assessment Centre Experience (RACE) – poster presentation by David Surtees and Sharon Homan at the 2015 QAA Scotland Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education, June 9-11, Glasgow.

Moreover, our event 'A Fresh agenda in Colleges and Universities: the student perspective' brought together 85 attendees from universities, colleges and student bodies, including Aberdeen, Heriot Watt and Queen Margaret universities, all the ELRAH college partners and SPARQS. The main aim of this event was to develop knowledge and understanding of the barriers and enablers for direct entrants coming from college to university. The findings from the Fresh Agenda Conference were presented at the QAA Conference, as well as other presentations involving Edinburgh Napier University students.

Other examples of dissemination to the sector as a whole include:

- Paper presentation at the HEA conferences 'Ready for Retention: effective systems for transition and student success' and 'HEA Assessment and Learning conference'
- Paper presentation at the 'Student Transitions: navigating the learner journey' conference at Robert Gordon University.

**Which institutions have you worked with collaboratively and what has been achieved?**

Most of our collaborative work for this theme has been conducted with our partner college regarding the transition undertaken by direct entrants from FE to HE. The University continues to provide the largest number of articulation opportunities in the south of

Scotland across a wide range of subject disciplines. We work in partnership with colleges and have developed established articulation routes that use Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) to progress into years 2 or 3, respectively.

Staff have highlighted a growing awareness of the difference between staff and students' understanding of the requirements of University study, the demands of the programme and of what is involved in the study of the discipline itself. Expectations about the difference between school/college and University are not always well-aligned with students' experience and, likewise, academic staff's expectation of students joining from school/college may not be understood.

As a result, we organised the Fresh Agenda Conference in Year 2 of the theme. This was attended by colleagues from Aberdeen, Heriot Watt and Queen Margaret universities, all the ELRAH college partners and SPARQS. The conference was structured to prioritise students' perspectives on issues surrounding teaching, assessment, curriculum and transition support, including panel and round-table discussions with students.

**Provide student reflective commentary on at least five of your existing examples of successful transitions practice. (To be shared through posting to the Enhancement Themes website -deadline of 7 April 2017).**

Completed

**Please provide details of your student-facing multimedia resource, which will be posted on the Enhancement Themes web site and showcased at the International Enhancement Conference.**

We developed a Moodle page for international students, in partnership with Edinburgh Napier Students' Association. This was responding to the gaps identified in last year's *International Students Transition Scoping Project*. It is available to students before their transition and is regularly updated throughout the year.

It includes:

- introduction by their Student President, outlining the main activities of their Students' Association, as well as some other events and ways to make friends when arriving in Edinburgh.
- the different support mechanisms available to them at the University.
- videos conducted with international students, sharing their experience at Edinburgh such as the surprises they have encountered when coming in the UK, the differences they have witnessed between educational systems, and how they have gained confidence.

As this page is available through the VLE, it cannot be granted public access. We will record a tour of the site using Camtasia instead and include extracts from the videos with international students.

**How have you contributed to Theme evaluation and other commissioned work?**

Staff at Edinburgh Napier University have been involved in the different stages of the Theme evaluation conducted by the University of Dundee. Our participation has included phone interviews as well as issuing questionnaires to students. Focus groups for the Year 3 evaluation are currently underway. The commissioned work on international student

transitions, was a further piece of work that we contributed insights to. Edinburgh Napier also contributed examples to the transitions mapping exercise.

**What changes have been brought about to date, which may be described in terms of combinations of strategy, policy or practice? What impact has there been on the student learning experience? Provide examples for posting on the Enhancement Themes website.**

Research into transitions:

The Theme has given us the opportunity to explore existing transition research and practice at the University in detail through the case studies and projects. The transition research projects more specifically provided an evidence base for enhancement of practice and have been a key strand of activity across the three years of the theme. Examples of the research projects funded by QAA and key findings for enhancement include:

- In Year 1, QAA funding was used to conduct transition research across schools and support areas and explore the complexities of transition in much greater detail.
- In Year 2, interesting findings emerged from the *International Students' Transition* scoping project, in terms of gaps and duplications of practices across Schools and support areas as well as the need to promote greater awareness of what is available. Research also looked at the distribution of activities throughout the year and activities which were specifically for international students.
- in Year 3, follow-up research focused on international students' needs and expectations in relation to transition activities and support. A survey was conducted and answered by 150 international students, as well as 12 one-to-one interviews.

Students have been involved as researchers in a number of these projects, developing their research skills and valuing 'the student as potential producer of knowledge' (Healey & Jenkins, 2009, p.9).

International transitions:

Two initiatives were piloted at Edinburgh Napier University in Year 3 of the Theme, the Friendship Family Programme and the International Students Community Moodle Page. These aimed to develop the socio-cultural dimension of students' acculturation as part of transition, including developing friendships and informal support systems (Bai, 2016) and supporting staff understanding of students' transition issues (Ramachandran, 2011).

Transitions from Further Education:

Below are some examples of changes in some of the Schools at Edinburgh Napier University.

At the *School of Computing* and the *School of Engineering and Built Environment*, support activities start when students are still at college and continue after they have transitioned at Edinburgh Napier University. The practices targeting college students include:

- Drop-in lectures and labs on campus at Edinburgh Napier University.
- Academic skills workshops in colleges and also on University campus.

- Access on Moodle to all the Year 1 and Year 2 modules with added quizzes.
- 'Let's start' induction event in June giving students three months to prepare for the actual start of the programme.

At the *Business School*, support provision includes a Moodle Community Page and a Facebook page for direct entrants to join over the summer. The 2016-17 direct entrants cohort further participated in an induction event in June and a 'Week Zero' prior to Fresher's week - a four day series of events, workshops and information sessions. The revised offering for the 2017-18 cohort will include webinars and workshops, giving more access to those who cannot attend in person.

At the *School of Arts and Creative Industries*, a Moodle Community page was also created, to prepare and support the transition of direct entrants onto the music programme. This is personalised for each student by using a conditional release system of teaching material from previous years. Students can also connect with students already enrolled onto the programme to collaborate on small projects and get support for the music theory exam (entry requirement).

*Edinburgh Napier Students' Association* works alongside academic and professional services staff to support college students and widening access more generally prior to students arriving at Edinburgh Napier University. ENSA delivers a 'Coming from College Welcome Event' on the Friday before Freshers week. The aim of the event is to provide a positive welcome, offer helpful workshops to ease their transition, and provide a networking and social opportunity.

#### Transitions out of HE and into work: the Graduate Employability Project (GEP)

Edinburgh Napier University designed a project including five strands of distinct, but inter-related, activity linked to clear project outcomes towards successful transitions of our students into the workplace. As part of the project, new resources were developed for on-campus and off-campus students alike, and the availability of careers workshops was increased too. The project also includes increased number of internship and outward mobility opportunities, development of the alumni programme and employer mentors.

As part of continued focus on the student journey, Schools were engaged as partners in the GEP. For example, in the *School of Applied Sciences*, the focus was on the Skills Passport tool, a student-owned document developed to support students' awareness of their skills and to keep reflective evidence of their skills using a STAR-L format. Using these records helps students articulate their skills more readily when communicating with employers, and think about where they might have skills gaps which need to be addressed.

#### **Demonstrate the long-term impact the Theme work will have on your institution, using the Theme's Logic Model as a guide.**

The Enhancement Theme has raised the profile of student transitions into, through and out of University as a key area for action across the institution. It has brought together staff and students from across Schools and support areas and become a key institutional focus for engagement, action and evaluation. The longer term impact of the specific pieces of work initiated during the Theme will continue to be monitored through our mainstream activity.



Here we highlight some particular areas of impact and change:

**Objective: Cross-institutional research to develop our evidence-base for enhancement of practice**

*Outcome:* There has been significant engagement with evidence-based practice regarding student transitions. This has stimulated practitioner research and scholarly activity as evidenced by recent conference presentations and the developing resource bank within the university.

**Objective: Improving Graduate Employability**

*Outcome:* The picture is highly positive with evidence of an upwards trajectory. The positive progress reflects the broad range of transition-related activities and the cross-institutional engagement. Our strategic aim of offering work-related learning to all full length undergraduate students will continue to support this going forward.

GEP-related activities and initiatives are ongoing beyond the duration of the theme. A range of sustainability arrangements have been developed or implemented, including structural changes, the creation of permanent posts to support activity trialled during GEP which will be sustained beyond the project timeframe, and the continuation of a range of curriculum developments. For example, developments in the School of Applied Sciences include:

- An App version of the Skills Passport, with the aim that this should cover general employability skills and therefore be more widely useable across the University.
- Employers belonging to our Life Sciences Employer Liaison Panel have been consulted regularly on the passport approach and consider it to be advantageous for students applying for graduate positions.
- An evaluation of the Skills Passport is planned for 2019.
- We intend on piloting a Bio Buddies network which will involve students from later years helping to support the new first year students in their transition to university.

**Objective: Improving the support to direct entrants**

Considerable focus was placed on this area of work and it is being taken forward as part of our institutional focus on the learner journey. We will continue to build on this work and the practices developed at School and University level through the Theme activity.

**School Level Examples of Impact and Change:**

*School of Computing:*

The first students to have benefitted from the new transition practices will graduate this year, so it is still early to measure impact of the example activities on student success. However, transition practices have been regularly evaluated on their efficiency in terms of students' academic and social integration at the University, using students and college teachers' feedbacks. Such data provides a useful platform for exploring appropriate platforms for engagement and support.

The evaluation process has also included exploring the dimension of economic sustainability of activities. Internal funding has been secured for the 'Let's Start' induction event to carry on after the end of the theme, and be extended to the direct entrants of the School of Engineering and School of Applied Sciences. In addition, an intern student will

keep updating the Moodle page for direct entrants and the student mentoring scheme, initially designed with paid mentors, will evolve into the volunteer-based buddy program.

*School of Engineering and Built Environment:*

Many students have actively engaged with the support activities targeted at college students and direct entrants. We have seen significant numbers engaging with this support and received positive feedback on its benefits:

- About 200 students attended the induction day.
- About 300 college students attended the lectures and labs at Edinburgh Napier University.
- About 500 attended the academic skills workshops delivered in colleges or at Edinburgh Napier University pre-transition.

*Business School:*

Evaluations conducted on the example activities of the Business School showed that the Facebook group reassured about 70% of respondents and answered questions prior to starting university. About 60% of respondents engaged with the Moodle Community Page. Qualitative feedback suggests this was well received and proved useful to students:

*"It was reassuring to see that there were lots of other direct entrants like myself who had questions and queries, and had a supportive space with lots of materials and discussion space to make us feel comfortable."*

*"It helped answer any queries we had. Was nice to know others had same issues "*

*"It helped me a lot to start my year more relaxed. I am so thankful for it."*

*The Fresh Agenda Conference:*

The content of the Moodle Community Page designed for direct entrants onto the Music Programme at the *School of Arts and Creative Industries* was based on the panel discussion at the Fresh Agenda Conference. Direct entrants expressed that they would have liked to have access pre-transition to the teaching material of the previous years, as they found it hard to compensate for gaps in the curriculum.

**Objective: Improved awareness of international transitions**

*The Friendship Family Programme*

About 15 families and 30 students joined the pilot year of the programme, with a further ten students on the waiting list. Feedback to date has been very positive. The initiative will be continued next year and will be hosted by the international team at Edinburgh Napier University.:

*"You will get more than you give by participating in this programme. University is about experiencing something different and challenging you thoughts, your perceptions of yourself, it is about lifting one's sight and looking into the horizon. And that's not just for students, we should all do that. So I'm giving the opportunity to two young students to challenge themselves, but it's about challenging myself too: I get to learn a bit about China and Gibraltar. It's all the more essential and vital in the current global context to take on board other perspectives. You can only gain by opening your heart and your home to*

*someone from a different culture.[...] This programme will enrich people's lives in so many ways, and that's what they will remember when they're older. They probably won't remember the University here, but they'll remember the [Friendship family Programme].” - Staff participant*

*“I learnt so many things about Scotland I never knew, and my friendship family is eager to learn about Nigeria too. [...] I have to create a family for myself here, with all the different people I have met. That is the best part of education and that is what the Friendship Family Programme has given me.” - Student participant*

*Impact indicators and long-term impact within Schools (example from the School of Arts and Creative Industries):*

As a result of the example activities and the theme, there has been a growing awareness of all transitions across the University, in particular international transitions. In the School of Art and Creative Industries, transitions have become part of the conversation with students and included in the way staff understand teaching, learning and assessment. For instance, in the PDT process, new questions are asked to check how international students are settling in Edinburgh. At the beginning of the year, more attention is being paid to group work including students from different nationalities. Moreover, an innovative, analogue and interactive assessment process has been developed and tested that aims to address some of the challenges of student feedback and assessment, especially across linguistic and cultural barriers. It involves the use of an actual rubber stamp that can be used to anchor a diverse range of tutor formative feedback.

**Objective: staff and students engagement with the Theme**

*Outcome:* The Theme involved a far wider range of staff and students than have previously engaged with Enhancement Themes. All the Schools and support areas participated, along with the students' association, student representatives, sabbatical officers and students as researchers. This has helped facilitate a strong community of Enhancement-focused staff and a strong base from which to launch engagement with the next Theme.