



Student Transitions Enhancement Theme: End of Year 3/End of Theme Synopsis

The key purposes of this report are to:-

- provide a framework for HEIs to report on their Year 3 activity
- help share information across the sector on the benefits and challenges around Theme engagement.

Institution
<i>University of Glasgow: Transitions into blended learning</i>
Theme Leaders' Group institutional representative(s)
<i>Dr Vicki H.M. Dale, Prof Jo-Anne Murray and Kerr Gardiner (staff reps) Kate Powell, Gemma Gratton and Caelum Davies (student reps)</i>
Institutional team membership
<p>Research assistants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Josephine Adekola • Eva Kubincova <p>Extended institutional team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Jason Bohan • Professor Denis Fischbacher-Smith • Dr Lisa Hau • Sarah Honeychurch • John Kerr • Drew McConnell • Dr Kay Munro • Dr Scott Ramsay • Jennifer Robertson • Dr Maxine Swingler

Transitions event organising team:

- Dr Vicki Dale
- Sarah Honeychurch
- Dr Camille Huser
- John Kerr
- John Maguire
- Professor Jo-Anne Murray
- Dr Amanda Sykes

Media production:

- Nigel Hutchins

Steering group:

- Professor Frank Coton
- Professor John Davies
- Professor Moira Fischbacher-Smith
- Christine Lowther
- Professor Jill Morrison
- Professor Don Spaeth

Outline what was achieved in relation to your Year 3 plan of work, at the time of submitting this report.

Identify what future outcomes are anticipated to be delivered by the end of the Theme.

Have there been any unintended outcomes/unexpected findings?

Our project focused on student, staff and institutional transitions to blended learning.

Year 3 achievements

In year 2, we identified a series of 'anchor point' interventions, in partnership with the institutional team, to embed blended learning in the practices of the university. These were developed during the third year, as follows:

- **Student induction resources**
 - An exemplary induction course to assist students transitioning to blended and online learning was developed within our College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences (MVLS). This is being used as a template for all subsequent online and blended programmes and courses. Elements from this resource will feed into the new, collaboratively produced resources to support student transitions to online learning (see inter-institutional collaborations, below).
- **Guidelines for good practice in e-learning development**
 - Again within the College of MVLS, Professor Murray and colleagues adapted the UCL E-Learning Baseline, which is available for remixing via Creative Commons. This is being piloted within MVLS before being further refined for use across the institution within the coming months.

- **Organisational learning:**
 - We have a **showcase event** 'Transitions to blended and online learning' planned for the 31st May; with 150 places including 15 places set aside for external TLG members.
 - We have been gathering **case studies** of good practice from academics who have newly introduced blended and online learning, that encourage them to reflect on how they have transitioned to blended and online learning, and what factors need to be taken into account to enable student transitions into these flexible modes of study.
 - We have also been capturing **student and staff video commentaries** of their transitions to blended learning, which form part of the institution's 'digital artefact'.
- **Scholarship:**
 - **Extending learning experience research:** We have been successful in extending learner experience research, particularly in terms of a blended course that includes a MOOC, and also how a MOOC can help students transition to a fully online distance learning programme.
 - **Outputs:** As well as presenting on the outcomes of our project to the QAA conference (with associated paper), we are disseminating outcomes via two peer-reviewed journal articles (one in press, one in review).

Future deliverables

By the end of the theme, as well as these tangible deliverables (event recordings, learning resources, scholarship outputs), we anticipate that discussions around transitions to blended and online learning will start to feature more prominently across the institution and in the sector. We hope that by disseminating our work locally and nationally, that our and other institution's digital strategies will start to be informed by this valuable work.

There were two additional anchor point interventions that we did not have time within the project timescale to implement:

- Digital capabilities work with staff
- Student engagement in terms of staff-student co-production of blended curricula

We are continuing to investigate opportunities to progress this work in other contexts.

Unanticipated outcomes

The main unanticipated outcome was the realisation that transitions are complex and multi-faceted, for all stakeholders. This is especially true for students, and international students in particular, whose transitions to blended learning and compounded by their transition to UK higher education, often during a shorter timescale (e.g. 1 year Masters).

In what ways have institutional team members (including students) engaged in Theme activities during this session?

It would be helpful to reflect on the following aspects: developing the institution's plan of work, contributions to institutional team meetings, participation in the Theme Student Network and TLG meetings, participation in the International Enhancement Conference, participation in the institutional team event held in November 2016, institutional work undertaken as part of the year 3 plan etc.

Institutional team members have been critical to progressing this work.

Student involvement: We have had three student representatives for each of the student projects, each of which have not only contributed to Enhancement Themes discussions and activities, but also participated in the Blended and Online Learning Development (BOLD) board.

TLG members: Staff and student TLG members were central to the direction of the work undertaken, in terms of ensuring that this was compatible with the overall Enhancement Theme. This was done in consultation with the institutional team. TLG members were also active - alongside members of the institutional team - in participating in Enhancement Themes events and conferences.

Institutional team: The extended institutional team have played an invaluable role, particularly as we developed our institutional framework; many of the original interview participants were part of the team, and we verified our study findings with the team via email and during face-to-face meetings. The institutional team were also vitally important in helping to identify our 'anchor points', or interventions, to ensure that the institution does not drift from identified good practice in blended learning, not only from a pedagogy point of view but also an organisational one.

Identify good practice in supporting the TLG representative/alternate both in their TLG role and in their institution.

It is critical for TLG members to meet regularly to align priorities of Enhancement Themes work. Where there is only one staff or student TLG representative, it is useful (we would advise essential) to appoint a joint or deputy representative, to ensure continual institutional involvement in TLG meetings, and to distribute the workload associated with being an institutional representative.

Which mechanisms has your institution employed to disseminate outcomes and resources internally, and to the sector?

Which approaches have been most effective?

Illustrative examples would be valuable.

Internal dissemination: We have disseminated the work through:

- Three institutional team meetings
- Regular meetings with the Assistant Vice Principal for Learning and Teaching, also a member of SHEEC
- A showcase event to jointly showcase the outcomes of the Enhancement Themes project (Transitions to Blended Learning) and an aligned project (Blended and Online Learning Development) on 31st May 2017

- We will also be disseminating our project outcomes to the University of Glasgow's Student Transitions working group, who report to our Learning and Teaching Committee.

External dissemination

- Presentations at the following events:
 - M25 Learning Technology Group (London, 11 November 2015)
 - ELESIG Scotland (St Andrews, 23 November 2015)
 - University of Stirling Learning and Teaching conference, 20 April 2016
 - QAA Enhancement Themes conference, Edinburgh, 9 June 2016
 - Association for Learning Technology Conference, Warwick, 6-8 September 2016
 - University of Edinburgh 'Gearing Up' conference, 9 March 2017
 - *To follow:* QAA Enhancement Themes conference, Glasgow, 6-8 June 2016
- Articles:
 - Adekola, J., Dale, V. H. M., Gardiner, K., Murray, J.-A. & Fischbacher-Smith, M. (2017) Institutional and student transitions to into blended learning paper presented at the *3rd International Enhancement in Higher Education Conference: Inspiring excellence - transforming the student experience, 6-8 June 2017*. Glasgow.
 - Adekola, J., Dale, V. H. M., Gardiner, K. & Fischbacher-Smith, M. (in press) Student transitions to blended learning; an institutional case study. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*.
 - Adekola, J., Dale, V. H. M. & Gardiner, K. (in review) Development of an institutional framework to guide transitions into enhanced blended learning in higher education. *Research in Learning Technology*.
- External TLG members have also been invited to our showcase event.

We believe that a combination of internal and external dissemination is essential, to effect positive change within the institution and sector. On hindsight, more regular institutional team meetings might have been helpful in raising the profile of the work across the institution internally, and we should have ensured regular (yearly) reporting to appropriate learning and teaching committees in order to influence strategy at an earlier stage.

Our recommendation for the next round of Enhancement Themes work would be to distribute the workload (and responsibilities) for the project across the institution, rather than being coordinated from within one service. This, we believe, would help to mainstream the activity and more quickly inform strategy and appropriate learning and teaching committees across the institution at various levels.

Outline your approach to collaborative working with other Higher Education institutions and what you perceive as the benefits and challenges.

Examples of activities and outcomes through inter-institutional collaboration would be helpful.

We collaborated in three ways:

- **Partner organisation:** We partnered with the University of Edinburgh, whose team was led by Nichola Kett. This was an incredibly useful benchmarking exercise in terms of enabling a comparison of the nature and parity of work being undertaken in relation to the Enhancement Theme. Ms Kett and colleagues are invited to our Student Transitions working group meeting in June 2017.
- **Critical friend:** Heriot-Watt University, led by Dr Irene Malcolm, invited us to be a critical friend at one of their Enhancement Themes team meeting, which brought together institutional team members, most of whom had led on an innovative project to effect change. This was also incredibly useful in allowing us to see the value of a 'distributed' approach to Enhancement Themes. Heriot-Watt allocated funding to several projects, each of which pursued relevant work under the theme.
- **Additional collaboration:** Given the interest in student transitions to blended and online learning at the University of Glasgow, University of Edinburgh, University of the Highlands and Islands, and Queen Margaret University, a collaboration led by QMU was instigated late in year 3 to produce online learning resources to support students' transitions to online learning. This has also been a positive experience and we are on track to meet project objectives.

Tips for successful cross-institutional collaboration would be:

- Have a clear aim, stay focused on this aim and plan SMART outcomes (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) from the outset, acknowledging all partners' workload.
- Be open-minded to new ideas and different ways of approaching Enhancement Themes work and student transitions generally.
- Do not collaborate for the sake of it; if an idea does not carry momentum, it is acceptable to defer work on this until an appropriate future date.

To help facilitate the sharing of practice please provide:

- **a list of the case studies further developed during Year 3 to include student reflective commentary on successful transitions practice (5 examples)**
- **details of your student-facing multimedia resource.**

You might also wish to report on any aspect of work that you are particularly proud of and want to promote.

Our student facing multi-media resource is available at:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/resourcesforstaff/blended/students/>

This includes five video commentaries as follows:

- Classical Civilisation blended pre-Honours courses – Grace Beswick
- Haskell Programming 4th year Blended course, incorporating a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) – Alexandrina Pancheva
- Introduction to Legal Studies first year blended course – David Fridman
- Robert Burns Online – blended Honours course in Scottish Literature – Audrey Walker
- Technology-Enabled Active Learning (TEAL) spaces – Georgios Kampanos

The commentaries are part of a broader resource to support blended and online learning that also aims to support staff transitions to blended learning, so we are in the processing of adding additional video commentaries from staff perspectives. We are really excited by our video commentaries, which show the benefits and challenges associated with transitions to blended learning, including use of TEAL spaces.

Identify the ways in which your institution has contributed to Theme evaluation and other commissioned work.

Members of TLG participated in the end-of-theme evaluation interviews.

We also submitted an expression of interest to undertake work as part of the 'Welcoming international students' project but this was unsuccessful. We were however delighted to see the outcome of the excellent work undertaken by Irene Bell in this context, which we have drawn upon when interpreting the outcomes of our own learner experience research of student transitions to blended learning.

As a result of engaging with the current Enhancement Theme, what has changed/is done differently within your institution and across the sector?

It may be helpful to reflect on changes in strategy, policy, practice and how these changes have affected the student learning experience.

Within the institution, the work has been undertaken in parallel with other consultations, such as Professor Donald Spaeth's VLE governance board and consultations with staff regarding the future development of our Digital Learning Environment. This could be argued to be part of a growing awareness of the importance of the institution's transition to enhanced blended and online learning, also facilitated by the parallel Blended and Online Learning Development (BOLD) project, and how we support staff and student transitions within that work.

One of our anchor points - our College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences' work on a baseline for staff use of the Digital Learning Environment - is serving as a pilot study for the institution. This, and parallel developments, and the outcomes of associated scholarship, should all help to enhance the learner experience in terms of pedagogy, learning technology support, infrastructure, management/organisation, institutional culture, and ethical/legal considerations, all of which are highlighted in our institutional framework for transitions to enhanced blended learning.

Reflecting on the totality of Theme activity what are your perceptions of both the short and longer term impact of the Theme?

It may be useful to refer to the Theme's Logic Model here.

Using aspects of the Theme's Logic Model as a guide, our perceived impact would be as follows:

- Improved understanding of student transitions through learner experience research – short term (achieved)
- Identifying good practice examples (case studies) of how transitions are supported – short term (achieved)
- Transitions map – short term (achieved)
- Adoption of enhanced practices – medium term (in progress)
- Engaging the Scottish HE sector in using what we have learned to improve/reflect on student transitions – medium term (in progress)
- Reputational gain for Scottish higher education – medium to long term
- More successful student transitions – medium to long term
- Show how our work affects change – medium to long term

Short term = Immediate

Mid term = Within next year

Long term = 2-3 years

Recognising that this is the end of the current Theme, what one piece of advice would you give to colleagues supporting the next Theme?

It would be a good idea for colleagues supporting the next theme to liaise with previous theme leaders, to learn from what has been done before, in terms of things that have gone well and also things that could have gone better. It would be a pity for the next institutional team not to learn from the previous one.