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transitions



Student Transitions

Institutional activities 2014 - 2017

University of Aberdeen

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Introduction

The Student Transition Enhancement Theme ran for three academic years from 2014-2017. During this Enhancement Theme we explored the transitions of students into, through and out of study at university. All Scottish higher education institutions took part, with staff and students working together to support key transition points in the student journey.

Institutional activities

The University of Aberdeen mapped transitions activity to identify areas for further development. One of the outcomes of their first year activity was the production of a scoping report. This highlighted the areas that could benefit from further work on Student Transitions.

The University's Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme (LTEP) distributed funding for projects. Both staff and students were able to put forward proposals for consideration.

In the second year of the Theme, the University also organised events related to the Theme. The University had three project groups working on specific aspects of student transitions:

- widening participation and induction
- student engagement
- managing expectations and work-related learning.

In year three of the Theme, the University focused on evaluation and dissemination. This was done through planned events and use of committees. The Institution also worked on developing a map on internal student transition activity. Finally, the University undertook several internal projects including:

- commuting students
- professional skills
- collaboration with schools and colleges.

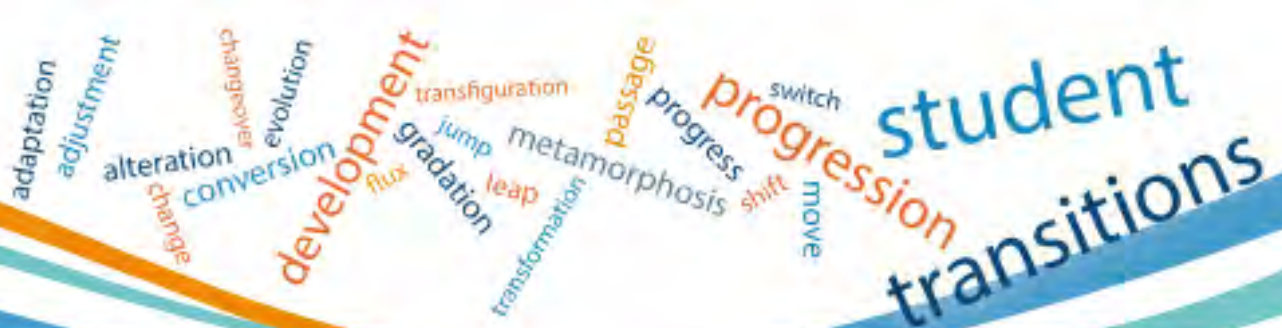
Key areas of work

Scoping; Student wellbeing and mental health; Expectations; Postgraduate; Employability and skills; Application and First Year; Technology and online support; Widening participation and induction activities; Student engagement and managing expectations; Work-related learning

Outcomes

This report combines the outcomes produced by the University of Aberdeen and includes:

- Case studies
- Student commentaries
- Collaborative work
- Multimedia resource



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: S6@Uni: Helping students make the transition from school to University

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transition at the start of a programme of higher education

Abstract: The S6@Uni Programme utilises lecture capture and virtual classroom technologies to convert current on-campus undergraduate courses into online courses with a campus based tutorial/practical element. These courses are ideal for S6 pupils looking for further academic challenge. They can complement existing Advanced Higher choices or, when no Advanced Higher is offered, replace this provision with study at the same SCQF level, gaining SCQF credits which are recognised by all UK Universities. By undertaking these courses, school pupils gain some experience of listening to lectures and can hone their note-taking skills. Students experience the type of self-directed study that is required at University whilst still able to get additional support from their school as well as the S6@Uni programme coordinator.

Description: The S6@Uni Programme converts current on-campus undergraduate science courses into online courses. These courses are delivered into Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Schools to complement the curriculum of pupils in the Senior Phase of their education.

The original aim of the programme was to allow students in the remote North and East of Scotland access to the teaching of the University of Aberdeen. Now established, however, the programme is proving to have multiple applications in the fields of widening access, School-University transition, and retention. The project allows pupils to experience the different teaching and assessment styles which they will encounter at University whilst still in a “safe” School and “supported” University environment.

Subjects offered currently include Archaeology, Sociology, Computing Science, English, Psychology, Geography, Geology, Business, Chemistry and Physics.

Our S6@Uni students continue to achieve grades comparable, or even higher, than our first year cohort showing the high levels of commitment of these pupils. In 2012-13, 14 pupils successfully completed the programme. Not all pupils applied to study at Aberdeen University but all pupils received an offer of University admission, 9 from the University of Aberdeen and 5 from other Scottish institutions, in the subject areas of Engineering, Geology & Medicine. Within our own institution successful completion of courses contributed to the strength of a student’s application and in some cases made the difference between an offer being given and not.



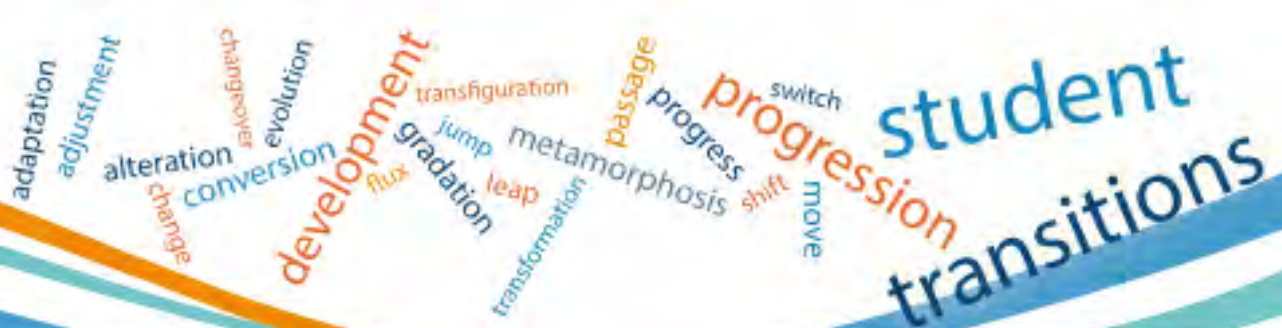
Feedback from our principle partner school report that over the past four years this strategy, in combination with others, has resulted in increased:

- S6 stay on rates (41% in 2009, 52% in 2012)
- S6 5+ Higher Grade attainment (27% in 2009, 35% in 2012)
- S6 1+ Advanced Higher Grade attainment (21% in 2009, 26% in 2012)

In addition pupils report positively on the independent learning opportunities, their personal and social development and confidence about going to University.

This scheme has previously been the subject of a feature article in the Times Education Supplement for Scotland, which can be read online at <https://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6179287>

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Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: University of Aberdeen College of Arts and Social Sciences: Academic Writing

Transition(s) the practice supports:

This course assists with the transition into university at first year level and offers an early opportunity to identify and offer writing development to those students who may not have the necessary level of writing skills to be successful learners in the Higher Education environment.

Abstract:

The University of Aberdeen College of Arts and Social Sciences offers a number of linked Academic Writing Courses to aid students in the transition from prior learning into University. The course is delivered to all first year students in the College and aims to identify those students who do not have the necessary level of writing skills to reach their full potential in the Higher Education environment. The initial stages of the course are delivered on-line via Blackboard and those students who are identified as requiring additional support attend a number of face-to-face writing development workshops with the Student Learning Service. The course aims to offer an early engagement with students in this vital area of their learning.

Description:

Several years ago it became apparent that many of our students were failing to reach their full potential not because of their intellectual capacities but because of their inability to communicate their ideas effectively in grammatical, clear and coherent English. This was a common theme of concern raised not only by staff but also by the students themselves who voiced a desire to improve this aspect of their work. While our students have been supported in this area for a number of years by the Student Learning Service, the College of Arts and Social Sciences sought to find a way to engage with this issue as early as possible, to identify those students who are in need of additional help and to provide this in a supportive environment where students can voice their concerns.

The Academic Writing Course is our response to this issue. Initially piloted in 2011 with the Schools of Education and Law the course was rolled out across the College in 2012 and became compulsory for all first year students with a degree intention based within it.



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The course follows the following structure:

Teaching Week 1

All students complete an on-line test. This involves writing a summary of a passage of prose (approx. 600 words) in no more than 150 words. Tests are set by the different Schools within the College and the passages chosen are relevant to the disciplines in the School. The test must be completed in one sitting and within one hour. The summary is marked by academic staff within the School both on how accurately students summarise the text and how correct they are in their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Summaries that are longer than 150 words lose marks.

Students who pass the first test have completed the course.

Teaching Weeks 2 – 4

Students who have not passed the first test work through an on-line, interactive resource 'Improving Your Writing'.

Teaching Week 5

Students who have not passed the first test take the second test.

If they pass the second test they have completed the course.

Teaching Weeks 8-10

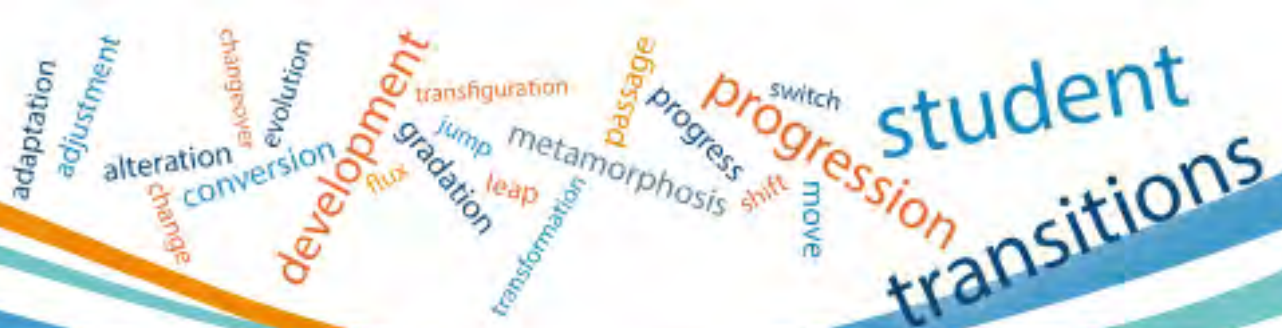
If they do not pass the second test they are required to attend a series of three writing workshops with the Student Learning Service during Weeks 8-10.

By attending these workshops they have completed the course.

Evaluations of the pilot course suggested that students value the reassurance this course offers and, in those cases where issues are identified, the support which it provides. In addition to helping our students to reach their full potential by enhancing writing skills the course also offers the College an early opportunity for engagement with our students as they enter the University, thus assisting in identifying those who are having wider issues in making the transition into this new learning environment. An occasional but important outcome of the course has been early indication of students with possible specific learning differences, such as dyslexia, with appropriate immediate referral. While evaluating the extent to which the course improves the longer term performance of our students is a more complex task, we are confident that the support offered by it is appreciated by a large section of our first year cohort.

Contact details:

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Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Students 4 Students: a transitional mentoring scheme for first year undergraduates

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transitions at the start of a programme of higher education

Abstract: Students 4 Students is a transitional mentoring scheme for incoming undergraduates. The scheme aims to help all first year undergraduates settle into student life through the offer of a student mentor who is studying within a similar or related discipline to them. All S4S mentors are fully trained in university practices and regulations, as well as active listening skills and group management skills so they are fully prepared for liaising with their allocated mentees. From the initial pilot to the scheme being fully integrated into the first year experience has taken five years and future developments include allocation of mentors to all direct entry and visiting students.

Description: Students 4 Students has been developed over a four year period, from a pilot with several students involved, to a university-wide initiative to help first year undergraduates settle into university life and make the transition from secondary and/or tertiary education to the higher education setting.

Starting out at university is often a daunting prospect for many students and with first year intake ever increasing this will only become more of an issue as we move forward. Born out of the retention and progression agenda at the University of Aberdeen, a pilot for a voluntary peer mentoring scheme was initiated within the School of Medical Sciences as a way of integrating first year students into university life. This scheme was successful for both mentors and mentees and it was expanded the following year to include the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy. This also proved successful, so the scheme was extended to cover all subject areas within the institution whilst remaining voluntary for both mentors and mentees. For academic year 2014-15 the scheme expanded further as all first year undergraduates from across the institution were enrolled, with the aim of offering a comprehensive and substantial support network for all incoming first years. This changed the scheme from a small scale initiative to one that required substantial administrative support and coordination to ensure a faultless service for first years and their mentors.

Mentors are fully trained by various university support networks, such as Student Support Services and the University Counselling Service. Training covers a diverse range of topics including knowledge of university procedures, practical information on university support services, active listening skills and confidentiality. This training is delivered face



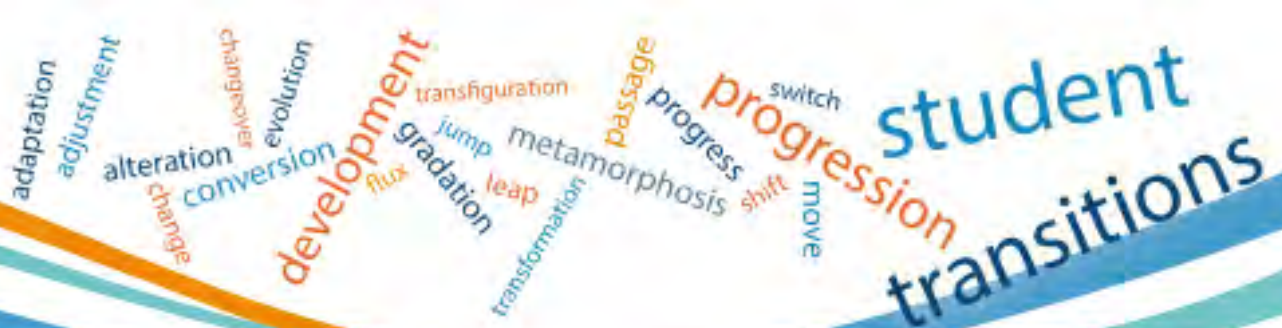
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to face and also via a newly developed online training resource.

Planned future developments of the scheme involve expansion to cover direct entry and possibly postgraduate students – this will present specific challenges for each specific cohort as they will require different stage-specific guidance.

At every stage during the development of Students 4 Students we have had positive feedback from those involved and now the scheme involves all first years, it has grown into an integral part of the first year undergraduate experience at the University of Aberdeen.

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Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Automated student engagement analytics: a short cut to transition monitoring?

Transition(s) the practice supports:

- Approaches to transitions
- Empowering students through transitions

Abstract: The current higher education climate involves substantially larger class sizes, greater student diversity and greater flexibility in curricular choice. As a result, monitoring student engagement and transition into HE or at key points within chosen programmes has become considerably more challenging. Furthermore, engagement (or lack of engagement) within chosen subject areas can be used as a predictive index of students who may be having difficulty and who are at increased risk of academic failure or leaving the University without a successful outcome. Automated procedures that facilitate large-scale monitoring are now available to make this process more manageable and efficient, and also less laborious. The author has piloted the use of such measures across various courses at the University of Aberdeen.

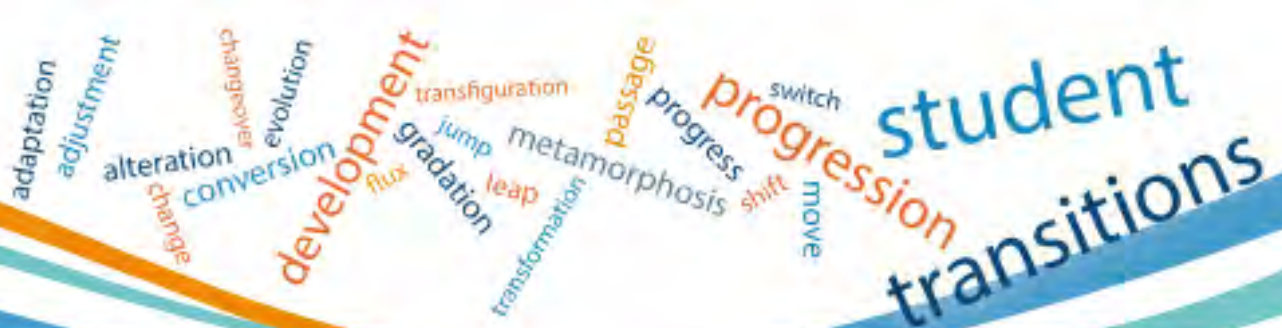
Description: As part of the wider field of learning analytics, automated monitoring/engagement measures can be used predictively to identify at risk students such that early intervention can be targeted to those that need it most, to help their retention, transition and progression within their degree programme. Therefore, effective engagement monitoring drives tailored and targeted support, maximising resource utilisation and sustainability, all of which are fundamentally important within the current HE business model. However, monitoring has traditionally been a manual, laborious and ineffective process and this is a major barrier to its accuracy and efficiency.

The author has experimented with the use of Blackboard's "Retention Centre" within the University of Aberdeen virtual learning environment (MyAberdeen) as a means of enhancing the efficacy of this process. The functionality allows flexible and tailored rules to be customised within course areas to alert coordinators in the event that students are failing to meet specific engagement criteria. Such parameters include last access of the virtual learning environment, adherence to deadlines, completion of selected tasks and actual grades received. The flexibility of the system allows coordinators to add identified students to a *watch list*, email them directly or take other intervention steps as necessary. The level of automation is entirely flexible, with the option to send editable automatic emails to students who don't meet the rule criteria, or perhaps when 2 parameters are not met; alternatively, only the coordinator can be

alerted, allowing a more personal approach. Indeed, the system can also be used to reinforce positive engagement (e.g. when a student achieves consistently high marks) by simple adjustment or addition of customised rules. This particular use of the system was seen as very positive by students, who suggested that this monitoring tool was fair, effective and encouraged their engagement with the course.

A variety of courses, at a variety of levels have been piloted using this automated monitoring instrument, and the specific findings of these were positive from both staff and student perspectives.

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Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: School of Medical Science Skills Support Centre: an online resource for medical science undergraduates

Transition(s) the practice supports: Empowering students through transitions

Abstract: We have developed an online skills resource specifically tailored to our students in the School of Medical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen. This project was initiated in the summer of 2014 and released to students for academic year 2014-15. As an ever growing resource we see this skills support centre as an evolving resource that can be easily tailored to any curriculum or set of degree programmes. Through thorough testing and evaluation of the four skill areas, the resource has been widely used by all levels of undergraduate student within our School.

Description: The aim of this project was to develop an online resource that would act as a “one stop shop” for undergraduate students across all levels of study within the School of Medical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen. The key features desired from the resource were ease of use and accessibility, with students being able to develop multiple skills freely and to an advanced competence regardless of their initial level.

The first phase of this project was to survey teaching staff within the School regarding the problems students encounter as they progress through their degree and what their ideal performance should look like. Afterwards, all final year Honours students were sampled and the process was repeated. The data collected was then analysed alongside researching current trends and techniques deployed in online education at other higher education institutions throughout the world.

The second phase of the project was to adapt a design sprint methodology used by technology start-ups in order to outline the structure of the resource and user experience. This allowed for quick prototyping and development to a final product framework within several weeks.

Blackboard virtual learning environment software was used to build the resource as this is the central online platform within the University of Aberdeen, and as such is familiar platform used by all students. Current skill sets are distributed into four categories (Organisational Skills, Practical-related Skills, Writing Skills, and Scientific Reading Skills) with each containing several subdivisions.

Educational content comes in both text and multimedia formats and was collected from several Aberdeen University resources as well as public resources alongside original content developed specifically for this resource. To enhance knowledge retention, retrieval practice is used, whereby educational content is followed by a short assessment.

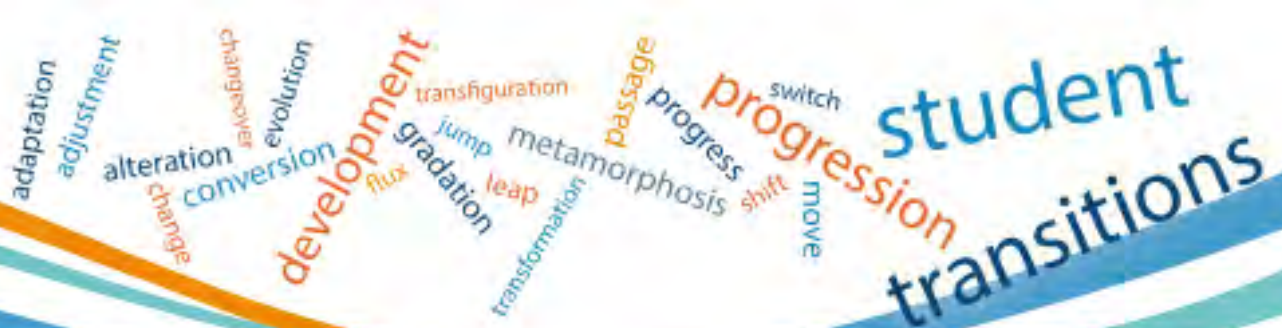


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The resource was launched to students from the start of academic year 2014-15, with usage being monitored to better understand user needs and observe adoption rates. To encourage collaboration and active learning further developments will include live chats, collaborative assessments and student made content areas (diagrams, notes, etc.).

Future objectives include surveying users to quantify the benefits of using this resource; implementing randomised diagnostic tests so that users can objectively track improvements in particular areas; and also expanding the skills sets to include other relevant skills known to be of high importance from our original surveys and through collaborations with external employers.

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Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Transition management case study: creating a transition tool box

Transition(s) the practice supports:

- Approaches to transitions
- Empowering students through transitions

Abstract: With an ever changing student population, internationalisation and strong strategic emphasis on retention, there is a critical need to provide pastoral and academic support to students at key transition points in their degree schemes. However, with increasing diversification in the student body and the problems faced, support must be offered proactively and in a manner which meets diverse student preferences and needs.

Following identification of student difficulties at the University of Aberdeen, a variety of strategies have been devised, developed and implemented, which has improved a variety of key transition points and stemmed the loss of students across the student body.

The resultant “toolbox” provides flexible, student empowered strategies for tailoring to individual School needs.

Description: The resultant strategies developed, implemented and optimised at the University of Aberdeen include:

- welcome events, promoting a sense of belonging and publicising available support
- design of a VLE site with support and guidance resources tailored to at risk groups
- drop in sessions for students to come along and discuss difficulties face-to-face
- careers days to promote potential degree end points and encourage career development
- experience advertising events showcasing the unique ways in which engaging in co- and extra-curricular experiences can serve as a launch pad for student careers
- contact with retention coordinator at key points of the academic year

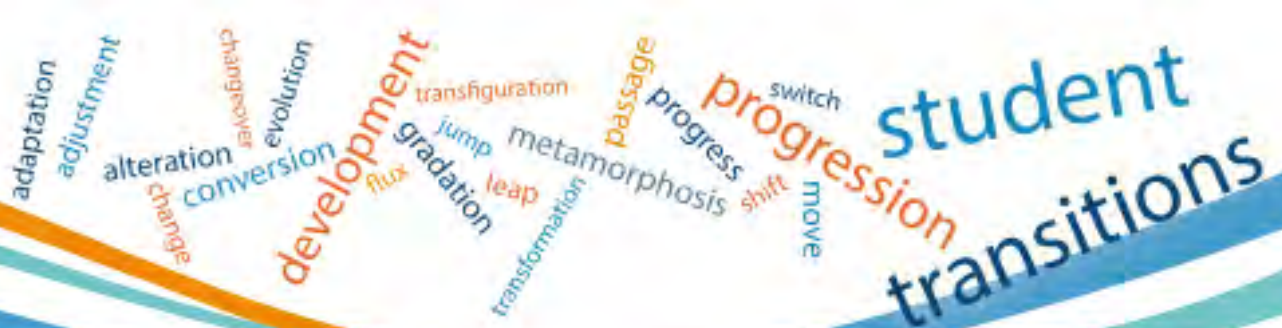
The success of these strategies are measurable in light of retention figures and show improvement from 13.2% student loss across level 3 in 2009 to only 7% in 2011. These numbers continue to decline towards the present time. The incorporation of these support mechanisms alongside the curriculum is a modern necessity and a critical supplement to University education. Recognition of the heterogeneous needs and approaches of the students underpins these strategies and is a vital consideration in terms of “a one option doesn't fit all” approach to transitional



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support. Information about the design, set up and logistics of these support measures and their successes since they were implemented can be obtained from the author.

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Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: The Role of Career Mentoring in Graduate Transitions

Transition(s) the practice supports: The University of Aberdeen Career Mentoring Programme matches employer mentor volunteers with student mentees for 6 months to develop their professional skills, knowledge and attitudes and support students as they transition into the world of work or postgraduate study.

Abstract: Delivered by the Careers Service and with strategic input from the Alumni Relations Team the 6-month career mentorships provide both undergraduates and taught postgraduates with an insight into the world of work or further study, and help students build confidence in applying for these opportunities. The Programme also enables students to enhance their professional skills and employment knowledge outside of their academic study as they transition into the life beyond the University. Working in close partnership with the Alumni Relations Team is crucial to drive the initiative and helps provide an excellent source of employer mentor volunteers with a wealth of specific careers experience and a real desire to connect to their local University.

Description:

The University of Aberdeen Career Mentoring Programme was launched in 2011 to enhance students' employability and offers a flexible programme of mentorship interactions over a six-month period (November to April). Since the initiative's inception over 500 students have benefited from the programme. To be considered for the competitive scheme students complete an online application form and submit their CV. During the mentorship students are expected to set their own career mentoring objectives and review these at the end of their mentorship. Mentees are supported by workshops and a range of written resources, and a bespoke Career Mentoring Programme Toolkit has been devised to support mentors. Guidance is also available to both mentors and mentees from the dedicated Work Placement and Mentoring Officer. A distinct feature of the career mentoring provision is the underpinning supporters' event programme hosted at a range of organisations (e.g. Pinsent Masons, Halliburton and Wood Group). Events strengthen links with employers and enable students to network and support their career learning.

During the Programme the mentor supports students by:



- Offering advice and guidance with their career planning and their transition from student to working professional or postgraduate study.
- Providing an 'insider's guide' to job search strategies or postgraduate applications.
- Supporting their understanding regarding skills and attributes development.

Evidence indicates mentors also gain valuable benefits including:

- Continuing Personal Development and the opportunity to enhance their coaching and mentoring skills.
- Keeping updated regarding developments in Higher Education.
- Broadening their professional networks and enhancing their interpersonal skills.

Institutionally, the Programme is clearly enhancing students' employability, by providing an opportunity for students to engage with early career development learning. Evidence of the impact of the Career Mentoring Programme on students' transition into the world of work or postgraduate study is also verified through the post-mentorship evaluation questionnaire data. Students often comment about the initiative being an extremely valuable aspect of their university experience and commonly cite benefits from the Programme such as: increased self-confidence; increased employment or postgraduate study awareness and improved career management skills.

Further evidence regarding the impact of the initiative on student transitions is supported by the following video which features a range of student career mentoring testimonials:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWqxIzqFar4

For further information: www.abdn.ac.uk/careers/skills-attributes/career-mentoring.php

Contact details: Julie Bakewell, Work Placement & Mentoring Officer, Careers Service, University of Aberdeen (j.bakewell@abdn.ac.uk)



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Individualised Self-assessment to Enhance Employability (I-SEE) in postgraduate students

Transition(s) the practice supports: Skills assessment and reflection and development during studies to enhance employability on exiting

Abstract: I-SEE is embedded in a compulsory non-credit bearing Generic Skills course and covers 3 stages – self-assessment, reflection and articulation. The skills audit includes an academic writing assessment, basic IT skills assessment, psychometric testing (Abstract, Numerical and Verbal reasoning skills & personality typing) and self-rating of other relevant employability skills (HEA employability profile and University of Aberdeen's Postgraduate Attributes). Automated responses provide tailored feedback identifying development areas and signposting to appropriate support such as online resources or workshops/courses. Thereafter, students are required to record and reflect on their progress using an e-portfolio and a checklist. Supportive documentation with tips and links are provided to support them in articulating these skills within future employment applications.

Description: Enhancing students' employability is increasingly being recognised as a priority for Higher Education Institutions and seems especially important for taught postgraduate programmes where students may have diverse graduate/professional backgrounds and nationalities. This translates into a variety of previous experience and skill levels in terms of key employability competencies, as well as their education and English language proficiency. Current induction programmes though are generally not individualised or reflective in nature. As self-awareness underpins employability, an online resource to extend employability provision for taught postgraduate students was developed with financial support from a HEA Individual Teaching Development Grant. I-SEE was developed on MyAberdeen and piloted with Division of Applied Health taught postgraduate students during the 2012/13 academic year. It is currently embedded in the non-credit bearing Generic Skills course which is compulsory for all taught postgraduate students in the Schools of Medical Sciences & Medicine and Dentistry for the 2013/14 academic year.

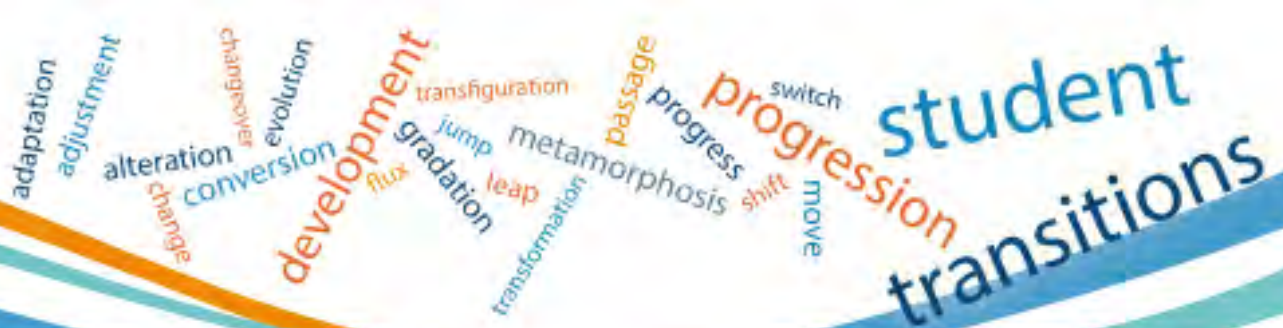
The I-SEE process covers 3 stages – self-assessment, reflection and articulation. The self-assessment of employability skills is based on the HEA employability profile and the University of Aberdeen's Postgraduate Attributes. Prior to completing the self-assessment questionnaire, students complete an academic writing assessment, summarising a given text in 150 words or less. This is



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assessed by Programme Coordinators using a standardised rubric for accuracy of summary AND language (grammar, punctuation and spelling). Grades are uploaded to MyAberdeen. An IT skills assessment of 50 questions relating to basic IT skills required for e-mail, Excel, PowerPoint, Word and the internet must be completed and automated scores and feedback are provided. Students are also required to complete psychometric testing from the *Profiling for success website*. The University Careers Centre have a selection of tests freely available to registered students and four were identified for I-SEE relating to Abstract, Numerical and Verbal reasoning skills as well as personality typing. Each test takes only 10-15 minutes to complete and feedback and scores are emailed directly to the students. Students are required to provide scores from these tests and self-rate other relevant employability skills. Automated responses provide tailored feedback identifying development areas and signposting to appropriate support – which may be online resources or workshops/courses available within the University. For the next few months, students are required to record and reflect on their progress using an e-portfolio. A checklist is provided for them to reflect on identified development areas, what they may have done to improve or plan to do in the future. A CV template, supportive documentation with tips and a link to Career Services are provided to support them in articulating these skills within future employment applications. For the first time this year (2015), a mock job application process will be followed at the end of the programme allowing students to apply for an advertised post, be shortlisted and attend a mock interview.

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Student Transitions: City Lab

Title: Aberdeen CityLab! Where the city is the classroom

Transition(s) the practice supports: Aberdeen CityLab! seeks to enable students to better understand their subject skills in levels three and four by placing them in a multidisciplinary group of students from Aberdeen's two universities. In this situation they will see how their skills contribute to a common project, while also gaining wider skills from other subjects. This supports the transition of the student moving towards their exit from the university as it gives them a better understanding of what they have to offer upon graduation.

Abstract: Aberdeen CityLab! brings students together from the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University in order to work with a local organisation to develop new services for the organisation or one of its partner organisations. Students are guided through their projects using a human centred design approach which provides them with the skills to gather information and apply it while also being able to deploy their subject skills as required. Each team is mentored by academic staff and assisted by an appropriate staff member from the organisation who can provide assistance for the projects.

Description:

The students on the course come from both the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University. This credit-bearing course is for students on either level three or level four in their degree and is designed to offer a work-related-learning component to students within which they have an opportunity to apply current skills and subject knowledge while also learning and developing professional skills.

Students work in multidisciplinary teams on live client projects with external organisations such as Aberdeen City Council or the NHS. The projects are envisioned and developed by students based on ideas from brainstorming sessions in a range of areas identified by the host organisation. Each student team works with an academic mentor and has access to specialist advisors from the host organisation and from a participating partnership voluntary organisation if that is appropriate. Projects will be continued by the host organisation, or the partnership organisation at the end of term. Students will gain live client experience in the working world while helping to create sustainable projects to develop a better city and community.

We are currently running this as a pilot this term between January and April 2016 with sixteen students. Ten are from the University of Aberdeen and six from Robert Gordon University and are divided into teams focused on projects around cycle paths, park lighting and usage, food waste, cultural activities and event finding. Each week the students meet and learn a new skill

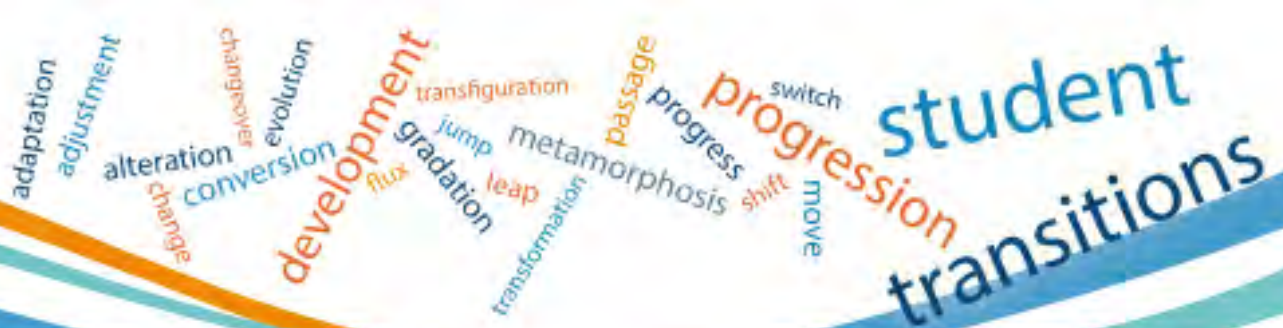
before working on their project and determining when they will meet again later in the week to continue work. The new skills are associated with the design process enabling students from all disciplines to engage and enhance their employability skills.

We expect the course to continue as the different stakeholders are impressed with results to date. Although early days, the project is meeting the expectations of the two academic Institutions involved. The current cohort of students is enthusiastic about the projects and has found each session stimulating and challenging. They have developed a good understanding of the materials and are making good progress with their ideas. The projects are seen as a way to gain valuable experience and a better understanding of how the city works and the intricacies of managing change in organisations. The City Council also values the input from the students on the course and is building the continuation of the project into plans for the future as it can see this as suitable means to help create ideas and capabilities for the city.

The course also has the potential to inspire work-related-learning postgraduate courses in this area across the Institutions as they become more familiar with each other's work and doors are opened across the city's organisations. These courses could either replicate this three-hour per week model, or could be modified to become summer project courses. This would give better opportunities for longer interaction with city organisations at a more intense pace, in order to achieve larger visions.

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All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Aberdeen University Students' Association Leadership Academy

Transition(s) the practice supports:

The Leadership Academy was developed by Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA), to support students from all disciplines by helping them to learn about, and develop, their transferable skills. Although initially aimed at current student leaders, the programme has been of interest to students at all levels (both undergraduate and postgraduate) who have the desire to develop their transferable skills and learn about becoming a great student leader. As such, the programme supports transition of students throughout University but also beyond University as students move into employment.

Abstract:

Being a leader is not an easy task; making decisions, working under pressure, leading a committee or team, running a society/club/student group, organising trips, competitions and events, trying to do the best, being successful, hoping to exceed in expectations, and all of that while going to university. The Leadership Academy was set up by AUSA to support engaged student leaders, helping them to enhance their skills and giving them the confidence to successfully lead their team. We wanted to give them more opportunities to develop skills that will help them achieve the best outcome in their current role as well as in their future careers and in life beyond University. In short, the aim of the Leadership Academy is to help students 'become the leader you aspire to be'. More information can be found at: <https://www.ausa.org.uk/societies/leadershipacademy/>

Description:

In the University's Strategic Plan for 2015-2020 it is highlighted that our University provides an environment that will 'empower our student community to thrive', with the goal of teaching our students 'independence and responsibility of thought and action', and wants every Aberdeen student to 'grow as an active citizen, acquire leadership skills to help them succeed in future life course'.

This is exactly what we want to achieve at the Leadership Academy.

In October 2014 the President for Societies and Student Activities, Veronika Hofmann, and her team at AUSA started the recognition and skills development program 'Leadership Academy'. This is aimed at student leaders who are involved in running activity groups within AUSA (societies, sports clubs, student media) and is designed to support them in their leadership role, help them to develop as a leader and give them recognition for the fantastic

work they are doing. Without their dedication the student experience at Aberdeen would not be the same.

The Leadership Academy puts on high-quality workshops for students and invites experts from all over the UK to talk about how students can enhance and improve their skill set gained through their current role. Additionally we want to empower our students and show them how to promote and market themselves as well as learn new skills that help them 'become the leaders they aspire to be'.

Although the Leadership Academy was originally aimed at undergraduate students this has been broadened out after a huge level of interest from postgraduate students in Freshers' Week 2015 who signed up to the Leadership Academy and attended the workshops. Also, as a new incentive this year we are planning not only to support current student leaders but are opening up the Leadership Academy to 'future leaders' who just need that 'extra push' to be empowered. We will offer self-confidence workshops and support students to overcome their fears of taking on a project or starting something new and, by building their confidence, encourage them to become a leader themselves.

Workshops for 2015/16 (so far):

Effective Intercultural Communication (October 2015)

Say it like Obama - Public Speaking (November 2015)

Learn to think outside the box – make alternative business models work (November 2015)

Elevator Pitching – quick & successful! (November 2015)

Setting up a business – 101 (February 2016)

Employability Week 2016 (8th-12th February 2016)

Self-Confidence Workshops (Feb/March 2016)

Workshops for 2014/15 included:

Motivational Skills

Negotiation and Influencing Skills

Applying like a CEO – how to use your current role to rock that job application

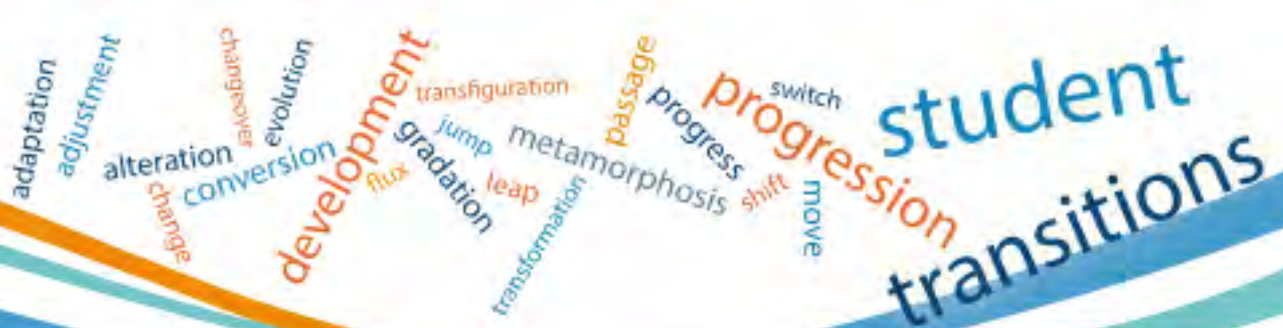
Employability Week 2015 (Feb 2015)

People Skills - Workshop With Barclays Bank's LifeSkills Programme

Leadership Academy Graduation and Awards

Contact details: Veronika Hofmann, pres.societies@abdn.ac.uk; Liam Fuller, pres.education@abdn.ac.uk

All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: LEVEL-UP! Student-led Conference

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transitions between any level of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree of any discipline, as well as into the job sector.

Abstract: LEVEL-UP! is a skills development conference organised for the first time in February 2016 at the University of Aberdeen. The main aim of this student-led initiative was to diversify the existing resources for skills development at university by providing a range of practical tools that could be incorporated into a student's day-to-day routine, allowing gradual improvement of a certain skill. The conference was an intensive two-day boot camp, consisting of a panel discussion, talks, networking activities and workshops. Multiple parallel workshops were provided to cover a wider range of topics and to limit the student numbers in each session. The limit on numbers enhanced the interaction between the speaker and the participants, facilitating the delivery of detailed and personalised advice.

Description:

Background

LEVEL-UP! was inspired by the identification, by students who had experienced difficulties in improving specific sets of skills, of a gap in skills development training at the University. Having attended various development events in London during their year-long placement, they were exposed to the different methods that could be used for improving skills. As an example, one of the co-chairs of the committee of organisers had the chance to improve her public speaking skills through voice coaching. In addition to teaching articulation, posture, and confidence, this example showed that there are specific exercises that can be incorporated into daily practice to gradually improve a skill.

This exposure illustrated the differences between the university experience and the opportunities available elsewhere. The university experience was useful because it identified the importance of personal and professional development, as well as the skills that students should aim to develop, however it did not necessarily facilitate the development of these skills. For example, students know that they should develop public speaking skills but are not given

specific tools or opportunities to put them into practice. Voice coaching could be used to address this skills gap.

The LEVEL-UP! Conference

The conference was introduced by the organising committee's co-chairs followed by a short presentation from the Scottish Institute for Enterprise about the changing trends in the workplace, concluding that students need to be "agile" in order to succeed. Workshops included Mentoring, Mindfulness, Confidence, Establishing a Business, Written Communication, Preparing a Winning CV and Intercultural Communication.

The second day began with a talk by one of the UK's leading expert on Body Language and Voice Management, followed by workshops covering Mastering Improvised Speech, Problem Solving, Personal Branding through Social Media and Career Development Coaching. The conference closed with a panel session led by three young successful entrepreneurs on "How to Succeed and Execute your Idea". Post-conference evaluation identified an inspirational talk on motivation and goal-setting by Jamie Andrew, the quadruple-amputee mountaineer, as a favourite part of the conference for many.

Networking activities, including one led by ELEVATOR UK, were organised during both lunch breaks to encourage delegates to communicate with each other.

Achievements

Organisation for LEVEL-UP! was completed in a five month timeframe. The conference was designed to be affordable, accessible and have innovative high-quality content. A committee of eleven members was formed to identify and bring twenty experts from across the UK and Europe to the University of Aberdeen. Funding of £5950 was secured through awards and donations enabling a conference fee of £5 per student. Approximately 120 delegates and volunteers attended.

Benefits for students

LEVEL-UP! benefited both the students attending the conference and the students who organised the event itself. The delegates were exposed to many skills and had the opportunity to network with other students and the speakers. This was the first conference or skills development workshop for most delegates and many were inspired to find out about attending or helping with future conferences.

The members of the organising committee benefited by setting and meeting targets to ensure the success of the conference, developing their own skills along the way. Skills developed included: leadership, effective communication, negotiation, estimating costing, finding funding and marketing and promotion, including the use of social media.

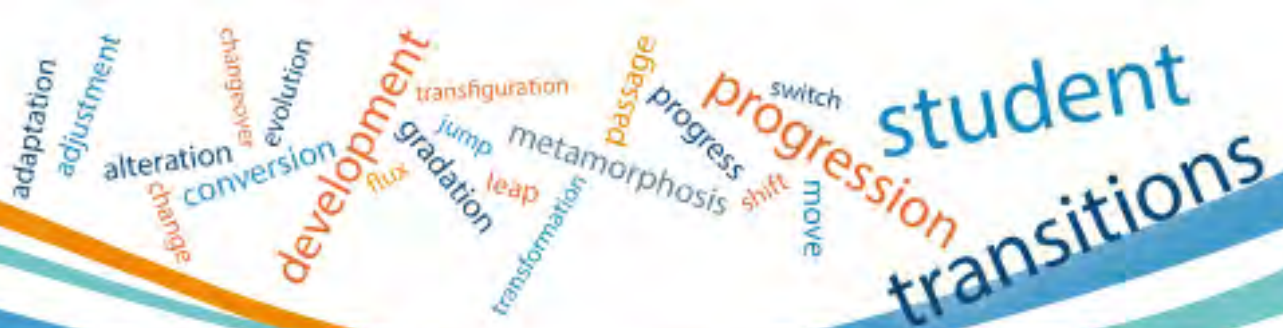
Feedback

The event was successful and was enjoyed by delegates who noted in particular how different it was from other events. The conference also received praise from the speakers who were impressed by the programme, its professionalism and the fact that students devoted their weekends to a skills development event. All concerned would recommend the LEVEL-UP! conference with 4.5 out of a possible 5 given as the average overall satisfaction rating. A selection of the qualitative feedback included:

- “It was an excellent conference! The speakers were great, inspiring and funny. Everything worked smoothly. Workshops were really interesting and difficult to choose from.”
- “I thought the conference was brilliant combining speakers and networking together to fill in the skills gaps that I have yet to gain or perfect. I would completely advise people to attend and would be excited to see more events as this throughout the year!”
- “Most useful weekend of my life.”

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All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Using Facebook to help aid the transition to university.

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transition from school/college to university.

Abstract: Facebook groups are used to promote engagement and aid the transition to university. The purpose of the groups is to allow potential students to ask questions. It also allows academic staff to post information about the course and for current students to answer questions from a student perspective. Once term begins the groups are used as a course management tool and prove to be particularly effective during the first semester of level 1. The group gives new students a more informal place to ask questions, gives them information they didn't know they didn't know, and most importantly, shows them that they are not alone in their sense of bewilderment with regards to the complexities of higher education.

Description: For the last three years the School of Psychology has been using Facebook groups to promote engagement and aid the transition to university. These groups are opened on applicant day and all offer holders are invited to join the groups. The purpose of the groups is to allow potential students to ask questions. It also allows academic staff to post information about the course and for current students to answer questions from a student perspective.

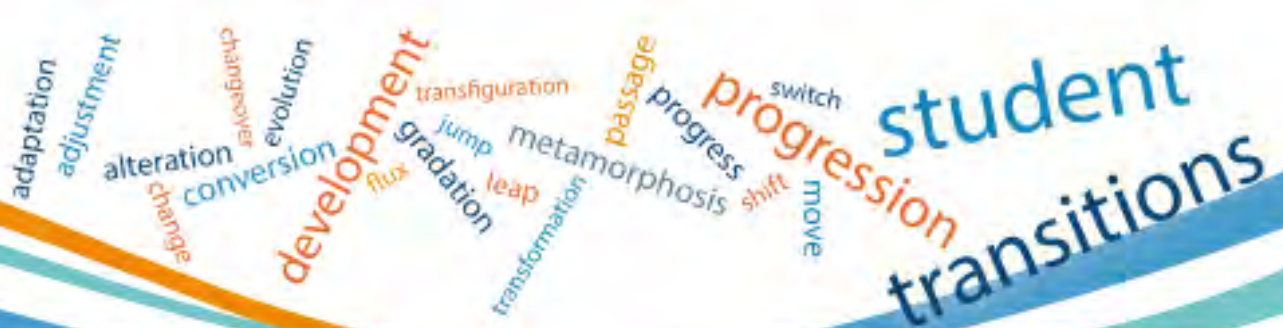
Once term begins the groups are used as a course management tool and prove to be particularly effective during the first semester of level 1. Rather than getting the same e-mail multiple times the groups can be used to answer questions once and have hundreds of students see the answer. This is beneficial in terms of the efficient use of academic time, however, it also has clear benefits to the students. The group gives new students a more informal place to ask questions, gives them information they didn't know they didn't know, and most importantly, shows them that they are not alone in their sense of bewilderment with regards to the complexities of higher education. We have multiple accounts of students using the group to make friends before they arrive and meeting up before e.g., induction lectures, so that they have someone to sit with. This seems to be a particularly popular strategy for international students who often find other students from their home country to meet up with and ease the transition not only to university but to life in a new country.

We continue to use the groups throughout the entire degree programme. As a subject with typically high-volume courses, the use of Facebook allows us to connect with students more than would be possible through face-to-face interaction and consequently promotes a sense of community and belonging, an important factor in student retention. We know that students

can be poor at checking their e-mails, however, they do check Facebook, with some surveys finding up to 95% of university students have a Facebook account. By posting information via e-mail and on Facebook we can help aid transition simply by increasing the number of students who have engaged with important course information.

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All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Student-led Careers Conference in the Medical Sciences

Transition(s) the practice supports: This conference assists with the transition of life sciences undergraduate students into postgraduate prospects through talks delivered by professional speakers, making them aware of the diverse career opportunities they could explore after graduating.

Abstract: The School of Medical Sciences (SMS) Careers Conference is a day-long event aiming to introduce the variety of career paths that a student with a Medical Sciences degree could follow after graduation. The conference is organised by students of the related discipline with the support of lecturers within SMS. Participating delegates are exposed to careers in academia and industry as well as medicine and dentistry. Additionally, information about job opportunities in science communication and the profession of physician associate are also covered. The event also shows the importance of work placements and gives delegates the chance to talk with previous placement students that share their experience and provide advice.

Description:

1st Undergraduate Biomedical Careers Conference-14th of May 2014

As an undergraduate student, you must have faced the panicking moment when you have asked yourself “What career should I follow?”; “What do I want to do next?”; “What do I like doing?”; “What options do I have as a postgraduate student with a science degree?” With these questions in mind, and the realisation that not many events/conferences held during university years explored these possibilities in detail, the School of Medical Sciences hosted the 1st Careers Conference aimed at students with science degrees in May 2014. Dr John Barrow and Dr Steve Tucker (Senior Teaching Fellows) oversaw the organisation of the event, which was led “by students, for students”. The Organising Committee was composed of Laura Kutt (2nd year), Ana-Maria Cujba, Christina-Anastasia Christopoulou (both 3rd year) and Janis Sliede (4th year). The event was attended by more than 120 delegates, which was a great surprise to everyone, suggesting that it attracted lots of interest among students.

The event focused on the delivery of talks given by speakers from a variety of areas, including PhD opportunities, Research Prospects, Advice on CV Writing and Interview Behaviour, Working in the Industry, Biotech Opportunities, Starting your own Business, Medicine/ PA Career and STP Training Programmes for Health Care Clinical Scientists in Life Sciences.

The event took place on a weekday (1-5 pm), included lunch and snacks and provided participation certificates.

A current 3rd year medical science student who attended the event commented: "I have to say today's conference was absolutely brilliant. Well-paced, good speakers, good subjects and fantastic organisation." Additionally, the outcome of the event was shared through a press release on the Aberdeen University's website: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/news/6316/>. Overall, it was very successful, leading to the subsequent organisation of the conference in 2015 and 2016.

School of Medical Sciences Careers Conference 2015

One member of the 2014 Organising Committee, Laura Kutt (3rd year), remained involved with the organisation of the 2015 conference in order to ensure continuity of best practice. Two further students, Josefine Bjorkqvist (2nd year) and James Gale (3rd year) joined the organising committee and Dr Steve Tucker provided additional support.

Some changes were implemented for the 2015 conference but the overall format remained the same. The conference was renamed the "University of Aberdeen Undergraduate Medical Sciences Careers Conference" in a move to be more inclusive of all disciplines within the School. The conference covered Science Communication, Chartered Biomedical Sciences, PhD Application and Student Experience, Forensic Science, Working in Industry, Patent Law and PhD Opportunities.

Similar to the year before, the event took place on a weekday (1-5 pm), included lunch and refreshments and the number of attendees was equal to the 2014 conference. Conference packs were introduced, which contained an agenda for the day with a section for notes, resources from the University of Aberdeen Careers Service and a feedback form. Feedback was collected at the end of the conference and responses were overwhelmingly positive. One 1st year student commented: "The speakers were all very interesting and gave useful advice. I now have a better picture of the range of careers out there."

School of Medical Sciences Careers Conference 2016

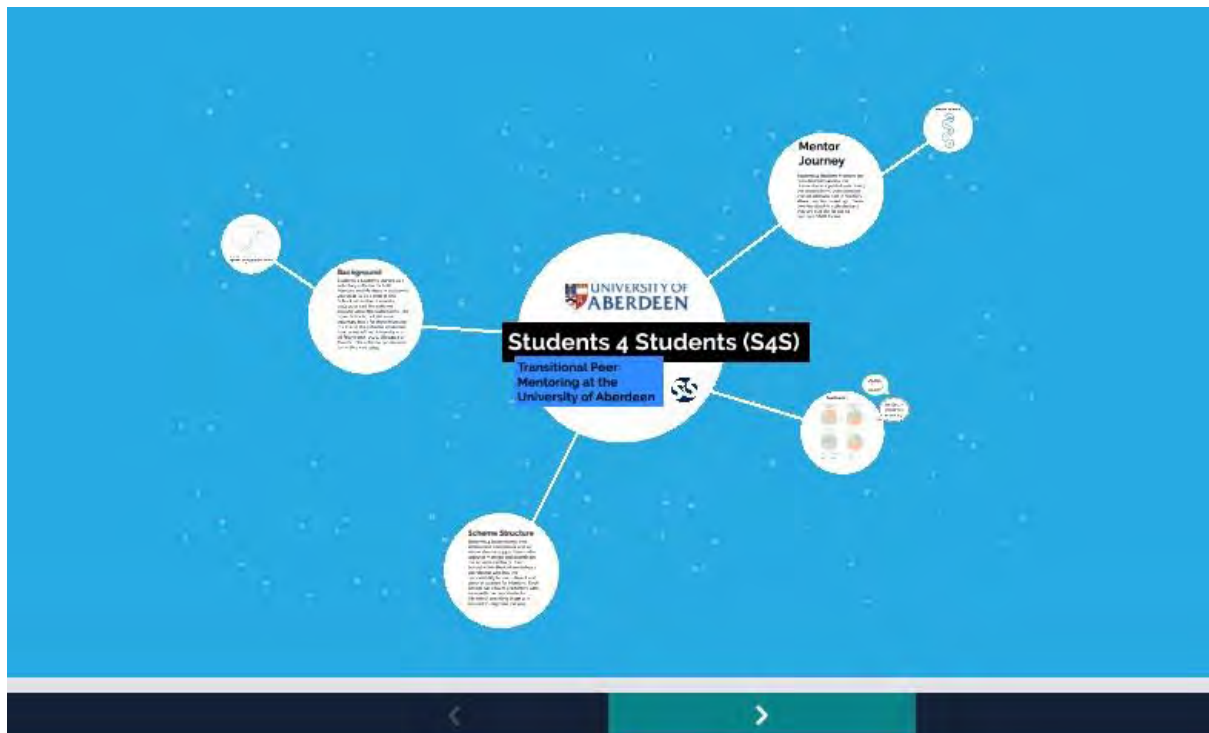
For the 2016 conference one member of the 2015 Organising Committee remained, Josefine Bjorkqvist (3rd year), and two new members joined, Audrey Cheng (2nd year) and Abigail Hay (3rd year). Dr Steve Tucker continued to provide staff support for the Organising Committee. Feedback from attendees of the previous conference informed the planning of the 2016 conference and the choice of speakers. There was a move to parallel career talks focusing on three separate strands: Clinical/Health Careers, Careers in Research and Working In Industry. Skills sessions have also been introduced in order to educate students regarding valuable skills for employment. Skills workshops include CV Writing, Science Communication and Motivational interviewing In Brief Patient Consultations. The 2016 conference is set to take place on the Wednesday 24th February and 150 students have registered.

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Laura Kutt (laura.k@aberdeensportsvillage.com)

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Student commentaries

[Students 4 Students](#) (Prezi presentation)



[Aberdeen CityLab](#) (YouTube Video)



[LEVEL-UP! – Transitions Report](#) (Prezi presentation)



[Using Facebook to help aid the transition to university](#) (YouTube Video)





UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

QAA Scotland: Student Transitions

Student Commentaries: Leadership Academy Case Study

Background

The Leadership Academy develops students' leadership skills and qualities through a series of interactive workshops and seminars. Sessions are delivered by inspirational leaders and external organisations around the theme of 'leadership'. A key objective of the Leadership Academy is to support student development of Aberdeen Graduate Attributes. Students participate in at least 4, 2-hour workshops which focus on different aspects of leadership and also submit a short reflective piece to demonstrate their wider co-curricular learning and development in a non-academic context. The Academy was originally established by Aberdeen University Students' Association and is now managed by the University of Aberdeen's Careers Service.

www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/case-studies/aberdeen-university-students-association-leadership-academy.pdf?sfvrsn=4

A survey was designed and delivered in order to capture the student voice and gather Leadership Academy feedback in the academic year 2016-17. 29 student (undergraduates and postgraduates) responses were received.

1. What do you think of the Leadership Academy?

Responses were very positive in relation to both Leadership Academy learning and enjoyment. Feedback and comments clearly illustrate students increased leadership knowledge and their understanding of their personal development. The main findings can be summed up as follows:

"I really enjoyed the Leadership Academy. It allowed me to meet a number of inspirational people, explore my own strengths and weaknesses, and learn more about leadership."

"I liked that all sessions encouraged us to think about our own leadership style and how we could develop in future."

"Employers were so helpful and down to earth, and gave us a lot of tips and advice. It was great to hear about their own personal experiences and leadership journey. I would definitely do the Leadership Academy again!"

2. Why do you think that?

A number of comments made by students illustrate the ways in which the Academy has impacted on their ideas for the future. In addition students revealed that the Academy had enhanced their confidence and motivation. The shaping of students' mind-set is illustrated via the following comments:

"I have to say that I do not feel like I have the same mind-set towards leadership as I had before the Academy. I was sceptical whether I could be an inspiring and good leader. However the programme showed me that everyone can be a leader in their own special way. I now feel more motivated and keen to take on a leadership role!"

"I got the chance to interact with new people and to hear new ideas."

Collaborative work

Support for students who live in rural areas and commute
[Robert Gordon University](#)

To explore professionalism in work-related learning
[University of St Andrews](#) and [University of Dundee](#)

To discuss the Strathclyde Toolkit to support students' transition into Level 1
[University of Strathclyde](#)

Challenges facing commuting students and improving engagement and retention
[Robert Gordon University](#), [University of the West of Scotland](#) and the [University of the Highlands and Islands](#)

Sharing practice on professional skills, digital badges, employability skills awards and more
[University of St Andrews](#) and [University of Dundee](#)

Other institutions and organisations

Working towards improving communication with students at various Colleges in Scotland.

Furthermore, the University is working with local councils and colleges to consider the challenges, and how they can be overcome, of transition from school into further and higher education especially in vulnerable groups.

Multimedia resource

The University produced a video signposting a number of resources supporting students' transitions in, through and out of their studies (YouTube Video). [Watch the video](#)

